

Communicative Styles through the Prism of Intersubjectivity

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Abstract

The style people communicate has a significant impact on how they get the things they want, express needs, avoid conflicts, and make healthy intersubjective relationships. The success of communication is always the shared responsibilities of both communicators – the sender and the recipient. The article offers the theoretical assumptions and practical results of the research on the communicative correlation between the phenomenon of intersubjectivity, and the existence of the communication styles – assertive, aggressive, and submissive. The authors introduce a semiological approach to the paradigm of intersubjective processes, apply the conversation analysis to the material of English fictional discourse, and characterize the nonverbal profiles of the communication styles under investigation. The article aims at highlighting the specificity of intersubjectivity realization in different communicative styles according to the degree criterion and intensity features. The main findings of the research reveal the intersubjectivity as a communicative style forming principle, which differently actualizes the concept of "self and other" and manages the creation of the communicative climates (supportive or unsupportive) via verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the sender and the recipient who can or cannot demonstrate their intersubjective competence.

Keywords: Communicative style, conversation analysis, English discourse, intersubjectivity, intersubjective competence, semiological approach, verbal and nonverbal behaviors

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Introduction

Communication can be defined as a continuous interactive process of expressing, interpreting, and negotiating messages, sharing communicative intentions, emotional attitudes, and social values. Communication is a complex multimodal phenomenon, which is never one-sided. Instead, it is always realized synergistically between people involved in the process of communication. The communication process is reflected in the amount and style of interaction in order for the sender to ensure that his / her messages have been received in the way they were intended, and for the recipient to ensure that he / she is interpreting the messages correctly. In this respect, many communication scholars (Gamble, 2012; Norton, 1983) highlight that any style of conversation results from joint, task-motivated efforts of participants to make sense of each other as subjects of the communicative event. Thus, the significance and the rationale of our study are to provide a new critical thinking framework to the communicative styles taxonomy guided by the pragmatics of intersubjectivity.

The concept of intersubjectivity has become of interest to communication researchers in recent years. It has been argued that making cognitive and pragmatic sense of discourse requires the intersubjective competence of how to use and interpret verbal and nonverbal behaviors of communicators. The same concerns the peculiarity of the communicative style (Gamble, 2012) of the discourse leading – the way of multisemiotic communicators' behavior built upon the opposition "to win : : to loose", which has not yet been the object of a particular linguistic research.

This paper aims to consider the English communicative styles through the prism of intersubjectivity. The article outlines the theoretical approaches to intersubjectivity; investigates the communicative styles (assertive, aggressive, and submissive) as certain types of intersubjectivity actualization; differentiate between the nonverbal profiles of each communicative style, highlights the communicator's intersubjective competence for creating the necessary communicative climate.

Theoretical Background of the Research

Communicating or getting our message across is the concern of us all in our daily lives in any language we happen to use. Learning to be better communicators is important for us in our private and public activities (Rehling, 2004). Better communication means better understanding ourselves and others, less isolation from those around us, and more productive, happy lives.

A multidisciplinary interest in the study of language and communication evolves through urgent demands and challenges of time conditioned by modern social standards of human interaction (Levinson, 2013). Language in use is nowadays understood and thoroughly studied not only as a cognitive, psychological, philosophical, neurolinguistic creature but also as a social and intersubjective phenomenon. The process of human interaction is inherently intersubjective, comprising subjective components of assessment and attitude to create "a speaker's imprint" in discourse (Finegan, 1995), aimed to be potentially shared by others (Nuyts, 2001). The phenomenon of intersubjectivity and the study of language as a form of social practice have

become topics not only for multidisciplinary research but for linguistics in particular (Shevchenko, 2010).

Philosophically, the problem of "other minds" as a central concern in studies of human consciousness and mind respectively reveals shared social experiences as phenomena that transcend human subjectivity per se and leads to the creation of dichotomy of "self and other", "personal and shared". While subjectivity is explained as the linguistic expression of the speaker's involvement, intersubjectivity is defined as the linguistic expression of the sender's (speaker's / writer's) attention to the recipient (the hearer / the reader) (Traugott, 2010). In other words, intersubjectivity as a phenomenological property inherent in the man as a social being may be characterized as the ability to share mental and emotional states of "others" (Martynyuk, 2020).

Meanwhile, there exist two recognized approaches to the topic of intersubjectivity in linguistics: cognitive and interactional. The cognitive approach focuses on the analysis of linguistic structures that provide for intersubjectivity, based on Edmund Husserl's philosophy and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the human body (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). The interactional approach is based on conversational analysis and Alfred Schutz's phenomenology of the social world (Schutz, 1967). The scholar claimed that intersubjectivity exists as a practical problem and a challenge for every case of communication. It should also be noted that both approaches highlight an essential notion of intersubjectively validated social reality as a sphere of language functioning and understanding that linguistic intersubjectivity is based on normativity in linguistic structures, language use, and everyday practices in social interaction (Etelamäki, 2016).

Based on the semiotic nature of language and discourse, it seems reasonable to introduce a new approach to the study of intersubjectivity— a semiological one. Semiology has its philosophical basis in the Kantian dichotomy of mental (phenomenal) and nonmental (material) worlds, which corresponds to the classic European dichotomy of subjective and objective. The semiological approach can reveal how to induce identical or similar informational states in the minds and attitudes of the sender and the recipient via their different verbal and nonverbal signs of behavior in communication. The use of verbal and nonverbal semiotic resources for intersubjectivity in different discourse genres is influenced by human and contextual factors of communication. They form and shape up the process of communication, where "personal and shared responsibility" can be studied in terms of psychological stances and evaluations, social and cultural norms, communicative intentions, styles, and climates.

Intersubjectivity, as one of the central notions of social semiotics tends to expand the application in different discourse practices and domains. Discourse, in its turn, is understood as an interactional and intersubjective process of "mind interaction" aimed at constructing language signs and presented as a unique social reality (Martynyuk, 2009; Stepanov, 1998; Shevchenko, 2018). The semiological approach research principle of multimodal intercommunication "man vs. the world" presupposes consideration of problematic issues of verbal and nonverbal semiosis, including the problem of exteriorization of emotional states with the help of gestures, posture, mimics, facial signals, voice characteristics, etc. in different discourse practices, coming into the focus of attention of another subject.

Along with verbal means (words, sentences), we use voice, gestures, facial expression, and many other nonverbal means of communication to convey meaning to persons around us. An awareness of body language - the subtle messages given by postures, hand movements, eyes, smiles – is among the many avenues to improved communication. Communication researchers claim that in social interaction, individuals communicate far more nonverbally than we do verbally.

The discovery of the importance of nonverbal communication has transformed the study of human social behavior. Nonverbal signs appear to operate at three levels of communication. First, they define and condition the communication system. Secondly, nonverbal cues help to regulate the communication system. They signal referents, statuses, indicate who is to speak next, provide feedback about evaluations and feelings. Finally, nonverbal signs communicate contents and intentions in discourses.

Effective communication requires the use of verbal and nonverbal means to avoid a direct answer or to hide one's intent while appearing to be open and forthright. In both instances, an understanding of what is really happening, as opposed to what one would like to see happening, is the first step towards improved intersubjectivity of communication.

The success of a particular communication strategy depends on many factors such as the willingness of people to understand each other, the level of their intersubjective competence and language acquisition, the social and cultural backgrounds, and the choice of appropriate discourse behaviors of participants.

In the context of the intersubjective communicative act (Martynyuk, 2020), both verbal and nonverbal semiotic systems as interrelated perceptual stimuli refer to the same referential situation and activate conscious/unconscious, shared/different sensory-motor, affective, cognitive, and volitional structures of the subjects' experience which are associated with the situation and determine the communicative meanings in the process of interpretation, resting on the intersubjective nature of human consciousness .

Amongst three models of communication, claimed by Schiffrin (1994), coding-encoding, cognitive, inferential, and the interactional, namely, the latter is entirely different from the previous in the interpretation of intersubjectivity. In the framework of the interactional model of communication, intersubjectivity is viewed as psychological and phenomenological experiencing common interests, actions, etc. and this "unity" is not permanent; it is considered as a part of "communicative work" aimed at its reproduction and maintenance in each new act of communication (Dubtsova, 2015). From the positions of the interactional model of communication, interpretation has become the main criterion of successful communication, taking into consideration the component of "shared knowledge", and the perceiver can output meanings that the speaker did not put into his message. Moreover, the interactional model of communication may answer the question of what is the driving force of a human's desire for the linguistic explication of his experience.

The importance of "intersubjective knowledge" is difficult to underestimate in the process of construing extra-linguistic reality in different discourse domains, genres, modes. "Shared knowledge" and "shared responsibility" together with various forms of their representation and actualization determine the choice of communicative styles, communicative climate, communicative outcomes, distancing or rapprochement as politeness strategies manifestations in discourse, etc.

To sum up, it is essential to underline the significance of the intersubjective aspect of communicative behavior both in verbal and nonverbal interaction since intersubjectivity is formed in the process of direct communication as a result of bodily-sensory and spiritual experience acquired in different discursive practices, creating and defining the features of this practice.

Methods

To achieve the aim of the research and accomplish its tasks, this study was conducted to assess the fundamental role of intersubjectivity actualization in the communicative style differentiation. Several methods of linguistic analysis were used namely, conversation, semiotic, contextual, and pragmatic analyses. The conversation analysis was used to provide a detailed description of turn-taking peculiarities, "repair" actions, sequences of actions that participants choose to address troubles of speaking, hearing, and understanding. The rest of the methods were used within the ideology of linguistic pragmatics. They concern about how saying something can count as doing something in terms of speech acts, emotions, and attitudes; how communicators produce and listen to the clues that allow for the intersubjective identification of whatever is meant to be doing.

Applied to English interaction, the semiotic analysis offers to reveal a set or inventory of nonverbal actions that is typically used in the aggressive, assertive, and submissive communicative styles. Levinson (2013) argues that the "front-loaded" information of voice pitch, gaze, gesture, and turn-initial tokens (such as "oh," "look," "well") can potentially tip off the recipient as to what is being intended and done intersubjectively.

The research material includes discursive fragments, singled out from modern English fictional conversational discourse, focusing on the designation of the characters' nonverbal behaviors in everyday communicative situations. As an illustration, let us consider the following husband-wife dialog regarding the intersubjectivity of their communicative styles.

WIFE: *You're late again. We'll never get to the theatre on time.*

HUSBAND: *I tried my best.*

WIFE: (sarcastically) *Sure, you tried your best. You always try your best, don't you? (shaking her finger) I'm not going to put up with this much longer.*

HUSBAND: (raising his voice) *You don't say! I happen to have been tied up at the office.*

WIFE: *My job is as demanding as yours, you know.*

HUSBAND: (lowering his voice) *Okay. Okay. I know you work hard too. I don't question that. Listen, I really did get stuck in a conference (putting his hand on her shoulder). Let's not blow this up. Come on. I'll tell you about it on the way to the theatre.*

It is evident that the wife chooses the aggressive style of communication by letting her husband know with her words, voice, physical actions that she is upset and outraged. She doesn't care about her husband's excuses. So, the degree of her intersubjectivity here is low. On the contrary, the husband is choosing the submissive style by responding in a kind manner, using words, vocal cues, and gestures to explain his behavior and to show respect to his wife. Thus, the degree of his intersubjectivity in this communicative event is high. Both individuals' communicative styles are affected by the nature of the situation (they are late for the theater), by their attitudes (how they feel about what is occurring), and by their past experiences.

Results

We like thinking of communication as ideal, conflict-free cooperation. In reality, people enter every conversation with definite needs, interests, and aims for which they are ready "to fight". To achieve a required communicative result in a turn-taking process, people use different discourse strategies and tactics to create a necessary style of their communication: they make orders, give promises, ask for favors, extend invitations, flatter, blame, pleading, etc.

Norton (1983) explained the communicative style as the way one verbally and nonverbally interacts, transmitting direct and indirect meaning. According to Norton's Theory of Communicator Styles, nine styles are typically used in the communication process – dominant, dramatic, animated, relaxed, friendly, attentive, open, contentious, and impression leaving. Researchers developed that theory qualitatively and quantitatively (Rehling, 2004; Waldherr, 2011), and Gamble (2012) offered to reduce the number of styles to the following three types: aggressive, submissive, and assertive communicative styles. We fully support this comprehensive subdivision of styles, which we have reconsidered from the viewpoints of intersubjectivity. Our research findings are as follows.

The pragmatic intent of the aggressive style is to dominate. Aggressive people always want to win: they insist on standing up for their own rights while ignoring and violating the rights and interests of others. The aggressive person begins by attacking, thereby initiating conflicts. The following example may illustrate the above-mentioned statement, "*Marielle looked up into his face. He was furious. His dark eyes were flashing and his mouth was set in a thin line of displeasure. "I'm lost. I, uh, got out to sort of stretch my legs for a moment and then ..."* She faltered. "*And then you damned near got run over!"*" he finished for her (H. Whitley). Here, the problem of "other minds" doesn't exist at all: the main concept of intersubjectivity "self and other" is violated as the communicative style is based on the opposition "winner-loser".

The assertive person intends to communicate in a confident, partnership, cooperative way, i.e., honestly, clearly, attentively, and friendly. The aim of the assertive person is to support other's beliefs and ideas without harming the recipient. Assertive people behave in a comfortable manner that attracts attention and respect by showing a strong, confident personality. For example, "*It sounds like fun,*" *Marielle said. "Of course I'll go."* *Bandy's face creased with pleasure. "Miss Mari, I'd be honored,"* he said gallantly. *He took off his hat and, from the saddle, bowed with a flourish* (H. Whitley). In the assertive style, the key

concept of "self and other" is not violated; instead, it is favored as this communicative style is based on the opposition "winner – winner".

Submissive people are neither aggressive nor assertive in their discourse behavior. They are very shy, are ready to lose, and show the willingness to obey other people. *“Are you okay? he asked. “You look a little feverish. “No, no,” she hastily replied, coming back to the present with a jolt. “I mean ...yes.” She laughed nervously. “I mean, no, I’m not feverish and yes, I’m okay” (H. Whitley). As this communicative style is based on the opposition "loser-winner", the key intersubjective concept of "self and other" is specifically violated under the influence of uncertainty and subordination of the character.*

Consider how differently people demonstrate their communicative style by such nonverbal means as voice characteristics and body language (see Table one), increasing or decreasing the intensity if intersubjectivity in conversations:

Table 1. *Nonverbal profiles of the communicative styles*

	<i>Aggressive Style</i>	<i>Submissive Style</i>	<i>Assertive Style</i>
<i>Voice qualities</i>	Shouting loud high pitch unreasonable threatening	quiet whining apologetic hesitant nervous	Calm friendly persistent reasonable clear and controlled
<i>Body language</i>	pointed fingers feet apart waving arms hands on hips chin is forward staring standing too close	hands together moving feet looking down looking away hand over mouth	good eye contact upright stance open gestures (shows palms of hands) relaxed smiling nodding

Based on the material analysis, we came to a conclusion that the intersubjectivity is a communicative style forming principle. Intersubjectivity of negative or low degree completion corresponds to the aggressive style of communication; regular positive and intensive realization of intersubjectivity favors the formation of the assertive communicative style, while the weak, uncertain verbal and nonverbal realization of intersubjectivity is relevant to the submissive communicative style.

The combinations and sequences of these styles with different degrees of intersubjectivity realization can create two types of communicative climates based either on cooperation or competition. These climates are called the supportive and unsupportive (or defensive). Supportive climate is provided by such discourse actions as cooperation, encouragement, satisfaction. This is

achieved by description, problem orientation, spontaneity, empathy, and equality expressed verbally and nonverbally. The unsupportive climate is based on defensive behavior, which occurs when a participant perceives or anticipates a threat. Defensive actions give rise to defensive means, such as the vocal, facial and postural cues that accompany words. We behave defensively when we perceive others are attacking our self-concept. The unsupportive climate is marked by the following behaviors: evaluation, control, strategy, neutrality, superiority, and certainty. The effectiveness and feedback of the relevant communicative climate creation are closely connected with the sender's and the recipient's intersubjective competence, which requires thorough investigation and assessment in discourse-analysis and communication studies.

Conclusion

With the research aim to consider the communicative styles through the prism of intersubjectivity, we applied the conversation analysis to the material of English fictional discourse. Due to this, we managed to characterize the nonverbal profiles of the communicate styles under investigation, discovered the specificity of intersubjectivity realization in different communicative styles according to the degree and intensity features. A low degree of intersubjectivity corresponds to the aggressive style of communication; positive and intensive realization of intersubjectivity favors the formation of the assertive communicative style; weak, uncertain verbal and nonverbal realization of intersubjectivity is relevant to the submissive communicative style. Thus, we may conclude that intersubjectivity is a communicative style forming principle, which differently actualizes the concept of "self and other" via the intersubjective competence of the sender and the recipient.

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