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LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY

- *Towards an Analysis of The Linguistic Communicative Aspects of Social Activities*

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ABSTRACT: The paper presents a theoretical discussion of the relation between social structure, language and communication. Ten axiomatic theses on this relationship are stated and elaborated through a discussion of social institutions and social activities in the light of activity based communication analysis. Finally, an overview is given of activity based communication analysis.

1. Background

The origins of this paper lie in puzzlement over a number of issues connected with the relation between language and social structure. They also lie in discontent with a dominant trend in 20th century linguistics toward what Hjelmslev (1943) called immanent linguistics, i.e., the study of language as a sui generis structure.

Among the puzzling issues I would first like to mention the issue of holism versus atomism and reductionism in social theory. Do social phenomena in some sense (ontological, epistemological or heuristic, cf. Allwood 1973) have an independent status or are they reducible to more basic phenomena which make up the atoms of social life? Durkheim (1895) is one of the classical examples of social ontological holism while Homans (1961) and Popper (1957) exemplify two reductionist approaches “social behaviorism” and “methodological individualism”, respectively. In later work Popper 1972, however, through his proposal of three ontological “worlds”, exhibits a more antireductionist-holistic stance. Specifically, we can ask the question of language. Is language an example of an ontologically irreducible social phenomenon as was assumed by Saussure (1916), most likely following Durkheim (1895), or is it just a theoretical construct invented by linguists and linguistic policy makers for heuristic reasons.

Another puzzle concerns how one should accommodate a number of insights, reached in the 20th century, originating in several academic disciplines, concerning the nature of linguistic communication in a more encompassing theoretical approach. From philosophy come insights some of which might perhaps very crudely be paraphrased as follows: To speak is to act – J. L. Austin (1962), to speak is to act rationally – H. P. Grice (1975), or the meaning of linguistic expressions is given by their use in language games – L Wittgenstein (1953). In linguistics, J. R Firth (1957) contributed the claim that language can only be understood in context and in anthropology B. Malinowski had earlier (1923) made similar claims and illustrated them by his very perceptive account of a Trobriand fishing trip as a communicative activity.

In Psychology K. Bühler already in 1934 pointed out that the psychology of language must take into account the social interactive functions of language. Similar points were made by L. S. Vygotsky (1962). In our days, R. Rommetveit has stressed the same point, e.g. Rommetveit (1974). In sociology G. H. Mead (1934) raises fundamental issues about the connection between social interaction and communication and in more recent times, we find H. Garfinkel (1967), E. Goffman (1971) and E. Schegloff (1987) arguing that social structure is constituted in social practice, especially communicative practice.

Even if one shares the belief that some of these views really amount to insights, one might still admit that many of the mentioned concepts, though inspiring, stand in need of explication and analysis. Many efforts have also been made to analyze some of the main concepts such as “action”, “rationality”, “meaning”, “language game”, “context”, “interaction”, “practice”, etc. Part of the purpose of this paper is, in fact, to propose a partial analysis of two of these concepts – “language game” and “context” – in terms of the notions “activity” and “communicative aspects of an activity”.

Both of the puzzling issues mentioned above can be subsumed by or at least connected to the following overriding issue: How can we more precisely understand language and communication as components in the analysis of thought and social activity? This issue can in turn perhaps be broken down into three subissues: How should we understand

- (i) language as an instrument for thought
- (ii) language as an instrument for social activity
- (iii) the intersection of these two issues?

In this paper I will mainly be concerned with the second of these subissues and start by considering ten abstract theses on the relationship between language, communication and social structure.

2. Some abstract theses on language, communication and social structure

Below, I will now state and briefly discuss a number of theses concerning the relationship between language, communication and social structure. The theses will form a basis for a more specific and refined analysis in succeeding sections.

- (i) Without communication (which is for the most part linguistic), most human collective activities could not exist.

Communication stands in a universal means-ends relation to human collective activities. As soon as human beings need to be coordinated in joint activity, joint information is needed for the coordination. The information becomes joint by communication which is mostly linguistic. The communication must be verbally linguistic in such activities as discussing, debating or negotiating but can be of other kinds, e.g. non verbal, in activities such as joint hunting or joint ploughing of the fields. However, whether verbal or not, there is always communication as soon as we have coordinated activity and this communication is frequently verbally linguistic, even in the cases where other types of communication are possible. Below, I will often for reasons of brevity and generality simply use the term *communication*, but I will assume that this communication is mostly verbally linguistically based.

One might here object that strictly speaking coordination between people does not require communication since one can like Leibniz (1952) imagine a preestablished harmony or perhaps even totally random coordination. Even if these suggestions are both logically possible, preestablished harmony does not seem to be compatible with fairly natural intuitions about on-line coordination and influence between people, and random coordination would in any reasonable probabilistic account have to be assigned a probability of zero or almost zero. For these reasons I discount both suggestions as serious alternatives and will continue to view linguistic communication as a universal means for coordination of human activities or to put it more crudely as the universally most important type of "social glue".

- (ii) Communication is always in the last instance anchored in and dependent on individuals

Communication ultimately always involves individuals sharing or coproducing information. This is true also when individuals represent large social institutions e.g.. nation states or industrial enterprises (big decisions are often made by small men) or when individuals are part of a large audience for mass media. A direct consequence of the combination of (i) and (ii) is that social activity, as far as its communicatively dependent aspects, e.g. coordination and cohesion are concerned, is viewed as anchored in and dependent on individuals. Communication helps constitute social structure by aligning properties of the individuals.

- (iii) Communication regulates cognitive, emotive and conative aspects of interhuman relations

Communication is anchored in individuals. More specifically, it is primarily dependent on cognitive, emotive and conative states and processes in individuals and it is by influencing such states and processes that interpersonal relations are constituted. Communication, thus, does not merely affect psychological and social states and relations built on factual information but just as much concerns emotions, volition, action and behavior.

- (iv) Essential aspects of the organization of a social structure such as (A) distribution of power, (B) relations of affinity, (C) distribution of labor and (D) distribution of information, are initiated (and sometimes constituted), upheld and changed through communication.

While thesis (iii) presents a way of classifying how communication affects social structure which is perhaps primarily micro relevant, thesis (iv) instead gives a more macro relevant perspective.

- (v) Communication is both micro and macro relevant for a social activity.

A consequence of (i) – (iv) is that communication affects social activity on many levels. On a microlevel it affects both the individuals who are engaged in the activity and the ongoing microrelations between these individuals. On a macrolevel it affects both the overall relational structure within an activity and the overall relational structure between different social activities.

- (vi) Communication is an essential aspect of both static and dynamic social structure.

Through communication properties of, as well as relations between, individuals are initiated, constructed, maintained, changed and terminated. This means that

communication plays a role not only for a static understanding of the relational structure of an activity but also for the dynamic processes (internal and external) the activity is undergoing.

- (vii) (Linguistic) communication constitutes the most important aspect of both the internal and the external relations of a collective activity.

When we look more closely at how communication provides “social glue”, we see that this is done by being one of the means whereby relations are constituted internally, between persons engaged in an activity as well as externally, between persons external to the activity and people within the activity. Such internal and external relations are present in and partly constituted by phenomena such as management, control, decision making, negotiation, evaluation, giving information, service and small talk. The same reasoning would apply if we, instead of talking about the relations relevant to the people engaged in an activity, talked about the internal and external relations of a social group. Both activities and social groups are social reifications which, to the extent that they exist, have both their internal and external relations partly constituted by communication.

- (viii) Communication is in itself multidimensional, and contextual.

Communication is multidimensional both with regard to its expressive features and with regard to the informational content which is communicated and in some cases shared. For normal spoken interaction expressive features include body movements and vocal signals, and especially within the vocal signals we can further distinguish a prosodic, a verbal and a grammatical dimension which can all be, to some degree, separately regulated. In many contexts, writing, pictures and many other types of artifacts can be used additionally. The informational content of communication includes dimensions such as a factual informative, an emotional and a conative dimension. Other content classifications are possible but the one just presented has been chosen because it is directly relatable to what was said in thesis (iii) about aspects of psychological states and social relations being affected by communication.

Besides being multidimensional with regard to expressive features and information content, communication is multidimensional because it involves several levels, or degrees, of awareness and intentionality both when it comes to production and when it comes to understanding.

Communication is contextual since most systems of communication, especially including language, are “open systems” with systematic facilities for utilizing contextual information. This means that limited communicative resources can be used for a larger number of functions. Individuals do not have to have everything prepackaged but can “tune-in” with what is provided by context in their sharing of information with other individuals, cf. Dretske (1981) and Barwise and Perry (1983).

- (ix) Communication is causally complex.

Communication is causally complex in several ways.

- A. Acts of communication are both multicausally determined and are themselves multiconsequential both in the sense of causally affecting several dimensions and in the sense of having consequences in several steps.

- B. Acts of communication are in causal interaction both with their surrounding non communicative (and nonlinguistic) context and with their surrounding communicative (and linguistic context).

Such causal interdependence can, for example, be seen in the feedback processes at work every time an utterance is articulated, or in the influence which an utterance exerts on the following utterances. On a macro level, one can observe how the external communication of a social organization can influence the internal communication and relations of the organization. For example, externally manifested satisfaction and enthusiasm by members of the organization may lead to a favorable external impression which results in positive external communication toward the organization which, in turn, has a positively reinforcing effect on internal communication and relations within the organization.

- (x) Since communication is socially essential but difficult to comprehend (cf. remarks above on multidimensionality, contextuality and causal complexity), attempts are made to reduce complexity by various kinds of restrictions and regulatory efforts..

We can distinguish two kinds of restrictions:

- A. Spontaneously arising restrictions
- B. More or less conscious attempts at regulation

In the first case, what is meant are several kinds of normative pressures on communication that arise spontaneously in many kinds of interaction. Among these pressures, we can distinguish, for example, rational pressures and ethical pressures. Rational pressures aim at increased means-ends efficiency and ethical pressures aim at ensuring that the well-being of the communicating individuals is not seriously threatened.

However, since communication is not primarily influenced by normative pressures but rather by causal processes, we can also speak of a “descriptive pressure” or rather “descriptive corrective” on the normative pressures resulting in a successive attunement of normative elements, to factual circumstances.

Regulatory efforts of a more or less conscious kind may also concern ethics or rationality but are mostly in addition connected with attempts by some party involved in the interaction at ensuring a certain division of labor and a certain distribution of power and information. Often consciously imposed regulations are also combined with mechanisms for positive or negative sanctions.

3. Individuals, groups, activities, instruments and institutions

3.1 Social institutions

The ten theses presented above represent what might be called a set of intuitive initial observations about the relationship between language, communication and social structure. In order to carry the analysis further, I would now like to become a little more specific about a perspective on social structure which, I think, at least is compatible with the enumerated theses and, hopefully, could help to connect the theses with the three issues of concern mentioned at the end of section 1. An overview of the perspective I wish to consider is presented in Figure 1 below.

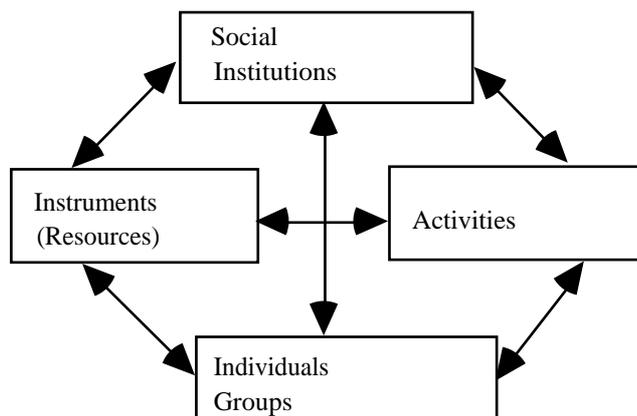


Figure 1. Individuals, instruments, activities and social institutions

Social structure arises from Nature through the activities of individuals and groups of individuals. In these activities a number of factors such as ways of thinking, linguistic communication, tools and value symbols such as money play a role as resources or instruments. Social structure becomes stabilized by a process where groups, instruments, and activities become institutionalized.

Social institutions are usually characterized by the fact that they combine groups of individuals, types of activities and types of instruments and material circumstances in set configurations with a certain stability over time. The institutionalized configurations obtain stability partly by being tied to a set of norms and conventions and partly by serving long term interests and needs. A social institution therefore acquires a stability and force which extends beyond the individuals who happen to be involved in the institution at a given time. In this way, social institutions can retain a kind of identity over extended periods of time even if the individuals who help to maintain them are changing. In what follows I will, when needed, distinguish complex social institutions of this kind by the term *conglomerates*.

We can speak of social institutions on many levels of aggregation and abstraction. What we think of as social institutions has partly to do with our analytic interest and perspective and partly to do with the fact that reality seems to be analyzable into a number of interdependent and interlocking self organizing systems. These systems are often based on properties which are only analytically discernible and, in fact, ontologically and empirically systematically dependent on other properties. For example, both the phonology and the grammar of a language can to a considerable extent be considered as a autonomous systems. This, however, does not mean that phonology and grammar are not also systematically empirically and ontologically interdependent.

On a more macro social level, we can, for example, from a political perspective, distinguish such institutions as the national state or the feudal state. From an economic perspective we could point to commercial enterprises and from a religious perspective various types of religious organizations.

But social institutions can also focus on one of the factors I have suggested as underlying institutionalization in figure 1, above. Some of the similarities between individuals can, for example, form the basis for the institutionalization of a social group - a fairly basic type of social institution. Commonly such group forming similarities are found in occupation, e.g. the group of teachers, place of habitation, e.g. Londoners, ownership and relation to means of production, e.g.. social class or interest, e.g. stamp collectors. However, most potential similarities do not usually lead to institutionalized group formation, for example such similarities as color of hair – the group of red heads, or height – the group of tall ones have not often been the basis for the formation of institutionalized groups. The strength with which a social group becomes institutionalized, in the sense that it follows common norms and conventions for instruments and activities can, as should be clear from the examples, vary considerably.

More abstractly, also what I have called instruments can become institutionalized, i.e., become regulated by norms and conventions systematically connecting them with groups of individuals and activities. Examples of institutionalized instruments are languages, types of economy, types of technology, types of behavior and types of thinking. Each of these phenomena viewed as social institutions are perhaps of a more abstract nature than when we regard social groups as institutions.

On a less abstract level than instruments but on a more abstract level than groups we can also consider the institutionalization of activities. Again, what we mean by this is that the activity becomes stabilized by norms and conventions and becomes systematically tied to instruments, groups and possibly to the natural environment. Many activities for which we have terms in ordinary language such as teaching, hunting, negotiating, buying and praying have, at least, in relation to some groups and individuals undergone a process of institutionalisation. In fact, many macro social institutions which today are characterized by being connected with several more or less institutionalized activities can be seen as originating in the institutionalization of single activities, e.g. teaching – the school, the practice of medicine – hospitals, fighting – the military, etc.

As the process of institutionalization continues, often the institution as such rather than the activity or activities it is associated with becomes the prime focus of social energy. One clear example of this can be seen when an industrial company changes its line of production totally in order to survive. Other perhaps slightly less extreme examples can be found in the change of activities of schools, universities, hospitals etc.

One common feature of the institutionalization of groups and activities is that it tends to be connected with a tendency toward assertion of the self identity of the institution and toward segregation from other institutions. This is, in turn, often combined with a differentiation of power among the individuals who are associated with the institution, where those individuals who have most power often also most strongly assert the social identity and autonomy of the institution.

One way to strengthen the identity and autonomy of an institution, while at the same time increasing possibilities of control and, at least, certain types of rational efficiency and in some cases ethical consideration is to try to regulate the activities and instruments which occur in the institution. This can be done by propaganda, rules, regulations, laws and use of positive and negative sanctions such as rewards and

punishment. I will call all such phenomena **means of control** and distinguish them from more spontaneously occurring instruments of activity coordination, such as languages or systems of economy, technology, behavior and thought, mentioned above. These latter instruments regulate but do so more indirectly by being instrumental resources spontaneously arising to help constitute the activity.

In practice, means of control can be used to influence activities directly but they can also be used to do so indirectly by controlling instrumental resources. Various means of control can, thus, be used to regulate systems of economy, technology, behavior, thought and languages.

3.2 Language and social institutions

Since my interest in this paper lies in the relation between language, communication and social structure, let me now try to connect this interest with the perspective on social structure I have outlined above (section 3.1). The general claim has been that language is a complex institutionalized instrument of social interaction. To be more specific it is an instrument for communication which systematically interrelates thought, behavior, artifacts and aspects of the natural environment or put differently it is an instrument for communication which systematically interrelates physical, biological and psychological properties with social properties.

Firstly, individuals relate to language and communication directly through their **linguistic communicative competence** which allows them to make use of the systematic interrelations on which the linguistic system is founded, i.e., they can share information by acoustic activation of their physical environment resulting in turn in psycho-biological activation of other individuals in a socially uniform way. The development of an individual linguistic communicative competence can be seen as the individual counterpart of social institutionalization and is a necessary condition for social institutionalization, just as the existence of socially institutionalized forms of language and communication are necessary conditions for the development of individual competence.

Secondly, language is also important for social groups. Since it is probably the most important instrument of interindividual coordination it is probably also the most important instrument for the institutionalization of social groups. Social groups therefore tend to be characterized by common norms and conventions for language and communication. These norms at the same time facilitate in-group cohesion and segregation from other groups. Sometimes the specificity of these norms and conventions are significant enough for it to be reasonable to speak of a separate “group language”.

In a similar way, language can be related to social activities. Since it probably is the most important instrument of interindividual coordination, most social activities rely extensively on linguistic communication for their accomplishment. To the extent that an activity becomes institutionalized we can therefore also speak of more or less developed “activity languages”. In other theoretical frameworks “activity languages” are also referred to by such terms as “genres” or “registers”. A special case to consider here is where an activity is more or less completely connected with a purely communicative function or purpose. Language and communication will in this case be doubly relevant, i.e., both by being the function and/or purpose of the activity and by being its chief means.

Fourthly, language, by being an essential instrument for individuals, groups and activities can be viewed as a social phenomenon in its own right – a social instrument. As a social instrument it can be said to have undergone its own process of institutionalization building on individual linguistic competence, group languages and activity languages, connecting these with a systematic use of certain “communicative artifacts”, such as pens, printing presses, printers etc. Often, but not always, it furthermore becomes connected with a political macro social institution like a national state which might, in turn, try to regulate it using the means of control discussed above.

4. Social activities

The focus of this paper lies, however, not on individuals and their linguistic, communicative competence, nor does it lie on groups and their languages or on language as an institutionalized instrument for communication. It lies on activities and the use of language in activities.

In contrast to individuals, groups and instruments which, in a sense, give static structure to social life, activities give dynamic structure. Social structures are initiated, maintained, changed and terminated through activities. A possible definition of social activity in the sense which is intended here is the following: A **social activity** is said to occur if:

- (i) two or more individuals
- (ii) perform mental acts, exhibit behavior or engage in action
- (iii) in a coordinated way
- (iv) which collectively has some purpose or function.

The definition thus connects social activities with more than one individual, with mental acts, behavior or actions, with coordination and with collective purpose or function. As institutionalization of the activity sets in, it will in many cases be connected with certain artifacts and in some cases with specific uses of the natural environment. In addition, it will be regulated by norms and conventions which will be reinforced by more or less strong sanctions. As a consequence, a set of activity determined social roles to be filled by the individuals who engage in the activity will develop and there will be expectations about what behavior is appropriate for the activity, in general and for the activity roles, in particular.

Activities in the sense defined here always exhibit some degree of coordination and cooperation, this can be heightened if the individuals in pursuing the purpose of the activity take each other into ethical consideration and trust each other, cf Allwood 1976.

The concept of “social activity” is crucial for a discussion of some of the puzzling issues mentioned in section 1. It is through social activities that holistic social structures such as instruments, groups and conglomerates are related on the one hand, to each other and, on the other, to atomistic social constituents such as individuals (and their acts, behavior and actions), aspects of the natural environment and artifacts (which are aspects of the natural environment transformed by individuals). Social activities are the arenas where holistic structures of various kinds (including institutionalized aspects of the activities themselves) are initiated,

maintained, changed or terminated. They provide the ongoing dynamic part of social life.

Even though, I, thus, would like to assign an important role to the concept of social activity in the perspective on social structure proposed here, it must be admitted that the concept is problematic in certain ways. One of these is the fairly abstract nature, the concept acquires by being intended to cover all the phenomena designated by already existing linguistic labels for social activities such as negotiation, bargaining, hunting etc. What is referred to primarily by these “folk activity labels” is not the empirically observable activity, in total, which takes place between certain individuals at a given space-time location. Rather, what is referred to are only partial aspects of such an activity, i.e., the aspects which are relevant for the intentional, functional characteristics primarily referred to by the “folk labels”. This has the consequence that two "activity labels" can simultaneously be applied to the same empirically occurring activity. A negotiation can simultaneously be a quarrel or an instance of bargaining. A simultaneous categorization is possible, since each categorization involves a distinct but partial organization and selection of properties from the properties of the activity as a whole.

Another way in which activities are problematic concerns their stability and power of predictable social organization. Do, for example, activities have an existence independent of linguistic labeling? Here we may first note that activities can be distinguished without the help of linguistic labels. After all, it seems reasonable to assume that linguistic categorization is preceded by the regular empirical occurrence of an activity type and that it is only when this regular occurrence has become important enough that linguistic codification of the activity type takes place. Below, I now want to turn to a number of factors or dimensions which independently of, or in addition to, linguistic labeling can give a social activity type autonomous stability:

1. The existence of certain properties in the activity (the most important of these are probably function and/or purpose) which are jointly focussed on by the participants
2. An organization of the focussed properties, for example, through norms or conventions.
3. Macro institutional background
4. Spatial location
5. Temporal location

On the basis of these factors we can hypothesize a scale ranging from random social interaction through ad-hoc activity types (cf. Tabor 1978) to institutionalized activity types. Given such a scale, linguistically labeled activity types presuppose some element of non-randomness and, thus, will often be connected with at least a mild degree of institutionalization. The extent of this institutionalization will, however, vary greatly and will, among other things, depend on how the activity types involve the five factors mentioned above. The degrees of independence and stability of an activity may be illustrated by considering some of the ways in which two activities may be differentiated from each other:

- (i) The two activities may be spatially, temporally, macro institutionally separate and have different purposes/functions and different organizations of functionally relevant properties, e.g. nursing in hospital and teaching in a

school. Two activities which are separated in these ways can be said to have an almost maximal degree of separation.

- (ii) The two activities may share a macro institutional background but be temporally and/or spatially distinct and have different purposes/functions and different organizations of functionally relevant properties, e.g. research and teaching in a university or production and marketing in a commercial company.
- (iii) The two activities may share a spatial and/or temporal location (the macro institutional background is irrelevant) but have different purposes/functions and/or a distinct organization of functionally relevant properties, e.g. a political debate viewed as a quarrel or as a flirtation.

Let me now consider two cases where it is not clear that we have distinct activities even though we have distinct activity labels.

- (iv) Two activity labels denote phenomena that share a function (spatio-temporal location and macro institution are irrelevant) but are on different levels of specification and abstraction, e.g. a political debate versus a debate.
- (v) Two activity labels denote phenomena with a shared function (spatio-temporal location and macro institution are irrelevant) but one is a part of the other, e.g. the activity of asking and answering a question can be part of a political debate.

The role of language for maintaining a fine grained categorization of activity types is probably considerable, cf. especially types (iv) and (v) above. Linguistic categorization helps maintain expectations about certain kinds of activity and these expectations in on-going interaction, in turn, help determine the actual course of the interaction. This, of course, does not mean that activity types could not be institutionalized and maintained without linguistic categorization, but it does mean that this would be considerable more difficult than if linguistic categories were available.

Over and above being able to analyze the discriminability and autonomy of two activities with, for example, the five dimensions given here we also often want to know whether activities are compatible with each other and whether one activity serves as a means for another activity. Besides logical compatibility which means that one activity does not logically exclude the other, we can relativize the notion of compatibility to the above mentioned five dimensions and talk of spatial compatibility, temporal compatibility, macro institutional compatibility, compatibility of focussed property (especially functional) and compatibility of the organization of focussed properties whenever two activities can share a given value on any of the 5 dimensions. Thus, two activities are spatially compatible if they can be pursued at the same spatial location etc.

When two activities are related by means-ends relationship this implies that they share some function or purpose in a causal chain. For example, they can both be means for some third end (like when after a lecture a question is asked to allow a certain answer in order to allow the lecturer more opportunity for clarification) which gives them their shared function, or one can be a means for the other in which case the latter activity can be said to be a function of the first activity.

5. Activities, language and communication

One of the overriding contentions of this paper is that linguistic communication is the primary instrument of inter-individual coordination in social activities. I now want to suggest a general model for an understanding of how this function is served. The model is primarily meant as a tool for a descriptive analysis of the communicative aspects of social activities but can also secondarily be used as a tool for a prescriptive normative analysis. An overview of the model is given in Figure 2.

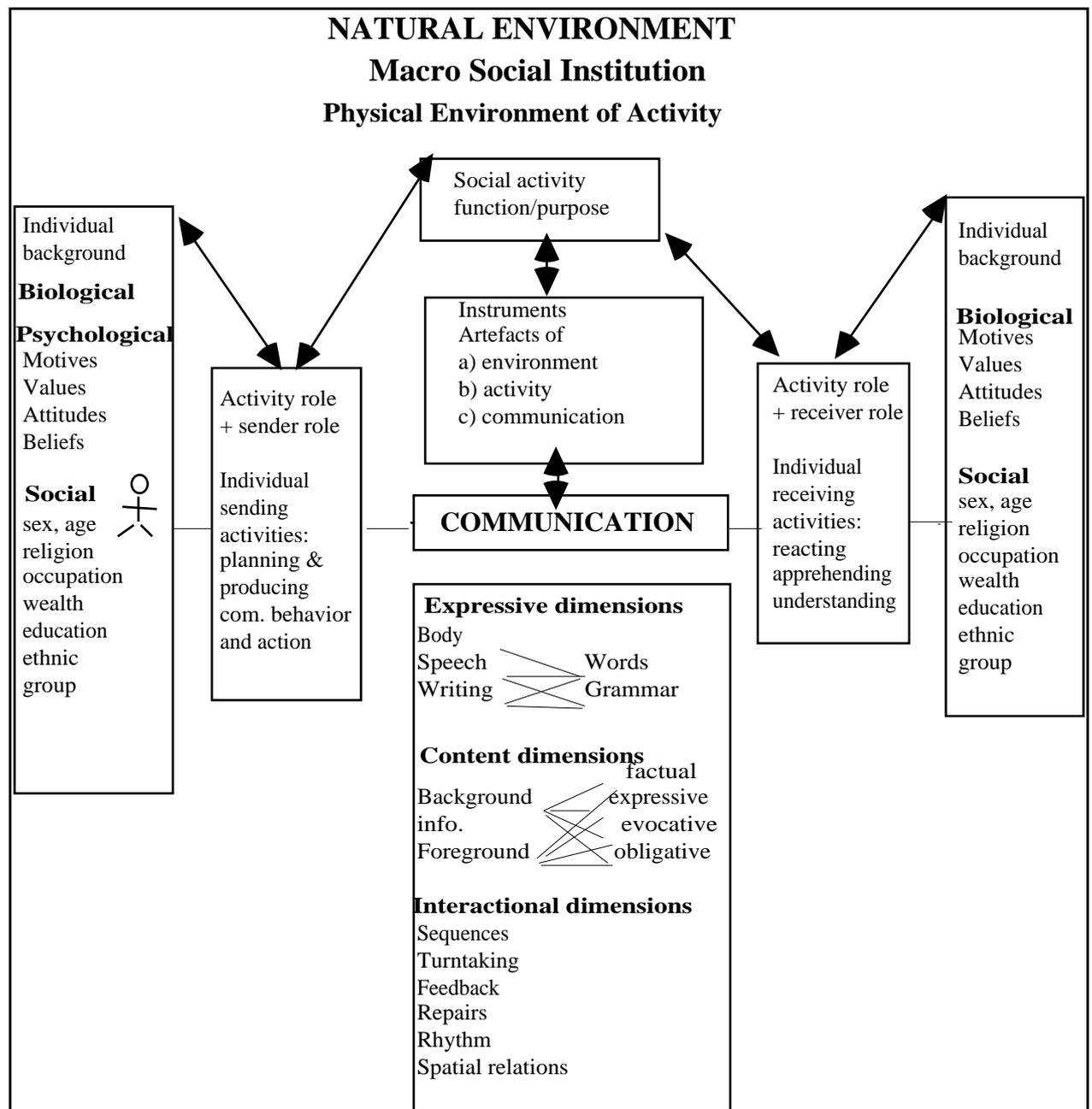


Figure 2. A general model of linguistic communication as an instrument of social activity.

The boundaries and anchoring points for the model are given by the natural environment, a possible macro institutional environment and the individuals who participate in the activity. These individuals come to the activity each with their own individual background, which provisionally can be divided into biological, psychological and social aspects. These aspects also constitute the individuals' biological, psychological or social identity. So, for example, the social groups the individual is a member of help constitute the individual's social identity.

The individuals engage in a social activity by occupying activity relevant roles and by jointly pursuing the function or purpose of the activity. The extent to which their individual activities (mental acts, individual behavior and actions) is determined by their engagement in the activity depends on several factors among which are:

- (i) the degree to which the activity has been institutionalized,
- (ii) the actual individual activities of other participants,
- (iii) the individual background of each individual, included in which is individual ambitions and expectations concerning the other individuals and the activity as such, and
- (iv) pressures from the natural, macro institutional and artifactual environment.

In pursuing an activity individuals often make use of tools. Some of these tools are concrete material artifacts. Others are more abstract, e.g. special abilities, skills or types of information. One of the most essential and also abstract tools of any social activity is communication, especially linguistic communication, which in itself, in fact, constitutes a kind of social activity. This activity becomes embedded in and part of the initial social activity as individuals need to coordinate their actions. Linguistic communication, thus, becomes part of the individual activities through which the social activity is pursued and by virtue of this fact also subject to the same determining factors as other individual activities pursued within the social activity. So, to understand the communicative role requirements of an activity given role like a teacher or a negotiator etc., we, thus, have to combine the requirements of the activity role with the requirements on being a sender or a receiver in communication. This also holds in the special type of activity where communication is not only instrumental but also the main function or purpose of activity, e.g. a discussion, debate or conversation. This is so since any type of communication is subject to specific restrictions.

Restrictions of space, unfortunately, do not allow a discussion of the dimensions of the activity of communication itself. But cf. Allwood (1984, 1985 or 1995). Here, I will merely point to the features which are exemplified in figure 2. Communication is seen as partly being constituted by a systematic association of certain expressive dimensions and certain content dimensions. The main expressive dimensions are body movements, speech and writing. The main content dimensions have here been proposed to be, on the one hand, foreground information, i.e., content directly evoked by the communicative behavior and, on the other hand, background information, i.e., content more indirectly evoked by the communicative behavior, e.g. presuppositions, implicature etc. The difference between foreground and background is a matter of degree. Both foreground and background content can then be further subdivided into, for example, factual and emotive content or expressive, evocative and obligative types of content (cf. Allwood 1995).

As individual acts of communication combining expressive dimensions with content dimensions unfold in the interaction within a given social activity certain systematic organizational patterns of the communicative interaction become apparent. Again, requirements of space does not allow any full discussion of these features but among them are: the sequences of subactivities within a given activity, turntaking or the distribution of the right to communicate among the participants in the activity, communicative feedback – the system whereby basic communicative functions such as perception, understanding and attitudinal reactions to preceding utterances are regulated on-line during interaction, repairs – a system of routines for repairing features of communication on-line, rhythm and spatial relations (i.e., regular rhythmic or spatial patterns arising during communication).

The resulting model gives us a picture of causally interdependent factors in fairly complex interaction with each other, allowing several different analytic perspectives. If we wish to know how social activities influence communication we can regard the activity - its function/purpose, its roles, its tools and its natural, institutional and artifactual environment as determining factors influencing both individual communicative acts and interactive collective patterns of communication. In any concrete empirical instances of communication, we will, however, have to combine a consideration of the influence of activity factors with a consideration of the influence of individual background and of other environmental factors than those directly dependent on the activity.

We can also turn our perspective around and regard communication as the determining force and ask how different expressive dimensions, content dimensions and features of interaction influence the parameters of a given social activity or the communicative behavior and other characteristics of given communicators. We can also, of course, consider still other directions of influence such as that from individual to activity or from activity to individual etc.

In Figure 3 below I present a somewhat simplified version of the model. The directions of influence in the model are the following:

Both individual background and collective activity factors influence features and patterns of communication. In addition, the features of communication by being part of individual interactive contributions constitute interactive patterns of communication. Last but not least communicative contributions influence other communicative contributions and, at least to some degree, individual and collective background factors.

	Primary non-communicative features	Primary communicative features
Individual	Individual background Biological, psychological, social factors	Body movements, phonology, writing vocabulary grammar
Interactive:	Collective activity factors: purpose/function, roles, instruments, environment	Interactional patterns - sequences - turntaking - feedback - repairs - rhythm - spatial relations

Figure 3. Main components in model of linguistic communication as an instrument of social activity.

Primarily, the model is supposed to bring out how aspects of communication can be used instrumentally in social activities which do not have communication as their main function. It is, however also applicable to activities which have communication as their main function. By extension, it is furthermore applicable to cases where not only aspects of communication but also activities with a mainly communicative function are employed as means in an activity which does not have communication as its main function, for example, giving therapy or marketing a product. In fact, the terms *communicative activity analysis* and *activity based communication analysis* are supposed to have the double sense of analysis of the communicative aspects of both of activities which have a mainly communicative purpose and activities which instrumentally depend on communication but do not have it as their main function.

6. Concluding remarks

In section 1 of this paper, I presented some puzzling issues pertaining to the relation between language, communication and social structure and, in section 2, I presented some abstract theses dealing with these issues. In sections 3, 4 and 5, I gave an analysis of some of the notions involved both in the puzzles and in the abstract theses. It is therefore fitting that the paper be concluded with some remarks on how sections 1 and 2 relate to sections 3, 4 and 5.

The main focus of the paper has been on analyzing language as an instrument for social activity which is one of the main concerns mentioned in section 1. I have also dealt with the problem of the analysis of certain key concepts concentrating on an analysis of the concepts of “activity” and “communicative aspects of an activity” and have, by virtue of this analysis, attempted to specify and explicate one of the possible interpretations of Wittgenstein's notion “language game” which, in turn, amounts to specifying and explicating an important part of what we mean by “context”. Other parts of the notion of context (extralinguistic) are given by the natural and macro social environment as well as by social groupings and by what I have called “social instruments”.

With regard to the first concern of section 1, holism versus atomism and/or reductionism, an argument has been made to the effect that insight into this issue can be deepened by viewing social activities as the settings and the communicative aspects of these activities as the instruments whereby holistic social structures, such as institutionalized conglomerates, groups and instruments as well as activities themselves are related (by processes of initiation, maintenance, change and termination) to atomistic social constituents such as individuals, artifacts and aspects of the natural environment.

Concerning the theses in section 2, the first thesis which says that communication is an essential instrument of all human social activities is argued for mainly by pointing to the need for coordination in all human activities and by pointing out that communication is our main means of interpersonal coordination. The arguments presented in sections 3, 4 and 5 can as a whole be seen as an effort to deepen this thesis. The general analysis in section 3 in combination with the analysis of social activities and the analysis of the communicative aspects of social activities in sections 4 and 5 provide the backing for the thesis of “modified communicative individualism” (thesis 2), thesis 4 concerned with the distribution of power, affinity, labor and information among individuals, thesis 5 concerning the macro and micro relevance of communication, thesis 7 concerning the internal and external relevance of communication and thesis 10 concerning the need for rational, ethical and descriptive correctives to communication. The analysis of the concept of activity in section 4, in combination with the model in section 5 (figures 2 and 3) provides the main background for the claims made about dynamics (thesis 6) and multicausal interdependence (thesis 9). The model itself provides the background for thesis 3 concerning the cognitive, emotive and evaluative effects of communication and thesis 8 concerning the multidimensional and contextual nature of language and communication.

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