The Theory of Cognition in Unification Thought and the Definition of Lying

A discussion of the proposition: “Being wrong is half of lying.”

The Theory of Cognition in Unification Thought provides a particularly interesting way to examine your statement:

“Being wrong is half of lying.”

I believe Unification Thought would support the distinction you are making between the falsity of information and the intention to deceive, while adding an important insight: cognition itself is a purposeful relationship between a subject and an object.

This allows us to examine not only whether someone is wrong, but how the error arises, what purpose motivates the communication, and how truth can ultimately be established.

I will distinguish between what Unification Thought explicitly teaches and my application of its principles to your definition.

1. Cognition is a process of collation

According to Sang Hun Lee’s Essentials of Unification Thought, cognition occurs through give-and-receive action between the subject of cognition and the object being cognized.

The human mind contains internal standards of judgment called prototypes. These are compared, or collated, with information received from the external world.

Through this relationship, cognition takes place.

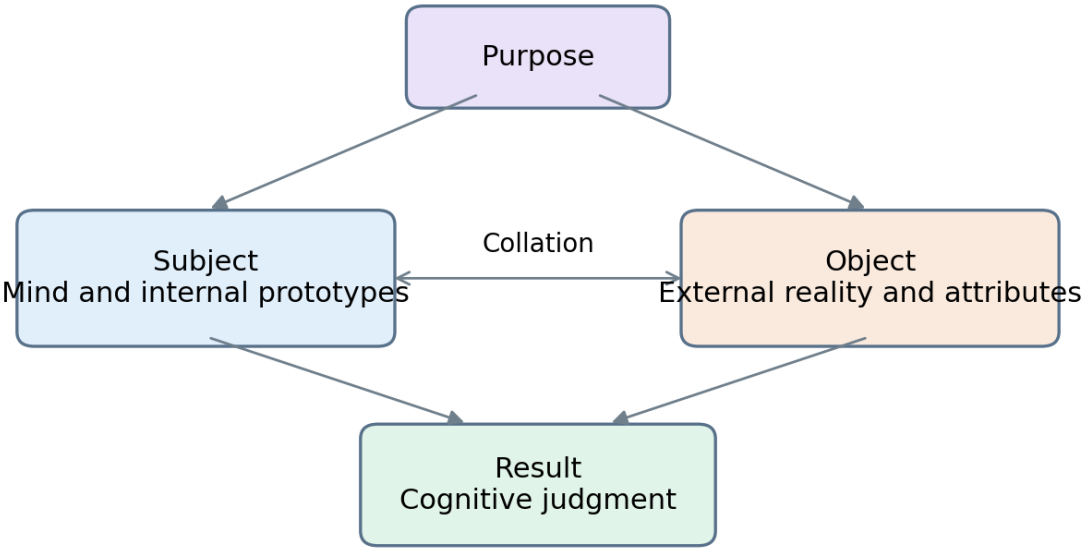
For example, suppose someone observes a physical object and concludes that it is made of aluminum when it is actually titanium.

The person’s cognition is incorrect because the judgment fails to correspond to the actual object. However, the incorrect judgment does not establish an intention to deceive.

Unification Thought’s Theory of Cognition gives us grounds for treating these as separate questions.

2. The four-position foundation of cognition

Unification epistemology specifically describes cognition in terms of a four-position foundation centered on purpose.



Simplified interpretation of the four-position foundation in Unification epistemology.

In this structure, a judgment is the result of the relationship between the subject and object, centered on purpose.

Notice something important: the purpose of cognition is present before the judgment is completed.

This is relevant to your definition of lying.

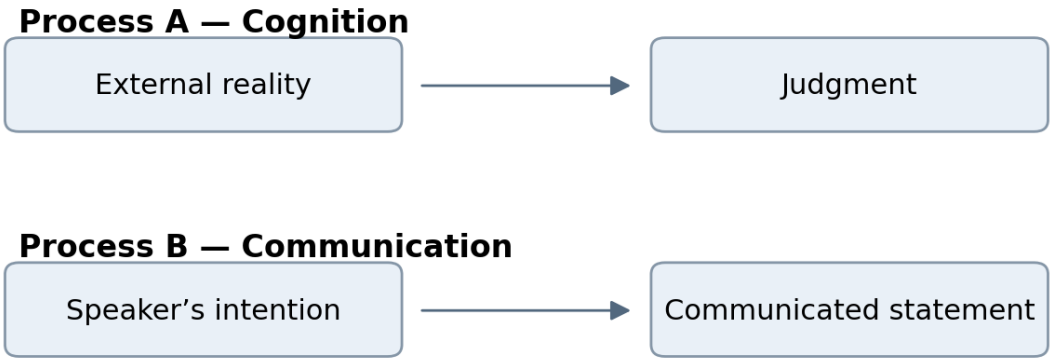
A person might pursue cognition with the purpose of discovering truth and nevertheless arrive at an incorrect conclusion.

Another person might correctly understand a fact but subsequently communicate a false statement with the purpose of deceiving someone.

The two people differ profoundly in intention, even though both might communicate the same false information.

3. Being wrong and lying belong to distinguishable processes

I would propose the following extension of Unification epistemology.



Process A — Cognition. Question: Does the judgment correspond to reality?

Process B — Communication. Question: Is the speaker attempting to deceive?

The first process concerns the correctness of cognition. The second concerns the purpose and honesty of communication.

These processes are related, but they are not identical.

Your definition combines a condition concerning the communicated information with a condition concerning the speaker's intention.

Consequently, your statement that "being wrong is half of lying" identifies one of the two components of your definition, provided that "being wrong" means communicating false information.

4. The relationship between Sungsang and Hyungsang

There is another way Unification Thought can illuminate this discussion.

Its ontology distinguishes between Sungsang (internal character) and Hyungsang (external form).

Applied to human communication, we might distinguish:

Internal dimension	External dimension
What the speaker believes	What the speaker says
The speaker's purpose	The communicated information
Intention to deceive or inform	Truth or falsity of the statement

This is an analogy drawn from Unification ontology, rather than an explicit classification of lying in its epistemology.

The importance of the distinction is that external behavior does not necessarily disclose the complete internal character or purpose of the person performing it.

A person can communicate false information while sincerely believing it to be true.

Conversely, a person can knowingly attempt to deceive while communicating information that happens to be true.

In your framework, false information is the external condition, while deceptive intention is the internal condition.

Neither can be substituted automatically for the other.

5. Does an error in cognition constitute half of a lie?

Here I would make a further distinction that I think Unification Thought encourages us to consider.

Suppose a person incorrectly believes: 2 + 2 = 5

There is an error in cognition. But suppose that person never communicates the judgment to anyone.

Under your original definition, we do not yet have the first component of lying, because the person has not given false information.

We must therefore distinguish three stages:

1. Incorrect cognition: The person's judgment does not correspond to reality.
2. Communication of incorrect information: The person expresses the false judgment.
3. Intentional deception: The person communicates with the intention to mislead.

Your initial statement becomes more precise when applied to the second stage.

We can say that communicating false information satisfies one of the two defining conditions of lying. However, an incorrect internal judgment alone does not.

This distinction is consistent with the separation between cognition and subsequent action.

6. A particularly important implication: the correction of error

In Unification Thought, knowledge develops through the repeated relationship between cognition and practice. New experience can correct or refine existing prototypes and judgments.

This has a significant implication for your argument.

Being wrong is not necessarily evidence of dishonesty. It may represent an incomplete stage in the development of correct cognition.

For example, consider the following progression:

Initial cognition — A sincere but incorrect judgment

↓ Further investigation — New evidence and renewed collation

↓ Corrected cognition — A more accurate judgment of reality

Thus, error can be part of the process by which cognition approaches truth.

Lying, by contrast, introduces a question about whether the speaker's purpose is consistent with communicating truth.

This brings us to something I consider especially significant.

7. The purpose of cognition versus the purpose of deception

Unification epistemology places purpose at the center of the cognitive four-position foundation.

If the purpose is to understand reality accurately, the subject seeks a correspondence between internal judgment and external reality.

But if the purpose of subsequent communication is to deceive, the speaker may attempt to produce an incorrect understanding in the listener.

These purposes point in different directions.

Truth-seeking: Judgment toward reality

Deception: Listener toward false belief

This is my philosophical extension of Unification Thought, not a direct quotation from Sang Hun Lee.

It suggests something quite important: An innocent error and a deliberate lie may have the same external content but fundamentally different internal purposes.

From the standpoint of Unification Thought, that difference matters because purpose is not incidental to the formation of the four-position foundation.

8. My conclusion concerning your original statement

Returning directly to your proposition:

"Being wrong is half of lying."

I would distinguish three levels of agreement.

First, definitional agreement. Under your proposed definition, communicating false information constitutes one of two necessary components of lying. I agree.

Second, epistemological agreement. Unification Thought provides a framework for evaluating whether cognition corresponds to external reality independently of the person's intention to deceive. This is consistent with your distinction.

Third, ontological interpretation. The internal purpose and external expression of communication can be analyzed as distinguishable but related dimensions. This is a reasonable application of Unification Thought's Sungsang–Hyungsang framework, although it should not be mistaken for an explicitly stated doctrine about lying.

There is, however, one refinement: the actual truth or falsity of the communicated information and the speaker's belief about its truth are different things. A complete analysis of dishonesty must account for both.

A question that takes us further

In Unification Thought, cognition is not merely the passive reception of information. It is a purposeful process involving give-and-receive action and the formation of a four-position foundation.

This suggests an additional question:

If a person discovers that information they previously communicated was false, does their response to that discovery reveal something about the original purpose and the continuing purpose of their communication?

For example, someone who corrects a mistaken statement demonstrates a different response to truth than someone who knowingly continues to defend it.

The initial error might be identical. The subsequent actions disclose additional evidence concerning the person's purpose.

I think this is where the Theory of Cognition could be productively connected with Unification Thought's Theory of Ethics: not by equating error with dishonesty, but by examining how cognition, purpose, responsibility, and the pursuit of truth are related.

For reference, the most directly relevant primary exposition is Unification Thought — Chapter 9: Outline of Unification Epistemology.

https://uthought.org/en/ut/chapter9/section2/outline-of-unification-epistemology