

Super-verbal components as discourse-forming medium for social roles

Yu. S. Skrynnik

V. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Kharkiv, Ukraine
Corresponding author. E-mail: j.skrynnik@karazin.ua

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Abstract. This paper examines the discourse-forming features of super-verbal communicative components proving that they are of high importance in the interaction process. The material for the research includes film scripts and fiction. This study shows that stereotypical communication can be shown in a form of the scenario with the help of which speakers implement their social roles taking their stance and choosing the right verbal, non- and super-verbal components. The latter are often more expressive and helpful, therefore, the knowledge and appropriate use of a speaker's non-verbal passport and super-verbals have their own place in communication leading to the successful interaction. The developed communicative approach to the analysis of super-verbals contributes to the development of the discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. The article concludes by drawing potential perspectives of considering the intercultural factor and developing non-stereotypical communicative scenario.

Keywords: *discourse, non-verbal passport, scenario, social role, stance, super-verbals.*

Introduction. The prerequisite for discourse analysis was defined by the growing attention to the human factor in communication and certain subjectivity of linguistic principles. In linguistic studies, the term "discourse" is still interpreted quite broadly, although today there is no single definition that covers all the contexts of its use.

In our study, we rely on the definition of discourse as a medium for realizing the social roles of the individual. M. Halliday defines discourse through the parameters of participants, that is, interlocutors who are considered to be "the bearers of status and role tasks", themes or areas of social interaction, in which participants use language as the main tool of cooperation, and mode, that is, functions or communicative intentions, which are achieved through the use of language [10, p. 57].

In a narrower sense, discourse is treated as "an integral phenomenon, mental communicative activity taking place in a broad socio-cultural context; it is a combination of process and result, characterized by continuity and dialogic nature" [26, p. 26].

The definition of discourse given by M. Jorgensen and L. Phillips [13, p. 24] is also informative in the social aspect. "Discourse is a form of social behaviour which participates in shaping the social world (including knowledge of people and social relations) and, thus, in maintaining and preserving social patterns of communication". The definition of discourse, taking into consideration the theoretical and methodological basis of social research, correlates with our study of the variability of usage of verbal and non-verbal components in the process of changing social roles by a discursive personality within the frames of a particular type of discourse.

At the present stage of linguistics development, there is a large number of approaches to both the analysis of discourse and selection of its various types [6; 12; 17; 30; 31; 35; 38; 39]. In discourse analysis, the influence of non-verbal factors is to be taken into account, and as a result, the research of social and anthropological parameters of communication appear at the forefront of discursive investigations. So, the universal features of the discourse type are defined both by linguistic and non-linguistic factors [28; 29, p.119-120].

The research is **aimed** at studying the super-verbal communicative components used in different communicative situations, therefore, it contributes to the knowledge of the principles of effective successful interaction. Moreover, the study investigates the discourse forming features of the super-verbals proving that they are the essential part of the interaction contributing to the effective flow of the communicative process.

Methods and material. The research methods include *the*

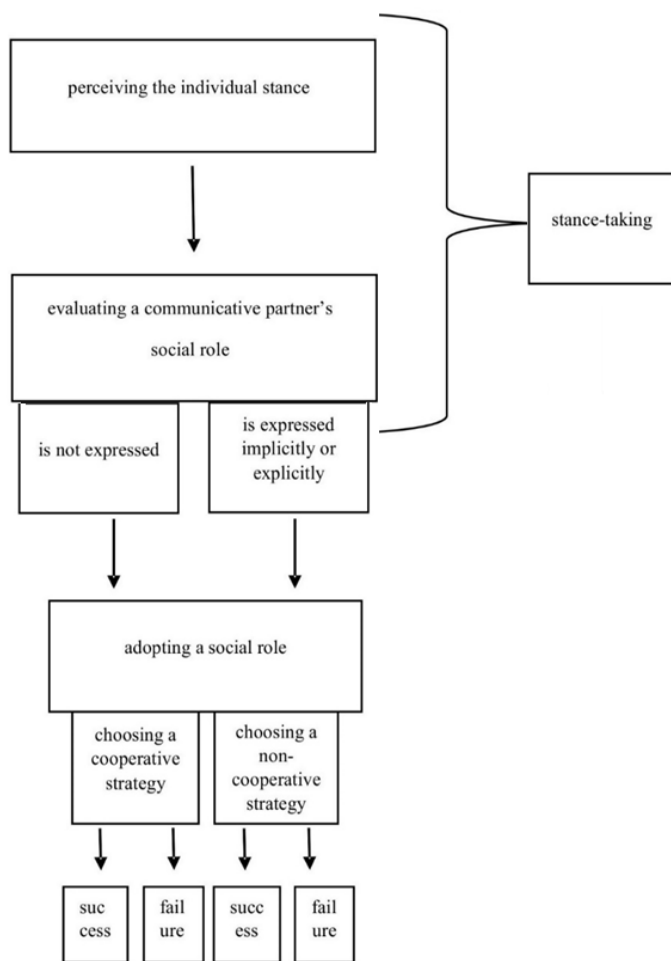
discursive analysis [26; 34; 38] for determining the type of discourse, within which interlocutors realize their social roles; *the contextual-situational analysis* [15; 16] for describing specific features of the communicative situation; analysis of *non-verbal* communicative components [1; 5; 14; 25; 28; 29; 32]. The research material comprises discursive fragments, singled out from fiction and film scripts.

Results and discussion. Language is one of the manifestations of the essence of a personality, which introduces in communication the properties of mental and life experience, worldview features, thinking abilities, interests, etc. The human factor in language is the fundamental phenomenon of linguistic pragmatics as a branch of modern linguistics [4; 9; 15; 23; 24].

Research of a human being in social sciences implies the fact that the perception of people is of a reciprocal nature, therefore, in the process of communication, not only the researcher forms the impression of the subjects he examines, but he himself becomes the object of perception [18, p. 22]. In contemporary discursive and pragmalinguistic studies, the language is analyzed as a complex dynamic system, which manifests itself in the interpersonal speech interaction of the addresser with the addressee. Under such conditions, in the center of the research is the **problem** of the communicative influence of the addresser on the addressee, which characterizes any kind of speech interaction, and the role of super-verbal components in it.

Basing on the general ideas of presentation the communicative process in the form of a scenario [16; 33], the scheme of realization of the social role's scenario appears in the following form: the structure of the "path" is the basis for the scenario as a propositional model: source – path – goal [16]. When performing the social role's scenario, the initial stage is perceiving the individual stance. Stance [33, p. 61] is an inter-subjective process in which communicative partners construct their positions concerning other speakers, usually under unequal social, psychological, and epistemic conditions, and therefore broadcast their own evaluative, emotional, and epistemic perspectives, focusing on the asymmetry of communicative relationships. At the stage of creating their stance, the person demonstrates understanding of his position. This first stage involves not only the speaker's attitude to his own position, but also the attitude towards the addressee / addressees with whom he / she communicates (as well as to their knowledge, emotions and status). Therefore, the stance-creating stage involves evaluating a communicative partner. The evaluation is expressed (implicitly / explicitly) by verbal /

non-verbal / super-verbal communicative components (Picture 1).



Picture 1. The scenario of stereotypical communication.

The next stage in the scenario is connected with choosing the path, which implies adopting a social role and choosing the appropriate strategy for achieving the goal. This is presented by the final state of affairs a person intends to achieve in case of a successful implementation of the scenario.

At the stage of adopting a social role the speaker presents his role not only through verbal communicative components, explicitly or implicitly, but also in a non-verbal way. Thus, the interlocutors' status-role inequality is also manifested through non-verbal means of communication. R. Birdwhistell advocated the need for a detailed study of non-verbal communicative components, emphasizing that non-verbal means in a communicative act are an independent and highly significant phenomenon. Communication is a holistic, organized continuum, and elements of communication cannot be divided into the central and secondary ones [2].

The science of signs and sign systems [25] is relevant for the investigation of the discourse. Non-verbal communicative components serve for preserving the official status of the speaker. In our research we refer to prosodic, kinesic, proxemic, and super-verbal components taking as a basis for their specifications their main characteristics (motion, space) and the basic systems of their creation and perception (visual and acoustic) [29, p. 35–36].

First of all, the interaction starts with the proxemic component [36]. A person having a dominant social role takes more communicative space, spreading his shoulders, putting his hands on the waist and having legs at the shoulder width. In the prosodic aspect, raising of the tonal level is observed. In

the kinesic sphere broad gestures, explicit facial expressions, looking and gazing into a partner's eyes are popular. A compact posture taking up a small communicative space is typical for a person having a subordinate social role. Their intonation is lower and quieter than the intonation of a communicative partner in the dominant social role. At the kinesic level, crossed hands or feet, eye contact avoidance, gestures reduced in their size and quantity symbolize the speaker's subordinate position and usually reflect his low confidence. Speakers who belong to the marginal or peripheral zones of the discursive environment [29, p. 127–128] are less aware of a communicative partner's non-verbal passport (a set of an individual's most frequently used non-verbal signs). Therefore, when performing social roles in non-nuclear zones, the advantage is given to the use of universal non-verbal communicative components.

It is relevant to mention that non-verbal components can fully substitute verbal ones, which can be done both spontaneously and purposefully:

(1) *[The boss [Miranda] enters the office talking on her mobile. She sees her secretary [Andrea] wearing stylishly and snazzy. She gives her a long approving look from head to toes and looks back at her as she leaves]* [11].

In the example above, the facial expression completely replaces the verbal expression. The boss's pleasantly surprised look embodies the praise and encouragement, and a positive confirmation of the communicative partner's social role.

An individual's non-verbal passport [29] varies depending on the discourse type – business discourse or everyday discourse. The following two examples (2, 3) demonstrate one and the same individual's non-verbal passport in two different discourse types. Strangers in the roles of companions on a train start talking to each other, due to the small distance between them. In everyday circumstances, the discursive personality when performing the social role of a travel companion has uninhibited behavior, which is manifested at the non-verbal level of communication:

(2) *"What is the matter?" she asked rather breathlessly in French. "Why are we stopping?"*

"It is nothing, Mademoiselle. It is something that has caught fire under the dining-car. Nothing serious. It is put out. They are now repairing the damage. There is no danger, I assure you."

She made a little abrupt gesture, as though she were waving the idea of danger aside as something completely unimportant.

"Yes, yes, I understand that. But the time!" "The time?"

"Yes, this will delay us."

"It is possible – yes," agreed Poirot.

"But we can't afford delay!" [3, p. 12]

Prosodic (*she asked rather breathlessly*) and kinesic communicative components (*She made a little abrupt gesture, as though she were waving the idea of danger aside as something completely unimportant*) demonstrate the emotional state of a personality. Appeal to a speaker's emotional state is characteristic of everyday discourse.

Business communication requires a speaker to follow the social norms and rules for performing social roles both at the verbal and non-verbal levels of communication:

(3) *"Listen, Mademoiselle, I will recall to you another incident. There was a delay to the train on the day we were to reach Stamboul. You were very agitated, Mademoiselle. You, so calm, so self-controlled. You lost that calm." "I did not want to miss my connection."*

“So you said. But, Mademoiselle, the Orient Express leaves Stamboul every day of the week. Even if you had missed the connection it would only have been a matter of twenty-four hours’ delay.”

Miss Debenham for the first time showed signs of losing her temper.

“You do not seem to realise that one may have friends awaiting one’s arrival in London, and that a day’s delay upsets arrangements and causes a lot of annoyance.”

“And yet, Mademoiselle, this time your manner is quite different. You no longer betray the impatience. You are calm and philosophical.”

Mary Debenham flushed and bit her lip. She no longer felt inclined to smile [3, p. 132].

In example (3) Miss Debenham while performing the social role of the suspect, tries to pull herself together, as evidenced by her non-verbal behavior (*your manner is quite different*), which is noticed by her communicative partner, who has the social role of the detective.

Non-verbal communicative components in business discourse serve to preserve a speaker’s official business status. The kinesic components of communication in business discourse are minimal in order to preserve the business image of a personality. Whereas in the roles’ configuration in everyday environment a speaker affords to use a wider range of non-verbal communicative components. In everyday life, an individual operates more widely with kinesic and prosodic non-verbal components. Choosing the topic of conversation under informal conditions may reflect a person’s occupation, which is also a reflection of the business style of communication under everyday conditions. The “flexibility” of everyday communication allows an individual to introduce the elements of speech behavior characteristic of business discourse, while the clear boundaries of business communication do not always allow to go beyond formal business communication.

The special attention should be paid to super-verbal components as a relevant source of information in communication. The semiotic significance of artifacts, such as clothing, footwear, hairstyle, jewelry, etc. lies in supplying relevant information about speakers [1]. The social status and the social group, to which a speaker belongs to, may be easily determined by his/her clothes [37]. “Even those people who do not pay much attention to the choice of clothes and are not very worried about their look, somehow transmit information about their emotional state, their individuality, their social role and relation to other people, to the culture which they belong to through their attire” [5; 32]. So, the super-verbal components are those situational components, mostly of static nature, which have a potential opportunity to influence the process of communication and regulate it [28, p. 33–35].

At the stage of adopting a social role super-verbal components, which include clothing, hairstyles, different accessories, etc. are of great importance. The official business style of clothing and footwear, complemented by accessories denoting the status of the individual, is stereotypically chosen to confirm a dominant social role. “Today the executive suit is so much more competitive that the advantage of being a well-dressed executive makes a bankable difference in how you and your company are perceived (business and social) by your clients, competition, and total strangers”, wrote Thourlby [32, p. 96]. Individuals having subordinate social roles usually choose an everyday style of clothing.

The conditions of communication dictate the style of clothing and behavior manners. There are certain rules that have emerged in the society regarding appearance and behavior. A

person who tries to deviate the established norms may be in the center of undue negative attention, because his appearance or behavior do not meet the established norms in the society.

Under everyday circumstances, when performing a social role of a mistress, the super-verbal components of communication are at the forefront:

(4) The question I couldn’t get out of my head – “Why did you come?” – now took the form of “How good of you to come!” She had put on just a bit of eyeliner and some pink lipstick. With her perfume, the makeup gave her an exotic womanly air. But her eyes were red and puffy like a child’s, so I knew that after we had parted that afternoon she had gone home and spent the early evening crying; but no sooner had I worked this out than she assumed the demeanor of a confident, well-bred woman who knew her own mind. [22, p 78].

The speakers having the social roles of lovers belong to the nuclear zone of the discursive environment. The nuclear zone of the discursive environment is characterized by a high degree of awareness of the partners’ communicative behavior [29], as well as awareness of the specifics of managing the super-verbal components in the communication process (*But her eyes were red and puffy like a child; spent the early evening crying*). The degree of the speakers’ closeness determines the importance not only of such super-verbal components as appearance, makeup (*She had put on just a bit of eyeliner and some pink lipstick*) and clothing, but also the importance of fragrance, which irritates the recipient’s receptors, and thus has not only speech impact, but also physical (*With her perfume, the makeup gave her an exotic womanly air*).

The business discourse type defines its rules and norms for using super-verbal components of communication. The famous saying “good clothes open all doors” is not coincidental when speaking about the norms and rules set for the official communication. The same personality in the example above, having the social role of a saleswoman in a clothing store, selects the appropriate super-verbal components when communicating with clients. The woman’s image and style of clothing corresponds to the social role of a saleswoman in the clothing store:

(5) Then I made out Fusun’s shadow through a screen and between the leaves of a huge vase of cyclamens. She was waiting on a fat lady who was trying on an outfit in the fitting room. This time she was wearing a charming and flattering blouse, a print of hyacinths intertwined with leaves and wildflowers. When she saw me she smiled sweetly.

“You seem busy,” I said, indicating the fitting room with my eyes.

“We’re just about finished,” she said, as if to imply she and her customer were at this point just talking idly [22, p. 7].

The style of clothing chosen by this saleswoman meets the expectations of the society in fulfilling this social role (*This time she was wearing a charming and flattering blouse, a print of hyacinths intertwined with leaves and wildflowers. When she saw me she smiled sweetly*). In addition, the non-verbal component – a sweet smile given to her client (*When she saw me she smiled sweetly*) – is appropriate for these communicative conditions – interaction between the saleswoman and the customer.

The store’s interior being treated as a super-verbal component is decisive in the example above (*Then I made out Fusun’s shadow through a screen and between the leaves of a huge vase of cyclamens*). Flowers and plants in the interior of the store correlate with the clothing of the saleswoman, which emphasizes the conformity of the personality to the social role performed.

In our study, we have come to the conclusion that the usage of super-verbal components in business discourse depend on the norms and rules set in the society. Operation with the super-verbal components in the everyday discourse is freer and may vary with the addresser's wish, not always depending on the established norms and wishes / requirements of the addressee.

The choice of clothing, make-up, accessories and other components related to the super-verbals should be appropriate to the communicative conditions and vary in the transition from everyday communication to business communication. Everyday communicative conditions extend the choice of clothing:

(6) "I came to collect my umbrella," said Fusun.

She wouldn't come in. "Why don't you come in?" I said. For a moment she hesitated. Perhaps deciding it would be rude to stand there at the door, she stepped inside. I shut the door behind her. This is the fuchsia dress in which she appeared to mesmerizing effect that day, with its white buttons and the white belt with the large buckle, which made her waist seem all the more slender [22, p 21].

In everyday discourse the choice of color is free:

(7) <...> in the shaded area where women gathered as if by instinct, I'd seen Fusun among the covered women and the society women who, for the occasion, had draped chic, fashionable scarves over their heads, and at that moment, my heart had begun to race. She was wearing an orange scarf [22, p 55].

Everyday communicative conditions allow speakers to choose a wide range of colors in clothing, footwear, accessories (fuchsia dress, white buttons, orange scarf). This choice depends on the emotional state of the individual, mood, desire to attract the attention of communicative partners.

In formal communicative conditions, the super-verbal components of communication must conform to the situation and to the norms established in the society. Intolerance in the fulfillment of a social role in the institutional discourse is manifested in violation of the rules and norms of proper appearance:

(8) Young doctors would approach like urbane gentlemen in European films, to ask, "Might I be of any assistance?" Crusty professors who seemed not even to notice me tried to charm her with quips and courtesies. All this disruption on account of a beautiful woman appearing without a headscarf in the office of a state bureaucracy, sowing momentary alarm, even panic. Some clerks could not bring themselves to discuss the business at hand in her presence, others would stammer, still others fall silent, obliged to seek out a man who could act as intermediary. When they finally saw me, and took me for her husband, they would relax, as would I, in much the same helplessness [22, p 222].

The same personality in examples (7), (8), being in the social role of the patient of the clinic, choosing the wrong style of clothing to visit the clinic, is the focus of undue attention of others.

If an individual seeks to emphasize his/her belonging (personal, social, and cultural) to a particular social role, he/she focuses on those non-verbal components, which help to determine this affiliation. If, on the contrary, a person tends to distance himself from his role, he/she demonstrates such models of behaviour and attitude, which do not meet the requirements ascribed to it by the society. Thus, individuals report that they do not identify themselves in full with an executable role and possess qualities going beyond its boundaries.

Age and life experience influence the performance of a social role that is most commonly demonstrated on the super-verbal communicative level:

(9) DAVIS [A YOUNG INTERN] sits at a desk, takes out his iPhone, an iPad mini, a flash drive, opens up his computer.

BEN [AN ELDERLY INTERN WHO IN THE PAST WAS A VICE- PRESIDENT OF THE COMPANY THAT WAS PRODUCING PHONE BOOKS] finds an empty desk, sits at it and although the atmosphere is unknown, he takes enormous pleasure in once again, sitting behind a desk. Ben opens his well-worn briefcase, takes out a new Pen and Pencil set, a small leather-bound pad, a flip phone, a travel clock.

LEWIS, a scrawny sleepy-looking Intern with long hair, sits across from Ben – watching him. Ben takes out his lucky Pocket Calculator, then an Eyeglass Case, then another eyeglass case. He slips on his bifocals, raises his neck and looks down at the CTF Screen Saver. Ben stares at the keyboard, not sure what to do when he becomes aware he's being watched. He looks over, sees Lewis eyeing him. Lewis decides to help him out by showing him to hit the space bar on his keyboard. Ben follows, hits his space bar. The computer turns on and a lot of icons pop up that don't look familiar. Lewis helps out again by moving his mouse to the Mail Icon, Clicks. Ben catches on and does the same.

BEN: Oh. Got one [21].

The super-verbal components demonstrate the generation gap in performing social roles (He slips on his bifocals, raises his neck and looks down at the CTF Screen Saver. Ben stares at the keyboard, not sure what to do when he becomes aware he's being watched). The elder trainee (Ben) uses outdated equipment (well-worn briefcase; Pen and Pencil set; leather-bound pad; flip phone; travel clock; Pocket Calculator; Eyeglass Case). While the younger one uses modern gadgets (iPhone; iPad mini; flash drive; computer) (as shown in Picture 2).



Picture 2. Extracted video frame of Ben and Lewis's super-verbal components from "The intern". Available at: <https://www.putlockers.me/movie/the-intern-3081.html>

Such an element as posture can also provide information about a person's social status / social role. We suggest differentiating "posture" and "position". Posture is treated as the carriage of a person inborn or adopted during the lifetime, which is permanent and usually is not controlled and can be referred to as a super-verbal component [27] while position is understood as a non-verbal component characterizing the speaker's standing, which is temporary and controllable. The posture and positions perceived by interlocutors vary depending on his/her place in the social hierarchy. Due to the posture one can determine whether a person tends to dominate or obey [14, p. 142]. A lady (Princess Dragomiroff) performs a dominant social role in relation to her German maid (Hildegard Schmidt) in the example given below. Her direct posture (e.g. sitting very upright) speaks of her role and high social status:

(10) *At a small table, sitting very upright, was one of the ugliest old ladies he had ever seen. It was an ugliness of distinction – it fascinated rather than repelled. She sat very upright. Round her neck was a collar of very large pearls which, improbable though it seemed, were real. Her hands were cov-*

ered with rings. Her sable coat was pushed back on her shoulders. A very small and expensive black toque was hideously unbecoming to the yellow, toad-like face beneath it [3, p. 21].

Accessories also contribute to the defining of the speaker's social status / role (gemstones, pearls, rings, sable coat, black toque, etc) (Picture 3).



1 – posture; rings, gemstones



2 – sable coat, gemstones

Picture 3. Extracted video frame from “Murder on the orient express” demonstrates the role of super-verbal components in Princess Dragomiroff’s discourse. Available at: <https://putlocker.icu/movie/murder-on-the-orient-express/4kyIW>

One can then exploit the knowledge of the use of super-verbals for implementing the proper strategies and tactics of communication. The ability to interpret the messages encrypted with the super-verbal components contributes to the ecological communication and prevents conflicts in the interaction.

The next step in adopting a social role is connected with choosing either cooperative or non-cooperative strategy of communication. Communicative activity is inherently strategic, since it always obeys the goals motivated by primordial socio-biological needs of a person. The strategy acquires the status of the basic notion in communication as it is structuring the speaker’s communicative activity [19, p. 20]. The speaker’s communicative strategies may vary according to the type of his speech interaction with the addressee and may be either cooperatively or conflict oriented. In addition, the variation of the speaker’s communicative strategies coincides necessarily with the general communicative purpose of the speaker, characteristic for each type of discourse [8; 20].

The communicative strategy provides the optimal realization of the speaker’s intentions, aimed at achieving a specific purpose of communication, which coincides with the personal (status-role) and psychological characteristics of the participants in the communicative process due to the communicative experience. It involves obeying the requirements and norms in the relevant area of communication and a specifically modelled communicative situation. In general terms, the strategy includes the speech planning for the communication process, depending on the specific communicative conditions and personalities of speakers as well as the implementation of this plan.

The strategy in contemporary discourse research is associated with an addresser’s intentions and an addressee’s interpretation, their reciprocal interpretative position being always taken into account. Their two-vector nature allows one to analyze strategies of social roles implementation as a necessary requirement where there are at least two participants available. The discursive strategy is a discursive phenomenon, which combines cognitive and language features. It implements a prototypical strategic significance, correlated with social stereotypes by means of language and its organization, taking into account contextual and situational factors. The discursive strategy constructs the subjects’ communicative practice of discourse [7, p. 209]. Thus, the strategy may be treated as the

implementation of a communicative stereotype, which is typical for a particular social role.

Implementation of successful interaction implies identifying the social status of speakers in the society according to their hierarchy. Taking into account general information about the communicative situation (relevance / irrelevance) contributes to the successful realization of social roles, which are treated as stereotyped behavioural patterns embodied in discourse through a scenario by using strategies implementing a stereotype at the verbal, non-verbal, and super-verbal levels of communication. Thus, instruments for implementation of strategies related to the realization of successful interaction are verbal, non-verbal, and super-verbal components of communication, which are used for updating the higher or lower social status/role of a speaker [28, p. 61].

Conclusions. Undoubtedly, “clothes speak the men”, “good clothes open all doors”, the first thing people draw attention at when speaking to a stranger or an acquaintance is a super-verbal component: clothes, perfumes, accessories, hairstyle, posture, etc. These super-verbals help to distinguish a communicative partner’s social role, status, occupation. Using this first-impression knowledge an individual starts building strategies to achieve his communicative goals.

Speakers’ non-verbal behaviour varies with the change from one discourse type to another. The performance of a dominant social role is mostly characterized by operations with kinesic non-verbal components. Gestures used by speakers for performing a dominant social role emphasize the vertical distance between him/her and the opponent. The speaker’s authority can also be demonstrated through prosodic communicative components. The performance of a subordinate social role is mostly characterized by the use of prosodic non-verbal components exhibiting a speaker’s emotions, which he can not demonstrate overtly in the verbal way. A lower level in the usage of gestures and facial expressions in the communicative process distinguishes a speaker’s subordinate role.

The super-verbal communicative components are of high importance in discourse construction as they can detect a speaker’s social role / status at the initial stage of communication, which is very important for its further development. They contribute greatly to effectively decode information that can not be transmitted verbally without violation of the rules of successful communication.

The super-verbals are chosen taking into account the discourse type – business or everyday. For successful achievement of communicative goals and successful social role performance the appropriate super-verbal components are to be chosen. With all the super-verbals and principles of their usage taken into account at the moment of interaction, the communicative process can lead to productive interaction.

Thus, the communicative approach to the analysis of super-

verbals contributes to the development of the discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. The research has further **perspectives** in the study of super-verbal components considering the intercultural factor influencing the process of successful communication that will also contribute to the modern studies of discourse; as well as in the research of super-verbal components as the discourse-forming medium in a non-stereotypical communicative scenario.

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