

Chapter 2

Dialogic Relations and Interactions as an Alternative to Power

Abstract This chapter presents a theoretical debate on the concept of communicative acts in dialogue with Searle's speech acts theory and Habermas' use speech acts in his theory of communicative action. I discuss how a theory of communicative acts conceives the existence of both power and dialogic interactions within the social structure, as well as other dimensions of the communication such as body language or accounting for more than speakers' intentions. In a second part, this theory is linked to the communicative methodology of research and exemplified through CREA's research with the Roma people. While research about the Roma have been traditionally dominated by power interactions, communicative research with them is based on an inter-subjective dialogue. Finally, I draw some reflections to continue advancing the development of transformative scientific knowledge that can contribute so social change.

Keywords Communicative acts • Dialogic and power interactions • Communicative methodology

The increasing importance of dialogic dynamics in current societies leads social sciences to also turn dialogic (Aubert & Soler, 2007) in the research and production of knowledge. Drawing from Habermas' contributions to this communicative shift, but also to other theoretical developments in the dialogic perspective that overcome the limitations of the Habermasian approach, we developed the communicative methodology of research. This methodology is based on the egalitarian dialogue between researchers and researched subjects: they are not the same, but they should bring their different knowledge to the dialogue on equal basis. Researchers contribute the knowledge available in the scientific community about the topic studied and social actors the knowledge from their lived experience in order to dialogically analyze reality.

The dialogic relation between researchers and researched subjects, even when researchers have very good intentions, is not free from power interactions. And this is especially manifested when we conduct research with people from vulnerable groups, such as Roma, unemployed or women who suffered abuse. We needed to

analyze in depth the nature of communication and interactions and had to go beyond the important contributions from speech acts' theory.

In the first part of this chapter I will explain CREA's development of the concept of *communicative acts* and the difference between our perspective and that of Austin, Searle and Habermas. On the one hand, they did not consider non-verbal communication, nor feelings or emotions beyond rational argumentation. On the other hand, we understand differently consensus, coercion and sincerity in the analysis of an utterance, in a situation of interaction, in a particular social context. I will also elaborate on the conceptualization of a dialogic relationship, within the framework of communicative acts, in contrast to an individual's validity claims.

In a second part of the chapter, this theoretical debate will be linked to the communicative methodology of research. I will exemplify the communicative approach through CREA's research with the Roma people, a field of study that has been traditionally dominated by power claims. Inter-subjective egalitarian dialogue is sought in order to conduct communicative research, while taking into account the existence of difficulties encountered along the way—such as power interactions from researchers over researched-subjects, or identified within the researched communities themselves. All these reflections will be always oriented to face the challenges of the research process and continue advancing the development of novel and transformative scientific knowledge that can enable social change.

2.1 Austin, Searle, Habermas and CREA¹

Within certain societies dialogic processes are becoming increasingly important. What Habermas calls *power claims* are being replaced by *validity claims*, or to use CREA's concepts, *power interactions* are being replaced with *dialogic interactions*. Years ago, whenever a patient went to the doctor, he or she would simply accept the doctor's diagnosis and treatment. Today, it is very common among patients to compare the doctor's opinion with existing information they have had access to either online or from other professionals or patients. To manage this situation, doctors are required to engage in dialogue and provide arguments that justify the certainty of their diagnosis and the evidence supporting the suitability of the treatment. Therefore, relationships between patients and doctors decreasingly rely on the power obtained by the status of "doctor" and increasingly rely on the information and arguments that both provide to the dialogue. The same happens in other fields such as in sociology.

Actually, these processes are occurring in diverse social areas and across the world, making societies increasingly dialogic. Obviously, power relations have not

¹An earlier version of this first part of the chapter has been previously published in an article that I co-authored with Ramon Flecha in the journal *Signos*: "Desde los actos de habla de Austin a los actos comunicativos. Perspectivas desde Searle, Habermas y CREA" [(2010), Special Issue 43(2), 363-375].

disappeared in dialogic societies. As Harvard Professor Rima Rudd has demonstrated, doctors tend to use more technical language when talking to patients with low academic and socioeconomic status, and they use more lay language when addressing patients with high academic and socioeconomic status (Rudd, McCray, & Nutbeam, 2012). Nevertheless, doctors now need to provide more evidence than in the past, and therefore, their relations with patients are based less on power and more on dialogue than before.

Children are also experiencing these changes in households. Five decades ago, Spanish households had living rooms with a sitting area that usually included one- and three-seats sofas. The father occupied the one-seater, which was placed directly facing the TV. At that time in Spain, the father was referred to as the “head of the family”. He would tell his 17-year-old daughter to be back home every night before 10 p.m., and she usually obeyed without a reply. While the father was watching TV, his wife cooked dinner; there was rarely sharing of housework, not even an argument about it. The power claims of the “head of the family” were very much rooted in that context.

In those same households, the reality is very different today. Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, streets and bars in the cities are full of 17-year-old girls; these public spaces are no longer predominantly male. Fathers, who are not referred to as the “head of the family” anymore, do not even bother asking their daughters to be back by 10 p.m. and if they did, most daughters would ignore them. Housework has begun to be shared among men and women, arguments arise when this is not the case, and there is often criticism of those who do not do any domestic work. The sofa may still be oriented facing the TV, and the father may continue sitting on it, but he may decide with his daughter which TV channel to watch—or he may be alone while his daughter is chatting on the Internet in her room.

Sociology cannot deny these realities lived today. Sometimes, authors tend to approach the analysis of social reality with opaque glasses due to former assumptions from their own past or from folk concepts that have not been empirically validated. Spending too much time doing so is a waste of time. For instance, while gender inequalities still persist in households, a valid and useful analysis of social reality cannot be performed without analyzing the differences between how the power claims of “the head of the family” that once worked are being increasingly questioned by other family members (like their children). These power claims—which previously guaranteed some type of order through oppression and sexism—are partly replaced by validity claims that guarantee a more dialogic and less unequal order than before. If an agreement is not reached, the questioned power claims are replaced not by an agreement but rather by permanent conflict. This is what happens when couples quarrel about their share of domestic work or about differing assessments on the quality of each partner’s domestic work. The picture has become much more complex and it requires innovative theoretical and methodological approaches to fully grasp its most embedded nuances.

Sociology—along with other social sciences—has made important contributions to the advancement of societies toward these dialogic dynamics, for example, by analyzing the transition from feudal to modern societies or more recently, analyzing

current steps toward deliberative democracies (Benhabib, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Elster, 1998; Fung & Wright, 2003—among others). However, sociologists still can make significant contributions to the sociological analyses of the differences between power dominated relationships and validity dominated relationships (following Habermas' concepts). However sociology, including Habermas' theory of communicative action, has not yet sufficiently contributed to analyze in depth, for instance, how communication between intellectuals and grassroots people, between doctors and patients, or between parents and children, is evolving. This gap in the literature is even more important and urgent to fulfil if we consider that these relations are connected to other issues that sociology needs to analyze, such as distinguishing between a free sexual relationship and sexual harassment, between human rights defined on an egalitarian way or as an imposition of one culture upon others, or between real workplace democracy and an apparent democracy in which important decisions only made by capitalists. Sociology would not benefit from its analytical and transformative potential if it does not identify these distinct situations, which is required for an understanding of most of the situations that take place in dialogic societies.

The philosophy of language has made and still makes many important contributions that can help to overcome this gap in dialogue with sociologists, in an attempt to better capture these social changes. In this section, we discuss contributions by John Austin and John Searle on speech acts, how Jürgen Habermas engaged with their theory in the Theory of Communicative Action, and what is still missing from their accounts. We will then engage on these authors' contributions and limitations to explain how the analysis of communicative acts can help to distinguish and understand the aforementioned situations.

Regardless of Austin's argument about his concept of *speech acts* or his almost unanimously rejected classification, his idea of "how to do things with words" is extremely clarifying both for dialogic society and for people's lives. According to Austin, words have a transcendental role not only in communication but also in the very construction of social reality. Beyond the traditional distinction between language and words, Austin (1962) developed pragmatic linguistics with his concepts of *locutionary*, *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* speech acts, and thus provided the theoretical framework for the study of the relationship between meaning, intention and the resulting action. The locution is the utterance, the illocution includes the intention of the speaker and the perlocution is the resulting action. For example, if I say "Let's prevent immigrants from living in our community!", the utterance is the locution, the intention indicated by saying it is the illocution and the resulting action (or in other words, the avoidance (or not) of this situation) is the perlocution. Searle (1969) later developed and corrected Austin's theory of speech acts, for instance, by saying that all speech acts are illocutionary because all of them include a speaker's intention and that there are not such perlocutionary acts but rather perlocutionary effects of the speech act.

Searle has criticized Habermas for his mistaken interpretation of Austin's writings—for example, his mistake with respect to the concept of 'understanding' and the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary (Searle & Soler, 2004).

In Austin, understanding means that the intention in the utterance is understood by the listener. However, according to Habermas, understanding requires consensus, an interpretative agreement of the intention of the locution among those who participate in the communicative process. This means that the person to whom this utterance is addressed not only understands the speaker's intention but also agrees with it and shares that intention (using the former example, the listener agrees and shares the intention of the speech act of preventing immigrants from coming to the building). Searle harshly criticizes Habermas for using Austin's concept of understanding in such an improper way. In other words, he does not criticize Habermas for having a different concept of understanding but instead for attributing to Austin a concept that is the same as his own.

Searle also criticizes Habermas for not understanding his theory. He distances himself from Habermas, considering that consensus is a perlocutionary effect: it is neither part of the understanding nor part of the illocutionary act. This means that if the two persons (listener and speaker) reach a consensus about preventing the arrival of immigrants, this consensus is the result (i.e. the perlocutionary effect), which is different from both the understanding and the illocutionary act. The illocutionary act implies only that the speaker performs the utterance with the intention of preventing immigrants' arrival; the listener may or may not understand this intention. Understanding requires an additional condition, which is that the listener understands the speaker's intention, either agreeing with him or not. Consensus requires another condition, which is that the listener not only understands the intention but also shares and agrees with it. Habermas links understanding (including the consensus) to communicative action through illocutionary acts based on validity claims; the speaker's ultimate aim is an understanding of the listener, and not the imposition of his intention. Conversely, Habermas relates strategic action to perlocutionary acts, when the speaker's ultimate aim is not to reach an agreement but to impose his own claim and the speech act is used as a means to achieve this. Searle firmly criticizes Habermas for stating that he uses his conception of speech acts, when he has not truly understood the concept and thus uses it erroneously.

In our analysis of communication, we recognize Habermas' error when referring to Austin and Searle and that his associations are confusing. However, we sympathize with Habermas for his concern about the existence (or non-existence) of consensus in a given social action, something that is of great theoretical and practical importance both for society and for sociology. Through clarifying misunderstandings, I want to emphasize that these types of mistakes are more likely to occur when there is limited interdisciplinary debate among scholars.

Doing public sociology oriented to create knowledge to transform people's reality needs from promoting open and diverse conversations with scholars from different backgrounds and with different publics. This is the way of doing science that we have been promoting in CREA (which of course does not mean that other ways are not valid). However, the knowledge created involving different voices led researchers involved in the discussion to think and reflect more deeply about the point he or she wants to make, as well as one's opinion can be directly reinforced or

contraposed upon the other person involved in the discussion. In all, it was from this particular understanding and process that we developed our theory of communicative acts, a theory that attributes an important role to sociology in explaining human relationships in very different social domains. In this theory, what we call ‘dialogic interactions’ are based on illocutionary communicative acts, and ‘power interactions’ are based on perlocutionary communicative acts. While being aware that these concepts are not the ones used by Austin, we used the names of ‘illocutionary’ and ‘perlocutionary’ in the meaning conferred by Habermas. The intention of the former is to generate consensus, while the intention of the latter is to generate an action.

2.1.1 Speech Acts and Communicative Acts

A number of differences distinguish CREA’s concept of communicative acts and the speech acts studied by Austin, Searle and Habermas. Communicative acts include not only speech but also any sign of communication, such as body language, intonation or gestures. If a person thinks that a migrant girl does not want to participate in a game that includes physical contact because of her “oppressive” culture, the utterance “Why don’t you participate?” is an illocutionary speech act. It is not a simple neutral question, but rather a suggestion, and therefore it is illocutionary. However, we consider this to be a communicative act, not merely a speech act, because it uses a series of communication signs that are different from words (gestures, intonations, etc.) that indicate the speakers’ intention to create pressure on her to participate.

A second difference is that illocutionary communicative acts include consensus—while Austin’s approach includes only understanding. Searle (who does not adopt Austin’s position) considers consensus to be a perlocutionary effect. In our case, we think that the perlocutionary effect is not the consensus, but rather what we decide to do “by consensus”. For instance, a worker invites a female coworker to have a beer in a pub by performing an illocutionary communicative act, he is not aiming at having a beer or having sex, but to reach an agreement with her about having or not a beer and perhaps later, having or not sex. The consensus is part of the illocutionary act that we propose in a communicative and interactive context. What shapes the perlocutionary effects is what is agreed by means of consensus. If both people agree, having a beer will be the first perlocutionary effect, which could (or could not) have other effects. The communicative act continues to be illocutionary because illocutionary acts also have perlocutionary effects.

Searle does not use the concept of interaction, and for him, the illocutionary effect is in the speaker’s intention rather than in the consensus between the worker and his female colleague. From this perspective, if what the worker wants is to push for sex, if he achieves his goal by any means, he has achieved his intended proposal, and has thus reached the perlocutionary effect, which is the consensus. From a communicative approach, the goal is not to have a beer or not, or to have sex or not,

but rather to have whatever both people freely agree to do. Moreover, the consensus is not an effect achieved by one of the two persons, but it is rather constructed together. From our perspective, Searle misunderstands a given consensus with the action that is agreed upon a consensus. This is actually the crucial difference between the theory of speech acts and that of communicative acts, a difference that is also central in clarifying what is harassment and what is freedom in everyday interactions.

The third difference is that one of the conditions for illocutionary communicative acts, and not for perlocutionary acts, is lack of coercion. A search for consensus is not enough for a communicative act to be illocutionary: a consensus free of coercion is also needed. If the worker who asks to have a beer is known as a “winner” and he has put a reputation on the female coworker as “being hot”, she (although she prefers not to be in such a situation in a pub) feels coerced by signs of communication that are different from words that imply that a “no” might give her the image of being “a prude”. In this case, the female speaker says yes (thinking “at the end of the day, what difference does a beer make... if the situation changes later, I will say no”), but she feels coerced to do an action that she would not have wanted in a situation of free consensus. Additionally, imagine that the female belongs to a culture that is discriminated against, for example, a cultural group labeled as “repressive” in terms of women’s sexuality, this label not only contributes to legitimizing harassment by the male worker from the dominant culture but also increases the pressure on the woman from the minority culture.

The fourth difference is that sincerity is one of the prerequisites of illocutionary communicative acts but is not necessarily a prerequisite of perlocutionary acts. Searle criticized Habermas contending that perlocutionary effects can be explicit (not only part of hidden strategic action). However, in the case of illocutionary communicative acts, this is a requirement, not a possibility. In an illocutionary communicative act, sincerity is essential. For instance, if the female coworker asks the male who invited her to a beer, “is this a date?”, the answer will be “yes” or at least “as you wish”, for the female to clearly understand his intention and to avoid finding herself in an unwanted situation. If she does not want it, the man who has made the proposition does not want either to have sex with her or that the beer generates the context of a date. This would be illocutionary. However, in a perlocutionary communicative act his answer could be “no, this is not a date”, while planning to create later a situation that leads to accept something she does not want now. Deception becomes a way to impose pressure on the “beer date” that the female coworker does not want.

All that said, our differentiation between perlocutionary communicative acts and illocutionary communicative acts lies on the different roles played by action and consensus in each type of communicative act. The perlocutionary communicative act seeks action, with consensus as one possible means to perform an action, even if that consensus does not hold sincerity and implies achieving it through coercion. The illocutionary communicative act seeks consensus and action, but only if this is sincerely agreed upon without coercion. Whoever performs a perlocutionary communicative act with the utterance “Shall we have a beer?”, with the intention to later use

all types of means to have sex, pursues that objective regardless of the other person's wishes. However, who performs the illocutionary communicative act with the utterance "Shall we have a beer?" with the intention to have sex later, would like to have a beer only if the other person wishes to, and would not like such beer if the other person does not agree; and later he would like to have sex if the other person also wants but would not wish without agreement. Some might think this illocutionary approach is utopian and innocent, and might state this never happens in real life. However, such statement implies they never had a relationship based on sexual freedom because if they ever had one, they would not say that this position is impossible. They actually extrapolate (in a nonscientific manner) their own experiences and attitudes—including 'using coercion to reach your goals'—to a billion human beings. Fortunately, there are many people around the world who can state that relationships based on sexual freedom do exist and will continue to exist in the future.

The analysis of speech acts and communicative acts have an increasingly important role in society. From macro social realities such as international relations to micro realities such as a couple's intimacy, people continually perform and are affected by communicative acts. In some cases, no consensus is reached, thus the door is open to relationships that are decided through violence. Sometimes an instrumental goal is reached through coercion or threat, for example, declaring a war or firing somebody from his or her job. Sometimes the goal is consensus, which is reached free from coercion or threat. We need to distinguish these different communicative acts with increasing clarity and precision, to be able to understand the diversity of social relationships in current society. Without these analyses, it will be almost impossible to contribute to improving society.

2.1.2 The Desire for Imposition Generates Power Relationships, the Desire for Sharing Generates Dialogic Relationships

Like Weber,² CREA's dialogic approach understands that power exists when an actor within a social relationship has the power to impose his or her will regardless of the validity of his or her arguments. Power relationships are based on the physical or symbolic violence of an individual or collective subject that turns other subjects into instruments for the achievement of one's goals. Dictatorship and rape

²For Weber ([1922]1978, p. 53) *Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of a basis on which this probability rests.* As he very well qualified, all the imaginable qualities of a person and all sorts of possible constellations can place someone in a position of imposing his or her will in a given situation. People who argue that post-structuralism or post-modernism showed us that power can be everywhere have never read Weber nor the many authors that had already done these analyses before post-structuralists were even born. Weber ([1922]1978) also saw that power can be at the service of other goals (ideal or selfish) or just to enjoy the feeling of prestige that it provides.

are two clear examples of power relationships in which physical violence intervenes. Media manipulation or a boss' sexist attitudes and behaviors toward his subordinate are examples of power relationships in which symbolic violence intervenes. Power relationships were described and analyzed by Max Weber, who used this concept to conceptualize this social phenomenon as the ideal type. In CREA, we highlight the need to further conceptualize dialogic relationships, to study their typologies and the potentialities they provide for human emancipation.

Dialogic relationships are based on the communication that leads all involved subjects to freely share an action, agreement, feeling or desire. Democracy, freely agreed sexual relationships, or egalitarian dialogue in communicative research are some examples of dialogic relationships. In power-based relationships, power interactions prevail, as it is the case in dictatorships. However, being dialogic does not mean that relationships are free of power. Social structures are linked to power interactions associated to class, status and roles (think of a businessman, doctor, professor or a leader of a rock band). For instance, a person can be a businessman and be also friends with one of his female employees. The dialogic interaction (egalitarian friendship) can prevail over power interactions (hierarchical labor relationship), shaping a dialogic relationship between them. While this friendship is a dialogic relationship, it includes a power interaction linked to a social structure that divides people into employers and employees.

Ignoring or rejecting the fact that there are power interactions within dialogic relationships leads to an acritical concept of dialogue. Moreover, it hinders the ability to overcome its current limitations (for instance, in democracy). However, ignoring or rejecting the difference between power relationships—such as a dictatorship—and dialogic relationships—such as democracy (even when it includes power interactions such as media manipulations)—leads to relativism, weakened democracies and legitimized dictatorships.

Our perspective has both coincidences but also important differences with the Habermasian conception of power claims and validity claims.³ From our perspective, the concept of *validity claims* has three limitations that are overcome by using the concept of *dialogic relationships*, which includes (a) placing claims in social structure, (b) considering the ethics of responsibility and (c) accounting for both feelings and desires in the analyses.

(a) It is not enough to only consider the subjects' claims in analyzing the character of an interaction or a relationship. The entire set of elements involved in interaction processes, such as the influence of the social structure, are essential in the analysis and must be considered. For instance, if I am the friend of a person who works in my company, I can rely on validity claims to invite him or her to have a drink. It may be, however, that he or she feels uncomfortable about rejecting the proposal because I am the boss. It is not only *my claim* that shapes the type of

³Habermas develops deeply the concept of validity claims, but he does not treat power claims in the same way. For instance, *This internal relation between imperatives and statements of intention shows that the claim connected with imperatives is not a validity claim, a claim that could be criticized and defended with reason; it is a power claim* (Habermas 1987, II, 31).

relationship but also the consequences (intended or not) that the structures of our capitalist patriarchal system project onto our relationship. The concept of dialogic relationships accounts for both my claim, which generates a dialogic interaction, and our hierarchical structure, which generates an interaction of power. Therefore, this concept is useful to analyze and better understand many situations in our society such as to clarify when there is harassment (or not) in the workplace.

(b) We overcome another limitation by drawing on and extending Weberian ethics of responsibility. While from an ethics of intention the analysis is limited to my claim when inviting my worker to a drink, the Weberian ethics of responsibility widens the analysis to the overall consequences of the situation generated by that utterance, including the consequences provoked by the structures we discussed above (forgotten in the Habermasian analysis). Unlike Habermas, in dialogical procedural ethics, the emphasis is not only placed on the intentions (claims) but rather in the set of interactions manifested in each communicative act. Beyond Weber's ethics of responsibility, the emphasis is placed not only on the potential consequences of our acts but also on all the interactions within each relationship and each action. This includes claims and consequences as well as the entire set of interactions that occur in each relationship and each action.

(c) The concept of validity claim within Habermas' theory of argumentation leads to a reductionism that prioritizes the Apollonian dimension (rationality) and excludes the Dionysian dimension (emotions, feelings and desires) in human reality. We define dialogue as people's interactive use of all types of language (words, gestures, looks, caresses) with all types of meanings (intellectual, sexual, commercial). We thus refer to dialogue not only in terms of words but also in terms of body language.

The concept of communicative acts enables us to overcome the dualism that opposes speech and body language, intellect and emotions, soul and matter. Communicative acts include all dimensions of people, both what for some is the language of the mind and what for others is the language of the body. Communicative acts include words, tones of voice, looks, caresses, smells, likenesses, desires, emotions, feelings, etc. They may be separately considered for analytical purposes, but we must always consider they are interrelated in the social reality.

All in all, our perspective of dialogic relationships embedded in the conceptualization of communicative acts enables us to analyze the social reality by considering all types of interactions and their consequences on the transformation or reproduction of such reality. This perspective contributes to improving all aspects of the very research process, for instance, the communicative methodology used in our research projects. This methodology is based on the principle of egalitarian dialogue since the very beginning of the planning of the research proposal. The dialogue between the researchers and the 'research subjects' must be based on a dialogic relationship, while accounting for the existence of power interactions (different status between a university researcher and a non-university social actor) from responsibility ethics, and the meanings from non-verbal communication. Only being aware of the existence of both types of interactions—dialogic and power

based—in the relationship *researcher-researched subject*, it is possible to enhance an environment of egalitarian dialogue, and do research in a communicative way. Some of these considerations will be discussed in the next section, in relation to our research with the Roma people.

2.2 Egalitarian Dialogue and the Communicative Methodology of Research

The dialogic turn of sciences and society has implied significant changes in the understanding of reality (ontology and epistemology) and in the way in which social reality is studied scientifically (methodologically). In this sense, the move from objectivist to constructivist, socio-critical and communicative conceptions have led to the elaboration of the communicative methodology, which allows to unveil new realities, by contrasting the expert knowledge with the common sense of their lifeworlds. This contrast is embedded into an egalitarian dialogue which is a key concept in the analysis of social reality when conducted through the communicative methodology of research. By egalitarian dialogue, we meant the intersubjective dialogue that takes place among researchers and the people involved in the communities and the realities that are being studied. In this sense, researchers bring into this dialogue their scientific knowledge, and the ‘researched communities’ the knowledge from their lifeworlds (Gómez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011).

Together with democracy, freedom, equality and fraternity, egalitarian dialogue is something that is never fully attained, similarly to Weber’s ‘Ideal Types’ (1978). In the same sense, other sociologists take similar theoretical and methodological stands in their analysis of society. For instance, Wright (2010) uses the concept of ‘Real Utopias’ to show alternatives to capitalism and realities that are closer than others in achieving human emancipation. Of course, it is easy to demonstrate that these real utopias are far from perfect ideal types because inequalities do exist within these projects or social processes. It is clear that inequalities exist in every reality and that inequalities are greater in some realities than in others. One of the most pressing tasks of the social sciences is to analyze these different grades and types of inequality, to describe the strategies that have reduced them. In this line, from a normative perspective, democratic societies devote resources to promote sociologists that analyze how to progress towards making inequalities smaller as well as to tackle those challenges that become central in their core.

The use of the communicative methodology in our research about the Roma has been a central strategy for a proficient achievement of social and political impact. This was because the use of the communicative methodology in research involved assuming a set of epistemological principles that allow the shared construction of knowledge not about the Roma but with the Roma, being egalitarian dialogue a central one. Egalitarian dialogue allows to build trust with a community that was initially reluctant to collaborate with researchers or “anything” that would sound

similar to an academic hierarchy. As it will be explained, this is due to the role science has played in perpetuating rather than overcoming prejudices and stereotypes about the Roma. For decades, when this has occurred the Roma people have revolted, become enraged, and turned against that sociology and that type of knowledge (Flecha, 2014; Gómez & Munté, 2015). This claim is straightly linked to the critique on some exclusionary ways of doing research “on them”, that consider the Roma as mere objects of study.

Throughout more than twenty-five years of CREA researchers working with the most under-privileged Roma communities, it has been possible to show that some scholars have indeed contributed with valuable analytical studies and insights, thus to advance in the Roma integration across Europe. When this has been the case, the Roma have enthusiastically defended this type of sociology. Thus, when research has been conducted from the communicative methodology has allowed grassroots Roma to have a voice and to become active agents of the research process. Indeed, acknowledging the equal role of grassroots Roma individuals as active actors who are able of contributing with key knowledge derived from their lifeworlds to the research process does not involve that power interactions are completely avoided throughout the research. As seen in the theory of communicative acts, examples of these ‘distorted communications’ occur when we do research, but at the same time, is in these cases when we also rely either on the experience of trained researchers on the methodology who know how to re-conduct these situations or when we just let the very grassroots researched subjects to speak up.

As can be observed, through the communicative methodology, researchers and social actors bring different types of knowledge into their dialogues. Whereas sociologists bring the systemic knowledge developed by the scientific, the social actors participating in the research bring their knowledge from their experienced reality and the meanings of their own *lifeworlds* (Munté, Serradell, & Sordé, 2011). Thus, using the communicative methodology requires from researchers to go into the field acknowledging existing power interactions and stereotypes, as the only way of overcoming them is not ignoring but being aware of their existence. When this happens, the researcher has the possibility to engage in dialogue with other people (either researchers or researched subjects) about his or her biases in accessing knowledge and the influence it can have on his or her analysis of the social reality. However, in this process, scholars’ good intentions are not enough. Good intentions to engage in egalitarian dialogue between researchers and social actors do not break with the methodological gap that has traditionally been present in scientific research. Not only do researchers and subjects need to be willing to engage in egalitarian dialogue but they also need alternative structures and norms and a particular approach for organizing the research that ensures greater equity and practical mechanisms in place.

Communicative research provides the structures and approach through specific methodological strategies. On the one hand, it organizes the research ensuring the representation of the diversity of Roma voices, for instance, through the creation of an Advisory Committee, multicultural research teams or the inclusion of Roma researchers. On the other hand, it takes into account not just accomplishing

technical criteria (as it can be the “formal” inclusion of Roma researchers within the research process—this is not enough!) but also with the respect of the principles of the methodology: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, equality of differences, solidarity, creation of meaning, transformation, and instrumental dimension (Gómez, Latorre, Sanchez, & Flecha, 2006). In all, the communicative methodology moves from an ethics of intention to a Weberian ethics of responsibility, the latter characterized by a commitment to the consequences of interaction. Similarly, Freire (1970) stressed egalitarian dialogue between educators and excluded people and proposes accordingly the possibility of social transformation from below. He acknowledged all human are transformative beings, regardless of their cultural background, a possibility that comes to reality through dialogic action.

Analyzing the social reality with the lenses of the communicative approach allows us, researchers, to tackle and approach daily life situations from a non-biased view or at least a less biased one, as it provides us from tools to counteract our preconceived opinions. This has been of major importance when we have conducted research about Roma people and labor market, for instance, in the FP5 Workaló project (will be described later) or the Spanish RTD project Callí Butipen (CREA, 2002–2004), focused on the Roma women access to employment. For a researcher with preconceived stereotypes, it could be easy to declare gender inequality and domination when conducting ethnography in a market shoe-parade in which the woman is the seller and the man is watching. At first sight, one could argue, following the existing stereotypes in which many sociologists fall when researching the Roma, that Romani women are dominated by their men. However, when the researcher engages in egalitarian dialogue with them and asks questions, she realizes that the woman is the seller because of a market strategy: most customers in the market are women and it is better that the man rather oversees stock and logistics. At the end of the day, the man asks the woman which types of shoes he should replace because she knows the customers’ preferences and trends much better than him. This example illustrates how the communicative approach helps to understand better the reality, beyond our own stereotypes.

The consideration of these principles is even more important when the research aims to find new patterns of labor inclusion as it was the case of both Workaló and Callí Butipen research. If we had approached the community with preconceived ideas regarding the Roma culture (women are subdued to male, male are so chauvinists and do not want to work, etc.), these studies would have had very negative consequences that would have been reported by many Roma organizations as arguing (as many studies have done) that the market is part of Roma culture (Flecha, Vargas, & Dávila, 2004). However, as a result of approaching the community by means of an egalitarian dialogue, and also because in both cases we counted with an Advisory Committee formed by Roma representatives, we concluded that Roma people worked in factories during the industrial society and many of them moved to the market primarily because of the oil crisis and the subsequent rise of unemployment caused by neoliberal reforms. Ethnic discrimination in access to the labor market became more common, and one solution found by many Roma was to create a market stall.

Thus, ensuring an egalitarian dialogue among the researcher and the researched subjects is a *must* criteria for making the communicative methodology work in scientific research oriented to reach not only scientific impact but also political and social impact.

2.3 Overcoming Stereotypes and Ethnocentrism

Traditional research following an objectivist conception, conditioned by reproductionist or structuralist approaches, saw the Roma as objects of the research, and it ended up being damaging for the Roma public image (Touraine, Flecha, & Wieviorka, 2004). Subjective conceptions of research have included the voices of the subjects, but often the Roma have no say on how they end up being portrayed, revealing deep misunderstandings. Indeed, the rejection by most of the Roma community of this type of research that does not consider their voices has grown stronger, especially because such studies conceptualize them as passive agents not only in society but also in the research process. Professor Ian Hancock (1988), a Roma linguist at the University of Texas at Austin, reacted by radically positioning himself against the type of ethnocentrist research that ignores Roma voices. Along the same lines, Rose (1983), notes that “some researchers try to legitimate our forced illiteracy stating that illiteracy is part of our cultural identity” (p. 23). Hence, the communicative methodology, different from participatory research or action research, does not only include Roma voices in the study, but it engages with Roma people in reflecting about the knowledge provided by the scientific community.

Studies of the Roma that do not consider Roma participation are similar to past studies of women that were conducted without taking the women into account, or studies of African-Americans exclusively conducted by whites, which tend to reproduce the stereotypes recreated and reinforced by the white media. This fact was denounced in the United States by many black scholars, such as W.E.B. du Bois and St. Clair Drake, who challenged the presence of racism and stereotypes in research and promoted the creation of African-American studies in the United States.

In the case of the Roma, however, racist statements continue to be included in books, and stereotypes are published as part of a pseudoscience. We can find statements that contribute to the reproduction of stereotypes about the Roma in the works of several authors. One example of this appears in a book by geneticist Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and his son Francesco. In the Italian and Spanish versions of the book *The Great Human Diasporas: The History of Diversity and Exclusion*, the authors associate Roma people with delinquency—supposedly after conducting a historical review—without no scientific basis, thus reproducing racist stereotypes. The editors probably did not allow the father and son to publish the same chapter with these racist statements in the English edition:

The survival of the individuals of the group depends on a few legal activities (...) and many illegal and parasitic ones such as theft, prostitution and begging. The latter has become a specialized activity that includes the renting of children, exhibited by their alleged mothers to soften the hearts of passersby and ask for their alms. Must we tolerate and even protect a culture of robbers and beggars? However, what else can they do?⁴ (Cavalli-Sforza & Cavalli-Sforza, 1993, p. 362).

Unfortunately, some self-appointed experts in Roma issues are sociologists, not biologists or geographers. By presenting their own stereotypes as sociological research, they damage not only the Roma people but also the prestige of our science. Fortunately, their disavowal from the sociological research community has been recognized by both the Roma people and the general population, thus differentiating sociology from the stereotypes that some people disseminate as part of it.

Other stereotypes about the Roma are related to sexism and how Romani women are portrayed as subordinated and passive by scholars. For instance, some authors have written about the supposed impossibility of Roma children to recognize female authority in schools as a result of the incompatibility of such authority with the Roma culture and identity, considered to be male-chauvinist (Fernández Enguita, 1999, p. 127). Along similar lines, forced marriages have been discussed in many instances not as a consequence of poverty, marginalization or the situation resulted from the intersection of axes of inequalities as some well-known associations report (e.g. ERRC, Romani C.R.I.S.S., UNICEF) rather as mere backward traditions of the ‘Gypsy’ culture, which made women to ‘succumb into a system of subjugation carefully constructed around gender-imbalanced entrenchment’ (Timmerman, 2004, p. 496).

Although these stereotypes are often presented as scientific knowledge, such practices should be discredited as it would happen in other disciplines. For example, if doctors were to propose treatments that not only had not been validated scientifically but also aggravated an illness. Some CREA researchers witnessed this type of situation when attending a seminar in Marseille of experts on Roma issues. Ramon Flecha and Julio Vargas, a Roma researcher from La Mina (a neighborhood in metropolitan Barcelona that is mostly inhabited by Roma) had attended to this seminar in 2002. To arrive there on time, Ramon and Julio arose at three o’clock in the morning and drove to Marseille. They were the only ones who were on time, most of the experts were late. However, what shocked them more was the attitude with which the other researchers—even having arrived some of them extremely late—did not prevent them from stating during the meeting that the Roma are lazy and never on time. They retained their stereotypes and attempted to impose their opinions, failing to engage in an egalitarian dialogue even when the only Roma researcher present there, Julio, stated: “Well, I am a Roma, and it is me who was on time after waking up at three in the morning, and you were late even though some of you live nearby”.

⁴ Author’s translation from Italian.

The opposite situation, one that reflects the egalitarian dialogue in which validity claims predominate, occurred during a seminar for the FP5 Workaló research project (2001–2004). At that event, a well-known sociologist presented his concept of mixed identity. He said, “As a result of the Arabic migration in France, mixed identities emerged, that is, people who are 50% French and 50% Argelian”. From the audience, a woman with no academic background raised her hand and answered, “I am not 50% French and 50% Roma. I am 100% French. I have the same rights and duties as any other French person, and I am also 100% Roma”. Being a smart person, the sociologist did not answer by exercising his academic authority and power claims as did the sociologists at the Marseille Seminar, saying that the woman had not understood the concept; instead, he responded in a dialogic manner. He recognized that her contribution was valuable and said, “I have to rethink my concept of mixed identity”.

2.4 Creating Egalitarian Dialogues: The Communicative Organization of Research

One of the many research projects in which CREA implemented the communicative methodology and organization was Workaló, funded under the 5th Framework Programme of Research of the European Union (CREA, 2001–2004). This project was aimed to analyze ethnic discrimination patterns in Roma’ access to employment throughout Europe and the possibility of identifying paths for their labor inclusion. Before 2001, this methodology had been implemented in regional and national research projects, but not in large-scale projects such as Workaló. The main features of this communicative organization consisted in: (a) an advisory committee, (b) a multicultural research teams and (c) not only exclusive but also transformative dimensions of social reality in data analysis. All of these three features, when combined and well structured, generated a new way to approach research in a more emancipatory and egalitarian manner.

First, Workaló included a set of management and advisory bodies that ensured the real participation of Roma people throughout the life of the project. One of these was the advisory committee (AC), which was composed of various Roma people (women, elderly people, college student, representatives, grassroots representatives, etc., with educational and professional backgrounds) and non-Roma people to ensure from the beginning that the scientific project was aligned with the advancement of society in general and based on Roma needs in particular. The selection of the AC members was not difficult as CREA researchers make continuous spaces for dialogue with Roma associations, the “people of respect” in the Roma community (i.e., some elders), and other people belonging to ethnic minorities who experienced the same situation of exclusion. The diversity of the participants’ profiles was an essential criterion for selection to serve on the advisory committee, attempting to avoid possible biases. This was possible because when the

project proposal was written in 2001, many of us were already collaborating as volunteers in various social organizations such as the Roma Association for Women (Drom Kotar Mestipen), the School for Adult People (La Verneda-Sant Martí), the Federation of Cultural Associations of Adult People (FACEPA), the Ujaranza Foundation (now the Jesús Gómez Foundation) and other NGOs.

The research team discussed with the AC the project's aims and hypothesis before submitting it, thus ensuring that if approved, the project would really respond not only to a scientific gap but also to the needs of the Roma community. Once the project was launched, the research team and the AC met at least annually to review drafts of the project's working papers, to advise researchers when performing the fieldwork, and therefore to guarantee that the research process and the project's conclusions and recommendations would have an impact in transforming the socio-labor reality of the Roma people. The advisory committee played a key role in all of the research team's analyses. Whereas both Roma and non-Roma scientists at CREA provided knowledge on sociological theories and previous research to social stratification, labor inclusion, and the Roma, the invited participants played a key interpretative role in research and theories with respect to both their reality and the reality of their people. For instance, it was very relevant to share the literature review with Roma participants and to orient both the fieldwork and the project in a manner that considered the implications of the transition from the industrial to the knowledge-based society for the Roma, especially given that many Roma employed in factories were the first to be fired. This idea questions the assumption that Roma were never employees. Additionally, members of the advisory committee provided many recommendations for carrying out the fieldwork, especially about how to address the Roma both when conducting communicative focus groups and when conducting fieldwork with illiterate Roma. For example, with respect to this last issue because of the suggestions received from a member of the advisory committee who was an illiterate Roma, everything discussed with the body was orally presented. This practice in turn promoted networks of solidarity among literate and illiterate people to help each other when it was necessary to read and work with written material. Illiterate Roma people were perceived as agents capable of interpreting their reality as competently as other participants. Indeed, it was the illiterate Roma who contributed the most information and knowledge to the research team as they had totally different *lifeworlds* than the other members of the team.

Second, another relevant feature of the communicative organization at Workaló was the multicultural research teams. The presence of Roma scholars within the research team such as Julio Vargas among others improved the quality of discussions and made it possible to do research "with" the Roma rather than "on" them. In the last decades, Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies have made important steps in the promotion of diverse scholars in academia. Romani studies are not an exception. In this case, Workaló was conducted by CREA's Roma Studies Center (RSC), a cluster of Roma and non-Roma scholars dedicated to perform analysis that lead to social impact among the Roma community. The core features of the communicative methodology supported the rest of the project partners to include Roma researchers,

so all of them complied; the research centers in Romania, United Kingdom, and Portugal included Roma academics as both junior and senior researchers.

Third, one of the most relevant features of the communicative methodology is the identification of both the exclusionary and the transformative dimensions of social reality (Elboj, Campdepadrós, & Cabré, 2014). In the Workaló project, we emphasized from the beginning that it is possible to identify in social reality both reproductionist and transformative dynamics, and therefore, research should not only focus on the former but also to unveil the latter. It is this attention to the latter which can provide some hints of how to go about eradicating Roma labor exclusion. For instance, we identified the strategies that employers and trainers used to keep Roma people out of the labor market—and how these strategies became institutionalized and an intrinsic part of the hiring culture and patterns. However, we also identified how to overcome these barriers and obstacles. This was possible because from the very beginning, we coded and classified all of the information and evidence found in the exclusionary and transformative dimensions and shared them with the advisory committee. In this sense, one of the elements highlighted by the data gathered during the fieldwork was the need to improve the education of the Roma (Vargas & Gómez, 2003). The research team also identified the main features of evidence-based programs for labor inclusion and adult education and discussed them with the advisory committee, for instance, measures of affirmative action. Another finding was about existing legal frameworks to act against ethnic discrimination in access to the labor market and how to promote specific—but not exclusive—policies. It was then that the institutional recognition of the Roma people as a European minority and the need for states to recognize their situation of social exclusion came into play.

Most of Workaló's final conclusions, which gathered many of these transformative dimensions turned into recommendations identified from the data that were collected in the fieldwork, were unanimously approved by the European Parliament. This process occurred because Workaló's final conference, which was held in the headquarters of the European Parliament in Brussels in 2004, was attended by MEPs (one of them Roma) along with Roma NGOs and other representatives; participants made a commitment to translate Workaló's results into policy, leading to an historical political and social impact for the Roma communities in Europe. At that meeting, one of the key policy recommendations presented was that "*A first step towards this transnational approach should be the official recognition of the Roma people in the different territories*" (CREA, 2004, p. 4). Several months later, in April 2005, the European Parliament approved a resolution recognizing the Roma as a people of Europe and called on EU Member States to do the same inside their borders.⁵ This resolution was momentous because it recognized the presence of Roma, the most discriminated people in Europe and paved the way for later resolutions.

⁵European Parliament resolution on the situation of Roma people in the European Union. Retrieved August 4, 2012 from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+MOTION+B6-2005-0274+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>.

For instance, the one introduced by the same European Parliament representative present at the final conference, Livia Járóka, which established Roma national inclusion strategies for European Member States.

In the final Workaló conference, the president of the Romani Association of Women *Drom Kotar Mestipen*, an illiterate Roma grandmother who was a member of the advisory committee spoke about the need to promote affirmative action and the education of Romani children, especially girls. She concluded by stating the need for Roma to be recognized as a people in Europe. In the same session, a member of the Spanish Parliament promised to take this recognition to the chamber of representatives. He did it, and his resolution was unanimously passed in 2005. This recognition led to the creation of Roma state councils, which have the right to be consulted on any legislation or policy that particularly affects the Roma.

With respect to the positionality of the researcher and the researched, using the communicative methodology of research we have overcome the interpretative gaps experienced by many scholars. These biases are present not only in traditional methods of policymaking but also in different methods of doing research. The following quote from José, a Roma man interviewed in 2003 for Workaló, shows how policy making [and research too] cannot comprehend the reality of the Roma:

Policies are done by non-Roma, so when it is said, for instance, what needs there are, the needs that you have, for example, you know them. The Roma are the ones who best know the needs that the Roma community has. So, it used to be that the policies made are not designed with the needs of the Roma in mind but on what those who make them [referring to non-Roma] think are the Roma's needs.

2.5 The Challenges of Communicative Research

While I have showed that the communicative methodology—with the principle of egalitarian dialogue and dialogic organization of research—allows to achieve unprecedented political and social impact, it also faces some challenges that need to be acknowledged here. One of the challenges is to ensure that the diversity of voices from the most vulnerable groups are both represented and heard. Thus, when using the communicative research, including minority representatives is not enough. People with college degrees, for instance, would not be representatives of all of the members of the targeted vulnerable group. What is intended is that those who participate in the research are the ones who are at most risk, the most vulnerable of the social group which is being studied (Flecha, 2014). By engaging the ones who are at the very grassroots it is then possible building new knowledge and transforming their living conditions.

A second related challenge is to achieve real egalitarian dialogue in advisory committees, which can become bureaucratized and dominated by power instead of dialogic interactions. For instance, in our research, one of the difficult parts was to recruit representatives of all the Roma, and especially those located more at the

bottom, in order to avoid to hear only the people who may be labeled (even self-labeled) as being the representatives but they are actually distant from the claims and reality of grassroots Roma (Sordé, Serradell, Puigvert, & Munté, 2013). When we conduct research at CREA, we select advisory-committee members accounting for their diversity within the vulnerable group, and they sign an agreement that we are going to discuss not the particular interest of any person or subgroup but rather the general situation of the Roma and the possibility of achieving a better interpretation and analysis of social reality through intersubjective dialogue. What it is actually sought is collaboration in responding to existing attacks on the Roma councils and the great step forward that they represent in relation to the previous situation of total exclusion from research on the Roma.

The communicative methodology focuses on identifying transformative actions that contribute to reduce inequality or improve living conditions, as well as exclusionary dimensions that build barriers to these transformations. The research process includes both qualitative and quantitative techniques such as interviews, focus groups or questionnaires with a diversity of people, not only with oppressed populations. A third challenge is therefore how to establish the egalitarian dialogue with all subjects. Any study oriented by the communicative methodology should therefore create situations of dialogue in which researchers bring the knowledge of the scientific community on the topic studied and research subjects bring their interpretations grounded on their common sense. Nevertheless, in any case, the analysis would focus on the transformative and exclusionary dimensions that, through a dialogic process of knowledge production, contribute knowledge that can improve society.

Scholars who criticize the communicative methodology tend to stress that power is embedded in all social relationships; in other words, every research methodology involves power relationships, for instance, between the researchers and the “re-researched”. However, spending time and resources in repeating this obvious fact is useless for the progress of the sociological knowledge and contributes to devaluing the social prestige of sociology. Indeed, those of us who now use the communicative methodology of research know very well that there are both dialogic and power interactions within the dialogic relationships established in a research process (for instance, as a result of different social status). What creates new sociological knowledge and increases the social prestige of sociology is, while accounting for these interactions, to focus on the rigorous analyses of transformative and exclusionary elements that can eventually contribute to achieving social impact. Sometimes we have been also critiqued for supposedly hiding the existing elements of power and falling in a “simplistic” analysis of reality. But again, this is another critique empty of epistemological credibility: indeed, we do recognize that these elements exist and we accordingly analyze them and attempt to identify actions that contribute to overcoming them. The people who actually hide their own interests are those who spend public resources attacking methodological approaches such as the communicative, which have largely evidenced to be effective in explaining the social reality and advancing novel social theory for current society, while in turn providing scientific tools to enhance social impact.

Researchers who want to improve both sociology and society make the intelligent effort to rigorously analyze the interactions of power and the dialogic interactions that are embedded in the dialogic relationships on which the communicative methodology is based. Moreover, this analysis is influenced by the inquiry into which new steps can be taken to continue diminishing the still remaining power interactions and to reinforce the dialogic interactions that have already been achieved.

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