Conceptual „Streching" Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis" - David Collier, James Mahon

Summary

The affair of generalization includes some abiding risk. Scholars used to their hypotheses to a broader group of cases (conceptual „traveling") they are run a risk of conceptual „stretching" (the category suitable for one group of cases and extended to another group could be inappropriate and generate some distortion) as noted by Giovani Sartori. To face this challenge, he created a framework, based on a taxonomic hierarchy, which may be called classical categorization. In Sartori's model each category possesses clear borderlines and defining features shared by all representatives and in this way members are also hierarchical. Furthermore, two most crucial traits to understanding this concept are „extension" and „intension". The former is the group of entities and the latter is the group of meanings or attributes that delineate category and membership. Following from this, there are two patterns in the relation between extension and intension: (1) a more detailed category with higher intension and narrower extension and (2) more a general category with broader extension but lower intension.

In a taxonomic hierarchy these more detailed and general categories are related to subordinate and superordinate positions, however extension of the subordinate category is included inside of the superordinate category. The problem of distortion increases simultaneously with increasing of the extension, but it could be easily decreased by reducing the intension to the level compatible with new set of cases. In short: to avoid conceptual stretching it is necessary is move up on the ladder of generality. However, it is entails a risk of watering-down or premature abandonment of the model because of it becomes ineffective.

The authors of this paper face the challenge of conceptual stretching through a nonclassical way, generating two categories: (1) family resemblances and (2) radial categories. The first one refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea that there may be no single trait that all entities share. Based on this, scholars may conclude that this category is an analytic construct and should not be expected that will be fit perfectly to each case. The issue may be approached differently: „in diverse contexts different attributes can be used as defining properties of the same category".[1] Therefore, a family resemblance model is suitable for multidimensional scaling of cases rather than simply present or absent them. It is noteworthy that scholars using this model should avoid the ladder of generality,

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[1] Przeworski, Adam, Teune, Henry, *The logic of Comparative Social Inquiry*, New York (1970)

which is too strict and leads to the refuse useful (but not perfect) category. Moreover, it is necessary to specify the precondition for this kind of scaling, what ought to be actual scaling.

The second model - radial category - refers to George Lakoff. This model is „anchored" to the „central subcategory" and through this way correlated to the „best" case even though entities of the category will not share all traits. In a nutshell: the central subcategory contains „traits that are learned together, understood together, and most quickly recognized when found together".[2] The „noncentral" subcategories do not share traits with each other but with the „central" category, furthermore these categories are a variant of the central.

The authors compared these two methods: the classical and more radial one. Firstly however they clarify categories into a primary category (superordinate/central) and a secondary category (subordinate/noncenteral). They then highlight the difference between these two categories: in the case of classical category the differentiating traits of the secondary category appear in addition to those of the primary category; while in the radial category these traits are contained within the primary category. Subsequently, the extension of the secondary category in the radial model may surpass that of the primary category. It is worth noting that in classical category, conceptual stretching may be avoided by moving up the ladder of generality from the secondary category to the primary category while in the radial categories it is avoided by moving away from the primary category to the secondary category. Further, scholars are moving to a wider group of cases in the classical category by dropping an adjective; in the radial category it is done by adding an adjective. In the former the primary category has greater extension and in the later secondary category has greater extension.

Method, result, reflection

Authors clearly explain fundamental theory of Giovani Sartori which is crucial for comparative politics. They have proven, that under certain circumstances scholars based on classical Sartori's category may fall into conceptual stretching and thereby this category, with low intension and high extension (higher on ladder of generalization), will be has low empirical content because „a theory that says 'anything can happen' excludes nothing".[3] It is because extension the meaning of concept (to cover more/new cases) by lessening its attributes or traits may leads to making this concept

2 Collier, David, Mahon, James, *Conceptual* „Strechnig" Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis", *American Political Science Review* (1993)

3 Keith Dowding, Charles Miller, „On Prediction in Political Science", *European Journal of Political Research* (2019), p 1003

meaningless and furthermore drives to the abandonment of very useful category. To face this challenge they adopted well-know theories of famous scholars to new field. Based on two great cognitive scientists, ie. Ludwig Wittgenstein and George Lakoff, they created new categories: resemblance family and radial category.

Obviously, these two categories do not solve all the problems of conceptual stretching in comparative politics. However, resemblance family is suitable for entities with easily observe attributes but difficult to present on zero-one scale. Thus it is applicable category for multidimensional scaling. In turn, to examination cases presented on zero-one scale better will be use radial category. However, it is worth mentioning that scientific analyze ought to start from descriptive arguments („what") which plays explanatory function and then proceed to causal arguments, which attempt to answer „why" questions.[4] Also, it is worthwhile to highlight, that comparative politics arise from the distinction between differences in kind - and typologies and taxonomies are suitable to scrutinize it. Then may occur difference in degree which will be measured. In working on this article, the authors drew on a multidisciplinary literature: philosophy, (MacIntyre), cognitive science (Wittgenstein, Lakoff), political science (Weber, Dahl, Lipset, Nie, Huntington), methodology (Sartori, Przeworski, Tenure, Taylor) et al.

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[4] Gerring, John, „Mere Description", *British Journal of Political Science* (2012)