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THE MEANING OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION (IN COMPARISON WITH SYSTEM APPROACH)

Andrey Linde (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) Odintsovo branch of MGIMO University, Russia, Moscow, Ostrovitjanova street, 9 h. 4, 69, anlinde@mail.ru

Abstract

The paper defines the meaning of phenomenological approach to communication as one of the main directions of communication research. To determine its advantages, it is compared to the systemic-functional approach. Communication in phenomenology is understood as interpersonal semantic communication at the philosophical, sociological level of this approach, its application in political communication is defined. Phenomenological and systemic-functional approaches to communication are compared on the following five points. Firstly, they have different scientific grounds. Cybernetics and mathematical information theory had the main influence on the theory of systems in sociology, while philosophy had the main influence on phenomenology. Secondly, the system analysis studies communication at the macro level. Conversely, the primary object of micro level research in phenomenology is the "inductive" study of the individual's mind. Thirdly, the normative-value level of society, which is reproduced by means of communication, is interpreted differently. Fourthly, the study defines the fundamental differences in understanding the meaning of language. Systemic approach sees a language as a set of symbols corresponding to the cybernetic code to regulate and maintain the regulatory system of society. Phenomenology assumes that a language fixes and expresses subjective ideas initially set in the "lifeworld" of a person. Fifthly, the political significance of communication is determined in different ways. The systemic approach leads to the technocratic rule of the informed elite, rather than to the democratic regime. The role of the phenomenological approach for the shaping of a genuine public opinion and the concept of the deliberative democracy is justified.

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1. Introduction

There is no consensus in modern science on to what extent the general theory of communication and the interrelation of different disciplinary approaches are formed. Therefore, it is of particular importance to determine the meaning of certain scientific approaches, which, in R. Craig's words, make up the "metadiscourse" of communicativistics. Among the directions of the social communication investigation researchers specifically distinguish and, to a large extent, oppose to one another phenomenological and cybernetic-systemic approaches. Thus, R. Craig detaches the phenomenological approach, which investigates interpersonal dialogue between people as a message of meanings, from the cybernetic approach to communication (developed by N. Wiener) in terms of technical transfer of accurate information (Timofeeva, 2009, p. 50).

Indeed, Parsons (1993) specifies that the pinnacle of cybernetics is the awareness that ensures control over society, "communication processes can operate under the condition of cybernetic control by institutional structures" (p. 113). Therefore, the systemic approach defines communication as a form of governance applicable in a particular organization and in society in general.

Along with the advantages, it is necessary to determine the disadvantages of system theory, in connection with which it is the phenomenological approach to communication becomes particularly important. Thuswise, an individual is defined as an element of the general organic whole, in which a person is only a variable on an equal footing with others. According to the philosopher Habermas (2011), who develops hermeneutical and phenomenological methodology, the systemic approach does not take into account the consciousness of people and its rooted meanings, does not study individual, initially existing views, norms, and values of general public. He also suggests that these views, norms, and values may be distorted for the purpose of state control and legitimization of the political subsystem. Therefore, there is a contradiction with the populace's subjective preferences, with a genuine public opinion, and with the fundamentals of the theory of democracy. As a result, democratic politics within the systemic approach "become impossible and unnecessary ... "Political" has been transformed into a program of the administrative subsystem self-maintenance" (Habermas, 2011, p. 1).

Conversely, phenomenology studies meaningful interpersonal communication by means of a qualitative methodology and interpretation of what is reported in a dialogue. To determine the meaning of this direction, it is necessary to conduct a comparative analysis between systemic and phenomenological approaches, determining its advantages. It is especially important to discover whether this approach can offer a way, a theoretical basis for the formation of a genuine public opinion, and, therefore, for the establishment of a democratic society, in comparison with the power of an uncontrolled technocratic state apparatus?

2. Problem Statement

From our point of view, in modern studies on the theory of communication there remains the question of the significance of independent approaches that form together a meta-discourse of the theory of communication. One of them is the phenomenological approach to communication.

3. Research Questions

The key research question of this work is what constitutes the primary importance of the phenomenological approach to communication.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main goal is to reveal the meaning of the phenomenological approach to communication in comparison with the system-functional approach.

5. Research Methods

The study uses common logical methods: analysis, synthesis, comparative analysis, identification of common and specifics.

6. Findings

First of all, there are different scientific grounds. The theory of systems in sociology was mainly influenced by the mathematical information theory by C. Shannon and the cybernetics by N. Wiener. N. Wiener offers the concepts of "self-reproducing system" and "feedback" in technics, which have been adopted by T. Parsons and N. Luhmann for studies of society in general. From Wiener's (1961) point of view, at higher levels of development elements start to form a broader system with emergency characteristics. C. Shannon also studies communication in a mathematical, computable form (Shannon, 1963), he proceeds from the uncertainty of the system in the absence of information for its functioning; communication gives new information to help "determine the path the system is taking" (Nazarchuk, 2009, p. 8). Communication was understood to be a formal, technical process of transmitting accurate, abstract information. Since communication in its various forms is a social phenomenon, it is questionable whether the universal application of the cyber-system and mathematical approach to the study of social communication is universal.

On the contrary, the phenomenological approach was formed within philosophy and humanities (Smith, 2009, p. 1) and communication was studied using qualitative methods as a transfer of a message's semantic component (see further about applied studies in phenomenology in Zahavi in 2018, (p. 96-129). The meaning, while being interpreted by people in different ways, forms their vision and "construction" of the world (see also van Manen, 2017, p. 1-12). To achieve coherence between different social groups, which is important in modern pluralistic democracies, it is necessary to establish mutual understanding between people. It is not the passive assimilation of information and statements that serves this purpose, but the explanation of meanings, the reflexive assimilation of what is reported and the "clarification of our opinion" (Husserl, 1996, p. 225). The systemic approach is not suitable for the study of this process.

Therefore, phenomenology takes on particular importance in communication. It was defined in the philosophy of E. Husserl, applied in sociology by A. Schütz, P. Berger, T. Luckmann and H. Garfinkel; J. Habermas applied it in the theory of democracy and principles of public policy.

The central concept is the concept of "lifeworld", defined by Husserl (2013) as a set of subjective and direct people's ideas about themselves and the world around them, about norms and values, which are always initially set in everyday life experience and define a person's interpretation of reality. These ideas precede the scientific experience of researchers, do not depend on "scientific findings" (p. 176).

Therefore, a scientist should move away from the study of the world as a cognition of facts in positivism and take into account the subjective notions that make up the everyday world. This defines the study of social communication as the interpretation of subjective meanings of the "lifeworld" that a dialogue participants report in an effort to reach mutual understanding, as opposed to the exact sciences approach. It is important that from Habermas's (1993) point of view the exact sciences, to which cybernetics belongs, pursue just a "technical" interest, while the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach corresponds to the practical interest of cognition and acquires emancipation value of a man's enlightenment in communication.

Interestingly, Garfinkel (1967) demonstrates on an experimental level that everyday communication between people does not consist of the transmission of accurate information, but of messages that are free to interpret and understand the intentions of a dialogue participants (p. 35-75). An accurate methodology cannot investigate such communication, and phenomenology is more applicable.

Secondly, communication within the systemic analysis is studied at the macro level and assumes the maintenance of the system functioning. It is not the influence of people on the political subsystem that is studied, but the importance of communication in the reproduction of state power structures. As Abels (1998) notes, positivist sociology studies the world as "subject to reasonable laws and therefore states the normality of the individual out of the effectiveness of common structures" (p. 101).

Wiener (1961) states that the concept of self-organizing system is applicable for economic planning, which depends on control and information security. The production system is stabilized by the flow of new information that is fed to the "input" of the device, which is defined by scientists as "feedback". In political science, the systems theory by Parson (1993) adopted the concept of feedback as a transfer of information from the object of communication (society) to the subject (state apparatus) and investigated whether the impact on the object of the desired effect had been achieved. It also leads to the dominance of the state apparatus.

Conversely, it is the "inductive" study of an individual's consciousness that becomes the primary object of micro-level research in phenomenology. Communication serves as a tool for mutual understanding between people when the other person "is perceived not as an organism but as a human being, and his or her behavior is perceived as the actions of the same person as we are" (Shutz, 1994, p. 488). The macro-level of communication between "home groups", which oppose themselves as "Us" and "Them" at the level of interpretations of reality is also analysed.

Thirdly, the normative-value level of society, which is reproduced by means of communication, is interpreted differently. Parsons (1993) singled out the cultural subsystem: it corresponds to the system of maintenance of norms and values, which determined the unity of society and *systemic* integration and served as a legitimization. Culture is understood as the pinnacle of cybernetic relations connected with the control of social processes. It is the means of political communication that serve to spread the normative and value model, which supports the state apparatus. Habermas (2001) defines it as "systemic"

integration of society. This is why he considers the lifeworld "technicalization" to be one of the threats to the modern society development. Contrariwise, Luhmann (2001) and Sandberg, (2019) claims that meaning is nothing but a functional product of system operations that use and define it; it is impossible to come to the original meaning existing in human culture in the course of a dialogue; subordination of the lifeworld to cyber-coding is required within the modern society systems development, and "technology takes the form of automation during information processing, it operates ideal units, excluding from the consciousness their wider meaning" (Luhmann, 2001, p. 112). Thus, the systemic approach, which assumed that norms and values serve to legitimize power, also states that the initial subjective norms and perceptions of people can be changed, subordinated to the system logic, when they are technicalized in the interests of the political system. Habermas (1993) criticizes this statement: he proceeds from the necessary rationalization of the lifeworld structures, when subjective norms and values of people gain strength and become clear in the political discourse.

Phenomenology determines the people's norms and values by their subjective experience; they are not set, defined or regulated by the political system. According to phenomenology, "we are the only ones who construct a common reality for each other, in which the connection of values and norms is established only by us" (Abels, 1998, p.118). The "lifeworld" corresponds to the inherent subjective norms and values of society itself and its constituent individuals. Communication serves to achieve mutual understanding between individuals from different perspectives.

At the same time, introduction to the norms of society achieved through communication also serves the socialization of people. Husserl (2013), Shutz (1994) and Habermas (1985) see the views of people not only as existing separately, but also as inter-subjectively related to each other in society, which is served by communication between people. Habermas (1985) rejects the distinction between the concepts of "community" and "society", as the sense of identity and the attachment to values that serve mutual understanding already exists in an intersubjective lifeworld. Thanks to the assimilation of social knowledge and traditions, the socialization of an individual and reproduction of cultural symbols of society take place, thus supporting social integration at the social level rather than at the systemic level (state level).

Habermas (1985) argues that, unlike the systemic method and technical integration of social groups, phenomenology makes it possible to achieve mutual understanding between groups that interpret reality differently by means of a special type of rationality and social action. In contrast to instrumental rationality, communicative one presupposes the coordination of actions, consensus building, mutual understanding between people with different worldviews. "the involvement of the Other", "respect for everyone extends to the non-similar, to the personality of the Other in otherness" (Habermas, 2001, p. 48). In the communicative action, the actors achieve their goal with equality, they agree with each other, they make arguments in defense of the claims, they win the "non-coercive coercion" of the best argument" (Nazarchuk, 1993, p. 41), and they can find an acceptable point of view for all parties to the discussion.

Fourthly, let us determine what are the principal differences in understanding the meaning of language between the systems theory and phenomenology. The systemic approach sees the language as a set of symbols corresponding to the cybernetic code that regulates and maintains the normative system of

society. "Language... is a system of symbols, the meaning of which corresponds to a certain code... the code is a normative structure parallel to that which is made by societal values and norms" (Parsons, 1993, p. 113). Language is understood as a "specific case of norms" (Parsons, 1993, p. 112), parallel to the structure of values and norms, which is set by the state apparatus and serves to legitimize power. Besides, as R. Meadow notes, language can serve as a control tool. The bureaucratic apparatus forms its own closed, specific language, which exists within its group, but is not open to other people who "do not have access to decision-making because of their limited ability to express political opinions and demands" (Timofeeva, 2009, p. 52). This also helps to exclude people from the political process (to read more about the system-functional approach to linguistic and language, (Mahboob & To, 2019).

Phenomenology assumes that the language fixes and expresses not the norms set by an external system, but the subjective notions initially set in the human "lifeworld". All typical notions and means of expression, with the help of which reality is defined, are funded and mediated in the language.

Therefore, language, on the one hand, serves to reflect an individual's own views. On the other hand, the commonness of the linguistic world, which mediates the consciousness of individuals, allows them to come to mutual understanding with each other and gain social integration; personal meaning grows from " intra-subjective to objective" (Husserl, 1996, p. 216). Inter-subjectively connected society is aware of itself as a "linguistic community" (p. 217).

Fifthly, the political significance of communication is defined in different ways. Habermas (1993) argues that the political subsystem is focused on ideological legitimation, loyalty of the masses, public opinion is distorted when access to communication is reduced, the political significance of communication is defined in different ways. Habermas (1993) argues that the political subsystem is focused on ideological legitimation, loyalty of the masses, public opinion is distorted when access to communication is reduced, when its structure is "*deformed*" (p. 127) and information becomes an object of manipulation. The systemic approach leads to the technocratic rule of an informed elite rather than to a democratic regime, public influence, and free shaping of public opinion.

Taking into account the ground rules of the phenomenological approach to political communication, which perceives a rationalized discourse originating from the "lifeworld" of people, J. Habermas (1996) justifies the concept of deliberative democracy. The main conductor of communicative rationality within a state becomes the public. In communication, representatives of civil society can approve a plan of action in the state, leading to the solution of common goals (Dryzek & Fishkin, 2019).

The projects of the authorities should be mediated by the public discussion, which forms a network of elements reacting "to the pressure of the public-spread problems" and stimulating "influential opinions" (Habermas, 1996, p. 301). Habermas (1996) defines that "public opinion turns to a ommunicating power through democratic procedures" (p. 301); it cannot rule by itself, but only direct administrative power. Communication does not come from administrative power, it is formed in discussions in civil society. Universal, rational discourse involves all parties, submits to argumentation instead of political coercion, and leads to understanding of the common good and its achievement instead of personal interests of elites. The scientist also writes that parliamentary discussions should be based on an open procedure of argumentation, rationality of argumentation within party debates, and initial pluralism of different beliefs and worldviews.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the systemic-functional and phenomenological approaches essentially offer the opposite understanding of the meaning and role of communication. If the systems theory assumes that communication serves to maintain the state apparatus and the political subsystem, the phenomenological approach emphasizes the free personal communication, a sense communicated by an individual. These directions form opposite models of political regimes, technocratic management of the elite and deliberative democracy, which perceives the inherent importance of public opinion. Phenomenological methodology both offers applied methods of communication research at the qualitative and interpretive level and defines the normative model of organization of uniform and fair social communication.

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