

## ***THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION STYLE***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Communication is an integral part of life, without it, we would not survive. During the pandemic, interpersonal communication was strongly affected because from an active life and face-to-face meetings we returned to a new normality, digital-online communication. On the other hand, new words were born, otherwise neologisms. Between us, only time will tell.

A new era was born, the era of the work-from-home world. The use of new communication channels also changes interpersonal relationships. Discussions and meetings took place in virtual form. Interpersonal communication in our lives can bring unique benefits, while digital communication is not the same, but in that period we had no other option.

What was noticed the most during the pandemic period was the lack of direct communication and physical contact between people. This was as stressful as it was disturbing since the right of “living word” was limited and replaced with technology where direct communication lost its essence and faded even the usual expressions, replacing them with completely new words related to the situation and vocabulary until before unknown and unfamiliar.

**Key words:** interpersonal communication, distance, *corona virus*.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Communication is an integral part of our life. From birth, without realizing it, we strive for it. We communicate through spoken language therefore during pandemic many researches pointed out once more the importance of the language in intra and interpersonal communication. Those, wanting to emphasize the importance of language in communication, Thompson (2010), rightly points out that language as a tool of communication does not mean only this characteristic, but is a means by which we express ourselves, our thoughts, desires, beliefs, social and cultural values and that language is what directs us and guides our orientation. Throughout human history, education has constantly changed and its opportunities have changed. Along with the evolution of the educational process, communication also developed. People gradually began to use new knowledge and the form of communication took a new form, mainly thanks to technological progress.

A completely extraordinary situation was created at the moment when the COVID-19 pandemic appeared. The whole society was going through a sudden crisis now, not only in our country, but all over the world. In the framework of the restrictive measures that were supposed to prevent the spread of the disease, most of the communication, but also of the teaching, moved to the online space.

Due to the closure of academic institutions, there was a massive transformation in teaching-learning methods around the world. Universities, colleges and other institutes of higher education switched to online teaching methods (Amita, 2020). The pandemic became a worldwide catalyst to seek innovative solutions to this problem. Both professors and students have embraced various technological platforms where students can actively participate in learning, but practical exercises that require a laboratory environment were not easy to administer. Learning began to take place on online platforms: google meet, zoom, etc. This blockade affected students' learning, exam schedule, student evaluation leading to increased stress between students and professors. Online teaching approach was adopted to minimize student attrition. The way of communication is always very important when it comes to communication between teacher and student. New words were also born.

## **2. INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Face-to-face communication encourages engagement and participation in meetings and builds a culture of trust at work. The COVID-19 pandemic presented a great challenge to interpersonal communication in all societies. Face-to-face communication took a heavy hit, felt severely over a long period. The only light in this darkness was the contribution of technology, i.e. the Internet, because only through the Internet did we communicate. Technology made it possible to break down barriers and create a different kind of social structure and connections despite isolation. As Olser and Zahavi (2022), states we can't deny the important role that technology played during pandemic period as tool for interpersonal communication but in other side we can't ignore the changes to the social worlds as result of usage of technology where during that period most of online platform became dominant. Interpersonal communication is communication carried out by two or more people. Simply put, "interpersonal" means the face-to-face exchange of information between two people through facial expressions, voice, gestures, and body language. However, the effectiveness with which these orders are delivered is the benchmark for measuring interpersonal skills. Interpersonal communication basically sheds light on the process of exchanging ideas, feelings and information between two or more people, either through verbal or non-verbal forms.

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major changes in the daily lives of individuals and communities. COVID-19 has had a major impact on the extent of social connectedness and the quality of relationships between individuals (Zhang & Ma, 2020). The implementation of health measures, such as the closing of schools and the reduction of social contacts, caused a shock both in interpersonal relations and in the spheres of work and studies. For example, young people have had to face some challenges related to distance learning, as have parents who accompanied their children for a long period because they attended school from home. Distance education was a challenge to be faced by either teachers, parents or students. Social distancing, working from home and canceled events - social life was hit with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020.

The transition from physical presence to online learning can be called a disturbance. The first perceptions of the students were that this lesson would be temporary (a month or two), not counting the future consequences of the pandemic. Dealing with him was unusual, as we were used to constantly attend lectures physically, concentrating entirely on learning. As it seems, the level of concentration during online learning was the least, the psychological situation of the quarantine and the media reports on the consequences of COVID19 also influenced this. The adaptation to online learning was very slow, since both we and the professors were facing something like this for the first time, and it had an impact on the interpersonal communication style. However, online learning was the only and best option in that period, despite the difficulties, I think it was effective and maybe the quality is not the same, but the different programs and advanced technology helped to keep the

process successful as we saved time and did not risk their health and life and the productive time spent in learning helped you and the students to cope more easily in the created situation. Lack of motivation and reduced concentration have made distance learning difficult for many young people.

The main challenge for parents has been online learning from home. According to some professors, physical distancing and remote work profoundly change human relationships. Forced remote work in the time of the corona virus, of course, causes some people to change their social relationships. This type of communication cannot replace real human contact. Face-to-face interactions are essential in professional life. These alternative solutions are suitable in times of crisis like the one with the corona virus. It is more difficult to call a colleague at home than to visit him in his office to discuss, for fear of disturbing him. Telephone exchanges are gradually reduced and we end up feeling isolated because face-to-face communication is different.

The application of health measures, such as closing schools and reducing social contacts, has caused a shock both in interpersonal relationships and in the spheres of work and studies. For example, young people have had to face some challenges related to distance learning, as have parents who accompanied their children for a long time in online learning at home. In terms of studies, the experience of distance education seemed variable. Students said they were demotivated or had difficulty concentrating. On the other hand, the fact that they did not have to go to class, according to many students, left more time for studying. For parents, it was also a challenge to support their children in daily school learning. Because "communication" is also: defining a relationship, asserting identity, negotiating one's place, influencing the interlocutor, sharing feelings or values and, more broadly, meanings.

Melanie Crew on her report for the National Literacy Trust (NLT, 2021), emphasize that implications for the home learning environment changed the development of healthy communication skills in relation parents – children during pandemic period. Accordingly, due to the pandemic in situation when parents fails to respond positively to the child's expression and vocalization, or to communicate with attention verbally and nonverbally, then the connections in the child's brain that support the development of communication and social skills do not form as they should.

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### **3. NEW WORDS RELATED TO COVID-19**

Language is constantly evolving and adapting to new realities and circumstances. The spoken language is constantly expanding with new words and expressions, the so-called neologisms. The spread of the coronavirus is no exception. The new words that entered our new dictionary include terms mainly from the field of medicine, epidemiology, abbreviations, as well as various other words to express the social imperatives of isolation and distancing.

We have read and heard new words on social media and also in everyday life. Neologisms were created faster than ever. During this period, several new words were added to our lexicon: Lockdown, smart working, Long covid, booster, Coronaparty, Coronavirus, Quarantine, Confinement, Pandemic, Home Office, Social distancing, Covidiot, Coronacoma, Coronials, Covidivorce, Coronaspeck, Comorbidity, self-isolating, WFH- "working from home" or "work from home". These include "covidiot" (someone who ignores public health advice), "covidio party" (online party via Zoom or Skype) and "covexit" (lockdown exit strategy).

Explaining the impact of the Pandemic on interpersonal communication and changes in communication style, Redi and Gupta (2020), emphasize the main factors that lead to these changes. Thus, according to them, there are multiple factors playing a key role in accepting information, like social and cultural characteristics, gender, generational contrasts, language inclinations, strict convictions, religious beliefs, and varying literacy also influence the action and communication of masses. They also emphasize attitudes as well, stating that difficulty and attitudes towards initiatives in public health communication is crucial to improving awareness and eventually acceptability or unacceptability of government advisories, and in incorporation new word on their everyday life vocabulary. They assume that also psychology factors had so much to do because as they say during pandemic peoples are discriminated, marker, stereotyped, offended to not forget also here the high level of anxiety and panic that many experienced (3974: 2020). In below they give as some of communication styles from the main peoples such as doctors and the way how they communicated and informed the public during pandemic period

Medical interviews	Breaking bad news to patients and family members	Discussing a medical error	Any encounter where emotions present	Challenging conversations
<b>C-L-A-S-S</b>	<b>S-P-I-K-E-S</b>	<b>C-O-N-E-S</b>	<b>E-V-E</b>	<b>B-U-S-T-E-R</b>
C – CONTEXT Physical Space, Family Members/ Friends, Body Language, Touch. L - LISTENING Open Ended Questions Eg: “Who all have you recently met?” Clarifying Eg: “That must have felt terrible when...” Eg: “So, if I understand you correctly, you are saying...” Time & Interruptions A – ACKNOWLEDGE Empathic Response S – STRATEGY The Plan S – SUMMARY Final Thoughts	S- Setting Up the Conversation Secure an appropriate area for the discussion. P- Perception I- Invitation Assess the patient’s understanding of the seriousness of their condition. Eg: “Tell me what you understand about COVID so far.” K- Knowledge Explaining the facts Eg: “Are you with me so far?” E- Emotions The Empathic Response – Be Supportive Eg: “Can you tell me more about how you feel?” S -Strategy and Summary Eg: “Does this	C - Context O- Opening Shot Eg: “This is difficult. I have to tell you what I found out about why your mother is COVIDl.” N- Narrative Eg: “As you know, your mother came in back in...” E- Emotions Eg: “I know it’s upsetting for you and it’s awful for me too.” S -Strategy & Summary Eg: “I am the doctor responsible for your mother so it is important that I found out what happened.”	E- Explore the Emotion Eg: “Can you tell me more about how you feel?” V- Validate the Emotion Eg: “I can understand how that would make you angry.” E- Empathic Response Eg: “I’m sorry this has happened and I understand how it would make you feel that way.”	B-Be prepared U-Use non-judgmental listening. Eg: “So let me see if I understand...” S-Six second rule. T- “Tell me more”statements. Eg: “Tell me more about your contacts.” E-Empathize and validate. Eg: “I can see you weren’t expecting this.” R-Respond with a wish statement. Eg: “I wish I had better news...”

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*mean you are  
undertaking a  
test?"*

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*Styles for effective communication by doctors in different COVID scenarios(3795: 2020)*

Piller et al (2020), as well talks about these phenomena stating that it was a necessary that all people had to learn about public health concepts such as social distancing; droplet transmission; flattening the curve and as they argued “never before have so many people globally engaged with the same topic of public communication” (504: 2020). Other phenomena they realized is that all researchers and scholars were focused on the influence that Covid had in everyday and interpersonal communication.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The pandemic situation required a well-trained integrated team to discover the needs of students and professors and provide immediate response and support with digital means. We have all "navigated" in the virtual environment, with more or less difficulty we had the firm conviction that education should not stop. Language and communication change in different ways, language evolves, expands, but above all new words are added, adapting to new realities and circumstances. Historically, natural disasters, wars, and other major events have been shown to have a major impact on language innovation. Above all, the COVID-19 pandemic was no exception.

On the other hand, we don't know which of these new words will stay with us in the long term, only time will tell. Interpersonal communication was severely affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Protective measures, such as social distancing and protective masks, were essential in mitigating efforts against the corona virus, but presented challenges in daily face-to-face communication.

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