

ON COMMUNICATION, SOCIAL ROLES, REGISTER AND TEACHING

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Abstract

The paper deals with the interconnection among communication, its effectiveness, social roles and communication register in the educational process. The first part is devoted to term communication itself which has its fundamental role in society. Whether it is realized or not, we do communicate always. One of the key aspects when discussing communication is our perception of communication. Derived from the Latin ‘communicare’, it implies not only talking or chat, yet it includes whole variety of elements that should not be forgotten in the process of communication. The second part of the paper deals with the concept of communication register, its definition in the foreign, as well as in the Slovak context. Moreover, during every communication communicants represent certain social role, depending on the circumstances they are in. In fact, social role might be referred to as an expected way of one’s behavior related to their social status (*Velký sociologický slovník*). Apparently, teachers have to handle during the teaching process few social roles, not just one. It might easily happen that teacher would need to represent assessor, controller, investigator, organiser, participant or tutor during one lesson. Another relevant point is that teaching is also considered as communication process. What is more, there is no effective teaching without effective communication. Therefore, it is crucial to realize the importance of effective communication in the classroom.

Key Words: communication, communication register, social role, teacher, student

Abstrakt

Predložený príspevok sa zaoberá prepojením medzi komunikáciou, jej efektívnosťou, sociálnymi rolami a komunikačným registrom. Prvá časť príspevku predstavuje pojem samotnej komunikácie, ktorá má v spoločnosti fundamentálne miesto. Či si to uvedomujeme alebo nie, komunikujeme stále. Jedným z kľúčových aspektov pri rozoberaní komunikácie je naša percepčia komunikácie. Pôvodom z latinského slova ‘communicare’, neznamená iba rozprávanie alebo rozhovor, ale zahŕňa v sebe celú variétu elementov, ktoré by v procese komunikácie nemali byť zabudnuté. Druhá časť príspevku sa zaoberá konceptom komunikačného registra, jeho definíciou v zahraničnom ako aj v slovenskom kontexte. Okrem toho, počas každej komunikácie predstavujú komunikanti istú sociálnu rolu v závislosti od okolností, v ktorých sa nachádzajú. Sociálna rola býva označovaná ako očakávaný spôsob správania, ktorý sa viaže na istý sociálny status (*Velký sociologický slovník*). Je zjavné, že učitelia musia zvládať počas vyučovacieho procesu niekoľko sociálnych rolí, nielen jednu. Jednoducho sa môže stať, že počas jednej vyučovacej hodiny bude musieť učiteľ zastupovať rolu hodnotiaceho učiteľa, kontrolóra, vedca, organizátora, participanta alebo lektora. Ďalším relevantným faktom je to, že vyučovanie býva často považované za komunikačný proces. Navyše, neexistuje efektívne vyučovanie bez efektívnej komunikácie. Preto je kľúčovým elementom uvedomiť si dôležitosť efektívnej komunikácie v triede.

Kľúčové slová: komunikácia, komunikačný register, sociálna rola, učiteľ, student

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of the term communication. Furthermore, humans communicate always. Whether it is intentional or not,

communication does not encompass words and speech only. On the contrary, communication is often expressed by silence, by gestures, by facial expressions or body movements. There are different definitions and descriptions of the term communication. Following are few definitions that depict communication from different angles.

Scales (2012, p. 38) emphasizes the importance of communication:

Communication is such a fundamental part of being human that we tend to take it for granted. Communication is the 'glue' that holds people together; it makes connections and interactions between people possible. It is the start and end point of all human activity and interaction and it makes possible everything we want to do.

Communication is of such importance that humans could not exist without it. Much of the available literature on communication deals with the question of verbal communication. To be precise, communication refers to the oral or written mediation of information by speech (*Encyklopédia jazykovedy*, 1993). Turning now to the definition including content of verbal communication, *Velký sociologický slovník* (1996) elaborates one of them. It analyses communication containing categories and types: source – recipient, communication channel, communication code etc.

Craig Calhoun (2011) examines communication as social science in *International Journal of Communication*. Communication as an academic discipline might be sometimes called "communicology" as it relates to all the ways humans communicate. To put it in other words, it embraces a large body of study but also knowledge. In addition, communication as a discipline includes both verbal and nonverbal messages. A large and growing body of scholarship about communication that has been investigated by many scholars is presented and explained in textbooks, electronic publications and academic journals. In the journals, researchers report the results of studies that are the basis for an ever-expanding understanding of how we all communicate (Calhoun, 2011). In order to link communication with teaching in the classroom, the background of perception of communication, social and teaching roles will be briefly outlined.

1 Perception of communication

What is really important and what matters is our perception of communication. *A primer on communication studies* (uploaded 2012, December, 29, p. 59) clarifies perception as "the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information." First of all, after hearing a message, human mind is about to select and organize information based on the importance, nature of information and order. Consequently, people tend to pay attention to the other factors such as tone of voice and stimuli that are included in the world around us. It is almost certain that all our senses are involved. Richmond comments on perception: "Our perception of our communication choices is normally based on our projection of the probable outcomes of communicating or not communicating in the given instance" (Richmond, 2006, p. 25). Indeed, we often enter communication with the assumptions of possible consequences and results.

Moreover, we commonly gather ideas and produce almost tailored constructions to achieve probable communication outcomes. In *A primer on communication studies* (uploaded 2012, December, 29, p. 59) perception is interpreted as a complex process: “Although perception is a largely cognitive and psychological process, how we perceive the people and objects around us affects our communication.” This is supported by the following figure that depicts The Interaction model of communication.

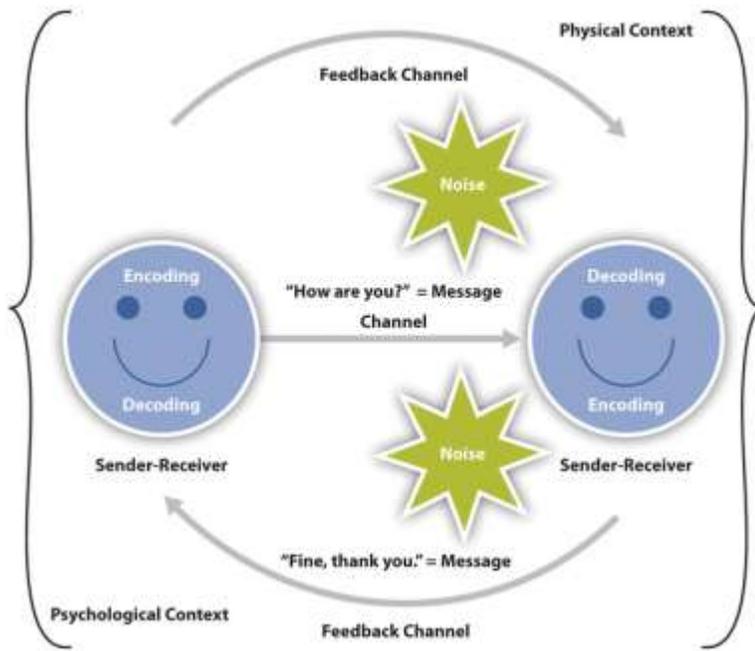


Figure 1. The Interaction model of communication.

Source: *A primer on communication studies*, uploaded 2012, December, 29. p. 23.

As it can be seen from Figure 1, any kind of sending and receiving information is surrounded by Physical, as well as Psychological context. The interaction model of communication illustrates communication as a process consisting of two ways in which participants interchange positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts. Likewise, this model portays the interactive aspects of communication, however, it does not account for how communication constructs our realities and is influenced by social and cultural contexts (p. 61).

2 Communication register

Before proceeding to examine concept of communication register, it will be described from different perspectives, as there might be found inconsistency in defining term. Communication register has been investigated mostly since the second half of the twentieth century. Linguists such as Hymes, 1974, Ferguson, 1977; Galperin 1977; Halliday, 1978; Baker,

1992; Andersen 1992, Biber, 1995; Hoffmanová, 1997; Slančová, 1999; Coupland, 2007; Biber – Conrad, 2009; Mrázková, 2014 strived to provide the most appropriate definition of communication register. When discussing register, there is an interconnection among varieties used in language. According to Hymes (1974a, p. 59) “for the situation-specific use, the British term register has gained acceptance.” It must also be noted that humans use different language style and different communication register in different situations. Another relevant view is suggested by Galperin (1977, p. 32) who points out that “a functional style [register] is a system of interrelated language means which serves a definite aim in communication.” Bearing in mind previous point, Galperin characterizes register with regard to aim in communication that implies what is the essence of communication. Commenting on communication register, Ferguson (1977, p. 212) writes: “A register in a given language and given speech community is defined by the uses for which it is appropriate and by a set of structural features which differentiate it from the other registers in the total repertory of the community.”

Turning now to the question of communication register in the Slovak context, a significant analysis and discussion on the subject was presented by Slančová (1999) who defines register as a method of situational language speech, bound to a particular form of the common human activity. Register is a kind of sociolect (in a broader understanding). Moreover, communication register is always associated with the communication situation (event) in progress and the communication roles that communicants acquire. Apart from that, D. Slančová and T. Slančová (2014) propose deductive and inductive classification of the communication sphere. In other words, deductive division is directed from social institution to a communication situation. Communication situation is, thus, a specific implementation of institutional or non-institutional conduct (Slančová, D. – Slančová, T., 2014). However, the authors introduce closely non-institutional communication, which is perceived as private communication, although private communication as non-institutional might be discussed only in quotation marks. Even the spheres of private communication, such as family, friendship, the neighborhood, are in fact and in sociological understanding institutions. (Slančová, D. – Slančová, T., 2014).

On the other hand, inductive classification of communication sphere is related to generalization. It is necessary to emphasize that inductive classification is directed from the communication situation and it happens in such a manner that the communication situation itself is divided by different communication situations. Therefore, communicants would use various communication registers in various communication situations.

It is worth noting that the diversity of language and communication register as such is pertained to the differentiation of society. The key aspect is that the more differentiated is society which uses the same language, the more differentiated is language itself. In addition, the more differentiated are spheres and types of communication situations, the more differentiated is preferred way of expressing thought regarding these spheres and situations (Slančová, 1999).

Moving on to classification of register, Slančová (1999) highlights that register might be characterized in three levels:

- With regard to situation:

a) based on communication spheres given by particular nature of the activities, object, communication topic, communication objectives and environment;

b) based on the social environment given by the relationship between communication participants and their social roles.

- With regard to the code (language material) that is the very first representative of particular register. Generally, we distinguish whether there are primarily expressions of speech (spoken) or principally written, however, we have to count with the whole repertoire of transitional types of expressions.
- Based on the set of linguistic formulations and rules that are regularly used in certain communication situations.

Additionally, language characteristics may be divided according to:

a) qualitative division, for instance their presence or absence

b) quantitative division, for instance their frequency and distribution.

(Slančová, 1999)

The notion of a communications register is also used in Slovak linguistics with regard to child speech. Apart from the term communication register, in child directed speech is also used term 'subregister'. However, it is important to note that term 'register' should not be misused with the concept of functional style, as they are not identical. Slančová (1999) draws our attention to the fact that register is a more general term than the terms slang, professional speech and argot, jargon (starting mainly with lexical characteristics). Similarly, it is not such a broad term as the concept of functional style, although these concepts may not be understood with respect to full inclusion. Besides, rather they are the result of different points of view on the same phenomenon: national language and its functioning in the common communication.

Having discussed how to perceive communication register, the final part of this section is devoted to differentiation of macro-social and micro-social communication register and their cooperation. To be precise, macro-social communication register is understood as a conventional linguistic and paralinguistic behavior of people related to communication spheres of the socially distinguished, mostly institutionalized life of people living in an advanced society. To put it in other words, it contains daily life, family, education, art, religion, science, administration, media, healthcare, sport, army, etc. (Slančová – Zajacová, 2007). In contrast, the micro-social communications register is interpreted as a conventionalized linguistic and non-linguistic behavior of the people linked to social status, social role and social distance (ibid., 2007).

3 Social roles

This section is devoted to description of social role. Why is it important to mention social role as such? Each and every one of us represents a social role wherever we might be. However,

it depends on the one's position in society. For instance, husband and wife stand for their role in marriage. Mother and father represent their parental role within family. Teacher and students have their roles at school, in the classroom, whereas group of young people that has a common bond or expresses mutual affection enters the role of friends. This is supported by Biddle (1986, p. 68): "Role theory concerns one of the most important characteristics of social behaviour – the fact that human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on their respective social identities and the situation."

A considerable amount of literature has been published on social role, its definition and use in the world around. It might be essential to mention for instance Biddle 1979, Loudfoot 1972, Tuomela 1995, Searl 1995. One of the interesting interpretations of the term social role was brought by Masolo, Vieu, Bottazzi, Catenacci, Ferrario, Gangemi and Guarimo who distinguish among roles in literature (2004) who summarize main ontological features of roles and introduce their own approach and point out on the key features of the roles. Different approaches to social roles reflect that focus might be put on different areas. "Like identities, social roles can be seen as particular forms of semiotic potential, organized in a repertoire, and constructed and enacted by linguistic and other semiotic practices in social interaction." (Blommaert, 2005, p. 207). Studies brought by Pahta, Palander-Collin, Nevala and Nurmiall, (2010) examine language use as social practice, social behaviour and human interaction. They perceive it as communication by which people build, index and maintain social relationships and also influence other people in various ways. "The focus is on the 'identity' and 'relational' functions of language, which, in addition to the 'ideational' functions, are present in all texts and communicative situations." (Pahta, Palander-Collin, Nevala and Nurmiall, 2010, p. 9). The concept of social role has been also developed in the Czech context. To illustrate that, for instance, Kořenský, Hoffmanová and Müllerová (2013) have provided definition of social role as position of the subject in the social group. The position is derived from the group features and is related to an assumption or probability of one's behaviour. Apart from that, Koenig and Eagly (2014) in *Evidence for the social role theory of stereotype content: Observations of groups' roles shape stereotypes* demonstrate social groups that were described with changes to their typical social roles in the future. Researchers infer that projected stereotypes were more influenced by these future roles than by their current group stereotypes.

Additionally, there is a clear interconnection between different approaches to the term social role. This suggests a strong link that exists among social status and one's behavior. Most of the explications have the common core. Similarly, the term 'social role' is used in *Velký sociologický slovník* (1996) and refers to an expected way of one's behavior pertained to their social status. The following definition is intended to deal with an entry into the social role. Kořenský (1994) perceives every 'entry' of individual personality as an act of creation and transformation of the role's quality. Furthermore, its qualitative shift, every 'release' of personality's role is an act of creation and transformation of personality. In forming each of the roles occurs some sort of the inner conversion, which takes place not only within a particular

role, but especially within our personality without the fact that one would have to take necessarily a notice.

According to Leška (2005) social role refers to standardized behaviour of people with a certain social status and is expected from society or social group they are members of. Apart from that, detailed examination of the types of roles by Gáborová (2007) showed that there might be distinguished three types of roles that are associated with a group:

- 1) roles that are associated with the role and group work,
- 2) roles that are directed to the formation and stabilization of a group,
- 3) roles that are associated with satisfying group members' needs.

3. 1 Roles in teaching process

As discussed above, everyone has a certain role in accordance with the circumstances they are in. This part, however, moves on to describe teaching roles. As Straková (2013, p. 37) reminds us, “the teaching process requires handling many different roles during a lesson. First of all, teachers need to organise the lesson and decide about the extent of their involvement in the lesson and the amount of time given to learners.“ As it is in the old saying: “*Everything within reason*“, teachers themselves have to divide their roles depending on the time devoted to instructions, feedback and rapport, error correction etc. There are different classifications of teaching roles. One of the most common is proposed by Harmer (2015) who demonstrates assessor, controller, facilitator, investigator, organiser, participant, prompter, resource and tutor.

However, Harden and Crosby (2000, p. 5) suggest following ones:

- 1) The teacher as information provider,
- 2) The teacher as role model,
- 3) The teacher as facilitator,
- 4) The teacher as assessor,
- 5) The teacher as planner,
- 6) The teacher as resource developer.

There are a number of similarities between two classifications. While assessor, facilitator and resource signify almost the same, organiser proposed by Harmer (2015) is not synonymous role with planner (Harden and Crosby, 2000). The role of organiser refers to a broader context. Moreover, Harden and Crosby (2000) refer to teacher as role model. On the basis of the evidence currently available, it seems fair to suggest that teacher as role model has a significant role in the classroom. It is important to take into consideration the fact how teacher as role model affects students or educational process as a whole. In fact, there is a wide range of elements of how teachers might influence their students. For instance, the way how teachers communicate, how they perceive their students, the way how they are perceived, the way how

they dress or just the way how they give feedback. Besides, all components create a complex unit that represents teachers.

3. 2 Teaching as communication

In addition, it has commonly been assumed that teaching is often seen as a communication process. In the field of language teaching, various definitions of communication are found. Each and every interaction between teacher and student during the educational process reflects a variety of elements that either facilitate or complicate teaching process itself. Communication in the classroom as a complex process incorporates more determining aspects. Those are represented by individual teachers, students, their communication styles and behaviour, strategies that are used during the teaching process, Initiation – Response – Follow-Up scheme, environment, atmosphere in the classroom and many other factors. “Good teaching and good learning alike are so dependent on language and communication that the two are inseparable” (Hodge, 2014, p. 15). What is more, there is no effective teaching without effective communication. Teachers should always bear in mind that once their communication is accurate and at appropriate level, subject matter, explaining and teaching itself will flow smoothly without obstacles.

Language in this aspect is a tool of thought, an ‘instrument’. However, it is more than an instrument: it is the condition of thought itself, profoundly determining the possibilities of thinking about any particular topic, in any field of knowledge, for teachers and scholars as much as for students and neophytes. (Hodge, 2014, p. 2).

3. 3 Importance of effective communication in the classroom

Drawing on an extensive range of sources, Scales (2012, p. 38) highlights that “effective communication is the foundation of all successful and inclusive teaching and learning.” A study by Glomo-Narzoles (2013) intended to find out the correlation between classroom communication climate and communicative linguistic competence. The findings revealed that the students considered the classroom communication climate as supportive. Furthermore, supportive communication climate indicates that the communication atmosphere in the classroom challenges students’ flexibility, experimentation, and creativity. Kerssen-Griep, Gayle and Preiss (2006) hold the view that classroom interaction is one of the pivotal aspects of communication enterprise. Among the other issues, they analyse which factors might affect teacher-student communicative interaction and observe such factors as interpersonal communicative relationships inside and outside the classroom, student motivation, teacher influence, listening behaviour and power relationships. Another key to take into account is understanding and listening to the students, respecting their feelings and acknowledging their individual differences, making them feel secure, and avoiding control in the classroom, since these are the teacher attributes that corroborate a supportive communication climate in the classroom (Glomo-Narzoles, 2013). Apart from that, an interesting view is brought into focus by Richmond (2006) who writes about the affinity between teachers and students. He believes that it is important to recognize that there is a considerable variability among both teachers and students. Thus, although much of both teachers’

and students' initiation of communication comes as a result of a desire to gain affinity with others, some have a stronger desire to do so, and some have a much weaker desire. (Richmond, 2006, p. 26).

Similarly, many scholars hold the view that effective classroom communication is pivotal not only for teaching, but it also has a fundamental role in our lives. For instance, McLeod, Fisher & Hoover illuminate debate about the merits of useful interaction in the classroom.

Effective communication skills are as important in the classroom as they are in other aspects of our life. Actually, they are the foundation of good management. If we don't master the art of communication, our attempts to create a smooth management system and to build relationships with students are limited. (McLeod, Fisher & Hoover, 2003, p. 68).

However, what shall we do if we are not masters in communication? Is there a chance to improve it? Scales (2012) notes that even though we might assume that communication and its skills can not be taught, there are many sources, for instance specific courses that might improve people's communication skills. In addition, it is essential to realize that communication in the classroom is in great extent work of teachers. In the same vein, Glomo-Narzoles in *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* (2013, p. 405) notes that "the responsibility of creating positive communication in the classroom, where issues are openly recognized and managed in a way that promotes learning, lies on the hands of the EFL educators."

Last but not least, there is a clear connection among communication, teacher's and student's register and their roles in the educational process. Classroom symbolizes social environment where teachers and students have certain social roles and act in accordance with them. Educational process itself consists of interaction between teacher and student. Therefore, it is crucial to illustrate factors that might enhance or block communication in the classroom. Effective teaching and learning may well be supported and improved by effective and lively communication that goes hand in hand with creating friendly and peaceful atmosphere in the classroom.

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