

WHAT IS THE SCIENCE OF COMMUNICATION? A POSSIBLE DEFINITION

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Abstract

The article's aim is to provide a definition of the science of communication together with the delimitation of the field of research and the identification of a general research method. The starting point is the general phenomenon of communication in the living world, as the research field of communication science is limited, by successive delimitations, to media discourses. The most important aspect that has been highlighted is the political nature of media speeches. Politics de-homogenizes the discursive mass and at the same time provides a clear criterion for classifying discourses. Thus, insofar as communication is media-based, it is also a political communication. The science of communication is defined as the study of the phenomenon of integration and discursive distancing, in other words of the discursive competition and social negotiation. The starting point of the entire process of definition is the work "Autonomous Discourse. Communication Strategies" (2013).

Keywords: communication science; political communication; social negotiation; heteronomous discourse; autonomy.

Some of the ideas and concepts presented below are also found in the work entitled "*Autonomous Discourse. Communication Strategies*" (2013) as well as in the work entitled "*Lost within the media*" (2020). We will report this as many times as necessary. However, the perspective upon the science of communication is new, which has led us to discover new ideas. The purpose of the article was not to make an introduction to the science of communication, but to describe a possible paradigm in which communication as a science could work. Undoubtedly, it is necessary that every step taken in the process of structuring the field be properly argued. For the moment, however, the fundamental interest was to describe the paradigm as such.

1. The communication perspective

The communication is an important phenomenon throughout the living world, and man stands out from the other creatures with a remarkable ability to communicate, far superior to other creatures. At first glance, we can say that the science of communication concerns both human and animal communication and even the plant communication. This definition, probably the broadest possible, overlaps with that of the living, researched in biology, and even if the research perspective is different – targeting a certain aspect of the living world, namely communication – the field of research has the same boundaries: the physical world which is not alive. At the same time, it includes in the same area phenomena that, due to the qualitative differences among them, can be unified only with great difficulty and, in fact, draw new boundaries, which are insurmountable in the so-called world of the living. According to biology, man is an animal like any other. This is also the condition of the possibility of studying man from the perspective of biology. However, the communication at the human level is a complex and specific cultural phenomenon, which cannot be reduced to the concepts of the living world in general. The difference between nature and culture therefore imposes a restriction upon the definition of the science of communication to the field of human communication and the understanding of communication primarily as a cultural phenomenon (starting from a natural basis, of course).

The form that communication takes in human society is culture, but if any form of culture is reduced to a form of communication, then it is be very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between culture and communication. And, indeed, we cannot determine, in the field of culture, quasi-ontological boundaries beyond which communication plays an essential role, as is, in the world of the living, the difference between nature and culture. In order to establish differences and limits, we must move away from the field of research as such and highlight the aspect under which the cultural phenomenon is researched; in this peculiar case, the aspect of communication. Culture is researched, in the science of communication, *in its communicative aspect*, that is, it is seen as *a form of discourse*. For example, a religious ritual can be researched in terms of communication regardless of its religious significance in order to highlight positions of the source of communication, interests and contexts of communication, as well as reception, etc. This view allowed, for example, Edward Bernays to note that “Israel's prophets had a keen sense of public relations” (2013, 20), without committing an anachronism. Therefore, *the communicative perspective* or, in the words of Bernard Miège, the “communicative thinking” (1989) is a defining element for the science of communication.

2. The media communication

Let us return to the cultural phenomenon to see if, in terms of communication, we can find *relevant differences* among discourses, as the discourse is, as we stated, the “unit of measure” in the field of communication. The question is whether any kind of discourse or just certain discourses become the object of interest in the science of communication; also, if we can have criteria for ordering and classifying the discursive mass.

The human communication takes different forms: the expressive (verbal, written, through images, etc.) form or the corporal form; the interpersonal and the private or the public form; the heteronomous form and the autonomous form (Suciu, 2013).

Any communication is mediated. For example, for the oral communication, the vocal cords (and the entire vocal apparatus) are the instrument, i.e. the medium of communication. The body as a whole, or only expressive parts of the body (face, hands) can also be used as a means of communication. To talk about unmediated communication we should use forms of interpersonal communication or strong feelings, such as love, which would make communication possible in the absence of any environment. However, although everyone's mind often communicates through unconscious or involuntary forms, it is impossible to find out what is really inside it, in the absence of *mediated* communication. Although the mind can self-reveal through unconscious or involuntary communication, it is no less true that it can also convey *misleading messages* about its own content or activity.

The fact that any communication is mediated, that in order to transmit meanings to a receiver it is necessary to use a communication medium does not mean that the whole communication has, in fact, *a media character*. The media involves the transmission of meaning *at a distance* and *in a public space*. In this manner, the message reaches the “open field” through a communication medium located outside the body. The interpersonal communication, the dialogue between two people is not mediated unless this communication or dialogue becomes public through a medium of communication (such as television). Sending a letter from one person to another is a form of distance communication, but it is not a public communication, therefore it has no media character.

The speech given by a person in front of a group of people (political speech, legal speech, etc.) can be considered media, if it is transmitted at a distance from another means of communication. By becoming public, any private discourse is *mediated* and thus changes its meaning transmitted through the initial communication; it becomes a completely different discourse. The media coverage is a moment of rupture in the discursive mass, which establishes a new boundary between discourses. We can therefore consider that the science of

communication studies any kind of discourse insofar as it has a media character, i.e. it is transmitted at a distance and in public space through a medium, while the private, interpersonal or group communication remains the responsibility of psychology. Therefore, the science of communication is distinct from both biology and psychology.

The media character restricts the sphere of the discourse, by excluding the private communication, but through this exclusion a certain *objectification* is expressed. The speech is broadcast remotely and publicly to a large number of people, who receive the speech as media speech. This is possible because the receivers have access to the communication medium and, in addition, they have *a common code of interpretation*. The speech is often given *in absentia* and it is received at a different date than the date at which it was delivered. However, the source of the communication knows that the receiver will decode the message, and the receiver knows that the speech was communicated by a certain source.

The receiver knows that in this case it is not a question of any private source, but of a public speech, as a result he will appeal to the common code of interpretation to refer to the speech; in other words he will consider a certain ideology as a basis for interpretation and reporting. This ideology is nothing else but the way of structuring the public discourse at a given moment (the heteronomous discourse – Suciú, 2013). It is, in essence, the discursive expression of power, of political power. We can therefore say that any public discourse has *a political character*; it becomes political by calling the receiver through the common code of interpretation.

The political character of the public discourse is not always revealed as such and it can be considered to be *the reality* itself. It becomes apparent only when its dominance is challenged by public speeches that do not observe the common code of interpretation. The distinction between what is public and what is private allows the understanding of *distance* as a communicative phenomenon, because any discursive form of contestation arises in the private space. The distancing is the way in which a discourse moves away from the dominant ideology, trying to restructure the way of understanding public discourse (Suciú, 2013). Through distance, power is provoked.

The revelation of the political character of the public discourse thus becomes possible starting from the separation between what is public and what is private. This separation, which is the result of exclusion, structures public discourses according to their degree of integration or distancing from the dominant ideology at a given moment in time. It therefore introduces a criterion for classifying discourses without which the sphere of public discourse would remain

homogeneous. However, this homogeneity is only possible by ignoring the political nature of the public discourse.

The distinction between the dominant (heteronomous) discourse and the distant discourses, which form the public space of the media, indicates the way in which the study of these discourses within the science of communication must take place (Suciu, 2013). The science of communication cannot be limited to the study of the political power discourses; this would mean that the exclusion of other discourses would work in the interests of power. The study of communication as a study limited to the media communication of power only becomes an integrated discourse in the discourse of power itself. Therefore, we cannot introduce a new limitation of the sphere of discourse, considering that the science of communication studies the field of power discourse *in the interest of power* or a simple plurality of more or less homogeneous discourses. Politics is heterogeneous. To know that a speech belongs to the political power means to lay the foundations of its good interpretation.

This is an aspect that cannot be ignored. At the same time, it goes without saying that the science of communication, like any science, must be autonomous in relation to any political power, which is why its field of study must include both the dominant discourse and the various forms of distant discourse. It investigates both the phenomenon of integration (and mediation through public communication) and the phenomenon of distancing (private and ironic distancing, such as art, literature, etc., and the critical or insurrectionary distancing, such as the communication of pressure groups) (Suciu, 2020, 68-73). In conclusion, *the science of communication is the study of the phenomenon of integration and distancing of mediated discourses*. The science of communication studies discourse in its capacity as a *political* discourse, a general aspect highlighted by Jacques Gerstlé with reference to the concerns of important authors: “Contemporary thinkers such as J. Habermas and N. Luhmann believes that the political communication as the key concept of their theory ...” (1992, 22).

3. Communication practice and theory

The science of communication, often referred to by the plural “sciences of communication”, is seen as a hybrid set of communication practices and theories belonging to the wider field of the human and social sciences: (primarily) philosophy, literary theory, political theory, psychology, social psychology and (especially) sociology, history, political science, etc. The theoretical hybridization, which was undoubtedly necessary, is not so much a sign that we are dealing with a recent science, insufficiently matured, but that the science of communication tends to become central and it is able to integrate multiple areas of research.

However, it cannot become a central science unless it pursues its research objective, namely the phenomenon of integration and distance of discourses.

The tendency to limit research to integrative studies is very high, especially since they are also the best funded. Private companies are highly interested in how advertising contributes to the sale of a product and for this reason they are willing to pay for research, especially for quantitative research upon the effects of advertising on a well-defined target audience. However, advertising can also be studied to find out, using qualitative methods, what is the influence, especially the cultural influence that it has upon people and its role in the social negotiation. It should be said that the integrative studies start from the business interests of the sponsors, but the cultural perspective is not either innocent or objective, responding to the interests of academics or sometimes opposition groups to promote a negative image of the advertising phenomenon. We can state without error that, although both types of studies can provide useful information to the science of communication, they can only be integrated into its theoretical corpus after a critical evaluation.

The general method used in the science of communication to understand discourses and also to evaluate research results, is the hermeneutics of suspicion. The instrumentation of scientific discourse is inevitable (it has, in any case, always been a stake of power of any kind), but the true science cannot become an instrument of interests other than the interests of knowledge. It is true that the interests of knowledge cannot be delimited, either, by political (ideological) interests, so that any research, in order to be legitimized scientifically, must be related to the phenomenon of integration and distancing of discourses. In the field of social studies the science of communication is a part of, there is no absolute scientific objectivity. But there can be intelligence and honesty.

The science of communication includes, at least in its didactic activity, a practical dimension (*praxis*), which reveals, once again, the political character of the media communication. It is deeply related to practice as it is primarily an action that pursues a certain purpose or certain effects. This explains why the curricula of communication faculties include subjects such as advertising, public relations or political and electoral marketing. These disciplines can be studied from an integrative or distant perspective, but, in fact, the advertising, the public relations or the political and electoral marketing are discursive domains of the dominant ideology in the capitalistic society.

It is useful to note that the practice of distant discourses has been left entirely to be taught in the faculties of letters or philosophy, although the distant discourses - which may be, for instance, novels (i.e. literature) - are, in turn, forms of mediated discourse. From a historical

perspective, the discourses integrated into the dominant ideology were initially researched with the means of literary theory (Roland Barthes is one of the critics who made this change); from the perspective of communication science, this approach cannot be ruled out; at the same time, the literary works, such as the novel, must, in turn, be researched as a mediated discursive form. In fact, both the integrative and the distant discourses are traces of communication practice that communication science studies or should study.

To better understand this political difference between theory and practice, let us consider an aspect of the morphology of the dominant discourse. The term “propaganda”, which originally referred to a communication activity of the Catholic Church, came to refer, after substantial changes in the dominant ideology, to a certain form of political communication. (Bernays, 2012, 17). Something has been preserved in the transition from the religious to the political discourse, and this is propaganda. Initially, this term defined the action of communication of the warring nation-states, but later it has received the meaning of communication of the undemocratic states, of the authoritarian states (fascist or communist propaganda).

In the latter states, the dominant discourse takes the dominant form of propaganda. The situation is different in the democratic and capitalistic states, where propaganda, as the quintessential political discursive form, withdraws, doubles itself, takes multiple forms, turns into advertising, public relations, political and electoral marketing, etc. In capitalistic states, the dominant discourse seems to take the form of advertising or, in any case, it becomes largely *promotional*. The political discourse itself becomes advertising, political and electoral marketing as it is nothing more than advertising applied to the political sphere (Teodorescu, 2001).

We will not analyze in this article the phenomenon of the transition from the religious to the political discourse, as politics is a secularized discursive form, which refers to the foundations of politics and the source of the dominant discourse (Marchart, 2011). What we want to point out is the doubling of the political character of discourse in democratic and capitalistic societies. They are no longer apparently political discourses (but advertising, PR, etc.), therefore they should not be analyzed in terms of their political character, but they become homogeneous discourses. The distinction between the integrative and the distant discourses itself loses its relevance.

This interpretation, which undoubtedly has an ethical (i.e. political) dimension, places politics *outside* the dominant discourse. The politics, the propaganda are *elsewhere*, which legitimizes the advertising and, in general, the integrative discursive forms of the capitalistic

ideology. This is why the advertising, the PR and the political and electoral marketing can become disciplines in the curriculum, and the integrative methods, such as the marketing studies, are considered to be legitimate studies of communication sciences.

In the face of this homogenization, the description of the morphology of the dominant discourse is a possible answer, which shows that, in the case of the democratic societies, we are not witnessing the dissolution of politics in any way. But some of this argument is undoubtedly real. In democratic and capitalistic societies, the phenomenon of integration and distancing includes more diverse and subtle forms of social negotiation, including forms of cultural struggle. The social integration is not a bad thing in itself. On the contrary, the dominant discourse ensures the discursive order within a society (Suciu, 2013). However, this does not mean that societies are perfect and that they cannot transform themselves and return to propaganda.

Power corrupts people, regardless of its nature. Power is neither democratic nor totalitarian. Power is just power. That is why the discursive heterogeneity continues to exist and the politics continues to exist in the democratic societies. The ethical response is, in turn, relevant. Beyond the need to encourage the discursive alternatives to art and social criticism, the science of communication highlights the existential falsity and materialism, the illusion of status and happiness (Baudrillard, 2008; Lipovetsky, 2007), to which the dominant discourse of advertising and PR can lead, and it also discloses, where appropriate, the unethical means of communication.

4. The strategic communication and the communication process

The science of communication determines the formal structure of the communication process, proposing various models of communication, such as: source – message – environment – interference – reception – feedback (McQuail & Windhal, 2001). But communication is not a formal science. There is no communication *in itself* unless we accept McLuhan's definition of the electric light; he states that the electric light is “an environment (a communication – A.N.) without a message” (2007, 33). The communication is always the communication *of something*. It is related to the human action, it is present in almost everything man does and it cannot be separated from man. Therefore, there is no such thing as an autonomous field of communication, such as mathematics. The science of communication studies discourses as they are transmitted in a particular social context and in relation to the dominant ideology or other discourses.

The message is therefore the main element of communication. *The message is the communication*, which does not mean that the way we communicate and the media do not also play important roles in communication.

The method of communicating concerns the strategic or spontaneous character of the communication. The media speeches, which must meet the requirement of objectification, are constructed and strategically guided to convey, in a timely manner, the appropriate message to a particular audience. The strategic approach to discourse is one of the consequences of differentiating between the public and private discourse, but it has also become a norm in the public communication by communication experts (Suciu, 2013). The elaboration of a strategy starts from the analysis of the situation (the position of the communication source in a certain context) and it constructs the message in a coherent way according to a predetermined communication objective.

This approach has consequences for the interpretation of the message in the context of its production, which justifies the study of the integrative communication in the science of communication. The strategic decisions that are made to promote a product, along with the whole concept of communication, become part of the interpretation process. The advertising message is thus understood not by the hermeneutic or semiotic analysis of the advertising itself, but by the understanding of the communication process (Fallon, Senn, 2008). The same approach is appropriate in the interpretation of autonomous communication strategies, which always have an existential basis (Suciu, 2013).

The importance of the media in communication was emphasized by Marshall McLuhan (2011), who shows that the preeminence of the media over the message ("*The medium is the message.*") is a feature of the heteronomous discourse. The integrative strategies aim to make the messages subsumed to the characteristics of the environment, in other words to integrate naturally in the dynamics of the communication media at a given moment in time. The introduction of a non-specific message on a certain communication medium draws attention to the environment itself as a medium, it makes it visible. Uncovering the environment is a strategic approach to autonomous discourses, which aim to delegitimize both the dominant media and the messages transmitted through these media (Suciu, 2013).

The communication strategy involves the transmission of a message in a competitive context, in which the access to the media is unequal and the interference is constant.

The communication is a process that involves a source and a receiver. The latter is the target of communication, but the way of receiving and interpreting messages depends upon the status of the recipient, his or her interests and intentions in relation to one communication or

another. Just as we cannot enter the mind of the source of communication to find out exactly what his or her thoughts are, we cannot enter the mind of the receiver; the effects of communication are visible in his or her feedback and action (for example, if he or she buys a product after he or she has been exposed to an advertisement). Once in the private sphere (because the receiver is most often a private person also), the message can be de-objectified, reinterpreted and re-signified.

5. Conclusions

The attempts to accurately define the field of research of the science (or sciences) of communication, which is a relatively new science, have often been met with a bewildering diversity of discourse, the hybridity of the theoretical area of this science, the difficulty of finding the most appropriate research method (only one preferably), etc. Finding the common element in a sea of speeches is not easy at all, but *the approach* remains the most important aspect. The approach can guide us to achieve a more accurate circumscription of the sphere of interest for the science of communication. This sphere cannot be too large (encompassing any form of communication, human or animal), nor too small, excluding the autonomous or critical discourses and being limited to the heteronomous communication practices.

The above analysis showed that the public – private separation gives rise to the dialectic of discourse, which makes the public discourse to be defined as a political discourse, but lefts unaffected by the obligation to objectify the discourse areas of production and reception. The fact that the public discourse propagated through the media is also a political discourse destroys the heteronomous intention of the discursive homogenization by differentiating between integrative discourses and distant discourses. Regardless of the dominant ideology in a given society, the politics plays the role of heterogenizing the discursive mass and highlighting the central point of interest of the science of communication, which is the phenomenon of integration and discursive distancing, in other words, of *social negotiation*. Or, the negotiation is always political, it seeks to revise the dominant ideology (reformation), if not change it (revolution).

The heteronomous interest is to promote a science of communication entirely dedicated to the integrative studies and to finding by the communication faculties' graduates of jobs on the labor market. This interest promotes theoretical hybridity and a quantitative approach to communication sciences. However, we also find quantitativism in academics concerned with the clear definition of the science of communication. This is the case of Cuilenburg (1998), who, in order to legitimize the science of communication, tried to impose the method of content

analysis. But at the heart of the science of communication is the message, the discourse. The speech comprehension cannot be exhausted by the content analysis. Moreover, the method as such ignores the hybridity of the media discourse. This does not mean that the content analysis cannot be as useful as other methods - qualitative or quantitative - but that any method which is applied must ultimately comply with the hermeneutics of suspicion that is the general method of communication science and the only appropriate verification tool.

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