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ACHIEVING QUALITY IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: A 'NEWPARADIGMATIC' MODEL OF EDUCATION AGAINST NARCISSISM

Abstract: *The paper presents an extended version of a theoretical exploration proposing an intervention program to promote more sustainable and ecological modes of communication and collaborative education in language learning. Our joint project in progress is grounded on the framework of ecolinguistics and a 'newparadigmatic' school of thought which consists of shared interdisciplinary methodologies with expanded input from the life sciences, especially ecology. In our view, ecological communication and language learning are based on developing meaningful interpersonal relationships within disciplines in the humanistic area (such as foreign languages) and beyond the learning environment. The aim of this exploration is to investigate the psycho-linguistic quality and the potential of ecologically sustainable environments for learning how to communicate. The question raised in our preliminary study addresses the complexity of ecological models for language learning and promotes the high quality of language education from a meaningful eco-communicative perspective.*

Keywords: *English as a Foreign Language; Quality; Empathy; Sustainable education; Ecological communication*

1. Introduction

A novel ecological model of learning coined 'newparadigmatic' (cf. Bogusławska-Tafelska, 2013, 2016, 2017; Bogusławska-Tafelska et al. 2019) is further developed with regards to the co-relational and participative nature of educational processes and communication in general. Our point of view draws on a new paradigm of language learning ecology set within an organic environment, where participants interact and cooperate, as opposed to entrenched behavioural patterns of narcissistic self-centredness which have become pervasive in modern societies. This approach focuses on

some essential concepts such as psycho-linguistic quality and the creation of ecologically holistic environments for learning how to communicate. The qualitative investigation proposed in this study aims at exploring the deep implications and problematic side-effects generated by classical-materialistic systems of education: the contagious narcissistic patterns of behaviour which manifest across domains of professional and personal life, in psycho-social and communicational situations. The discussion outlines the unintended consequences and expanding crisis in communication which have been engendered by these models. Thereafter, we proceed by considering an alternative

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perspective suggesting possible strategies for overcoming the crisis in educational environments, first as a theoretical proposal and, furthermore, as an applicative intervention program on a wider cultural level. The proposal may potentially be carried into effect once we shift the paradigm within which we work and educate young learners.

2. Methodology

The aim of the present study is to expand the contributions highlighted in preliminary studies (Bogusławska-Tafelska et al., 2019) and to explore the educational potential of more ecological and sustainable ways of communicating in various settings (including, but not narrowed to educational ones). The research relies on methodologies for language teaching and learning proposed by the ecolinguistic and communicative approaches, such as cooperative language learning. This type of methodology considers the class environment as an ecosystem with a complex balance which is maintained within optimal parameters when all the participants (learners, trainers) develop patterns of interpersonal relations

which are in coherence from a psycholinguistic point of view (cf. Dragoescu Urlica, 2018).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Synchronizing ecological models of interpersonal communication with the paradigmatic shift in scientific discourse

The aim of our joint project is to verify our research hypothesis and thereby contribute to the qualitative development of communication in the ‘newparadigmatic’ culture of consciousness (Bogusławska, 2013, 2016).

Diagram 1 was proposed to illustrate the main direction of classical scientific processes, as opposed to our theoretical proposal of joining the post-classical paradigmatic shift across sciences (cf. Bogusławska-Tafelska et al., 2019). As a consequence, mechanistic models fail in their application to interhuman relationships, resulting in the pervasive narcissistic phenomenon prevalent in interpersonal communication throughout Western society.

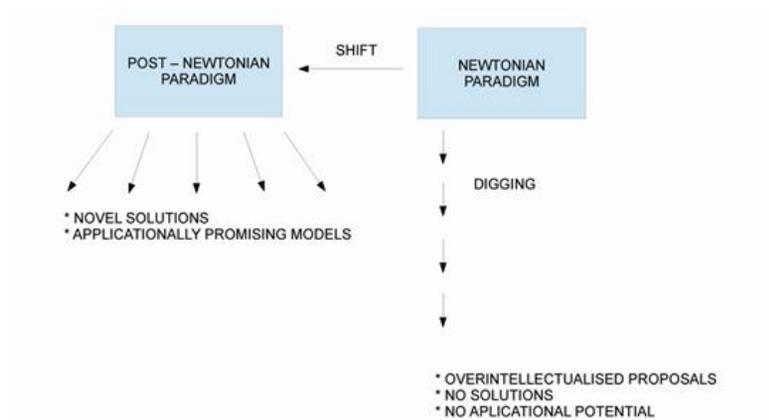


Diagram 1. The paradigm shift and its benefits for the applied sciences

The process of achieving meaningful qualitative education requires taking into consideration higher exigencies in relation to

the humanistic fields of study and the extended social context of learning. Thus, educators must strive to guide learners in

gaining a more coherent understanding of communication and to help them connect ideas, as well as to personally connect to each other by becoming more cooperative learners.

The natural sciences, as well as social and language sciences, have focused on cognitivism and neurocognitivism (emergentism) as pivotal meta-models. While recent scientific output across disciplines displays deeper levels of complexity as scientists are beginning to consider life processes from the standpoint of semiosis, the (neo)cognitivist meta-model is still the main theoretical background considered axiomatic. From our point of view, this standpoint has been conducive to reasonable advances in scientific developments, but also to anthropocentric and narcissistic attitudes which should be questioned.

3.2. Paradigms, thinking styles and collective *status quo* as the nonconscious steering mechanisms in modern science

It has become a fundamental prerequisite to initiate scientific endeavours by identifying and specifying paradigmatic frameworks. Any subsequent research procedures are established within these frames and scientific objectives are thus set for further research. Given the ‘newparadigmatic’ shift we have proposed, scientists are presented with two alternatives in this respect: they can either choose the classical Newtonian paradigm which is still largely postulated as mainstream or the postclassical, holistic paradigm which is being brought forth by new science (cf. Friedman & Hartelius, 2015).

When the holistic paradigm is selected as a point of departure in scientific endeavours, research may be expanded on the multilevel hypostases displayed by living systems and life processes, which are intertwined in dynamic relationships. As far as communication is concerned, in such an emergent and multilevel relational process,

the communication sign becomes (i) transpersonal and (ii) holographic. The transpersonal aspect of human language and communication is a natural effect of life processes. Relational activeness of living systems cannot be narrowed down to the personal boundaries of the human body or the human self. All communication happens in “the sea of life”, where borders and barriers are non-existent (cf. F. Goli, 2016). The main ontology corresponding to this postclassical framework is entanglement and the values and qualities which exist as potentials become emergent intracategorically.

Thus, according to the postclassical paradigm, linguists are able to work on two complementary levels: the surface level of forms and the deeper level of underlying living processes, potentialities, meaning and relationships. Essentially, this deeper level of analysis displays much more complexity than the modalities used in contemporary cognitive linguistics or other humanistic disciplines. For these reasons, this higher complexity level may be considered as the site of creative potential intrinsic to all living beings. An integrated understanding of language learning also draws on this complex educational paradigm which is consistent with the goal of achieving ecological communication beyond narcissistic models.

3.3. Narcissism in the mainstream psychological research

An increasingly pervasive phenomenon of modern societies, narcissism has been researched by experts in psychology and related fields for more than a century. The body of research on narcissism has expanded in the areas of personal and social psychology, as well as clinical psychology and psychiatry (see Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). Rohmann et al. (2012: 279), alongside with other researchers in the area, associate narcissism with “self-love, inflated self-views, self-serving bias, and demanding

display of entitlement.” Pinkus & Lukowitsky (2010: 8.6-8.7) acknowledge grandiosity as “a core component of narcissistic personality”, which is displayed by “interpersonally exploitative acts, lack of empathy, intense envy, aggression, and exhibitionism”. Besides a host of dehumanizing and anti-social personality traits, narcissism is characterized by a general lack of empathy, which is indispensable in successful communication with others from the point of view of the ecological paradigm. If empathy, as an ability to comprehend other people’s feelings, acts as “social glue”, subclinical/normal narcissists may be seen as “socially glueless” (Heppert et al., 2014). This is also characteristic of clinical/pathological narcissists, along with other traits, such as “self-centeredness, vanity, and a lack of empathy” (Krizan & Herlache (2017:1). The most often cited aspect seems to be related to empathy or the absence of openness towards the others and the environment, leading to a growing and unnatural isolation of individuals.

Krizan & Herlache (2017) emphasize the relevance of conceptualizing narcissistic traits which surface in various environments across transactional processes among individuals. Despite the fact that existing definitions of empathy vary or overlap to more or less significant degrees, the majority of researchers agree that empathy lies at the core of communion and has a major role to play in maintaining a wide array of social relationships (Heppert et al., 2014). In this context, the language class is seen as a suitable setting to enhance both empathy and collaborative cooperation with members of the community.

Understanding ecological patterns of interaction implies furthering social aspects such as coordination with others and intersubjectivity, which also includes a strong participatory component (Suthers, 2006). Messages are co-constructed and co-generated transpersonally (cf. Davis & Canty, 2015) within a given micro-macro

communicational situation. Moreover, messages arise, wax and wane along the rhythm of communicational activeness displayed by human communicators. In the holistic paradigm, we stop being only speakers-listeners of linguistic messages; we become conscious living beings embedded in dynamic, relationships which are alive and evolving constantly (cf. Plotnitsky, 2004). This perspective suggests a potentially functional way out of narcissistic traps we may get enclosed in by isolating ourselves from this perpetual flow of life as learners and as communicators.

Finally, the experience of educational quality as well as qualitative human communication is reached through the dynamics of coordinating ourselves with one another, as language learners and beyond the classroom environment. It is essential to touch upon the issue of intersubjectivity, as it is a major component of the co-creation of meaning which occurs in early stages through the mutual incorporation of ideas. This creates new potential layers of connectivity which may not have been available to individuals in isolation.

3.4. Ecolinguistic multimodal mechanisms of communication – moving beyond narcissism

In the light of the theoretical background presented above, we turn to the postclassical, holistic perspective which was put forward as a groundwork platform, in order to further approach the complex, psychological-communicative mechanism of narcissism. In order to develop our theoretical proposal for transcending narcissism via the educational intervention program, we propose the holistic model of ecological communication from the standpoint of ecolinguistics. This model is briefly outlined in what follows and we are looking forward to extending our joint research with fellow researchers in the future.

The model proposed here follows the direction of communication processes as

seen from the perspective of biosemiotics: “communication is the interaction of lived bodies” (*cf.* Langewitz, 2009: 20). Accordingly, we acknowledge that “human communication is embodied and biologically situated’ (Brier, 2016). This should nonetheless not be understood in the narrow sense in which cognitive grammarians, cognitive linguists and (radical) embodied cognitivists perceive and discuss embodiment (*cf.* Wellsby & Pexman, 2014; Kiverstein, 2012; Chemero, 2009).

Our model takes into consideration the overall organism, its organisation on both micro and macro levels, from local processes of the (neuro)cognitive dimension towards the level of nonlocal and transpersonal relations. We propose to incorporate these basic layers into the analysis of how living systems communicate. In other words, human communication is not only (neuro)cognitive or navigated solely on a neurocognitive basis.

Furthermore, human communication is not based merely on linguistic forms as carriers of messages. Neurocognitive and formal aspects of language/communication constitute but one communication layer or modality. Our ecolinguistic research (Bogusławska-Tafelska, 2013; 2015; 2016) has proposed that apart from this common modality, humans have in potential a number of other communicative modalities, dispersed widely on other layers of active organisation (nonconsciously, semi-consciously or consciously) in every communicator or interpretant.

Hence, communication embraces a wide range of processes and relations, beyond the human central nervous system and beyond cognitive representations. The ecolinguistic model removes the focal point from the speaker-hearer exchange of material signals to the multidimensional grid perspective of living systems entering complex webs of relationships (Bogusławska-Tafelska, 2016).

These multiple webs are forming communicative and highly creative links

between living systems, while being: local/material – a traditional exchange of signals and also nonlocal/nonmaterial – where relationships are formed in the deep, noncausal, nonlocal level of life architecture.

4. Conclusion

As educators, we believe that ecological models of communication and empathy development could greatly benefit students by developing coherent communication abilities and other inter-relational soft skills that they will be able to employ in a variety of situations.

To summarise the working hypothesis of this paper, when narcissistic behaviours and nonempathetic attitudes become operative in interpersonal settings, they generate unintended side-effects which affect communicative process at large. Research on the etiology and possible effects of narcissism on the development of personality and interhuman relationships indicates that addressing these harmful social phenomena requires shifting anti-social features of academic education (isolation, paperwork, scientific assessment based on quantity, etc) into more pro-social directions (free discussion, open networks and exchange of ideas, scientific assessment based on quality). Warnings against “the narcissism epidemic” (Twenge & Campbell, 2009) and “the culture of narcissism” (Lasch, 1976) as well as the mounting use of the personal pronoun “I” in public discourse are to be taken under scrutiny if we care to achieve higher quality in education.

In conclusion, communicative skills and awareness need to further be addressed in the research to follow, as these aspects represent the potential solution to the psychological, social and cognitive narcissistic modes we need to overcome. The model proposes that by modifying our awareness as conscious communicators, we may remove ourselves from potentially harmful narcissistic relationships, while also avoiding negative

labelling. Finally, ecolinguistically competent communicators will have learned to identify and consciously confront narcissistic traits, thus contributing to the development of a conscious communicative ecosphere.

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