

# Communication Structures and Processes in Globalization

by Peter Monge

Today, in the predawn of the new millenium, we collectively live in what has come to be known as a globalizing world, what can be characterized as “the process of the world becoming a single place” (Scholte, 1996, p. 43). Importantly, these processes of globalization are fundamentally altering the nature of human civilization and shaping the future of life for all living beings on this planet. Unfortunately, as Anthony Giddens (1994) has said, the notion of globalization is “much bandied about but as yet only poorly understood” (p. 4).

Globalization is a process that influences and is influenced by many aspects of contemporary life, including the economy, international relations, society, politics, and religion. Communication is also an integral part of these globalization processes (Monge, 1998). Unfortunately, even less is known about the role of communication and communication theory in globalization than about globalization itself.

Of course, it would be naive for us to view globalization as a new phenomenon. Garnham (1997) identified the early beginnings of global thinking with the precursors to the rise of capitalism and modernism in the late 15th century (p. 62). Kilminster (1997) pointed out that in 1750, Turgot wrote, “With the passage of time, nations, hitherto living in isolation, draw nearer to one another” (quoted on p. 257). This process, observed 2 1/2 centuries ago, is now well integrated into globalization theory (Mattelart, 1994). Of course, a number of the great social theorists of the 19th and early 20th centuries addressed global issues, albeit in different terms, more suited to the social issues of their day. For example, Durkheim’s (1984) theories of differentiation and culture, Weber’s (1978) views on rationalization and bureaucracy, and Marx’s (1977) theories of capitalism and class struggle all imply global, universal visions. Needless to say, globalization is not a new concept.

Globalization also is not a new topic for communication scholars. Several of our colleagues have studied communication phenomena that are intimately related to globalization (e.g., transborder data flows, cultural imperialism, media events, global network organizations, developmental communication, etc.). Yet,

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even those who work in these areas have acknowledged that their studies have generally failed to take a global perspective. In fact, several scholars in each of these areas have recently urged their colleagues to refocus their efforts explicitly on global issues. For example, Boyd-Barrett (1997) argued that international communication has for too long adopted a simplistic “media-centric” perspective that it must now shed in favor of focusing on a wide range of global issues beyond the international media. Hegde (1998) observed that feminist communication scholarship faces a new array of challenges created by globalization, and Ferguson and Golding (1995) insisted that cultural studies must be revised beyond the national level to incorporate “global political, economic, and media systems” (p. xiii).

Despite these and similar calls, those whose work adopts a global perspective comprise a small fraction of communication scholars. Most of the rest of us in the communication discipline are just beginning to respond to the global imperative. Many contemporary scholars believe that several important changes have occurred in globalism over the past 2 decades. According to Hurrell,

First, we are witnessing a dramatic increase in the “density” and “depth” of economic interdependence. Second [and as Shimon Peres said so eloquently in his July 1998 ICA plenary address in Jerusalem], information technology and the information revolution are playing an especially critical role in diffusing knowledge, technology and ideas [and altering the world political landscape]. Third, these developments create the material infrastructure for the strengthening of societal interdependence. . . . Fourth, this is leading to an unprecedented and growing consciousness of “global problems” . . . and of belonging to a single “human community.” (quoted in Clark, 1997, p. 20)

Perhaps more importantly, many commentators believe that we are observing changes of unknowable magnitude that are fundamentally irreversible (Barnet & Cavanagh, 1994). As Robertson (1992) has said, “trends towards the unicity of the world are, when all is said and done, inexorable” (p. 26).

Given the personal and professional importance of these changes to all of us, it might serve us well to reflect on our discipline from the perspective of globalization. This is especially important because the ideas and issues in globalization hold considerable promise of helping us transcend our traditional disciplinary boundaries, broaden our intellectual scope, and expand our academic relevance. To do so, let us briefly explore three theoretical globalizing dynamics that depend in fundamental ways on communication structures and processes and conclude by returning to the issues of boundaries, scope, and relevance.

## **Globalization and Communication**

### *Globalization*

“Globalization in its most general and uncontroversial sense . . . refers to the rapidly developing processes of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions, and individuals world-wide” (Tomlinson, 1997, p. 170), or, as

Robertson (1992) said, globalization refers to the entire world system, the global human condition.

Several scholars, including Anthony Giddens, David Harvey, Roland Robertson, Emanuel Wallerstein, and Malcom Waters, to name but a few, have recently developed theories of globalization. This body of work builds upon and extends the earlier theories of Marshall McLuhan (1967), Harold Innis (1950, 1951), and before them, Lewis Mumford (see Carey's 1981 analysis of the foundations of modern media theory).

In some way or other, all of these scholars examined three dynamic processes that, they argued, have driven the development of globalization. The first is fundamental alterations of our perceptions of time and space. The second is the development of global consciousness through processes of reflexivity. The third is the notion of disembeddedness of events, which permits new realignments and restructuring in time and space.

*Time and space compression.* To be human is to recognize our place in the world in terms of time and space. Physical, social, and communicative events we experience are almost always situated in time relative to themselves and to each other in terms of sequentiality, simultaneity, and synchronicity. Sequentiality refers to a succession of events over time, simultaneity refers to two or more events that occur at the same moment, and synchronicity refers to two or more events that unfold together (Monge & Kalman, 1996).

Historically, time and space were directly connected; "when" was almost always associated with "where," and simultaneous, sequential, and synchronous events were anchored to the immediate locale in which people found themselves. Several theorists have argued, however, that in the 20th century, the relationships between time and space have become transformed in ways previously unknown in the history of the world. Specifically, time has been separated from space and both have been dramatically compressed, with time becoming shorter and space being shrunk. Robertson (1992) called this compression of the world, Harvey (1989) labeled it time-space compression, and Giddens (1990, 1991) identified this process as time-space distancing.

The process of time-space compression began in the 18th century with the invention of the mechanical clock and continued into the 19th century with the development of global time zones (Beniger, 1986). It has accelerated over the past century as different forms of transportation have enabled people to move across the globe at ever-faster rates of speed. Likewise, time-space compression increased with successive communication inventions, which facilitated the development of what has become instantaneous communication at a distance. Harvey (1989) argued that these standardized and generalized concepts of time and place enable time essentially to obliterate space. As anyone who travels densely crowded roads knows, distance tends to be measured in terms of the time it takes to traverse the space. As Waters (1995) said, "to the extent that the time between geographical points shortens so space appears to shrink. Insofar as the connection between physically distant points is instantaneous, space 'disappears' altogether" (p. 63). At one extreme, this implies that people who experience the same events from different locations in the world, for example, media events such as the transfer of

Hong Kong from Great Britain to China or the World Cup (Katz, 1980), in effect, are in the same location. Thus, as time frames become synchronized, localized time disappears and instantaneous communication has obliterated distinctions in space. Of course, this is a phenomenological experience rather than a literal truth (Hoogvelt, 1997; Waters, 1995).

In his later work, Giddens (1994) described globalization as “action at a distance.” However, Scholte (1996) argued that,

globality introduces a new quality of social space, one that is effectively non-territorial and distance-less. . . . Global relations are not *links at a distance* across territory but circumstances *without distance* and relatively disconnected from particular locations. Globalization has made the identification of boundaries—and associated notions of “here” and “there,” “far” and “near,” “outside” and “inside,” “home” and “away,” “them” and “us” – more problematic than ever. (pp. 48–49)

*Global consciousness and reflexivity.* Robertson (1992) and Giddens (1990, 1991, 1994) employed the concepts of global consciousness and reflexivity to represent the second important dynamism of globality. Global consciousness refers to “the scope and depth of consciousness of the world as a single place” (Robertson, 1992, p. 183). This implies that in “an increasingly globalized world there is a heightening of civilizational, societal, ethnic, regional, and indeed individual, self-consciousness” (Robertson, 1992, p. 27). Reflexivity represents the idea that “knowledge spirals in and out of the universe of social life, reconstructing both itself and that universe as an integral part of that process” (Giddens, 1990, pp. 15–16). Reflexivity comes about because “social practices are constantly examined and reexamined in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens, 1990, p. 38).

Communication plays a central role in creating global consciousness and in the reflexive processes of creating and recreating human community. The more we learn about people, places, and events around the world, the more global we become. Globalization is not just an event that is happening all around us, it is something that we help to create because we participate in the worldwide communication processes that raise global consciousness for all. Participation in these processes is as much active as it is passive. For example, knowledge of the world is increasingly stored in knowledge repositories that are accessed via communication networks. Fulk, Flanagin, Kalman, Monge, & Ryan (1996; see also Monge et al., 1998) identified connectivity and communality as two important communicative properties of these knowledge repositories, or for that matter, any interactive communication technology such as those found in shared databases and the Internet. Connectivity provides the physical and social infrastructures that enable people to contact each other through the communication system, thus providing a network of others to which people are linked. Communality, that is, the ability of individuals and collectives to store and share information with each other, provides the basis for community and for increased knowledge about the world.

Similarly, the globalization of radio, television, the Internet, movies, telephone,

and other means of communication provides images, sounds, events, ideas, and knowledge from distant locations around the globe to other distant locations around the globe. All this information makes us, to some extent, more knowledgeable and cognizant of worldwide diversities and commonalities. Thus, for Robertson (1992), global consciousness represented a major shift in the ways in which people view themselves, the world, and their place in it. We begin to think of all the issues we face in global, rather than local, terms. The local is no longer isolated from the global, as was true of human experience for so many centuries. Now, the global and local are inherent parts of each other, the global having been localized, the local having been globalized. Economics is no longer just the household, the local, or the national economy, but also the global financial markets and the interconnected worldwide economy (Melody, 1991). Similarly, we speak of citizenship not just in terms of neighborhood, township, or country, but in terms of universal human rights and world peace.

*Disembeddedness.* The third dynamic of globalization, disembedding, is identified as the “lifting out” of human interactions from local contexts and restructuring them across time and space (Giddens, 1990, p. 21). This process of freeing human interaction from its local contexts is important because it provides the foundation for reconnecting them to others at a distance. This restructuring creates radically different sets of connections and thereby opens up the possibility of new forms of groups, organizations, society, and the entire world system (Wallerstein, 1974, 1990).

As Tehranian and Tehranian (1997) pointed out, globalization has created

a new deterritorialized system of centres and peripheries based on the levels of science, technology, productivity, consumption and creativity, regardless of the location. The new centres and peripheries now reside in transnational organizations and networks wherever they happen to be situated. (pp. 120–121)

Multinational organizations play a crucial role in this process because they create infrastructures that typically require people to communicate with globally dispersed others. To those of us who spend our lives working in “invisible colleges,” those cosmopolitan networks of professional relations that link people worldwide (Crane, 1972), this may seem like a commonplace phenomenon. To many in the world, though, it is a very new experience. For example, Wheeler (1998) described how the introduction of “cybercafes” has altered the worldview of the younger generation in Kuwait and other Islamic Persian Gulf nations, where strong traditions for local values and considerable restrictions on the flow of information create inward-oriented societies.

As Contractor et al. (1998) pointed out, one interesting outcome of continual restructuring via communication is the emergence of new organizational forms. These new forms, which are likely to dominate organizational life well into the next millennium, include global network organizations (Miles & Snow, 1995; Monge, 1995; Monge & Fulk, in press). Network forms of organization are neither vertically organized hierarchies, like their bureaucratic predecessors, nor unorganized

marketplaces governed by supply and demand (Powell, 1990; Williamson, 1991). Rather, network organizational forms are built on generalized communication network structures that link people and knowledge in all parts of the organization to each other (wherever they are located around the globe), while tying them to multiple external network organizations worldwide (Dicken, 1992). A large number of nongovernmental organizations have used the Internet and fax machines to create worldwide networks to mobilize people to save the environment, oppose tyranny, and improve health and medical conditions (Annis, 1992). These new forms are knowledge intensive (Badaracco, 1991) and constantly changing, as new knowledge links are added and dysfunctional ones are dropped. Thus, the evolving, constantly changing network form *is* the organization. Take away the network, and the organization vanishes. This phenomenon is but one example of the worldwide increase in network connectedness and interdependence. The world is becoming a highly dense, multiplexed web of communication (and other) networks, what Tehranian and Tehranian (1997) called “deterritorialized and informatized networkds” (p. 135).

Giddens (1990) identified two disembedding mechanisms. The first is symbolic tokens, a concept that he adapted from McLuhan (1967). Symbolic tokens are “media of interchange which can be passed around” (Giddens, 1990, p. 22) and, therefore, used to connect people across large distances. Historically, money was viewed as a token because it provided the basis for exchange across time and space. Today, money is essentially information, and, consequently, it is treated as a symbol that can be transmitted instantaneously virtually anywhere in the world. Likewise, the mass media convert many aspects of human experience into symbols that are transmitted around the globe, impacting human relationships, altering social identities, and creating economies of signs and space (Lash & Urry, 1994).

The second disembedding mechanism is the expert systems. Expert systems consist of people with specialized knowledge and special expertise in the use of knowledge repositories and knowledge networks that can be used to distribute knowledge worldwide. These are often used to solve specific problems that lie beyond the purview of any single individual. Distributed knowledge may refer to the flow or diffusion of information that increases the level of knowledge among all people. Alternatively, it may refer to the parts of a larger knowledge base possessed by separate people within the network. In this form of distributed knowledge, dispersed people possess relatively unique, nonredundant knowledge that enables a collective to accomplish complex tasks (Gore, 1996). Distributed knowledge occurs at many levels in the empirical world, including work groups, large-scale project teams, and interorganizational strategic alliances. As these communication systems grow in size, they connect people in complex relations to those outside their own local system, and create new perceptions of self and the world.

### *Communication*

These three processes, space-time compression, global consciousness through reflexivity, and disembedding mechanisms that restructure human relations, con-

stitute the major dynamics of globalization that have been theorized to date. As we have seen, communication is an integral part of all three.

Waters (1995), however, suggested that communication and symbolic processes play an even more important role. He observed that these dynamics of globalization typically have been manifest in three central arenas of human activity: the economy, the polity, and culture. Traditionally, many scholars have viewed economics and international relations as the primary areas in which these globalization processes occur, a view that Waters argued is wrong. Each of these areas, he contended, contains a unique form of exchange. The economy is comprised primarily of material exchanges; the political consists of exchanges of power, authority, and legitimacy; and culture is formed largely out of symbolic exchanges. Waters observed that economic exchanges "tend to tie social relationships to localities," that "political exchanges tend to tie relationships to extended territories," but "symbolic exchanges liberate relationships from spatial referents" (p. 9). These observations lead to three interrelated and interesting theoretical claims: "*material exchanges localize, political exchanges internationalize, and symbolic exchanges globalize*" (p. 9, emphasis in original). Thus, the communicative, symbolizing processes inherent in culture give it priority in globalizing processes. Further, he suggested that the greater the level of exchange that occurs through symbolic processes in any of the three arenas, the greater the level of globalizing. Whether this view proves to be correct remains to be seen, but it certainly provides one of many interesting theoretical perspectives on the globalization process for communication scholars to investigate.

### *Caveats*

It is important to emphasize that globalization has negative as well as positive features. As Giddens (1994) said, "Globalizing influences are fracturing as well as unifying, create new forms of stratification, and often produce opposing consequences in different regions or localities" (p. 81). Likewise, it is important not to view globalization as a universalizing process. As Robertson (1992) observed, "we are, in the late twentieth century, witnesses to—and participants in—a massive, two-fold process involving the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalization" (p. 100). Further, "Globalism does not necessarily imply homogenization or integration. Globalization merely implies greater connectedness and de-territorialization" (Waters, 1995, p. 136). Also, of course, there are major theoretical and analytic issues as globalization theory attempts to embrace all levels of human experience from the individual to the entire world system. Equally important, there are ethical, moral, and practical implications to globalization that require extensive deliberation and careful scholarship.

## **Conclusion**

The study of communication processes in globalization provides significant opportunities to transcend our traditional disciplinary boundaries, broaden our intel-

lectual scope, and expand our academic relevance. In terms of transcending our traditional disciplinary boundaries, Stohl (in press) said, "even though contemporary communication theories seem well suited to address the dynamic tensions embedded in the interpersonal, organizational, and community interfaces of global systems, these multi-level, interdependent, constraining and enabling alignments are rarely studied together." For far too long now it has been true that, "The sub-divisions in our field and academic departments oftentimes resemble national borders in their capacity to limit knowledge, restrict cooperation, and impede collaboration" (Stohl, in press). Ironically, one set of traditional boundaries that globalization requires us to transcend are those we ourselves have erected in our discipline. We must now dismantle those boundaries and focus and integrate our separate theories, perspectives, and research findings on these common problems.

There is, however, a second, equally important, set of boundaries that we must address. Communication has long been viewed as a cross-disciplinary field. Yet, ironically, as Jamieson and Cappella (1996) observed, most research in communication is done in isolation, without collaboration with our colleagues in other disciplines. That stratagem will not work for the study of global issues. Processes of globalization are too complex, too intertwined, and too wide-ranging to yield meaningful results via isolated, independent research. Globalization requires that we theorize globally and integrate our work across the spectrum of scholarship that is addressing global issues. We must collaborate with our colleagues in such fields as economics, history, philosophy, political science, sociology, and religion, or we are doomed to provide isolated, and, therefore, virtually useless knowledge.

Several scholars have argued that studying globalization requires considerable expansion of the scope of our intellectual quest. Scott (1997) observed that "the full appreciation of the impact of globalizing tendencies demands no less than a revolution in the way in which social science conceptualizes its object and a complete rethinking of its most basic categories: society, *Gemeinschaft* (community), nation, state, etc." (p. 4). Tomlinson (1997) claimed that the concept of globalization "is both so general and so radical in its implications that it threatens to destroy the images of the world cherished in so many intellectual and critical traditions" (p. 171). These claims seem somewhat overblown, but even if they are only moderately true, they suggest that considerable intellectual work remains to be done. Kofman and Youngs (1996) suggested that this work has already begun in a "second wave" of global studies that

are characterized by a dissatisfaction with the current state of global play, both theoretical and practical. They reject the universalizing characteristics of much of the discussion about globalization. They are circumspect about its euphoric nature and question the problematics of its roots in particular traditions of thought and structures of power. (p. 1)

As we embark on our own efforts to study globalization and communication, it would do us well to heed the lessons learned from the first wave of global studies.

Globalism provides an important opportunity to expand our academic relevance to issues that are central to the entire world. All too often we find ourselves talking and writing to ourselves and to no one else. In her 1993 ICA presidential address in Miami, Ellen Wartella eloquently addressed the question of why our discipline is seen to have such little relevance to the societies in which we live, and she offered several important suggestions of how to increase our relevance.

Globalization asks us to take the issue of relevance one step further and address worldwide problems. Practical and policy issues in communication and globalization cover many areas relevant to our discipline: information processing, interpersonal relationships, local and global political processes, health campaigns, gender issues, communication law and policy, and so on. Likewise, there are many practical issues for us to examine in which we have particular expertise, including negotiations over regulation of our precious global commons (Buck, 1998; Volger, 1992); language issues created by mass population migration (Kilminster, 1997); equal access to the new information repositories and highways (Gerbner, Mowlana, & Nordenstreng, 1993); and so forth.

To take my own area of expertise as an example, organizational communication needs to examine global organizations, their roots in local societies, their homogenizing influences, and their impacts on individuals, relationships, and families. It needs to expand its horizons beyond large profit-making corporations and examine not-for-profit organizations, nongovernmental organizations, international labor unions, worker collectives, and even the worldwide influence of religious organizations. It needs to address practical issues of child labor exploitation, equal pay for equal work, language problems in the workplace, gender inequalities, full and fair disclosure of corporate information, and many others. The global imperative requires no less than that we apply our communication theories to address practical human issues.

Today, in the predawn of the new millenium, the collective forces of globalization have already presented humanity with enormous political, social, economic, environmental, ethical, and communicative challenges. These will only continue to grow in scale, scope, and importance during the decades ahead. Global forces will significantly alter the world as we have come to know it. Some changes will be better. Some will be worse. As individual communication scholars and as a collective discipline, we need to develop the theoretical formulations, research tools, and research base that will enable us to understand better the global processes in which communication plays such a pivotal role. In collaboration with our colleagues in different disciplines around the world, we must generate the knowledge that will enable us to influence the ways in which these global processes occur, hopefully, for the betterment of all humankind.

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