

Integrative Complexity: An Important Theory for Peace Psychologists

Julie M. Levitt

Psychologists for Social Responsibility, United States of America

I will consider the important issues relating to peace psychology that Koo and Han raise in their article, South–North Korean Relations: the integrative complexity in correspondence. Their article carries out 5 significant tasks: (a) to present the theory, integrative complexity; (b) to add to our limited analysis of divided peoples; (c) to demonstrate the complexity of cross-cultural analysis; (d) to emphasise the need to integrate historical references, culture, and many other factors to our understanding of policy decisions; (e) to analyse the relationship of power, affiliation, and achievement, with integrative complexity.

The theory, integrative complexity, uses the integrative complexity coding scheme to understand how the oral and written communication of leaders and decision-makers may be analysed objectively to understand how syntonic the communications are among players and conjecture about how each entity may influence the communication and decision-making of others. While integrative complexity has been used as a construct and analysis technique in political science, history, and social psychology, to my knowledge, it has not been applied by peace psychologists. That is not to say that other content analysis techniques have been ignored (Fabick, 1996, 2004, 2005). Peace psychologists are more likely to rely on analysis of personality factors and societal factors, qualitative and quantitative, when interpreting the motivations and actions of policy-makers and predicting changes in policy. As a result, we may fail to factor in some of the subtle complexity of decision-making at all levels of government and that of influential non-governmental leaders, such as the press, and therefore, misread the motivations and intentions of those in positions that influence or make policy. The authors' use of a theoretical construct and technique that analyses official documents and unofficial communications provides us with another objective tool to study the variables that correlate with decision and policy making. Koo and Han's analyses can help us as

peace psychologists to understand and anticipate decision-maker directions. Integrative complexity analysis may offer perspectives that in conjunction with other data allow for more sophisticated strategies by which power brokers may influence communication and thereby, possibly impact decision-making.

To add to our limited analysis of divided peoples, Koo and Han offer us a unique perspective on how a divided nation, the two Korea, share the same factors which contribute to their level of integrative complexity work. We have too few studies that explore the inner workings of divided countries.

Citing the work of Tetlock (1985) on American-Soviet relations, Koo and Han contrast the finding of integrative complexity analysis of the language of the two Koreas. Tetlock (1985) found that an increased level of integrative complexity (combining cognitive and conceptual rules) led to a more peaceful relationship between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union, while the Koreas responded to each other in less straightforward ways. Koo and Han demonstrated that integrative complexity declined during competitive/aggressive periods and rose during peaceful/collaborative ones, suggesting a relationship between rhetoric and decision-making. After a period of increased reconciliation, there was also a decrease of integrative complexity. The authors maintain that this finding may

Address for correspondence: Julie M. Levitt, Psychologists for Social Responsibility, 33 East Princeton Road, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004-2242, United States of America. E-mail: julie.levitt@verizon.net

be the result of the unwillingness of leaders on both sides to take the peace process further.

As the theory would have led to the expectation that there would be differences in degree of integrative complexity during critical conflict situations, actually the mutual influence of integrative complexity was negative, that is, in the opposite direction. One Korea increased its degree of integrative complexity in official documents while the other simplified its rhetoric, maintaining as it were a homeostasis. Koo and Han explain the opposing degrees of integrative complexity of the two Koreas by suggesting that the two Koreas have different ways of interpreting issues during critical situations. Such differences preclude moves toward reconciliation.

To emphasise the need to integrate historical references, culture, and many other factors to understand policy decisions, Koo and Han's analysis sensitises us to how written communication mirrors a nation's ambivalence toward change and maintains equilibrium. Their research also raises questions about how important stakeholders, both within and outside a government, such as the press, may be for readying citizens for new political initiatives or directions.

Koo and Han have advanced the field further by analysing the relationship of integrative complexity with power, affiliation, and achievement. Such analysis allows us to better tease out what the model is addressing. Their findings are not surprising. Power is negatively correlated with integrative complexity; affiliation is positively related to integrative complexity. Achievement and integrative complexity were not correlated.

Their finding that integrative complexity decreases before the South Korean elections is interesting and consistent with a previous analysis of presidential elections in the US (Tetlock, 1981). However, it must be kept in mind that Tetlock's study analysed campaign speeches of presidential candidates while Koo and Han in their article analysed the communications between the major policy decision makers in the two Koreas. Tetlock conjectures that the simplicity of pre-election rhetoric may be strategic and not reflective of a potential leader's intrinsic cognitive style or presage the policies and degree of integrative complexity once in office.

A gnawing question in US politics is the place of oversimplified rhetoric and its impact in 'dumbing down' the US public, preventing the public from seriously assessing the positions of candidates and the ramifications of their positions once in office. If we as peace psychologists and concerned citizens were to press for candidates to explore issues based less on simplistic rhetoric, would there be differences in how the public votes? Or would we simply be increasing the complexity of the presentation of issues without necessarily understanding basic differences in candidate's belief systems? Differences in the rhetoric of political candidates, after all, may be rooted in fundamental moral beliefs that

cannot be understood or bridged easily (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Civil discourse may not improve using the now accepted approaches for dialoguing and issue presentation but instead, may require innovative new approaches, new stories as it were, that allow us to transcend basic difference. Conversely, is it possible that the US public needs to reach a critical degree of dissatisfaction before they demand more than simple, non-nuanced explanations or sound bites? As peace psychologists, we need to delve more deeply into the role of integrative complexity in political process pre- and post-elections periods. In comparing the pre- and post-election content of the US and Korea, we must be mindful that Korea has been under colonial occupation from early days till now, possibly leading to less clear distinctions between pre- and post-elections changes in rhetoric than in the US.

There are questions raised by integrative complexity theory that yet are not answered. Koo and Han reinforce the concept that each nation operates within its own historical references and culture, and that many other factors must be understood if we want to understand how policy decisions are made and implemented. As the investigators are South Korean, their findings need to be understood in the context of possible researcher bias. Great caution must be exercised when attempting to generalise from measures that appear universally applicable. Words and actions in different societies cannot be assessed in a cookie-cutter manner. As peace psychologists we are in an advantageous position to reinforce this idea.

The article also reiterates the importance of considering multiple factors that enter into decision-making rather than relying on simplistic explanations of leader motivations. The motivations of our own governmental leaders can easily be inaccurately simplified. We need only look at recent accounts of the presidential candidates of the two major parties of the US to see how easily the press and others explain behaviour by relying on biographical material and other simplistic rationales to explain motivations and predict how an individual will formulate policy once in office.

Koo and Han look at the motivations that underlie language. Unclear is how much written communication is driven by a desire to mould thinking of others and how much such communication reflects a genuine underlying belief system. We will need more studies analysing rhetoric of political leaders and nations over prolonged periods, using measures of integrative complexity. Psychologists and particularly peace psychologists could find this a productive area of investigation.

An overriding question is under what circumstances integrative complexity can be most useful to us, peace psychologists, as a tool for promoting understanding among groups and developing cultures of

peace. The authors force us to question our own language use, constructs, and methodologies, challenging us to expand our understanding of our own biases and assessment repertoire.

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