

# FRAME CATEGORIZATION OF CONVERSATIONAL INTIMACY

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## Abstract

*The article deals with the notion of intimacy. The frame of intimacy is studied on the basis of the linguistic parameters, analysis of text extracts and universal knowledge about intimacy. Frame analysis helped to establish the categorization of types and nominators of intimate speech genres, their construction in static and dynamic aspects.*

**Keywords:** *intimacy, parameter, analysis, text.*

## 1. Introduction

The study of language in cognitive aspects is important for understanding not only the processing of the world perception, but also the processes of comprehension and categorization of the world. Conceptualization of information is carried out in the form of frames. The frame, being the unit of cognitive and semantic language modeling, enables to study the correlation between the semantic dimension of language (*language meaning*) and information structures of cognitive dimension. The frame theory was developed by such scientists as Minsky (1979), Dijk (1989), Lakoff (1987), Langacker (1987), Zhabotinska (1999), Fillmore (1982), etc. Frames are used to represent stereotyped situations. "Frames are not randomly extracted "pieces" of knowledge. Firstly, they are units organized "around" certain concept. Besides, it is most likely that they are of more or less conventional nature and, thus, can define and describe what is "characteristic" or "typical" for a particular society. It is a conceptual frame (also called "scenario") that organizes our behavior and allows to interpret the conduct of others, which is revealed in particular types of situations like issuing a check or purchasing goods in a store"<sup>1</sup>.

In this paper the frame analysis is involved to categorize the notion of conversational intimacy. Some forms of conversational intimacy have already been researched by linguists, but speech genres that are typical for intimate conversation have not been established. The importance of successful human intimate interactions makes the exploration of them topical. The categorization of the information about conversational intimacy is especially important for revealing and understanding the role of different linguistic units in such speech genres.

Speech genres were first defined by Bakhtin (1986) as typical forms of utterances. Now speech genres are considered to be "the most important categories of communication in contemporary linguistics, certain attractors, which systemize and stabilize the spontaneousness of the interpersonal, group and other interaction types. There is a clear tendency to analyze them as frame "systems" of social, cultural and linguistic behavior of interlocutors that are acquired and perfected in the socialization of a personality"<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Parameters of intimacy

In psychological definitions of intimacy three aspects are distinguished, such as intimate relationships, intimate interactions and intimate experiences. Psychologist Prager (1995) believes that intimacy clearly overlaps with concepts such as love, closeness, self-disclosure, support, bonding, attachment, and sexuality. According to this psychologist instances of intimacy are “a rush of warmth and love (emotion), a tender physical contact, sharing private information, two people married (a relationship), describes how well people know each other, fishing in silence, how people occupy space together”<sup>3</sup>. Prager (1995) also argues that the superordinate concept of intimacy should be parceled into such two basic concepts as intimate interactions and intimate relationships. Intimate interactions... are dialogues between people that have certain specific characteristics (to be discussed momentarily), and intimate relationships involve multiple dialogues over time. Relationships exist in a much broader, more abstract space-and-time framework. Intimate context, time of day, nature of occasion, psychological surroundings may effect interaction, but have minimal effect on a relationship. The following prototypes of intimacy are suggested by Helgeson, Shaver and Dyer (1987): partners appreciate each other and their relationship, have mutual interests and desire to spend time together, talk about personal things and have physical contact. Cahn (1992) points out that intimate couple must meet three criteria: have experienced a close personal relationship in the recent past or at present; be mutually dependent and engaged in joint actions. Therefore, “like romantic partners in a developing relationship, dissatisfied spouses who seek marital counseling and spouses engaged in divorce mediation may be viewed as intimate partners even when they are temporarily or permanently separated, because of their close personal relationship in the immediate past”<sup>4</sup>. To be intimate with another is to have access to, and to comprehend his/her inmost character. It means different things at different times: “Intimacy occurs as certain catalytic qualities of experience are discovered when individuals participate in knowing another as they know themselves”<sup>5</sup>. Intimate relationships are often differentiated from other personal relationships by the presence of intimate experiences and, more importantly, confiding interactions between the partners.

Thus, there are different types of relationships in which people are involved: friendships, marital, cohabiting, parent-child, therapist-client, student teacher/mentor, supervisor-employee, romantic. All of these relationships can be characterized by intimacy. We only deal with conversational intimacy in close personal relationships like intimate friends, intimate family and intimate romance relationships. Only a fraction of all interactions in such relationships is intimate.

As analysis of text extracts shows, in intimate communication the following are important: common perception background, as well as the ability of the Addresser to produce intimate genres, Addressee's capacity to interpret them correctly, psychological state of communicants and the existence of intimate relationships. The example (1) is a vivid display of the communication style of the man, who avoids intimate communication, does not know how to be sincere, straightforward and cordial or will not confide to others his real thoughts and feelings:

- (1) "He sloughed off praise and criticism with equal ease, using his cynical brand of humour to appear open and gregarious, while in fact revealing little about himself that wasn't already in the public arena"<sup>6</sup>.

In the next example (2) the stepmother tries to talk intimately with her would-be stepdaughter about their future life together. Not being an intimate friend of Molly, she aims to have an intimate conversation with her about private things:

- (2) "- Ah! That's just it, love. He'll always be handsome; some people always are. And he is so fond of you, dear. - Molly's color flashed into her face. She did not want an assurance of her own father's love from this strange woman. She could not help being angry; all she could do was to keep silent. - You don't know how he speaks of you; 'his little treasure', as he calls you. I'm almost jealous sometimes. Molly took her hand away, and her heart began to harden; these speeches were so discordant to her"<sup>7</sup>.

Even though intimate relationships entail intimate interactions, the amount of time they know each other is not essential for intimate interactions. Neither is the relation people are in. People that are closely related or in a long-lasting friendship may not interact heart-to-heart, confide to each other about something private and personal, confess love and admiration:

- (3) "- Yes! The Squire is a good deal changed; but he's better than he was. There's an unspoken estrangement between him and Osborn; one can see it in the silence and constraint of their manners; but outwardly they are friendly - civil at any rate..."<sup>8</sup>.

The above illustration (3) is an observation of the Addresser about father-son relationship and he remarks that it is characterized by estrangement, which is revealed in silence (i.e. absence of intimate talks) and constraint.

### 3. Frame analysis

So basing on linguistic parameters of intimacy revealed as a result of the analysis of text extracts and the above discussed prototypes of this concept, we will represent it in a form of a frame structure, which represents its two main aspects: intimate relationship and intimate interaction. Next, special attention is paid to the super-frame of intimate interactions, dynamic and

static frames of speech genres of intimate interaction. Firstly, the top levels of the frame *intimacy* represent two super-frames: *intimate relationship* and *intimate interaction*. Secondly, the lower levels have many terminals or “slots” that are filled with nominators in infinitive form of the basic parameters suggested by Helgeson, Shever and Dyer (1987) that concern intimate relationship and intimate interaction.

The super-frame *intimate relationship* has the following terminals *think, feel, have*. This semantic continuum of intimate relationships is differentiated further in terminal levels by discrete lexical units. Terminal *have* is marked by sub-frames *physical contact, common interests, desire to spend time together*; terminal *feel* by *appretiation, love, liking*; terminal *think about* by sub-frame *relationship*.

The super-frame *intimate interaction* represents the frame to *talk about* and sub-frames that:

- (1) nominate the nature of speech genre: *personal things, intimate experiences, relationships, feeling of love, liking*;
- (2) specify the nominated speech genre: *discuss personal things, entrust with personal thoughts/feelings/intimate experiences, confess, talk in relational terms, attract intimate attention*;
- (3) nominate speech genres: *intimate conversation, confiding/heart-to-heart talk, confession, conversation about relationship, flirt*;
- (4) represent particular lexical and semantic units that nominate speech genres: *to have intimate conversation/private talk, talk intimately; to confide/talk confidentially/make confidences about, to bear one's soul, to have heart-to-heart talk, say out openly; discuss/talk about relationships; confess love, propose; express admiration, compliment, attract, offer help, invite*.

#### 4. Discussion

The concept of intimacy is represented in a form of a network of nodes and relations. Top levels of a frame are fixed and represent things that are always true about intimacy. The lower levels have four terminals or slots that are filled by specific data. Each terminal specifies conditions its sub-frames must meet. Simple conditions are specified by markers that require a terminal assignment to be a person, reason, an object, an action or a pointer to a sub-frame of a certain kind. Next we shall construct the content of the intimate speech genres by modeling their frames in static and dynamic aspects. Static frame determines the choice of strategies and tactics in the involvement of the dynamic frame. The dynamic frame determines the choice of the functional style, communicative form, linguistic and extra-linguistic means of speech genre expression

The analysis of the lexical meaning of the nominator of the speech genre “intimate conversation” enables to present the following performative formula of this genre:

*Partners talk about personal things = “We talk intimately with you about our private life, something secret and personal, because we are in intimate relationship, which we appreciate, have mutual interests and desire to spend time together”.*

This formula helps to design the frame of the speech genre “intimate conversation” by marking the main conceptual senses of the linguistic and cultural scenario of the communicative situation “intimate conversation”. Statically this frame is represented in the following way:

*“Talk intimately”, “Who?/intimates, “About what?/Private things, “Why?/partners are in intimate relationships”, Where?/in intimate atmosphere, How?/fondly intimate.*

The following sequence of speech acts represents the dynamic frame of the speech genre “intimate conversation”: *address; initialization of intimate conversation (the use of private jokes, request to give permission to ask about/discuss private things); **inducement to be straightforward (reminding about personal and intimate things)**; intimate talk (expressive statement of personal information, straightforward expression of opinion about the idea/fact).*

Performative formula of the speech genre “confiding”:

*I confide in (to) you = «I entrust you with my thoughts/feelings/experiences which are not intended for public knowledge, because I trust you and believe you are capable of understanding me”.*

Thus, the top slots of the static frame of this genre are the following:

*“Confide”, Who?/confider, To whom?/confidant/alter ego, soul mate, kindered soul”, About what?/thoughts, feelings, experiences, Why?/one experiences communion of souls/elective affinity, How?/ openly, straightforwardly, forthrightly.*

Consequently, the dynamic frame will have the structure: *address; attraction of attention to unusual thoughts, experiences; confiding; appeal to the Addressee for approval, understanding; expression of approval, support, understanding.*

The informal oral “confession” concerning feelings has the formula:

*«I confess love, deep feelings” = I say I love you because I feel long lasting love and have deep feelings for you and want to tell you the truth about it. I think about our relationship and want to nearer it.*

Statically we can presented like this:

*«Confess/Propose”, “Where?/in intimate, romantic atmosphere”, “Who?/ Confessant, proposer”, “To Whom?/Beloved one, intimate”, “About what?/Truth about feelings, desire to nearer the relationship”, “Why?/ Confessant feels love, has deep feelings, wants to accelerate intimacy”, How?/ honestly, confidentially.*

Dynamically the frame of speech genre "confession" evolves in the following way: *address; confession of love; marriage proposal; reaffirmation/reiteration of love in return.*

The speech genre "conversation about relationships" is formulated as:

*"Partners talk about their relationships = Partners discuss ongoing relationships to resolve the conflict, restore, enhance or maintain positive feelings; initiate rekindling or termination of relationship".*

In the communicative situation "conversation about relationships" the ensuing static frame is activated:

*Talk in relational terms Who? intimate partners Why? discuss conflict, rekindle/terminate relationship Where? in pleasant context When? partners in good mood, How? angrily, gravely, wearily, looking askance, lovingly, mildly.*

*Where and When* are variant terminal slots.

The respective dynamic frame will develop like this: *address; (optionally) an offer to discuss the relationships; (optionally) expression of positive feelings towards Addressee; reminding about positive moments; (optionally) revealing one's concern about /reasons for discontentment in relationships; (optionally) clarifying the Addressee's emotions, feelings and future plans and the future of the relationships; an offer to change one's behavior, rekindle, terminate the relationships.*

Finally, basing on the analysis of the definitions of flirt, text extracts and the parameters of intimacy, the performative formula of this speech genre can be defined as follows:

*«Partners express liking to each other" = I attract your attention by expressing my liking, admiration, offering help, inviting the partner to spend time together, because I like you and think about winning mutual feelings/optimization of relationships/closeness and bonding.*

In communicative situation "flirting" the following static frame is actualized:

*Flirt Who? intimate partner/With whom? intimate partner/love interest When? partners in good mood Why? express attraction, build connection Where? in informal/formal context, How? laughingly, lightly, playfully.*

Linguistically flirt can contain one or several speech acts: *greeting; address; compliment/joke; irony/small talk.*

## 5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the notion of intimacy, in particular conversational intimacy. The frame analysis helps to establish the categorization of types and nominators of intimate speech genres, their static and dynamic frames. The results are of practical and theoretical value in communicative linguistics, geneology, interpersonal relationships. The possible further research in the area could be dedicated to the peculiarities of expression of intimate speech genres in diachrony.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>van Dijk, 1989, p. 16-17.  
<sup>2</sup>Batsevich, 2005, p. 225.  
<sup>3</sup>Prager, 1995, p.18.  
<sup>4</sup>Cahn, 1992, p. 2.  
<sup>5</sup>Bennett, 2000, p. 5.  
<sup>6</sup>Napier, 2007, p. 52.  
<sup>7</sup>Gaskell, 1999, p. 132.  
<sup>8</sup>Gaskell, 1999, p. 221.

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