



Communication and Emotion. Non-Sociocultural Reflections

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Perspective

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Abstract

This text builds a reflection on the articulation between human communication and emotion. This reflection is based on disciplinary and epistemological sources that have been alien to the field of communication and social sciences. For this reason, the reflection that is made here is constructed as an alternative theoretical-conceptual perspective to the way in which the communication of human beings is generally understood and studied today. Our objective is to explain how emotions arise and participate in human communication from the legacy of neurophenomenology, biosemiotics and enactivism, concluding that this communication always appears crossed by the emotional-affective imprint of the subject.

Keywords: Human Communication; Emotion Neurophenomenology; Biosemiotics; Enactivism

Introduction

The communication-emotion duo has been little explored from the academic field of communication studies. Recently, however, under the Affective Turn, from cultural theory and the post-constructionist approach in discourse studies, communication has found a niche where the study of emotions can be inserted. But, in general, these studies-still scarce-have focused on registering the presence of emotions in communicative events, especially in the fields of digital communication (from social networks) and political communication (around electoral marketing, political discourse and social movements). These are empirical and descriptive studies that, starting from a sociological conception of communication (as an instance of socialization and exchange of information and meaning that founds and reproduces the logic of social relations), show the way in which communication constitutes the support of expression and emotional effect.

The review of the academic literature in this regard

indicates that both communication and emotion are conceived as practices and sociocultural constructions, respectively, but with this-although they are legitimate-the study of emotions and communication moves towards sociocultural and historical scenarios, that they are scenarios where they appear.

Here, another look is proposed, seeking to understand how emotions operate in communication. For this, an approach to communication and emotion as phenomena is necessary, thus defining their ontic properties, that is, their properties as concrete, empirical entities, just as they appear in the natural world of their emergence, and because they are phenomena that occur in living subject, it is essential to reflect on them from the mind-body relationship that constitutes it as such.

From this perspective, the human subject constitutes above all a living organism, that is, an individual who, due to his character as a social being, needs individuals like him to reproduce, eat and protect himself not only from naturals

inclemency but also from other organisms that are both unlike and like him; otherwise he would perish. But it is also about an individual who manages his life cycle in at least three environments: the natural or nature environment, the social or socialization environment, and the symbolic-cultural environment that defines the world of his abstractions (values, traditions, customs, beliefs, knowledge, regulations, language, economy, politics, art, etc.). The human individual is thus a biological, psychological, social, symbolic, cultural, linguistic and historical being, and from this complex multidimensionality he acts in the world by actively inserting himself in it, that is, by experiencing it with interest in a sensible, emotional, logical and historical way.

The communication of this human individual constitutes a mechanism of adaptability to all the environments in which he lives and with which he has to deal correctly to ensure his survival. This is what his interested experience consists of, since the human individual, like any other organism in the animated world, needs to survive. In order to this, he needs to adapt to changes in the environment and for this-as Maturana H, et al. [1] point out from the biology of knowing-he requires generating successful couplings with the environments to preserve their autonomy and identity, that is, what makes it a living organism.

This implies that coupling is the mechanism that allows organisms to get in contact with the environments in which their life cycle develops and interact with them without destroying himself. Both for these authors and for Hoffmeyer J [2], these couplings are of a cognitive order, that is, they involve perception processes that function as information production and interpretation processes. These are processes in which the organism itself “produces” its knowledge, a knowledge that is essential to preserve its life.

From biosemiotics, this knowledge is produced from the correct interpretation of the signals of the environment in the way that Von Üexkull J [3,4] proposed it, that is, as a relationship between the internal world of the individual (his identity as an organism) and the external world or environment (his surroundings). For this author, all organisms create their world as a world of meaning insofar as it makes sense to them. It is a world involved in the movements of the organism at the same time that it regulates them, since this world is existentially discovered in the interaction or experience of the being in it, thus the world is what the being can build from the singularity and concretion of his interest in it.

The foregoing makes sense with the contemporary contributions of enactivists that can be summarized from the neurophenomenological approach developed by Maturana H, et al. [1], Varela F [5]. Among these contributions there are

two that are particularly relevant for our argument:

- That the information of the world (the world itself) is not configured outside the cognitive perspective of the one who knows, and
- That what is known is nothing more than what can be known [6].

As it can be seen, from the biosemiotic and neurophenomenological approaches, cognition is not only a fundamental mechanism for survival, but also a biased individual way of understanding the world in which live occurs.

In the case of the human organism, the above needs to be made more complex since, due to the presence and development of the neocortex, the human being has the ability to imagine and anticipate a desirable world [7,8], that is, not only he has to deal with what is in the world as he lives it (feels it) and experiences it (means it), but deals with everything that allows him to transform it at will and in the very long term.

Being able to do so it is an attribute of the human species where our language has intervened in a relevant way. Unlike the language of other living organisms, human language refers to what do not exist, that is, human language is abstractly self-referential; this language operates through symbols that may or may not have a real reference [9]; and although all languages, as such, are implied as a codified matrix of meaning that allows their collective use, it is precisely the symbols without real referents that make human language a language of the possible. In principle, human communication is installed in these latitudes of possibility, specifically through its conceptual nature.

Through its capacity for conceptual construction, human language is not tied to reality, but it has the capacity to name the non-existent, but above all to explain the existence of the non-existent in the same terms in which it explains the existence of reality. This gives human communication the power to ontologize reality and to manipulate its existence; in this way, human language constructs realities [9,10].

One of those realities that human language constructs is precisely the emotional one. For this reason, it is not surprising that from a sociocultural perspective (dominant today in communication studies) one can speak of emotions as sociocultural constructions, that is, of emotions as phenomena that are not felt, or rather that do not depend on being felt to be named and understood as such.

From the neurobiological point of view, emotions are homeostatic bodily reactions that are elaborated in the brain from sensory stimuli; these also involve the autonomic

neurosystems [11]. These emotions are affectively “tinted” [7] configuring a sense field that is somatosensory in nature, that is, perceived by the brain insofar as the human brain has the ability to learn about the states of the body and make decisions in response to it in benefit of its proper functioning and, in general terms, in terms of guaranteeing the organism minimum optimal conditions of well-being for survival.

Thus, between mind and body there is a constant back and forth of information that at its lowest threshold, even in organisms without a brain, enactivists have called mechanisms of the search for meaning; it is a perceptual-cognitive activity through which the organism regulates its experience in the world, signifying it while interacting with it for the sake of survival [12]. Consequently, there is an inescapable and perennial cognitive bridge between the body and the brain that, through the production of sensitive information (linked to the body), allows the human organism to know that they feel and what they feel [13].

Feeling what they feel is something that human beings can do because we have a conscience that allows us to understand the meaning of sensitive experiences, as well as express them through a common domain of language; this makes it possible for other human beings, with similar language structures, to understand them. From this perspective, language functions as a translator of conventions, that is, as a system through which information is codified, but rather that this allows it to be done. With this, meaning or intersubjective meaning is given to reality, which thus acquires historical, symbolic, collective, shared properties.

But what would it happen if we could think of a different language, of a language that, using its coding matrix, encodes non-representational meanings, that is, meanings that are not of the intersubjective and historical domain like linguistic meanings, but only subjective or individual? What would it happen if it were possible to think of a language that, although in form and content, was interspecific, that is, it constituted the language of the same species, but was in turn a mechanism for encoding individual meaning, sharing some encodings based on the organisms phylogeny, but also certain differentiations from their ontogeny?

This is what neurobiology suggests when referring to the bridge between body and mind; this is also what phenomenology and cognitive psychology suggest when they understand the relationship between experience and meaning as part of the processes of individuation and subjectivation of human beings; the phenomenology of perception does this from a corporeal, sensitive, emotional and affective perspective of individual experience; neurobiology and cognitive psychology of an enactivist nature from the configuration of an “indoors” world of its own,

subjective sense, which is both phylogenetic and ontogenetic.

From a cognitive conception of language, it is not an instrument for understanding, but rather a cognitive interface through which the being relates to his environment. It can thus be verified that the language does not have to be linguistic-as it is not the mathematical, the computational or that of the bees languages for examples; in that sense, from an ontological criterion-like the one being used here it is rather an information processing system.

Although from the linguistic point of view this information processing system has two components: the sensory-articulatory and the intentional-conceptual, both operating on linguistic representations [14], it could be suggested as Damasio A [7] does that in the case of a language that operates from somatic-sensory information, it is not the linguistic representations, but the images that the brain produces from this somatic-sensory information that are endowed with meaning or significance. Certainly it is about meanings that are inextricably tied to the body, its sensations and their respective affective “dyes”.

In other words, the meaning that is elaborated in the brain from the somatosensory images is encoded taking into account the thymic-emotional register in which it is supported. Thus, this thymic register, which is a register of the affective in consonance with the sensory-emotional, ranges from the pleasant to the unpleasant, from what causes pleasure to what causes pain, from what is liked to what is disliked. It is this type of information or meaning that is recorded from experience.

As Varela FJ [6] points out regarding cognition, it is the recurrence of regular perceptual patterns that generates knowledge, so that if an experience regularly appears associated with states of pleasure or reward, the meaning produced from it will be, at least contingently, a pleasurable experience. Thus, pleasant experiences will be configured as pleasant experiences insofar as the emotion involved in them is affectively tinged with this positive valence, producing a sense of pleasantness that is only such for the subject who experiences it.

Thus establishing a parallelism with the aforementioned linguistic postulates, this personal or subjective language has the same components. In the case of the sensory-articulatory component, it can be said that it finds its equivalent in the perceptive support that allows the mental elaboration of these images based on what is felt and the way in which the emotional reaction occurs depending on how the brain interprets the sensation in terms of threat or benefit, pain or pleasure, punishment or reward. On the other hand, the intentional-conceptual component corresponds to

the affective valence that is generated from the sensory-articulatory component, so that this valence configures an image with an affective meaning, that is, with a meaning that disposes the body to experience the interaction. From the pleasant-unpleasant axis.

In the human case, which is what concerns us in this text, the thymic axis is named through feelings such as: joy, happiness, euphoria (the pleasant), sadness, anger, fear (the unpleasant), among others. Thus, the affective content of the emotional sensations and reactions configure the intention of this language, while the sentimental content does so conceptually and depending on the culture [15].

As can be seen, the language that we have called personal or subjective which, we insist, is of an emotional-affective nature uses linguistic language of a symbolic nature to insert itself into the social world. Everaert DN [16] gave an account of this shift from the phenomenological to the symbolic scopes regarding the processes of artistic communication when she spoke of the insertion of thirdness (the norm, the conventional and collective) in the secondness (the empirical-concrete perceived as real); hence it is possible to refer to the executive level of language through the way in which it is "advertised" through communication.

At the level of execution, communication depends on language to configure itself, whether it is conventional language or this personal language that is billed in the interweaving between mind and body, and where emotions and their affections play a constitutive role [17,18]. For this reason, it is possible to point out that communication is a mechanism for the execution of language, but it must be understood that it is a mechanism that, although sociocultural approaches have defined from and for socialization, is also and we would say, above all corporeal. Phenomenologically speaking, there is no communication without a body that executes it, since communication is an attribute of living beings [19-21], that is, it is something that happens to living beings as long as it configures a way of relating between these beings and their environments. As you can see, communication is the way an organism adapts to and survives in its environments.

Thus, communication constitutes a behavior that takes place in the order of saying, that is, that is invoiced from the execution of the senses or meanings that are derived from the cognitive mode that any living organism, including humans, possess to adapt to the environment and thus ensure their survival. The fact that human complexity contributes to its communicative complexity does not evade the above. It is then about understanding communication as an action that allows language to be executed in the manner of an expression, of projecting or taking out the meanings that

have been produced affectively by the human being from their own distinctive constitution as a living being [17].

Sometimes, as happens with babies (babbling, for example), communication will be unintelligible because the language of babies does not go through the intersubjective conventions of social language; in others cases, the communication will be so full of emotions and affects that only the subject understands while only he feels them (and does not necessarily perceive them and name them logically), that it will only be possible to identify and understand their meaning through empathy or others non-logical perceptions; in others scenarios, as happens with works of art, emotions may be captured through chromatic symbols, figures, musical notes, textures or through signs that will not be easily interpretively accessible to others, as the most intimate of abstraction; in the same way, the politician will stamp an emotional seal on his harangues against his antagonists. And so a multiplicity of examples from which it can be realized that ontically speaking all expressive action is communicative action that contains both felt emotions and non-felt emotions. In the first case we will talk about a more spontaneous and existentialist communication; in the second one, we could refer to a more strategic, more declarative communication [17].

In both cases, however, communication executes the language (social and/or individual) projecting the universe of emotional meaning that humans constantly elaborate and update from their subjective biographical and intersubjective and historical experiences. Thus, the relationship between communication and emotion, at least from a bio-phenomenological perspective of communication such as the one defended here, are not separate pairs, but rather they are a unit. They constitute an undifferentiated unit from which, as Maturana H [22] said, it occurs from the indissoluble intertwining between rationality and emotionality.

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