

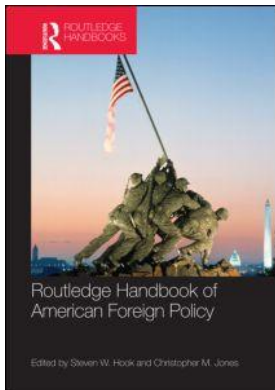
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 03 Oct 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of American Foreign Policy

Steven W. Hook, Christopher M. Jones

Constructivism

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203878637.ch8>

Jennifer Sterling-Folker, Dina Badie

Published online on: 31 Aug 2011

How to cite :- Jennifer Sterling-Folker, Dina Badie. 31 Aug 2011, *Constructivism from:* Routledge Handbook of American Foreign Policy Routledge

Accessed on: 03 Oct 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203878637.ch8>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

8

Constructivism

Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Dina Badie

Constructivism gained prominence as a theoretical perspective in the study of international relations (IR) in the early 1990s, at a time when IR theorizing was in considerable flux. As older theoretical approaches grappled with how to explain the Cold War's unexpected end, constructivism provided a new and alternative way to understand dramatic changes in the international system. Drawn from work in sociology, linguistics, and cognitive psychology, as well as from English School and liberal theoretical perspectives already within the discipline, constructivism sought to explain how our reality is socially constructed and what this meant for understanding IR. While a number of scholars were influential in developing this perspective, including Nicholas Onuf (1989), Friedrich Kratochwil (1989), and John Gerard Ruggie (1998), it was the work of Alexander Wendt (1987, 1992, 1994, 1999) which served as a catalyst for much of the subsequent debate among IR theorists over constructivism, as well as for shaping how scholars chose to apply to constructivism to foreign policy analysis (FPA).¹

It is no surprise that the study of American foreign policy has mirrored the general trend toward constructivist analysis in recent years. This chapter explores the constructivist literature on American foreign policy by placing it in the context of more general trends in foreign policy analysis. While constructivism as applied to the study of foreign policy has analytical implications for many different countries and contexts, the formulation and conduct of American foreign policy has remained a primary focus among constructivist FPA scholars, as we will see in the sections below. Their application of constructivist theory to a variety of case studies, detailed in this chapter, has enriched our understanding of American foreign policy while strengthening the empirical basis of constructivist theory. Through this process, which has now extended more than two decades, constructivist FPA scholars have revealed dimensions of American foreign policy that were previously unknown.

The chapter first introduces readers to the main elements of constructivist theory and to the ways in which FPA scholars have tested the theory's assumptions in studies of historical cases. The next section details the centrality of discourse in the constructivist literature. Particular attention is paid to the linguistic tools used by American foreign policy makers in creating and later reinforcing national identities of the United States in order to justify its foreign policy goals and actions. As we will describe, however, the construction of identities is not limited to the United States, as leaders of other governments have "constructed" foreign countries and groups in ways that advance their foreign policy objectives. The chapter ends

with a concluding assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of constructivism in the study of American foreign policy.

In Wendt's formulation of constructivism, which was developed in contrast to realism, anarchy did not determine a state's interest in survival, security, or war. He argued instead that anarchy was "what states make of it" (1992) because state interests depended on the specific quality of their interactions with other states over time. These interactions constituted a form of learned social behavior which was the essence of identity—and interest formation. Wendt argued that through an ongoing cycle of interaction, involving signaling, interpreting, and responding to one another's actions, states produced "intersubjective" meanings. That is, each state attempted to ascribe meaning to, or make sense of, the actions and words of the other, thereby producing particular values or connotations that were situational and specific to their relationship. These meanings were intersubjective in that they involved how states thought of themselves and their identity in relation to the other state.

These intersubjective meanings, not brute-material facts, gave rise to particular interests, shaped how we view the material world, and determined what we make of the world and its materiality.² While acknowledging that material conditions exist independent of their social construction, what constructivism highlighted was that such materiality is actually not the main subject of analysis in international relations. It is, instead, relations between states, which is a social activity or, as Onuf (1989) put it, "a world of our making." According to Wendt and other constructivists, then, the identity and interests of the interacting states did not exist or result from anything outside of their interactions, as realism claims, but rather their identity and interests were *produced by* their relationship.

Over time, the quality of the interaction, and its accompanying identities and interests, could become self-reinforcing, embedded, and reified, so that states could not imagine behaving toward one another in any other way. From Wendt's (1992: 406) perspective, "it is through reciprocal interaction ... that we create and instantiate the relatively enduring social structures in terms of which we define our identities and interests." Because states would have developed a common understanding of what their relationships within one another entailed, they would act in ways that would reinforce their expectations of that relationship. In so doing, the relationship would take on structural properties which seemed out of reach of the agents whose ongoing interactions and intersubjective meanings were creating it. Thus if states found themselves trapped in security dilemmas, it was a structural trap of their own making (Wendt 1992: 407).

This issue of co-determination or co-constitution lay at the heart of constructivist analysis (see Dessler 1989, Carlnaes 1992, and Kowert 1998). States were "agents" because they were responsible for creating their relationships with one another. Yet over time their relationships could become "structures" which constrained the actions of agents. One of the central goals of constructivist analysis has been to highlight this co-constitution, because it can explain why relationships that remain stable for long periods of time can suddenly undergo rapid change.³ According to Wendt (1992: 418–422), the end of the Cold War was due to a change in the quality of state-to-state interactions between the Soviet Union and the United States. As leaders in the USSR began to behave differently toward the United States, both states reinterpreted their identities and hence interests in relationship to one another. Once this reinterpretation began, the seemingly intractable structure of Cold War bipolarity crumbled of its own accord.

As should be clear from this description, constructivism is not simply the claim that "ideas matter." According to David Houghton (2007: 33), "an approach does not become 'constructivist' merely because it emphasizes the role of ideas."⁴ Constructivist theory is instead about the analytical interconnection between interaction, identity, ideas, materialism, social meaning, agency and structure. This combination has led to an extensive literature covering

a diverse range of topics on the social construction of IR. Much of this literature has focused on the role of systemic norms in shaping state behavior.⁵ Constructivism's relationship and application to existing theoretical perspectives has also been extensively examined.⁶

It would seem obvious that constructivism's interest in the co-constitution of agency and structure would have important implications for FPA. Valerie Hudson's (2005: 2–3) claim that FPA is ultimately “agent-oriented” theory, in which “only human beings can be true agents, and it is their agency that is the source of all international politics,” would seem a possible link to constructivism's concern with agency. The foundation for the link between constructivism and FPA had been explored by scholars such as Houghton (2007), Howard (2005), and by contributors to a seminal volume on the subject edited by Vendulka Kubáľková (2001a). Yet Wendt's (1992: 423) version of constructivism had an obvious structural bias in that he had treated the state as a unitary actor for the sake of analysis. This bias became a source of considerable tension among constructivists who sought to apply constructivism to FPA.

Constructivism was also criticized for failing to take seriously its own injunction that agency and structure were simultaneously co-determined and hence neither should be causally privileged in explanation. Instead, constructivists have tended to adopt research designs in which co-constitution is either temporal or bracketed altogether. In a temporal research design, the researcher adopts a time series analysis in which, typically, structure first impacts agency and then agency goes onto reshape structure. In a “bracketing” research design, a researcher focuses on either structure or agency almost exclusively while holding the other constant (and hence not the subject of analysis). Doing so means the researcher does not problematize one half of the agent-structure equation, but rather takes its existence as a given. As we will see, this latter bracketing strategy is common to constructivist FPA and has been defended on the grounds that bracketing agent or structure does not necessarily mean that scholars takes either to be materially given or ontologically primitive. Rather, it is a methodological tool and choice employed to penetrate the alternative interplay between socially constructed units of analysis.

Constructivist Foreign Policy Analysis

The vibrant constructivist debates in the IR field paralleled an upsurge in constructivism within the foreign policy domain. With constructivism rapidly solidifying its position in IR, foreign policy analysts took note of the “constructivist turn” and a wealth of constructivist FPA scholarship emerged as foreign policy scholars began to absorb and apply its insights into the study of decision-making. Walter Carlsnaes (1992: 258) first observed that foreign policy could now grapple with the agency-structure problem by analytically examining the “empirical interplay between action and structure, since the notions of action and structure ontologically *presuppose* each other.” This new constructivist FPA scholarship sought to illustrate the social construction of reality as well as the co-constitution of agents and structures at the level of interests and decision-making. To demonstrate this point, constructivists rejected rationality as the basis for behavior while modifying, and at times transcending, traditional frameworks that centered on psychological, pathological, or bureaucratic explanations for policy outcomes.

Early empirical constructivist-FPA forcefully reproached structural theorizing, with realism taking the bulk of criticism; however, as constructivism found widespread support, its scholars “have begun allowing themselves to drop what had become the almost-obligatory debunking of realism and the fierce self-justification arguments” (Sjostedt 2007: 236). Instead, constructivism itself became a target as intra-theoretical debates highlighted differences between theoretical variants and their relation to foreign policy analysis. Constructivism came under increasing criticism by scholars who sought to absorb its assumptions into empirically

based studies of foreign policy decision-making. As Jutta Weldes (1996: 280) observed, “Wendt’s anthropomorphized understanding of the state continues to treat states, in typical realist fashion, as unitary actors with a single identity and a single set of interests.”

Steve Smith (2001) likewise rejected Wendt’s structuralism in suggesting that language-based constructivism is best suited to foreign policy analysis. Rebuking the Wendtian variant, Smith argued that mainstream constructivism could not account for domestic influences and foreign policy considerations due to its flawed conception of the state. He instead pointed to Onuf’s (1989) rule-bound variant as a superior alternative that left room to maneuver within states and assess domestic-level decision making. In the same volume, Paul Kowert (2001: 279) echoed these sentiments, suggesting that language is critical to constructivist analysis because it “binds together *is* and *ought*.” That is, a critical examination of policy language allows scholars to determine the crucial links between speech, interests, and identity.

Although Wendtian constructivism had not emphasized discourse, scholars gravitated toward this subject given the theory’s main assumptions. The process of interaction upon which identities and interests developed is one that necessarily involves communication, and hence the use of language, in order to establish shared social meanings. Thus the words and narratives policy makers use as they interact with others and try to make sense of the world provide the evidence that the social realities upon which policy makers act are being constructed.

When it came time to apply constructivism to the study of foreign policy decision-making, then, scholars turned to domestic- and individual-level analyses which focused on the policy makers’ use of discourse (Reus-Smit 2002: 494). Moving “inside the state” made sense given the object of analysis in FPA. As Hudson (2005: 2–3) explains, foreign policy analysis formulates “multifactorial” explanations of agency that integrate information from various disciplines and “variables from all levels of analysis.” Producing theories of agency requires looking within the state and ending the practice of “black-boxing.” Among other leading scholars, Ted Hopf (1998: 194) welcomed this “return of domestic politics to international relations theory.” More specifically, scholars began asking “prior questions” (Weldes 1998) that problematize policy preferences, identity, and the legitimacy of policy rather than assume their pre-given status.

Two general strains of empirical constructivist FPA emerged from these early debates. The first strain seeks to link existing FPA literature on psychology, belief systems, and leadership decision-making styles to the constructivist interest in systemic norms. This interest in norms, reflected in the work of scholars such as Martha Finnemore (1996) and Audie Klotz (1995), stems from “the regulative and constitutive role of international law and rules in shaping state behavior and interests” (Shannon and Keller 2007: 81). In applying this focus to FPA, scholars such as Vaughn Shannon and Jonathan Keller (2007) argue that the constructivist emphasis on norm conformity is unable to explain why some states violate international norms despite intense global social pressure. To explain variations in norm compliance, such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Shannon and Keller argue that leadership belief systems and decision-making styles mitigate foreign policy choices. More specifically, leaders who view the international environment in Hobbesian terms are more likely to violate international norms than leaders who view it in more benign terms.

To make this argument, Shannon and Keller hope “to foster a third wave of constructivism that engages its ideational ally, political psychology, to understand normative variations at the individual level of decision makers” (2007: 80). This is consistent with Houghton’s (2007: 42) arguments that by focusing on the interaction between social norms and individual beliefs, “the two approaches might be integrated in particular cases” (2007: 42). This approach assumes that while the international system fosters common types of state behavior internal dynamics and psychological factors are relevant to understand variations in state behaviors. International

structures constrain agency to a large degree, a view that is closer to Wendtian constructivism than the rest of the constructivist FPA literature.

The second strain of empirical constructivist FPA explicitly denounces Wendtian structuralism and relies instead on language and discourse to illustrate the social construction of agents and structures. It is possible to subdivide this scholarship according to whether discourse is examined broadly or specifically as linguistic speech acts and games. Broader interpretations can be further differentiated according to alternative bracketing strategies. Such strategies, as noted above, involve a focus on the social construction of either the agency of actors (with the structure taken as given) or the structure of interests and identity (with the actor taken as given).

While sharing a commitment to language and discourse is central to foreign policy analysis, the constructivist FPA literature on speech acts and language games differs from the broader discursive bracketing scholarship in that it draws from the study of pragmatic linguistics to focus on and identify specific rules of speech. Or as Karin Fierke (2002: 348) puts this, “the focus is on use of speech as a form of action itself.” It follows from Onuf’s original conception of constructivism that operationalizes linguistic tools to understand how language determines the “rules of the game” in international relations. Each of these alternative discursive strains is examined in greater detail in the sections that follow.

The Critical Role of Discourse

Scholars who “bracket” structure illustrate how discourse affects and constrains agents and makes possible certain actions. This literature draws heavily upon post-structural thought in that actors and actions are only considered within the context of language that confers meanings and relationships.⁷ Theoretically, this approach assumes that linguistic connotations are rooted in historically contingent social structures. For example, based on historical and social Cold War contingencies, “communism” connoted aggression and totalitarianism that was juxtaposed to “democracy,” from which peace and leadership derived. Post-structural analysis of language emphasizes the emptiness of these categories—communism and democracy—outside of their linguistic connotations.

Empirically, the constructivist FPA literature that utilizes this approach engages in the “deconstruction” of discourse and language in order to demonstrate *how* certain policy choices came to be viewed as plausible or preferable. This contrasts with asking *why* certain policies were enacted, which takes “as unproblematic the *possibility* that a particular decision or course of action could happen” (Doty 1993: 298). Asking *why* requires scholars to begin by examining the agent, while asking *how* involves highlighting the discursive structural constraints.

This strategy assumes language meanings and discourse exist *prior to* agency, thus constraining the range of possibility. That is, by bracketing the discursive structure, one assumes that “certain background meanings, kinds of social actors and relationships, must already be in place” (Doty 1993: 299). Language constitutes power that neither emanates from pre-given agents nor necessarily follows from individual preferences or motivations. Rather, preexisting discourses and linguistic structures affect policy by shaping the range of possibilities.

Doty (1993) applies this framework to U.S. counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines in the 1950s and suggests that deconstructing discourse illuminates *how* the United States came to view a counterinsurgency policy as the only possible course of action soon after granting the Philippines independence. In her case study, discourses pointed to the United States as “world citizen” with “moral obligations” while the discourses surrounding the Philippines pointed to ineptitude that conjured child-like images. In this context, Doty (1993: 302) illustrated how

discourse “produces interpretive possibilities by making it virtually impossible to think outside of it.” More recently, Amy Skonieczny (2001) provides a similar analysis of U.S. foreign policy toward Mexico in the construction of North American Free Trade Agreement, arguing that American “myths” fostered the view of Mexico as both an equal and inferior partner in the process.

Scholars have also studied the role that crisis plays in the construction of American foreign policy (see Widmaier, Blyth, and Seabrooke 2007). Dirk Nabers (2009), who examines U.S. foreign policy after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, argues that foreign policy decisions fit neatly within hegemonic discourses and remain stable in the absence of crises. He suggests that crises such as the 9/11 attacks constitute events that are, by definition, devoid of meaning and therefore serve as “a prerequisite of identity change, as they create new discursive voids that have to be filled” (Nabers 210). In her examination of the construction of the Truman and Bush doctrines, Roxanna Sjostedt (2007) finds them a product of discursive structures rather than a reaction to material crises. While scholars have pointed to the Bush Doctrine as a *reaction* to 9/11, Sjostedt argues that cataclysmic events simply provide a window of opportunity for discursive structures to manifest themselves in policy. She recommends that scholars examine “how doctrines become possible” as a product of political and societal discourse rather than as reactions to material changes (Sjostedt 2007: 234).

Constructing Particular Events and Others

These and other applications of discourse analysis are concerned with how policy makers construct their identities from which their interests are derived. In another case regarding American foreign policy, Weldes (1996; see also 1999) examines U.S. actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis and offers a paradigmatic case for integrating the construction of national interests into foreign policy analysis. While she draws on Doty’s contention that “how-questions” better relay the ways in which language affect policy, Weldes’ empirical analysis differs in that actors are assumed to have a greater range of agency in selecting certain categories to assign meaning to objects and events. She suggests that “what is at issue in the claim that national interests are socially constructed is meaning” (Weldes 1996: 286, emphasis in original). Actors draw on widely available linguistic categories, such as “hostile,” “friendly,” or “leader,” to assign meanings to objects and events. Accordingly, the process of constructing interests occurs through two simultaneous processes: articulation and interpellation. Articulation constitutes the creation of “chains of association” that are “socially constructed and historically contingent” while interpellation refers to the process in which individuals come to identify with and accept these identities as “common sense” (Weldes 1996: 285–287).

Weldes finds that there was nothing “obvious” about the Cuban Missile Crisis. In fact, the Kennedy administration faced competing narratives that allowed policy makers to choose whether or not to respond. The administration drew on historic language used to describe the Soviet Union as aggressive; however, several decision-makers recognized that the presence of weapons did not constitute any real shift in strategic terms. In order to legitimize action, the Kennedy administration began emphasizing the language of *secrecy* and *brinkmanship*—both attributed to the Soviet Union—to obviate any need to address the strategic narrative that would have required no action. The U.S. response in the crisis, she concludes, required “the creation of consent” (Weldes 1996: 303). Similarly, Wesley Widmaier (2007) views framing as a critical component in the construction of American national identity. In his study of U.S. foreign policy change after a crisis, he points to presidential agency as central to understanding different responses to crisis. Variations in presidential rhetoric define and legitimate alternative visions of the “American way of life.” These variations oscillate between isolationism,

pragmatic realism, and crusading liberalism, which are intended to insulate, protect, or spread U.S. liberal values. This follows from Sterling-Folker's (2006: 119) contention that "identities and interests may be consciously reshaped by particularly shrewd or conscientious individuals." That is, American foreign policy makers exercise agency in the active construction of national identities.

Other scholars have turned to non-U.S. cases to explore this link between identity construction and policy legitimacy within the context of specific events or in relation to other specific actors. In his examination of the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, for example, Michael Barnett (2002: 63) suggests that the active social construction of identity "makes some action legitimate and intelligible and others not so." Therefore, disagreements over the essence of national identity contribute to debates over foreign policy. That is, identity crises trickle down to the policy level. In examining the Israeli side of the peace process, Barnett demonstrates that the 1996 election "blurred" Israeli identity and led to tensions surrounding the Oslo Accords as various groups vied to reframe the national identity in order to legitimate certain policies.

Foreign Policy as "Us Versus Them"

Other discourse analysts who bracket agency and problematize structure focus on the ways in which agents discursively produce dichotomous identity categories in order to label and hence legitimize different foreign policies toward different "others." In a comparative study of U.S. nuclear policy toward India and Iran, Jarrod Hayes (2009) suggests that actors who operate in democratic states invoke the language of democracy in references to other states for two reasons. First, this practice separates states into known categories that facilitate decision-making. Second, and of equal importance, the decisions of foreign policy makers in democratic states relies on popular consensus. In this context, the invocation of democratic language serves to reaffirm the American identity and to legitimize policy to popular audiences.

Hayes' examination of democratic language seeks to absorb the construction of identity into the "securitization" framework. The classical framework examines the ways in which actors operationalize security through speech acts, resulting in a particular logic of action. Threats are "securitized," and the success of securitization depends on its acceptance by a referent audience. Hayes suggests that the absorption of identity politics into securitization is unique to democracies in that the public is the likely referent that must accept foreign policy decisions. In an effort to legitimize policy, "political leaders use the language of democratic identity and norms to signal possible threats or the lack thereof" (Hayes 2009: 982). In affirming the democratic identity through the securitization process, Hayes suggests that the term "democracy" appeals to notions of trust, while "non-democracy" summons fear of the unknown and signifies distrust. Therefore, policy makers securitize undemocratic states, resulting in a particular logic of action. Through this process, the American democratic identity is juxtaposed to the undemocratic identity of the "other" state and requires action.

Hayes goes on to demonstrate that framing has affected American security policy toward India and Iran's nuclear programs. India, framed as a *trustworthy, democratic* state, received support for its nuclear program from the Bush administration, despite the questions raised regarding America's obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Likewise, framing Iran as an *untrustworthy, undemocratic* state created an image of an unpredictable regime that required economic sanctions against an NPT signatory. That is, similar actions by India and Iran were met with starkly different reactions in American policy-making circles. By securitizing the undemocratic Iran and invoking the American democratic identity with regard to India, the Bush administration simultaneously crafted and legitimized its nuclear policy.

Similarly, in a study of U.S. foreign policy toward “rogue” states, K.P. O’Reilly (2007) examines the link between the use of particular categories and ensuing action. He suggests that the term “rogue state,” which was first used widely by the Clinton administration in the 1990s, conjures an image of institutional and cultural shortcomings that constructs the classic “us versus them” dichotomy. Yet the construction of this dichotomy results in policy choices that differ from those associated with the “enemy” label. In particular, rogue states are viewed as subordinate to the United States in terms of power, and their constructed deficiencies create threatening, uncertain images that require proactive policy measures. As such, O’Reilly positions the “rogue” category as an alternative to “enemy” or “friend,” that results in a third method of American foreign policy formulation.

Such behavior, of course, is not limited to the U.S. government. A typical example of a non-U.S. case study that examines the construction of comparative categories of “us versus them” is provided by Kivanc Cos and Pinar Bilgin (2010). They examine Turkish relations with the USSR during the interwar years in order to understand how Turkey shifted its foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. Although their focus is on the relationship between two particular states, they examine how shifts across comparative identity categories affected Turkish foreign policy choices. They argue that discursive processes “recast” Turkish identity vis-à-vis the USSR from “rival” to “sincere friend” and then to “Russian expansionist,” leading to significant shifts in policy making.

Speech Acts and Language Games

In comparison to the discourse analysis discussed so far, constructivist FPA scholars who focus on speech acts and language games have more specific ideas about discourse and how it should be analyzed. As with other language-based constructivists, these scholars concur that, as Peter Howard (2005: 11) puts it, “we cannot get beyond our language to a more objective reality—language constitutes our reality.” Language is, as Onuf (2001: 77) puts it, a collective activity in that while “each of us uses language as an instrument ... to carry out our individual intentions ... it is never possible for us to carry out those intentions without the participation of others.” This participatory process is not random or chaotic, because there are shared rules of speech that make language and communication a mutually intelligible process.

Drawing upon the work of linguists such as J. L. Austin and John Searle, Onuf (2001: 82; see also 1989) argues that there are three fundamental categories of speech acts—assertive, directive and commissive—each of which represents one of the primary ways in which speech produces social effects. As Kubálková (2001b: 66) describes them, “we may assert something about the world that others will accept (or reject, qualify, etc.). We may demand that others do what we say. We can make promises that have consequences for us if others accept them.” These acts produce three categories of rules—instruction-rules, directive-rules, and commitment rules—which are the three primary categories into which we organize our experiences. According to Onuf (2001: 77, 83), “policies do not exist apart from the words that we, as agents, use to characterize them, “ but “agents use rules the way that they use policies and commitments to affect other agents’ conduct.” That is, they use speech rules and engage in language games strategically. But because communication is a collective activity, other actors must accept the validity of their claims. In doing so, actors collectively create shared behaviors and policies that are specific to their relationship.

These shared behaviors and policies can appear to become cemented overtime because, as Gavan Duffy and Brian Frederking (2009: 327) observe, “as actors repeat sequences of speech acts, regularities emerge.” These regularities can evolve into settled practices, norms and even codified rules which take on the appearance of immutable structures. Yet such structures are

ultimately reliant on the regular practice of particular, sequenced speech acts and will change if actors mutually change those sequences. Another way to think of such sequencing is as mutually entangling language games. As Howard (2005: 813) describes this, “rules define a game, a way to use language, a way to act,” and “actors can attempt to change the rules, but in doing so, they change the meaning of their actions and change the game.” Thus what speech act and language game constructivists are interested in is how foreign policy is produced by regularized patterns inherent to communication.

There are alternative labels for this variant of constructivism. Karin Fierke (2002: 345) calls it “consistent” constructivism (in juxtaposition to Wendtian constructivism), while Kubalkova (2001b: 63) calls it “rule-oriented” constructivism. Both make a further distinction between those who draw upon the work of Wittgenstein to examine language games (such as Fierke) and those who draw upon the work of John Searle to examine speech acts (such as Onuf and Kratochwil).⁸ In practice, most practitioners combine elements from both to develop their arguments. For example, Duffy and Frederking (2009: 327) trace their rule-oriented constructivism to linguistic pragmatics, the work of Onuf, and the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas, which Fierke (2002: 348) cites as an example of language games. Duffy and Frederking (2009: 330; see also Duffy 2008) also develop a useful template for how to do “pragmatic analysis” in IR, which involves analyzing “the flow of speech acts in specific political interactions in an effort to” identify “the practical reasoning of political actors.”

Duffy and Frederking apply this template to the Cold War, which they argue was a network of social rules sustained by the speech acts of the superpowers. More specifically, they argue that the Cold War had two competing sets of social rules. One involved a commitment to respect one another’s sphere of influence; the other involved a mutual insecurity system in which there was a first-strike prohibition but a commitment to retaliate with a second strike. To demonstrate these rules, Duffy and Frederking compile a list of propositions that constitute the initial background knowledge of intersubjective rules. They then list explicit speech acts performed by state agents during their Cold War interaction, and from this they generate a list of implicitly converged propositions during the interaction. These converged rule systems made it possible for superpower agents to act in specific, anticipated ways during the Cold War, because “repeated speech acts institutionalize social rules and influence future interactions” (Duffy and Frederking 2009: 330).

Yet Duffy and Frederking also maintain that there were tensions between the two dominant social rule systems of the Cold War. While the system of influence rules involved the maintenance of a stable balance of power via an agreed-upon territorial arrangement, the mutual insecurity system rules threatened this common interest. The end of the Cold War came about as both the United States and USSR attempted to resolve this tension by performing speech acts that challenged existing social rule systems. By invoking alternative but mutually recognizable validity claims in the international system, leaders in both countries undermined existing speech acts and practices that constituted the bipolar “structure” of the Cold War.

In another application of “rule-oriented” constructivism to American FPA, Peter Howard (2004) examines why the United States focused on Iraq as a major security threat in the immediate post-9/11 period despite overwhelming evidence that North Korea was the greater security concern. As the title of his article pointedly asks, “Why Not Invade North Korea?” To answer this question, Howard (2004: 813) focuses on how “the rules of the language game create possibilities, make things possible, and give meaning to action,” but also how actors become entangled in a set of rules that come to re-constitute their security interests within the game. Howard examines familial resemblance among the linguistic rules of different games between the United States, North Korea, and Iraq in order to understand how different rules create different situations and hence foreign policies. In the language game in which the U.S.

government was engaged vis-à-vis North Korea, its nuclear weapons program was cast as a manageable threat that could be dealt with diplomatically. By contrast, the language game in which the U.S. leaders were engaged involving Iraq was constructed to leave no room for compromise. According to Howard (2005: 11), then, “as this realm of possibility becomes constricting, actors find themselves entangled in the rules of a language. The material reality of security studies is given meaning and purpose by the language that enables its uses.”

Conclusion

As indicated by the copious and vibrant body of literature we have discussed, constructivism and FPA have already converged to provide new insights into American foreign policy. Fortunately, this convergence has in no way reached its intellectual capacity. In fact, scholars can employ a variety of methodological and analytical tools to uncover and refine the understanding of the causal dynamics among agents, structures, and material resources in the social construction of foreign policy behavior. The substantial and growing empirical record of the United States, as seen through the constructivist lens, greatly enhances our collective understanding of this subject.

Despite differences among constructivist strains all of them attempt to, as Hopf (1998: 182) puts it, “‘denaturalize’ the social world ... to empirically discover how the institutions and practices and identities that people take as natural ... are, in fact, the product of human agency, of social construction.” It is in this same vein that Houghton (2007) believes FPA can increase its stock in the IR discipline by “hitching its wagon” to constructivism. In particular, bracketing retains its utility by allowing scholars to problematize agents and structures to investigate cases in depth. Temporal analyses, first recommended by Carlsnaes (1992), can expose the social construction of agents and structures over time. Finally, relational analyses can demonstrate how “agents *and* structures are understood to emerge from social networks and social relations” at any given time (see Jackson 2006: 141; and Jackson and Nexon 1999).

The studies reviewed in this chapter have tested and largely affirmed the assumptions of constructivist scholars. Their efforts to open the “black box” of the American foreign policy process, largely through the study of elite discourse, not only substantiate past claims but open doors for future research and theoretical refinement. In this sense scholars have established their own discourse in foreign policy analysis. Their past and future findings promise to retain the theory’s dynamism in the scholarly literature.

Notes

- 1 Our point is not that Wendt’s form of constructivism is the best example of constructivism, which has been the subject of much criticism within the discipline (Pasic 1996: 87–90; Reus-Smit 2001: 225–227; Smith 2001). Christian Reus-Smit (2002: 491) is correct that the “tendency to conflate Wendt’s writings with constructivism more generally” has led to a number of “erroneous conclusions” about constructivism. Rather our point is that Wendtian constructivism proved to be the most influential because it provided an important baseline against which other theorists (both constructivists and non-constructivists) compared and contrasted their subsequent work.
- 2 One of the classic examples of how material and social facts overlap is money, which has a material existence as coins and designed paper, yet has no value or meaning absent the social context in which it is used. For the distinction between brute facts and social facts, see discussions by Ruggie (1998: 12–13, 90–91), Kratochwil (1989: 22–28), Houghton (2007: 28), and Searle (1995).
- 3 The relationship between constructivism, the end of the Cold War, and explaining change in IR is discussed by Hopf (1998: 180–181), Reus-Smit (2001: 218–219), Ruggie (1998: 25–28), and Snyder (2005: 57–59).

- 4 Thus works which deal with ideas or collective belief systems in foreign policy, such as Goldstein and Keohane (1993), Blum (1993), Checkel (1993), Hook (2008), Hurwitz, Peffley, and Seligson (1993), or Badie (2010), would not be considered examples of constructivism.
- 5 See, for example, Finnemore (1996), Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Katzenstein (1996), and Klotz (1995).
- 6 For examinations of its relationship, see Adler (1997), Price and Reus-Smit (1998), Reus-Smit (2002), and Sterling-Folker (2000). For its application to realism specifically see Barkin (2010) and Sterling-Folker (2002, 2009).
- 7 See Foucault (1977, 1979, 1981, 1983), Derrida (1978, 1981, 1982), Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), Der Derian (1987), and Campbell (1992).
- 8 Examples of language game and speech act analysis, other than those discussed here, include Duffy, Frederking, and Tucker (1998), Frederking (2003), Fierke (2002, 2007), Fierke and Jorgensen (2001), Kratochwil (1989), Onuf (1989, 2001), and Schimmelfennig (1999, 2001).

References

- Adler, Emanuel. 1997. "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics." *European Journal of International Relations* 3(3): 319–363.
- Badie, Dina. 2010. "Groupthink, Iraq, and the War on Terror: Explaining US Policy Shift Toward Iraq." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6(4): 277–296.
- Barkin, Samuel J. 2010. *Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnett, Michael. 2002. "The Israeli Identity and the Peace Process: Recreating the Unthinkable." In *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. Shilbey Telhami and Michael Barnett, eds., 58–87. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Blum, Douglas W. 1993. "The Soviet Foreign Belief System: Beliefs, Politics, and Foreign Policy Outcomes." *International Studies Quarterly* 37: 373–394.
- Campbell, David. 1992. *Writing Security: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Carlnaes, Walter. 1992. "The Agency Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis." *International Studies Quarterly* 36(3): 245–270.
- Checkel, Jeffrey T. 1993. "Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution." *World Politics* 45(2): 271–300.
- . 1998. "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory." *World Politics* 50(2): 324–348.
- Cos, Kivanc, and Pinar Bilgin. 2010. "Stalin's Demands: Constructions of the 'Soviet Other' in Turkey's Foreign Policy, 1919–1945." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6(1): 43–60.
- Der Derian, James. 1987. *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1981. *Positions*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1982. "Difference." In *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dessler, David. 1989. "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" *International Organization* 43(Summer): 441–473.
- Doty, Roxanne. 1993. "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of US Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines." *International Studies Quarterly* 37(3): 297–320.
- Dreyfus, Hubert, and Paul Rabinow. 1983. *Michel Foucault – Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Duffy, Gavan. 2008. "Pragmatic Analysis." In *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakesh, eds., 168–186. Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Duffy, Gavan, and Brian Frederking. 2009. "Changing the Rules: A Speech Act Analysis of the End of the Cold War." *International Studies Quarterly* 53(2): 325–347.

- Duffy, Gavan, Brian Frederking, and Seth A. Tucker. 1998. "Language Games: Dialogical Analysis of INF Negotiations." *International Studies Quarterly* 42(2): 271–294.
- Fierke, Karin M. 2002. "Links Across the Abyss: Language and Logic in International Relations." *International Studies Quarterly* 46(3): 331–354.
- . 2007. "Constructivism." In *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, eds., 177–194, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fierke, Karin M., and Knud Erik Jorgensen. 2001. *Constructing International Relations: The Next Generation*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- Finnemore, Martha. 1996. *National Interests in International Society*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52: 887–917.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Power/Knowledge*. Edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books.
- . 1979. *Discipline and Punish – The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books/Random House.
- . 1981. "The Order of Discourse." In *Untying the Text*, Robert Young, ed., 48–78. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- . 1983. "The Subject and Power." Afterword in *Michel Foucault – Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, eds., 208–226. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Frederking, Brian. 2003. "Constructing Post-Cold War Collective Security." *American Political Science Review* 97(3): 363–378.
- Goldstein, Judith, and Robert Koehane, eds. 1993. *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Hayes, Jarrod. 2009. "Identity and Securitization in the Democratic Peace: The United States and the Divergence of Response to India and Iran's Nuclear Programs." *International Studies Quarterly* 53: 977–999.
- Hook, Steven. 2008. "Ideas and Change in US Foreign Aid: Inventing the Millennium Challenge Corporation." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4(2): 147–167.
- Hopf, Ted. 1998. "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory." *International Security* 23(1): 171–200.
- Houghton, Patrick. 2007. "Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3(1): 24–45.
- Howard, Peter. 2004. "Why Not Invade North Korea?" *International Studies Quarterly* 48(4): 805–828.
- . 2005. "Constructivism and Foreign Policy? A New Approach to FP Analysis." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of International Studies Association – Northeast, Philadelphia, PA.
- Hudson, Valerie. 2005. "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1(1): 1–30.
- Hurtwitz, Jon, Mark Peffley, and Mitchell A. Seligson. 1993. "Foreign Policy Belief Systems in Comparative Perspective: The United States and Costa Rica." *International Studies Quarterly* 37: 245–270.
- Jackson, Patrick T. 2006. "Relational Constructivism: A War of Words." In *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, Jennifer Sterling-Folker, ed., 139–155. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner.
- Jackson, Patrick T., and Dan H. Nexon. 1999. "Relations before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics." *European Journal of International Relations* 5(3): 291–332.
- Katzenstein, Peter. 1996. *Cultural Norms and National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Klotz, Audie. 1995. *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle against Apartheid*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Kowert, Paul A. 1998. "Agent Versus Structure in the Construction of National Identity." In *International Relations in a Constructed World*, Vendukla Kubáľková, Nicholas Onuf, and Paul Kowert, eds., 101–122. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- . 2001. "Toward a Constructivist Theory of Foreign Policy." In *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*, Vendulka Kubáľková, ed., 266–287. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- Kratochwil, Friedrich. 1989. *Rules, Norms, and Decisions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kubáľková, Vendulka, ed. 2001a. *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- . 2001b. "A Constructivist Primer." In *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*, Vendulka Kubáľková, ed., 56–76. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.

- Nabers, Dirk. 2009. "Filling the Void of Meaning: Identity Construction in US Foreign Policy after September 11, 2001." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5(2): 191–214.
- Onuf, Nicholas G. 1989. *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- . 2001. "Speaking of Policy." In *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*, Vendulka Kubáľková, ed., 77–98. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- O'Reilly, K. P. 2007. "Perceiving Rogue States: The Use of the 'Rogue State' Concept by U.S. Foreign Policy Elites." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3(4): 295–315.
- Pasic, Sujata. 1996. "Culturing International Relations Theory: A Call for Extension," In *The Return of Culture and Identity to IR Theory*, Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, eds., 85–104. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner.
- Price, Richard, and Christian Reus-Smit. 1998. "Dangerous Liaisons: Critical International Theory and Constructivism." *European Journal of International Relations* 4(3): 259–294.
- Reus-Smit, Christian. 2001. "Constructivism," In *Theories of International Relations*, Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit, and Jacqui True, eds., 212–236, 4th edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2002. "Imagining Society: Constructivism and the English School." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 4(3): 487–509.
- Ruggie, John Gerard. 1998. *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2001. "The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union." *International Organization* 55(1): 47–80.
- Schimmelfennig, Frank. 1999. "NATO Enlargement: A Constructivist Explanation." *Security Studies* 8(2–3): 198–234.
- Searle, John. 1995. *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Free Press.
- Shannon, Vaughn P. 2000. "Norms are What States Make of Them: The Political Psychology of Norm Violation." *International Studies Quarterly* 44(2): 293–316.
- Shannon, Vaughn P., and Jonathan W. Keller. 2007. "Leadership Style and International Norm Violation: The Case of the Iraq War." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3(1): 79–104.
- Sjostedt, Roxanna. 2007. "The Discursive Origins of a Doctrine: Norms, Identity, and Securitization under Harry S. Truman and George W. Bush." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3(3): 233–254.
- Skonieczny, Amy. 2001. "Constructing NAFTA: Myth, Representation, and the Discursive Construction of U.S. Foreign Policy." *International Studies Quarterly* 45(3): 433–454.
- Smith, Steve. 2001. "Foreign Policy is What States Make of It: Social Construction and International Relations Theory." In *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*, Vendulka Kubáľková, ed., 38–55. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- Snyder, Robert S. 2005. "Bridging the Realist/Constructivist Divide: The Case of the Counterrevolution in Soviet Foreign Policy at the end of the Cold War." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1(1): 55–71.
- Sterling-Folker, Jennifer. 2000. "Competing Paradigms or Birds of a Feather? Constructivism and Neoliberal Institutionalism Compared." *International Studies Quarterly* 44(March): 97–119.
- . 2002. "Realism and the Constructivist Challenge: Rejecting, Reconstructing, or Rereading." *International Studies Review* 4(1): 73–97.
- . 2006. "Constructivism," In *Making Sense of International Relations Theory*, Jennifer Sterling-Folker, ed., 115–122. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Press.
- . 2009. "Neoclassical Realism and Identity: Peril Despite Profit across the Taiwan Straits." In *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, Steven Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro, eds., 99–138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weldes, Jutta. 1996. "Constructing National Interests." *European Journal of International Relations* 2(3): 275–318.
- . 1998. "Bureaucratic Politics: A Critical Constructivist Assessment." *Mershon International Studies Review* 42 (2): 216–225.
- . 1999. *Constructing the National Interest: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Wendt, Alexander. 1987. "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory." *International Organization* 41(Summer): 335–370.
- . 1992. "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46(Spring): 391–425.
- . 1994. "Collective Identity Formation and the International State." *American Political Science Review* 88 (20): 384–396.
- . 1999. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Widmaier, Wesley W. 2007. "Constructing Foreign Policy Crises: Interpretive Leadership in the Cold War and War on Terrorism." *International Studies Quarterly* 51(4): 779–794.
- Widmaier, Wesley W., Mark Blyth, and Leonard Seabrooke. 2007. "Exogenous Shocks or Endogenous Constructions? The Meanings of War and Crises." *International Studies Quarterly* 51(4): 747–760.