

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE COMMUNICATION: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A PRACTICE ICAPABLE OF BECOMING SCIENCE

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Abstract. From the period of the 60s with its Hofstede's survey cross-cultural communication being a relatively minor and oft-neglected field in cultural studies has attracted increased attention within academicians and gained popularity as a subject up to nowadays. This is a result of growing needs and available opportunities as experts and businessmen find it increasingly necessary to develop communication techniques that bridge disparate cultures. Global technology expansion, the interconnectedness of the globalized economy has made such contact constantly more common. Experts such as Richard Lewis, Richard Craig, Fons Trompenaars, Kory Floyd, etc. have expanded the field and categorized cultural differences to aid in communication. The refinement of communication has a clear-cut goal to solve problems that transcend cultural borders. Despite the essential nature of its application, the practice of cross-cultural communication appears to be limited from being considered a science or serious field of research. There are three main arguments that consist of a methodological basis, a definitional basis, and an empirical one. Firstly, "communication" is a nebulous and ill-defined term that differs in meaning according to contexts of technical field and cultural background. Additionally, communication is not an entity that exists itself but rather is an informational link between two separate entities. Therefore, communication can be studied only through the lens of separate fields that relate to these entities. Lastly, communication cannot meet the criteria of a science through the Scientific Method owing to the lack of a controlled experiment. Cross-cultural communication therefore

cannot exist as a “hard science” without a substantive transformation. Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, behavior. This vague definition is divided into numerous categories depending on field of study and its use. According to Richard Craig, they can be summed into seven traditions: rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, critical. Each of these differ radically by process of handling distinct aspects of communication with unique goals in mind. As consequence, their research process is also at odds in procedure. This divide is exemplified by the difference between the field of cybernetics, established through mathematical theory of communication such as that by Claude Shannon and critical theory, which derives from a more philosophical and ideological basis. (according to Craig). It is the hope of Craig that such setbacks may be overcome and that eventually a unified “metadiscourse” concerning all seven traditions could exist. A united metadiscourse encompassing communication may, nonetheless, prove untenable given the vast area involved. Some forms of communication are different from other forms. Cybernetics handles precise bits of information that are transmitted and received by machines; the goal is to reduce random variance in order to maximize the flow of information. In contrast, the political theory of communication considers the use of political tools, verbal/nonverbal, to sway an audience emotionally. The difference in use and nature of information between these fields is insurmountable. Artificial intelligence is capable of using and interpreting words to some extent and as well as audiovisual context, but outside speculation it is unlikely that machines could ever adopt a sense of “otherness” that the field of phenomenology necessitates. For human being communication is a simple, thoughtless process, but a computer requires internal communication loops of its own in order to process an external message. Sensory input must be transferred cybernetically through circuitry to determine an adequate response based on conditions. Such heuristic processes are efficient in transferring logical information, but they lack the intuition and emotional attachment that a human being provides. Therefore, cybernetic forms of communication are evidentially a class apart from more social and subjective forms.

Keywords: communication theories, cultural dimensions, epistemology.

Introduction

From the period of the 60s with its Hofstede’s survey cross-cultural communication being a relatively minor and oft-neglected field in cultural studies has attracted increased attention within academicians and gained

popularity as a subject up to nowadays. This is a result of growing needs and available opportunities as experts and businessmen find it increasingly necessary to develop communication techniques that bridge disparate cultures. Global technology expansion, the interconnectedness of the globalized economy has made such contact constantly more common. Experts such as Richard Lewis, Richard Craig, Fons Trompenaars, Kory Floyd, etc. have expanded the field and categorized cultural differences to aid in communication. The refinement of communication has a clear-cut goal to solve problems that transcend cultural borders.

Objectives

Despite the essential nature of its application, the practice of cross-cultural communication appears to be limited from being considered a science or serious field of research. There are three main arguments to communication that consist of a methodological basis, a definitional basis, an empirical one. Firstly, “communication” is a nebulous term that differs in meaning according to contexts of technical field and cultural background. Additionally, communication is not an entity that exists itself but rather is an informational link between two separate entities. Therefore, communication can be studied only through the lens of separate fields that relate to these entities. Lastly, communication cannot meet the criteria of a science through the Scientific Method owing to the lack of a controlled experiment. Cross-cultural communication therefore cannot exist as a “hard science” without a substantive transformation.

Definitions and Methodology

Communication is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, behavior (Mirriam-Webster Online Dictionary). This vague definition is divided into numerous categories depending on field of study and its use. According to Richard T. Craig, they can be summed into seven traditions: rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, critical (Craig R.T., 1999). Each of these differ radically by process of handling distinct aspects of communication with unique goals in mind. As consequence, their research process is also at odds in procedure. This divide is exemplified by the difference between the field of cybernetics, established through mathematical theory of communication such as that by Claude Shannon (Shannon C.E., 1948) and critical theory, which derives from a more philosophical and ideological basis (Craig R.T., 1999). It is the hope of Craig that such setbacks may be overcome and that eventually a unified “metadiscourse” concerning all seven traditions could exist.

A united metadiscourse encompassing communication may, nonetheless, prove untenable given the vast area involved. Some forms of

communication are plainly different from other forms. For instance, cybernetics handles precise bits of information that are transmitted and received by machines; the goal of communication is to reduce random variance in order to maximize the flow of information (Shannon C.E., 1948). In contrast, the political theory of communication considers the use of political tools, verbal and nonverbal, to sway an audience emotionally (Chesebro J.W., 1974). The difference in use and nature of information between these fields is insurmountable. Artificial intelligence is capable of interpreting words to some extent and as well as audiovisual context, but outside speculation it is unlikely that machines could ever adopt a sense of “otherness” that the field of phenomenology necessitates. For human being communication is a simple, even thoughtless process, but a computer requires several internal communication loops of its own in order to process an external message. Sensory input must be transferred cybernetically through circuitry to determine an adequate response based on conditions. Such heuristic processes are highly efficient in transferring rote or logical information, but they lack the intuition and emotional attachment that a human being provides, even if the machine in question passes the Turing test (Russel S., Norvig P., 1995). Therefore, cybernetic forms of communication are evidentially a class apart from more social and subjective forms.

A similarly significant obstacle in the universalization of communication metadiscourse is its heavy dependence upon context of purpose. Every field of study, including mathematics as well as the social sciences, utilizes communication for the purpose of education and examination of a principle (Österholm M., 2009). Without communication, knowledge would be restricted to the individual and every person would be required to accumulate knowledge alone from the bare basics. The development of language capable of expressing complex and abstract concepts allowed for the technological and philosophical progress of society. However, this is but one of many such uses of communication in daily life. The written or spoken word in conversation may be used for informational purposes as well as misinformational, querulous or humorous, to castigate or to celebrate. Likewise, in entertainment there are multiple purposes and methods in communication. This form of communication is all but alien to the academic understanding of communication, which is generally utilitarian. The study of the purpose of communication to satisfy a social or emotional end is largely confined to psychology as it deals primarily with its effect on mentality (Craig R.T., 1999). Yet considering the preponderance of cultural references in written and spoken word that are frequently exercised in even plainly functional conversation, any sort of metadiscourse

on communication must also embrace these aspects. How the open-ended discussion of such emotional factors on an intellectual level could be conducted is left unanswered and unclear. In-depth and dedicated delving into the contextual significance of culture is still highly limited and unexplored.

Subjective Structure

Objections may be raised that communication already exists as a respected and definite field through which multiple patterns of thought can be reconciled and interwoven. This is, of course, cross-cultural communication, as it is an increasingly necessary study in an era of transcontinental business and mass migration. It should be no surprise, then, that cross-cultural communication owes the bulk of its innovation to efforts of businessmen. Rather than depend on the efforts of a few scholars in this narrow and nascent field, a loose cooperation among businessmen, educators and journalists has enabled steady advancement in understanding how cultural and behavioral aspects influence communication (Tulloch C.D., Manchon L.M., 2018). Yet, despite optimistic hopes held by some this will pave the path toward a formal science of communication as the alchemists of yore did for chemistry, this informal research will most likely fail in providing a universal standard.

It is generally the norm for classifiers of cross-cultural communication to arrange cultures according to a set spectrum of values. Such classifications differ wildly, however. Hofstede is world-famous for his cultural dimensions (Hofstede G., 1984). Trompenaars prefers a seven-dimensional model (universalism-particularism, individualism-communitarianism, specific-diffuse, neutral-emotional, achievement-ascription, sequential-synchronous, and internal-external direction). Lewis is unique in arranging cultures along a three-point axis, with linear activity, multiactivity, and reactivity the extremes (Lewis R.D., 1996). Although some aspects of these arrangements correlate, not all can be reconciled, and one system must prevail to allow further integration within communication. According to Hofstede, “no dimensions exist” but are inherently imaginative, therefore, until an agreed-upon general standard can be established for cross-cultural communication, true progress cannot be accomplished in the field.

Dialectical Dialogue

A solution for bringing together major fields of cross-cultural communication exists through finding common ground, through either explicit tenets or implicit logic, within definitions that are seemingly at odds. Reconciling opposing viewpoints by forming a synthesis (Hegelian dialectic) is the chief viewpoint of Trompenaars. He has used such a tactic to great success in practical terms through finding paths of action and

communication between cultures that satisfy both their cultural expectations, such as those involving alternate interpretations of truth (Trompenaars F., Hampden-Turner Ch., 1997). There exists a superficial appeal to this arrangement due to an innate human attraction, at least in the West, towards compromise and conflict resolution. Yet there are major faults. The first is that such a dialectic theoretically functions with only two ideas to reconcile. However, communication is far from divided into merely two camps: there are dozens of alternative definitions. Even narrowed down according to Craig, there are seven general theories of communication that pose radically different visions of the components of communication and few of which fall on any singular spectrum.

Craig, despite these flaws, continues to recommend a “weak normativity” that rejects empiricism. Practicality should not exist without theory, nor should the inverse take place. Rather, a practice is by its definition a coherent set of activities that are commonly engaged in and familiar to those of a particular culture. As such, there are numerous practices (social networking), which can be discussed within society. Craig advocates the metadiscourse of communication practices to develop norms and common beliefs. Therefore, he desires a fuller integration of communication practice. However, it is not enough to support an integration of communication science on practical grounds but rather practice and theory should be applied normatively to change the landscape of communicative practice. Theories should explain not only how to make a speech but when to make a speech. According to this “grounded practical theory,” a practice is first constructed from identification of a problem, development through timecard and fulfillment via deep philosophical consideration.

Craig does raise valid points. Open dialogue can bring about improvements to various practices and help with the establishment of standards. However, the aforementioned obstacles to a dialectical process of development do not vanish. If a strictly empirical science attempts dialogue with a social science, no compromise can be reached without one side altering its very epistemological method, therefore neutralizing it. Such attempts are further hampered by assertions among different fields. Also, although Craig recognizes that a unified theory is not feasible, his vision of a directional development cannot be attained. It requires general consensus among practitioners and theorists that does not appear to exist. Craig, although he acknowledges the existence of absolute knowledge, asserts a chiefly relative view of communication that may not be shared. His efforts to define a unified metadiscourse do not appear likely to achieve success.

Furthermore, there are inconsistencies between communication science and the scientific method that cannot be reconciled. Interaction cannot be

reduced to a set of fixed principles in the language context due to an enormous degree of intricacy and subjectivity. And it's difficult to classify any individual as a "true representative" of a culture due to regional, professional, individual variances in outlook and upbringing. However, variances are only one obstacle to scientific classification of human communication, as human beings tend constantly adapt according to situation and experience. This evolution of behavior renders a controlled environment impossible and warps meaning within communication as language changes. Even by the standards of social sciences there can be nothing rigorous in communication science and attempts at classification are exercises in futility.

The definition, use, methodology of different areas within communication science are different and ultimately incompatible. Social communication as a concept has little scientific foundation but is largely a product of experience, surveys, hypotheses formulated by international businessmen, journalists, academics in other fields. What little exists in common between human studies and technical applications cannot at the present time establish even a loose collaboration among such fields. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future as what constitutes research remains wholly different according to areas of "hard" and "soft" scientific discipline. Reconciling these fields would require a reform of these entire subjects and a restructuring of communication science from the ground up along universal principles.

Cross-cultural communication is unlikely to develop as a formal discipline for the aforementioned reasons. Despite the existence of applications that necessitate a knowledge of cross-cultural communication, structural inconsistencies prevent a formal presence in the realm of science. Communication must remain as it has: namely, as a fragmented practical field enhanced by knowledge in related scientific disciplines. An academician may yet appear who is capable resolving the issues inherent in communication studies, but this would be a herculean task that would necessitate a repair of deep schisms existing within the broader scientific community. This prospect may be impossible and therefore a pessimistic or modest view should be adopted for the future of communication science.

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