

Not by Communication Alone. Epistemology and Methodology as Typological Criteria of Communication Theories¹

Kęstutis Kirtiklis

Department of Logic and History of Philosophy,
Faculty of Philosophy, Vilnius University,
Postdoctoral fellow
Vilniaus universiteto Filosofijos fakulteto
Filosofijos istorijos ir logikos katedros
mokslininkas stažuotojas
Universiteto Str. 9/1, LT-01513 Vilnius
Tel. (+370 5) 266 7617, fax. (+370 5) 266 7600
E-mail: kestutis.kirtiklis@fsf.vu.lt

The article deals with the attempts to typologize communication theories proposed in recent decades. Examining their flaws it argues that communication theorizing is inseparable from the practice of research, therefore (1) the appropriate criteria for typology of communication theories are to be found in combining theoretical conceptions of communication with methodologies of research and their grounding epistemologies; (2) it is epistemology that provides the basis for bringing together the conceptions of communication and the methodologies of research. It also argues that using epistemological and methodological criteria, two – naturalist and interpretive – traditions of communication theory and research may be distinguished.

Keywords: communication theory, philosophy of communication sciences, naturalism, interpretivism, methodology of social sciences.

¹ This article is part of author's postdoctoral research "Outline of the Philosophy of Communication Sciences". Postdoctoral fellowship is being funded by the European Union Structural Funds project "Postdoctoral Fellowship Implementation in Lithuania" within the framework of the Measure for Enhancing Mobility of Scholars and Other Researchers and the Promotion of Student Research (VP1-3.1- MM-01) of the Program of Human Resources Development Action Plan.

Parts of the draft of this article were presented at the seminar for doctoral students at the University of Surrey Guildford, United Kingdom, May 2011 and the international conference NordMedia 2011 in Akureyri, Iceland, August 2011. Author would like to thank the participants of the discussions for their useful comments, especially Colin B. Grant, Juha Koivisto, and Mats Bergman.

The question of identity of communication sciences² is perhaps their most frequently discussed problem. Probably since the end of fifties when Berelson (1959) lamented the withering away of communication research, communication scholars are engaging in constant debates on the

² Communication theory is one of the constituents of communication sciences; therefore, in this article both terms are used synonymously, unless indicated otherwise (e.g. discussing the relationship between theory and research in the paragraph on Craig's metatheoretical project).

“ferment in the field” (e.g. thematic issues of the *Journal of Communication* in 1983, 1993, 2008), possibility and number of paradigms (Dervin, et al. 1989; Mumby, 1997) or metatheoretical perspectives in communication sciences (Pearce, 1977; Craig, 1999) etc. Yet, despite the number of discussions, no agreement has been reached, no consensus achieved.

The questions debated are indeed fundamental: why are there so many (or so few) communication theories? What should be counted as a communication theory? Is there a possibility of unity of the field amidst theoretical and methodological divisions? Does such thing as autonomous communication science / communication theory exist?

However, the oddest characteristic of these debates is their disconnectedness from the rest of social sciences. Often it seems that communication scholars act as if they were experiencing unique problems that no other sciences have ever experienced; therefore, they should resolve their difficulties completely on their own. Or, in some other cases, the influence of other social sciences is acknowledged, but mostly in the area of the methods of research; when it comes to theory or the problems of typology of various theoretical / methodological positions, communication scholars rather hesitate to learn from their counterparts in sociology or political science.

The relationship between the parts of theory and research in communication sciences itself is an important question. Compared to the earlier debates (e.g. Pearce, 1977; Bostrom & Donohew, 1992) contemporary typologies of communication theories pay much less attention, if any at all, to the issues of methodology and re-

search (Craig, 1999), although the interest in methodology in general is not decreasing (Höijer, 2006, p. 101).

The double genesis of communication sciences (both from social sciences and humanities) make things quite complicated; however, author of the present article believes that bringing communication sciences closer to metatheoretical debates in other social sciences, and especially to the corresponding debates in the philosophy of social sciences, could suggest some solutions to the ongoing identity debates in communication theory.

The article analyses various attempts to solve the identity problem in communication sciences by providing typologies for this still rather chaotic field. Examining their flaws, it argues that (1) the appropriate criteria for typology of communication theories are to be found in combining theoretical conceptions of communication with methodologies of research and their grounding epistemologies; (2) it is epistemology that provides the basis for bringing together the conceptions of communication and the methodologies of research.

Craig’s Metatheoretical Project

In 1999, the American communication scholar Robert T. Craig published an influential³ article “Communication Theory as a Field” (Craig, 1999), which proposed a solution to the identity problem. Craig has argued that this problem rises from the multidisciplinary origins of communication sciences. Various theories of

³ Although Craig’s metatheory did not evoke much critical discussion, his metatheoretical framework was widely used in communication theory textbooks as a framework for introducing the field (Craig, 2007, p. 125).

communication, stemming from various disciplines, bring their own methods of research and problems to be solved; therefore, a unified communication theory, let alone united science of communication is hardly possible. Yet it is not necessary, because, according to Craig, “the potential of communication theory as a field can best be realized [...] not in a unified theory of communication but in a dialogical-dialectical disciplinary matrix, a commonly understood (though always contestable) set of assumptions that would enable productive argumentation across the diverse traditions of communication theory” (Craig, 1999, p. 120). If communication theory cannot be unified into one-paradigm-science, it might be united into a common discussion forum, where various theoretical traditions could take part in the debate without losing their identity and converging between themselves.

Craig (1999, p. 121) suggests that this could be achieved using a constitutive metamodel based on James Carey’s ritual model of communication (Carey, 2009 [1989], p. 15). Theories would “communicate” according to this metamodel, just as people communicate according to the first order corresponding model of communication.

However, the notion of the ritual model of communication is rather vague. Craig presents it simply as a more open and democratic alternative to the transmission model (Craig, 1999, p. 125–126), whereas Carey describes it as the model for communication in time rather than in space; he also emphasizes the ability of the former type of communication to draw people together, to create their commonness (Carey, 2009 [1989], p. 15). The communication

of theories according to this model raises more questions than provides answers.

As communication between people, according to the constitutive model, creates communicative community, so communication between theories, according to the constitutive metamodel, creates a dialogical – dialectical field of communication theory. Various conceptions of communication are the messages communicated in this field. Seven traditions⁴ (Craig, 1999, p. 135–148) participate in this forum, each with a particular conception of communication, which is the main criterion for distinguishing them:

- rhetorical tradition defines communication as a practical art of discourse;
- semiotic tradition – as intersubjective mediation by signs;
- phenomenological tradition – as the experience of otherness;
- cybernetic tradition – as information processing;
- sociopsychological tradition – as expression, interaction, and influence;
- sociocultural tradition – as the (re) production of social order;
- critical tradition – as discursive reflection.

The conception of communication is not the only criterion; there are a few other criteria for the candidates to the status of tradition, closely related to the first one: “the proposed tradition must comprise a substantial body of thought that contributes a unique, practically consequential

⁴ Later he (Craig, 2007) considered the possibility of adding the eighth – pragmatist – tradition to his dialogical dialectic field. However the number of traditions does not make influence on the argument of the present article.

conceptualization of communication, significantly different from all other traditions, and that it must be incorporated into the matrix of the field by specifying its distinctive view of communication problems, metadiscursive vocabulary, commonplace beliefs it affirms or challenges, and topoi for argumentation vis-à-vis other traditions.” (Craig, 2007, p. 130). In other words, “communication theories [...] have something to agree and disagree about – and that “something” is communication, not epistemology” (Craig, 1999, p. 135).

Craig’s metatheory has two problematic points: (1) he disregards the practice of communication research in his typology and (2) he cuts off theorizing of communication from its philosophical basis.

First, it is rather odd that the methodology of empirical research of communication is not mentioned as a criterion for discerning traditions and it seems that in his metatheory in general Craig underestimates communication research.

In many places Craig emphasizes that communication theory is a practical discipline, and yet it seems that he elaborates this idea as if it was almost a purely speculative praxis. People get their knowledge of things by encountering them daily; this is a sort of primitive “empirical research”. If Craig models his metatheory according to the patterns of everyday thinking and practice, he should pay attention to the encounters between theory and the “data” of communication.

The second point is closely related to the first: it is doubtful whether the conceptions of communication are really so independent of epistemology as Craig suggests. Avoiding the analysis of research, Craig also avoids the question of the ori-

gins of knowledge about communication. Analyzing the seven traditions, he does not ask how they get the knowledge of their object. Thus, he overlooks that some of his traditions are closer to each other (e.g. sociocultural and critical, or rhetorical and sociocultural, but all of them are pretty far from sociopsychological or cybernetic traditions), and that this is because some traditions derive their conceptions of communication from one source, while others – from a different one. I will argue later that these sources are broader, more general methodological positions based on particular epistemological assumptions. Denying or disregarding their influence might even lead to the suspicions of circularity in a theory: traditions are different because they define communication differently, and they define communication differently because they are different.

Typology Based on Methodology – An Alternative?

However, Craig’s metatheory was not the only suggestion for solving the problem of identity. A few years earlier Swedish scholar Karl Erik Rosengren, who was taking part in the debates on “ferment in the field” and paradigms, had published several articles (e.g. 1983; 1989) suggesting quite a different typology of what he called paradigms in communication sciences.

Rosengren starts from the statement that communication sciences are not unique, and that other social sciences also experience identity problems (“problems of ferment in the field”) (Rosengren, 1983, p. 185–186) and experience them since longer time, so communication researchers can turn to their neighboring disci-

plines for suggestions. Rosengren adapts the typology of sociological theories made by the Anglo-American duo Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan, where theories are classified according to two criteria – their assumptions about the nature of social sciences (subjective vs. objective, based on different views on ontology, epistemology, methodology and human nature) and the nature of society (sociology of radical change vs. sociology of regulation – this dichotomy is based on differences in axiology and political engagement).

Crossing the two dimensions makes a four-part typology, i.e. four schools or traditions of research:

- radical humanism – subjective / radical change;
- radical structuralism – objective / radical change;
- interpretive [sociology] – subjective / regulation;
- functionalist [sociology] – objective / regulation (this paradigm is dominant; the majority of communication researchers work in it.).

Usually, it is considered that each paradigm differs in research questions, which are raised and answered in it (Rosengren, 1983, p. 188). Yet Rosengren argues that it is possible to answer questions raised in one paradigm by means of methodologies developed in another paradigm (Rosengren, 1983, p. 189 ff.). Analyzing three examples – news research, general type of measurements in the study of culture, and multivariate analysis – Rosengren demonstrates how the dominant paradigm (functionalist) answers the important questions raised by other three “alternative” paradigms. It means that they rather make a continua than are separated by insurmount-

able division lines, which would make them incommensurable (Rosengren, 1989, p. 22, 24). Therefore, concludes Rosengren, in the long run the convergence of paradigms is possible, and the question of the title of 1983’s article “one paradigm or four?” must be answered in favor of the former.

Later, however, Rosengren (1993) admitted that not many communication scholars shared his optimism and followed the suggested way towards one paradigm. They rather accepted the existence of the dichotomy of paradigms, based on methods; as Robert Bostrom put it, “a distinction between qualitative and quantitative is currently given paradigmatic status” (2004, p. 347). Although this distinction may appear to be supported by everyday discourse and some handbooks on communication research (cf. Stacks & Salwen, 2009 [1996]; Jensen, 2002), there seem to be no significant attempts to theorize, define, and defend it. The critics of this dichotomy (Rosengren 1989; 1993; Bostrom 2003; 2004) emphasize the convergence of qualitative and quantitative methods not only as a methodological possibility, but also as actual reality in communication research. Hence, the division of communication sciences into qualitative and quantitative paradigms remains at best vague, or even indefensible, but somehow popular.

However, the lack of popularity is not the only problem Rosengren’s theory faces. It is rather odd that Rosengren never asks whether this sociological typology is applicable in communication sciences. He simply assumes that it is: “many of the same schools and groupings appear in communication research, albeit sometimes under different names” (Rosengren, 1993,

p. 6). Paraphrasing John Durham Peters' bitter remark on political communication research as political sciences practiced in the field of communication, one can say, that Rosengren sees no problem in practicing sociological metatheory in the field of communication sciences. However, there is a problem: in this case, communication sciences are losing their particularity, for it is not the scope and pace of changes in society, but communication they are studying and debating. Yet communication, as an object of research, theorized on its own, separately from the social institution of mass media, is mentioned by Rosengren only as a constituent of culture (albeit the most important) (Rosengren, 1983, p. 193). Then why one should call it communication science and not the sociology of communication?

Rosengren eludes the circularity that might be suspected in Craig's theory; he can demonstrate how differences in conceptions of communication theory and research emerge from broader philosophical and methodological differences, still he chooses not to discuss the conceptions of communication and melts communication research in the melting pot of the rest of social sciences.

Towards the Philosophy of Communication Theories?

Rosengren was not the only one who realized the importance of philosophical premises for research methodologies. In recent years, a few researches on philosophy of communication were made; their authors (Anderson, 1996; Anderson & Baym, 2004; Nastacia & Rakow, 2004) tried to provide a typology of approaches

in communication sciences via typologies of philosophical positions on which the methodologies of communication sciences are based.

James A. Anderson (1996) saw the rise of various philosophies of communication as a reaction to the dominance of positivism in communication research. Though the name of his book (*Communication Theory. Epistemological Foundations*) promises the analysis only of epistemological foundations, Anderson exceeds this promise and presents a wide panorama of various ontological, epistemological, praxeological, and axiological positions, although using an epistemological vocabulary. Since he considers himself a rebel against positivist-scientist authorities, his book is rather "an unfinished jazz symphony in which themes and their variations are played but remain open to further improvisation"; "here, there is a response for everything, but an answer for nothing" (Anderson, 1996, p. 3).

However, this colorful and sometimes insightful panorama rather often lacks an in-depth analysis of its contents. With the lack of analysis comes the lack of clarity. For example, the question of the nature of the real is discussed from two points of view – objective versus hermeneutic empiricism (which are resolved into positivism vs. semiotic, phenomenological, pragmatic, cultural / critical and actional positions) (Anderson, 1996, p. 13–42); and the variety of positions on the character of the justified argument consists of foundationalism, positivism, correspondence theory, justificationism, verificationism / falsificationism, instrumentalism, conventionalism, sociological relativism, programmatic methodism, sociological de-

terminism, and hermeneutics (Anderson, 1996, p. 103–121). Some readers would really like to know whether and how those positions are related to each other; do they really differ in views or just in vocabulary? This curiosity, however, remains unsatisfied.

A decade later, in a study conducted with Geoffrey Baym (Anderson & Baym, 2004), Anderson undertakes a task of such analysis. Philosophical fields of interest remain the same: ontology, epistemology, praxeology, and axiology. Mixing the problems arising in these fields, Anderson and Baym create a four quadrant table, based on the intersection of two theoretical continua: foundational / reflexive and empirical / analytic (by which they mean realist / idealist).

Theoretical positions in quadrants differ in five key elements: “the character of theory that arises in the philosophic domain, the typical method associated with that theory type, the form of argument that is used to advance claim, the goal or objective of the theory and the underlying assumptions about the reality the theory engages” (Anderson & Baym, 2004, p. 592).

Hence, there are four philosophical domains of communication scholarship (and the representative scholarship communities) (Anderson & Baym, 2004, p. 591):

- foundationalist / empirical – behaviorism, cognitivism, neuro-psychological structuralism, functionalism, material anthropology, post-positivism, message effects, forms, and conventions research;
- foundationalist / analytical – critical theory, Marxism, cultural studies, second-wave feminism, identity theories, criticism, literary theory, rhetorical studies;

- reflexive / empirical – ethnography, performance studies, social action, structuration, discourse and conversation analysis, social semiotics, symbolic interactionism;
- reflexive / analytical – deconstructionism, third wave feminism, cultural Marxism, postmodernism, politics of desire, resistance studies, poststructuralism.

For the purposes of the present research, there are two important points in Anderson’s and Baym’s typology: first, there are relatively few theories / scholarship communities that could be strictly named *communication* scholarship communities: message effects research, rhetorical studies, discourse and conversation analysis, and – provisorily – a couple more. As in the case of Rosengren’s suggestion, the authors rather provide a typology of scholarship communities in social sciences and humanities in general. Second, the definition or the conception of communication is absent from the list of criteria, and different traditions of communication research seem to differ in everything but the notion of communication, and the question what makes this typology suitable for communication sciences remains unanswered.

Another attempt of philosophical typology was made by Diana Nastacia and Lana Rakow (2004) who maintained that communication theories should be typologized on deeper philosophical basis rather than on “chronological development, domains of provenience, subfields of study, or components of an essentialized communication definition”⁵ (Nastacia & Rakow,

⁵ An element from the so-called *Lasswell’s formula*: “A convenient way to describe communication is to answer the following questions: Who / says what / in which channel / to whom / with what effect?” (Lasswell, 1971 [1948], p. 84).

2004, p. 2). This deeper philosophical basis is provided by positions taken in the fields of theory of being (ontology), theory of knowledge (epistemology), and theory of power (ideology) (Nastacia & Rakow, 2004, p. 3). Analyzing various possible approaches to these three philosophical fields, Nastacia and Rakow found five schools of thought in communication studies (Nastacia & Rakow, 2004, p. 28):

- rationalism – idealist ontology, rationalist epistemology, absolutist ideology (representatives: classical rhetoric, structuralism, information / system theories);
- functionalism – realist ontology, empiricist epistemology, elitist ideology (positivism, structural anthropology);
- criticism – objective nominalist (materialist) ontology, materialist dialectical epistemology, revolutionary ideology (the Frankfurt school, political economy);
- interpretivism – subjective nominalist ontology, humanist epistemology, pluralist ideology (interactionism, interpretive rhetoric, cultural studies);
- postmodernism – solipsist / relativist ontology, skeptical / de/re-constructivist epistemology, anarchist ideology / postideology (postmodern rhetoric, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, feminist studies, critical race studies).

Having in mind that these are the schools of communication theory, one might rightly ask (as one may ask Anderson and Baym, too) about their attitudes toward empirical research and its methodology. It is unclear what kind of research methodology is in-

herent to each of the schools; is there any at all? If theory presumes research, then the conception of methodology should play an important, if not essential, role in defining various approaches in studies of any object; otherwise, one is dealing with a theorizing for its own sake. Yet, as in Anderson's and Baym's project, the criterion of methodology is simply missing.

Also, as in Anderson's and Baym's project, the possible differences in conceptions of communication are omitted, as is also the particularity of communication studies. Nastacia and Rakow do not ask what conceptions of communication are proposed by various schools, how they define the object of their studies; yet the answer given to this question might show that there are a different number of traditions of communication research (presumably less than five).

All these problems arise, because it is unclear with what kind of philosophy do Anderson and Baym and Nastacia and Rakow deal. What do they mean by *philosophy of communication theories*, what questions does it presume? Is it a particular branch of philosophy, usually called philosophy of social sciences? The problem, however, is that *philosophy of communication theories* oddly does not address probably the most important questions in the philosophy of social sciences – the problems of scientific methodology. Methodological and philosophical problems of explanation and understanding, individualism and holism, or value neutrality that seem to be the key issues of the debates in the philosophy of social sciences (Martin & McIntyre, 1994; Rosenberg, 2008; Hollis, 1994; Braybrooke, 1987; and many others) hardly appear in explicit form in the philosophi-

cal typologies of communication theories. Of course, following any philosophical tradition is by no means obligatory, yet it might prove itself useful, especially if one is considering the experience of neighbor disciplines looking for help in answering questions about the identity of communication sciences. Maybe that is what communication sciences need?

In a series of publications, Charles Pavitt (1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2004) made an attempt to “import” the debates of philosophy of science into the field of communication theory. Pavitt does not try to create a typology; he is more an advocate of the particular philosophical position – scientific realism – and his main concern is to establish it in the field. Scientific realism has already strong positions in communication research practices (Pavitt, 1999, p. 162 –163), but in theoretical reflections communication scholars are still divided into two camps – positivists and interpretivists – who believe that they differ in methods they use (respectively quantitative and qualitative). Pavitt (1999) argues (as Rosengren (1989; 1993) and Bostrom (2003; 2004) did) that this dichotomy is indefensible. He suggests that one should look instead to the contemporary philosophy of science, where one finds three competing positions – scientific realism, logical positivism, and perspectivism (*à la* Thomas Kuhn).

However, Pavitt’s idea of scientific realisms debate against various antirealist positions (Pavitt, 2004, p. 334) is based on the philosophy of so-called hard (natural) sciences; it disregards the actual situation in philosophy whose problems arise in social sciences, and where realism is challenged not only by logical positivism or

perspectivism, but also by “hermeneutic” scholarship, which Pavitt prefers not to deal with (Pavitt, 1999, p. 176; 2000a, p. vii), thus somehow oversimplifying the picture.

The question, however, is: what would the theoretical debates in communication sciences and their typology look like, if they would be reconsidered from the point of view of contemporary philosophy of social sciences?

Bringing Communication Theory and Philosophy of Social Sciences Together

Today, the main question of philosophy and methodology of social sciences still remains that of the uniqueness of social sciences – whether they are a (still immature) part of general science, and the methods that are applicable in the research in natural sciences should be also applied in social sciences, or they are a completely different type of science. The debate dates back to early modern philosophy and still has not run out of steam. Therefore, social scientists in general are divided into two camps, which are not quantitative vs. qualitative, but naturalist vs. interpretive (anti-naturalist).

The aim of natural sciences is to explain and predict, so is the aim of naturalist approach in social sciences. In order to achieve success in prediction, a naturalistically oriented social scientist seeks to discover the scientific laws describing the social life that could provide a causal explanation for social actions. A scientist is an impartial observer observing from a distance, not engaging in the situation researched, like, for example, a zoologist

studying a group of orangutans. Naturalist social science is possible, because social phenomena, as naturalists argue, in the end are reducible to natural phenomena.

Interpretivists, on the contrary, instead of searching for the laws that could provide causal explanations of social actions, try to grasp the situation from within, from the participants' point of view. Considering social life as something completely different from the natural events and impossible to be researched and conceptualized using the naturalist approach, interpretivists seek to understand the rules social actors are following, or, in more radical forms of interpretivism, to interpret and understand social actions as a kind of texts. The relationship between the observer and the observed is complex, for the observed themselves observe and interpret their life, and a social scientist reinterprets their interpretations. In this case, social sciences cannot remain value-free, as naturalists insist, since theoretical concepts, which correspond to everyday terms used by social actors in daily life, are always value-laden⁶.

The traces of this naturalist / interpretivist dichotomy could be easily found in Rosengren's metatheoretical suggestions as well as in Anderson and Baym's work. The task, however, is to put it together with Craig's concern about the conceptions of communication. The question here is whether those different conceptions of social sciences presuppose different conceptions of communication.

Let me start from the point that the two approaches in social sciences are dis-

⁶ A more comprehensive analysis of naturalist / interpretivist dichotomy in philosophy of social sciences can be found in numerous books on the subject (e.g. already mentioned Rosenberg, 2008; Braybrooke, 1987; Martin & McIntyre, 1994).

cerned not by negation, as naturalists and anti-naturalists (although some authors make such dichotomy), but through the differences in epistemology and methodology. In the relationship between the two, epistemology holds the dominant position. I completely agree with the definition of methodology provided by Brigitte Höijer (2006, p. 101) who uses the term "methodology" to "designate a meta-perspective on methods, e.g. treatments of methods in theoretical, epistemological and ontological perspectives."⁷ Therefore, the methodology chosen for the research will depend on the ideas about the source of knowledge, the nature of justified argument, and this idea is already present in the work of Rosengren and Anderson and Baym. What is missing in their studies is the idea that from different epistemological and methodological positions stem different conceptions of communication.

Of course, neither naturalists nor interpretivists form finished and coherent schools of thought. They should rather be treated as quite loose currents in contemporary social sciences, holding some similar beliefs on some issues. Of course, in each of them there are plenty of intramural debates; for example, Bostrom and Pavitt's debate on realism and theory/data relationship (Bostrom, 2003; 2004; Pavitt, 2004). Yet it is an intramural naturalist debate, for both of them agree on some basic premises, namely that communication happens "out there" in the world and it could be studied by scientific research (observation, experiments) and the results of the research might get a form of scientific

⁷ "Methods' denotes more scientific procedure and concrete approaches – in short, how we go about it" (Höijer, 2006, p. 101).

theory, which could be tested and proved true or false by other communication researchers. In spite of their differences, Pavitt and Bostrom generally agree on the manner of relationship between the observer and the observed and the character of the justified argument, and both of them oppose some basic premises characteristic of the interpretivist camp: the double reflexivity of the observer / interpreter, the consensual (or constructivist) nature of truth, or the statement that knowledge always depends on various forms of power and inequality. Bostrom and Pavitt, as well as other naturalists (Rosengren, 1993; Boster, 2002; Miller & Berger, 1999), believe that the progress of knowledge can be achieved through improving empirical research, models and theories, and this progress is the goal of communication research (cf. Craig 1999 as an example of a different goal – communication theory as a dialogical–dialectic field, with no idea of progress nor accumulation of true knowledge and rejection of false theories).

Given such differences, it is not surprising that the notion of theorizing on communication will differ in naturalist and interpretivist camps. Naturalist and interpretivist epistemologies and methodologies will propose not concrete definitions of communication, but a broader basic notion and the way of conceptualizing it; they are two general traditions of theorizing (perhaps one may even risk calling them competing paradigms in a Kuhnian sense as there is pretty much incommensurability between them) inspiring a variety of concrete definitions of communication, based on common premises.

What exactly are the differences in conceptualizing communication?

Naturalist epistemology is based on the Cartesian divide between the observer

and the observed (object). It is the active observer who gets the observational data from the experiment, measurement, observation. Though the data might be distorted by a fault of instruments or observer, justifiable knowledge is possible.

In communication theory, the naturalist view inspires the conception of communication, which is best schematized in the transmission model (sometimes called Shannon's model). This model represents communication as transmission of messages from sender to receiver. The sender has a privileged active position in determining the content of the message and the proper encoding of it. The receiver is rather passive, having almost the only function of adequately decoding the message. Even though the receiver has some freedom of interpretation, provided that the message has the meaning that could be understood properly, the scope of possible interpretations is rather narrow. Sender and receiver are independent of each other, and the meaning of the transmitted message is independent of both. The naturalists (especially their classical representatives – the so-called Columbia school of mass communication research) are not interested in the origins of transmitted meaning. The more important thing is that both sender and receiver can understand it, despite the noises in the communication channel, which may distort the message. (The channel is any environment where the messages are being transmitted.) Naturalist communication research predominantly aims at explaining the effects of communication. Effective communication occurs when the messages are encoded, sent and properly decoded. A properly encoded and properly decoded message has an effect on the receiver, which should be explained in causal terms.

The naturalist conception of communication research encounters many faces of *interpretivism* / (neo)pragmatism / constructivism⁸, based on different ideas about acquiring knowledge. In the interpretive epistemology, the explanation of social action through the conception of causality is replaced by the understanding of rules according to which people act, or by the notions of interpreting a social action as a text. The rules, however, are modified in the processes of action, and a reliable knowledge of them is achieved through knowing the beliefs of the members of communicative community. Therefore, the notions of what counts as communication and what is communicated depend on the participants of communication processes, and these notions are (re)formulated during the process of communication. Communication in the interpretivist approach is conceptualized according to the constitutive / ritual model which conceptualizes communication as “sharing, participation, association, fellowship, possession of common faith” (Carey, 2009 [1989], p. 15). The interpretative understanding of communication takes place, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, in some sort of cultural game. The dichotomy of sender and receiver is rejected in the interpretative theorizing. The main participant of communication is the whole communicative community which maintains communication through the common tradition of interpretation. The meaning of the message does not ex-

⁸ The disunity of interpretive tradition is perhaps more visible than the naturalist one. Some members of this current, e.g. constructivism have rather complicated relation to the research of communication. Some varieties of constructivism in communication theory could hardly be considered as basis for research methodology. However more detailed analysis of the inner debates in the interpretivist camp requires much deeper research which would go beyond the limits of the present article.

ist outside the process of communication, so it is not somehow discovered and transmitted by a particular individual, but rather created during the act of communication. Therefore, the channels of communication are not only media or face-to-face situations; the main channel for the creation of meaning is cultural tradition; it determines the frames of interpretation. Interpretivists are not interested in communication effects. Communication is created and maintained by communicative community, and community itself is created and maintained by communication; this mutual influence is the main characteristic of successful communication.

Concluding remarks

The practice of theorizing and researching communication might be described as passing the three levels: first, it is the level of general philosophical ideas about the nature of knowledge; second, the level of methodological ideas about the nature of science, and third, the level of communication theories. All of the discussed typological attempts operate on one particular level: philosophical (Anderson and Baym, Nastacia and Rakow), methodological (Rosengren), or theoretical (Craig). Therefore, they either lose their specificity as typologies of communication theories, or lose the sight of the relation of communication sciences to the rest of social sciences, thus encountering the risk of inventing the wheel.

The present article suggests that the typology of theories in communication sciences should integrate the three levels as well as bring communication sciences back to the rest of social sciences. The typological analysis must show the dependence of

the conception of communication on both the epistemological and methodological premises. Therefore, there are two ways of conceptualizing communication – naturalist and interpretive – based on two methodological approaches in social sciences.

This, however, does not mean that the typologizing of communication theories becomes an easy task of telling black from white. The two traditions in communication sciences should be regarded as ideal types, and the practice of communication theory and research sometimes is rather messy, taking place in a grey zone between the two extremes. Although the perfect match of a particular communication theory to the naturalist or interpretivist ideal is

hardly achievable and the attribution of a particular theoretical position to a particular tradition may sometimes be challenging, it is by no means impossible.

Learning from other social sciences might have another positive impact on the identity debates in communication sciences. Plenty of books and articles in philosophy and methodology of social sciences show that the identity problems and paradigmatic battles are typical of all social sciences. None of social sciences can proudly declare being a unified, mono-paradigmatic science. And this provides some consolation: the existence of identity problems makes communication sciences neither worse nor inferior.

REFERENCES

- ANDERSON, James A. (1996). *Communication Theory: Epistemological Foundations*. New York, London: The Guilford Press, 1996. ISBN 1-57230-083-3.
- ANDERSON, James A.; BAYM Geoffrey (2004). Philosophies and Philosophic Issues in Communication, 1995–2004. *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 54, No. 4, p. 589–615.
- BERELSON, Bernard (1959). The State of Communication Research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 1–6.
- BOSTER, Franklin J. (2002). On Making Progress in Communication Science. *Human Communication Research*, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 473–490.
- BOSTROM, Robert N. (2003). Theories, Data, and Communication Research. *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 70, No. 4, p. 275–294.
- BOSTROM, Robert N. (2004). Empiricism, Paradigms, and Data. *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 71, No. 3, p. 343–351.
- BOSTROM, Robert; DONOHEW, Lewis (1992). The Case for Empiricism: Clarifying Fundamental Issues in Communication Theory. *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 59, p. 109–129.
- BRAYBROOKE, David (1987) *Philosophy of Social Science*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc. ISBN 0-13-662294-3.
- CAREY, James W. (2009). *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. Revised Edition. New York and London: Routledge (First edition published 1989). ISBN 0-415-98976-0.
- CRAIG, Robert T. (1999). Communication Theory as a Field. *Communication Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 119–161.
- CRAIG, Robert T. (2007). Pragmatism in the Field of Communication Theory. *Communication Theory*, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 125–145.
- DERVIN, Brenda; GROSSBERG, Lawrence; O'KEEFE, Barbara; WARTELLA, Ellen, eds. (1989). *Rethinking Communication*. Volume 1: *Paradigm Issues*. Newbury Park, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications. ISBN 0-8039-3029-1.
- HÖIJER, Brigitte (2006). Are We as Attentive to Method as We Should Be? *Nordicom Review*, No. 1, p. 101–106.
- HOLLIS, Martin (1994). *The Philosophy of Social Science*. Cambridge; New York; Melbourne; Cape Town: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-44264-8.
- JENSEN, Klaus Bruhn, eds (2002). *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research. Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*. New York and London: Routledge. ISBN 0-203-465105.
- LASSWELL, Harold D. (1971). The Structure and Function of Communication in Society. In:

W. Schramm, D. F. Roberts, eds. *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication. Revised Edition.* Urbana; Chicago; London: University of Illinois Press, p. 84–99. (Original article published 1948).

MARTIN, Michael; MCINTYRE, Lee C. (1994) *Reading in the Philosophy of Social Science.* Cambridge, Mass. London: MIT Press. ISBN 0-262-63151-2.

MILLER, Gerald R.; BERGER, Charles R. (1999). On Keeping the Faith in Matters Scientific. *Communication Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3, p. 221–231.

MUMBY, Denis K. (1997). Modernism, Post-modernism and Communication Studies: Rereading of an Ongoing Debate. *Communication theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 1–28.

NASTASIA, Diana Iulia; RAKOW, Lana F. (2004). *Towards a Philosophy of Communication Theories: An Ontological, Epistemological and Ideological Approach:* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans Sheraton, New Orleans, LA, May 27, 2004. Available online <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p113255_index.html> [cited 25 March, 2009].

PAVITT, Charles (1999). The Third Way: Scientific Realism and Communication Theory. *Communication Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 162–188.

PAVITT, Charles (2000a). *The Philosophy of Science and Communication Theory.* Huntington; New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc. ISBN 1-56072-875-2.

PAVITT, Charles (2000b). Answering Questions Requesting Scientific Explanations for Com-

munication. *Communication Theory*, Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 379–404.

PAVITT, Charles (2004). Theory–Data Interaction from the Standpoint of Scientific Realism: A Reaction to Bostrom. *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 71, No. 3, p. 333–342.

PEARCE, W. Barnett (1977). Metatheoretical Concerns in Communication. *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 3–6.

PETERS, John Durham (1986). Institutional Sources of Intellectual Poverty in Communication Research. *Communication Research*, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 527–559.

ROSENBERG, Alexander (2008). *Philosophy of Social Science.* Third Edition. Boulder: Westview Press. ISBN 0-8133-4351-8.

ROSENGREN, Karl Erik (1983). Communication Research: One Paradigm or Four? *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 185–207.

ROSENGREN, Karl Erik (1989). Paradigms Lost and Regained. In: B. Dervin, L. Grossberg, B. J. O’Keefe, E. Wartella, eds. *Rethinking Communication.* Volume 1: *Paradigm Issues.* Newbury Park; London; New Delhi: SAGE Publications, p. 21–39.

ROSENGREN, Karl Erik (1993). From Field to Frog Ponds. *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43, No. 3, p. 6–17.

STACKS, Don W.; SALWEN, Michael B., eds. (2009). *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research.* Second Edition. New York and London: Routledge (First edition published 1996). ISBN 0-8058-6383-6.

NE VIEN KOMUNIKACIJA. EPISTEMOLOGIJA IR METODOLOGIJA KAIP KOMUNIKACIJOS TEORIJŲ TIPOLOGIJOS KRITERIJAI

Kęstutis Kirtiklis

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje analizuojami pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais pateikti komunikacijos teorijų tipologijų pasiūlymai. Išnagrinėjus jų trūkumus tvirtinama, kad komunikacijos teorizavimas yra neatskiriamas nuo tyrimų praktikų, todėl (1) deramų kriterijų komunikacijos teorijų tipologijai reikia ieškoti jungiant teorines komunikacijos sampratas su tyrimų metodologijomis ir jas pagrindžiančiomis epistemologinėmis pozicijomis; (2) būtent epistemologinės

nuostatos teikia pagrindą jungti komunikacijos sampratą ir tyrimų metodologiją. Straipsnyje taip pat tvirtinama, kad remiantis epistemologiniais ir metodologiniais kriterijais skirtinos dvi, natūralistinė ir interpretacinė, komunikacijos teorijos ir tyrimų tradicijos.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: komunikacijos teorija, komunikacijos mokslų filosofija, natūralizmas, interpretacinė prieiga, socialinių mokslų metodologija.