

## TRANSACTIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL GAMES IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

**Кристина Тереза Панас. Коммуникативные акты и психологические игры в межличностной коммуникации.** *Социальный мир, который мы делаем, состоит из отношений между людьми, событиями или объектами. Межличностная коммуникация предоставляет нам возможность выявить наши мысли, чувства или отношения к себе и другим. Это есть благодаря коммуникации, что мы поддерживаем контакты с пространственным временем: с прошедшим временем, подарком и будущим. Мы создаем мифы, ритуалы, церемонии и принципы. Путь, который мы сообщаем также, влияет на нашу способность построить семью, себя профессионала, политическое, просвещенное общество и тому подобное. Отсутствие диалога, если не быть знакомым с принципами соответствующей коммуникации, не пользоваться барьерами коммуникации, может приводить к патологиям в социальной жизни.*

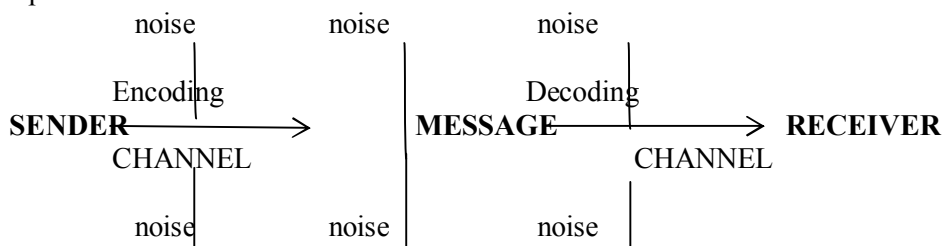
*Искусство объяснения, интерпретации, поиски механизмов, влияющих на отношения между людьми в межличностной коммуникации, имеет большую важность в психотерапии, психовоспитании, в сфере образования или политики. И вот почему, – по мнению автора, – существенно важно разобраться в коммуникативных актах в сфере общения, в механизмах психологических игр, исходя из определенного круга вопросов.*

**Ключевые слова:** коммуникация, коммуникативный акт, психологические игры, поведение, бихевиоризм.

The term “communicating” is descended from the Latin word *communico, communicare* – which means – make something common, connect, impart information, confer and from the word *communio* – commonality, sense of connectedness (Baczyński, 2004, p. 545). Many definitions of this word have been developed in science. The most useful definition of communication has been proposed by Frey, Botan and Kreps (after: Morreale, Spitzberg, Barge, 2007). It can be applied to different situations and people. Communication is thus a process of organising information with the aim of creating meaning. The basic terms which should be quoted here are messages, organising and meaning.

Messages consist of words, behaviour, gestures expressed and voiced in interpersonal relationships. Messages can be verbal and nonverbal, they can also be symbolical, while organisation refers to managing people, processes or materials. Organising and processing messages always requires the necessity to make choices between different possibilities. Meaning refers to the way messages are interpreted, recognised and understood.

The subject literature offers many models of communication. The fundamental ones regard communication as a transfer of information, agreeing on meaning, persuasion and creating community. The simplest model of communication is a linear one.

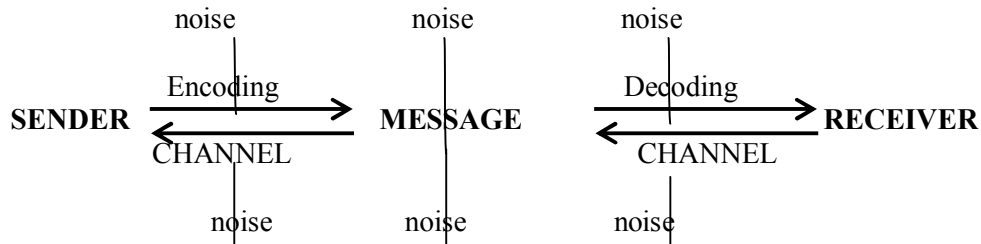


**Source: Author's own elaboration**

The presented model was created by Shannon and Weaver (after: Morreale, Spitzberg, Barge, 2007). It is a one-way model and does not assume reciprocity in message encoding and decoding. However, it takes into account a possibility of the occurrence of disruption, noise, which can distort the message sent from the sender.

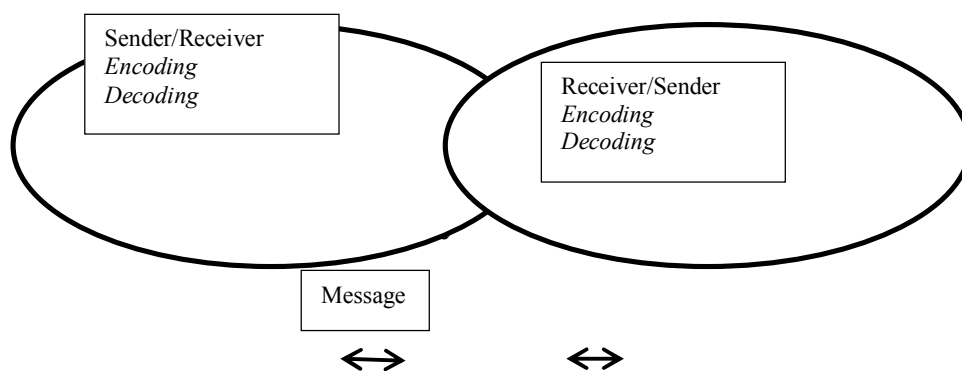
The two-way, interactive model – is based on message sending and receiving. The sender sends a message and waits for a response from the receiver of the message (thus an exchange between the sender and receiver is achieved). In this model there may appear different disruptions during the transmission of the message: badly phrased sentences, wrong communication/transmission through body language,

mutual accusations between partners in the conversation. This model can be compared to a dialogue or a discussion. The presented model assumes attentiveness of listening and observing of one's interlocutor and depending on his/her reactions we try to change our behaviour in order for the interlocutor to receive the information in accordance with our intentions. This model assumes that the sender and receiver take turns.



Source: Author's own elaboration

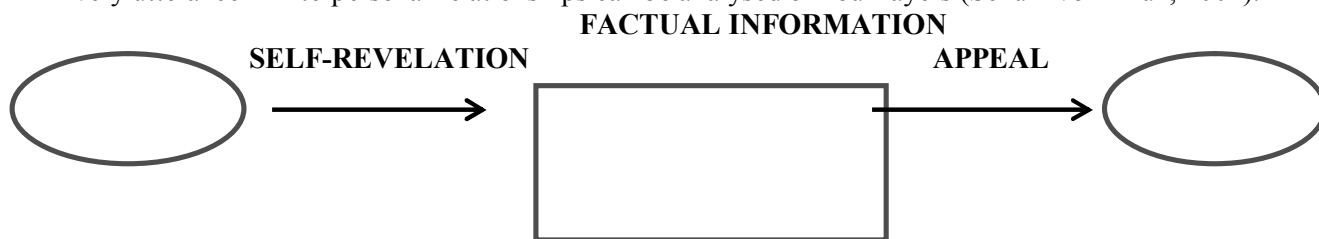
The opposite of the interactive model is a transactional model in which people are senders and receivers of the message at the same time. The model refers to areas of meaning – values, attitudes, convictions and thoughts of each person – which may overlap creating a common area of meaning.



Personal area of meaning      Common area of meaning      Personal area of meaning

Source: Author's own elaboration

**Interpersonal Relationships in the conception of Friedemann Schulz von Thun and Eric Berne.** An utterance in verbal or nonverbal communication is a carrier of interpersonal relationships. Every utterance in interpersonal relationships can be analysed on four layers (Schulz von Thun, 2001).



1. **Factual information** – do I communicate in a clear and comprehensible way?
2. The treatment of the interlocutor, the receiver of my actions – the quality of the encounter (mutual relation). The quality manifests itself in acceptance or lack of it (not always conscious), expressed as rejection, patronizing, pity. We must also stress the importance of the interlocutor's system of values, and of the manner in which he is addressed.
3. **Self-revelation.** An utterance reveals the person who produces it. It manifests self-knowledge, acceptance, the ability to express emotions. We deliver a portion of our personality. Thus, authenticity of an encounter, not putting on a mask, is important.

4. **Appeal.** Every utterance that we produce has an influence on our interlocutor. We always expect the recipient to accept our expectations concerning him. There is a risk of manipulation involved in this aspect of communication.

All the spheres of verbal and non-verbal communication discussed above are equally important. It is inappropriate to focus on one or a few selected aspects only. It is vital to ensure that all four aspects play an important role. A particular emphasis should be placed on the quality of an encounter and self-revelation. These are the most often neglected areas, although they are the important carriers of the message.

Self-revelation, letting oneself confront what I know about myself and what others know about me builds the right relationships. The nonverbal side of every utterance must be in accordance with its verbal message. In this instance we should talk about coherent and incoherent utterances. A coherent utterance is characterized by harmony and clarity of message. An incoherent message introduces confusion and lack of understanding. It could be a result of poor self-knowledge, multitude of simultaneously given information, inappropriate language – not adjusted to the recipient, inappropriate linguistic and emotional connotation.

The above considerations referred to the sender of the message. And how does the recipient decode the message?

Again, let me refer to Schulz and von Thun's considerations (2001). Depending on what the recipient wants or is prepared to hear, we talk about "listening with four ears". Each sphere of an utterance mentioned above is received by a different ear, the one that is better developed or perfected. The threats posed by one-sidedness of reception may be connected with our relation as a whole, or one of its aspects.

1. The matter ear – is set on receiving information only from the factual sphere. In this case we may not notice that relations between people in interpersonal communication are not compatible, interlocutors talk at each other and not to each other. They do not hear messages, for example emotional ones.

2. The relationship ear – set on receiving information pertaining to mutual relations. In the recipient's view it may indicate positive relations, thus making him feel good. It may, however, convey a negative message; in this case every piece of factual information is interpreted negatively in its emotional aspect. There is yet another manner of perceiving relations when every message, even a neutral one, is decoded as harmful to the receiver.

3. The self-revelation ear – it is not the hypersensitive relationship ear, but one that is open to what the sender wants to say about himself. This type of listening is very helpful when building appropriate relations between the sender and the receiver, or between a volunteer and a receiver of help. It facilitates the understanding of what is behind the emotions displayed by the sender. The danger connected with self-revelation ear is interpreting every utterance as attacking the receiver, jeopardizing his self-esteem or system of values. Often the message is arbitrarily distorted, triggering a sense of inferiority, or building your self-image depending on the context of an utterance. If this happens to a volunteer, he undoubtedly needs to work with a supervisor.

4. The appeal ear – set on hearing, seeing, reacting promptly, in other words, recognising and fulfilling the wishes expressed by the sender.

Lack of compatibility or cooperation between the sender and the receiver, resulting from insufficient knowledge about the message that is sent and received, and about ME and YOU in interpersonal relations, may lead to concealed misunderstandings or ignoring crucial elements in a meeting (Panas, 2012 a).

With regard to the I-YOU relation, it is a good idea to consider the suggestions that Eric Berne puts forward in his conception of transactional analysis (Berne, 1969, 2012).

He defines **Ego-state** as a coherent system of thoughts, feelings and the corresponding behaviour. Ego states are ways and manifestations of a person's existence in relation to other people and oneself. The author distinguishes 3 Ego-states: Child, Parent, Adult. Each of them expresses different characteristics of ways of functioning.

**Child Ego** state consists of a collection of experiences originating in childhood. It includes needs, wants, emotions, intuitive thinking, creativity. This state is a source of feelings, emotions and energy.

**Parent Ego** state gathers opinions, norms, rules and values. It includes opinions concerning work, men and women, students, pupils, our subordinates and superiors. The whole content of **Parent Ego** state is taken from our parents, teachers, authorities without modification, as their messages are considered true and indisputable.

**Adult Ego** state contains everything that has been worked out in the process of personality forming, namely the procedures and strategies allowing for a mature contact with oneself, with other people and the “here and now” reality. According to Berne, the mature ego uses this state to solve problems, take decisions, gather information, and express emotions in a mature and responsible way.

*Functional analysis of Parent, Adult, Child Ego states (PAC Ego states) indicates ways of using the resources that we possess.*

**Parent Ego** states has two varieties: **Nurturing Parent** and **Normative (Controlling/Criticising) Parent**. We learn these roles from our parents, who teach us how to be caring, but also how to instil rules, norms of behaviour, values, how to bring up and support in difficult situations. Nurturing Parent cares about others, gives advice, permission, motivates.

A negative aspect of this state manifests itself in the actions of the so called **Rescuer**, who does not possess the appropriate knowledge, skills or competence, and his way of acting may bring more harm than good.

Feeling pressurized to help others we may subconsciously feel used. In this case a volunteer may feel resentment towards the person he is helping. Another aspect of the **Rescuer** is helping when no help has been asked for. Often the **Rescuer** thinks he knows better what kind of help a person needs. He cannot administer help in reasonable doses, giving more than is needed. Moreover, he can reinforce the demanding attitude or deepen the state of inborn helplessness, inability to act.

Behaviours associated with **Normative Parent** pertain to building a system of values, setting boundaries, obligations and restrictions. A negative aspect of this state manifests itself in the **Persecutor**, who is not set on helping, but criticizing or punishing.

**The Adult Ego** state does the analytical and synthetic thinking, acts here and now, is objective and may perform the role of a negotiator or mediator between the **Parent Ego** state and **Child Ego** state.

**The Child Ego** state is manifested as a **Spontaneous (Free/ Natural) Child** and **Adapted Child**. The Child state needs an instant reward. Its emotions are revealed with no internal control.

The **Spontaneous Child Ego** state is in every one of us, despite growing up and socializing (all the nurturing, educational, internalising actions). It depends on us if it is activated. Definitely, it is advisable to take advantage of it in interpersonal relations such as: play, intimate relationships, expressing admiration. Striving to satisfy one’s own needs and lack of reaction to danger reflects a negative aspect of the Spontaneous Child Ego state.

**The Adapted Child Ego** state. When confronted with a variety of life situations, we learn to compromise and activate our creativity, which helps to adapt to the existing situation. Inadequate and automatic adaptation occurs in a negatively Adapted Child – rebellious or submissive.

**The Creative Child Ego** state (Little Professor) is manifested in intuitive, creative, curious reactions, questions, explorations.

The Creative child Ego state positively cooperates with the Adult Ego state in a way that is fit to a situation, but in a more intuitive than logical way.

In the **Creative Child Ego** state magical thinking, as opposed to factual thinking, plays an inappropriately large role. In this case a person slips into passivity, idleness, or initiating psychological games.

Relying on his conception of Ego states, Berne put forward an innovative approach to interpersonal communication. He referred to it using the word “transactions”. According to Berne, a transaction is an exchange between two people, between their Ego states. Interpersonal relation is a sequence of transactions occurring one after another. Considering the six Ego states in their positive and negative aspects, we can talk about a multitude of possible transactions. Such an approach helps to understand the complicated exchange of messages that occurs between people.

Therefore, we can assume that a human being characterized by a mature personality and the ability to communicate chooses the Ego state that is most appropriate here and now. Thus, the effectiveness of communication depends not only on the content of an utterance, but also on the manner in which it is conveyed (Panas, 2013).

Presenting his theory, Berne warns against the so-called “drivers”, who “change the soul into barracks”. Most frequently, these are messages we receive from people who are important to us, e.g.: be perfect, act quickly, demand from yourself, please everybody, be strong, powerful.

As opposed to “drivers”, “tranquillisers” instruct us: be yourself, give yourself time, work peacefully, live in harmony with yourself, respect yourself and your boundaries. Interpersonal relations are endangered by transactional games, psychological games – that is several, most frequently implicit messages exchanged between people, that lead to gaining psychological benefits.

A game is a defence mechanism used by people with an unsatisfied need for support and appreciation of their value, who cannot obtain it in a normal, sincere, open way. Every game contains a trap, in which the partner is to be caught. The game is bait which seemingly satisfies somebody's need, but in fact serves a different purpose. It is bait that targets the victim's weak point, but as soon as the victim reacts, a change of situation occurs (according to S. Karpman's Drama Triangle – Rescuer, Victim, Persecutor, after: J. Jagieła, 2000), and the real purpose is revealed, and an unexpected “ending” appears. It is an ending the victim never expects.

From the psychological point of view, the less developed the Adult, the more frequently he will resort to a game, which will be his way of coping with reality and personal difficulties.

In interpersonal contacts – as shown in the above theoretical considerations – we should familiarise ourselves with the kinds of transactions and psychological games in order to guard against the latter.

### **Psychological games**

Psychological games are a series of repetitive and complementary ulterior transactions, which proceed towards a predictable outcome. In psychological games one can identify certain roles as well as the dynamics of events, the tension involved, building up to the climax. Berne sets forth six stages in psychological games. Each stage is a separate whole, though they are interconnected at the same time.

The stages proposed by Berne are as follows:

1. **Con – it** is message communication that contains a trap based on the fact that there are two levels: an explicit and implicit one; the aim of the trap is to “catch” somebody on the explicit message.
2. **Gimmick** – it is a negative opinion of ourselves concerning a certain field, which we want to hide from ourselves and others.
3. **Response** – it is a series of complementary transactions.
4. **Switch** – a turning point, a change of roles.
5. **Cross up** – confusion, astonishment caused by the turnabout.
6. **Payoff** – it is what the players are left with.

The sequence of a game according to Formula G can be recorded in the following way:

**Con + gimmick = response = switch = cross up = payoff**

A game can be identified on the condition that a certain sequence of manoeuvres takes place.

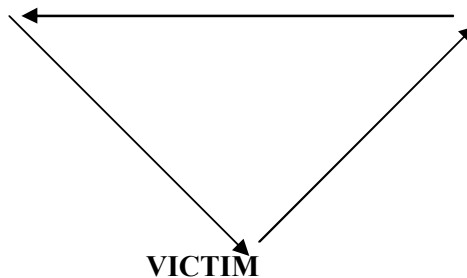
**Mutual consent of both players is essential for the game to come into existence.**

### *Roles in psychological games*

Dynamics and change are part of games. At least two people are needed in order to talk about a game. Each of the people plays their favourite role of a Victim, Rescuer or Persecutor (in Transactional Analysis it is customary to write the name of a role with a capital letter to differentiate it from an everyday role).

If two people are playing then one of them has to be the Victim and the other one can choose between the Persecutor and the Rescuer. Thanks to the Drama Triangle we can see how complementary these roles are and how they shift (Jagieła, 2000; Goffman, 1981).

**Drama Triangle**  
**PERSECUTOR**



**RESCUER**

**VICTIM**

Someone who is a victim in everyday life waits for a rescue from somebody who comes to his or her aid. It is similar in psychological games, with the exception that the person who comes to the Victim's aid could be the Rescuer or on some occasions the Persecutor.

The **Victims** are people who complain about their fate, about the fact that they are not successful. They wait for somebody to take care of them and solve their problems. They believe they play the role of the Victim in order to protect themselves.

There are two types of Victims. One is a person who complains about what she/he doesn't have but would like to have and as a result feels frustrated and anxious about it. When asking for help, this type of Victim summons a Rescuer.

The second type is a Victim who provokes, rebels, and is afraid of rejection. This type of Victim summons and provokes a Persecutor.

The **Persecutor** solves his or her problems through aggressive behaviour and belittling the value of other people. He or she takes revenge for the frustration he or she suffered, uses incommensurate means of defence and personal problems solving. The Persecutor responds to the Victim's invitation or summons him or her, convinced that the Victim deserves to be rejected and abandoned.

The **Rescuers** think that they should help others without being asked for it. They then feel a sense of importance. The Rescuer becomes sensitive to a cry for help, devaluing other people's abilities to satisfy their own needs. The Rescuers help others although they are not competent to do so, expecting due gratitude for it.

Everybody has their favourite games, though we are not always able to identify or name them. By playing, we build our own self-esteem as well as our own image of other people.

Psychological games

- are insincere and not genuine,
- are a way of avoiding intimacy,
- build our own image of ourselves and others,
- result from childhood experiences and that is why they appear unconsciously, automatically without any control.

Negative sides of Ego are engaged in games.

***The object of the game***

Why do people play? Why do they look for partners to play with? Why do they willingly join other people's games? After all, they lose energy, activate negatively valenced emotions, build a distance towards people and build their own illusory world. Berne claims that every player seeks an only and most appropriate for them payoff and builds his or her own sense of security on one of the levels:

- biological – games provide negative stimulation when there is no positive stimulation; at the last count, the negative one is more profitable than lack of it;
- psychological – game is a defence mechanism learned in childhood and used unconsciously in adult life despite a possibility to use mature ways of reacting in difficult situations;
- existential – games provide us with a sense of meaning of our own life;
- social – games help us feel that things are happening and we are among other people. They are then a method of time structuring.

Rooted in childhood, games are transferred into adult life.

*Types of games*

Psychologists think that there are as many types of games as it is possible to mathematically calculate, taking into account a number combination of the Earth's population.

Below I will present a few most popular psychological games.

### ***1. Disruptive games***

- **Row** – provoking retaliation behaviour and collecting “aggression tickets”, which become expiation for the behaviour;
- **Touchy**– the aim of the player is to draw other people's attention away from a difficult situation; the game is active when a person trying to hide something is provoked to do so;
- **Stupid** – the player attracts other people's attention, provokes people to give him or her “verbal kicks”. The main point of the game is manipulation and provocation.

### ***2. Games of passivity***

enable one to avoid responsibility, shift responsibility onto other people

- **It's awful** – the point of the game is to complain, introduce „them” as responsible for one's situation.
- **Fault** - the point of the game is to belittle others. The player gets the feelgood factor after finding fault in somebody. Then calm appears, self-esteem is boosted and there are grounds to avoid close relationships.
- **If it weren't for you** – the players profit psychologically from complaining about the restrictions or duties imposed on them.
- **Wooden leg** – the players justify their failures and defeats by different kinds of faults or lack of skills.

- **Trapped** – the player is a master of multiplying reasons why he or she cannot do something.
- **Exhausted workaholic** – the player appears to have a lot of work, others sympathise with him/her and do not ask for anything in order not too additionally burden the overworked one.
- **See what you made me do** – the player presents oneself as a Victim expects help. Then he or she accuses the helper of causing the victim to make a mistake. This type of game frequently appears in teamwork.

### 3. Games of seduction

This type of games is similar to sexual games of seduction. A player flirts, attracts the partner and when the player is convinced that the he/she has won the partner's trust, he or she shows her or him another side of functioning – one that he/she finds unpleasant and unsuitable.

- **You are truly wonderful** – the player compliments another person, only to claim something in return.

The social world we make consists of relationships between people, events or objects. Interpersonal communication enables us to reveal our thoughts, feelings or attitudes towards ourselves and others. It is due to communication that we maintain contact with space-time: with the past, the present and the future. We create myths, rituals, ceremonies and principles. The way we communicate also influences our ability to build a family, professional, political, education community and the like. Lack of dialogue, not being familiar with principles of appropriate communication, using communication barriers can lead to pathologising of social life (Panas, 2012b).

The art of explaining, interpreting, searching for mechanisms influencing relations between people in interpersonal communication is of great importance in psychotherapy, psychoeducation in the field of education or politics. And that is why – in the author's opinion – it is essential to find out about transactions in communication, mechanisms of psychological games as well as reflecting on the following questions:

WHOM? Whom do I see?

Who am I? What do people experience when they contact me? What is my understanding of man? How does my experience contribute to my understanding of man? Do I treat the people I encounter as partners?

WHAT FOR?

What precisely is the aim of a conversation, meeting? Who is to benefit from my help?

WHAT?

What is the object of my actions? What precisely does my action refer to?

HOW?

What methods do I choose and why? How do I apply them?

WHO?

Who is the person that takes action (ME)? How do I treat my interlocutor? What feelings does he/she arouse in me? Can I control these feelings in myself and others? What aim do I want to gain through the contact with the recipient? (Panas, 2013)

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