The algorithm for articulating meanings of entrepreneurship as a social concept

Abstract. The development of social sciences based on positivism led to a multiplicity of social concepts’ definitions. The study aims to operationalize a constructionist approach to the formation of concepts’ meanings in specific place and time. The study used metadata of articles on entrepreneurship from OpenAlex with the “entrepreneurship as” search syntagm. The resulting sets of authors’ operational metaphors and analogies were analyzed semantically and contextually; social cartography was used to study the distribution of meanings within discourse. The results of the study are: (1) identification and schematic modeling of social concept’s sense as an outcome of discourse consolidation process through basic metaphor detection; (2) the notion explication and schematic modeling of the concept’s meaning as an interplay of complementary tensions within discourse; (3) the construction of a generalized model of articulation and dispersion of the social concept’s meanings based on the interaction of discourse’s metaphors and its tenseness.

1 Introduction

1.1 Articulating the meanings of entrepreneurship as a social concept

Currently, the constructionist approach, “in order to master, at least partly, the great proliferation of discourse” [3. P. 67] of a social phenomenon/concept, proposes a transition from their definitions in the spirit of classical science with its semantic concepts that fix objects of reality to the distributions of these concepts’ meanings that operate in a particular context. This approach implies a primary means for overcoming concepts’ ambiguity – “discrepancies” in the definition of the concept that expresses it become inevitable [2].

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abating, as Michel Foucault put it, “the great incessant and disordered buzzing of discourse” [Ibid.]

are groups of theoretical views on entrepreneurship based on “sociological paradigms” [4–6] or “philosophical foundations” [7, 8].

of this concept’s meanings that systematizers consciously choose. Therefore, discourse is

of a concept’s meanings presented in authors’ subjective utterances. of concepts so that we can talk about the “order of discourse”?

2 Materials and methods

was the “entrepreneurship as” syntagm; the time period and concepts (i.e., subject fields)

build a “model of the autonomization of” based on the analysis of the process of hegemonization of one of the “operational metaphors” as a “basic metaphor” (3.2). After this, we proceed to analyze the mechanism of “dispersion” of meanings within individual discourses based on the identification of the “tensions” present in them (3.3). Finally, we propose “a generalized model for articulating the meanings of entrepreneurship as a social concept” (3.4).
3.1 Differentiating the notions of discourse and literature array

A single system of formulation means maintaining it by discarding irrelevant utterances. Accordingly, the totality of literature extracted from search engines using linguistic markers of the analyzed concept and introducing discipline-, temporal, etc. restrictions, necessarily contains sources with utterances that formally correspond to the search parameters, but are inhomogeneous in meaning to the emerging system of utterances and therefore subject to rejection by it. Many contemporary studies of concepts based on big data technologies reduce discourse to a base of formally similar bibliometric data. The same can be said about sets of utterances collected using given linguistic markers on social networks on the Internet; such sets are uncritically interpreted as discourses. However, in view of the ambiguity of words in natural language, a search in this case can show a significant number of utterances semantically related to other systems of formulation, i.e., discourses.

3.2 Roles of operational and basic metaphors in discourse autonomization

For discourses of scientific concepts, the primary focus is not a concept’s topic, but the gradually emerging vision of its objects. The vision – vague at first, and then increasingly clear – is set by the tâtonnement (trial-and-error process of reaching results) of the most capacious and simultaneously the most productive (basic) metaphor, which serves to consolidate utterances corresponding to its meaning and separate them from others that in their sense-searching journey discover their metaphorical family or stay outside any discursive formations. Due to the metaphorical nature of cognizing, the meanings of a concept articulated in various utterances do not immediately reveal their unity that is expressed through a basic metaphor: they can see their object in the light of their own (operational) metaphors. The process is similar to searching for a road with a flashlight until it clearly shows in roadside lights. Within the framework of discursive unity, defined by a basic metaphor that can be ontologized as the essence of the formed subject of research or its defining property, sets of utterances united by individual operational metaphors or their groups receive the status of scientific views, not necessarily characterized by the homogeneity of the concept’s meanings.

Thus, the many operational metaphors involved in the scientific process gradually intertwine into various discursive flows organized by mega-metaphors. Let us illustrate this with the example of the autonomization of the discourse of the entrepreneurial function, that is, the discourse of entrepreneurship organized by the vision of it as a function, or, similarly, by the metaphor of the function, which supports the semantic unity of quite diverse conceptual utterances about entrepreneurship (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Autonomization of discourse as a homogeneous semantic formation. To ensure greater clarity, only explicit metaphors were extracted from OpenAlex using the “entrepreneurship as” query.
3.3 The algorithm for “dispersing” meanings within individual discourses based on identifying “tensions” present in them

Simultaneously with the process of discourse consolidation when its utterances acquire an increasingly clear sense consistent with a more “influential” metaphor, the discourse works the formation of the analyzed concept’s extreme meanings and represents opposite answers to the “what-question” of the discourse: what it actually constructs as a new object of reality. However, the social concept, being more than the discourse’s semantic designation, also contains the way of its formation and social functioning, i.e., the answer to the “how-question”. The answer to the latter is also ambiguous: it is a continuum of meanings located between certain extremes that are identified via tâtonnement in the discursive struggle.

The formed lines of discursive tension, connecting opposite answers to the “what-questions” and “how-questions”, represent the main structure that simultaneously provides the “order” of the discourse (its semantic identity) and its “expansion”, provoked by the orthogonal relationship between the lines of tension of the what-question and of the how-question, the field of discourse acquires its metric and its certainness at each given moment due to the resulting configurations of the distribution of the concept’s meanings. Each mature 

Fig. 2. Layout of the field of meanings of entrepreneurial function discourse

3.4 A model for articulating the meanings of a social concept

forming a “menu” of its meanings (Fig. 3) within the framework of the emerging
communication presupposes an indication of its superscription: Which particular discourse of entrepreneurship that supports its semantic certainty does it belong to? What position (meaning) in this discourse does it occupy?

Fig. 3. Model of the formation of a social concept’s meanings (N is authors’ positions in discourse)

Despite all the apparent formality of this two-factor model of the discourse, it expresses alternative realities of the functioning of a person as a subject of entrepreneurship that are constructed by entrepreneurship’s different discourses, namely, entrepreneurial function, entrepreneurial action, or entrepreneurship as practice [11].

An entrepreneur’s particular way of thinking or talking about their activities determines a certain mode of their subjectivity [12] in it. An entrepreneur may simply act as a bearer of formal entrepreneurial status obtained as a result of, e.g., registration with the tax authorities and associated with their normative participation in the discourse of entrepreneurship as function external to them in all its meanings (bearing responsibility, carrying out transactions, managing an enterprise, developing business plans). As a performer of an entrepreneurial role, an entrepreneur can actualize for themselves one or another meaning of entrepreneurial action in the field of the corresponding discourse.

Accepting the everyday life of entrepreneurship as a special lifestyle (the discourse of entrepreneurship as practice), an entrepreneur creates their own entrepreneurial identity [13] in one meaning or another (as simply a business owner seeking to earn money, as a maker of a business comfortable for themselves and a community associated with it, as a creator of new worlds based on freedom of creativity, as a person who needs to demonstrate their own superiority over others and strives for power over future).

4 Conclusion

The presented models make it possible to analyze the discourses of social concepts and avoid mixing their heterogeneous meanings. The very notions of “sense” and “meaning”...
social concepts’ meanings [14], for studying their distribution both between discourses and within a specific discourse (sense) (see, e.g., [15]), and for analyzing the dynamics and direction of changes in their meanings.

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