

# Geography of social relations and economy of speaking: Centre doesn't support, periphery doesn't threaten, while semi-periphery is only vituperating

## Setting

In this analysis, we describe the interrelation between social networks and a communicative interaction process in a village located in North-western Senegal.

The particularity of this study consists of the combining of social network and discourse analysis in the description of reactions to the violation of a social norm underlying a collective action.

Which actors from the recorded social networks take which position in the discourse? What are their positions in the social networks related to the incriminated village chief? Why cannot the present actors find an unanimous voice against the social norm violation?

## Aim and Hypothesis

The social interaction process takes course between actors and is communication, as it is carried out through communicative channels (Becker-Beck, 1997).

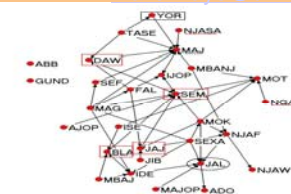
These actors are embedded in webs of (social) relations that determine and promote (facilitate) their behaviour (Degenne/Forsé, 2004).

This analysis will explain:

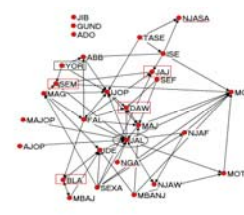
- The interrelation between social networks of actors and interaction processes in a communicative situation (network positions related to verbal positionings),
- How social network structure can explain the failure of unanimous sanctioning of a social norm violation: Two hypotheses support these questions:
- Distance (closeness/remoteness) of the one actor involved in the discussion related to the incriminated central actor determines his communicative behaviour.
- Unconnectedness in the (social) networks guarantees a low probability of alliance/coalition building among actors of equal or different status.

## Method

- Record of two directed (social) networks for measurement of prestige degree (Wasserman & Faust, 2007) and determination of positions in the social networks;
- Extraction/elaboration of discourse markers from the communication setting to form a discourse register;
- Sequencing of the interaction process in three main episodes (Auer-Rizzi, 2001) related by reversal points; because the treatment of the main episodes goes beyond the scope of this paper, we will analyse only the first sequence that is composed of three under-episodes.
- Overlapping of (social) networks and discourse register for description of the interaction process under consideration of its cyclic phases.



**Money-borrowing network:** "Supposed that you need a great money amount (to finance the migration of your son, for an investment or for business opportunities) that you do not have at your disposal. Whom of the following persons should you ask to lend you the needed money?"



**Advice solicitation network:** "Supposed you need someone to advise you in an important decision in your life. To whom of the following persons would you speak?"

## Communicative behaviour and social networks

•**Threat and Critics** As social network are channels of diffusion, control and repartition of political, economical and social resources (Lemieux, 1999), violation of a norm for one's own profit is reduced to a disadvantage for other actors, particularly those of equal status (SEM and JAJ), who have the same pretensions on these resources. Semi-peripheral actors (DAW) gain, as receptor of relations (In degrees) from the centre, a power position that allows them to challenge incriminated central actors.

(Indirect) critics from the margin (YOR) are considered as opportunistic strategy: marginal actors who are in dependence relations with the present (central or semi-peripheral) actors support them to avoid direct confrontation rather than the "absent" central one

•**Silence and Moderation** concern central (MAJ) and peripheral actors (NJASA) as strategic behaviours: gains respectively of a mediating position between the involved central actors and neutrality or avoidance of confrontation with the incriminated central actor.

•**Defending** behaviour is a strategy of marginal actors who are related neither to the central nor to the semi-peripheral criticizing actors (NJASA, NGA).

## Interaction process and coalition building

Main sequences of episode I:

- 1st sequence: Accusation
- 2nd sequence: Defence and break up of the coalition/alliance
- 3rd sequence: "Derailment"

It is postulated from experimental studies about decision making and finding that a coalition or an alliance functions as a group only under the condition that the confederated actors are related to one another (Dutta/Jackson, 2007).

The alliance formed by the central and the semi-peripheral actors (BLI, DAW, JAJ, SEM) broke up, as expected support from the moderate central actor (MAJ) failed, and opinion divergences occurred between alliance members.

## Interaction process and contingency

Differences not only in the position in the social networks (connectedness/unconnectedness), but also in the individual interests may affect group formation.

The **failure of coalition building** against the social norm violation lead to a **normative vacuum** (absence of a social sanctioning power) which is in return filled by a conflict in the conflict (*wax wu jur wax*) between two marginal actors ("derailment"), the one deciding consequently to sow a piece of land the coming day, the other preventing him, while central actors are silent, for executing such an action.

Interesting is the assumption of a marginal actor (YOR) of the responsibility of rearranging or balancing the disordered system. This position however failed as one of the protagonists is a semi-peripheral actor (also of higher status).

This interaction process shows in this way a ramified form, the outcome occurring as a contingency that is not successfully managed in the sense of Bales (2001).

## Constraints

The particularity of this analysis (study of a natural setting compared to the multiple experimental studies in Social Psychology, Economics, Political and Communication Science, Linguistics) is however a constraint, for it restrains the **referential field** of the gained results. There are indeed several studies about social networks or conversational/discursive situations, but few of them take into account the two perspectives in the same investigation field (Diamond, 1996; Milroy, 1987).

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