Communication Theory

EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

Edited by
D. LAWRENCE KINCAID

HUMAN COMMUNICATION
RESEARCH SERIES

Communication Theory
EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

HUMAN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH SERIES

PETER R. MONGE, Editor

Monge and Cappella:
MULTIVARIATE TECHNIQUES IN
HUMAN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH 1980

Cushman and McPhee:
MESSAGE-ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOR
RELATIONSHIP 1980

Woelfel and Fink:
MEASUREMENT OF COMMUNICATION
PROCESSES 1980

Kerr and Hiltz:
COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS:
STATUS AND EVALUATION 1982

Hart:
VERBAL STYLE AND THE PRESIDENCY:
A COMPUTER-BASED ANALYSIS 1984

Hunter, Danes, and Cohen:
MATHEMATICAL MODELS OF ATTITUDE CHANGE.
VOLUME 1: CHANGE IN SINGLE ATTITUDES AND
COGNITIVE STRUCTURE 1984

Kincaid:
COMMUNICATION THEORY:
EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES 1987

Communication Theory

EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

Edited by

D. Lawrence Kincaid
Department of Communication
State University of New York at Albany
Albany, New York

ACADEMIC PRESS, INC.
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers
San Diego New York Berkeley Boston
London Sydney Tokyo Toronto

ACADEMIC PRESS, INC.
1250 Sixth Avenue, San Diego, California 92101

United Kingdom Edition published by
ACADEMIC PRESS INC. (LONDON) LTD.
24–28 Oval Road, London NW1 7DX

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Communication theory.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Communication. 2. Intercultural communication.
I. Kincaid, D. Lawrence, Date
P90.C6335 1987 001.51 87–1257
ISBN 0–12–407470–7 (alk. paper)

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

87 88 89 90 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Contributors

Numbers in parentheses indicate the pages on which the authors' contributions begin.

Chung-Ying Cheng (23), Department of Philosophy, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

Donald P. Cushman (1, 57, 223), Department of Communication, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, New York 12222

Jesse G. Delia (255), Department of Speech Communication, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois 61801

Wimal Dissanayake (151), Institute of Culture and Communication, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii 96848

James S. Fu (45), Department of Foreign Languages, San Jose State University, San Jose, California 95192

Randy Y. Hirokawa (137), Department of Communication, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242

Kyung-wha Kang (235), Department of Mass Communication, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea

D. Lawrence Kincaid (1, 209, 275, 331), Department of Communication, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, New York 12222

Klaus Krippendorff (189), Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104

Sang-Hee Lee (101), Department of Mass Communication, Seoul National University, Seoul 151, Korea

Keizo Okabe (127), The Institute for Journalism, University of Tokyo, Tokyo 113, Japan

W. Barnett Pearce (235), Department of Communication Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003

Gerry Philipsen (245), Department of Speech Communication, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195

Abdur Rahim (173), Department of Communication and Journalism, Osmania University, Hyderabad, India 500007

Akira Tsujimura (115), Department of Social Psychology, Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo, Tokyo 113, Japan

Joseph Woelfel (275, 299), Department of Communication, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, New York 12222

J. S. Yadava (161), Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi 110049, India

Muneo Jay Yoshikawa (319), Department of East Asian Languages and Literature, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

June-Ock Yum (71, 87), Department of Communication, State University of New York at Albany, Albany, New York 12222

Preface

The field of communication has entered one of the most exciting periods in its history. The steady, rapid pace of technological development continues to break down the natural barriers of time and space that once made communication on a global scale so difficult. As the natural barriers diminish, the political and cultural barriers seem more formidable than ever.

The number of people studying communication has reached critical new proportions. New ideas challenging the old come from all parts of the world today. Those who listen to many voices will find the reward in the improved quality and scope of their own work.

This book is a positive response to the demand that has developed during the past few years for theoretical approaches to communication which are compatible with the political and cultural realities of Asia and which clearly differentiate between communication as it is practiced in the East and the West, especially the United States. The main purpose of this book is to broaden our thinking about communication as a fundamental process of society.

A look at communication theory from different cultural perspectives will contribute greatly to the future development of the field. For many readers the ideas presented in this book will be new and quite exciting, challenging and stimulating their own thinking about communication. New students of communication will find a richness heretofore unknown.

We have taken an inclusive approach to "theory." Theory is something to be developed, not a finished product. A formal theory consists of several equally important parts: intuitive notions or presuppositions,

more precisely defined constructs, postulates or hypotheses that relate the constructs, deduced laws, and experimental tests of the hypotheses. The authors of some of the chapters in this book limit their discussion to basic presuppositions from a particular cultural perspective or define useful new constructs for theory construction. Others formulate postulates or hypotheses capable of empirical test.

Presupposing and defining phenomena a particular way is a prerequisite for perception and intelligent discussion. Good concepts allow us to see new things or to see old things in a new light. At the same time they divert our attention or blind us from seeing other things. Escaping from this paradoxical situation is no easy task. Progress can sometimes be made by borrowing formal language systems developed in other domains of science, as when biologists apply the language of cybernetics to their own problems or physicists apply the concept of evolution to theirs. One who comes to understand and appreciate concepts developed in different cultures and language systems from their own, the "*Tao*" or "feedback" or "dialectical materialism," has gained a new set of tools to see new phenomena in his or her own culture or see the familiar in a new way. By forcing constructs and relationships into the English language which were originally developed in other language systems, we create a new leverage for theory building. Those who pursue what they are introduced to in this book will find their vision of communication enriched forever.

It would be impossible to cover all of the possible theoretical perspectives of both the East and the West in one volume. The Eastern perspective is represented by discussions from four cultures: China, Korea, Japan, and India. The Western perspective is limited to recent trends in North American thinking. This structure leaves room for the inclusion of several chapters that discuss ideas held in common by the East and the West. Together, the full set of chapters makes an important contribution to the study of intercultural communication, where cultural differences must be clearly understood and, if possible, transcended.

Once the idea for this work was set in motion, it could be realized only with the help of a great many people. The East–West Center's Communication Institute, Honolulu, Hawaii, sponsored the international seminar from which many of the papers originated, and Tokyo University sponsored a second symposium in Yokohama, Japan, which allowed the work to continue.

I would especially like to acknowledge the contributions of Chung-Ying Cheng and Joe Woelfel, who have been with the project since the beginning, and Akira Tsujimura and Keizo Okabe, who gave so much support, and all who participated in the two seminars and who contributed papers.

Communication Theory
EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Initial Insights

Donald P. Cushman and D. Lawrence Kincaid

Human communication theory can be productively explored from a variety of perspectives. It is the purpose of this essay to explore the insights which are provided by examining communication theory from Eastern and Western perspectives. The knowledge on which our discussion is based comes from the papers presented in this same volume which were written by scholars from both Asia and the United States for the purpose of enhancing our understanding of communication theory.

Before entering into the main portion of our discussion we are in need of some analytic tools for exploring what is meant by the concepts, communication and theory. Both of these concepts are at once ambiguous and conventional in their meaning. They are ambiguous in that each of these terms is employed to designate several rather diverse conceptualizations. They are conventional in that there is considerable agreement among philosophers, theorists, and practitioners as to the elements which make up each of these diverse conceptualizations. Let us therefore begin by defining the terms communication and theory in their most general sense and then provide a conceptualization of the elements involved in each of their different and yet conventional usages.

COMMUNICATION THEORY:
EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

Communication in its most general sense refers to a process in which *information* is shared by two or more persons and which has *consequences* for one or more of the persons involved. Much of the ambiguity and controversy regarding the nature of communication stems from the different ways that "information" is defined, and the different approaches that are taken toward the "consequences" of communication. Kincaid (Chapter 15, this volume), for instance, focuses on the physical nature of information, defining it as "a difference in matter-energy which affects uncertainty . . . " To him, the most important consequences of communication are *between* the persons involved, in terms of their mutual understanding, mutual agreement, and collective action.

This recent approach to communication may be contrasted with that of Cushman and Whiting (1972), who define communication as "the successful transfer of symbolic information." This definition focuses attention on the act of transfer and the nature of success, especially about for whom the transfer is successful: source, receiver, or both? In fact, the introduction of the term, "success," emphasizes an instrumental aspect of communication which is so often associated with Western ways of thinking in general. If success is limited to external criteria, to the effective manipulation of the external world including other people, then the Western bias of this definition is evident and can be traced back to Aristotle's principles of rhetoric. On the other hand, if success is interpreted more broadly we can make room for a greater variety of approaches to communication, perhaps even those which are compatible with Eastern ways of thinking.

First, successful communication can be claimed to have taken place when an individual can subjectively make sense out of his perceptions of experiences and incoming messages. Such a conception of successful communication focuses on the internal information processing capability of an individual. It is communication rooted in *psychological processes* and represents an individual's own subjective estimate that the symbolic patterns confronting that individual have been interpreted correctly. Such personal understanding occurs when one reads a poem or practices meditation, from either external or internal experiences. Understanding gives a personal interpretation to the patterns of information taken from those experiences. From this perspective successful communication is a matter of personal understanding.

Second, successful communication can be said to have occurred when two or more individuals interactively arrive at a common set of interpretations for patterns of information. Such a conception of successful communication focuses on agreements between individuals. It is communication rooted in social consensus and represents two or more individuals' estimates that the information pattern confronting them has been inter-

preted correctly as a consequence of their interaction. From this perspective successful communication is a matter of mutual understanding and agreement.

Third, successful communication can be said to have occurred when some institution of authority provides a criteria for the correct interpretation of patterns of information. This is communication rooted in institutional authority and represents imposed standards or conventions for interpretation. Examples of institutional conventions for correct interpretations of symbolic patterns are found in various religious ceremonies, cultural conventions for greeting others, and ideological interpetations of government policy. From this perspective, successful communication is a matter of institutional understanding.

Human beings can depend on psychological, social or institutional processes and criteria, or combinations of all three to arrive at coherent, meaningful interpretations of experience based on their shared patterns of information. Defined this broadly, "success" is a question of *how* understanding is reached as a consequence of communication.

The concept *theory* like that of communication has both general and specific conventional uses. In its most general sense, theory is simply a coherent set of hypothetical, conceptual, and pragmatic principles which function as a frame of reference for some field of inquiry. A *principle* is a propositional statement about some aspect of reality which provides a basis for reasoning or a guide for action. A principle serves reasoning to the extent that other statements or propositions can be logically derived from it. In other words, a principle is the ultimate basis from which other statements take their origin.

In the case of scientific theory, we can be much more formal and specific: a theory is a collection of theorems. "A theorem is a proposition which is a strict logical consequence of certain definitions and other propositions" (Rapoport, 1974, p. 260). The logical validity of any given theorem is ultimately derived from assertions which are not proved but simply assumed and terms which are not defined but simply listed. In science as opposed to other fields of study, some of the terms must be related extensionally to referents and at least some of the assertions must be empirically verifiable. The accuracy of these assertions about the empirical world is what makes a scientific theory successful. On the other hand, it is the nature of the theorems that makes a theory part of an exact science. The exact sciences have completely rigid rules for deducing theorems, usually mathematical rules. "It is the rigidity of these rules, not the accuracy of the assertions or precision of measurements which makes an exact science" (Rapoport, 1974, p. 261). Because of its deductive nature, one of the interesting aspects of theory is that none of the statements (theorems,