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Interpersonal Communication Strategies in Doctor-Patient Interactions:

A Discourse Analysis Study

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(Linguistics)

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Abstract

Doctor – patient interaction is an interpersonal process and essential to relationship – centered care. Doctor-patient communication is the building block upon which the doctor's relationship with the patient is made up. The medical interview, during which doctor-patient communication occurs, is a tool by which the doctor gets to know the patient so that he/ she feels like a person, not just an embodiment of a medical problem. Taking into consideration the patient's problems, understanding his complaints and the expectations that he/ she has of the doctor's mutual satisfaction gives the self-confidence in revealing his/ her complaint. Thus, both verbal and nonverbal processes, through which a doctor obtains and shares information with a patient, all patient-doctor interactions are influenced by the expectations of both parties, because this is always a two-way process, this is called doctor-patient communication.

This study investigates the interaction between doctors and patients in consultation rooms by using the qualitative descriptive method as a research type to show and describe how verbal and non-verbal communication function as integrated parties of interpersonal communication within the interaction between doctors and patients in the healthcare setting

Introduction

This study aims at investigating doctor-patient relationships in health care encounters. It focuses on how doctors use interpersonal communication strategies in their interactions with patients. What is being investigated here is how doctors and patients build relationships during the treatment journey.

The study also focuses on the relationship between verbal and nonverbal communications, between what is said and what is implied through the use of nonverbal signals such as facial expressions, raised eyebrows, nods, and handshakes, leaning forward or backward - all such paralinguistic features are highly meaningful and hence if they are made good use of, may help in achieving a successful communication process that in turn will lead to a successful relationship between doctors and patients.

According to Čenry (2008:2-3), a good communication process involves the following elements : **the participants** that is to say, the doctors and the patients, **the topic** and this may involve a variety of subjects, ranging from very serious to less serious, **the setting** and this could be the health center or the consulting room of the doctors, and **the function**, that is , the purpose and goal of the interaction.

Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to present the findings obtained during the research in the field of medical interaction, especially between doctors and patients. Few are those who have attempted a study of this point, doctor – patient communication strategies, via a linguistic perspective. This point has been rarely tackled linguistically. Hence, the task of analyzing such interactions has been arduous and by no means easy at all. The study demanded delving into the field of Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis to

be able to analyze the medical interactions linguistically in the hope of reaching the findings that, if observed well, may lead to improving the relationship between both parties, doctors and patients.

The theoretical interest of this study concerns the intent of obtaining knowledge about the linguistic processes in the interaction. It also enables students to know the importance of both verbal and non-verbal communication in medical interaction. Its practical goal is to help doctors and medical students to learn more about the roles they play in medical interviews. This is particularly significant since the relationship between doctor and patient is important, especially in serious cases of cancer and other fatal diseases.

Questions of the Study

- 1-What is meant by interpersonal communication?
- 2- What are the styles of communication that doctors use to reach patients' satisfaction?
- 3- To what extent nonverbal language is of importance in the communications which take place between both doctors and patients?
- 4- What are the shortcomings in the relationship between doctors and patients?
- 5- How can the relationship between both sides be improved?

Sources of Data

This study depends primarily on data collected from material derived from books, articles, and researches and, to a certain extents, material on YouTube and British national corpus.

Techniques of Data Collection

Some steps followed in collecting the data:

- Searching for corpus providing medical interviews in healthcare encounters.

- Finding the websites for the data on the internet. The researcher searched on the internet for websites that provide the script of the interview.
- Downloading the data interviews between doctors and patients from the chosen website.
- Watching the videos of the data presented.

Divisions of the Study

This study is divided into an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion:

The Introduction: presents the study in general: the significance of the study, questions of the study, sources of data, techniques of data collection and organization of the thesis.

Chapter One: explains the definition of interpersonal communication, interpersonal communication strategies and how to use them in a healthcare setting, and also how to use verbal and nonverbal communication in describing and developing the relationship between doctors and their patients in medical encounters.

Chapter Two: is a review of the literature on the previous studies conducted on doctor-patient interactions in a healthcare setting. It tackles the different factors that shape the relationship between doctors and patients and the problems that affect the communication process during their interaction.

Chapter Three: elucidates the general theoretical framework that is used for the analysis of interpersonal communication in the healthcare setting. It presents some linguistic theories, such as "Speech Acts Theory," "Politeness Theory," "Techniques of Conversational Analysis," and Maxims of Grice.

Chapter Four: is an investigation of the relationship between doctors and patients; it presents an application of the linguistic theories that were chosen to the medical interviews to show how doctors and patients use them in their

interactions. This chapter also investigates the nonverbal signals used by both doctors and patients in their interactions to prove that verbal and nonverbal communication are integrated, and complement each other, and are necessary parts of a successful communication process.

Conclusion: is a general winding up of what has been mentioned, and includes the findings.

Chapter One

Interpersonal communication

In this chapter, the researcher presents the definition of the term interpersonal communication, its features, its models, its principles, and its strategies and also present the nature of verbal and nonverbal communications which people use in sending and receiving messages as the main parts of interpersonal communication.

1. Definition of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is very important to everyday life and a major part of human existence. People use interpersonal communication to get their needs, create effective relationships like friendships and impressions, and work out the problems that may face them during the interactions. The more the person is effective in using interpersonal communication skills, the more he becomes attractive and popular in his society, gets his needs and achieves what he wants from others. The social success that people achieve in their dealing with others depends on how they make a satisfying conversation by use of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication is simply a verbal and nonverbal interaction between two or more than two people(small group). Interpersonal communication takes place between people who are connected with each other like a mother and a son, a doctor and a patient, the teacher and the students , a brother and a sister and a father and a daughter .

Interpersonal communiation according to Trenholm & Jersen (2008: 29) refers to “ dyadic communication in which two individuals, sharing the roles of sender and receiver, become connected through the mutual activity of creating meaning.”

Interpersonal communication is “a distinctive form of human communication that ... is defined not just by the number of people who communicate, but also by the quality of the communication. Interpersonal communication occurs not when you simply interact with someone, but when you treat the other as a unique human being”.

Peter Hartley(1993: 4) defines interpersonal communication as a face –to– face interaction. It happens between individuals. The content and the form of communication reflect the personal characteristics, the social roles and the relationships between the participants.

Interpersonal communication can extend to include small groups like friends, family, employees and so on. These different relations show that interpersonal communication has a dyadic nature. Interpersonal communication reflects interpersonal attitudes, and attitudes, as defined by Michael Argyle (1972), “ are attitudes towards others present – the main dimensions are found to be inferior – superior, and like – dislike” (251). The choice of address terms , the employment of politeness markers, the emotional overtones of the words we choose in interacting with others, all convey our own feelings towards others – friendliness, animosity, intimacy, distance, and so on.

During interpersonal communication, people turn from impersonal communication into personal communication and this is called communication continuum. (Julia T.Wood 2010 :19). Julia T.Wood (2010:20) mentions that the philosopher Martin Buber distinguished between three levels of communication. These levels are:

I- IT Communication:

People treat other people impersonally as objects, not as humans. In I-It communication, people do not acknowledge the humanity of the other people. People do not deal with them as unique individuals; they treat them as

instruments to do their orders as waiters in restaurants, or as we can see in the relation between masters and slaves. When a homeless person asks people for money, people deal with him as a person, but they look away as if he is not there.

I-You Communication:

In I-You relationships, people do not deal with others as objects, but they consider them as persons. I-You relationship is more personal. People in I-You communication interact with each other from the roles that they play in the process of interaction as in the interaction between a teacher and students.

I-Thou Communication:

In I-Thou communication, people deal with others as unique individuals. Bubber considers “the “I-Thou communication” as the highest form of dialogue” (2010: 20). I-Thou relationship is rare and special because a person cannot reveal himself totally to the other people all the time.

According to the description of Martin Bubber ,interpersonal communication is a selective, systematic, unique and an ongoing process that allows people to form personal knowledge about one another and create shared meanings.

2. Features of Interpersonal Communication

In interpersonal communication, people are not only individuals but also interdependent. The behaviour of the person can affect the other’s action. For instance, if the team leader of a project has a problem with the boss, it will affect the members of the team.

Interpersonal communication takes place between interdependent people. Therefore, it is essentially relational in nature. The way the person interacts with other people is determined by the kind of the relationship that exists between them. The way people communicate with others is different from one situation to

another as the interaction between friends is different from the interaction between an instructor and a student.

The way the people communicate with others forms their relationship. For example: if Mary deals with John in a good way, she forms a friendly relationship and if she deals with John in a respectful way, she forms a respectful and supportive relationship. The more people understand the interpersonal communication, the more they influence the development of their relationships, so interpersonal communication plays an important role in shaping relations between people.

Interpersonal communication exists on a long continuum relationship. At the beginning of the relationship, it is impersonal and by the time it becomes personal. In the impersonal relationship, people make simple and short conversations with other people that they do not know like a taxi driver and a customer but in personal relationships, communication occurs to people that know each other such as a father and a daughter, or two highly intimate friends. There are some characteristics that can be used to distinguish between impersonal and personal relationships, such as the use of modes of address which serve as an indication of whether the relationship is personal or impersonal.

Interpersonal communication includes both verbal and nonverbal messages. Besides the talking of the words that people use, they also send messages through their facial expressions, how they gesture and their body movements. Nonverbal acts are an indispensable component of interpersonal communication. Both verbal and nonverbal messages are important to successful interpersonal communication. In some situations, nonverbal communication is even more important than verbal communication especially in expressing emotions, and sometimes verbal communication is more important as when dealing with topics

related for example to the field of science so both verbal and nonverbal acts are very important for the interpersonal communication process.

3. Models of Interpersonal Communication

Linear Model:

Harold D. Laswell (1948) asserts that the communication process is a linear and one-way process which means that one person acts as a sender of a message and the other person acts as a listener who receives the message. This model of communication depends on the verbal language only. In the linear model, there are five questions that create the communication process. These questions are: “who? – says what? – In what channel? – To whom? – With what effect?” (2010:17).

Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949) develop the linear model by adding noise to it. Noise means something which prevents the speaker from sending the message and the listener from receiving the message as a background conversation in the workplace.

The linear model has some weak points. In the communication process, the listener receives messages from the speaker and does not send any messages. The communication process does not occur like that. When the speaker sends a message, the other person listens to the speaker and also sends a verbal or a nonverbal message as a smile, frown, nod, etc. Linear models show that communication is a sequence of actions from the speaker to the listener but in the real interpersonal communication process, speaking and listening are usually simultaneous (Julia T. Wood 2010:17).

Interactive Model

In this model, Wilbur Schramm (1954) shows communication as a process in which the speaker sends a message and the listener is not passive, but he sends