

EMOTIONAL-SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION AS A PREDICTOR OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN PROFESSIONAL SUBCULTURE

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Abstract

The article gives a short outline of different approaches to studying the problem of emotional symbolic communication. Some theoretical results of the research into this phenomenon as a predictor of building up communicative competence of those doing socialnomics jobs have been discussed. The role of constant communicative patterns in self-identification of young people and development of professional subculture is presented.

Key words: emotional symbolic communication, communicative abilities, professional subculture.

Introduction

In modern socio-cultural context the attention to human resources becomes not only a significant problem for the community, but also for the state as a whole. This results in higher demands for training students especially those who will work in socialnomics. The character of “person-to-person” work enables the development of “assisting professions” in the professional subculture environment which is based on certain norms, values, patterns, and stereotypes of social interaction, interpersonal links, as well as special communication features: professional etiquette and language (symbols and signs).

Students as future experts represent a certain subculture which possesses original system of sign-symbolic perception of reality. Research into emotional symbolic communications as the predictor of building up communicative competence of the future expert will make it possible to get a new idea of the ways of social-symbolic coding of daily routine and will enable the formation of constant patterns of interaction in professional environment, self-identification and building an active social position of young people.

Relevance of the problem. It is obvious that the notion of the phenomenon studied is defined by the constituent concepts. It is logical to distinguish the following structural

components in the theoretical construct: substantial, instrumental, target and functional. Each of them will be discussed in more detail. The apparatus of scientific research will be defined.

Object – emotional symbolic communication in the process of building up communicative competence of students in professional subculture.

Aim – to investigate the peculiarities of emotional symbolic communication of students of socialnomics.

Objectives: to study the essence and structure of emotional symbolic communication in the context of development of students' communicative competence; to distinguish the stages of building up students' communicative competence; on the basis of qualitative analysis to identify the predictors of students' communicative competence depending on the level of emotional symbolic communication in professional subculture.

Hypothesis: it has been presumed that emotional symbolic communication as a form of nonverbal communication is a direct predictor of the level of development of students' communicative competence and in general of their professional subculture.

Sample. In the research in the years of 2007-2013 the following respondents took part: students of the Faculty of the European Languages and Cultures of Durham University (Great Britain) – 14 persons (experimental group 1); students of Ulyanovsk State Technical University: speciality of Management – 13 persons; participants of the programme “Master of business administration” of the Centre for Business Education – 11 persons (experimental group 3); students of Russian State Social University (Moscow) – 16 persons (control group).

Method. Differential-psychological and social-pedagogical context of the research provides the arguments for the choice of complex approach, harmoniously joining ideographic and nomothetic principles.

The following methods have been employed: theoretical analysis, descriptive and graphical modelling; questionnaire survey, testing, methods of self-assessment and expert assessment, ranking, content analysis and qualitative analysis of texts, various types of observations; scales of “sympathetic distance” of Feldes and test card of communicative activity of Leontyev (1969) adapted to the present research, pedagogical experiment; method of mono-factorial dispersive analysis for unrelated samples (criterion of Kruskal-Wallis H-Test); sign criterion G, interpretative methods.

Content and results of the research

Theoretical model of emotional symbolic communication became the conceptual result of the research and it comprises the following structural components: substantial, instrumental, target and functional.

The substantial component in the structure of emotional symbolic communications is defined primarily by the basic concept “communication” that is translated from Latin as “to share”, “to connect”, “to make known or understood by others”. In national science literature the term appeared early in the 20th century and meant “means of connection between objects”. Development of sociology and culturology has added some information context to the concept “communications” highlighting sharing some information between humans in the society in the definition given. Some authors put great emphasis on interaction and perception aspects while considering exchange of information between communicators. This, undoubtedly, adds some emotional colours to the communication process.

It means, therefore, that the process of interaction and exchange of any information (visual, tactile, verbal, cognitive) includes also non-verbal and, particularly, emotional communication.

At present it is a proved fact that a person's idea of himself/herself, his/her emotions, worries, inner conflicts and his/her emotional condition in general affect the communication

process in some way. Naturally, another constituent of communication is connected with the information code i.e. the system of signs or signals which transmit information. In emotional symbolic communication this sign is a symbol. It is notable that the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC) emphasized: “It is signs and symbols that reign the world rather than words and laws”.

The notion “symbol” is interpreted by modern science in various ways, for example as a sign of some idea or phenomenon (a dove is a symbol of peace, an anchor – a symbol of hope, an owl – a symbol of wisdom, a heart – a symbol of love).

Symbol also means a unit accepted in science and used to express a sound, an operation, a number, etc. (e.g. a letter, sign, or figure).

Some prominent scientists focus on instrumental psychological context of the meaning. According to S. Freud, symbols are deformed demands. According to C. Jung, symbols mean the natural way of psychic reaction on different stages of psychic development, including adult stage. C. Jung emphasized polysemous nature of symbols saying that it is impossible to interpret symbol in one way (Юнг, фон Франц, Хендерсон, Якоби, Яффе, 1997).

In fact owing to polysemy, symbol is often identified with a sign, image, a metaphor, an epitoma, an emblem, etc.

In the course of the theoretical analysis of various definitions, which was done in collaboration with N. A. Tarakanova, it has been found that the concept “symbol” has the following typical features:

- Tangibility – the possibility of visual, audible, and tactile perception.
- Irrationality – the indefinable nature of “symbol” that is impossible to explain reasonably and logically. Therefore, intuition, imagination, and real ability to perceive symbols on sensual emotional level are very essential.
- Association is connected with development and “associative reading” the symbols.
- Spontaneity is caused by the fact that symbols are formed unconsciously. According to S. Langer, “... our sensual data are first of all symbols” (Лангер, 2000, p. 24). Hence no one can totally monitor the process of symbol formation.
- Naturalism in symbol formation is considered in contrast to artificiality of a sign.
- Subjectivity shows through variety of symbol perception by different people.
- Polysemy is studied in two aspects. The first is caused by symbol definition as a term, concept or an image possessing some additional sense besides its meaning. The second aspect is connected with subjectivity. Specific features of perceiving the same symbol generate a variety of meanings.

According to G. Firth, to understand what can be hidden deep in a person’s psyche it is necessary to find out what a certain symbol means to this person in the context of his/her own language of symbols (Ферс, 2000).

Hence individual and psychological nature of symbols can cause misunderstanding among people.

It should be noted that subjectivity is intrinsic to individual symbols reflecting private world of a certain person. Other – cultural – symbols originate in myths and rituals and, being a part of culture and its traditions, reflect “the collective unconscious” (Юнг, фон Франц, Хендерсон, Якоби, Яффе, 1997).

Altogether the mentioned features of a symbol illustrate its instrumental nature (instrumental component in the phenomenon structure). The target component involves discovering the aim of the phenomenon analyzed. Within the issue studied the mentioned component presents achieving emotional self-expression, i.e. giving personal emotions and feelings, discovering one’s own potential and “self-image” awareness which reflects the inner world of a person and his/her relationships with those around him/her.

The functional component illustrates the multi-aspect nature of emotional symbolic communication functions. In the broad sense, this is the function of “protection” against obvious confrontation with emotionally overloaded information. Symbols enable to verbally signal for the certain emotional state the communicator is having. As Firth (2000) said, a symbol, unconscious as it is, always acts as a compensatory or complementary element concerning conscious psycho areas in a certain moment of life.

Symbolic communication can take various forms, such as words-symbols, objects-symbols and/or drawings-symbols.

In Oster and Gold’s opinion, “self-expression by means of drawings is more symbolic and less specific comparing to words” (Остер, Гоулд, 2000, p. 15). Actually drawings are the direct message of the unconscious, therefore, they are less psychologically protected and more open and sincere in contrast to verbal messages.

So, emotional symbolic communication should be understood as the interaction by means of symbols aimed to express oneself, often spontaneously.

It should be especially focused on paralinguistic means of nonverbal communication which add to its emotional aspect. In psycholinguistics intonation, tone and volume of speaking are usually distinguished among supra-segment means as they are some sort of a marker determining the emotional state of the communicator.

Leontyev (1969) emphasized how much different speech can be depending on the special situation of perceiving it, for example, speech and language units in media. “... Both the parameters of communication (e. g., its orientation) and its social functions affect the formal characteristics of the communication process, mainly in speech and language. For example, there are special rules of how to use intonation patterns and other norms which make radio-speech different from every day interpersonal communication” (Леонтьев, 1969).

In general, the achievements of high level of the formation of communicative competence depend on (1) the assessment of the probability of success by the students and (2) interest in successful use of adequate repertoire of emotional symbolic communication.

According to the formula of J. Atkinson $M = P \times I$,

where M = motivation, P = probability of success, I = interest.

Consciousness and motivation of students were forming in specially organized conditions of educational-cognitive games, educational discussions, situations of emotional stimulation.

The above-mentioned theoretical results became the basis for the modelling of the process of the formation of students’ communicative competence. The worked out model is graphically presented as an open spiral. It is presumed that on its every circuit the level of the formation of communicative competence is higher than on the previous one. The direction of the vector of the spiral “up-down” associates with positive regression to a lower level of development of a respective professional feature if the correction of indicators of one or another component is necessary according to individual needs and abilities of every student (Figure 1).

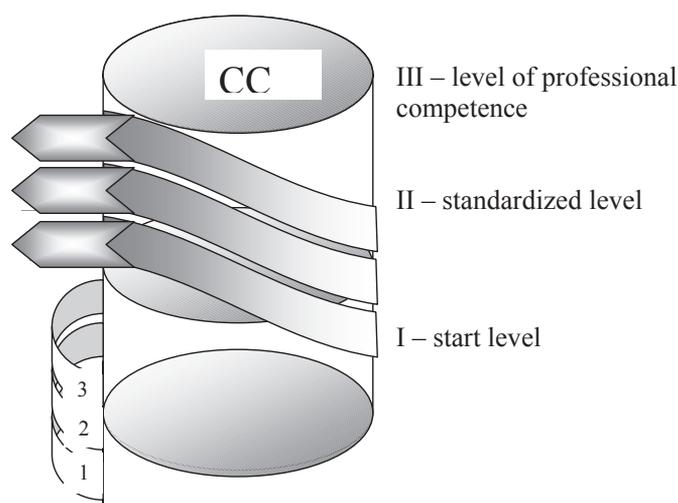


Figure 1. Model of the formation of students' communicative competence
Symbols: CC – communicative competence; 1 – cognitive strategies;
 2 – metacognitive strategies; 3 – social-affective strategies

1. **Start level** – the source level of mastering the ways of verbal and emotional symbolic communication by the students.

2. **Standardized level** is reached in the process of specially organized activity directed towards development of students' communicative competence.

3. **Level of professional competences** characterizes high effectiveness of communicative activity of the personality. It is the level of the most comfortable existence of a person in any communicative environment, inducing for further communicative self-realization. Integration of personality, professional and social values takes place. Knowledge and abilities to effectively choose and apply adequate repertoire of verbal and nonverbal communicative strategies and communicative competence in the context of professional culture gain special significance.

In the research special experimental conditions were created presumably influencing on the dynamics of levels of the formation of students' communicative competence. The received quantitative data after mathematical processing were presented in Table 1 reflecting level shifts the students of experimental and control groups experience. **Sign criterion G** was applied (Сидоренко, 2002). It has been proved that the fewer are “untypical” shifts, the bigger is probability that a “typical” shift is prevailing. G_{emp} – the number of “untypical” shifts. In Table 1 it is seen that in experimental groups (E1 and E2) “untypical” shifts were absent, in the control group (C) 2 “untypical” shifts took place.

Table 1. Number of recorded shifts

Number of shifts in groups:	Groups		
	Number of students		
	E1 $n_1=14$	E2 $n_2=13$	C $n_3=16$
a) positive	13	11	7
b) negative	0	0	2
c) zero	1	2	7

The hypotheses could be formulated:

H_0 : Shift to the side of increasing the level of communicative competence of the students of experimental groups (E1 and E2) as a result of mastering of the ways of emotional-symbolical communication is accidental.

H_1 : Shift to the side of increasing the level of communicative development of the students of experimental groups (E1 and E2) as a result of mastering of the ways of emotional-symbolical communication is not accidental.

If $G_{emp} > G_{cr}$ then H_0 is accepted. If $G_{emp} \leq G_{cr}$ then H_1 is accepted.

It is accepted to consider the number of “untypical” shifts as the empirical meaning $G_{emp} = 2$. Critical meanings G_{cr} corresponding to the levels of statistical significance accepted

$$\text{in psychology: } G_{cr} = \begin{cases} 4(\rho \leq 0,05) \\ 2(\rho \leq 0,01) \end{cases}$$

In the present case $G_{cr} = G_{emp} = 2$, that is the shift is not accidental and may be considered as reliable. Hypothesis H_1 is accepted: Shift to the side of increasing the level of communicative development of the students of experimental groups (E1 and E2) is not accidental.

Graphically the data of the distribution of respondents of the experimental research according to distinguished levels of communicative development are presented in a final histogram (Figure 2).

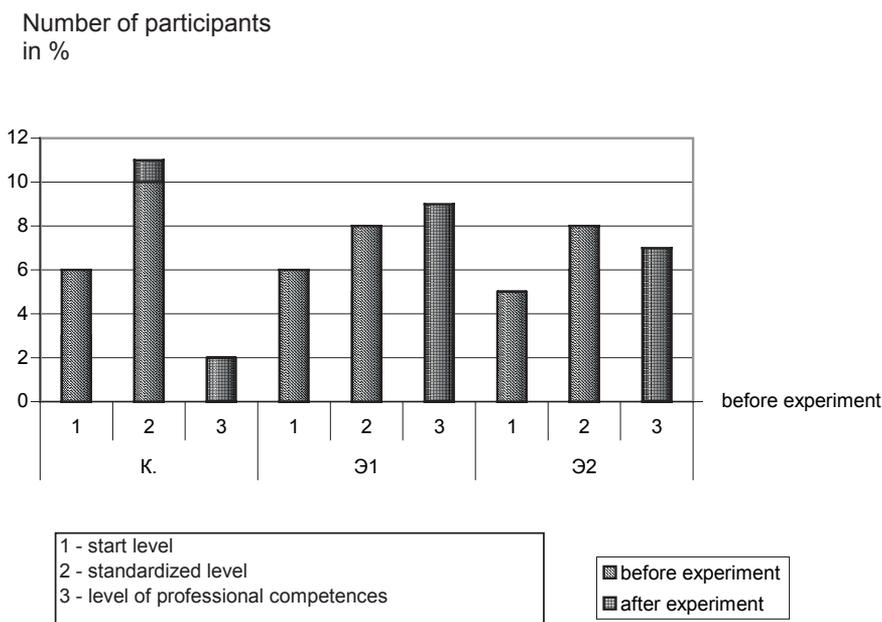


Figure 2. Levels of communicative competence of students from experimental and control groups

Conclusion

Hence, a professional needs communication skills to be a successful communicator in his/her professional community, both to contact his/her colleagues and to preserve his/her group and its status.

In the subculture of those representing socialnomic professions their special original system of signs is being developed – they build up their professional slang. These are words, slogans, expressions – “professionalisms” used by experts to highlight the effect of identity and being part of a certain social stable professionally united group (“we are professionals”). Professional subculture with its own slang is a kind of linguistic phenomenon which exists within some social, time and space limits. Special words and word combinations are markers that, being a kind of universal messages, are not just a short (“archived”) form of presenting information, they also function as special codes to keep outsiders unaware of what is being discussed.

It should be noted that the problems discussed also belong to the field of emotional symbolic communication.

So, to sum up, in modern high social-psychological education the most urgent task is optimizing communicative training and developing communicative abilities of students as well as their abilities to recognize “symbolic messages” (semiotic interpretation), implicit intentions of communicators and emotional sensitive information. Intentional understanding and applying effective means and ways of nonverbal communication will dramatically increase professional potential of specialists employed in socialnomics.

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