The Handbook of Communication in Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Russian Perspectives on Communication

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Russian Perspectives on Communication

Igor E. Klyukanov and Olga A. Leontovich

This chapter has an overall focus on communication as it is conceptualized, studied, and taught in Russia. (1) The chapter begins by introducing the cultural and cross-cultural nature of the approach guiding this discussion. (2) Next, based on that approach, the chapter analyzes two key terms employed to shape a certain view of communication. (3) The chapter then moves to explore various resources used for constructing and legitimizing the discipline of communication in Russia, focusing on three contexts—(a) sociocultural, (b) intellectual, and (c) institutional. In so doing, the chapter provides examples of enactment of meaning in the form of social scenes and communication practices; presents a variety of theoretical traditions and trajectories; and gives a critical overview of how the study of communication is structured in various academic units and reflected in university curricula. (4) The chapter ends with a conclusion in which the key points are emphasized.

APPROACH

While it is true that the canon of communication study is considered by many to be unmistakably Western, with the most visible countries in communication journals being “English-speaking ones, the U.S. in particular” (Lauf, 2005, p. 148), it is also true that we hear calls from Western scholars “to reflect on culturally based assumptions that characterize current theories of communication and to imagine how our field might be enriched or perhaps even fundamentally transformed by concepts derived from different cultural traditions” (Craig, 2007, p. 256). To such calls, responses are often framed as a debate about the ‘de-westernization’ of communication studies, cf.: “Undeniably, ‘de-westernized’ knowledge is in, parochial and Eurocentric research out” (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014, p. 361). The thrust of such efforts seems to be in line with the main meaning of the prefix ‘de’—that of removing something. And yet, while rarely explicitly formulated, recent writings on ‘de-westernization’ seem to be more consistent with another meaning of this prefix—that of departing from something: whether they admit it or not, most debates about the ‘de-westernization’ of communication studies still depart from the Western canon, albeit in the efforts to subvert it.

This ambivalent position was reflected in the Call for Papers for a special issue of Communication Theory on ‘Questioning Geocultural Boundaries of Communication Theories: De-Westernization, Cosmopolitalism and Globalization,’ which, it was stated, should not be understood as an effort to
‘de-Westernize’ communication studies. On the contrary, the task is to explore whether non-Western perspectives expand the analysis and challenge central assumptions and arguments—a statement that sounds ambivalent, considering the title of the special issue.

Most often communication has been examined from African, Asian, and Latin American perspectives. Unlike those works, however, that openly challenge the Western bias in communication research (Wang, 2013) and especially the “American-dominated views of communication as a rational, cognizant, and goal-oriented act” (Ayish, 2003, p. 91), the study of communication in Russia is not so much about ‘de-westernization’; rather, it is a struggle with its own legacy (cf. Shepherd, 1999). We witness this struggle in the development of communication as a discipline, viewed in terms of its contributions to knowledge in different intellectual traditions, its evolving institutional forms, and its relevance to communication conceptualized as a constituted category of sociocultural problems and practices, cf. R. Craig’s article, ‘Communication in the Conversation of Disciplines’ published in the inaugural issue of Russian Journal of Communication (2008).

Thus, the present chapter’s approach has a deeply cultural nature aimed at providing an emic account of how communication is conceptualized, studied, and taught in Russia. At the same time, while the struggle in the development of communication as a discipline is mostly internal to Russia, it is taking place against the background of ‘non-Western’ communication research. As a result, the present chapter’s approach is also comparative, i.e., cross-cultural: this way, it contributes to an important goal best stated by D. Hymes: “Ethnographic and comparative studies in the context of communication are needed to extend the etic frameworks” (1964, p. 26).

**KEY TERMS FOR COMMUNICATION**

Using this approach, we view communication first of all as an idea. In the article tellingly titled ‘Ideas Still Have Consequences’ D. McMahon and S. Moyn note that scholars today, with an invigorated interest, are “trying to connect ideas in new ways to the psychology, lived experiences, and self-fashioning of those who think them” (2014, p. B12). It is no exaggeration to say that communication is not only the ‘most wonderful of all affairs,’ to use J. Dewey’s famous phrase, but also an idea that has most important consequences in all spheres of human life. By treating communication as an idea, we follow in the footsteps of John Peters’ seminal book Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication (1999). At the same time, we agree with D. Theall who notes “that perhaps the subtitle should not have been A History of the Idea of Communication but either A History of an Idea of Communication or A History of Some Ideas of Communication” (2001, p. 414). Indeed, all cultures develop their own ideas of communication, which in our case is first of all manifested in the key Russian terms used to construct a certain view of communication—obchenie and kommunikatsiya.

*Obchenie* is a Slavic word derived from obchyi (‘common’). *Kommunikatsiya*, on the other hand, is of Latin origin and was first used in the Alphabetical Lexicon of New Vocabulary. Peter the Great personally oversaw the compilation of, and made changes in, this first—hand-written and never published—“dictionary of foreign words” (Dixon, 1999, pp. 10–11). Later, the word *komunikatsiya* (spelled with one ‘m’) is found in V. Dal’s famous Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language, where it is explicated as ‘ways, roads, means of interconnectedness between places’ [пути, дороги, средства связи мест]. It is in this meaning that the word is used in such expressions as ‘The Ministry of Transport and Communication’ [Министерство транспорта и коммуникаций] and “The Ministry of Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation” [Министерство связи и массовых коммуникаций Российской Федерации]. Also, it is this meaning that has clearly dominated over the more humanistic meaning of *komunikatsiya* that Peter the Great attempted to introduce into the Russian language.
While both *obchenie* and *kommunikatsiya* originate from the word ‘common’, their meaning and usage in Russian have their peculiarities. The term *obchenie*, used both terminologically and non-terminologically, can occur in everyday speech and is identified with such human characteristics as participation, sharing, and sympathy. Also, *obchenie* is usually assigned more positive connotations than *kommunikatsiya* (Peshkov, 1998, p. 143; Shaikhidinova, 2004, p. 166; Vasilik, 2006, pp. 25–26). *Obchenie* thus has traditionally been more valued, cf. the word and its derivatives denoting such communication concepts and social practices as *obchenie s druž’yami* (interaction in the company of friends), *obchenie po dusham* (soul talk), *obchetsvo* (society), *obchezhitie* (everyday life), etc.

The term *kommunikatsiya* sounds more formal and is stylistically more specialized. Today, however, it is gaining more popularity and applied to various forms of human contact and social practices, e.g. *kommunikatsiya v malykh gruppakh* (small group communication), *mezhkul’turnaya kommunikatsiya* (intercultural communication), and *organizationalnaya kommunikatsiya* (organizational communication). This can be explained, in part, by the morphological structure of *kommunikatsiya*, which allows for different and wider usage, found in a number of derivatives. While the nouns *obchenie* and *kommunikatsiya*, as well as the adjectives *obchitel’nyi* and *kommunikabel’nyi* (sociable), can be viewed as counterparts, the word *kommunitsirovat’* (to communicate), although grammatically well formed, cannot (perhaps yet) be considered an idiomatic counterpart for the verb *obchat’ sya* (to associate with, to socialize with). At the same time, *obchenie* produces lacunas for such modifiers as *kommunikativnyi* (communicative) and *kommunikatsionnyi* (communicational). Thus, for instance, a popular expression ‘communication revolution’ can only be rendered as *kommunikativnya revolyutciya*. Similarly, and more importantly, the two nouns, derived from *kommunikatsiya*, are found in the names of the main candidates for denoting the field of communication in Russia: *kommunikativstika* (communicativistics) and *kommunikologiya* (communicology). Both terms are grammatically well formed, unlike those that could be derived from *obchenie*—*obchenievistika* and *obchenielogiya*, which sound awkward and are not even considered as candidates for the field’s name.

**TOWARDS THE DISCIPLINE OF COMMUNICATION IN RUSSIA**

According to R. Craig, every disciplinarity has intellectual, professional-institutional, and socio-cultural components. In other words, the resources for constructing and legitimizing every discipline are found in three contexts: “intellectual contexts of classic and current texts, theories, problems, methods and modes of analysis; institutional contexts of universities and departments, professional organizations, funding agencies, publishers, libraries, databases, and associated classification schemes; and sociocultural contexts of ordinary concepts and practices more or less deeply ingrained in the cultural belief systems and habits of the general society” (Craig, 2008, pp. 8–9).

**Socio-cultural Context**

First, the discipline must address social problems and practices that are regarded as important by the general public (Craig, 2008, p. 16). The name itself used for ‘communication’ (*obchenie* and *kommunikatsiya*) determines the ways in which cultural practices are conducted and social roles are viewed, as well as how communication is theorized, researched, and taught.

The term *obchenie* is regarded as one of the key concepts of the Russian language and culture (Wierzbicka, 2001). This accounts for the difficulties encountered by translators when
they try to render in English such phrases as lyublyu obchat'sya [люблю общаться] or prikhodi vecherkom, poobchaemsya [приходи вечерком, пообщаемся]. The relevance of obchenie for Russians is further proved by the data obtained by M. Shamanova who has discovered 2,659 Russian lexical units and 1,107 idioms belonging to the corresponding semantic field (2015).

It is no surprise, then, that this word is often used to justify the exclusive and unique character of interaction between Russians. Obchitel’nost’ (sociability) is viewed as one of the leading traits of the Russian national character (Ter-Minasova, 2000, p. 150), embracing such qualities as openness, intensity, the ability to establish meaningful contact with interlocutors, the easiness of interacting with strangers, and intolerance of silence (see: Sterin, 2001, p. 205). This view is consistent with the research conducted by D. Carbaugh who identifies three fundamental cultural dimensions along which “Russian conversation, as Russian life in general, is conducted”: public/private, shallow/deep, and taciturn/voluble. Public discourse takes place in the presence of outsiders or outside influence, whereas private discourse with insiders goes much deeper, when “the passionate and sentimental dimensions of lives are given a voice through what is called a broad-spirited (shirokaya dusha), heart-to-heart or soul-to-soul (po dusham) kind of exchange” (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 100).

The Russian concept of zadushevnnoe obchenie (soul-to-soul exchange) can be seen as a unique cultural practice with the notion of dusha (soul) as its core. Much has been written about the mysterious nature of the Russian dusha, which N. Berdyaev explains by its irrationality and closeness to nature (1990, pp. 235–236). A detailed analysis of this concept can be found in S. Ter-Minasova’s book Language and Intercultural Communication (2000, pp. 161–169). American authors who write about the Russian dusha are evidently dissatisfied with the English equivalent ‘soul’; for instance, D. Carbaugh refers to it as symbolic of a model person—“not just a distinct physical body with a rational and mindful self within,” but “a kind of cosmological connectedness, <...> a transcendent moral (good or bad), deeply feeling, and distinctly inter-human realm” (Carbaugh, 1993, p. 194). He juxtaposes the concepts ‘soul’ and ‘self’ as the key notions characterizing communication in Russia and the US and argues that for Americans “the presentation of ‘self’ is a preferred communication activity, with statements of personal experiences, thoughts and feelings counted as proper ‘self’ presentations.” In Russian discourse, on the other hand, “we find <...> a soulful collective conversing on the basis of morality, orienting to the possible virtues of their social life.” Russians, he concludes, might find Americans “soulless (lacking morality, commitment and loyalty to the common good), just as the latter might sense the former as mindless (lacking factual information and analytic abilities)” (Carbaugh, 1993, pp. 194–196).

When it comes to obchenie, Russians generously share their time, money, food, and drink with others participating in the process. The typical Russian cultural practices involving soul-to-soul conversations usually take place during parties with sit-down dinners, rather than standing receptions because, as L. Visson indicates, the idea of ‘getting together’ is when everybody is sitting around the table with a common conversation going on. The idea itself of talking to someone and then moving on to another interlocutor contradicts the concept of a long and soul-to-soul exchange (Visson, 1999, c. 162). Y. Richmond remarks that in order “to go beyond casual conversation with Russians, it is necessary to sit down with them, eat and drink together. The best conversations with Russians occur <...> at the kitchen table” (Richmond, 1996, p. 142).

Another common cultural practice is the so called vagonnoe obshchenie, i.e., communication in a train compartment between interlocutors when at least one of them relates the innermost and intimate details of his/her life to the other(s). A train compartment is a place where Anna Karenina’s love story with Vronsky begins; where Pozdnyshev from The Kreutzer Sonata by Leo Tolstoy tells complete strangers about the way he murdered his wife (see: Shapovalov, 2001, p. 439); where Alyokhin in Chekhov’s story About Love is seeing his friend’s wife off at a station and suddenly realized how unnecessary, petty, and deceptive everything except their love is.
Vagonnoe obchenie is often asymmetrical: one is a speaker and the other—an attentive listener. The prerequisites for such communication are mutual trust, high degree of empathy on the part of the listener, and the agreement between the two about the appropriateness and acceptability of the information the speaker is relating. The confessor must be ready to take the risk of revealing the intimate details of one’s life. The justification is usually the anonymity of the communicators and small probability of future contacts. They believe their secrets are safe—their listener will be lost in the wide spaces of Russia, and they will never again see each other. This probably accounts for the fact that, even in spite of low interpersonal trust in modern Russian society, vagonnoe obchenie is still a common cultural practice.

A parallel could be drawn between obchenie and kommunikatsiya, on the one hand, and the ritual and the transmission views of communication, proposed by J. Carey (1989), on the other hand. It can be argued that obchenie highlights the maintenance of community and fellowship (in time), while kommunikatsiya focuses on the extension of messages (through space). It is known that Carey’s emphasis on time and history carried a nostalgic charge and “was about correcting the ‘spatial bias’ of US communication research and policy through an awareness and analysis of (cultural) history” (Hay, 2006, p. 31). In its turn, a stronger focus on kommunikatsiya in Russia seems to indicate an increasing importance of not only achieving ‘cultural stability’ but extending it further through space, dramatically intensified by the well-known processes of glasnost’ (openness). Communication now comes to be understood not only as the associating of people who share similar values engaged in soul talk, but increasingly as a more mediated, and mass, process. It is in this light that the study of communication has been lately focusing on such socio-cultural practices as PR, advertising, public debates, elections, image making, territory branding, negotiation, etc. Often the study of such practices is labeled kommunikativnye tekhnologi (communication technologies).

Intellectual Context

Historically, the study of communication (both as obchenie and kommunikatsiya) has been conducted in Russia predominantly from linguo-semiotic, psychological, and philosophical perspectives.

Speech communication as an academic discipline is first of all identified with public speaking (cf. Beebe, Kharcheva, & Kharcheva, 1998). Rhetoric had been taught at Russian educational institutions since the 16th century, originally as part of religious education. M. Lomonosov’s famous Brief Guidebook to Eloquence was written in 1748 and was followed by I. Rizhsky’s Rhetoric Study (1796), A. Mrezlyakov’s Brief Rhetoric (1809), and N. Koshansky’s textbook General Rhetoric (1829), among others. In the late 19th–early 20th century the study of rhetoric was substituted by slovesnost’ (speech study). The years after the October Revolution of 1917 saw the rise of rhetoric and ideological propaganda. As M. Hazen writes (2008), a number of scholars “investigated the presence of speech activity and the use of rhetorical principles in the Soviet Union and discovered that they were practiced and taught by the Party. Remington (1988) described the ‘mighty complex’ of institutions conducting ideological work including the media, the agitation-propaganda establishment, education, science, culture and the corps of professional ideological cadres . . .” (p. 463). Thus, “when the NCA’s Committee on International Discussion and Debate established a debate exchange with the Soviet Union, it was with the Student Government Association of the Komsomol because that was where young people with training in public discourse could be found” (Hazen, 2008, p. 463). M. Hazen additionally notes the role of philology that “has provided a home for Russian considerations of classical rhetoric . . ., paralleling elements of the American speech stream” (Hazen, 2008, p. 464). Further, one should not overlook
The journalism courses offered in Russian universities where speech communication is a cornerstone of most curricula. Modern-day scholars who have made important contributions to the field of journalism are I. Blokhin (social and ethnocultural dimensions of journalism), A. Prohkorov (journalism, democracy, ethics, and mass consciousness), S. Korkonosenko (theory of journalism and mass communication), E. Vartanova (mass media, information society, media management), L. Fedotova (advertisement genres, public relations), and A. Fyodorov (media education).

Speech communication in Russia has always been understood broadly, addressing discourse, conversation, narration, etc. It is somewhat similar to the area of Language and Social Interaction (LSI) the way it is conceptualized in the Western (mostly US) tradition. The interest to communicative characteristics of speech has a long history in the Russian philological tradition (see: Annushkin, 2014). Recently, the Institute of Language Study at the Russian Academy of Sciences established the Scientific Center of Theory and Practice of Communication, named after academician Yu. Stepanov whose publications, including 14 books and over 250 articles, are still waiting to be translated into English.

What is well known in the West, of course, is M. Bakhtin’s pioneering work on speech genres (1986), which is critical for understanding the dialogic nature of communication. For more on the relevance of Bakhtin’s theory of language and discourse for human science, including the concepts of polyglossia, heteroglossia, and new view on the parody of language, see Ivanov, 2008.

While Bakhtin’s focus on speech was mostly from the perspectives of literary theory, ethics, and philosophy of language, his work spans many disciplines and is sometimes conceptualized as semiotic in nature (e.g. Mandelker, 1995). However, there are a number of Russian scholars who directly studied language as a form of speech communication from semiotic positions, and, first of all, cultural semiotics. Following the groundbreaking doctrine of Russian Formalism, wide-ranging research had been conducted on the nature of language as a communication system of signs. In 1964 the first of a series of ‘summer schools’ was held in Kääriku, Estonia, under the sponsorship of Tartu University. Its significance can be compared to the impact that famous Macy Conferences had on the development of cybernetics and systems view of communication. The semiotic movement, which mostly had (especially initially) a structural orientation, came to be known as the Moscow-Tartu School (see: Matejka, Shishkoff, Suino, & Titunik, 1977). Its leader Yu. Lotman was instrumental in establishing in 1964 the journal Sign Systems Studies (initially established as Труды по знаковым системам). Originally (until 1992) a Russian-language series, the journal is now published in English and is the oldest international semiotic periodical.

The work by Lotman himself cannot be overestimated and is deservedly well known in the West. Influenced, in part, by R. Jakobson’s views of language in relation to other communication systems (1968), Lotman developed the cultural semiotics of secondary modeling systems into the overarching framework of semiosphere. As he wrote in one of his letters, “Only the antecedence of semiotic sphere makes a message a message” (quoted by: Kull, 2005, p. 178). Today, it is difficult to imagine the field of communication studies in Russia without a strong semiotic tradition.

While the study of communication from linguo-semiotic positions mostly focuses on pragmatic aspects of discourse and cultural texts (including non-verbal), the psychologically oriented research looking into the cognitive and neurobiological mechanisms underpinning communication has been conducted in Russia for at least a century. For instance, A. Shakhmatov, a famous Russian linguist, used the word ‘communication’ (kommunikatsiya) to refer to the psychological foundation of a future utterance (1925–27). Of course, it is Vygotskian perspectives on the relationships between communication and cognition that have been most influential not only in Russia but also in the West (Wertsch, 1985). L. Vygotsky has been one of the most important thinkers who demonstrated the intricate interconnections between thought and language in human action and development.
Another thinker famous for his research into human cognitive development and its cultural and social foundations was A. Luria whose works have been translated into English (1982). Less known are the ideas of A. Leontiev (1903–79). It is common to speak of the legacy left to us by these scholars who all saw communication not as a simple transfer of messages but as a complex cognitive activity (cf. Alanen & Pöyhönen, 2007). Inspired by this legacy, much work has been done in Russia; one can mention the research by B. Lomov and his colleagues who, in the 1970s, started a comprehensive program of studies into how people interact by making use of various psychological qualities, functions, and states. The results of these studies have been published in four volumes put out by the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The latest, *Communication and Cognition*, came out in 2007 (Kharitonov, 2008). Also, the Russian field of psycholinguistics developed on the basis of Vygotsky–Luria–Leontiev’s legacy and focuses on the relationship between communication and the mind. In fact, one of the earliest centers of the study of communication in Russia was the Sector of Psycholinguistics and Theory of Communication at the Institute of Language Study at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, established over half a century ago. Overall, these ideas could shed new and important light on the nature of communication as it is usually conceptualized within the socio-psychological and socio-cultural traditions (Craig, 1999), where the names of Vygotsky, Luria, Leont’ev et al. are seldom mentioned.

Along similar lines, several more approaches to communication need to be mentioned. *Linguistic conceptology* (Karasik, 2004; Lihachev, 1980, 1997; Popova & Sternin, 2007; Slyshkin, 2004; Stepanov, 1997) is a specifically Russian research area closely connected with communication as a cognitive activity. The Russian language differentiates between two terms: *ponyatiye* (concept 1—equivalent to English ‘concept’ in its most common philosophical meaning) and *kontsept* (concept 2) defined as a unit of mentality reflecting the intersection of language and culture and possessing three major aspects: notion, image, and value. A well-developed methodology, which draws out clearly on the implications of these findings, has allowed Russian scholars to research such concepts as *money, love, life, space, property, privacy*, etc. and discover the similarities and differences in the way they are represented in human interaction in the context of different cultures.


Several other areas studying the interrelation of language and culture also include: ‘linguo-ostranovedenie’—literally ‘linguo-country study’ (Vereshhagin & Kostomarov, 1980); ethnolinguistics (Gerd, 1995; Tolstoy, 1995); and ‘linguocul’turologiya’—the Russian equivalent of linguistic anthropology (Karasik, 2009; Kulinich, 1999; Maslova, 2001; Telija, 1996; Vorob’ev, 1997).

Cross-cultural topics deal with communication both within the country and across its borders, investigating the Russian worldview (Zaliznjak, Levontina, & Shmelev, 2005), intercultural family communication (Leontovich & Yakusheva, 2013), the Russian view of gender in British and American cultures (Bodrova, Gritsenko, Lalaetina, & Sergejeva, 2011), the Russian and German communicative styles (Koptelzwa & Kulikova, 2011), the US–Russian intercultural communication (Leontovich, 2005), etc. The popularity of intercultural communication accounts for a huge number of publications, conferences, seminars, but also contributes to the boundaries of the field becoming too fuzzy.
From the philosophical perspectives, communication is studied as a cornerstone of human experience, displaying a strong interest in ontological issues (Kalmykov, 2007; Kostina, 2004). Russian philosophers see communication in terms of ‘cosmism,’ ‘all-unity,’ etc. One can mention N. Berdiaev with his concepts of ‘nothingness’ and ‘creativity’ as part of human existence; P. Chaadaev whose ideas gave rise to the continuing debate between Westernizers and Slavophiles; N. Fedorov, the founder of Russian ‘cosmism’ and the doctrine of the ‘resurrection of the dead’; V. Soloviev, one of the most systematic of all Russian philosophers promoting the concept of ‘all-unity’; and P. Florensky, a most original philosopher of Orthodox rituals and universal symbolism (see: Epstein, 1996). The fears of Russian philosophy coming to an end (cf. DeBlassio, 2014) do not bear well for the study of communication. Such fears, however, seem to be exaggerated, cf. a number of attempts recently made to conceptualize communication from philosophical perspectives (Klyagin & Shipunova, 2013; Klyukanov, 2012).

As can be seen from the above, the study of communication in Russia has been developing mostly in the realm of the humanities. This seems to be in contrast to the development of communication research in the West and especially US where “clearly the coin of the realm is still foundationalist studies, whether empirical or analytical, more than doubling the work done from a reflexive position” (Anderson & Baym, 2004, p. 599). The foundational/empirical “aspires to the mantle of ‘science’” (Anderson & Baym, 2004, p. 593). Just as (some of) the US scholars try to address the social scientific bias by addressing communication from more humanistic perspectives, in Russia, where perhaps too much reflection had been done over decades, the study of communication today is being more shaped within the social science tradition. A telling example is how ‘communicology’ is conceptualized in Russia and US. For example, the new Russian scientific journal Communicology positions itself as focusing “on the theory and practice of public relations, media and communications, the basic theory of communication, sociology of mass communications, image making skills, as well as problems of formation of non-material values (image, publicity, brand, reputation, etc.)” (About the journal “Communicology,” 2013). In its turn, Communicology in US, as an alternative to the mainstream research, is presented as “the study of human discourse in all of its semiotic and phenomenological manifestations of embodied consciousness and practice in the world of other people and their environment” (The Discipline of Communicology; see also: Ich-er-Catt & Catt, 2010).

Thus, there exists a challenge of integrating the heritage of Russian studies of communication, informed by philology, linguistics, and psychology, with the new research more focused on messages, outcomes, and social influence (cf. Kashkin, 2014).

Institutional Context

The Russian Communication Association organized in 2000 to promote communication research, education, and its practical social application in Russia has been active in developing collaboration with international professional organizations such as the National Communication Association (NCA), International Communication Association (ICA), the Eurasian Communication Association of North America (ECANA), the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), the Polish Communication Association (Polskie Towarzystwo Komunikacji Społecznej PTKS), and others. Its biannual conferences have been successful in bringing together representatives of different disciplines within the field and helping them acquire ‘a common language.’ Other activities include the annual book competition, regional conferences, information sent out to the RCA members about events essential for the development of communication studies, etc.
At the same time, the study of communication in Russia is not yet well established institutionally, and its disciplinary status is not universally recognized.

Today’s generation of scholars have not been trained in communication studies as a major, moreover, the discipline is not included in the list of majors officially acknowledged by the Russian Ministry of Education (with the exception of Intercultural Communication). Russian communication scholars have all grown out of different disciplines, such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, journalism, computer science, etc. and are still torn between those fields. As noted by V. Kaslkin (2014), in 2013 the Russian eLibrary and Science Index reviewed 7,937 academic journals. Only 46 of them contained ‘communication’ in their names: 24 journals were from the domain of telecommunications and radio physics; six belonged to economics, marketing, culture, sociology, or education; and 16 journals were from the domain of linguistics and intercultural communication studies.

It is interesting that until recently the Russian field of communication studies did not have a name of its own, which would unite its different aspects of research under the same label. Ten years ago when the term kommunikativistika started gaining momentum, many scholars winced when they heard it. However, because of the lack of another adequate term, which would combine both theory and practice of communication, it has now been almost universally adopted, though it has not yet acquired a full terminological status.

Russian universities must conform to the ‘State Standards of Higher Professional Education,’ which outline the main disciplines and their contents. They consist of three main components: federal (obligatory), regional (university), and elective. While for most degree programs communication studies do not fall into the obligatory part of the curriculum, universities have the freedom of including it in the latter two categories.


**CONCLUSION**

The present chapter provided an account of how communication is conceptualized, studied, and taught in Russia. That account was guided by a cultural approach to the development of communication as a field and a discipline. It was shown how those developments, while taking place against the background of ‘non-Western’ communication research, reveal an internal struggle unique to Russia.

It was shown how Russian perspectives on communication are first of all manifested in two key terms—obchenie and kommunikaciya, the former associated with human contact and interpersonal interaction, while the latter—with information exchange and communication technologies. The steps taken toward the discipline of communication in Russia were discussed in the light of sociocultural, intellectual, and institutional contexts. The interrelationship was demonstrated between the terms—obchenie and kommunikaciya—and the ways in which cultural practices are conducted and social roles are viewed. The intellectual traditions of communication study in Russia were presented to focus on linguo-semiotic, psychological, and philosophical perspectives. And it was noted that the disciplinary status of communication study in Russia is
not yet universally recognized although much work is being done to that end, including the pro-
motion of communication research and education by the Russian Communication Association.

It remains to be seen if the communication studies in Russia can integrate into one discipline
those (increasingly numerous) fields one finds in university curricula, such as rhetoric, stylistics,
mass communication, media ecology, public relations, pragmalinguistics, etc. Whatever new
developments we witness in the study of communication in Russia, it is important that the poten-
tial for understanding the discipline more successfully depends on “productive argumentation
across the diverse traditions” (Craig, 1999, p. 120). It is such a dialogical–dialectical
approach that can help us to conceptualize the nature of communication both as theoretical metadiscourse
and socio-cultural practice in its diverse manifestations of everyday life.

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