

CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN THE COMMUNICATIVE STYLES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Communicative style is one of the variables that visibly influence the process of interpersonal communication. In order to reach their communicative goals, speakers use the language strategically, some meanings being literally transmitted, and others just involved. The full understanding of the behaviour of participants in verbal interactions have to be based on the premise that they are delineated by the cultural context in which they take place. There is a progressive interaction between personal identity, group identity and cultural identity, the most complex particular case of social identity. The professional identity of the teacher is, ultimately, a social construction. The identity of the professional group overlaps self-identity in educational communities. The intercultural identity overlaps the group identity in the context of linking the educational curriculum and the teaching practices to the European recommendations, the obligation of all the Member States of the European Union on the one hand, and in the context of globalization and interconnectivity on the other. The case study regarding the communicative styles of primary school teachers was conducted in the second semester of 2015 - 2016 school year, in a school of Braşov. The supportive, self-centred and playful communicative behaviours differentiate the stylistic profiles of primary school teachers in the investigated educational community. The personalization of the relationship by promoting interactive patterns based on strategic behaviours that satisfy both fields of communication contributes to the construction of group identity.*

Keywords: *cultural identity in educational communities; communicative styles of teachers; personalizing professional interpersonal relationships.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In sociological studies, Romanian culture is framed among cultures with a low degree of assertiveness, a typical feature of collectivist and low masculine cultures (Şerbănescu, 2009). Globally, Romanians show a low degree of assertiveness, aiming at passivity, while discursive aggressiveness manifests emotionally, non-argumentative (Şerbănescu, 2009:154). Romanian linguists considers the following variables determines the process of interpersonal communication:

- The individual peculiarities of the speakers - the set of values, attitudes, behaviors, abilities, personal characteristics determined by the communication situation and previous communication experiences of the interlocutor;

- The individual peculiarities of the listener - individual abilities to understand and decode various patterns of information structuring, abilities to process words, positive attitudes, the ability to process in the semantic memory information, the ability to process the emotional content of the message, the ability to process

information by integrating it into certain cognitive schemes and behavioral scripts;

- The perception;
- The relation between the interlocutors - formal or informal; intense or superficial; equality or inequality of power; competitive, hostile or cooperative, friendly;
- The communication situation – ideological, social, stressful or intercultural;
- The communication goal – personal, domestic or social;
- The individual communicative style - dominant / submissive, histrionic / reserved, conflictual / nonconflictual, vivid / inexpressive, calm / frantic, careful / careless, impressive / insignificant, open / closed, friendly / hostile;
- The communicative behavior - heuristic, reinforcement, supportive, reflexive, explicative, self-centered, playful;
- The emotion – in anthropological sense, as a generic term for affective states (Şerbănescu, 2009:43-60).

A socio-metric study developed by Gallup International and Interact in 2005 highlights the

characteristics of the Romanian culture: collectivist culture, with high score of power distance, predominantly feminine, with a high level of uncertainty avoidance, and with short-term orientation. The concept of cultural variation was introduced by Geert Hofstede, who in 1974 had access to a survey of the values of people in over fifty countries employed in local affiliates of the IBM multinational corporation, representing almost ideal samples, as the profile of employees was identical, except for nationality, which allowed the discernment of cultural differences in their responses (Hofstede *et al.*, 2012). The statistical analysis of country averages of answers to questions about values has revealed common problems and different solutions in terms of social inequality, the relationship between the individual and the group, the concepts of masculinity and femininity, the handling of uncertainty and ambiguity. The four areas of fundamental issues defined by two Americans in 1954, sociologist Alex Inkeles and psychologist Daniel Levinson in a study of English language literature on national culture and empirically confirmed by the IBM study are the cultural dimensions. The four dimensions, aspects of culture that can be measured in relation to other cultures, are: distance from power, collectivism - individualism, femininity - masculinity and avoidance of uncertainty. The scores recorded by Romania are as follows: distance to power - 90 - high distance to power (pp. 64-66); individualism - collectivism - 42 - predominantly collectivist culture (pp. 99-101); masculinity - femininity - 45 - feminine culture (pp. 142-144); avoidance of uncertainty - 90 - culture with a strong avoidance of uncertainty (pp. 188-190); long-term orientation - 52 - short-term orientation culture (pp. 246-249); permissiveness - austerity - 20 - austerity culture that does not like expressing happiness (pp. 272-275). Geert Hofstede's theory on cultural dimensions and differences does not have major educational implications, but it can help explain the social behaviors of individuals. Relationships and interactions between individuals are influenced, in addition to personality factors, by the traits of the culture in which the individual is formed.

The position of Romanian culture appears clearly in comparison with different cultures with which it has different and lasting connections, but for the present stage it is interesting to compare with the American culture given the importance of the American management model in the Romanian companies as well as the influence of English language over Romanian since 1990 (Șerbănescu, 2007:305-306). A market survey conducted by the

IRSOP in 2005, dedicated to setting Romanian values in European context, shows that the typical European is seen in a more positive light than the typical Romanian, and in some areas the difference is very high. Europeans consider that Romanians care less about others and have a tendency towards aggression, authoritarianism, dishonesty, lack of organization, conceit, idealism, superficiality and conservative opinions. The differences between the personality of the European and that of the Romanian are slightly higher in the minds of the more educated Romanians (*Romanian and European Values and Beliefs: the same or not*, IRSOP Market Research and Consulting LTD., 2005). The values of Romanian culture are considered to be eclecticism, mimesis, tolerance for diversity, coexistence of opposites, picturesque, adaptation, instinct of self-preservation, fluctuation, change as an end in itself, moment solution, ambivalence, compromise and nuance, lucid assumption of the laws of nature, the nature of things (ordinance) (Șerbănescu, 2009:310-336). Empathy to the interlocutor is directly proportional to the degree of discursive intimacy. In institutional relations the speaker tends to empathize little and superficially. Relationships based on intimacy imply affection, the dominant role belonging to nonverbal elements. As for the expression of emotions, Romanian culture manifests itself in *vaguely emotional*, in the sense that individuals analyze their emotions a little, make them superficial and impersonal, live short-lasting and fluctuating emotions. Instead, emotions play an important role in raising interpersonal relationships, group emotions prevailing on individual emotions, an effect that can be put on the collectivist feature of Romanian culture where the focus is on the needs of the group of belonging, not the individual ones (Șerbănescu, 2009: 364-367).

2. OBJECTIVES

Our study sets as main objectives:

1. To identify the individual communicative styles of primary-school teachers;
2. To identify the group communicative style.

3. METHODS

3.1. Procedure. The research was conducted during the second semester of the school year 2015 – 2016. The individual communicative style was decomposed in individual communicative behaviors. The communicative behaviors were recorded in common educational practices.

3.2. Participants. The target population of our study consists in 30 primary school teachers of Secondary School no. 2 *Diaconu Coresi* of Braşov. One subject have gone into study leave and has been carried out of our research. All primary-school teachers are women. The structure of the group of subjects regarding their age is homogeneous, starting from 18 to 60, the majority being of middle age ($M=43,83$; $SD=16,17$). Regarding their studies, 73,3% graduated, in addition to their initial teacher training, undergraduate studies and 30,0% of those postgraduate studies. The statistical analysis identified a direct correlation between the didactic degree and age ($r=0,62$; $p<0,01$).

3.3. Measures. In order to identify the individual communicative style used by the primary-school teachers in the investigated educational community we articulated the qualitative data gathered through the creative analytic practices methods, the collaborative interview, and the discourse analysis. We identified the individual communicative style using a five-step observation grid (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always), starting from the following communicative behaviours: heuristic, reinforcement, supportive, reflexive, explicative, self-centred, and playful (Şerbănescu, 2007:55-59). In order to identify the group communicative style we analyzed all the individual styles in a case-study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISSCUTIONS

In order to identify the individual communicative style we used a Likert scale (never rarely, sometimes, often, always) for each of the seven types of communicative behaviors: heuristic behavior, reinforcement behavior, supportive behavior, reflexive behavior, self-centered behavior, playful behavior. Statistical data processing highlighted the following frequencies:

1. Heuristic communicative behavior ($M = 4,20$, $SD = 0,84$): rarely - 1; sometimes - 5; often - 11; always - 13;

2. Reinforcement communicative behavior ($M = 4,93$, $SD = 0,36$): sometimes - 1; always - 29;

3. Supportive communicative behavior ($M = 2,97$, $SD = 1,37$): never - 7; rarely - 2, sometimes - 11; often - 5; always - 5;

4. Reflexive communicative behavior ($M = 4,87$; $SD = 0,73$): never - 1; always - 29;

5. Explicative communicative behavior ($M = 5,00$, $SD = 0,00$): always - 30;

6. Self-centered behavior ($M = 3,53$; $SD = 1,16$): never - 2; rarely - 3, sometimes - 9; often - 9; always - 7;

7. Playful communicative behavior ($M = 3,43$; $SD = 1,07$): never - 2; rarely - 2, sometimes - 12; often - 9; always - 5.

Certain types of communicative behavior are specific to the didactic activity. We excluded from the analysis the types of behaviors intrinsic to the didactic discourse. Thus, we may say that in the analyzed community, the supporting, self-centered and ludic communicative behaviors are the ones that differentiate the stylistic profiles of teachers for primary education.

As far as the communicative support behavior is concerned, 23.3% of the teachers participating in the research never use it, 6.7% use it rarely, 36.7% use it sometimes, and 16.7% often, respectively, always use it. In terms of self-centered communicative behavior, 6.7% among the participating teachers never use it, 10% of the participants rarely use it, 30% use it often, and 23.3% of the primary-school teachers always use it. The vast majority of the primary-school teachers involved in our research often use this form of revealing themselves to personalize their professional relationships. The playful attitude of participants towards the message fulfills some functions that transcend the communicative situation. This usually demonstrates the transmitter's care and empathic attitude towards the problems and the needs of the receiver. The care to protect the interests of the verbal interaction partner shapes the group identity. The continuous concern towards linking individual practices to the promoted rituals accentuates the group identity. In the investigated educational community, 6.7% of the participating teachers never use this kind of communicative behavior, 6.7% rarely use it, 40% sometimes use it, 30% often, and 16.7% always use it.

In order to identify the communicative group style we used the case study method with the educational community as the unit of analysis. We choose the in-depth perspective of the case study. The phenomena have been investigated in their usual context, and the results of this research are the effect of direct interactions with the teachers involved in the investigation for a long period of time.

The descriptors of heuristic behavior are interrogative statements and manifestation in the question-answer pair. In didactic discourse, justice, medical consultation, psychotherapy, the question-answer pair represents the way of organizing the discourse. The reinforcement behavior is a positive or negative response to the action of the

interlocutor, the purpose of the positive reinforcements being to produce similar future behaviors, and the negative ones to prevent the repetition of the reinforced behavior: representative speech acts (*Well done!, Excellent!, Shame on you!*) or declarative speech acts (*The winner of the contest is..., Insufficient! You will repeat the class!*). The reinforcements are specific to certain types of speeches, especially to the didactic discourse. The supportive behavior plays an essential role in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships by showing the communicative support that the speaker gives to the interlocutor. They contribute to the building of group identity, satisfying the needs of appreciation, approval and cooperation of the interactors. The reflective behavior is a form of response by which the current speaker marks co-participation in dialogue, despite the assumed passive role. Explicative behavior is typical of some types of speeches such as didactic discourse. Self-centered or self-revealing behavior is a constituent part of social relations as it defines the stage of a relationship (initial, advanced or final), degree of intensity (superficial, intimate) or gives indications of the direction that the relationship will follow (constitution, continued, dissolution, relationship repair). The use of self-centered communicative behavior has a strategic function, the transmitter proposing to the receiver a certain self-image he / she will negotiate during verbal interaction. The linguistic marks of self-centered behavior are verbal and pronominal forms of person I; adjective and adverbial determinations; marks of affectivity. The playful behavior or humor creates a common context of interaction, giving the feeling of belonging to the group and mutual support as a form of brand identity; regulating anxiety; the fixation of cognitive patterns and stereotypes (Șerbănescu, 2007:55-59).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of the teaching process is dependent on the effectiveness of communication

in the class of students. The effectiveness of communication is dependent on the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships within the classroom seen as a learning community and in school, a learning organization, seen as an educational community. If, traditionally, effective communication depended on how the teacher, in his capacity of transmitter, built and transmitted the message (Pânișoară, 2014:48), postmodern education implies the repositioning of the transmitter and receiver roles between the teacher and the pupils. The message is the key-element of communication. Its coding at the transmitter level and decoding at the receiver are related to internal factors in the cognitive, emotional and interactive structure of the two poles of communication. They also include external factors belonging to the context of the communication relationship, including its cultural determinants. In educational context, the construction of postmodern education communities will develop by promoting effective communication patterns. The communication context depends on the communication actors or the social conditions that anticipate specific structures, such as proximity, similarity and group fellowship. School curricula for primary education explicitly propose ways to individualize the classes and to build the educational community.

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