



Mnemonic differences and similarities across opposing social groups: The linguistic conflict at the University of Leuven as a case study[☆]



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(Bohannon, 1988), the emotions the event elicits (Bohn & Berntsen, 2007; Finkenauer et al., 1998), and the extent to which individuals are involved with the unfolding events (Berntsen & Thomsen, 2005; Conway et al., 1994; see Talarico & Rubin, 2007, for a review). We are specifically interested here in which of these factors might affect the elaborateness of long-held memories of an emotionally charged, directly experienced, public event.

Surprisingly, the number of studies addressing this issue is small, perhaps because it is difficult to assemble a reasonably large sample of those who directly experience public, emotionally charged events. One exception to this rule is sporting events. This exception may be the result of the fact that, in general, sporting events have wide-spread popularity and, therefore, alleviate the difficulty in recruiting participants. The extant studies examining memories of sporting events suggest that social identity, defined here in terms of team loyalty, matters (see, for example, Breslin & Safer, 2011; Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; Talarico & Moore, 2012; see also Sahdra & Ross, 2007). Hastorf and Cantril's (1954) landmark study of the contentious Princeton/Dartmouth game showed that team loyalties influenced the content of the memories of the opposing fans. Talarico and Moore (2012) found that the memories of the outcome of the game were affected by team loyalty: Fans of the winning team had more accurate memories than the fans of the losing team. Furthermore, personal rehearsal did not fully mediate this relation between team loyalty and accuracy. Breslin and Safer (2011) found similar results when comparing the memories of New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox fans for two World Series in which each team either won or lost. They found that fans had more elaborate memories of the game their teams won; however, this relationship was mediated by the extent to which they rehearsed the events of the game. Alternatively, Kensinger and Schacter (2006) modified this conclusion, finding that, not only was there no difference between accurate or elaborate memories of New York Yankees (losers/negative) fans and Boston Red Sox (winners/positive) fans

whether the initiating conditions [rehearsal (Berntsen & Thomsen, 2005; Breslin & Safer, 2011; Hirst et al., 2009; Luminet & Curci, 2009; Talarico & Moore, 2012), personal/political involvement (Conway et al., 1994) emotional appraisals (positive or negative) (Bohn & Berntsen, 2007; Breslin & Safer, 2011; Kensinger & Schacter, 2006; Luminet & Curci, 2009; Talarico & Moore, 2012), and importance (Bohn & Berntsen, 2007)] often found to initiate detailed FBMs would similarly be associated with the formation of elaborate event memories of the conflict itself (Berntsen, 2009; Breslin & Safer, 2011; Kensinger & Schacter, 2006; Talarico & Moore, 2012).

In line with Berntsen's approach inspired by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), we expected Dutch-speakers to rate the events surrounding the conflict as more positive and, therefore, have more elaborate memories (Breslin & Safer, 2011; Talarico & Moore, 2012). We also expected them to rehearse the events more often (Breslin & Safer, 2011; Talarico & Moore, 2012), to be more personally/politically involved and, therefore, rate the events as more important (Conway et al., 1994). In turn, we expected the French-speakers to rate the events as more negative.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 124 former students (53 French

Table 2

Mean comparisons across social groups: memory elaborations, rehearsal types (media, conversational, rumination), importance, personal/political involvement, negative emotions, and positive emotion.

Scales	French-speaking		Dutch-speaking	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Memory elaboration	2.3 [*]	2.8	3.6 [*]	3.3
Media rehearsal	.58 ^{**}	.37	.83 ^{**}	.24
Conversational rehearsal	.65 [*]	.35	.80 [*]	.26
Rumination rehearsal	.60 ^{**}	.34	.80 ^{**}	.24
Importance	.59	.33	.68	.23
Personal/political involvement	.59 [*]	.27	.72 [*]	.20
Negative emotions	.52 ^{**}	.29	.29 ^{**}	.19
Positive emotions	.25 ^{**}	.25	.53 ^{**}	.34

Note: SD = standard deviations.

Table 3
Pearson correlations (and partial correlations where relevant) according to social group: Memory elaborations and rehearsal types (media, conversational, rumination) by rehearsal types, importance, personal/political involvement, negative emotions, and positive emotions.

	Memory elaborations		Media rehearsal		Conversational rehearsal		Rumination rehearsal	
	French-speakers	Dutch-speakers	French-speakers	Dutch-speakers	French-speakers	Dutch-speakers	French-speakers	Dutch-speakers
Media rehearsal	.21 .11 PE	.15 .10 PE	1.00	1.00	.42**	.46**	.58**	.41**
Conversational rehearsal	.38** .34* PE	.24* .10 PE	.42**	.46**	1.00	1.00	.74**	.66**
Rumination rehearsal	.41** .35* PE	.28* .14 PE	.58**	.41**	.74**	.66**	1.00	1.00
Importance	.27 .16 PE	.34** .16 PE	.50**	.42**	.57**	.45**	.62**	.54**
Personal/ political involvement	.31* .5							

memories of WWII in Danes and found that the more involved individuals were with the Resistance, the more vivid and detailed their memories were of the announcement of the German occupation and Liberation.

Second, and in line with our first point, positively appraising the events of the conflict (or appraising the events as less negative as the case may be for the French-speakers) was associated with increased memory elaborations. This variable did not, however, correlate with rehearsal type. Critically, the association between positive appraisal and elaboration was not limited to the Dutch-speakers (the “winners”) but held for the French-speakers (the “losers”) as well. Furthermore, positive emotion is the only initiating condition that remained significantly correlated with elaborateness when controlling for all other variables, for both French- and Dutch- speakers. This suggests that, unlike previous research (Breslin & Safer, 2011), rehearsal may not be the sole factor in determining elaborateness of a memory. Rehearsal may reinforce a memory, but it does not necessarily lead one to form a more elaborate representation. These results partially support the work by Talarico and Moore (2012) who found that rehearsals did not fully mediate the association between positive emotions and accurate/elaborate memories.

Lastly, for both French- and Dutch-speaking individuals, appraising the events surrounding the Leuven/Louvain conflict as negative was generally associated with increases in rehearsal (see Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998). Perhaps more interesting though, is that, not only did the French-speakers exhibit a significant association between negative emotions and conversational rehearsal (no such association with Dutch-speakers), but that the associations between negative emotions and media and rumination rehearsal were significantly stronger than that for the Dutch-speakers. That is, at least for the French speakers, the more an event is appraised negatively, the more likely people will dwell on it. Moreover, when we controlled for positive emotions, the association between elaborate memories and negative emotions for the Dutch-speakers became significant. That is, the more Dutch-speakers appraised the event negatively

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