

DEFINIENDUM AND DEFINIENTIA OF “COMMUNICATION”

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Abstract: *Teaching a subject should always start with a clarification of the specific concepts. Which definition to choose and how when there are tens of them for the same concept? This paper aims to answer these questions. To find the best definition of “communication” (the definiendum), a corpus of 20 definitions from printed and online English language dictionaries was identified. A second corpus of 19 words defining “communication” (the definiens) was then identified. Finally, starting from the clusters of similar elements identified and based on their occurrence, a new definition of “communication” was developed. The new definition of “communication” allows teachers to define a complex concept in the most synthetic way possible since it extracts the most salient features of all previous definitions.*

Key words: *communication, definition, definiendum, definiens*

INTRODUCTION

All concepts have definitions. A **definition** is “a statement of the meaning of a word, phrase, or term, as in a dictionary entry” [1]. Logicians define it as “a sentence or set of sentences determining the meaning of a term or pointing to the essential features of an object or class of objects” [25].

Each definition has a **definiendum** (pl. **definienda**), i.e. “a word or expression that is being defined” [1] or “a newly-introduced term or combination of terms” [25], and one or more **definiens** (pl. **definiens**), i.e. “a word or words serving to define another word or expression, as in a dictionary entry” [1] or “the term or combination of terms whose meanings are already known” [25]. Thus, in the definition below, “Communication is the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing, or behavior” [1], “communication” is the **definiendum** and “exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing, or behavior” is the **definiens**.

Teaching a subject should always start with defining concepts. The most common difficulty when doing it is that the same and one concept may have tens of definitions, which confuses both teachers and students. The problem is that there is no generally admitted rule for defining a concept. Therefore, teachers should try and build up their own definitions of a concept, synthesising the most important features of a meaning.

This article presents an attempt to build up a definition of **communication** based on lexical definitions from English language dictionaries.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The building up of our definition of **communication** relied on 20 lexical definitions of this concept from both printed and online (the most used sources nowadays) English language dictionaries available to all those interested in communication. They are all **dictionary** or **lexical definitions** (a **lexical definition** is “the meaning of a word in common usage by speakers of the language” [23]):

- “The act of communicating with people” [11];
- “The act of communicating; transmission” [2];
- “The act of conveying intended meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs and semiotic rules” [13];
- “The act of transmitting” [19];

- “The act or fact of communicating” [10];
- “The act or fact of communicating” [20];
- “The act or instance of communicating; the imparting or exchange of information, ideas, or feelings” [3];
- “The act or process of communicating” [7];
- “The act or process of communicating” [17];
- “The activity of communicating; the activity of conveying information” [8];
- “The activity of communicating; the activity of conveying information” [16];
- “The activity of communicating; the activity of conveying information” [21];
- “The concept or state of exchanging information between entities” [5];
- “The concept or state of exchanging information between entities” [6];
- “The exchange of ideas by writing, speech, or signals” [18];
- “The exchange of information between people, e.g. by means of speaking, writing, or using a common system of signs or behavior” [4];
- “The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium” [12];
- “The process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior” [15];
- “The process of transmission of information of an originator to a receiver by means of the use of a message that it goes from one to another across a channel” [9];
- “The transfer of information, such as thoughts and messages, as contrasted with transportation, the transfer of goods and persons” [14].

Written content analysis, i.e. describing written communication providing a quantitative description (Mayring, 2000; Rață *et al.*, 2012), was used to analyse the definitions of communication in our corpus.

From the 20 definitions, 19 *definiētia* were extracted and were then used to build up our own definition of communication. The choice was determined by the number of occurrences of the *definiētia*, occurrences that were also taken into account by lexicographers in their definition of **communication**.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Nineteen *definiētia* were found in the most authoritative English language dictionaries, both printed and online. The nineteen *definiētia* have the following occurrences:

- *Act of communicating* – 7 occurrences [2, 3, 7, 10, 11, 17, 20];
- *Act of conveying intended meanings* – 1 occurrence [13];
- *Act of transmitting* – 1 occurrence [19];
- *Activity of communicating* – 3 occurrences [8, 16, 21];
- *Activity of conveying information* – 3 occurrences [8, 16, 21];
- *Concept of exchanging information* – 2 occurrences [5, 6];
- *Exchange of ideas* – 1 occurrence [18];
- *Exchange of information* – 2 occurrences [4];
- *Exchange of information, ideas, or feelings* – 1 occurrence [3];
- *Fact of communicating* – 2 occurrences [10, 20];
- *Imparting of information* – 1 occurrence [12];
- *Imparting of information, ideas, or feelings* – 1 occurrence [3];
- *Instance of communicating* – 1 occurrence [3];
- *Process of exchanging information* – 1 occurrence [15];
- *Process of transmission of information* – 1 occurrence [9];

- **Process of communicating** – 2 occurrences [7, 17];
- **State of exchanging information** – 2 occurrences [5, 6];
- **Transfer of information** – 1 occurrence [14];
- **Transmission** – 1 occurrence [2].

The nineteen *definientia* and their 37 occurrences are shown graphically in Figure 1 below.

The other words contained by the *definientia* of “communication” point to some of the elements of a communication scheme:

- The *emitter of the message*: entity [5, 6, 13], group [13], individual [15], originator [9], people [4];
- The *receiver of the message*: entity [13], individual [15], people [11], receiver [9];
- The *message*: message [9, 14], thoughts [14];
- The *message encoding*: behaviour [4, 15], other medium [12], semiotic rules [13], signals [18], signs [4, 13, 15], speaking [4, 12], speech [18], symbols [15], writing [4, 12, 18];
- The *channel*: channel [9].

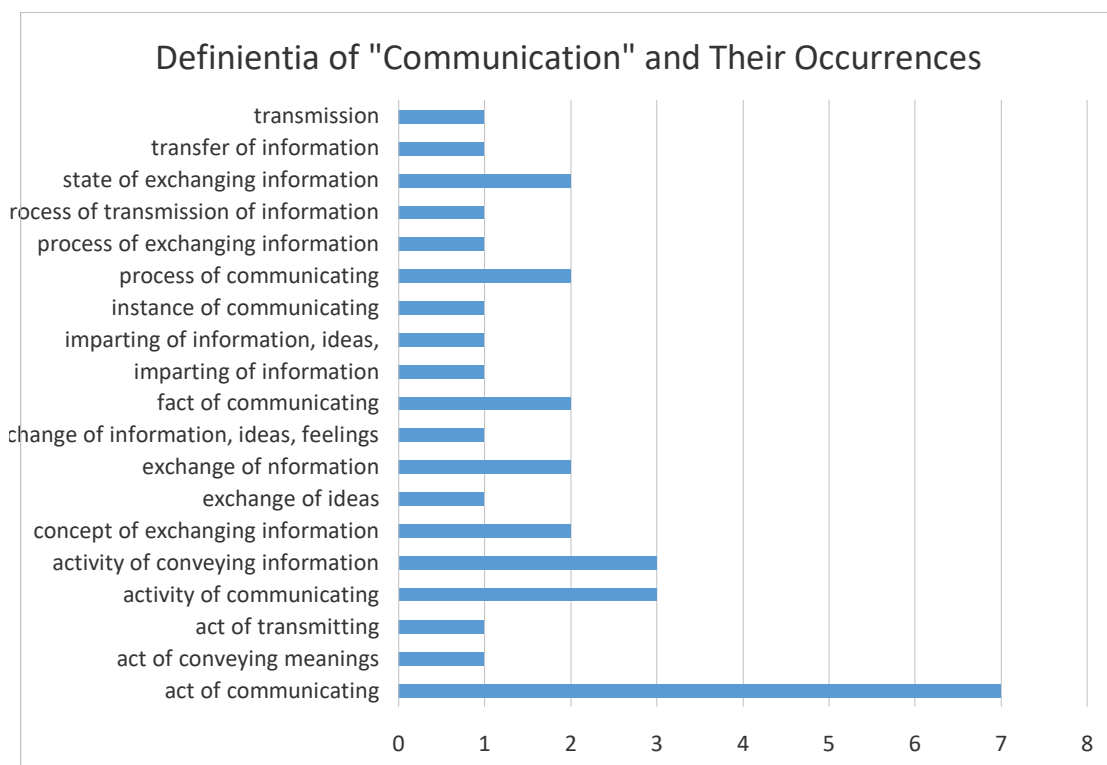


Figure 1. Definientia of „communication” and their occurrences

In our definition of communication, we observed the following requirements of an utterance aspiring to be a definition [24]:

- Be characteristic;
- Not to be circular (i.e., a word cannot be defined by itself);
- Be clear and accurate;
- Be logically affirmative;
- Not to contain contradictions.

We have made an option not to use in our definition any word referring to the *emitter* or *originator of the message*, to the *receiver of the message*, to the *message*, or to

the *channel of communication* because mentioning them would be superfluous (the structure of communication is implicit).

In the process of encoding a message, the emitter / originator of the message can use either *verbal* (words, and also enunciation, stress, and tone in speaking, symbols in writing) confirmed by some of the definitions in our corpus [4, 12, 18] or *non-verbal symbols* – aesthetic (art, craft, dance, music, painting, sculpture, theatre), physical (body language), signs (a display of airplanes in formation, 21 gun salute, horns, signal flags, signal lights, sirens) and symbols (cars, clothing, jewellery) confirmed by some of the definitions in our corpus [4, 13, 15, 18].

As far as the “message encoding” is concerned, we need to mention that the definitions of communication above contain some incongruences. Thus, our corpus of definitions of communication mentions as message encoding *behaviour* [4, 15] (“the actions or reactions of persons or things in response to external or internal stimuli”) [27] and *semiotic rules* [13] (“syntactic rules – formal properties of signs and symbols, pragmatic rules – relations between signs/expressions and their users, and semantic rules – relationships between signs and symbols and what they represent”) [26]. In addition, definition [12] points to “other medium” without mentioning it.

Given all the details above, we would like to simply define **communication** as “an *act of communicating* [conveying, imparting, making known] *information* [knowledge derived from study, experience, or instruction]” for the following reasons:

- **Act of communication**, because of its 7 occurrences: the other definientia have smaller numbers of occurrences (*activity of communicating, activity of conveying, concept of exchanging, exchange of information, fact of communicating, process of communicating, state of exchanging information* have, each of them, 2 occurrences, while *act of conveying, act of transmitting, exchange of ideas, exchange of information, ideas, or feelings, imparting of information, instance of communicating, process of exchanging information, process of transmission of information, transfer of information, and transmission* have only 1 occurrence each);
- **Information**, because it has 10 occurrences: the other attributives have smaller numbers of occurrences (*ideas* – 3 occurrences, *feelings* – 2 occurrences, and *meanings* – 1 occurrence); **information** means “knowledge derived from study, experience, or instruction” [1] and, therefore, it covers *idea* (“something, such as a thought or conception, that potentially or actually exists in the mind as a product of mental activity”) [1], *feeling* (“an affective state of consciousness, such as that resulting from emotions, sentiments, or desires”) [1], *meaning* (“something that is conveyed or signified; sense or significance”) [1], *message* (“a usually short communication transmitted by words, signals, or other means from one person, station, or group to another; the substance of such a communication; the point or points conveyed”) [1], or *thought* (“a product of thinking”) [1].

CONCLUSION

The importance of communication as a tool in everyday life is unquestionable (Paunchici, 2008). When teaching about communication, concepts need to be accurately, clearly defined and, when it seems impossible to choose from the tens of definitions a concept has, teachers should design their own definitions. To do so, they need to analyse the content of these definitions and retain, from the multitude of *definientia* and based on the number of their occurrences, the ones that best suit the

goals and objectives of the teacher. This is what we did in our study. Thus, we managed to reach a **definition of communication** that seems to include the most frequent *definiția* of this *definiendum*: “an *act of communicating* [conveying, imparting, making known] *information* [knowledge derived from study, experience, or instruction]”.

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