

The Validity of Validity Claims: An Inquiry into Communication Rationality

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Abstract

The communicative action theory of Habermas has been discussed and used within the research community of Language Action Perspective. The concept of validity claim is considered to be an important contribution. In his theory, Habermas has formulated three validity claims to be universal in communication: The claims for truth, rightness and truthfulness. A theoretical inquiry into the validity claim concept and the three validity claims is performed in the paper. A critical analysis is pursued based on communication examples from Habermas. The concept of universal validity claims is transformed to general communication claims. The truth claim is rejected as universal. Besides the claims emanating from Habermas several other general communication claims are formulated: Descriptive correctness, addressee relevance, respectfulness, deliberation, dialogical adequacy and argumentativeness.

1 Introduction

Information and communication can be studied from many perspectives. In the disciplines of organisational communication and information systems (IS) there is a growing interest for an action view on information and communication, e.g. [Dietz, 1994; Goldkuhl & Lyytinen, 1982; Ljungberg & Holm, 1996; Winograd & Flores, 1986]. Much of this interest emerges from speech act theory, which was originally formulated by [Austin, 1962] and later refined by several scholars. Among later contributions the best known seem to be made by [Searle, 1969] and [Habermas, 1984]. The fundamental speech act thesis is that speech should be seen as a special kind of action. Speaking (and writing) is not just describing the world. There are

many kinds of communication - e.g. promising, commanding, issuing, thanking - which can not be reduced to just describing. To promise is to *perform an act* of promise directed towards other people. According to this theory, all speech acts can be said to consist of two parts; one descriptive part (called locutionary or propositional aspect) and one part expressing the action character of the speech (often called illocutionary aspect). The interest from organisational communication and information systems in speech act theory rests on this fundamental thesis but is also oriented towards other aspects of the theory.

Many scholars foster an interest in the communicative action theory of [Habermas, 1984]. One important contribution made by Habermas [ibid] is the concept of validity claim. He states that the communication between a speaker and a listener is constituted by the existence of three universal validity claims: The claims for truth, rightness and truthfulness. These validity claims play a fundamental role in communication according to Habermas: "The concept of communicative action presupposes language as the medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which the participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be accepted or contested" [ibid p 99].

There are several IS researchers who have shown an interest in Habermas' communicative action theory and his validity claim concept; e.g. [Dietz & Widdershoven, 1992; Reijswoud, 1996; Auramäki & Lyytinen, 1996; Schoop, 1999 and Eriksson, 1999]. These authors, however, seem to take the validity claim concept for granted. They all acknowledge the importance of it and they do not question it. They discuss but do not really question the different validity claims described by Habermas. If we should use the validity claim concept in theorizing around information systems and communication in organisational settings, then it is necessary to pursue a critical discussion concerning the validity claim concept. This is the *main purpose* of this paper; to critically examine the validity claim concept and the different universal validity claims put forth by Habermas. It is of great importance to critically investigate one of the key concepts within the theoretical underpinnings of the Language Action Perspective (LAP). This critical analysis will be done in the critical spirit of Habermas. It is outside the scope of the paper to discuss other theories in the field of communication pragmatics. The focus will be on the validity claim concept of Habermas.

2 The Concept of Validity Claim

2.1 Validity Claims in Habermas' Communicative Action Theory

Validity claim is an important concept in Habermas' theory of communicative action. [Habermas, 1984] is critical towards Searle's "speaker-oriented" theory.

Instead of this one-sided view Habermas wants to establish a theory concerning communication as a way to reach a shared understanding. In order to arrive at such a shared understanding the speaker and listener must agree on universal validity claims raised in communication. "A *validity claim* is equivalent to the assertion that the *conditions* for the *validity* of an utterance are fulfilled" [ibid p 38]. This view of Habermas is rooted in his view of communication as a rational enterprise. To be rational is to be able to present good reasons (grounds) for one's action. "Rationality is understood to be a disposition of speaking and acting subjects that is expressed in modes of behavior for which there are good reasons or grounds" [ibid p 22].

When a speaker is performing a speech act he is (often only implicitly) raising a number of validity claims. These validity claims can potentially be challenged by the listener. To accept a speech act the listener accepts the validity claims raised. Habermas presents three kinds of validity claims which he asserts to be universal: Claims to truth, normative rightness and sincerity. He also talks about comprehensibility as a validity claim. But this a more fundamental claim directly related to the use of language as a medium for communication. Comprehensibility can be seen as a basis for the three other claims. If the speaker can not present a linguistically understandable utterance, then there is, by definition, nothing to understand and assess. The three universal claims are associated with the three functions of language which Habermas presupposes. He distinguishes three fundamental uses of language: The cognitive use, the interactive use and the expressive use [ibid and Habermas, 1979]. These three modes are rooted in Habermas ontology. He divides reality into three worlds: The objective world, the social world and the subjective world.

Each of the three claims is related to one basic function of language and also to one "world" (table 1). Although there is this primary relationship Habermas asserts that all three claims are inherent in all speech acts. We relate to all these worlds at the same time when speaking or as [Habermas, 1979 p 68] puts it the different worlds "come to appearance together". In his analysis of validity claims, Habermas also reformulates the speech act classes of [Searle, 1979]. Habermas reduces these to three classes: Constatives, regulatives and expressives. A fourth class, imperatives, is related to strategic action where there are no validity claims, only claims to power according to Habermas.

The different validity claims raised in a speech act are assessed by the listener and he can accept or contest them. [Habermas, 1984] differentiates three levels of reactions in relation to a perceived speech act: 1) "The listener understands the utterance, that is, he grasps the meaning of what is said" [ibid p 297], 2) "with his 'yes' or 'no' the hearer takes a position on the claim raised with the speech act, that is, he accepts the speech act offer or declines it" [ibid] and 3) "in consequence of an achieved agreement, the hearer directs his action according to conventionally

fixed obligations” [ibid]. With his second level, Habermas has formulated an important operational principle for assessing validity claims. If a hearer accepts the validity claims, then he takes a ‘yes’ position. If a hearer declines any validity claim then he takes a ‘no’ position and when doing so he should present some ground for his rejection. What are the reasons for his rejection? I will use this principle for validity claims assessment in section 3 below when examining some examples of speech acts.

Validity claims	Functions of language	Worlds (domains of reality)	Speech act type
Truth	Cognitive use	Objective world	Constatives
Normative rightness	Interactive use	Social world	Regulatives
Sincerity	Expressive use	Subjective world	Expressives

Table 1 Validity claims and their relations to language functions, domains of reality, speech act types; building on [Habermas, 1979 p 68 and Habermas, 1984 p 329]

2.2 Validity Claims in Information Systems Research

There are several researchers in the information systems area who have taken an interest in the concept of validity claim as it is proposed by Habermas. [Dietz & Widderhoven, 1992] have made a comparison between Searle’s and Habermas’ theories. They claim Habermas’ theory to be superior and one of the main argument seem to be the importance of the validity claims. In their analysis they have related Searle’s speech act classes to Habermas’ validity claims and speech act classes. [Reijswoud, 1996] follows this comparison and conclusion in his analysis of business communication. He seems to agree concerning the importance of the validity claim concept of Habermas and this theory as superior to Searle’s.

[Ljungberg & Holm, 1996] comment on the analysis of [Dietz & Widderhoven, 1992]. They seem also to agree on the superiority of Habermas’ theory. They question, however, if this superiority should have any impact on the design of information systems. In the spirit of [Suchman’s 1994] famous critique of adopting speech act concepts in IS design they question if the use of validity claims would be a good design framework. They are very hesitant concerning explicitly accounting for validity claims in communication supporting IT artifacts. [Ljungberg & Holm, 1996] propose another usage of Habermas’ theory: ”An alternative approach, which we would like to suggest, is applying Habermas’ theory as a vehicle for reflection, rather than using his taxonomy in concrete design.”

Another researcher acknowledging the superiority of Habermas is [Eriksson 1999], although he ascribes some benefits of Searle. Eriksson has made a similar comparison between Habermas and Searle as Dietz & Widderhoven did. The analysis of Eriksson goes into more detail concerning speech act types, validity claims, directions-of-fit between word and world. He presents a communication model which he claims is a partial synthesis between Habermas' and Searle's theories. "The generic communication model presented cannot be considered to be a full synthesis of Habermas' and Searle's models, this is not possible because the two models are based on different basic ontological assumptions" [ibid p 53].

There are researchers who do not want to give priority to any of these theories of Searle and Habermas and who do not see any great problems in combining the theories. [Auramäki & Lyytinen, 1996] and [Schoop, 1999] present such approaches. In an analysis of speech act success [Auramäki & Lyytinen, 1996] combine Searle's speech act taxonomy and Habermas' validity claims. Their approach is an "integration of the best features of" the two theories [ibid p 11]. [Schoop, 1999] has also combined the two theories in her work to develop a methodological framework for the design of cooperative documentation systems. She claims "Contrary to Dietz and Widdershoven, we do not see Searle's and Habermas' theories as contradictory. Rather we would argue that they consider different aspects of speech." "The two theories can be integrated to provide a powerful framework for communication analysis" [ibid p 70].

All these researchers, although their different standpoints in the Searle-Habermas controversy, seem to acknowledge the importance of the validity claim concept. There is no analysis of the validity claim concept as such and thus no questioning of it¹. [Eriksson, 1999] has made an analysis of the different validity claims. He accepts the three universal claims proposed by Habermas, but he wants to add to these a claim for satisfaction. [Auramäki & Lyytinen, 1996] do not want to rule out power claims from an analysis of communication: "Use of power is a part of everyday action, and we do not want to exclude communication based on the use of power (strategic action) from the analysis of communication" [ibid p 4].

My conclusions from this examination of validity claims in information systems research are

- the validity claim concept as such is not analysed in depth and its importance is simply taken for granted
- the different universal validity claims proposed by Habermas are not contested; only some supplements are proposed

I will try to pursue such a critical analysis in the rest of this paper.

¹ In the comprehensive debate concerning communicative action theory [e.g. Honneth & Joas, 1991] there are discussions concerning validity claims. [Seel, 1991] pursues an analysis of relations between different validity claims.

3 An Inquiry into Validity Claims

[Habermas, 1984] relates the three validity claims of truth, rightness and truthfulness directly to three different types of speech acts (table 1). Each validity claim can be seen as the primary claim thematized in each of speech act type. There is not however this kind of 1:1 relationship between speech act types and validity claims. Habermas emphasises that all three validity claims are at least implicitly raised in all communicative action. "Every speech act in a natural context can be contested (that is, rejected as invalid) under more than one aspect" [ibid p. 306].

Habermas uses one example to illustrate this thesis of multiplicity of validity claims of speech acts. The situation is a seminar with a professor asking one of the participants to bring him a glass of water. I think this example is illustrative concerning validity claims. I will use this example rather thoroughly below. Habermas has used this example to show three types of objections made to this request; each of these objections challenging each of the three universal validity claims (truth, rightness and truthfulness). Habermas states as a conclusion of his illustration "What we have shown in connection with this holds true for *all* speech acts oriented to reaching understanding. In contexts of communicative action, speech acts can always be rejected under each of the three aspects" [ibid p 307]. He is astonishingly sharp in regard to this thesis in connection to empirical evidence: "This strong thesis can be tested against numerous cases" [ibid]. I can only notice that Habermas does not account for numerous cases, only some simple fictitious examples are shown.

I will question Habermas' examples for the three validity claims. I propose, in my opinion, some better examples; and I present several other examples of rejections of the request. It is obvious (which will be shown below) that Habermas has a very limited view of possible rejections of speech acts, when he adopts his three validity claims. My analysis points at a much richer bunch of possible claims in communication than the three validity claims.

The complete formulation of the request made by the professor (P) directed towards one seminar participant (S) is as follows [ibid p 306]:

"Please bring me a glass of water."

In the analysis I will use Habermas operational principle for contesting utterances and their validity claim. "A speech act may be called 'acceptable' if it satisfies the conditions that are necessary in order to that the hearer be allowed to take a 'yes' position on the claim raised by the speaker" [ibid p 298]. Later on Habermas expresses this as "the options open to the hearers to adopt rationally motivated 'yes' or 'no' positions on the utterances of the speakers" [ibid p 306]. I will in this spirit of validity contesting examine different possible ways to decline a request of the illustrated type. I will use the principle proposed by Habermas and in doing so I will question his analysis and conclusions.

[Eriksson, 1999] has also referred to this example of Habermas. In doing so; Eriksson has no objections towards the examples of rightness and sincerity rejections, but he dismisses the truth claim example. I am questioning all three examples as can be seen below.

I have chosen to use Habermas' own examples since it will then be easier to demonstrate my objections with clear references to Habermas' own formulations and quoted argumentation. This "water glass" example can be questioned to be a typical "armchair" example common in philosophical literature. At this stage of analysis it has, however, proved to be useful and illustrative for the purposes of this paper. For further research, I do think it is important with real-life examples.

3.1 Claims for Rightness

[Habermas, 1984 p 306] uses the following example to illustrate the normative rightness of the utterance. The seminar participant declines the request of the professor through the following utterance:

#1. "No. You can't treat me like one of your employees."

Habermas says "what is contested is that the action of the professor is right in the given normative context" [ibid]. I partially question Habermas' characterization. Let us look closer at what seems to be done in the seminar participants utterance. This speech act consists of a refusal of the request and an explanation why S makes this rejection. In his explanation S makes a characterization of P's action "treat like one.... employee" and with reference to this characterization he declines the request. S interpretes P's request as an attempt to establish a special kind of relationship between them; not a formal employee-relationship, but a relationship that at least resembles this kind of relationship. S declines the request because he will not be engaged in such an inter-personal relationship. To fetch a glass of water for P would be an act of an employee serving the professor according to S' view. Accepting the request would mean that such an undesired relationship was imposed on S.

I would not characterize this rejection primarily as one against the normative rightness¹. A more apposite characterization would rather be a rejection of the implicitly suggested *inter-personal relationships* between P and S. Another way to

¹ I do not deny that S could claim that P violates a norm like "do not treat seminar participants as employees". This norm can however seem to be constructed from the actual situation and it can be disputed in different ways. P could claim the existence of an opposite norm like "do not treat seminar participants and employees differently" and thereby deny the general existence of the norm claimed by S. This is also an example that many norms are contextually negotiated and that situationally conflicting norms must be evaluated with reference to existing circumstances and expected consequences.

put it is to say that to S the utterance is not *respectful* enough. S rejects the request since he considers it to be disrespectful to him in his role as seminar participant.

I think that Habermas could have chosen a more appropriate example to illustrate rejections with reference to normative rightness. I will give one such example below:

#2. "No. I can not leave the seminar room. Participation at seminars is mandatory according to faculty rules."

In this rejection, S gives a clear reference to an *established rule*. This norm is not subject to subjective interpretations (as can be seen to be the case in #1). The mentioned norm can be checked according to its written formulations¹. S rejects the request because the bringing of water to the professor should imply that he had to leave the seminar room since there is no water tap in the seminar room. Performing such an action (leaving the room) is not permitted (according to social rules) and would be negative to S. I find this example (in relation to Habermas' utterance #1) a more straight-forward example of questioning an utterance because it is not considered to be in alignment with established social norms.

3.2 Claims for Sincerity

Habermas uses one example to illustrate rejection of the claim for sincerity (truthfulness). The seminar participant declines the request of the professor through the following utterance [ibid]:

#3. No. You really only want to put me in a bad light in front of the other seminar participants.

Habermas says in relation to this example that "what is contested is... that the professor means what he says" [ibid p 306-307] and Habermas adds in parenthesis the following explanation "because he wants to achieve a certain perlocutionary effect" [ibid p 307]. I question if this rejection should mainly be seen as a contest of lacking sincerity. This reaction of S is rather similar to #1. It has to do with *lack of respect* from P. S characterizes the action of P "to put me in bad light". He declines the request because of its negative effects on himself. The primary concern does not seem to be a question of sincerity ("you really only want") which is a presumption made by S concerning the intention of P. S explains his rejection with reference to the negative effects to him. In this case S refers to the *inter-personal relationships* which he has to the other seminar participants. These relationships will be influenced in a negative way according to S. One can suspect that the *self-respect* of S would *be hurt* if he performed the requested action. It seems also to be an implicit reference to the inter-personal relationships between P and S. S does not want to be treated in this way by P.

¹ I do not presume that social norms must or should be recorded externally. Many norms exist only as parts of the intersubjective field of a community [Berger & Luckmann, 1967].

There is a reference in this utterance (#3) that the intentions of P is something else, but this does not seem to be the primary concern (and thus a thematized claim) for S. There is an implicit contestation of sincerity, but this is not in the foreground. The Seminar participant's main concern seems to be the negative effects for him.

I have constructed another example which seems to be a more straight-forward illustration of contesting lacking sincerity:

#4. No, dear professor. I don't think you really want a glass of water. You only use that utterance as an illustration of your theory of communicative action."

In the case of #4, S makes an interpretation (characterization) of the intention behind P's action. S presumes that P does not utter his request in order to get a glass of water, but he uses the request with another purpose. In this case, S makes an assumption that P's real intention deviates from the one that is inherent in the utterance (i.e. to get a glass of water) and thus S declines the request. P's *sincerity* is questioned and an *alternative presumed purpose* is presented by S. In this response of S, there is not either any reference to negative effects to S. It is the lack of sincerity that is thematized.

3.3 Claims for Truth

Back to the examples given by Habermas! The third and last one is concerned with contesting the truth claim. The seminar participant declines the request of the professor by the following utterance [ibid p 306]:

#5. "No. The next water tap is so far away that I couldn't get back before the end of the session."

Habermas says "what is contested is... the truth of propositions the professor has to presuppose in the given circumstances" [ibid p. 306-307]. This explanation seems to be very far-fetched. I can not see that this rejection has anything to do with truth of the utterance made by P. Habermas translates the rejection of the truth claim in this case to a denial that certain presuppositions obtain [ibid p.306]. He does this obscure translation probably because it is obviously incorrect to say that P's request is not true. A request can not be true or false. This is one of the main points behind Austin's speech act theory¹ and it is astonishing that Habermas resides in this verificationist fallacy to put it sharply.

Let us look at the formulation of the utterance #5. In this case there is made a reference to *negative consequences* for S, which was also made in the two other examples of Habermas above (#1 and #3). Habermas classifies this rejection (#5) as a questioning of the truth claim. The rejection does however not seem to be concerned with truth issues. The refusal is not made with any reference to incorrect description of circumstances. There is rather an implicit reference to the goal of S

¹ Truth is only an appropriate claim for assertives/constatives. For all other speech act classes it is inadequate to evaluate the truth claim.

which is to be present at the seminar. This is obviously a primary purpose for S. He declines the request, since the requested action is inappropriate for him. He does not decline the request due to any false or inadequate descriptions made by P. There is no such deviations in the request. The action (bringing a glass of water) is not impossible to perform, but *its consequences are inappropriate* since they interfere with the desire to participate at the seminar.

Objections made with reference to propositional contents are not restricted to truth matters. I will show additional examples below; some of them are concerned with the material circumstances of fetching water. As will be shown, these are not to be seen as issues of truth. The material circumstances, as e.g. the distance to the water tap (in case #5) have significance for the efficiency and possibility of performing the requested action.

When talking about "existential presuppositions" Habermas seems to focus aspects in the world talked about. The existential presuppositions in #5 did not make the action impossible per se, but they were in conflict with the goals of S.

I will show one example where the material circumstances (existential presuppositions) are preventing the performance of the suggested action:

#6. "No. The water is turned off in this building, so it is impossible."

This means a rejection of the request since the requested action of bringing water is considered not to be executable. Water is not available and therefore water can not be fetched as was presumed in the request. I think this is a better example of rejection with reference to existential presuppositions than #5. It is however not the issue of rejection of any truth claim of the initial utterance made by P. This request is considered to be *inappropriate* since it was made based on *inadequate knowledge*. P did not have adequate knowledge about the possibilities that his request could be fulfilled. In this case there is no reference to negative consequence for S. It is rather a fairly neutral remark on the *impossibility* to follow the request. S explains to P why his goal can not be fulfilled.

The last two examples (#5 of Habermas and #6 by me) was treated under the heading "claims for truth". As can be understood from my discussion I reject the application of truth claims in relation to requests and also other directives. This is totally in line with the main ideas within speech act theory [Austin, 1962 and Searle, 1969]. The two examples were rather rejections concerning the appropriateness of the requested action. Appropriateness¹ is not a universal claim in speech acts according to Habermas. Below I will present some more examples of inappropriateness since we can learn more about possible claims in communication from these examples. Appropriateness seems to be an important claim.

¹ In some situations Habermas uses "appropriateness" as a synonym to "normative rightness" [e.g. Habermas, 1979 p 54]. In these cases it is a question of whether the speech act is appropriate in relation to existing norms. It is not case of the appropriateness of proposed actions.

3.4 Claims for Appropriateness of Action

Several of the examples given above mean rejection with reference to negative consequences for S, the one to perform the requested action (#1, #3, #5). One example did not involve any supposed negative consequences for S, but rather for P, since the requested action was declared to be not executable (#6). I will give another example with presumed negative examples for the requester P:

#7. *"No. It will take so long time for me to bring you the water. I have injured my foot. It is better that someone else with quick legs brings you the water."*

S declines the request made by P. S explains that the proposed way for P to get the water (by S bringing it to him) is not an appropriate way for P. This is done with a clear reference to *means-ends efficiency*. The proposed *means is inappropriate* (since it takes too long time) *to reach the goal* (P to obtain a glass of water). In his rejection S does not refer to any negative consequences for himself (as in case #5 for example), only to negative consequences for P.

As can be seen in this example there are no objections made to social norms, truth or sincerity of the requester. Neither of Habermas' three validity claims is challenged. But S is taking a 'no' position towards the utterance of P. S is declining the request. The challenge is done with reference to the presumed *success* of the requested action. The success is questioned since the proposed means is found to be inappropriate. According to Habermas claim for effectiveness (for success) is an issue for strategic action and not for communicative action which is related to the three claims of rightness, truth and sincerity. To me the objection made by S in this case is a fair and legitimate one. Neither of the two utterances of P and S is made in a "strategic mood". It is obvious that S is adopting a helpful attitude towards P when proposing a better way for him to reach his goals.

I will present another example where S declines the request since he thinks the consequences are negative:

#8. *"No. The water tap is in the other seminar room. I will disturb the people there."*

S declares the means to be inappropriate. If he should fetch a glass of water he should influence other people in an undesirable way. The bringing means that he disturbs other people. Their goals will conflict with goals behind bringing the water. In this case S does not give any reference to negative consequences for P and S (at least not explicitly). The mentioned *negative consequences apply to other people*. Implicitly one can presume that the suggested action, if performed, should lead to deteriorated inter-personal relationships between S and the seminar participants in the other room.

One can claim that this refusal involves a reference to normative rightness; to a norm like "one does not disturb other people". I acknowledge this, but the rejection should not be reduced to just that. The main point is not that the bringing of water

does not comply with a social norm. It is not a thematizing of such a norm in the rejection, as it was in #2 above. The negative consequences for the other people are emphasised as a legitimate obstacle for the requested action.

3.5 Claims for Appropriateness of Goal

There are several examples above where a rejection has been made with references to problems in performing the requested action. These rejections are concerned with the means of reaching the goal of a glass of water to drink. Some rejections have been concerned with inappropriate side-effects. No response has been directed to the beneficial of the aim. I will give one example with a thematization of the goal part, i.e. a glass of water for P to drink:

#9. *"No. The water is poisoned. You can not drink it. You can be sick!"*

This refusal is not oriented to any problems regarding the fetching of a glass of water. S' concern is about P when he should use the water for his purposes, which S presumes, is that P will quench his thirst. S' objections is concerned with the *presumed goals* of P to drink a glass of water from this building. To drink such a water will not lead to any positive effects. The drinking of water would hurt P.

This rejection is also an example of the difference of knowing between P and S. S knows that the water is poisoned, which P does not know (or at least S presumes that he does not know). Several of the other examples are also related to differences in knowledge about existing circumstances for fetching a glass of water. S knows about his injured foot (#7); he knows about the distance to the water tap (#5); he knows about the place of the water tap in the other seminar room and the existence of people in this room (#8); he knows that the water is turned off (#6). The way he answers in these situations reveals that he presumes that P does not have the corresponding knowledge about the state of affairs. Anyhow this is not, as has been said above, a challenge to the truth claim. The differences in knowledge concerning the surrounding circumstances are grounds for rejecting the request, but there is no accuse from S towards P about not telling the truth. Having incomplete knowledge and communicating from this incompleteness is not the case of telling a lie.

3.6 Claims for Dialogical Adequacy

I have shown nine examples of communication between P and S above. Much of the analysis has been focused on reconstructing the rationality behind the utterances. All refusals of S can be found rational on grounds presented in each case. Let me present one example, with an illustrative purpose, where the rationality of S' utterance can easily be challenged:

#10:A. *"No. I am not thirsty."*

In this case S rejects P's request but on grounds which are easily questionable. P could respond in the following way:

#10:B. "I am thirsty and I need a glass of water to drink. Please bring me a glass of water!"

This response was needed since S' motivation in his refusal was considered to be inadequate in this dialogue situation. P contests the motivation of S. In #10:B P is taking a 'no' position towards the refusal. He does not accept S' refusal, since he does not accept the grounds for refusal. P finds S' refusal inadequate in this dialogue. P had no idea (in his initial request) about S bringing a glass of water to S himself for drinking. P wanted a glass of water for himself to drink. S was a means for this purpose.

3.7 Summarizing Different Grounds for Contesting Speech Acts

I have now shown ten examples of contesting a speech act (a simple request for bringing water). In this section I will summarize and systematize the different type of objections. The requested action is considered inappropriate in different aspects. The responses of S are based on different apprehended deviations. There are deviations between the request and some other circumstances:

- desired inter-personal relationships (#1, #3)
- self-respect (#1, #3)
- established rule (#2)
- existential circumstances (#2, #6, #8, #9)
- interpreted purpose (#4)
- plans and desires of listeners (#5)
- proposed means (#7)
- plans of other persons (#8)
- motivation in refusal (#10B)

A request is a directive according to the taxonomy of [Searle, 1979]. It is an attempt by a speaker to get a listener to perform an action. This kind of speech act can be contested by the listener in several ways. Habermas has used this example to show rejections according to his three universal claims (#1, #3, #5). I have raised objections concerning the appropriateness of Habermas' illustrations. The main point behind my expansion of Habermas' example is that *there can be other ways of contesting a request as a speech act*. These other examples are not possible to fit into the three pre-defined validity claims of Habermas. They are concerned with other issues than truth, normative rightness and sincerity. Most of the request refusals are made because the requested action is considered to be *inappropriate* in some aspect. I summarize these objections in relation to appropriateness of proposed action. The requested action was considered to be

- inappropriate for the listener to perform

- inappropriate for the speaker/requester concerning action efficiency (means)
- inappropriate for the speaker/requester concerning action result (ends)
- inappropriate for the relationships between speaker and listener
- inappropriate for other people (disturbing actions)
- not really requested
- impossible to perform

4 Beyond Validity Claims: General Communication Claims

One conclusion from section 3 above is that Habermas' three claims for contesting speech acts are not complete. There are objections possible to make, which do not fit into the three validity claims. This is partially due to the validity claim concept as such and partially due to the three validity claims.

There are claims raised during communication; claims which can be raised by speaker and hearer. All such claims are not concerned with what can be called validity. If we look closer to the validity claims proposed by Habermas, they are all related to the past or at least to something given and not to the future. An utterance is assumed to be valid in relation to some existing circumstance. Truth is concerned with "existing states of affairs" [Habermas, 1984 p 88]. Normative rightness is concerned with "the existing normative context" [ibid p 99]. Sincerity is concerned with "manifest intention of the speaker" [ibid]. All these claims are thematizing *what exists*. They are not thematizing *what is to be*. This seems to be a fundamental deficiency in Habermas' theory; an orientation towards that which exists. Communication is a lot about the future; what is intended or supposed to be. Contesting a request for a glass of water, because the water is turned off or the water tap is too far away, is not a concern for the validity of that request. The addressee does not say "your request is not valid", he rather contests that it is not *reasonable* due to the circumstances to act within. I would like to expand Habermas' concept of validity claim and instead speak of *communication claims*. Such communication claims involve both claims concerning *existing* states and *future* actions and states. They involve claims for validity and reason.

I find no problem with Habermas' sincerity claim. I think it is easily justifiable in a communication theory. It thematizes the speaker. I have however problems concerning the other two claims. I have objected towards the truth claim several times above. Truth claims can not be universal¹ since it is only a feature of assertives and not of other types of speech acts [Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969]. I think that Habermas mixes truth with what I prefer to call *descriptive correctness*.

¹ It is obvious that Habermas asserts truth to be a universal validity claim: "The validity claim of constative speech acts is presupposed in a certain way by speech acts of *every* type". "Truth is universal validity claim; its universality is reflected in the double structure of speech" [Habermas, 1979 p 52].

It is possible to relate descriptive correctness with all types of speech acts and not only assertives. Truth is to be seen as one special kind of descriptive correctness and this feature is only valid for assertives. I distinguish between three types of descriptive correctness: Truth, linguistic adequacy and descriptive completeness.

I use a single example for illustrations of these three categories: Person A is uttering: *"I want something to drink"*. Person B is responding: *"There is a glass of water on the table"*. A can assess B's response, i.e. evaluate the communication claims raised by person B. Concerning the communication claim of descriptive correctness, he can contest it in different ways. He can say: 1) *"No, I can not see any glass on the table"*. In this case he is contesting the truth of the utterance. He can also say: 2) *"Yes I see, but it is only some left in the bottom. I would not call this a glass of water."* In this case he is not accusing B for not telling the truth. There is a glass with some water on the table, but it is not considered to be enough to drink. He is contesting the linguistic adequacy of speaking of a glass of water. He can also say: 3) *"No, I do not want to drink it. I think the water is poisoned"*. In this case he is contesting that the utterance of B is informative enough. B is not telling the "whole story". Some important information is concealed. A is contesting that B's utterance is descriptively complete.

In all of these objections made by person A, he is evaluating it from an action view, i.e. from his interest to drink something. It is not only objections concerning descriptive correctness. The objections are concerned with appropriateness and efficiency. He is recognizing obstacles for drinking.

The validity claim for normative rightness needs also some commenting. I am not challenging that it should not be seen as a universal claim in the same way as I did with the truth claim. I do think it is important to assess speech acts concerning their concordance to social norms. The problem is that rightness sometimes seems to be a *residual* category. All that is not truth and truthfulness claims can be considered as rightness claims. Such a vague concept is not useful. Sometimes "rightness" is substituted by "appropriateness". This is made by Habermas and commented above (sec 3.3). Also [Schoop, 1999] is making such a substitution. I take this as an expression of a need for more exhaustive claims, as I have showed in sec 3 above. Normative rightness is the thematized claim related to the interactive and regulative use of language in Habermas' theory. I think this is the reason why it is sometimes becoming a residual category for all aspects concerning social interaction. But all aspects concerning social interaction can not be reduced to issues of norm concordance. This objection is in accordance with the critical observation made by [Joas, 1991 p 100] concerning Habermas' action theory: "interaction that is not normatively regulated, or is so only slightly, is lacking in Habermas' typology".

Normative rightness seems, however, mainly to be concerned with existing normative background and I think that this claim should clearly be restricted to this.

Such a normative background consists of "institutions, roles, socioculturally habitual forms of life" [Habermas, 1979 p 54]. A speech act is said to "actualize an already-established pattern of relations" [ibid]. A speech act with thematized rightness claims implies that it is "covered by existing norms, and that means by (at least) de facto recognition of the claim that these norms rightfully exist" [ibid].

When describing it in this way I think it is rather clear that normative rightness is concerned with existing social rules, institutions etc. It can not be reduced to issues of contingent action appropriateness, as I showed several examples of in section 3 above. To avoid ambiguity I will rename this claim and call it *norm alignment*.

Besides these three partially reformulated claims from Habermas (sincerity, descriptive correctness and norm alignment) I would like to add some more communication claims. I present a list of general communication claims (table 2):

General communication claim	Communication aspect
Sincerity	Speaker
Norm alignment	Norms
Descriptive correctness	Referred world
Addressee relevance	Addressee
Respectfulness	Addressee
Deliberation	Means and ends
Dialogical adequacy	Other utterances
Argumentativeness	Utterance itself
Comprehensibility	Language

Table 2 General communication claims and corresponding communication aspect

This list is to be seen as preliminary. There remains more work to be done; both theoretically and empirically. I will briefly comment on the different claims which have been added. First a general remark. Instead of talking about universal claims I prefer to talk about *general claims*. By universal Habermas means that these claims are applicable for all possible speech acts. The concept of general claims is not as hard as that. By general claims I mean that these claims can *in principal* be raised for different *types* of speech acts; that is they are applicable to the different speech act classes. Every claim may not be appropriate to raise for every speech act due to its characteristics and context.

The different communication claims can be related to different aspects of the communication situation; not only the three worlds of Habermas. In table 2 the relations between the utterance and these important communication aspects are described. The claims can be seen as relational concepts, binding together the utterance and the communication aspect.

Habermas' model is considered to be more symmetric (than that of Searle) since it considers the mutuality of speaker and listener. I think this is true but not in all aspects. I have found it astonishing that the (world of the) speaker is apprehended but not the (world of the) listener. The relations to the listener is in Habermas' model reduced to be one (implicit) aspect of normative rightness. The listener (addressee) must be considered to be one important part to relate that utterance to and thereby to challenge its claims. I distinguish two claims which are related to the the addressee: Addressee relevance and respectfulness. It is possible to challenge a speech act for not being addressed correctly. The objection #1 (in the example in sec 3) can be seen to be such a case. S contests that he, as seminar participant, and not an employee, should perform the proposed action. In #1 and #3 it is contested that the speech acts of P are not respectful enough. One could claim that respectfulness should be special case of norm alignment, since it is concerned with ethical treatment in communication situations. I would like to restrict norm alignment to underlying norms, and having explicitly addressee respectfulness as a general claim since it is directly related to the addressee.

Another deficiency of Habermas' model is his reluctance of bringing in means-ends rationality. Speech acts can be contested due to means and ends. In the example there were objections concerning inappropriate means (#5, #6, #7) and ends (#9). One way to put it is to say is that the request was not deliberate enough. Appropriate ends or means were not chosen. I call this claim deliberation. The speech act should be an expression of well deliberated ends and means. When explicitly addressing ends and means one is addressing intended perlocutionary effects.

Speech act theory has been criticized for being too narrow-sighted and only viewing isolated speech acts [Ljungberg & Holm, 1996]. Discourse aspects are mainly disregarded. A discourse is considered to be a collection of statements with relations to each other [Coulthard, 1985]. A conversation is a discourse, in this meaning, that is consists of several inter-related statements from different participants. A text is a discourse when it consists of written inter-related statements. A compound utterance can also be seen as a discourse.

An utterance can be challenged from a discourse perspective [Kreckel, 1981]. What is said in one utterance can be questioned if it is not an adequate response to another utterance (#10:B). I call this dialogical adequacy. There can also be critique towards a single utterance for not being argumentatively lucid, transparent and complete.

The last general communication claim comes from Habermas. It is the comprehensibility claim. The utterance must be understandable in accordance with linguistic rules and competence.

When formulating these different communication claims I have used the powerful operational principle of Habermas for assessment of speech act claims.

The interpreter can take a 'yes' or 'no' position against the speech act. The contesting position depends on what aspect is contested. I have above described that such a questioning can be made concerning the following aspects: The utterance's relations to the speaker's intentions, to social norms, to the referred world, to the addressee, to means and ends, to other utterances, to the utterance itself and to language.

5 Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to critically investigate the validity claim concept of Habermas' communicative action theory. This should be interpreted as an analysis of one important theoretical underpinning of LAP. The validity claim concept has been used by IS researchers without any deeper analysis of it. I have questioned if the validity claim concept is a valid concept in a theory concerning communication. I have questioned the concept of validity claim in different respects. The concept in itself is too narrow. Speech acts can not only be contested by "historical validities". Speech acts can be challenged concerning their presence and suggested future. An addressee can question whether the speech act is *reasonable*.

The concept of universal validity claims is transformed to general communication claims. The claim concept was made more restricted in the sense that these claims are not considered to be applicable for all speech acts, but applicable for different speech act types in principal. The claim concept was made less restricted in the sense that it covers other aspects than validity claims.

One of Habermas' validity claims is the truth claim. This claim is rejected as universal. Truth is one subclass of descriptive correctness, which is considered to be a general communication claim. The rightness claim has been renamed norm alignment. Besides the four claims emanating partially from Habermas (sincerity, descriptive correctness, norm alignment, comprehensibility) several other general claims were formulated: Addressee relevance, respectfulness, deliberation, dialogical adequacy, argumentativeness.

There is a need for future research along the lines presented in this paper. The different communication claims have been formulated based on a critical reading of Habermas and an investigation of some of his prototype examples. Empirical research is needed to further validate the communication claims presented in the paper. There is also a need to look deeper into other communication theories and compare the communication claims presented here with other theoretical constructs; e.g. the felicity conditions of [Austin, 1962], the speech act conditions of [Searle, 1969], the conversational maxims of [Grice, 1975] and the felicity conditions of [Allwood, 1976].

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