ANALYSIS OF THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

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Abstract
In this text, authors try to represent e new contemporary understanding of Habermasian Theory of Communicative action. The theory of communicative action, with its inventiveness made a real revolution in the understanding and the interpretation of communication as an activity that constitutes the social world. This text aims to analyze exactly this communicative action, the reasons why it was developed, its most important characteristics, especially in regard to instrumental action etc. Special attention will be paid to the incorporation of this theory in the works of its author and one of the most influential contemporary authors in the field of social sciences, Jurgen Habermas.

Key words: *theory of communicative action, Jurgen Habermas, social action, sociological theory*

1. INTRODUCTION

The theory of communicative action is developed by Jürgen Habermas, the most influential author of the second generation of the Frankfurter school of sociology and a progenitor of most modern flows in the theories of democracy (deliberative democracy). Habermas as a student of Theodor Adorno and Max Hornheimer after their return from the USA, is following their example indicating that historical Marxism has serious weaknesses, and therefore is needed correcting. Starting from this position in the beginning of the 1970-es he started developing his own social theory above all dedicated to analyzing of communication.

Some authors think that several phases can be recognized in Hagerman's intellectual and scientific development: speculative hermeneutics, empirical criticism, neomarxistically and communicatively characteristic after the developing of the communicative action theory (Mitrovic 1999:217). All these phases are interlaced in between and generally form a coherent totality. So in theory of communicative action Habermas implements his attitudes of critical theory which he represents as part of the Frankfurter school of sociology.

The communication between individuals is the most important constitutive element of society. The society can't be understood without understanding communication among individuals. Therefore, the key aspect of theoretical perspectives which are opened by Habermas is his theory of *communicative action*. Relying on *communicative action* Habermas analyzes societal development, but also societal conflict in modern society that gives the critical dimensions of his opinion about society.

As for the larger part after war sociologists Habermas also started his communication analysis with the analysis of social action and the wider theoretical range of Max Weber. But unlike others Habermas in his analysis of communicative action makes an attempt to reconciliate different intellectual traditions in sociology. On one hand, what is visible in Hagerman's analysis of communicative action is the influence of symbolic interactionism and Meed's view especially pragmatism as an intellectual tradition which inspired symbolic interactionists same as Habermas (Heath Joseph 2006:120), so Habermas (Habermas 1984) on the other hand can be under the strong influence of Parsons'sundestanting of social action as an integrating element of social system. However, as Habermas himself says in the introduction of his *Theory of social action*, it is the very Parsons's*TheStructure of social action* he takes as a model for combining of conceptual analysis of social theory. It was precisely the deep knowledge of different intellectual traditions, the attempt for their reconciliation and the systematic side of the analysis which gave a special weight to Habermas's analysis of social action.

2. TYPES OF ACTION

After Weber's example, Habermas (Habermas 1998:62) has also made typology of several different action types. Generally, Habermas makes a different between: instrumental action and social action. *Instrumental action* is fully oriented action which the intention to manipulate natural and social world (Edgar 2006:74). More accurately*instrumental action* is a kind of action which natural world (things) and social world (social actors) takes as instruments (items) that uses to achieve a certain goal.

In the field of social action Habermas differentiates: symbolic action, communicative action and strategic action. Thereto *symbolic action* is an action oriented toward understanding and it relies on using symbols as social constructs, *communicative action* is oriented toward understanding while using talkative (symbolic) acts such as orders, demands, terms, pleads etc., while strategic action is a kind of social action striving for mutual understanding of social actors while using instrumental logic. Unlike *communicative action* which is spontaneous and is satisfied only by understanding between social actors, *strategic action* is planned; it is a kind of action plan which includes understanding other social actors whose help is needed in order to achieve a certain goal. For achieving an understanding with the rest of the social actors *strategic action* doesn't exclude manipulation, imposing, and enforcing. Mutual understanding in *strategic action* among other is achieved using techniques such as violence, bribing, blackmailing. Speech, especially an emotional is one of the techniques in strategic action.

Habermas's typology is a result of the synthesis of sociological view in the area. Namely if we were to review sociological theories of communication and the type of actions characteristic for each one of them we will see that what Habermas defines as*communicative action* is much alike Weber's *rationally valuable action*. Instrumental/strategic action of Habermas has many common things with Weber's *rationally oriented action* of as with Gofman's dramatic action, while Habermas's *symbolic action* corresponds to symbolic action of Meed and Bloomer even by name. In this Habermas differentiates more the dominant character of one action or another, then placing a sharp and nontransient limit between them i.e. some of social action types are not excluded in between. It applies especially to symbolical and other types of social actions, which serves Habermas as a buffer zone (interspace) in reviewing the relation between *instrumental/strategic* action and *communicative* action.

3. DEFINING OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

Habermas's communicative action is based on Weber's *theory of social action*. Actually as we could notice communicative action is a type of social action. Pointing to different types of social actions, Weber is indicating, and Habermas is accepting, that modern society has *instrumental/strategic* action as its foundation. However, unlike most modern analysis which has been concentrating on examining of *instrumental/strategic social* action, Habermas developed theory *of communicative* action. At the same time, Habermas had a proper answer to the dilemma which perspective to be used for analyzing of *social action*. Unlike micro sociological theories of communication of Meed, Schulz, Garfunkel, Berger and Lokman, Gofman, who analyzed social action from social actor's perspective, Habermas has chosen to place *social action* ambivalent and analyze it from both perspectives. With Habermas's words he analyzed "social world" perspective and "social system" perspective.

Communicative action as understood by Habermas includes establishing or happening of social relations between two or more social actors and is directed toward mutual understanding and agreement. Because such action is meaningful, in includes an appeal by using regular language, by saying or writing on something. The simplest actions can be gestures which hold some meaning as a shaking, a greeting etc. These gestures have a purpose to start or to maintain conversation between two or more people (Edgar 2006:21); Habermas (Habermas 1998:81) has identified **three types** of*communicative action*: **transferring of information, establishing relations with other and a enabling for expressing ourselves**. More precisely, *communicative action* is cognitive, interactive and expressive. These three types of communication in the theory of Habermas are connected to three types of reality: the outside world of nature (connected to our expressions: it's going to rain, it will be

shiny etc.), our social world (our communication with others) and my inner world (my subjective expressing where expressions like I thought it will rain are a part of).

The analysis of Habermas of *communicative action* is based on his understanding of speech communicating. In it *communicative action* is directed to achieving mutual understanding and agreement. Even the act of asking for water wouldn't be enough to be seen only as a relation between two individuals where a demanding is set, but as a language act where understanding is included (anticipation of context and relation between individuals) (Outhwaite 2009:229). For this understanding to be achieved it is necessary for certain conditions to be satisfied above all connected with validity claim of the expressions of the interlocutors, but at the same time Habermas knows that there are situations when social actors can't understand each other, respectively when communication is unsuccessful, because of improper speech, using of inarticulate idioms etc. Agreement achieving is based on the accepting of arguments where we use the communication as justified. The goal of mutual understanding of the interlocutors is the agreement achieving. The example after we have understood that the interlocutor ask us for water, to achieve an agreement that the demand for water there are justified reasons, we need to understand and accept as justified the arguments which are used by the interlocutor in the communication. In that direction some authors as Scharp (Scharp 2003:9) find a breach in the theory of Habermas, noticing that Habermas is making a gradation between a poor communication directed to understanding and strong communication directed to an agreement.

4. COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY

Social action, social relation, social relations must have meaning, to be designed in a particular way. Rationality connects thing in a certain way, giving them meaning. That is the reason why according to Habermas (Habermas 1983) each of classic sociologists Weber, Meed, Dirkem, and Parsons more or less, in one way or another is exploring rationality. The interest for rationality is an interest for the way thing are marked, the meaning they establish, hold, change and the sense they reflect. Rationality is the basis upon which communication is set. The interest for rationality is actually an interest for communication because communication is rational.

Rationality as understood by Habermas is a connection between ratio and knowledge. He differentiates rationality of instrumental action set upon the relation *goal-resources*(tools) and directed toward goal achieving and communicative rationality placed upon the universal pragmatism and directed towards mutual understanding and eventual agreement achieving through the use of symbols. The difference between rationality of instrumental action and communicative action is a difference between "to know how" and ,,to know that". According to this people who can use language as a system of symbols we can say are communicationally rational (for example a lecturing teacher), and for those who know to use the knowledge of acting we can say that are actionably rational (for example factory workers who manufacture cars). In the way Habermas defines communicative rationality, communicationally rational are only people. Animas aren't.

With rationalization of communicative action, Habermas finished the tradition that had seen rationality only in *instrumental action*. It is probably the key point, the stronghold which his theory of communicative action is placed upon, but also the most criticized part of this theory.

5. UNIVERSAL PRAGMATISM AGAINST FORMAL PRAGMATISM

Habermas analyzed practical side and normative side of *communicative action*through the development of the separate theoretically analytical concepts, universal pragmatism and *formal pragmatism* (Cooke 1998:1-2). *Universal pragmatism* (Habermas 1998) is actually the second name of speech. In this, speech can be seen as a pragmatic side of language, respectively the part of the language as an abstract system of symbols, being used. Such usage value of the language gives the question of correlation between the speaking subject and words being used. Here Habermas makes the difference between *universal pragmatism* which is more connected to the meanings brought by the speech for the social actors and its metaphorical functions and formal pragmatism which is connected

to the prerequisites of speech action through satisfying of universal valid basis of speech as a key which used turns speech action in communication. *Formal pragmatism* is a concept offering exploration of linguistic competency of actors who communicate. It includes the linguistic rules which an actor is intuitively aware of. *Formal pragmatism* encompasses the rules according which a conversation is happening, their understanding prior the exchange of symbols between social actors. Because of this, maybe, as Cooke notices (Cooke 1998:1-2), Habermas gives priority in his theory to formal pragmatism, unlike Searle who had given priority to ilocatory act analysis, although as Scharp had noticed (Scharp 2003:5) insisting of mutual understanding (that Scharp considered to be a special phase in Habermas's speech understanding) passes the limits of formal pragmatism. In other words although for achieving mutual understanding a sharing of linguistic rules used by interlocutors is necessary, it is not enough. Understanding can't be reached unless the meaning that is given to the words by interlocutors which they use while talking including metaphors is understood.

6. HABERMAS INTERPRETATION OF SPEECH ACTION

Communicative action which Habermas analyzed is happening through using of language as a normative construct of communication and speech as a practical construct of communicative action. In this the basic unit of analysis of language is the sentence, and speech is the expression. Habermas gives a special emphasize to speech analysis, respectively speech action.

When Habermas exposed his interpretation of speech action Austin and Searle already had developed a theory of *speech action*. Therefore Habermas have them recognition to Austin and Searle who made first steps in analyzing speech as communicational, not instrumental action, but according to him they didn't go far enough in that analysis. Namely although for Searle speech wasn't instrumentally oriented, he stayed only on analyzing the performance of the speakers. Habermas analyzed speech as a *communicative action* directed towards understanding and eventual agreement. As Pusey noticed (Pusey 2003:76) while Austin and Searle were speaking about speech as a performance, for Habermas it was a combination of speaking and acting, respectively *communicative action*. Speech according Habermas's understanding (Habermas 1998:63) has double structure. Whenever we use language we express ourselves in the process establishing a relation with others. According to this every using of language is at the same time directed toward others establishing relations with them.

Habermas (Habermas 1998:81) is mentioning three types of constative speech action which is in function of representation of facts, regulative which is in function of establishing legit interpreting relations and avowal which is a function of discovering the subjectiveness of the speaker. Communication includes more than symbols, words, grammar, language, gestures, in also includes credibility (in Habermas's terminology validity claim) of social actors participating in the speech action. By satisfying the criteria of speech validity it evolves in communication. If a speech act doesn't satisfy these criteria it is not a communication. Social actors go through four phases of validity claiming. These four phases are (comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness). The first condition for an existing communication is comprehensibility. For a communication to exist social actors must compare the picture of the world, respectively in a similar way to see the world. According to this social actors must exchange the facts of physical and social environment. The next phase of validity claim is connected not only to with the fact we are understanding each other, but after we have understood ourselves the facts we talked about must be **true**, correct. This validity criterion of communication involves the correctness of the expressions about natural and social environment being used in the conversation. The third phase of validity claim of the communication is connected with the freedom the participants in the communication have in presenting themselves to others. But at the same time, truthiness (or sincerity) in the communication is connected with the style of expressing of the social actors. Namely, sometimes the expressions being used by the social actors are cynical, jokes etc. The way sentences are being expressed can be ambiguous and with this the difference between truth and lie and what is said and done is being diminished. To be able to communicate properly you must know the interlocutor's style, but also the social context of the conversation being made. In the end (rightness) the expressions in a conversation must be meaningful. Sometimes we use neologisms, idioms and for a conversation to be done properly good knowledge of the language being used is

necessary. According to Habermas this check presumes the reservoir of mutual knowledge with Shic, and enables negotiating for different demands.

According to Habermas (Habermas 1979:4-5), the interlocutor in any usual conversation in a very short time can see if the expression is grammatically correct, if it's true, if the speech is sincere and if the expression is logically correct, that practically passes validity claim. As Pusey (Pusey 2003:79) noticed the conversation between at least two interlocutors who are simultaneously and reciprocally speaking, practically satisfies the criteria for validity established by Habermas. But such conversation can't happen if validity conditions aren't satisfied, if there is a misunderstanding i.e. incomprehensibility, inaccuracy of the expressions, dishonesty in the conversation, senselessness in the expressions. By satisfying the conditions of validity of speech action it is turned into a communication. Unlike the speech that is an addressing of one interlocutor to the other, communication is mutual understanding. For a communication to happen social actors must mutually cooperate offering arguments that validity conditions of the communication are met, which gives the cooperation rational dimension.

Because every communication is directed to agreement achieving, the question comes out about the ideal conditions of making a conversation and mutual understanding and agreeing. These conditions Habermas determines as an ideal speech situation. Using the methodological procedure of Weber's ideal type, Habermas analyzes the ideal speech situation.

7. THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE IN COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

According to Taylor (1991) the language has a key meaning of understanding communicative action of Habermas. The language is the prerequisite if speech and communication. For exploring the language Habermas developed the concept of *formal pragmatism*which dedicates the central place while analyzing communication according to some authors (Cooke 1998:2). Realizing the basic line of giving arguments, Taylor appreciates that for Habermas in language most significant is the structure of expression – discourse. In other words ,,since we have conversed we are". It is further leading to understanding of whole society through the structure of expression (discourse) that we use. Exactly in analysis of the language Pusey (Pusey 2003:69) had seen the inspiration of Habermas for exploring of communication at all. Namely since in 1965 y., 15 year before *Theory of communicative action* appeared, Habermas had written for the language as most significant type of communication. Based on the key role of the language Taylor (1991) divides whole theory of *communicative action* of Habermas, in four approaches:

- *Fundamental*: the language is developed and renewed independently (from itself). We perceive it only as a structure of expressions and use the vocabulary that we have taught from others. When we learn new and unique ways of expressing we do that against (as a reaction) to the mutual language, not independently.
- *Complementarity* between structure and practice. More precisely language can be understood as a structure of codes. This structure is normative structure of linguistic (speech) acts. Among acts (practice) and structure e reciprocity connection exists. In the way acts affect the structure, so is the structure affecting acts.
- As a consequence results of the connection between structure and practice (acting) can be found *applied in the accompanying knowledge*, in linguistic practice etc. More precisely this connection is not seen only in the preparedness to act in certain previously prepared codes in communication, but also in accompanying knowledge, that opens space of know-how and prior knowledge.
- *Complementarity of*,,me" and ,,we". With Taylor's words (1991:28) the difference between me and we is the difference between initial and usual. Through we the mutual space (public space) is formed in which all participate more separately. We respect the rules, we do the rituals, we adopt the norms.

8. GENERAL METHODOLOGY OF EXPLORING COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

According to Habermas (Habermas 1998:29) there are two methods for exploring communicative action: *observation and understanding*. *Observation (observing)* is directed to perceiving the outer, objective characteristics of speech, while understanding is directed to meaning which expressions have. *Observation and understanding* are two levels of reality, sensory and communicative reality, which are interconnected. In this first level of speech observing, making an observation after which follows the second level understanding and interpretation. *Observation* as a method of exploring of the first level falls upon describing communicative action, while understanding is characterized with explaining of communicative action. In the process we have a direct access to the phenomena we explore through observing: while with understanding we have a mediated access to this phenomenon. The difference between *observed and communicative reality* is practically the difference between sensory reality and symbolic reality. By using expressions we can describe the observed part of reality. We can additionally give our interpretation. But we use explaining only in situations when symbols being used are not clear enough.

9. CRITIC OF THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

The theory of *communicative action* causes a serious attention in social science and has become one of the most influential modern sociological theories, which has given its author a reputation as one of the most significant intellectual appearances in modern sociological view. This theory doesn't attempt only to explain or complement Weber's theory of *social action* that calls which he calls upon when analyzing the communication as social action, as many modern micro sociological theories have done, but it represents a serious critic of such, at the same time using this theory as a clutch for critic of modern (capitalist) society. But, although the theory of *communicative action* was criticallyas to the theory of social action, as to modern (capitalistic) society it had also suffered serious critics.

Among the first analysis that appeared just before the printing of Habermas's *Communicative action* was the one of Schnadelbach (Schnadelbach 1991). As Honneth and Joas (Honneth and Joas 1991) notice, Schnadelbach on one hand gives a recognition to the thoroughness of Habermas's analysis, but on the other hand finds certain observations which can be grouped in three points: the connection with theory of rationality and rationally oriented knowledge, the connection between understanding and evaluating of speech, the blurriness (vagueness) of Habermas's definition of the live world. In respect to the last question Habermas had received many observations in social view.

In a similar way go the observations which came from Heath (Heath 2003) according to who Habermas's understanding of rationality is problematic. Namely to rationality that is strictly *instrumental* according to Heath, Habermas has given moral and normative character, presenting communicative action as rational. Heath had pulled this line in regard to the dichotomy economy-sociology, placing rationality in the basis of this dichotomy where economy is the range of instrumental rationality, while sociology is the range of communicative rationality. According to Heath the basis of communication mustn't be looked for in rational sources like Habermas had attempted to do, but in irrational factors like social context, socialization, character etc.

For some of the attentive readers of Habermas's theory the problem was the dichotomy itself; *communicative action* directed towards understanding and agreement, against *instrumental/strategic action* directed towards achieving success. According to Krueger (1991:142) Habermas had unsuccessfully tried to surpass this dichotomy through the analysis of evolution of communicative action. This dichotomy had met serious critic also from Plot (Plot 2009), who says there are actions which at the same are instrumental and communicative without instrumental action in the process destroying or distorting communicative action. Referencing to Hanna Arendt, as an example of such action Plot points out democratic politic action which at same time is communicative asking for an agreement and support with majority of the people and instrumental using suck agreement for succeeding, while the scale of success for gaining control through the support obtained by majority of the people. Habermas's attitude for distorting of communicative action in the cases when it is seen as a

condition for *strategic action* Plot defines as a democratic deficit of the theory of *communicative action*.

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