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Communication withdrawal in the situations of discordance

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Abstract

The article represents a deep analysis of reasons for communication withdrawal in the situations of discordance. The following classification differentiated on the basis of the communicant's motives in the communicative situation, the emotional condition of the communicant, the relationships between communication partners and communication process itself.

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Refusal, communication withdrawal, communicative situation, interpersonal communication, communication process.

Introduction

The research "Refusal from communication as an element of interpersonal communication" generally represents a complex description of the act of refusal from

communication in the area of interpersonal relations and is based to a large extent on the elements of discourse analysis, which helps to reveal and interpret the intentions of the participants of communicative actions. The work contains detailed description of verbal (semantic and syntactic) and non-verbal (paralinguistic, kinesic, eye contact, haptic, prosemic) means of refusal, exposes implicit and explicit meanings produced in the communication process. Besides, it represents different classifications, covering the set of strategies, functions of and reasons for investigated phenomenon. (In the research "refusal from communication" is defined as a communicative action or its significant absence, the aim of which is non-participation in the communicative process or its termination). Data used for the research includes feature films and novels of XX-XXI centuries of any origin and author's records of oral speech.

The present report aims at introducing the results of the conducted research concerning the topic under discussion "Discourse and discordance".

People often choose to terminate or avoid communication instead of finding a compromise and using appropriate communication strategies for accordance. Such behavior cannot not affect the further communication process. We attempt to trace the factors that influence the choice of either maintaining or terminating the communication.

In the western and especially American society, where the high level of directness in communication is quite common, refusal from communication is rendered as an unproductive strategy of conflict resolution [DeVito, 2001, 397; Carassa, Colombetti, 2015]. J.T. Wood talks about such a withdrawal as a distractive way, which does not solve the discordance but makes it worse. Besides the nature of such avoidance is devastating for interpersonal relations: not willing to communicate a person demonstrates his/her disrespect to a communicative partner, neglect to his/her feelings [Wood, 2002, 292]. Kehtlin and Rudolph Verderber assume that conflict avoidance only postpones and enhances confrontation and, as a rule, has negative consequences [Clovin, Roloff, 1991]. Daniel Dana, the specialist in the field of conflict resolution, calls the withdrawal from communication a false reflex supposing that people break the relationships too easily [Dana, 2001]. In the opinion of American researchers active participation in the situations of discordance is significant for ef-

fective communication. It is important not only to speak but also be able to listen to and hear your partner and what he/she feels. Refusal to talk may also result in misunderstanding and irritation [Clovin, Roloff, 1991; Dana, 2001; Weaver, 1996; Canary, 2001; DeVito, 2001; Wood, 2002; Werderber K., Werderber R., 2003; High, Solomon, 2016; Yilmaz, Peña, 2015; Lockwood, 2015; Hengst, Devanga, Mosier, 2015].

As for intercultural communication, according to S. Ting-Toomey's theory [Ting-Toomey, 1985] different cultures treat the issue of discordance resolution differently. It depends on to what extent a person cares of "face maintenance" of his/her own as well as other people's. In collectivist cultures "face maintenance" of the group prevails whereas in individualistic ones an individual, protecting his/her face often at the cost of somebody else's "face loss", comes first. Therefore unwillingness to discuss the problem and conflict avoidance is typical of collectivist cultures while individualistic ones are prone to choose other strategies of conflict resolution.

Nevertheless, it is to be noted that communication avoidance during discordance is not always rendered as a negative phenomenon. In Richard Weaver's opinion, such way of behavior is acceptable if it is not frequent as it gives people time to calm down when the atmosphere is tense [Weaver, 1996]. Rudolph and Kehtlin Verderber suppose that communication withdrawal may be effective as it gives an opportunity to think about the problem. Besides sometimes termination of communication takes place due to senselessness of discussion of discordance in the situations where relationships are of no significance. In other words it is more reasonable and polite to stop the conversation rather than heat up conflict taking part in the argument [Verderber K. Verderber R., 2003]. The following example, where the priest ignores the atheist, who tries to disrupt a sermon, illustrates this:

Finally, when Dad was unable to stand it any longer, he'd shout out something to challenge the priest. He didn't do it to be hostile. He hollered out his point in a friendly tone: "Yo, Padre!" he'd say. The priest usually ignored Dad and tried to go on with his sermon, but Dad persisted. He'd challenge the priest about the scientific impossibility of the miracles, and when the priest continued to ignore him, he'd get mad and yell out something about Pope Alexander VI's bastard children... (The Glass Castle. Jeannette Walls).

The research contains a deep analysis of reasons for refusal from communication. It concerns multiple communicative situations including discordance in everyday communication. The following classification is carried out referring to the situations of discordance only.

The material used for analyses enabled us to subdivide the reasons into several groups.

Why aren't you talking to me?

I. The reasons stipulated by a communicant's motives in the communicative situation

A. Attempts to avoid a conflict

In the movie "In the land of women" the daughter doesn't want to talk to her mother as she is irritated by the topic of the discussion. She tries to stop the conversation:

– Mom, I can't talk about it anymore. It's too retarded. And I really don't want to fight with you right now.

Another situation takes place when two women have a conflict based on some disagreement during the dance competition, where their daughters participate. One of them tries to solve the discordance starting the dialogue. The other mother is unwilling to communicate:

– I wanted to talk to you.

– I am not in a good mood to talk. You'd better leave now.

One more example from the Russian movie "Give me a complaint book" shows that communication avoidance is a common way to escape from some unpleasant conversation.

– I am sorry, I'm busy.

– Sure. People always say this when they want to run away from a nasty talk.

B. Face maintenance

People may become unapproachable in case they don't want anybody to see them weak, upset, devastated, outraged and etc.. It may be typical of those, who can not control themselves and realizing this fact they intentionally choose to avoid meeting others at that particular moment instead of fighting, arguing, crying or saying some undesirable things. It may take them some time to be ready to talk again:

The story "The classes of calligraphy" by M. Shishkin illustrates this:

A wife is going to leave her husband. He tries to dissuade her:

– I know, – I heard her respond, – you want me to die! Ok, I will die!

She sprang and ran out of the room. I tried to hinder her:

– What are you talking about?! Stop it!

She locked in her room. I got scared, started to knock on the door, but suddenly Olga opened it and said in almost a calm voice:

– Stop breaking the door. Everything is fine. (the translation is ours, M. Gulyaeva)

C. Willingness to manipulate a communication partner

If a woman says "I don't want to talk to you" it doesn't mean that she will not speak. It means only that she is not going to listen to you. The joke reveals the ambiguous nature of refusal from communication. What we mean and what we say may be different. When somebody threatens to stop the conversation it may have a lot of various implications, including manipulations of different kinds.

Communication avoidance often works as punishment, means to prove something to the communicative partner or achieve a desirable goal. Parents often choose it to discipline their children: *Don't come up to me, you've hurt me. Go away, you are not a good boy/girl. I am not talking to you until you clean up this mess. I am not a friend of those who misbehave.*

Such manipulation concerns not only children. Communication refusal in general is a strong and powerful weapon, an effective instrument to affect people.

I was losing my temper. My wife kept silent. Silence is an enormous power. It must be prohibited like a bacteriological weapon (S. Dovlatov).

II. The reasons determined by the emotional condition of the communicant

Sometimes the refusal from communication is triggered by disappointment, offence, anger, rage, lovesickness and others. Affected by emotions a person can terminate the communication or avoid it at all. In the novel "Something blue" by Emily Giffin the main character Darcy is disappointed with her friend and overwhelmed by emotions she claims the following:

– And you, – I said to her. – I never want to see you again. You are dead to me.

Retelling the episode from his life in the book "Parting with illusions" Vladimir Pozner describes what happened after a serious row with his father:

Then my father got a grip on himself. "Get into the car," he said to my brother, who stood there, petrified. Then he turned to me and said, shortly, "I'll take care of you later".

The way he took care of me was to ignore me. For several weeks he did not speak to me. Then, very gradually, things got back to a kind of normalcy.

In the next example difficult life circumstances force Cavita to part with her newborn daughter and put her in the orphanage. It is her husband Jasu's decision and she cannot accept and put up with it. She has no right to protest directly but what she feels doesn't let her be herself :

After she and Rupa came back from the orphanage, Cavita was somber and impenetrable. She barely spoke a word to Jasu and pulled away whenever he touched her. Before, as a newly married couple, the awkwardness between them was expected. But now, their mutual avoidance was based on seeing too much in the other (Secret Daughter. Shilpi Somaya Gowda).

III. The reasons postulated by the relationships between communication partners

Character of relationships between partners affects their behavior in the situation of discordance and their willingness to maintain the relationships. For instance, antipathy or repulsion between partners do not create a favorable climate for conflict de-escalation. Not tight relationships are more vulnerable, whereas close and continuous ones encourage communicants to choose more friendly strategies to resolve discordance.

Two sisters don't get on well with each other, which doesn't make them allies. They don't see eye to eye on multiple matters and this kind of relationship prevents them from successful conflict resolution:

– Amy, I really want to apologize. I know things have been hard for you since Dad died... Come here. – I hold my arms out for a hug.

–Leave me alone, – she says almost savagely.

–But Amy...

– Go away! – She backs away urgently, raising her arms as though to fend me off (Do you remember me? S.Kinsella).

IV. The reasons determined by communication process

People are not prone to communicate if they are not satisfied with the way it works. The following reasons influence the willingness to communicate irrespective of whether it is an open discordance or a simple talk between communicants:

a) the violation of cooperation principles and politeness [Grice, 1978, Leech, 1983];

b) inappropriate nonverbal behavior;

Scott Ginsberg describes behavior patterns, encumbering communication. These are eye contact avoidance, lack of smile, posture, silence, involvement shields [Ginsberg, 2005, www].

Eye contact is a powerful communicative signal. It is hard to start the conversation with a person when he or she looks away. People in an elevator try not to look at each other and doing this they block the communication channel. A smile expresses friendliness. The lack of a smile may be perceived as an evidence of unwillingness to communicate. Posture and arm position can be repulsive and unwelcoming. Long silence creates a tense atmosphere and affects negatively the communication process. Involvement shields include reading, talking on the phone and other kinds of activities reducing approachability of a person.

This kind of behavior may be both deliberate and unintentional. Therefore people may block communication channels without realizing it. At the same time nonverbal signs we send to others may be powerful signals affecting people's willingness to communicate with us.

c) communicative disbalance (i.e. non-equal participation in the conversation, interruptions, over or under demonstration of communicative initiative)[Ekroth, 2010, Sternin, 2001, Vorontsova, 2005].

Conclusion

The data under analysis enabled us to reveal fundamental reasons for unwillingness to communicate in the situations where communicants experience lack of agreement, harmony and conformity. However, we can not declare that the above-mentioned set of reasons is complete due to overwhelming diversity of communicative situations and factors affecting them. The reasons under analysis demonstrate

the sensitive nature of communication process, where the tiniest thing may affect the willingness to communicate and be significant for communicants. Any situation of discordance creates a tense atmosphere with both partners in a vulnerable position and with especially sensitive perception, which requires maximum carefulness in the choice of communicative strategy on the way of effective communication.

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Отказ от общения в ситуации несогласия

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Аннотация

В статье представлен глубокий анализ причин отказа от общения в ситуациях несогласия. Предложенная автором классификация построена на следующих основаниях: дифференциация мотивов коммуниканта в коммуникативной ситуации, эмоциональное состояние коммуниканта, отношения между партнерами по коммуникации и сам процесс коммуникации.

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Ключевые слова

Отказ, отказ от общения, коммуникативная ситуация, межличностная коммуникация, процесс коммуникации.