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Review

Developing New Identities in Social Conflicts: *Constructivist perspectives*
Esperanza Morales-López and Alan Floyd (eds) (2017)

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Reviewed by Ilpo Kempas

As indicated by its title, this collective work offers different perspectives on different types of social conflicts of our time. However, contrary to what the title might imply, not all twelve chapters are strictly speaking concerned with social conflicts; some of them focus on the theoretical tenets of the constructivist approach. Moreover, some of the conflicts addressed in the book are ideological and covert (cf. Chapter 10 by Sara Molpeceres, devoted to the Smart City project of Barcelona), or occur within a relationship (cf. Chapter 9 by Laura Filardo-Llamas, titled "The (re)construction of gender roles in the genre of song"). Yet, the book does address phenomena commonly regarded as conflicts affecting entire societies, such as *Charlie Hebdo* (Chapter 5), human migrations (Chapter 6), the 2009 influenza pandemic crisis (Chapter 7) and the 15M movement (Chapters 11–12). The majority of the authors are from Spain or other Spanish-speaking countries. Consequently, the publication of the book in English may be interpreted as the authors' effort to share their research with even wider audiences.

The common denominator is the authors' constructivist approach to their respective topics. This epistemological approach holds that there exist no unchangeable truths or pre-existing knowledge, but scientific knowledge and truth are constructed by researchers. In this respect, constructivism contrasts sharply

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with the paradigm of positivism. Constructivism is closely related to critical discourse analysis and socio-cognitivism, also covered in the book. In the constructive process, rhetoric also often plays an important role.

Chapter 1, by Hayden White, discusses constructionism in historical writing. History is, by definition, one of the disciplines of interest for constructionism. The discussion about historical 'truths' continues in Chapter 2, written by Verónica Tozzi, titled 'White, Burke and the "literary" nature of historical controversies'. This chapter is focused on the views of some of the key proponents of the constructivist school, and a reader not familiar with the positions of the authors mentioned may find it difficult to follow. As an interesting practical example, the author mentions (p. 19) the Browning-Goldhagen controversy, which may not be familiar to readers of other disciplines.

Chapter 3, written by David Pujante, is about constructivist rhetoric and its historical origin, traced back to Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. The author believes that rhetorical theory, based on its five classic divisions, coincides with modern constructivist approaches, notably in the area of discourse analysis.

Chapter 4, by Simón Ramírez Muñoz, addresses social conflict from an epistemological perspective. The author regards emotions as the operational grounding of the world(s) we live at every moment (p. 72). In the last section (pp. 80–81), the author presents his solution for conflict prevention, based on the generation of a space of mutual respect.

In Chapter 5, titled 'I am and I am not Charlie', David Pujante analyses the discursive conflict around the attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* from the viewpoint of constructivist rhetoric. In the same way as the author of the previous chapter, Pujante aspires to contribute to the prevention and resolution of conflicts through increasing people's awareness of discursive strategies (pp. 103–105); consequently, constructivism, by definition, seeks to be constructive.

Chapter 6, by Alan Floyd, takes a look at media representations of recent human migrations to the UK and other Western countries. The author presents, referring to the study of Berry, García-Blanco and Moore (2015), interesting differences in the labelling of migrants between newspapers and countries (the UK vs. Spain).

In Chapter 7, Javier Nespereira García carries out a rhetorical analysis of two speeches representing contradictory attitudes towards the topic in question, the 2009 influenza pandemic crisis.

Chapter 8, by Francisco Vicente Gómez, is not about a social conflict but rather about a (potential) social problem, namely, the lack of dialogue in the discourse shaped by society about reading and understanding texts. A major part

of the chapter is devoted to a Spanish commentary proposal related to literature in education, written by Lázaro Carreter and Correa Calderón (1975), at a point in time when the era of Franco was drawing to a close.

In Chapter 9, Laura Filardo-Llamas discusses the reconstruction of gender roles in songs. Her corpus consists of (mainly Spanish) songs about domestic violence. Interestingly, this theme has long-established roots in the Spanish pop music tradition; as another example, one could mention *Cruz de Navajas* (1986), a well-known song by Mecano, a Spanish pop group.

As mentioned above, Chapter 10 deals with the Smart City project of Barcelona. In this case, the conflict resides in the contradiction between, on the one hand, collective sustainability and effectiveness and individual privacy and freedom, on the other. Sara Molpeceres describes the discourse around the concept of Smart City and the different rhetorical tools used to defend the project.

The last two chapters (11 and 12) focus on the Spanish 15M social movement. Chapter 11, by David Pujante and Esperanza Morales-López, examines the slogans of 15M. This chapter is very interesting and illustrative, with colour photos of different posters and examples of the recontextualization of poetry and songs in those slogans. Chapter 12, authored by Esperanza Morales-López, analyses the discourse of a Catalan social group representing the 15M movement.

Finally, the book ends with an epilogue written by Esperanza Morales López, in which she discusses constructivism at a general level.

Developing New Identities in Social Conflicts: Constructivist perspectives is a serious piece of work, which will inevitably serve as a reference for future studies. The book is accompanied by an extensive author index (pp. 285–288), which will assist readers not yet familiar with this approach. Moreover, familiarization with the topic area is further facilitated by a subject index (pp. 289–293). To conclude, one final word about the purely external aspects of the book: the hardback cover makes the book highly scuff-resistant and adds to the reading experience.

References

Berry, M., García-Blanco, I. and Moore, K. (2015) *Press coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries Report prepared for the United Nations High Committee for Refugees*. Cardiff: Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies.

Lázaro Carreter, F. and Correa Calderón, E. (1975) *Cómo se comenta un texto literario*. Madrid: Cátedra.