

VIRTUAL SEMIOSIS OF COMMUNICATION.

ВИРТУАЛЬНЫЙ СЕМИОЗИС СВЯЗИ

Аннотациясы: *Статьяда коммуникациянын виртуалдык семиотикасы изилденип суйлошуунун этикалык ыкмаларын онуктуруу зарыл экендиги корсотулгон. Виртуалдык семиотика виртуалдык маанилерди тузуунун эмпирик, коммуникативдик жана уйротуучу аспектилерин карап чыгыт. Ал индивидуалдык жана ар туркун экендигин динамикасын, эволюциясын жана алардын оз ара байланыштуулугун, ырааттылугун билдирууго жана таанууга аракеттенет. Семиотика бизге жашообуздагы бардык татаал кырдаалдарда багыт алууга жардам берип, биздин жашоодо жана иштерибиздеги коп сандагы белгилердин маанисин тушундуруп турат.*

Негизги сөздөр: *Семиотика, виртуалдык семиотика, турбуленттуулук, ынандыруу.*

Аннотация: *В статье показано, что необходимо развивать этический способ общения, исследуя виртуальную семиотику коммуникации. Виртуальная семиотика рассматривает эмпирические, коммуникативные и обучающие аспекты создания виртуальных значений. Она стремится включить и признать множественность и разнообразие, динамику и эволюцию, взаимосвязанность и согласованность индивидуальных и коллективных мыслей в процессе их общения. Семиотика помогает нам ориентироваться во всех сложных ситуациях нашей жизни, показывая смысл огромного количества знаков, с которыми мы живем и имеем дело.*

Ключевые слова: *Семиотика, виртуальная семиотика, турбулентность, предубеждения.*

Abstract: *This paper argues for a need to develop, by exploring virtual semiosis of communication, an ethical mode of communication. Virtual Semiosis examines experiential, communicative and learning aspects of creating virtual meanings. It seeks to incorporate and acknowledge plurality and diversity, dynamics and evolution, interconnectedness and coherence of the individual and collective thoughts, and of the process of their communication. Semiosis helps us to navigate through complexity of life by making meaning of huge number of signs we live and deal with.*

Key words: *Semiosis, virtual semiosis, turbulence, preconceptions.*

Introduction

Semiosis is an originally Greek concept that relates to human ability to establish meaningful connections (relations) between signs (things, events, phenomena, processes) a priori seen as not interacting with each other.

Semiosis helps us to navigate through complexity of life by making meaning of huge number of signs

we live and deal with, and their intricate and dynamic interrelationships.

Both experience and learning are inseparable from the process of communication. Life starts with communication and ends when our ability to communicate ceases. It is our experience that we share in communication with others (interpersonal communication) or reflect solely upon by ourselves

(intrapersonal communication). Any experiential event stirs up our inherent potential for learning. And it is through communication that we can realize this potential. Learning needs togetherness – a dialogue with others or with our own thoughts and feelings, a communion with nature or with various sources of inspiration and wisdom. If we stop to communicate, learning also stops.

The semiosis of communication is virtual – it possibly leads to emergence (discovery, creation) of new meanings. The term ‘virtual’ is used in the same sense as Peirce used it when firstly introduced semiotics as a “theory of experience mediated by our ability to create and rely on representations” (Peirce, 1905). According to Peirce, “no present actual thought has any meaning, any intellectual value; for this lies not in what is actually thought, but in what this thought may be connected with in representation by subsequent thoughts; so that the meaning of a thought is altogether something virtual.”

The virtual semiosis of communication (VSM) reveals human potential for creating meaning out of complex webs of ever-changing relationships between experience, communication and learning. VSM explores also the conditions facilitating spontaneous emergence of new meanings as a result of self-organizing dynamics of life events, communicative acts and learning practices – meanings able to guide individuals, communities and society in their journey of self-organization, self-realization and evolution.

Creative Misunderstanding

The moment an individual starts to interpret some experiential event, this event becomes immediately colored by individual’s thoughts and feelings. Filters of preconceptions, beliefs, likes and dislikes, moral and ethical values, prejudices, dreams and various forms of illusions carried by every individual inevitably stand between the event (as directly experienced at the moment of its occurrence) and individual’s interpretation that follows. Wittgenstein used the expression “language-games” when referring to the ways people interpret the events occurring in their life, by ‘playing’ with their mental, emotional and spiritual filters (Wittgenstein, 1931).

Individual interpretations are usually communicated through narratives (stories). A narrative reveals (or hides) how an individual (A) thinks and feels about a certain event or events. The narrative

can be shared (externally) with others or reflected upon (internally) by A.

As the worlds of experience and interpretative capacities of A and of the individual (B), with whom A is in communication, essentially differ from one another, B will never understand A’s narrative in the same way as A does. There will be a degree of misunderstanding of A’s narrative by B.

Teubner characterizes this kind of misunderstanding as *creative* (Teubner, 1987) – it does not reject the meaning of A’s story as captured by B. On the contrary, it may enrich this meaning and even lead to co-creation of new meaning negotiated in the process of communication between A and B.

Learning about Selves

The co-creation of new meaning appears as a virtual result of some learning process that happens in parallel with communication. B learns about the nature of the interpretative filters used by A and vice versa: A learns about the interpretative filters of B. Thus the negotiation of new meanings of the experiential events under consideration represents a kind of mutual exploration into beliefs, thoughts, feelings, motivations, dreams and illusions held by the individuals.

The beliefs, thoughts, feelings, etc. held by an individual constitute his/her own *self*. When negotiating a new meaning, individuals start to learn more about the nature of their selves. This process is obstructed by the fact that the self on public display often does not match the self on which an individual is privately aware. Often the story that A is telling to B in regard to some event is quite different from the interpretation of this event contemplated by A in private. The conditions of our present social life are very much in favor of such discrepancy.

False and Self-suggestive Communication

We live in an ambitious and enormously competitive world where the seeds of separateness easily grow. Both the competitiveness and separateness inject falsehood in communication. Often the ‘shared’ narratives deal with deliberately distorted descriptions of what has happened in order to disadvantage, humiliate or even brutally get rid of some rival(s). In other cases, communication process degenerates into self-suggestive monologues of the narrator(s) continuing to repeat one and the same interpretation of certain events in order to convince both themselves and the listeners that this interpretation provides the only possible way for the

events to be understood.

Although false or self-suggestive communication may have significant learning components (after discovering that A is lying or indulging in self-suggestive stories, B inevitably learns lessons how to relate to A in future), it is deprived of the most essential feature of VSC. False communication contributes neither in the process of understanding human experience, nor in the process of learning how deeper to penetrate into its dynamics in order to extract, create (or facilitate the discovery) of new meanings. Not only because false (or self-suggestive) communication opens impassable gaps between the events as they occur and the events as they have been described and interpreted by individuals, but also because it drastically emphasizes separateness of the individual selves. Through the contorted prism of separation individuals cannot read the signs of interconnectedness and unity that are vital for VSC dynamics.

There are two typical classes of life situations where false communication loses its potency and VSC clearly exhibits its creative power.

Coherent Communication

The first class relates to situations of communication process entering a zone of criticality ('edge of chaos'): suddenly the interwoven dynamics of experience, communication and learning involved in VSC 'explode' in an outburst of enormous turbulence. There could be many factors contributing to this outburst, for example, false communication may easily provoke such turbulence in the life of a family or in the function of an organization (company, community, and society as a whole).

Under the threat of mutually undesirable disintegration of the communication process or other critical events of a common danger, people tend to throw away their masks of falsity and to openly talk to each other.

Once false communication stops, the edge of chaos turns into a region impregnated with a plethora of opportunities for new developments, which highly activates creative capacity of VSC. Turbulent dynamics of communication under criticality are so overwhelmingly saturated with energy, that only a tiny little 'nudging' towards signs of mutual tolerance, equal acceptance and dialogue based on what connects rather than on what separates, can easily transform turbulence into *coherence*. Coherent communication may emerge as a new level of

manifestation of experiential, communicative and learning dynamics of VSC.

In coherent communication VSC realizes fully its creative potential: so complementary are the individual dynamics and so harmoniously they resonate with the group dynamics, that all participants seem to act like one inseparable whole. Coherent communication resembles very much a synchronous flight of birds in the flock or the joint pulsation of fibres in the muscle of the heart.

Empathy based Communication

The second class of situations where falsity loses its potency in communication process is when this process is driven by the mutual empathy of the individuals.

In its Greek origin the word *empathia* means literally 'in-feeling', that is, a kind of mental entering into the feeling (or spirit) of another person.

"The term is also used to describe the apprehension, whether intellectual or imaginative, and whether intentionally or not, of another person's state of mind. Thus to empathize is to experience vicariously the thoughts, feelings and actions of another person, thereby understanding (and, to some extent, being able to predict) her/his behaviour and capacity to deal with a given situation. The knowledge that one is thus understood is liberating and stimulates the growth of a relationship" (Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential, 1995).

In the case when communication is permeated by mutual empathy, VSC opens an infinite space for realization of human creative potential. According to Barnard, empathy experienced between the members of a group "encompasses a whole set of higher-order mental skills: openness to learning, a capacity for self-criticism, low defensiveness, and the ability to process multiple realities and values" (Barnard, 1998).

Empathy gives birth to coherent communication but in an entirely different way than criticality does.

At the edge of chaos people are forced to explore opportunities for coherence in order to minimize the danger of an approaching disintegration of communication. At a level of an organization, critical conditions of organizational dynamics exercise a significant pressure on individual dynamics for urgent transformation – from opposing and competing to coherent and collaborative with each other.

When there is empathy between people, the driving force for coherence is from inside of

individual dynamics. Whether there are critical conditions or not, it does not particularly matter: people are driven towards coherent communication as a natural manifestation of empathic relationships to each other.

Criticality inevitably emerges as a result of complex interactions between people in unpredictable unfolding of their lives.

Empathy emerges from the inner depth of our humanness in a conscious awareness that neither our personal growth as individuals, nor our evolution as a society, nor even our survival as a human kind, is possible without constant realization of that limitless ability to understand and help to each other.

Conclusion

Virtual Semiosis examines experiential, communicative and learning aspects of creating virtual meanings. It seeks to incorporate and acknowledge plurality and diversity, dynamics and evolution, interconnectedness and coherence of the individual and collective thoughts, and of the process of their communication.

Emergent outcomes, as well as the means and ways leading towards this emergence are not predetermined or certain. They are constructed, facilitated or discovered, and

therefore under influence of human interpretation and representation, which are often collectively expressed as common understanding that in turn emerges out of a specific process, we name coherent communication.

This paper argues for a need to develop, by exploring virtual semiosis of communication, an ethical (empathy based) mode of communication. It further implies a moral conviction that philosophy, explored and applied, co-operatively and in the public domain, must build and repair the events of human experience.

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