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Complex polysemy and reflexivity in organizational research

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Abstract

Although it raises some interest in the field of social sciences, polysemy is often overlooked in organizational science, where research relies on positivist traditions. These traditions continue to influence researchers, regardless of their epistemological or methodological approaches; this in turn has an impact on the way they address polysemic terms. Our objective is to propose an integrative reflexive approach structured around eight topics of reflexion in order to explore how, in an organizational research project, both participants and researchers understand and use complex polysemic terms. By doing so, we bring four major contributions: it first highlights the central position polysemy could occupy in organizational science; secondly, polysemy could bridge and enhance the debate between positivist and interpretivist organizational researchers; thirdly, reflexivity for polysemy has the potential to improve the theorization; and finally, the mutual influence between polysemy and reflexivity could stimulate creativity.

Keywords: Research methods, reflexivity, polysemy, theorization, creativity

Introduction

While most researchers consider that communication plays a role in organizational life, they do not consider it as being essential to its existence (Taylor, 2002). We agree however with Cooren, Taylor & Van Every (2006), that organization is constructed through a textual-conceptual world (ideas and interpretations) and through a practical world (conversations directed to actions). This view of organization as a construction through the processes of communication places “the role and dynamics of language and discourses on the forefront of our consciousness” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p.X)¹. Language is an interactive and interpretative medium which adds fine nuances to our communication process. It does therefore include a multitude of semantically ambiguous words such as homonyms, metaphors or polysemes (Eddington & Tokowicz, 2014), the latter being the most ambiguous. By its ambiguous character, polysemy could have strong negative or positive impacts on organizational research: the negative being that by not taking polysemy into account, one might misconstrue the research results -- see for example the research of Woodard (2001) on managerial courage; the positive impact is that by taking polysemy into account, we are forced to reflect on meanings, which enhances our reflexivity and thereby our creativity and theorization.

Derived from the Greek ‘poly’ (meaning ‘many’) and ‘semy’ (meaning ‘sense’), polysemy refers to a phoneme which takes on several interrelated meanings. For example, the word organization is polysemic since it is a phoneme having at least four interrelated meanings:

1) An organized group of people with a particular purpose, such as a business or a government

¹ *J.R. Taylor (2002)* refers to John R. Taylor, a researcher in the field of linguistics, while the J.R. Taylor in *Taylor & Van Every (2000)* and *Cooren, Taylor and Van Every (2006)* is James R. Taylor, a researcher in the field of communications.

department; 2) The action of organizing something; 3) The quality of being systematic and efficient, and 4) The way in which the elements of a whole are arranged (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). Polysemy relate to language constructions (Cuyckens & Zawada, 2001), e.g. verbs, nouns and adjectives, to texts and stories and even to symbolic constructions such as symbols (Taylor, 2002). Polysemy is a phenomenon that is believed to result from an economy of words – or symbols – aiming at preserving lexical storage space (Mamolo, 2010), at speeding lexical access (Crossley, Salsbury, & McNamara, 2010; Eddington & Tokowicz, 2014) and at adding to the discourse nuances related to a given situation (Benjafield, 2012). In fact, Riggs (1987) points out that the tolerance for ambiguity, which stems from a frequent use of polysemic terms, is intrinsic in social interaction and helps deal with delicate situations.

While not labeling it ‘polysemy’, organizational researchers have already considered the ambiguity in the meaning of concepts they were studying. The ambiguous meaning of words, concepts, texts and symbols has concerned many organizational researchers, especially symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists. Gephart (1978) for example discussed the meanings of the term “organization”, concluding that from an ethnomethodological perspective, “We cannot [therefore] assume that conceptions and constructions of the organization are stable or that all participants share them”(p. 557). From this viewpoint, the term “organization” can have more meanings than the four definitions found in the Oxford dictionary (2016). Time, policing and risk are also concepts identified in previous researches as showing various meanings without actually being identified as polysemic (Gephart Jr, 1978, 1993; Kolb & Van Maanen, 1985; Staudenmayer, Tire, & Perlow, 2002).

When searching for the keyword ‘polysemy’ in the databanks of scientific articles in the field of organizational management, we note a growing interest. However, in most of the articles

found in these databanks, organizational researchers view polysemy's research issues mostly (if not only) as being linked to the participants or the respondents of a survey or an interview: Hardy and Ford (2014) studied the polysemy of terms as a survey respondent understood them; Alvesson (2011) proposed to hold interviews as a means of identifying the various concept meanings which are not obvious to a researcher from the outset; finally, Harbour and Kisfalvi (2012) proposed a mixed method focussing on the study participants' polysemic use of the term "managerial courage".

However, since polysemy is an intrinsic part of communication, we believe that it needs to be addressed more widely in research. Indeed, the polysemic character of a term that could be more or less complex and whose meaning can vary in time and space is true not only for the participants but also for every researcher taking part in a study. Researchers must therefore reflect on the use of a polysemic term from all of the actors' perspectives – senior and junior researchers associated with the research project, participants as well as from their own point of view and from the perspectives given in scientific and professional literature. Our study will therefore focus on proposing themes of reflexions to study complex polysemic terms through these different perspectives.

The reflexive and methodological analysis of complex polysemic terms we propose would interest organizational researchers in four ways. First, these researchers can put a name on a phenomenon, which most positivist and interpretivist organizational researchers have already taken into account implicitly or explicitly. Secondly, as polysemy is a subject of study in linguistic and cognitive psychology, organizational researchers could then mobilize the knowledge in these academic disciplines to improve their research design. Thirdly, while polysemy does not constitute a problem for people in their everyday language, it raises major

concerns for most of organizational researchers since language is an important input and output in their research. One of these concerns is to communicate adequately the meanings of the terms under study while understanding adequately the meanings of the terms as used by their research participants. Another concern would be that the researchers themselves, just as everyone else, could create new meanings for terms in their everyday life. As professionals, they also contribute to the development of meanings for polysemic terms in their research practices and in their academic discipline (Benjafield, 2012). We would tend to assume that these concerns prevail in research studies for which language is an important medium. According to Pierre Bourdieu, these issues are part of a sociologist's everyday challenges: "The same words can be used by different groups, different milieus, and they don't have the same meaning" (Bourdieu & Chartier, 2015, p.12). Bourdieu adds that that by using normative conceptual categories (universal categories which do not change with groups, environments and time periods) one directly shields the construction of all social phonemes under study. Therefore, in contrast to the classical research approach, which uses normative conceptual categories to supposedly eliminate bias, we believe that looking at ambiguity through the lens of complex polysemy – and this is the fourth and last interest for organizational researchers – could improve our understanding of language/terms constructions about an organizational phenomena and generate reflexions, and then creativity and theorization, in research.

In this regard, we have explored the reflexive methods recently put forward and discussed by several researchers in the field of administration. These authors (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Chia, 1996; Cunliffe, 2003; Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013; Goldpink & Kay, 2010; C. Hardy & Clegg, 1997; Haynes, 2011; Hibbert, Coupland, & MacIntosh, 2010; Hibbert, Sillince, Diefenbach, & Cunliffe, 2014; Mahadevan, 2001; Munkejord, 2009; Orr & Bennet, 2009) offer a

rich discussion on reflexivity (also a polysemic term!) for which they propose practices that could improve how different actors (participants and researchers) use and understand terms. For example, Cunliffe & Karunanayake (2013) insist on the importance to reflect on the researcher-respondent relationship (hyphen-space) because these relationships can influence the interpretation or the meaning attributed to the data.

Subsequently, we concluded that reflexivity can help address the challenge of studying complex polysemic terms since it can challenge researchers and direct, or even force them to examine different perspectives. We will therefore explore how reflexivity could improve the study of complex polysemes in organization by looking at the ways participants and researchers perceive them. To do so, we will first review some important concepts on polysemy and discuss the difference between simple and complex polysemy. Secondly, we will examine how organizational researchers deal with complex polysemic concepts and the issues they create. Thirdly, we will propose an approach structured around eight topics of reflexion stemming from the hermeneutic approach of Alvesson & Skoldberg (2009). We will then conclude with a discussion on our contributions and a conclusion.

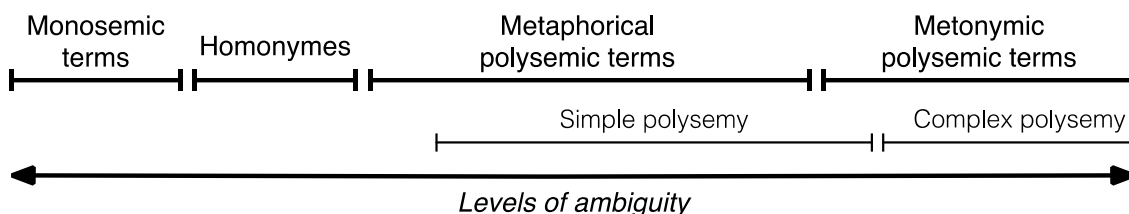
Polysemy

Researchers in the field of linguistics agree on a definition of polysemy. For example, Klepousniotou, Titone and & Romero (2008, p.4) have a definition similar to Taylor's (2002) we presented in the introduction; indeed for them, polysemy is "...a single lexical item [that] has several different but related senses". The antonym of polysemy is monosemy, which points to lexical terms related to one meaning only (Cuyckens & Zawada, 2001). However, monosemy is quite rare because in the English language (this is also true for most of languages), most of the

words are considered as being polysemic (Klepousniotou et al., 2008). Ambiguity is therefore completely integrated in language. However, even though polysemy is an important source of ambiguity, it is not the only one: homonyms and metaphors are also considered as sources of lexical ambiguity (Benjafield, 2014).

Lexical ambiguity is a continuum (see figure 1). On one end, we have monosemic terms which do not generate any ambiguity, followed by homonyms – phonemes with two or more unrelated meanings (Eddington & Tokowicz, 2014), like the word ‘cookie’ (a sweet to be eaten or a message given to a web browser by a website in order to send login information). In the middle of the continuum, we have metaphorical polysemic terms – phonemes having a literal meaning and a related figurative (metaphorical) meaning (Eddington & Tokowicz, 2014), like ‘incubator’ (an enclosed apparatus for premature babies or an environment dedicated to support a business start-up). At the opposite end of the continuum, we have metonymic polysemic terms – phonemes with related literal meanings (Eddington & Tokowicz, 2014), like the word ‘organization’ (an organized group, the action of organizing, the quality of being systematic and efficient or the way in which the elements of a whole are arranged).

Figure 1: Levels of ambiguity



Metonymic polysemic terms are therefore the most ambiguous of all lexical items. However, not all metonymic polysemic terms have the same level of ambiguity (Eddington & Tokowicz, 2014). Some metonymic polysemic terms have only two related meanings while

others could have many more (Foraker & Murphy, 2012). The older a polysemic term is, the more it develops related meanings, as Benjafield (2012) has demonstrated in his study on the use of polysemic terms in the academic discipline of psychology. Therefore for the purposes of our analysis, we make a distinction between simple and complex metonymic polysemic terms.

Simple polysemic terms refers to terms having well-circumscribed related meanings, like metaphorical polysemic terms or simple metonymic polysemic term. For example, we consider the word “corporation” to be a simple polysemic term: a corporation can refer to the legal structure of a company, to an association of professionals or to a group of business people. For Pedhazur & Pedhazur (1991), a well-built empirical index (valid and reliable) makes it possible to accurately distinguish between these meanings (e.g. a legal structure, an association of professionals or a group of business people) according to the context in which the word is used.

Complex polysemic terms are highly polysemic terms that “exhibit higher degrees of ambiguity” (Crossley et al., 2010, p.576). These multiple related meanings are more likely to generate new meanings (Taylor, 2002). The development of polysemic terms shows a tendency to start from a concrete meaning to yield different abstract meanings (Benjafield, 2012). Complex polysemic terms cannot therefore be reduced to the number of explicit meanings of any given term (Taylor, 2002) – just as we mentioned Gephart stressing the unstable conceptions of "organization" while the Oxford dictionary presents only four definitions of this concept. Indeed, in addition to being potentially different for every person, the meaning given to a term could vary with the context (emotional, professional vs familial, place, culture, etc.). It could also vary in time on a very short period (even in the course of a conversation, for example) or on a long

duration (as through the development of an academic discipline)². As well, a new meaning could come to one of the participants' or one of the researchers' minds during a conversation if the context requires it. Moreover, a simple polysemic term could evolve into a complex one. The developmental character of polysemy and the network of overlapping meanings of complex polysemic terms where new meanings could emerge spontaneously present great challenges to positivist and interpretativist researchers alike.

Courage is a good example of a complex polysemic term: as a concept, it is often used to describe one's appreciation (after the fact) of the behaviour or of the decision of an individual or an organization (for a list of the definitions given to the word "courage", see Harbour & Kisfalvi, 2012). In practice, this appreciation can be so subtle as to be difficult to define: the same behaviour can lead to various meanings for the term "courage" by different observers. As an example, Harbour & Kisfalvi (2012, 2014) have named in their research the different meanings associated to managerial courage "the courage to act" and "the courage to be". Moreover, the difference of meanings between "courage to act" and "courage to be" was so subtle that the participants and the researchers did not consciously understand them until an analysis of the data was performed, as Harbour & Kisfalvi (2012) explain.

Although they always generate an ambiguity, simple and complex polysemic terms are very common in everyday language, and people use them with no hesitation or even unaware of their polysemic nature. Taylor (2002) calls this phenomenon the polysemic paradox. Polysemy in everyday language does not generate real-life issues; however, complex polysemic terms,

² As we explain it in our introduction, the complexity of studying social systems construction has nothing new, since Bourdieu already underscored it in 1988 (see Bourdieu & Chartier, 2015).

which create a high level of ambiguity, could present challenges, and then become a source of creativity and theorization for most organizational researchers.

Challenges Facing Organizational Researchers

According to Corbin & Strauss (2015), "*...concepts are the foundation for knowledge*" (p.26). We have seen that polysemy is an important aspect of language constructs. As a result, the ambiguity around polysemy, and particularly for complex polysemic terms, plays a particularly important role when one constructs the theoretical framework, which constitutes a network of concepts (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This ambiguity goes beyond the theoretical framework as this latter "*...offers a clear, consistent frame of reference for making methodology decisions, including choices about how you organize, interpret and ultimately analyze*" according to Ravitch & Riggan (2012, p.81).

Both positivist and interpretivist authors agree on the importance of theoretical frameworks. However, their perspectives diverge when constructing this framework. We have here two opposing traditions (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009): deduction and induction. We usually associate deduction with quantitative (or positivist) research and induction with qualitative (or interpretivist) research (Weathington, Cunningham, & Pittenger, 2012), even though Bitektine (2008) warns about the limits such a generalization creates. We agree with Bitektine (2008) on such limits. However, for the purpose of our paper, we will retain this commonly accepted view (see Bryman & Bell, 2015) of both traditions: deduction for quantitative/positivist/objectivism research and induction for qualitative/Interpretivism/Constructionism research.

In this section, we will address the issues polysemy presents to organizational researchers. In the first and second sections, we discuss the limits of deductive and inductive approaches for dealing with polysemy while constructing a theoretical framework. Finally, in the third section we will examine some specific issues complex polysemic terms create for organizational researchers.

Polysemy and the Deductive Approach

Strongly influenced by sociology, the research methods in organizational science have been developed from positivist perspectives based on objectivist ontological premises. The existence of a phenomena is independent of individual consciousness and universal, which is why focus is placed on researching regularities and causal systems (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; P. Johnson & Duberley, 2000). These premises led to nomothetic research approaches proposing well circumscribed and systematized techniques and protocols drawn from natural sciences models (P. Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

In these approaches, terms (words) or concepts (general ideas) are used to identify an objective phenomenon. As objective phenomena can take on various meanings, they are implicitly considered as being potentially polysemic. Consequently, the practice is for organizational researchers to define them in an explicit and rigorous manner. In organizational studies, as in social sciences in general, the traditional method to construct a theoretical framework is deductive. In other words, after scanning the literature to find all the different meanings applied to a concept, the researcher specifies the meaning to be used and operationalized by following the four step approach proposed by Lazarsfeld (1958): 1. Visually representing the concept, 2. Specifying concept dimensions, 3. Choosing observable indicators for each dimension, and 4. Synthesizing the indicators into empirical indices.

Researchers following a deductive approach are not immune to the impact of the variability of concept meanings. Indeed, as B. Hardy & Ford (2014) have shown in their research on polysemic terms in a survey – a traditional deductive research design for organization studies (Schwab, 2005) – the various meanings of a studied concept other than the one specified by the researcher could potentially be measured. Tradition dictates that one apply validity criteria (contents, constructs, convergence/divergence, etc.) and reliability criteria (test-retest, Cronbach's alpha) to confirm, *inter alia*, the researcher's ability to control how polysemy affecting the concept under study influences the results obtained. Indeed, validity refers to the principle dictating that the empirical index provide an accurate measure solely of the concept and in terms of the monosemantic meaning defined for it (Cooper & Shindler, 2011). Reliability relates to the accuracy and precision with which an index will measure the determined concept (Cooper & Shindler, 2011).

We cannot count on the validity and reliability of empirical indices to resolve all of the challenges caused by polysemy in research. In our view, the two definitions presented in the last paragraph show clearly that methods used to verify the validity and reliability focus on the impacts simple polysemy has on research while disregarding the issues around complex polysemy. Take the example of Woodard (2001) who, in his research on hardiness and courage, retained a definition of courage based on the ability of an individual to control his or her fear. Performing measurements on internal consistency and other statistical analyses, Woodard ensures the validity and the reliability of measurement indicators for the term "courage" as per his definition. However, even if his indicators for "courage" are reliable and valid, Woodard explains in the discussion of his study that he was not able to demonstrate the links between "courage" and "hardiness" precisely because he had not retained the correct definition of

“courage” – an existential definition would have been more appropriate. In our opinion, Woodard (2001) identified one of the pitfalls of his research as being simple polysemy when he concluded that another definition is necessary, as are the valid and reliable measurement indicators, to show the link between “courage” and “hardiness”. However, a later study (Harbour & Kisfalvi, 2012, 2014) revealed that the concept of “courage” is much more complex than establishing a simple definition and that measuring validity and reliability could be insufficient. Several of the leading topics in management and organizational studies (leadership, strategy, etc.) are complex polysemic terms, and “courage” is no exception.

Woodard’s research illustrates the important influence of deductive tradition on contemporary research in organization studies. However, some researchers believe that by favouring an inductive approach, they are safeguarding their research from this deductive tradition and its positivist principles. Instead, Alvesson & Skölberg (2009) point out that several of these so-called “inductive” research approaches are based on systematized techniques and protocols like Lazarsfeld’s as well as on a deductive building approach. This pitfall becomes even more significant if we consider the issues related to complex polysemic terms in inductive approaches.

Polysemy and the Inductive Approach

The inductive approach aims at constructing a theoretical framework from empirical material (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Of all inductive approaches, the Grounded Theory is particularly popular with organizational researchers (Locke, 2001). As do other inductive approaches for constructing a theoretical framework (e.g. symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology), the Grounded Theory focusses on systematically creating categories (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Corbin & Strauss (2015), Glaser (1992), and Alvesson

& Sköldberg (2009) point out that these “categories” and their inducted properties align with the “concept” in Lazarfeld’s deductive approach to construct a theoretical framework.

While rejecting Lazarfeld’s “positive” approach, some researchers using inductive approaches claim there is nothing polysemic terms used by participants that a researcher cannot take into account when conducting a (well-constructed!) qualitative research. Constructing categories must be combined with other reflective steps to integrate the meaning given by the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). If not, research remains at the level of a “trivial constructivism”. “Trivial constructivism manifests itself in professionals [researchers] who treat the knowledge of others as subjective construction and never doubt the ‘objectivity’ of their own” (Von Glasersfeld, 1991, p.5 -- our note added in brackets). As Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) point out, “Constructions need to be taken seriously in a variety of respects – not only how natives construct, but also how researchers construct their constructions”.

We have seen that both deductive and inductive approaches are limited in the way they deal with language ambiguity (e.g. polysemy) in the theoretical framework’s construction. Considering that the theoretical framework guides the researcher throughout his or her research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012), we believe that it is important to consider the specific research issues of complex polysemic terms.

Complex Polysemic terms and Research Issues

Researchers studying polysemy in linguistics adopt a positivist stance by using statistical analysis, computational models or mapping (Eddington & Tokowicz, 2014) to “...know the nature of polysemy ; its relation to the more general phenomenon of semantic ambiguity; the ways in which multiple meanings, or senses, are represented in a dictionary or lexicon and related to each other; the principles that govern these relations and the mechanisms that allow the creation of

new senses” (Ravin & Leacock, 2000, p.1). While in the positivist tradition of organizational science, the meanings of language items (for example the Lazarfeld’s “construct”) must be considered universally, researchers in linguistics conclude that the meaning of polysemic terms always depends on the context and, for this reason, it keeps changing (Foraker & Murphy, 2012; Klepousniotou, 2002; Taylor, 2002). Indeed, according to Taylor (2002, p.639) “...semanticists and lexicographers have taken meanings to be abstractions over usage events, specific uses being contextual elaboration of the abstract senses”. Accepting the fact that the meanings of language constructs could multiply and evolve is not without consequences for positivist and interpretivist researchers alike. After examining diverse academic literature (communications, linguistics, psychology, management and organization), we have identified four issues facing organizational researchers. To these four issues, we add the meta-issue of impermanency.

The first issue for an organizational researcher is to acknowledge that, whatever epistemological approach he or she follows, the majority of terms can be qualified as polysemic, including the term “polysemy” itself! The researcher must then ponder on the lexical ambiguity (monosemic, homonym or simple/complex polysemic) of the terms under study and must investigate the character of this ambiguity. When polysemy is identified, the researcher has to determine whether it refers to a simple or to a complex polysemic term. However, the researcher must remain aware of the developmental character of polysemic terms – e.g. a complex polysemic term develops a new meaning, or a simple polysemic term evolves and becomes a complex one, as Benjafield (2012) demonstrated in his study of the evolution of polysemic terms in the academic discipline of psychology. In this study, he shows clearly how researchers also reveal and disseminate new meanings for language items. Organizational researchers must thus

be aware of the polysemy of terms, they must know how to recognize them and remain open and critical in this respect.

The second research issue on polysemy was initially identified for researchers in linguistics (Taylor, 2002). According to Taylor (2002), when examining polysemic terms, the researcher must consider on one hand the necessity to take into account the general meaning of a term at its highest level of abstraction and, on the other hand, all of its possible uses in a given context. We believe this issue is a true challenge for an organizational researcher studying a complex polysemic term. For example, the term “strategy” at its highest level of abstraction could be defined as the art of combining or coordinating means and ends. According to Porter (1980), this definition summarizes all of the definitions presented in various general dictionaries (Merriam-Webster, 2016; Oxford Dictionaries, 2016; Oxford Dictionary, 2016) and also the definition usually used in a corporate setting. Yet this term also takes other meanings. For Mintzberg (1987), a strategy relates to the five P’s: a plan, a ploy, a pattern, a position and a perspective. For Johnson, Whittington, Sholes & Fréry (1998), in a handbook for administration students, strategy refers to contingency (as in positioning on an industrial market), to strategic development orientations (as in differentiation strategy), or to a process (as in strategic planning or daily practice). These authors also identify strategy on three levels: corporate, business units and operations. Moreover, in management the term strategy is also used in the context of different operational functions such as finance, marketing or human resources for which this construct refers to completely different concepts. Even in the well-defined field of strategy as strategy-as-practice, the term “practice of strategy” could take on different meanings, according to Rouleau (2013). Furthermore, different academic disciplines and professions such as psychology, law and medicine, to only name a few, give various other meanings to the term

“strategy”. Thus for an organizational researcher, the difficulty lies in simultaneously considering the different levels of abstraction to be sure to grasp the adequate meaning which, according to Taylor (2002), proves to be impossible in many cases. This particularly applies to complex polysemic terms, as it can be difficult to identify all of their contextual meanings. In this regard, the term strategy is a perfect example.

A third issue for researchers looking at complex polysemic terms is that the meaning of a term can emerge directly from a particular experience (Taylor, 2002). This is an extension of an already acquired meaning, a phenomenon well studied in linguistics (Taylor, 2002). This conception of a polysemic term is linked to linguistics’ cognitivist approaches, which postulate that the emerging meanings of a polysemic term form a cognitive network for an individual (Kishner & Gibbs Jr., 1996). This cognitive network can take form and grow throughout the experience. Organizational researchers must thus be aware that they themselves and/or their study participants can “build” a new meaning according to the context of the study.

The last issue we wish to point out here relates to the role of emotions in the choice of a semantic term. The literature in linguistics is curiously quiet as to the place of emotions in the recognition and use of complex polysemic terms. Organizational researchers have started to address this issue. Indeed, according to Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009), the participants’ and researchers’ understanding of the words and concepts are influenced by emotions (their own and the emotions of the “others”). In this regard, Harbour & Kisfalvi (2014) have also observed the weight influence emotions can have. In their study on managerial courage, they described two types of courage. The first (courage to act) consists of the courage usually expected from senior managers and the second (courage to be) is a rarer but more intense type of courage. These two types of courage were recognized in the interplay of the intensity of emotions and their control, as

perceived by the participants in the study. These results suppose that the use and the recognition of the complex polysemic terms are influenced by emotions, both those of the observed and those of the observers. A solid grasp of emotional reality thus seems to be a necessary ally in studying complex polysemic terms.

We have identified four research issues related to complex polysemic terms: recognition of polysemy, determination of general versus contextualized meanings, the emergence of meanings and finally the impact of emotions on the meaning given to complex polysemic terms. Although these issues may at first seem simple, their interaction generates what we will call a meta-issue: impermanency. Organizational researchers are thus confronted with a double level of analysis for polysemy that has to be taken into account when developing a research design, because the meaning given to a complex polysemic term can evolve through time, both for the study participants and for the researchers.

These research issues related to complex polysemic terms could leave a researcher feeling perplexed. We believe, however, that organizational researchers can use these issues and the meta-issue to their advantage in a creative way in their interactions with the empirical material and in the interpretations they draw from the material. They will then develop a better theoretical framework – and generally a better research – that will be more pragmatic and more firmly based on the construction of social life. In this respect, using reflexive methods in research constitutes an interesting mean to better understand complex polysemic terms.

Reflexivity for Polysemy

Reflexivity in Organizational Research

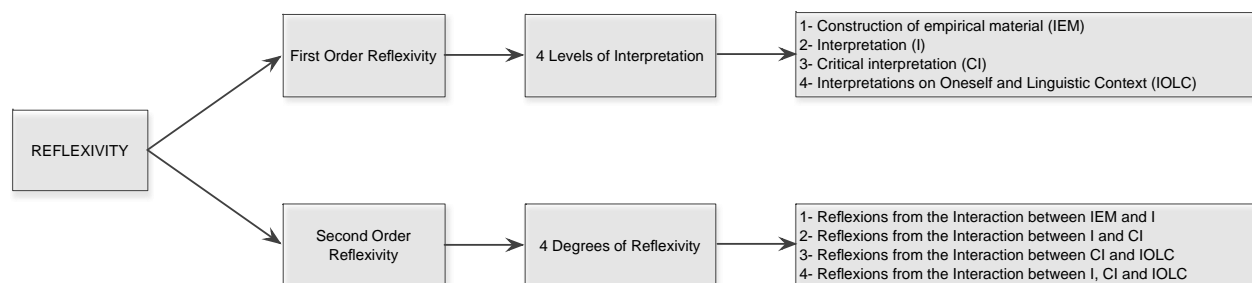
Researchers using a critical approach, particularly those looking at the interactions and influences between the researcher and the study participants, have integrated reflexivity in their research methods (Alkon, 2011; Cunliffe, 2003, 2010; Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). As such, reflexive methods are not new. They are already a part of academic literature in philosophy, natural sciences, anthropology, sociology and psychology, as noted by Cunliffe (2003). However, reflexive methods have only recently attracted the attention of the organizational researchers (Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley, 2008; Buchanan & Bryman, 2007; Cunliffe, 2003; Janasik, Honkela, & Bruun, 2008; Leich, Hill, & Harrison, 2010).

This new interest in reflexive methods is particularly present in theories of organizations. As Daft & Lewin (1990) point out, organizations are complex entities resulting from the interactions and emotions of the people who form them. In this way, at the beginning of the 1990's, Daft & Lewin (1990) suggested developing methods, even "heretical" ones, that could encompass the diversity of the organizational life and the changes inherent therein. This paved the way for the emerging interest in reflexive methods. Nevertheless, organizational researchers began to publish scientific articles on reflexive methods only by the end of the 1990's and particularly from 2000 to the present day.

We distinguish two orders of reflexivity (see Figure 2). The first refers to the objectively structured study approach of a social phenomenon. The researcher examines how the actors, through their actions, the words they use (language) and the knowledge they share, take part in the construction of the social phenomenon under examination. The researcher excludes himself or herself as an actor involved in the social phenomenon under study. The researcher sets his or her interpretation of the construction dynamics of the studied phenomenon and self-criticism of both his or her research and the subsequent communication of its results on an "objectively"

structured grid. Reflexivity of the first order is then a series of interpretations on the literature and on the data in order to interpret this information. The second order of reflexivity, which Cunliffe (2003) has named radical reflexivity, focuses on the singularity of the researcher (knowledge, experiences, skills, emotions, etc.), from which postulates on the studied phenomenon are established. The intersubjectivity characterizing the knowledge development process is also a focal point of the second order of reflexivity: as he or she interacts with the subjects of the research, the researcher also takes part in the construction of the phenomenon under study while developing the knowledge on this phenomenon. The second order of reflexivity is therefore a series of reflections on oneself in order to reflect on the initial interpretations. This level goes further as it is a second phase of reflexion coming after a first series of interpretations.

Figure 2: First and Second Order Reflexivity



Within the framework of our article, we chose to combine these two orders of reflexivity with the approach proposed by Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009). Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009) suggest four levels of interpretation: 1. Construction of the empirical material [IEM], 2. Interpretation (of material) [I], 3. Critical interpretation (of interpretation) [CI], and 4. Interpretation on one-self and linguistic context [IOLC]. We have associated these four levels of interpretation with reflexivity of the first order (see Figure 2). The very first level refers to the interpretation of the

phenomenon and of the organizational contexts constructing the empirical material. The former relates to an interpretation of empirical material (the second level of interpretation) as proposed in the two traditional approaches (induction and deduction – see Figure 3). A critical interpretation of the interpretation (the third level of interpretation) consists of examining the interpretation of empirical material from various angles, namely ideology, exerted power and domination, and the reproduction of particular social forms. Finally, the last level of interpretation focusses on scientific production as such (production of texts and use of language).

Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009) point out that by opposing the results of the four levels of interpretation, four degrees of reflexivity are produced, which we associate with reflexivity of the second order (see Figure 2). In the first order of reflexivity, the researcher's various interpretive interactions (e.g. the critical interpretation of his or her interpretation of the material or the interpretation of the critical interpretation) align with his or her preferences (e.g. symbolic, theoretical, ontological), with his or her experiences and emotions, with the intersubjectivity between researcher and participant and with the contextualized character of the meaning given to things. Consequently, the second order of reflexivity consists of various reflexions on his or her preferences and experiences, which could influence the researcher in his or her interpretive interactions (the first order of his or her reflexive approach).

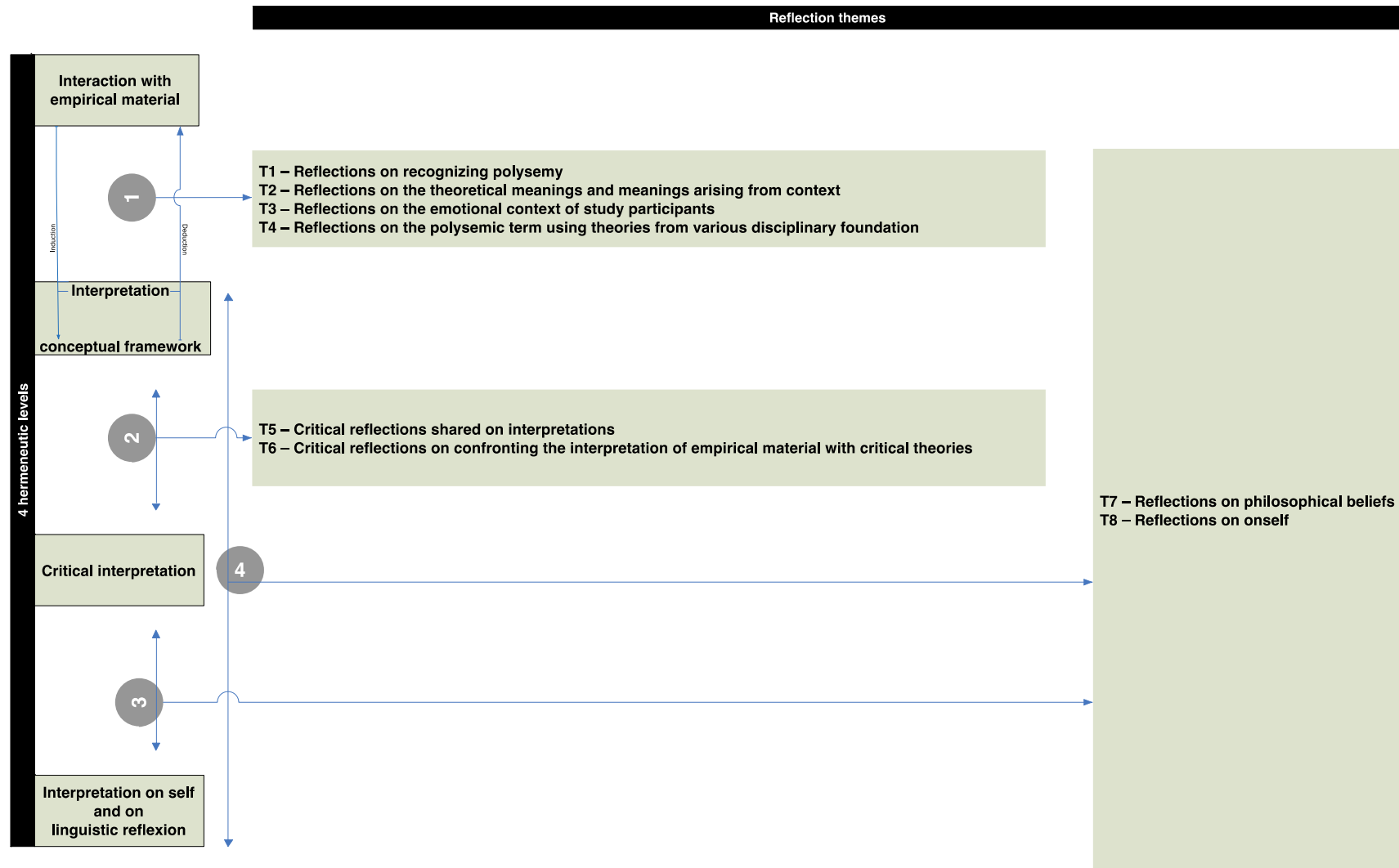
Reflexive methods are popular in organizational research mainly because they allow the researcher to apply a construction and a deconstruction of the collected data (Alkon, 2011). For example, reflexive methods favour both the comprehension of the way in which the researcher builds his or her data and his or her interpretations of the data. Moreover, by deconstructing his or her interpretations of the data through questioning their basis and thus exposing their hidden

side (influences, dominations, power, emotions, etc.), the researcher gains a better understanding of the subject under study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

Reflexivity as Applied to Complex Polysemic terms

While complex polysemic terms are often used in everyday language, they remain difficult to analyze and thus complicate qualitative (inductive) and quantitative (deductive) research studies. Earlier, we pointed out four organizational research issues linked to complex polysemic terms: recognition of polysemy, general versus contextualized meanings, emergence of meanings and impact of emotions on the meaning given to complex polysemic terms. We also identified a meta-issue – the impermanency of the meaning given to a complex polysemic term. Such issues are different in that they require research practices that will address the polysemic ambiguity not only to mitigate it or even to eliminate the research bias, but also to leverage them for a better understanding of the concepts under study. Polysemy can therefore contribute to a researcher's hermeneutic work. We believe that by using different practices to construct and deconstruct empirical material, reflexive methods are the best possible tools to guide researchers who need to adapt to complex polysemic terms. We therefore have developed a model presenting eight topics of reflexion (see Figure 3) stemming from the second order reflexivity; these topics are located at the interface of the various degrees of reflexion (identified by 4 pellets on Figure 3) proposed by Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009).

Figure 3: Topics for reflexive themes on polysemic term, based on Alvesson & Skoldberg (2009, p.277)



First Degree of Reflexivity. To study a complex polysemic term, one needs sensitivity and a critical view in order to question the meaning given to terms both by the researcher and the participants. Undertaking research on a complex polysemic term implies that a researcher acknowledges that he or she has a specific conception of the term (translated into his or her research through a deductive or an inductive approach) that may be different from the conception held by other researchers or participants in the study. We propose four topics of reflexion here (T1, T2, T3 and T4), corresponding to the first degree of reflexivity (Pellet 1 on Figure 3).

Initially, a researcher must be aware of the various terms he or she uses and must define them. Some might respond – quite rightly – that this is exactly what researchers already do, particularly those who adopt a deductive approach. The research issue here goes beyond a simple definition because the empirical material comes mainly from a construction used during the research process. Consequently, the first topic of reflexion (T1) aims at recognizing that the term that has just been defined is malleable and developmental and can be interpreted and used in different ways. Moreover, some terms are frequently used in particular ways by the members of a given social group.

Reflecting on the meaning given to the term implies first of all looking introspectively at one's own conceptions of the subject under study. How has the researcher's conception influenced his or her deductive conceptual framework (for example the Lazarfeld approach) or how has it influenced his or her inductive conceptual framework (for example the Grounded Theory approach)? The researcher then has a second topic for reflexion (T2): the theoretical concepts of the study subject and the way in which a term is used in everyday language. It is important to stress that for the researcher focussing on the polysemy of the main terms central to his or her research, reflexing on the use of the term in everyday language continues indefinitely.

The interesting point is, on the one hand, to see how the term is used in a series of contexts, and on the other hand, to grasp any variation in its use. It seems easier to do so using qualitative approaches. However, Bourdieu (1979) explored symbolic preferences by measuring them according to context and to social group by carrying out a correspondence analysis. According to Nord (2005), referring to Bourdieu's sociological work is a must when studying organizations. One could therefore explore the preferential use of a term (and of its meanings) according to organizational contexts and groups of actors by carrying out a correspondence analysis just as Bourdieu did. This will provide the researcher with a different interpretation angle.

Emotions are another topic of reflexion (T3) for the researcher. Acknowledging a participant's emotions and their impact can be an interesting subject of reflexion for the researcher. We observed that the emotional environment influences the meaning given to a complex polysemic concept. It can thus be said that the emotional environment contributes to the contextualized meaning and, further, to judgement as a whole, as showed by Harbour and Kisfalvi (2014). Emotional reflexivity has already been discussed. For Munkejord (2009), emotional reflexivity includes the recognition of emotions, empathic comprehension and the decisions in the decision-making process. However, reflecting on emotions can prove to be complex. Indeed, there are perceived emotions and felt emotions. Moreover, emotions are "contagious" (Wild, Erb, & Bartels, 2001); they can influence the emotional state of people staying in the immediate environment (Pugh, 2002). Then emotions could be collectives and be part of an organizational dynamic (Fineman, 2003). Despite these difficulties, in our opinion this reflexion is an essential step within the framework of studies on complex polysemic terms in an organizational setting. The emotional context, i.e. the emotions as such, the strategies used to regulate them and way emotions influence the emotions of others, are all elements contributing to

the contextualized meaning – albeit the emerging meaning – of a complex polysemic term. These elements also influence the interpretation of the empirical material. There is a lot to reflect upon when emotional context is regarded as one of the sources of interpretation of the empirical material and the construction of the data, particularly if we consider that emotional reality is continuously changing.

Apart from topics of reflexion which call upon the observation skills and a certain introspection on the part of the researcher, reflexion can continue on a fourth topic (T4) which is more theoretical. For a deductive or an inductive approach, Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009) propose taking into account various theories in order to view concepts and phenomena under a different light; this is particularly interesting when reflecting on complex polysemic terms. Moreover, reflexion can be stimulated by exploring quantitative and qualitative findings from various anchor disciplines. Indeed, a vertical integration across disciplines on a given subject of study makes it possible to see shared and un-shared significances, thus adding to the researcher's creativity.

The reflexion topics listed above allow the researcher to address research issues related to a complex polysemic term because they are part of an interactive approach with empirical material (data construction) and with data interpretation, i.e. the first degree of reflexivity suggested by Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009). These authors recommend that quantitative and qualitative data be treated in a pluralistic way, i.e. by considering several facets of the subject under study and by using a series of interpretations following various theories that are more or less related; in our view, this is a pertinent approach.

Second Degree of Reflexivity. Taking into consideration the impermanency associated with complex polysemic terms and their contextual character, we believe that it is very important

to critically reflect on the understanding of empirical material. The topics of reflexion that we propose will enable a researcher to go beyond a first degree of comprehension and interpretation, thus favouring the perception of different aspects of the term under study and stimulating creativity in theorizing the complex polysemic term. We identified two topics of critical reflexion (T5 and T6) that are associated with the second degree of reflexivity (Pellet 2, Figure 3).

The first critical reflexion topic (T5) involves confronting the interpretation of the data resulting from the interaction with the empirical material at the participant level. In this context, inspired by Hibbert, Coupland & MacIntosh (2014), we propose a reflexion based on feedback shared between the researcher and the study participant. Quantitative research can collect the participants' feedback by adding a Delphi process to the design (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Khran, 2007). Let us consider for example the study of project management themes borrowed from organizational science. Jugdev, Hartman & Thomas (2000) examined "leadership fears and frustrations" in project management. After using a deductive approach to define the terms "fear" and "frustration", they categorized the sources of fear and frustration expressed by their participants (who were project managers) through a first round of the Delphi Approach. They also used the next rounds to match these categories of fear and frustration with the different types of projects. These studies by Jugdev, Hartman & Thomas (2000) are exploratory. Yet they revolve around three polysemic terms: leadership, fear and frustration. Since fear and frustration are traditionally considered (or interpreted) as being negative affects, it might be interesting to hold additional Delphi rounds to verify if the participants perceive them more positively when associated with leadership and with the notion of courage.

In a qualitative research study, one can allow participants, in a focus group and/or individual interviews, to assess the researcher's interpretation of material they provided him or her. These methods, which are not new in and of themselves, also enable a researcher to perform a critical (and shared) evaluation of his or her interpretation of the context and its impact on the meanings given to complex polysemic terms under study. For example, Alvesson (2003, 2011) suggested that interviews be considered as a means of exploring major issues that are outside the interior reality of the participants being questioned, and beyond social realities inherent in the data. By means of eight metaphors, Alvesson (2003, 2011) proposes a criticism and a new way of designing interviews, notably allowing for better reporting of complex phenomena using language. By designing the interview as an arena for a construction project (metaphor 7), Alvesson (2003, 2011) proposed that the nature of the language and its use be mobilized to understand how the person interviewed builds his or her answer in order to persuade, request or accuse, depending on the context. Alvesson (2003, 2011) views the comments of the interviewee as if they were a linguistic work of art.

Reflexive work on the underlying meanings of complex polysemic terms must allow researchers to determine the conditions leading to a particular (contextualized) meaning. The supposition is that the researcher does not take ownership of the data but rather that he or she receives data in the name of the study participant, who holds the key – or one of the keys – to understand the subject under study. However, such a shared reflexion demands quite a degree of modesty on the part of the researcher. As C. Hardy & Clegg (1997) point out, the diversity and the ambiguity of meanings are better understood when the researcher engages in a reflexive process characterized by dialogue and debate. The richness of the resulting interpretations should thus encourage the researcher to take some risks in this respect.

A second critical topic of reflexion (T6) on the interpretation derived from an interaction with empirical material is the use of a more theoretical or more “rational” analysis, as proposed by Alvesson & Skoldberg (2009), i.e. comparing various theoretical approaches (such as a deconstruction) or critical perspectives (feminism, Marxism, etc.). This method differs from the one discussed in the previous section, which was based on the variety of abstract meanings a term takes in different disciplines. Here, reflexivity focuses on the influence ideologies, power and social inequalities have on the meaning attributed to a polysemic term when interpreted.

We have seen that polysemy is inherent to language. It allows individuals to interact by modulating conversations through adaptation. An intentional and maintained vagueness provides for a flexibility that supports the interactions between individuals. This characteristic constitutes, in our opinion, an interesting perspective on the use of complex polysemic terms for different organizational purposes: ideology, power or even social reproduction. To our knowledge, no research has been conducted on courage in a context of organizational power. In the armed forces, the concept of soldiers’ courage is highly valued (Miller, 2000; Rachman, 1978). The valorization of courage thus could become a tool for mobilizing and motivating (encouraging), even for indoctrinating and helping individuals carry out tasks considered to be very difficult, dangerous or even impossible. However, we have no knowledge of research studies investigating the way officers or managers use the concept of courage versus the way it is understood by the soldiers or the employees.

Even though critical perspectives are commonly associated with qualitative research, studies reflexing a critical angle on power, such as feminism (see Caprioli, 2004), could also apply to quantitative methods (Ely, 1995). For this reason, comparing the interpretation of

“qualitative” and “quantitative” field data with critical theories could undoubtedly provide interesting and relevant results on complex polysemic terms used in organizational studies.

These last two topics of critical reflection concerning the interpretation of data – regardless of whether it is divided or collected in a “rational” or a theoretical way – resulting from empirical material, are part of the second degree of reflexivity; Alvesson & Skoldberg (2009) propose at this stage to question the interpretation (or interpretations) from the field by adopting critical perspectives. The objective remains the same: to promote the acquisition of a broad range of interpretations that can contribute to the researcher’s creativity and theorization.

Third and Fourth Level of Reflexivity. The last two reflexive topics (T7 and T8) that we propose focus on the positivist and the interpretivist researcher’s introspection during interpretation and critical interpretation, that is to say the degree of reflexivity 3 and 4 (Pellets 3 and 4 in Figure 3). The first of these reflexions (T7) is linked to philosophical beliefs: ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological beliefs (Creswell, 2007; Grix, 2002). We have seen that polysemy is considered as being inherent in language in general. In this way, it takes on a particular importance in organizational research given the communications aspects associated with it. Recognizing polysemy is inherent to philosophical beliefs is thus the first research issue we identified. Such recognition implies, for example, reflexions on one’s philosophical beliefs but also on those of the major researchers who have published articles on a particular complex polysemic term. Although all organizational researchers must start with such a reflexion, we believe that it is particularly important for research dealing with complex polysemic terms. In organizational science, and in social sciences in general, major paradigms clash (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). For example, each of these paradigms is built out of a specific ontological base. By following a particular paradigm, researchers adopt the ontological position

on which the paradigm is based (Gauthier & Ika, 2012). Thus some researchers study a reality which exists; the data reflects this reality and the analysis is factual. Other researchers study a constructed reality; the data reflects a construct formed by social actors, by study participants and by the researcher, and as such it is subjected to an interpretative analysis. These two major ontological ideal-types are important in the study of complex polysemic terms and in addressing related research issues.

An ontological reflexion on complex polysemic terms is particularly interesting because it targets a particular design of reality, given the link between complex polysemy and the impermanency issue that we identified earlier. We have seen that simple and complex polysemic terms are tools providing some flexibility in the relationships between individuals or groups of individuals. However, this flexibility also applies to one individual. For example, polysemic terms allow meaning to be constructed in a flexible way; the meanings can also evolve without creating cognitive dissonance, or they at least limit this dissonance. Polysemy thus brings about some ontological opening – to consider other ontology already preferred – through the construction of meanings and their inherent interactions. Ontological reflexion on the meaning of terms must, however, take into account that some terms are monosemic whereas others are polysemic with two different natures (simple or complex).

This reflexion can take many forms. One can simply reflect on the various designs taken for granted in an organization. Indeed, Gauthier & Ika (2012) show that the various conceptions or definitions of a project (another polysemic term in organization) are in fact projections of various ontological postulates. Thus the researcher does not have to spend time identifying each ontological base associated with a conception of the main polysemic terms central to his or her research. Rather, he or she can simply take a position on the various concepts and consequently

initiate reflection on ontological assumptions. Then, the researcher who wants to pursue this reflexion can write them in a log book, noting assumptions and how the empirical material, interpretations and critical interpretations can reinforce or weaken these assumptions. This can lead to an exchange with other researchers through publications. The two forms of reflexion presented here are developed separately. The researcher can continue his or her reflexive approach by conferring on ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological approaches with other researchers during conferences, conventions or seminars, thus confronting his or her assumptions and the reflexions emerging from the research process in which the researcher is implicated (Hibbert et al., 2014).

A second topic of reflection (T8) associated with assumptions is reflexion on oneself. Here, the researcher looks at his or her emotions, values, and convictions and at the authority with which he or she practices his or her profession. These are reflexions on oneself both as a researcher and as an individual member of society in general or of a group or sub-group. In each case, a comparison is made with the complex polysemic term under study. At the first degree of reflexivity, if the emotional context of the study participants is taken into consideration, a critical reflection on oneself requires that the researcher consider his or her own emotions – both perceived and experienced – influence his or her interpretations throughout the research. The researcher must also reflect on the impact of his or her past, present and even future experiences in terms of his or her comprehension of the subject of complex polysemic study. Moreover, as underlined by Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje (2004), the reflexive researcher should critically analyze the relationships between the concepts of time, life experiences and research, both for himself or herself and for the study participant.

A trend in reflexive method practices promotes methods of introspection on the part of a researcher (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Haynes, 2011). In this way, autoethnography is a recognized practice. Ellis (2004) defines autoethnography as the process of writing about oneself in relation to culture. It is an exercise in theorization proceeding from an analysis of oneself. Autoethnography is a reflexive practice that can be particularly interesting when the role of emotions (the researcher's and the study participant's) is important for understanding the study subject, as is often the case for complex polysemic terms. We should however stress that autoethnography is also criticized or suggested with prudence (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Weick, 1999). As Tomkins & Eatough (2010) indicate, the researcher might slip into narcissism. Theorization can thus take on a marginal importance. However, within a global reflexive approach, autoethnography can prove to be an interesting tool to follow how we, as researchers, progressed in our comprehension of complex polysemic language items.

The research issues that we have identified relative to the study of complex polysemic terms imply that the researcher must use innovative methods to maintain awareness of the impermanency of meanings given to a subject, both by the researcher and by the study participants. Organizational researchers have not published much on polysemy and on the methods used to study this phenomenon. For this reason, the reflexive topics we propose can be considered exploratory and simply as addressing complex polysemic terms. Moreover, these themes of reflexion are not proposed as a rigid process of reflexivity but as tools to be used at the convenience of any researcher following a deductive, an inductive or a mixed research method.

Discussion

Polysemy is quite an interesting concept. In the first place, this phenomenon is ingrained in the language, yet most people use it without being aware they do. Polysemy is also interesting for the challenges it poses to organizational researchers, since language is an input as well as an output to their scientific studies. The challenges we met in our research practice directed our interest toward polysemy and incited us to explore the usefulness of reflexivity in organizational research on complex polysemic terms. We concluded that our research brings four contributions to the organizational research debate: first, it highlights the central position polysemy could occupy in organizational science; secondly, polysemy could bridge and enhance the debate between positivist and interpretivist organizational researchers; thirdly, the operationalization of reflexivity through polysemy has the potential to improve theorization; and fourthly, the mutual influence of polysemy and reflexivity could stimulate creativity.

The first contribution is that polysemy has the potential to take up a central position in organizational research. Indeed, researchers in this field already show an interest in language ambiguity. We have actually seen positivist and interpretivist researchers develop disambiguation practices before and after establishing their theoretical framework. For example, the act of defining terms constitutes a disambiguation practice in qualitative and quantitative studies (Creswell, 2009). According to the field of linguistics' knowledge on polysemy, our present practices do not allow us to properly understand polysemic terms because we do not adequately take into account their omnipresence in language. Our practices do not allow for their characteristics and contextual aspect, for the role emotions play, and mostly they do not consider their evolution through time as perceived by researchers and study participants. Linguistics' knowledge on polysemy prompts us to examine the different types of polysemic terms and to

address and organize them for various organizational contexts. In fact, as Alvesson & Sandberg (2014) suggest, by introducing a new research field's knowledge, we broaden our knowledge and escape from a “boxed-in” research style by promoting creativity.

We believe that organizational researchers begin to understand the potential they will gain by introducing polysemy in research practice. Indeed, as Suddaby (2010) points out, researchers keep focussing on concept operationalization while they are not adequately trained to understand language subtleties, resulting in a lack of construct clarity. An approach integrating our present knowledge in organizational science and in linguistics on the meanings given to language items will certainly have a positive impact on research practices.

Our second contribution is that the introduction of polysemy in the scientific debate bridges and enhances the discussions between positivist and interpretivist organizational researchers. Polysemy is inherent to language, just as language is inherent to all research studies. Whether a study is based on a positivist or interpretivist approach, polysemy is central to its data collection tools, to the collected data, to analysis and report production. For this reason, all organizational researchers should possess a good knowledge of polysemy in general and more specifically on a particular polysemic term and on the tools and methods used to study it.

By its ambiguous nature, one might think polysemy faces two philosophical worldviews in organizational science – on one hand, positivists whose ontological conception allows a good grasp on reality, and on the other hand the constructivists for whom reality is relative since it is constructed. Yet researchers in the field of linguistics study polysemy using experimental and quantitative methodologies which are positivist while, just as constructivists do, they believe that the meaning attributed to a polysemic term depends on its context and therefore can change, or can even produce a new meaning which then would have been constructed. On this point – and

this is quite interesting – the researchers in the field of linguistics share Weick's (1995, p.108) conception of meanings when he states that in order to change a group, "...one must change what it says and what its words mean". With polysemy, researchers from different and opposite schools could share a common understanding of the meanings of language constructs and develop different and complementary strategies to study it.

It is thus possible, or even desirable in organizational science, to reconcile two different perspectives. As Creswell (2009) points out, the quantitative and qualitative research approaches stand at two opposite poles between which most researchers position their studies. Actually, organizational science proponents tend increasingly to disregard the debate between positivism and interpretivist and turn toward new perspectives such as pragmatism (Suddaby, 2010) or toward new approaches like abduction (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2009). We believe that polysemy is a phenomenon which prompts researchers to open their mind to ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological diversities and enhances the debate.

Our third contribution lies in the theorization generated by a "reflexivity for polysemy" approach. A theory is a set of associated constructs (Bacharach, 1989; Creswell, 2009; Suddaby, 2010). Bacharach (1989) even maintains that a theory "...is no more than a linguistic device used to organize a complex empirical world" (p. 496). According to Suddaby (2010), a good understanding of constructs leads to a better theorization because it facilitates communication, empirical analyses and creativity. Actually in organizational science, one of the main concerns Suddaby (2010) identifies in theorization relates to the issue of clarifying constructs.

This concern about clarifying constructs takes on a major importance when considered through polysemy. Constructs are abstractions that we can't observe directly (Suddaby, 2010). We have indicated that phonemes evolve from monosemy to polysemy as they acquire

increasingly abstract meanings (Benjafield, 2012). Many constructs are actually complex polysemic terms holding several abstract meanings which are impermanent, as Suddaby (2010) points out. This is why the operational reflexive approach we propose to study polysemic terms gets very useful as it deepens the exploration of a complex polysemic terms past the first level of interpretation of its empirical material. As it facilitates the comprehension and the use of complex polysemic terms, and therefore of the constructs, this operational reflexive approach in eight themes constitutes a precious tool in the theorization of inductive or deductive research studies.

The fourth and last contribution lies in the mutual influence polysemy and reflexivity apply on creativity. We have considered reflexivity as a research tool facilitating the exploration of polysemic terms. Yet polysemic terms can also be considered as tools facilitating reflexivity. In fact, most papers on reflexivity are quite abstract and remain upstream and downstream from the research. Our model innovates by proposing to operationalize a reflective approach from complex polysemic terms all through the research process. Ambiguity inevitably prompts us to ponder upon the meaning, the development and on the how and why we will use these polysemic terms. We are therefore convinced that polysemy can leverage an introduction of reflexivity in research design. Moreover, addressing language items as polysemy opens a researcher's mind to different perspectives equally derived from the mind of research participants or from other academic disciplines.

As they incite researchers to think "out of the box", polysemy and reflexivity mutually influence researchers by stimulating their creativity. The debate aiming at stimulating creativity in research (and therefore enhancing theorization) has already been raging for a long time (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2014; Bartunek, Rynes, & Ireland, 2006; Boxembaum & Rouleau, 2011;

Bush & Hattery, 1956; Kor & Mahoney, 2000; Suddaby, 2010). Actually, Boxenbaum and Rouleau (2011) point out that these past years have yielded very few new organizational theories. Yet creativity generates "...novel, useful ideas or problem solutions." (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005, p.368). Alvesson & Sandberg (2014) discuss the shortcomings of today's research (specialization, incremental adding-to-the-literature contributions, blinkered mindset) which produce what they call a "box-in research" leading "to a shortage of imaginative and interesting research..." (p.968). To correct the situation, they suggest a "Box-Breaking Research" which would "...focus to an ideal that stresses *broad and varied scholarship* in the sense of working over wider and different intellectual terrains." (p.977). Alvesson & Sandberg (2014) actually propose a series of specific guidelines for accomplishing a box-breaking research, which they summarize as being a process of reflexivity. Introducing reflexivity while dealing with polysemic terms in a research project could contribute to producing a box-breaking research.

Conclusion

We have portrayed complex polysemy as being ubiquitous in organizational science and have highlighted four research issues and one meta-issue associated with it. We also have adapted and operationalized the reflexive method as suggested by Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009), articulating it around eight reflection topics focussed on complex polysemic terms, with a view of enriching our comprehension of them.

Polysemy and reflexive methods play an important part in organizational science: polysemy because it is inherent to language and thus central to all human activities, and reflexive methods because they prompt researchers to leave their comfort zone in order to face new horizons. Yet we believe these two topics to be closely related. Indeed, the study of a complex

polysemic research subject requires reflexion at several degrees to understand its evolution whereas reflexive methods should include reflexions on the polysemic (simple or complex) or on the monosemantic character of the subject under study and of the concepts associated with it.

Even though organisational science has already acknowledged the ambiguity of language a long time ago, our article proposes an operational model to deal with polysemic terms for researchers; this is quite novel in organisational science. It also offers a theoretical treatment on reflexivity (as most of articles discussing reflexivity) which constitute a limit. But this presents an opportunity to explore polysemic terms and reflexivity in a new way.

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