

# Uncertainty Communication Status: Theory or Science

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, we argue in favor of the thesis that communication as an academic discipline faces many uncertainties. One of these is the uncertainty regarding the status. Some talk about Communication theory, others about the Communication Science, about Communication "Sciences", "Information et de la Communication" (SIC), Communication studies etc. Nuclear question about the status of the communication is: the study of communication is a theory or a science, is a weak cogitative system or a strong cogitative system? We distinguish five causes that determined communication study to remain to this day a weak cogitative system: the effervescence of the theoretical-scientific and practical researches in a knowledge area full of promises; heavy coagulation of a cogitative communication community; refusal of the rule; articulation of communicational thinking as "weak thinking" - "weak thought" (G. Vattimo); and the delay in the development of the communication ontology. Discipline that studies communication is a weak-cogitative thinking system of theories but not yet a science. As a set of weak theories, the study of communication is becoming science. In any case, discipline that studies communication is on the way to become a science.

**Keywords:** communication ontology; uncertainty of communication; weak cogitative system

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are significant relational gains which will lead to a scientific community of communication that would communicate well (De la Peza Casares, 2013).

A theory of communication can be based on interpretation, but a science must be objective, methodical, systematically and should allow for verification. L. Duarte and B. Alonso also speak about this, they see the future of communication sciences as "based on objectivity, truth, and empirical verification as the only method of approaching reality" (Duarte L., Alonso G., 2008).

However, at present there is a controversy regarding the status of communication, that status is uncertain (see Kulczycki, 2008; Wedland, 2013).

## 2. FIVE CAUSES

(A) The first cause of communication as discipline without accredited title and object is the effervescence of the theoretical-scientific and applicative researches in a knowledge area full of promises. The fourth and the fifth decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were the beginning of the

world of true communication. The coherent thinking and discourse about communication began then (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger & Gudykunst, 1991; Ritt, 2003; Balaban, 2008). A hesitant logos was established during those years, but it was determined by communication. "Logos" means "thinking, study", but also "speech", in Greek. We would say that a thought out discourse about communication was established between 1940 and 1960. As Uma Narula states, "research in Communication has conceptualized communication per se in 1940s and 1950s, and to develop Model and Theories" (Narula U., 2006, p. 1). The discourse in those years was thought out, but it was a discourse on several voices. It is an apparently divergent discourse. In essence, it was a matter of a thought out discourse and converging, in a fundamental line; and yet a hesitant discourse, of a beginning of the world. For those analyzing the evolution of "communication" today, they will note that it hesitated to be defined as science, set an object and include it into a "-logy" ("logos"), such as: psychology, anthropology, sociology, etc.

(B) We may identify the second cause in the slow coagulation of a cogitative communication community. "Communication" specialists making a postulate of the object called communication originating from a field such as psychology, sociology, technical communications. The lack of some schools and a "communication" community has delayed the paradigmatic imposition of a new discipline. Alternatively, something else happened: communicational thinking centers from various continents found a glory in being isolated, as well as in not communicating among themselves. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss noted the allure of divergence of the particularity where the American, European and Asian communication schools were established: "The development of the discipline of communication took different forms and foci in different parts of the world. Communication theory has had a different history in Europe, Asia, and Africa than in the United States" (Littlejohn S. W., & Foss K. A., 2008, p. 5).

(C) A third cause is the rejection of the rule. 1940, 1950 meant the beginning of postmodernism. Concordantly, it was a matter about freeing the world from the war pressures and constraints it involved. A great appetite for freedom represented the social background of the time. As a form of freedom, communication found its favorable ground. The freedom to speak and think in terms of a new discipline was however smiting a more influential, more powerful freedom. Postmodernism was an inhibiting freedom for communication. Freedom is decoded, under its practical aspect, as freedom from rules. As James Richard Mensch showed, "the postmodernism period (...) is post-normative", it is a matter of "a post-normative view of self and reality" (Mensch J. R., 2004, p. 1 and p. 283). Postmodernist "post-normative" propensity did not come as the communication specialists to no longer incline easily before the scientific rule to search for the basis, for the integration in knowing the problem worldwide, and to search for a consensus on this basis. Fleeing from norms puts into motion the beginnings of the discipline called "communication".

The unification of the communication "theories" has been attempted several times. It is an unattainable objective. The theories as theories cannot be unified. First of all, because theories are unilateral cogitative constructs, they address just the ontological characteristic of the field (Craig, 2013; also Pavalache-Ilie & Unianu, 2012; Pavalache-Ilie, 2012). Theories arise from perspectives which consensus cannot exist for. Theories could find their convergence in a strong cogitative system, in a strong science, in a strong General Communication Science. To unify the theories is not actually one of the ideals of the theories themselves. It is an illusory aspiration. This convergence ideal could be done only inside a comprehensive science, settled in object and methods. The unification could occur based on a strong ontology, under the conditions of a clear epistemology and a consistent methodology. It is known that several

theories individually explaining the ontological, specific elements subsist in a science. We emphasize: theories can be unified in a science.

**(D)** Fourth of all, postmodernism comes with a “weak thinking”. A weak thinking can only cause a weak cogitative system. A paradigmatic science is a strong cogitative compact system. Delia Cristina Balaban considers that the discipline that is concerned with communication is a science; in the study “Development of Communication Science in Romania. Challenges and Perspectives. *Professional Communication and Translation Studies*, 6(1-2), 3-10” asserts that “Communication Science is a relatively new science” (Balaban, 2013, p. 3). Left free, postmodernism will be driven by originality, pluralism, diversity and unlimited freedom of thinking, insight, a mix of ideas, categories and concepts. Its weak thinking can only cause theories. Postmodernism cannot generate science; the maximum of its cogitative force can only rise to the level of a theory. Postmodernism produces fascinating, paradoxical, enlightening theories, but it causes theories again and again. By itself, it produces just theories, which is salutary and worth being promoted. However, the conceptual organization of the cognitive and computational experiences is only established as a paradigm of the concept of the cogitative compact science system. Weak thinking must be brought in the convergence of a critical thinking in the area of the same thinking that thinks of the self while thinking (Bângăoanu, Negrea & Dascălu, 2010). When Jacques Derrida was practically showing the operation of a weak ontology, Gianni Vattimo established weak thinking. Vattimo showed that “weak thought” is based on Martin Heidegger’s concept “*Verwindung*”, which means “declination/distortion” (Vattimo G., 2012, p. 46). Declination determines that “One has access to Being not through presence but only through recollection, for Being cannot be defined as that which is but only as that which is passed” (Vattimo G., 2012, p. 47) (also Bușu & Bușu, 2014). No longer staying determined in presence, the postmodernist cogitative subject sees the world through the lens of a thinking that lets time pass by. Abdicating from seeing the present as present, the reality of the present is noticed subsequently as a delay, as past, as belonging to the past. Abandoning the presence is to abandon the “strong thought, that of deductive cogency”, the “strong categories” (Vattimo G., 2012, p. 39 and p. 46). In this regard, Peter Carravetta clarifies several things, by perceiving “weak thinking” as “dissolution of strong thought” and stating that instead of “axioms, principles, strong theories”, the weak thinking brings “interpretation” (Carravetta P., 2012, p. 11 and p. 4) (also Wendland M., 2013).

**(E)** The fifth cause is the delay in the development of the communication ontology. Weak thinking deprives ontology significantly because, above all, it does not see well and directly the existence and evidences. Weak thinking shapes a compliance schedule, where a “weak ontology” results from: “The program of weak ontology holds that such change in the way of thinking about the fundamental traits (even simply descriptively, or typical) of Being will have important consequences” (Vattimo G., 2012, p. 47). A weak ontology is an ontology that does not see all the field which it is responsible for. It is that which is on the verge of losing it after seeing it. Without an ontology settled in its own responsibilities, a theory or a weakened science. Already imposed or in the process of consolidation, theories-sciences likely to have “weak ontology” will be unable to theorize, categorize, conceptualize, in order to be fully acceptable. As Peter Carravetta notes, “weak thought can show the way to a contemporary understanding of hermeneutics, theories of knowledge, ethics, and discourse” (Carravetta P., 2012, p. 2) (also Babrow, 2001; Mucundorfeanu & Abrudan, 2009; Radu, 2012; Borowski (a), 2013).

Of course, no ontology is perfect. All indexes of categories and concepts have questionable parts, and some ontological models are contradictory. All ontologies are imperfect. Most of them have specific problems that are solved by applicative or technical-

scientific research. The weak ontology of communication has however structuring difficulties: the patterns are common and divergent, the theories are many and unclear, some concepts are not thoroughly grounded, the network of categories is not articulated in a coherent whole within one science. Out of these, theories are the weakest and most toxic part. The multitude of theories is what undermines the consolidation of a unitary understanding of the communication process, of the basic ontological elements. This is why in 70 years a theory or a communication science difficultly, troublesomely and ambiguously creates a tradition (Dâncu, 1999; Barr, 2001; Koester & Lustig, 2012; Knight, 2012).

In 70 years of development, communication itself defined many traditions. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss, together with Robert T. Craig (The "Traditions" Matrix-Standard - R. T. Craig) accredited the idea that it would be a matter of 7 traditions: "Craig described seven traditional standpoints that provide different ways of talking about communication: (1) the rhetorical; (2) the semiotic; (3) the phenomenological; (4) the cybernetic; (5) the socio-psychological; (6) the socio-cultural; and (7) the critical" (Littlejohn S.W., Foss K.A., 2008, p. 7). When dealing with the matter, the two renowned specialists deal with the 7 traditions in the following order: "The Semiotic tradition", "The Phenomenological Tradition", "The Cybernetic Tradition", "The Socio-psychological Tradition", "The Socio-cultural Tradition", "The Critical Tradition" and "The Rhetorical Tradition" (Littlejohn S.W., Foss K.A., 2008, pp. 35-55) (also Stoica, 2007; Crețu, 2009).

At the level of axis 1 (the ontological axis), there have been registered effects that clarified that we currently have a "weak ontology" in communication. A higher level effect of the "weak thought" is, as Peter Carravetta says, that "most forms of theorizing cannot find a credible legitimization" (Carravetta P., 2012, p. 2). The multitude of communication theories and traditions is explained through the lack of "credible legitimacy" on behalf of each individual (Radu, 2012; Abrudan, 2013; Borowski (b), 2013).

A paradox of the communication discipline (of the "communication science", of the "communication theory", of the "communication studies", of the "communicology") is that there was no-one to give legitimization to some theories that could have been legitimated. In other words, the institutionalization was not produced, not because the theories of communication would not have been valuable and appeared as not having "credible legitimacy", but because there was no one anymore to give them legitimacy. And, more specifically, in writing theories specialists had no more time to give legitimacy to others' theories (Fârte, 2004; Grant, 2004; Maior, 2009; Copley & Schulz, 2013). Strangely, the history of the communication idea shows that communication specialists do not communicate well towards communication. They do not communicate well with each other. From a cluster of creditable theories, but without many specialists to credit them, strong theory/science/communication studies or a communicology could not be created and cannot be created tomorrow. Surprisingly, we have many specialists in a given field, but the community of scientists in a field lacks the shaping influence. The scientific paradigm is established by the community of specialists (Rus, 2004; Berger, Roloff & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2010; Balaban & Abrudan, 2011).

### 3. CONCLUSION

Not being based on a strong thinking, communication remains an amorphous construction as a discipline. By looking from afar, the impression is that communication specialists theorize excessively. Following a thorough analysis, the first impression is however confirmed: in the

universe of communication, theorization is done excessively. Weak thinking, based mainly on interpretation, theorization, is descriptive and typical, too mobilized in the inscription of types and models. The scientific and institutional destiny of communication has been seriously affected by weak thinking. Status of communication changes radically: the study of communication is on the way to become a science.

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