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They say - I say.

Shrugs, head tilts and palm up open hand gestures as markers of uncertainty in the context of collective memory.

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Data

- 16 focus groups from the project about **"Collective memory, collective identity in Poznan"**

- 4x4 generations

- semi-structured ethnographic interviews

- answers to the questions:

  – places in Poznan connected with Jewish/German heritage

  – Soviet war cemeteries

  – cemetery of Distinguished Wielkopolska Citizens, cemetery on Samotna Str.

Collective memory

a shared pool of knowledge and information in the memories of members of a given social group

(Halbwachs, English transl. 1980)

Uncertainty markers

Some gestures function as markers of doubt and uncertainty:

- shoulder shrugs (Debras and Cienki 2012)

- lateral head tilts

- palms up open hand (PUOH) gestures (Müller 2004)

Hypothesis

We hypothesized that the **number of such markers will be higher** in discourse contexts related to some ethnicities (e.g. Jewish) than others (German, Russian/Soviet and Polish) to reflect disagreement and fractures in collective memory on some topics as opposed to others.
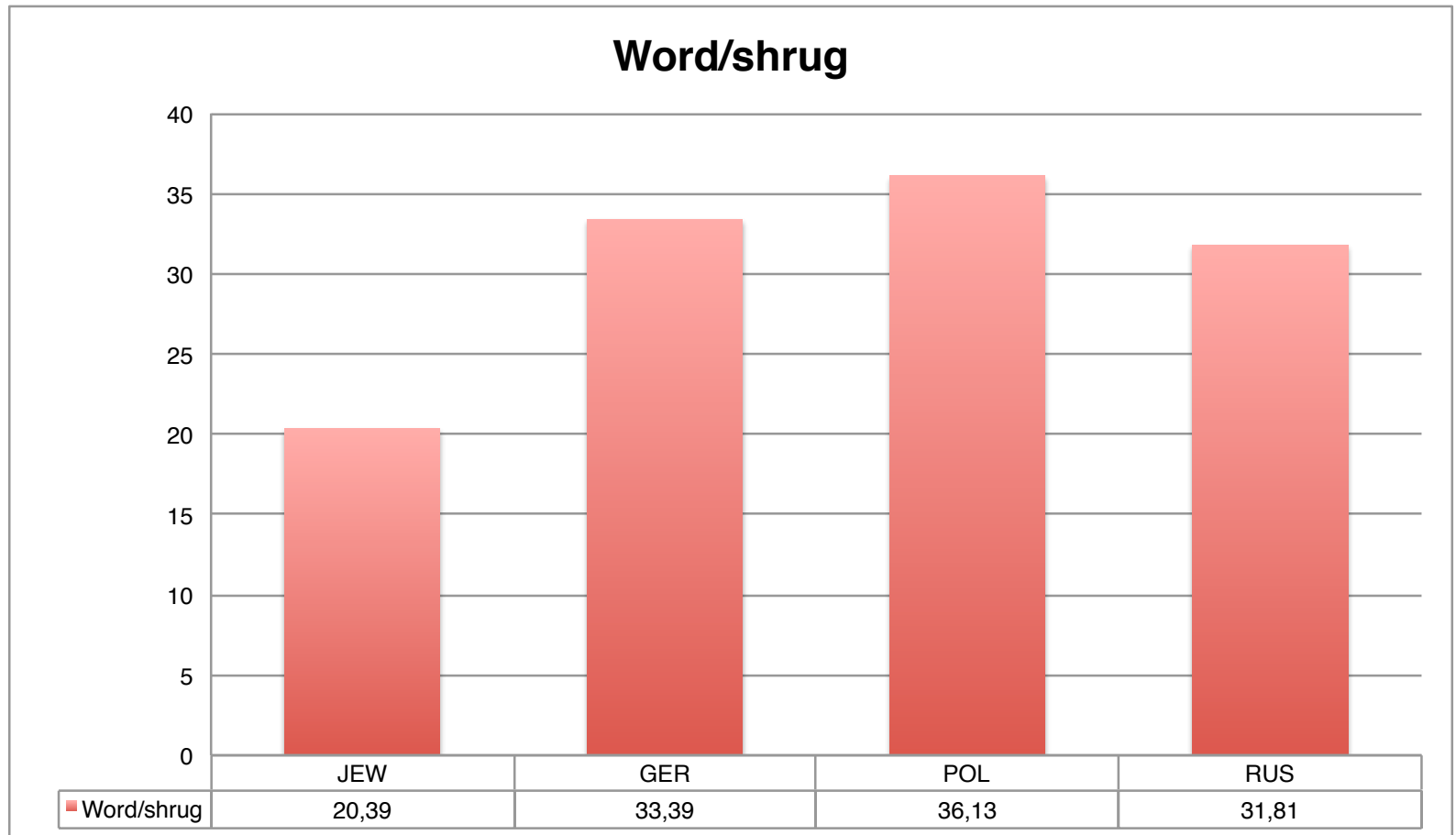
Hypothesis

Preliminary results confirm that our intuitions were correct!

When talking about Jews, Polish participants perform one uncertainty gesture per 20 words.

This frequency is much lower for Germans, Poles and Russians (once every 33, 36 and 31 words, respectively).

Results

Word/shrug

Word/shrug	JEW	GER	POL	RUS
	20,39	33,39	36,13	31,81

How we got there

1. Identify relevant fragments of recordings

2. Annotate gesture (no sound)

3. Check annotation with transcripts

4. Divide discourse into measurable units

5. Identify topics (JEW/POL/GER/RUS)

6. Calculate word / gesture ratios for relevant topics

STEP 1: Data culling

Out of 16 videos, 30-60 mins each we chose fragments where the following ethnicities were discussed:

- Jewish

- Polish

- German (Evangelical Christians?)

- Russian (Soviet)

We ended up with 197 video fragments.

STEP 2: Annotation

What we were looking for:

- **shrug** (one arm / both arms)

- **palm up open hand** (one palm / both palms)

- **shrug** + **PUOH**

- **head tilt** + **one of above**

shrug - one arm

shrug - both arms

shrug - both arms

PUOH (palms up open hand)

head tilt

STEP 2: Annotation

Problems?

- is the gesture meaningful or reflexive (adaptor)

- is it possible to identify the verbal referent for any given instance of gesture?

meaningful or not?

human reference

STEP 3: Sound ON

Annotation with the sound and transcript available was meant to check:

- if PUOH / shrug gestures are uncertainty gestures

- if head tilts are uncertainty gestures (or eg. deictic)

STEP 4: Divide into units

We had 3 options:

1. Phonological units

2. Sense units - senteces

3. Micronarratives

Each of the available choices would have affected the quantitative analysis.

STEP 4: Divide into units

We had 3 options:

1. Phonological units -> time consuming / loss of data

2. Sense units - senteces

3. Micronarratives

Each of the available choices would have affected the quantitative analysis.

STEP 4: Divide into units

We had 3 options:

1. Phonological units

2. Sense units - senteces   -> problematic definition

3. Micronarratives

Each of the available choices would have affected the quantitative analysis.

STEP 4: Divide into units

We had 3 options:

1. Phonological units

2. Sense units - senteces

3. Micronarratives -> (based on sense units)

Each of the available choices would have affected the quantitative analysis.

Labov and Waletzky (1967) propose that the minimal requirement for a sequence to be a narrative is a temporal clause with **a before-and-after relation** holding between two independent clauses.

Micronarratives

Labov (2006: 37) writes: "For L&W, the fundamental concept that **distinguishes narrative from other ways of reporting** the past is temporal juncture" This suggests that **there are more forms of reporting than just narratives**, but does not develop this idea here.

Further he adds (2006:38): "A narrative is initiated when a person is impelled to tell others about something, sometimes by an external stimulus ("What happened?"), sometimes by an internal one ("I've got to tell you what happened.")."

eg. "I fell and I broke my leg."

Single speaker narrative

Żydzi w Poznaniu byli prześladowani,	abstract / orientation
oni byli nietolerowani	evaluation
To mówił stały pikiety przed sklepem żydowskim,	complicating action
2 osoby i mówili, nie chodź, nie kupuj	complicating action
Jak wszedł i kupił,	complicating action
jeden miał pędzel i taki ten szablon	complicating action
a drugi miał puszkę z farbą	complicating action
i ten szablon mu przyłożyli na plecach i go zaznaczyli	resolution
Mówi, do tego stopnia	coda

Multiple speaker narrative

But sometimes one narrative is co-constructed by more than one speaker.

G1_F1_R4	Mąż pamięta jak Greisera to wieszali na narożniku
G1_F1_R4	Jako dzieciaki lecieli tam patrzeć o 5 rano
G1_F1_R5	moja mama tam była

Chinese box stories

For the youngest generation, references to the past rarely took form of a fully fledged narrative. Sometimes they had a complex form of multiple stories embedded in one another as the ironic story 4 seems to be (example G4_F1_22, R1)

Pytanie, czy ktoś to zrobił,	intro to story 1
dlatego że szła za tym jakaś idea,	
czy po prostu ktoś był w pobliżu	orientation/complicating event
i stwierdził, że sobie zerwie gwiazdę	resolution
bo róznie może być.	evaluation
Znaczy czasem się zdarza,	intro to story 2
że ktoś celowo niszczy miejsca związane z upamiętnieniem żołnierzy radzieckich,	orientation (broader context)
ale akurat nie uważam tego za dobry sposób rozliczania się z historią.	evaluation
Tym bardziej, że jednak miliony dziesiątki milionów Rosjan zginęło na obcej ziemi tak naprawdę.	begining of story 3 / complicating action 1
Oczywiście kontrowersje są ogromne, związane z tym, co się działo później w Polsce	evaluation
i jak wyglądało działanie tych tych żołnierzy tutaj na miejscu,	complicating action 2
ale na pewno to nie jest sposób,	evaluation
żeby się z tym rozliczać: Niszczenie pomników	evaluation, coda
czy nie wiem	marker of irony – intro to story 4
może zaraz ekshumujemy wszystkich Rosjan z ziemi?	complicating action 1
Najlepiej ich deportujemy do Rosji,	complicating action 2
bo nam tu bardzo przeszkadza,	evaluation
że oni leżą na Cytadeli?	???
nie uważam tego za dobry sposób	evaluation

STEP 5: topics

Identifying the theme of the micronarrative (discourse fragment) was not always straigtforward.

Problems included **narratives presenting two topics** (divided into two, if possible), **narratives with mixed topics** (excluded), **narratives where the topic was not human** (usually excluded eg. Jewish architecture) and **narratives where the human referent was non-specific** (excluded).

We were left with approximately 500 micronarratives, divided into four categories.

Word/gesture ratios were calculated for each category.

Preliminary results suggest our intuitions were correct, but naturally further statistical analysis is required.

Conclusions

- Gesture studies can give a new dimension to sociological and anthropological studies

- Semi structured interviews are quite a challenge for quantitative analysis

- Choice of unit of analysis affects the results

References

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