

СЕКЦІЯ 3
ПОЛІТОЛОГІЯ
POLITICAL SCIENCE
SESSION 3

**Соціальне уявлення підлітків
про ідеології політичного лівого
та правого крил**

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Найчастіше у політичній психології досліджуються ідеології. Загалом, науковці вивчають існування, актуальність та зміни ідеологій. Багато вчених намагались визначити зміст різних ідеологічних поглядів, особливо серед дорослого населення. Однак, тільки деякі дослідження зосереджені на розумінні підлітками поняття ідеологій. Теорія соціальної репрезентації може слугувати потенційною концептуальною основою для вивчення соціально-психологічних явищ, таких як зміст ідеології чи вплив ситуації на їх соціальну репрезентацію.

Метою нашого дослідження було виявити, як старшокласники уявляють політичне ліве та праве крила, тобто вивчити їх соціальне уявлення, пов'язане з ідеологіями.

Ми використали метод асоціації з обмеженням кількості слів, адже його використання допомагає не лише отримати найбільше значень, але й структуру репрезентації.

У нашому дослідженні взяли участь 228 старшокласників з Угорщини. Їм було запропоновано записати перші п'ять слів, які їм прийшли на думку при уявленні лівих та правих.

Отримані результати підтвердили, що соціальне уявлення підлітків про лівих-правих містить чітко визначені і стійкі елементи, наприклад, уявлення про сучасних політичних діячів, ідеологічний фон (наприклад, соціалізм чи консерватизм) і символічний зміст, особливо кольори, які асоціюються з цими партіями. Ці конструкції формують основну структуру репрезентації. Незважаючи на стабільні елементи, що часто зустрічаються їх останні асоціації були різні, результати свідчать, що різноманітність репрезентації висока, тому вона ще не стабілізувалась і не консолідувалась.

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**Adolescents' Social
Representation about
Political Left- and Right-Wing
Ideologies**

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In daily discourse people often talk about the 'left' and 'right' as a potential label of their political identity. Are these names just simple labels or do they have an underlying content? The social representations theory can be a conceptual framework to examine the core- and peripheral contents of ideologies. A plenty of research have investigated adults' political views and thoughts, but only a few studies concentrated on teenagers' opinion and concepts about ideologies. The aim of this paper (as a part of a bigger research) was to reveal adolescents' social representations of the political Left and Right.

Using the Five Words Association Method we attempted to explore the social representation of political Left and Right among adolescents. 228 high school students participated in the study. Data showed that the core structure of the representation is formed by current political actors, ideologies and symbolic contents, such as colors regardless to the wing. In addition, periphery mostly included actual-political contents, methods and tools of political activity. An affective evaluation also was characteristic for both sides, however, the direction varied. Left was associated more often with negative adjectives and deviant behavior. These findings refer to the importance of historical context.

Keywords: Left-wing, Right-wing, social representation, five words association method, adolescents

I. Introduction

Ideologies constitute one of the mostly studied areas of political psychology. Numerous studies have tried to define the content of different ideological views used in daily communication about politics. In Hungary like in other post-communist countries characteristics of ideologies are significantly influenced by the historical context, therefore it can

be an interesting subject to research. The aim of this study is to examine the constitution of political left and right among high school students. The theory of social representations can be a potential conceptual framework to investigate social psychological phenomena of modern societies.

The theory of social representation

When political, scientific, professional and ideological concepts diffuse into daily discourse, they are transformed or become integrated into social representations, which are forms of thinking and of activities based on 'folk logic' (Moscovici, 1984).

They prescribe socially shared definitions of social phenomena enacted both in language and in communicative situations. According to Moscovici (1984) there are differences between collective and social representations.

While collective representation concerns to whole societies, social representation refers to smaller groups of the society. They are also less static than collective representations and change dynamically.

Two main mechanisms play roles in the construction of social representations. *Objectification* means naturalization, simplification and concretization of an abstract concept through perceptive selection and decontextualization. The first step of the process is filtering the available information or that pieces which fit with the values of the group. Because of the group interprets the phenomenon freely, it can be biased, but coherent. The selected notions generate the *figurative core* of the representation. According to Abric (1994), who calls it as *central core*, it contains only a few, particular elements, composes the concrete substance of the representation. Actually, it defines the whole meaning of the representation (Orosz, 2010).

The other important component in the structure of social representations is the *periphery*. Peripheral elements are organized around the central core and have connection with it, so their presence, values and functions are determined by it. The periphery matches the environment and the central core. It is more flexible than the central core, which is a rigid structure. They compose a duplex system.

The other mechanism of construction is *anchoring*. Through categorization the new, sometimes unfamiliar information hitches to old ones and becomes more familiar to values, integrates into the pre-existing frames.

Language is a system built on social representations, which can follow the changes and formations of social representations easily (Moscovici, 1984). *Free association's method* uses explicitly the richness of language in order to explore the social representation of a social object, providing information about the structure of the representations.

Adolescents' representations of political ideologies

Children views about politics have not been studied extensively and also the methods for gathering empirical data are poorly developed. They often do not use the adults' forms and terms to express their political opinion,

nor identify their views or action as political (Kallio & Häkli, 2011). But they have own opinion, they are interested in politics and have initial representations of ideological, political phenomenon. These representations are important because they can influence later political actions, views, etc.

School has a major influence on political socialization, even bigger than family background (Himmelweit & Swift, 1969). Not just the type of the institution provides a determinate atmosphere, but also the community and friends. In an empirical study (Banks & Roker, 1994) 15-18 years old girls from two types of school – state and private – were asked about social inequality, poverty and unemployment. A number of significant different orientations were indentified between state and private school students (e. g. the private school sample had a greater interest in politics).

In addition, students from different types of high schools can be an appropriate sample to investigate and compare adolescents' social representations about ideologies.

II. Method

The methodology of free associations is widely used in order to explore the social representation of a concept, which is based on the possible connection between a stimulus (e.g. questions or words) and an answer (e.g. words or sentences). In our research we used the "Five Words Association Method". The most important advantage of this method is that it is capable of exploring not just the content, but also the structure of a representation, i.e. the central and peripheral meaning as well. Moreover, the data collection is fast and its analysis is clear and well-defined. According to the method our participants were asked to note down the first five words that came to their mind related to Left-wing and Right-wing. The instruction was the following:

"The expressions 'Left-wing' and 'Right-wing' are a recurring feature of public discourse. Please note down the first five words that come to mind when you think about the following concepts!

What are the first words you associate with (political) Left?

What are the first words you associate with (political) Right?"

For analyzing the data we modified the content analysis method introduced by Züll, Scholz and Schmitt (2010) on a German sample. We used their framework and their main categories, however, we rationalized and supplemented the system with new country-specific elements and categories. Finally, associations were classified into 9 main categories (Ideologies, Societal Values, Symbolic Contents, Time and Space, Social Groups, Current Political Actors, Tools and Methods of Political Activity, Affective Contents, Not Classifiable Answers). Then we created middle- and subcategories as well, and all answers were classified into this hierarchical system. Each answer was coded by two different researchers. In the case of discrepancy a third researcher was included in the coding process.

III. Sample

228 adolescents participated from nine classes of three different high schools. The schools varied in their profile. The sample included an elite high school, a common high school and a vocational school located in the Hungarian capital. 41% (N=94) of participants attended the 3rd year of an elite high school, 34% (N=77) were 3rd year students of a common high school. 25% (N=57) of them studied in the 2nd and 3rd years of a vocational school.

IV. Results

In the followings we present the general findings of the whole sample for both wings. Then we discuss the structure, the core and peripheral contents and the density of Left-Right representations of adolescents.

General findings

Altogether 1654 associations were classifiable, 836 of them related to the Right-wing and 818 to the Left-wing. In 630 cases the associations were not meaningful or the participant denied the answer. Table I. presents a general overview about the results based on main and middle categories.

Main Categories/Middle Categories	Right-Wing			Left-Wing		
	N	% of classifiable	% of all answers	N	% of classifiable	% of all answers
Ideologies	44	5.26	3.46	95	11.61	8.30
General	13	1.56	1.14	90	11.03	8.00
Specific	31	3.71	2.72	0	0.00	0.00
Societal Values	89	10.63	7.72	36	4.40	3.15
General	39	4.67	3.42	36	4.40	3.15
National Sentiment	35	4.19	3.07	0	0.00	0.00
Religion	14	1.67	1.23	0	0.00	0.00
Symbolic Contents	16	1.96	1.47	87	10.64	7.68
Colors	33	3.95	2.91	36	4.40	3.15
Time and Space	26	3.11	2.28	38	4.64	3.32
UN Common System	5	0.60	0.44	14	1.71	1.27
Previous Political Actors	4	0.48	0.36	18	2.20	1.61
Past	7	0.84	0.61	2	0.24	0.17
Future	6	0.72	0.53	1	0.12	0.09
Foreign Elements	4	0.48	0.35	6	0.73	0.52
Social Groups	23	2.76	2.02	27	3.30	2.36
Current Political Actors	182	21.77	15.96	155	18.95	13.95
Tools and Methods of Political Activity	289	34.67	25.35	224	27.38	19.58
Actual political Contents	12	1.44	1.10	38	4.64	3.32
General Contents	26	3.11	2.28	41	5.01	3.58
Tools	113	13.62	9.91	102	12.47	8.92
Methods	37	4.44	3.32	43	5.26	3.76
Other not classifiable answers	1	0.12	0.09	0	0.00	0.00
Affective Contents	109	13.04	9.56	154	18.83	13.46
Characteristics of the Wing	62	7.42	5.44	69	8.44	6.08
Social norms/values	47	5.62	4.12	85	10.39	7.38
Not Classifiable Contents	304	36.67	26.67	285	35.09	26.50
No answer	272		23.66	270		24.30
No meaning	19		1.67	26		2.27
Meaningful, but not classifiable	13		1.14	22		1.92
All answers	1346			1346		
All classifiable answers	841			822		

TABLE I. FREQUENCY OF ASSOCIATION IN THE MAIN AND MIDDLE CATEGORIES FOR BOTH SIDES

According to the frequencies of associations the most significant differences between the content of Left's and Right's representation were in the following categories: Ideologies, Societal Values, Time and Space, Tools and Methods of Political Activity and Affective Contents. More than 11% of answers showed association between ideological contents and the Left, but only in 5% were connected ideologies to the Right. However, ideological associations related to the Right-wing were more diverse and varied than ideological contents of the Left-wing. Right-wing associations included ideologies such as Conservatism, Racism, Antisemitism, Fascism, Nationalism etc. In contrast, Left-wing associations involved only Liberalism, Socialism and Communism. In addition, Societal Values were associated to the Right two and a half times more often than to the Left. Moreover, Left-wing was connected with general values, such as equality or solidarity, but participants associated a wide range of values to the Right-wing, such as national sentiment, religious values or the importance of traditions. Participants also tended to relate Left with the past, while

Right with the future. Regarding to the political activity actual-political and methodological contents were more frequent in the case of Right, which is not surprising, since the current Hungarian government was established by a Right-wing party. In addition, Left was associated with general, classical contents, such as education policy. In the affective contents there were remarkable differences as well. Adolescents connected norm-breaking and deviant behavior two more times with Left-orientation than with Right-orientation.

In spite of significant differences important similarities were also observed. The frequencies of political actors and symbolic contents, especially the number of colors were relative high for both sides. Likewise in the number of unclassifiable answers there was no difference between Left and Right.

The Structure of Representation

Figs 1. and 2. present the ratio of main categories in the mirror of the association's range. Patterns of Left and Right are excessively similar, different main categories follow the same deceleration on both figures. It is conspicuous that the number of unclassifiable answers increases rapidly. Participants associated one or two words very easy, however, the more associations we asked, the higher the ratio of non-response was.

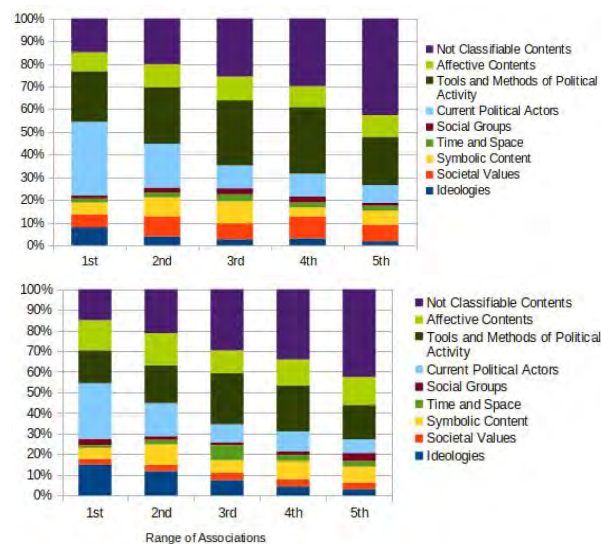


FIGURE 1. RATIO OF DIFFERENT MAIN CATEGORIES IN THE MIRROR OF THE ASSOCIATION'S RANGE – RIGHT-WING

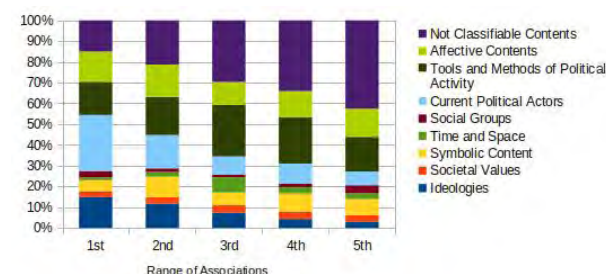


FIGURE 2. RATIO OF DIFFERENT MAIN CATEGORIES IN THE MIRROR OF THE ASSOCIATION'S RANGE - LEFT-WING

In order to explore the core and peripheral elements of a concept, we have to take into consideration not just the frequency of an association, but also its range. Words with

high frequency and low range form the core structure of a social representation. According to our results current political actors and ideological contents comply with this condition in both cases. Until firstly our participants associated an actor or an ideology to the Left in 32% and to the Right in 40%, in the case of the 5th association this ratio was only around 10% regardless to the orientation.

The number of associations in the other main categories seemed to be stable. However, analyzing the middle categories of the 7th main category labeled as Tools and Methods of Political Activity results revealed that these middle categories play an important role in the structure of representation. Figs. 3. and 4. show the frequency of each middle categories in connection with the range of association. According to our data actual-political contents were frequent in the late associations but they rarely came into mind on the first or second places. The same was true for general concept, especially in the case of Left. These contents had a high frequency but also a high range, thus they form peripheral elements of the representation of Left-Right ideologies.

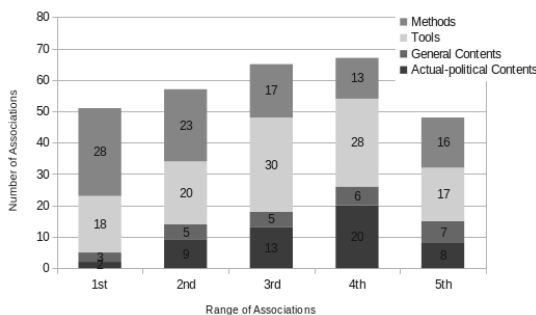


FIGURE 3. TOOLS AND METHODS OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY: NUMBER AND RANGE OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR SUBTYPES (RIGHT-WING)

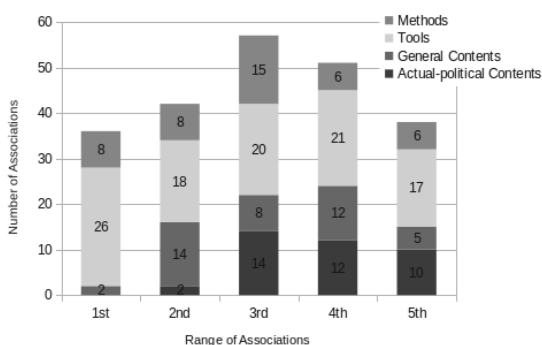


FIGURE 4. TOOLS AND METHODS OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY: NUMBER AND RANGE OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR SUBTYPES (LEFT-WING)

Regarding to density it is apparent, that the associations captured a wide range of contents, however, they varied along certain number of well-defined main categories.

V. Conclusion

Our results proved that adolescents do have an opinion and a social representation about political Left- and Right-orientation, even if its core is symbolic or limited to political actors or to the definition of ideological background. Data also show that at that age representation about Left-Right political orientations has not been consolidated yet, it is very diverse and has a relative extended peripheral ring. However, focusing only on main categories we revealed some core elements and the nature of the peripheral structure as well.

The general results also showed basic differences between the representation, the meaning and the level of abstraction of the political wings.

Analyzing the subcategories we can explore a wider and more well-defined system, which may be capable of capturing the processes how adolescents organize their concepts and knowledge about ideologies.

In a longitudinal research project we intend to explore, to what extent the representation changes and whether it can consolidate.

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