Maksymenko Y.V.
Semantic and pragmatic aspects of interest expression in modern English discourse

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Abstract. The article deals with the issue of the expression of interest in modern English discourse. It offers a complex approach to the study of interest on the basis of the semantic and pragmatic analysis of the data. Verbal and non-verbal markers of interest are identified. Functions of interest in communication are defined. The data is summarised in the communicative strategies of interest expression.

Keywords: *the emotion of interest, nominative field, verbal and non-verbal means, pragmatic functions, communicative strategies*

Interest as one of the basic human emotions [6; 20; 21] plays an essential role in our lives as a motivational force in the process of education and communication, a precondition of any successful and rewarding activity, and one of the most desirable emotional states. There has been a sufficient number of research done within psychology on the nature and role of interest. Within it curiosity is viewed as "a positive, emotional-motivational system that energizes and directs novelty-seeking behaviors, with the ultimate goal of stimulating one's interest" [9, p. 319]. Apart from that, interest is considered as a prerequisite of successful communication in the society [14]. Although there have been some studies of interest from the psychological perspective, we claim that the obtained data is insufficient to provide profound understanding of the emotion in the communicative process. The reason for this is that emotions are not simply felt but also expressed with the help of linguistic and extralinguistic means.

The current study is done within linguistics of emotions (or "emotionology", R. Harre's term). According to this approach in order to identify and interpret an emotion correctly one needs to consider: (1) a felt bodily disturbance, (2) a characteristic display, (3) the expression of a judgment, and (4) a particular illocutionary force [5, p. 148]. In other words we have to analyze the emotion itself, both its verbal and non-verbal representations as well as the speaker's intentions. Nowadays there are a number of researchers working within this perspective such as V. Shakhovski [19], N. Arutiunova [2] and many others. A study by M. Bamberg [3] reveals a *discursive* nature of emotion talks which was proven by the fact that the informants described the same emotions in different ways. Their descriptions were determined by the person who experienced the emotion (the first or third person narratives) rather than the emotion itself.

Thus, these approaches show the necessity of using multi-dimensional data in the studies of emotions taking into consideration both a communicative situation and its participants. This will provide more reliable results and better understanding of the phenomenon.

The main object of this article is the expression of the emotion of interest in the modern English language. We are going to consider interest expression through the analysis of verbal and non-verbal means, its illocutionary force or functions, as well as the choice and use of particular communicative strategies and tactics in a dialogue. The material for our research is obtained from modern English fiction as a representation of characteristic speech behavior of a definite language community. It provides excellent verbal data within the dialogues and a non-verbal description of the interlocutors' behavior in the form of the author's remarks.

The emotion of interest is expressed both explicitly (verbally) and implicitly (by means of describing its characteristic manifestation) in the modern English discourse. We would like to begin with the typical *non-verbal expression of interest*. The reason for this is that according to A. Mehrabian [10] 93 % of information is transmitted non-verbally (38 % through the voice and 55 % with the help of facial expressions) and only 7 % verbally. The non-verbal markers of interest were singled out in the psychological studies [6, p. 89–108; 20, p. 57] They can be classified into visual (gaze), kinetic (face mimics and body movements), proxemic (the use of space), paralinguistic (voice characteristics), and haptic (the use of touch). Let us illustrate them with the examples from the English fiction.

– A fixed gaze on the object of interest or eye movement: "*The thin boy glanced swiftly back and forth between Jacob and me*" [13, p. 138].

– Raised eyebrows: "*I let my eyes meet Peeta's. He raises his eyebrows. A question. What happened? I just give my head a small shake*" [4, p. 104].

– An open mouth or pursed lips: "*Crabbe and Goyle were both sitting with their mouths open like gargoyles*" [17, p. 151–152].

– A raised or tilted head: "*As she turned around to question him, she caught him with his head tilted, studying her*" [1, p. 35].

– A smile: "*You were both there too, were you?*" *said Slughorn with great interest, looking from Ginny to Neville, but both of them sat clamlike before his encouraging smile*" [17, p. 146].

– A pointing gesture: "*What's that?*" *said one of the twins suddenly, pointing at Harry's lightning scar*" [18, p. 95].

– Approaching an interesting person or object: "*Trix and Lisa also gravitated immediately to Ashling's desk, reeled by avid interest in the exotic Mai*" [7, p. 243].

– A touch: "*The fur was both soft and rough, and warm against my skin. I ran my fingers through it curiously, learning the texture, stroking his neck where the color deepened*" [12, p. 400].

– A faster speech rate and greater range in vocal frequency: "*Tell me everything, everything, about this great new job,*" *Dylan ordered energetically. "I want to know all about it*" [7, p. 190]. The adverb "energetically" in this case describes the speech rate. The most important words ("everything") are highlighted both with the help of voice and graphically.

Interest is sometimes expressed through its physiological influence on a person.

– An increased heart rate: " *Harry <u>peered</u> down over the edge of the luggage rack, his <u>heart pumping a little faster.</u> What had Malfoy wanted to hide from Pansy? Was he about to see the mysterious broken object it was so important to mend?*" [17, p. 153].

On the other hand, interest can be expressed verbally, for example: "*Oh, <u>bravo</u>! Yes, indeed, oh, very good. Well, well, well ... how <u>curious</u> ... how <u>very curious</u> ... *" [18, p. 85]. The analysis of the entries in monolingual dictionaries, thesauri and dictionaries of idioms revealed a body of over 700 nominative units related to the expression of interest in the English language. Those have 13 semantic integrative features that are: the subject of interest, the object, the reason, manner of its manifestation, constituents, intensity, temporal characteristics, assessment, legal / illegal nature of interest, intentionality, the influence on the subject. On the basis of these features the verbal means of interest expression were subdivided into four thematic groups within the *nominative field* (V. Vizaulina's term [22]) "interest". They are "the expression of interest", "subjects of interest", "objects of interest", and "behavioral expression of interest". This nominative field has a lexical unit "interest" as the dominant due to the qualitative prevalence of its use in modern discourse (30 % of all the analysed cases) and neutral character. The field has a complex structure and is constantly changing due to the appearance of new means of interest expression, changes of word meanings etc.

Functional analysis of the selected discourse extracts revealed several *functions* of interest in communication process: cognitive, communicative, metacommunicative, emotive, pragmatic, and entertaining. These functions reflect the illocutionary force of the message or, in other words, the speaker's intended meaning. Let us consider the functions in more detail.

1) Cognitive function of interest stresses the role of this emotion in learning and development. For example:

"*<u>Watched</u> by the rest of the office, Lisa and Jack ate their sushi. Ashling, in particular, was appalled, but <u>couldn't keep away.</u> She kept <u>sneaking looks</u> at them [...] Ashling <u>watched fascinated</u>.*

[...] The <u>words were out before she could stop</u> herself. "*<u>What's this</u>?*"

"*Pickled ginger.*" *[...]*

Ashling <u>watched</u> for a few more <u>intrigued</u> seconds, before <u>blurting out</u>, "*<u>What's it like? All of it</u>?*" [7, p. 391].

The cognitive function is realized in this excerpt by Ashling's desire to find out more about sushi which drives her to take part in the dialogue with the expert in it.

2) Communicative function reflects the importance of mutual interest for the success of any speech act which enables it to happen:

"*<u>So what did Professor Slughorn want?</u>*" *Hermione asked.*

"*To know what really happened at the Ministry,*" *said Harry.*

"*Him and everyone else here,*" *sniffed Hermione.* "*People were <u>interrogating</u> us about it on the train, weren't they, Ron?*" [17, p. 164].

In the previous excerpt people's desire to find out some information about the events at the Ministry makes them seek communication with those who know it.

3) Metacommunicative function means that interest organizes the communicative process. This includes drawing the listener's attention at the beginning and keeping it throughout the whole conversation, as well as making future communication possible and desirable for both interlocutors.

"*<u>Do you still want to hear about Sam?</u>*" *he offered.* *I shrugged.*

"*Like I said, it's a long story. And very…<u>strange</u>. There're so many strange things about this new life. I haven't had time <u>to tell</u> you the half of it. And this thing with Sam – well, I don't know if I'll even be able to explain it right.*"

His <u>words pricked my curiosity</u> in spite of my irritation.

"*<u>I'm listening</u>,*" *I said stiffly*" [12, p. 116].

The girl's initial reluctance to communicate was reversed by the promise of an interesting story.

4) Emotive function represents the speaker's attitude towards the discussed information:

"*Fleur's words were drowned in a <u>scream</u>. Hermione was <u>pointing</u> through the kitchen window. Three black specks were clearly visible in the sky, growing larger all the time.*

"*They're definitely owls,*" *said Ron hoarsely, <u>jumping up</u> to join Hermione at the window.*

"*And there are three of them,*" *said Harry, <u>hastening</u> to her other side* [17, p. 101].

The children's behavior shows their great interest in the arrival of the exam results by owl mail which is expressed by paralinguistic (a scream), kinetic (pointing), and proxemic (jumping) means. In this situation interest is mingled with the emotions of anxiety and fear.

5) Pragmatic function unites a wide range of the intended influences on the interlocutors such as complimenting, threatening, encouraging etc.: "*Ashling found Dylan <u>watching</u> her <u>with anxious interest</u>. "Are you OK?" he <u>asked</u>. She nodded assent. "For a minute I thought we'd lost you there*" [7, p. 194]. In this excerpt the pragmatic function is to show care and concern for the person.

6) Entertaining function is based on one of the meanings of the word "interest" which is "an activity you enjoy doing". Interest is not always aimed at obtaining some important information. Its purpose can be pleasure:

"*Two men <u>stood</u> beside a fancy SUV with brand-new kayaks tied to the top.*

Neither of them was looking at me; they both were <u>staring</u> at the car. [...]

"*Do you mind if I <u>take a picture</u> with it?*"

It took me a second to process that. "Really? You want to take a picture with the car?"

"*Sure—nobody is going to believe me if I don't get proof.*"

"*Um. Okay. Fine*" [11, p. 8–9].

The purpose of the men's interest in the posh car is mere entertainment.

Interest can be expressed in different ways depending on the extralinguistic factors that include the speaker's and the listener's personalities, their relationship, the situation, the speaker's aim etc. All these factors define the choice of communicative strategies by the speaker and become clear within a wider context. Communicative strategies are the approaches to realizing the speaker's

intentions. On the basis of the analysis of the excerpts from the English fiction we identified six common strategies of communicating interest: cognitive, intrusive, diplomatic, aggressive, adventurous, and spectacular. They are based on the principles of desirability / undesirability, positive/negative assessment, and some other characteristics.

1) Cognitive strategy is characterized by its positive assessment, desirability. It fulfills cognitive and communicative functions of interest. For example: "*My cake? Our cake," Mac corrected quickly with a grin for Carter. "I wanna see, I wanna see!*" [15, p. 36]. Mac's wish to see the cake presupposes a perceptive form of interest and is expressed verbally with the help of repetition to intensify it.

2) Intrusive strategy is negative and undesirable. It corresponds to entertaining, emotive, and pragmatic functions. It is usually associated with gossiping, as in the example: "*Did he kiss you back? Well?*" Mac *demanded when Emma kicked her. "It's a question*" [15, p. 62]. The content of the question as well as the manner of putting it (a demand) characterize the interest as intrusive.

3) Diplomatic strategy contains a positive assessment and is considered to be desirable. It is based on the principle of politeness in communication introduced by G. Leech [8] and has communicative, metacommunicative, and pragmatic functions. "*Why are you going to London?*" Harry *asked, trying to keep things friendly*" [18, p. 90]. The author's remark identifies the purpose of the question which is not mere interest but an attempt to improve the atmosphere. This is an instance of a metacommunicative function.

4) Aggressive strategy is characterized as negative and highly undesirable. It also violates politeness principle of communication and is applied by those who are stronger and/or more influential. It fulfills cognitive, emotive, pragmatic, and entertaining functions. Its expression usually presupposes the use of physical force, as in the example:

"*Harry was on the point of unfolding his letter, which was written on the same heavy parchment as the envelope, when it was jerked sharply out of his hand by Uncle Vernon.*

"That's mine!" said Harry, trying to snatch it back.

"Who'd be writing to you?" sneered Uncle Vernon, shaking the letter open with one hand and glancing at it" [18, p. 34–35].

5) Adventurous strategy represents a character trait curiosity rather than a single instance of being interested. It is characterized by positive assessment, activeness and purposefulness. It represents cognitive and entertaining functions of interest. For example: "*He had just found an incantation ("Sectumsempra!") scrawled in a margin above the intriguing words "For Enemies," and was itching to try it out, but thought it best not to in front of Hermione*" [17, p. 447–448]. The boy's desire to experiment is caused by his character and is not directed at obtaining some essential knowledge but rather enjoyment. All this information is communicated by the author to the readers in the remarks.

6) Spectacular strategy is negative and undesirable. It is associated with gawking at accidents, celebrities, something unusual. As opposed to the adventurous strategy it

is based on the temporary state of being interested. It is passive in its expression. Its common functions include entertaining and cognitive.

"*I brought about the death of Albus Dumbledore!*"

"*You thought you did," said Harry, "but you were wrong.*"

For the first time, the watching crowd stirred as the hundreds of people around the walls drew breath as one [16, p. 740].

In this example a crowd of people watch the dual of two people and listen to their conversation without taking any active part in it. Thus, they communicate their interest only passively (non-verbally).

These strategies form three opposing pairs: cognitive vs. intrusive, diplomatic vs. aggressive, adventurous vs. spectacular. The choice of a strategy is always situation and person bound and is aimed at the most appropriate self-presentation. Let us consider the following example which illustrates a dialogue between a teacher and a boy:

"*Are you a wizard too?*"

"*Yes, I am.*"

"*Prove it," said Riddle at once, in the same commanding tone he had used when he had said, "Tell the truth.*"

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows. "If, as I take it, you are accepting your place at Hogwarts –"

"*Of course I am!*"

"*Then you will address me as "Professor" or "sir.*"

Riddle's expression hardened for the most fleeting moment before he said, in an unrecognizably polite voice, "*I'm sorry, sir. I meant – please, Professor, could you show me – ?*" [17, p. 271–272].

It contains instances of the aggressive and diplomatic strategies of interest. In the fragment the speaker changes a demand which is a tactics of the aggressive strategy to a request that is one of the tactics of the diplomatic strategy. The demand is expressed both verbally by a question "Are you a wizard too?" and an imperative "Prove it" and non-verbally by specifying the manner of speaking (in the same commanding tone). The request is also transmitted verbally by an apology and a question and paralinguistically (polite voice). The reason for the change into the opposite strategy is the boy's failure to reach his goal in the first case. Riddle's partner rejects a subordinate role in communication which induces the speaker to change his tactics in order to achieve the desired result. Both strategies are aimed at realizing cognitive (finding out about the wizard world) and pragmatic (eliminating any danger of a lie) functions of interest. The diplomatic strategy also performs a metacommunicative function of restoring a favorable atmosphere of communication ruined by the initial inappropriate choice of strategy.

This paper provides a complex research of the emotion of interest from the semantic and pragmatic viewpoints. It proves the importance of interest in the modern English discourse by revealing a body of its verbal and non-verbal expressive means, a wide range of pragmatic functions it performs, as well as its significant role in self-presentation. The scope of aspects concerning the expression of interest is only briefly outlined in the article. Further studies of cultural and gender specificity of its expression seem to be of great interest.

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Максименко Ю.В.
Семантический и прагматический аспекты выражения интереса в современном английском дискурсе

Аннотация. Статья посвящена вопросу выражения эмоции интереса в современном английском дискурсе. Предлагается комплексный подход к изучению интереса с использованием семантического и прагматического анализа. Выделяются вербальные и невербальные маркеры интереса. Определяются функции интереса в процессе коммуникации. Данные обобщаются в форме коммуникативных стратегий выражения интереса.

Ключевые слова: эмоция интереса, номинативное поле, вербальные и невербальные средства, прагматические функции, коммуникативные стратегии