Generic Utterances as a Form of Communication

Linguistic communication, or communication in the narrow sense, can be considered as part of communication in the wide sense. According to E. Atayan, communication as such goes through a number of ontological (atemporal) phases: 1. static communicability, an indefinite possibility of communication (objectivity); 2. a more real valency -definite form of readiness to syntagmatic linking (transition from objectivity to subjectivity); 3. syntagmatic linking proper (subjectivity); 4. a kinetic realization within the time and space of the process – the act of communication (transition from subjectivity to objectivity); 5. the resulting static peace of communicative satisfaction, which in some other respects may turn out to be total lack of peace for one or both of the communicating sides, and therefore can give rise to new communicative acts (objectivity) (Atayan 1981: 4-5).

Marika Tonyan

Generic statements serve to define, describe and classify objects, phenomena, concepts, etc. As A. Cohen says, "Generic sentences […] are a prevalent phenomenon of natural language. Much of our knowledge about the world is expressed using generics; one need only glance at an encyclopedia to find myriads of examples" (Cohen 1999: 10). Within the class of generics there is a certain type of utterances containing the generic-personal pronouns *one, you, we* which not only serve to express our knowledge about the world, but perform a number of other functions, closely connected with the act of communication. These multifunctional utterances include generalization over particular events and at the same time realize reference to the particular events and their participants. The consecutive ontological statuses of the communicative process taking place in these utterances reflect the generic and the egocentric semantic characteristics of the generic-personal pronouns:

1. In the initial phase, which precedes linguistic communication proper, a certain instance of extralinguistic reality affects the subject of consciousness. Objective reality induces the individual to make use of his communicative potential and transmit the received experience to the addressee.

2. The stage of more real, immediate readiness to communication is preconceived as a means of the speaker's self-expression. The content of the utterance with *one, you, we* is not a 'copy' of reality, but rather one's subjective conceptual picture of the world presented in the form of a generalization.

3. Syntagmatic linking proper allows the speaker to include the hearer/reader into the generalization: in this way transition from the objective to the subjective is realized.

4. The realization of the communicative act lies in the fact that the individual presents his worldview as *a priori* shared by the addressee and as applicable to any participant of the situation. Formulating the utterance as a universal statement, the speaker creates a new attitude to reality. Despite the fact that the source of this attitude is the speaker's personal experience, it is represented as a norm which others are supposed to follow. Here the transition from the subjective to the objective is realized.

5. At the stage of static peace the speaker experiences communicative satisfaction from the fact that he has managed to win the hearer over to his side or, as the case may be, has proclaimed solidarity with him. As far as the addressee is concerned, his response may be that of communicative dissatisfaction because he does not share the speaker's opinion or does not see any grounds for the offered partnership.

When the individual starts communication, he usually has some idea of himself as the speaker and of the interlocutor as the addressee. Correspondingly, the speaker's attitude to his message is predetermined by the images of himself and of the addressee that he has in his mind. According to B. Gasparov, the speaker's I-consciousness and I-evaluation, his idea of the impact that he and his utterance make upon the hearer contribute greatly to the communicative space (Gasparov 1996: 295-296).

The meaning of the generic-personal pronouns combines the general and the specific. The specific is the experience of the speaker or another person whom the speaker empathizes. Therefore the message conveys information about one's personal experience which the individual presents in the form of a general norm, and thus leads the addressee to the conclusion that what is said is trustworthy. In this way the speaker exerts a linguodemagogical influence upon the hearer.

Demagogy (Greek "demos"="people", "agein"="lead") was originally used by ancient sophists for persuasion in an indirect, concealed manner. The early 20th century American social critic and humorist H. L. Mencken, defined a demagogue as "one who will preach doctrines he knows to be untrue to men he knows to be idiots". Actually, the demagogue's argumentation is essentially false, but it has a semblance of truth. However, the use of lying and falsehoods is not always required: skilled demagogues often use certain devices by which the uncritical listener will be led to draw the desired conclusion himself. The demagogue's seemingly convincing argumentation allows him to achieve the pursued goal without revealing his real motives.

As to linguistic demagogy, according to T. Nikolaeva who suggested the term, "linguodemagogy is a perlocutionary phenomenon the essence of which lies in the evaluative influence upon the hearer, which is carried out indirectly" (Nikolaeva 1988: 155). The speaker seeks to impose his own ideas upon the hearer without revealing the fact that he manipulates the latter for his own ends. Often this method is used when one of the communicants pretends to misunderstand the other's intentions and diverts the communication in the way that is advantageous for him.

One of the ways of achieving a demagogical effect by linguistic means is the presentation of the main proposition of the utterance in the form of a presupposition. Let us consider the following situation. A man visiting his friend's office and tells him, *"What a beautiful secretary you have"*. The friend replies, *"Well, her husband also thinks*

so". It is clear that the boss is going to warn his friend against close relations with his secretary, hinting at the existence of an obstacle. However, he does not do this in an explicit manner. The information about the secretary's marital status is the presupposition of the statement, but it is on the presupposition that the actual purpose of the utterance is based: *"Do not flirt with my secretary"*.

Another common form of linguodemagogy is the pluralization of either the agent or the action itself, or both. According to T. Nikolaeva, "The chief reason for linguodemagogical influence is intolerance to the feeling of social solitude. Whenever such a feeling arises, a person tends to lean against a certain social layer, a communicatively 'full' space, for support. Even if there is no such stratum in reality, one builds it up by linguistic means. As a result, the speaker makes the hearer believe that what he says is shared by a whole social group, and this group is made up of people similar to the speaker (and very often the hearer)" (Nikolaeva 1988: 156). Along with other linguistic means this type of 'hidden' influence upon the hearer can be realized by the generic-personal pronouns. The user of these pronouns functions as the spokesman of the group generated by him, verbalizing the opinion of the constructed community. The speaker suggests that he thinks and behaves like others, or as the case may be, that others think and behave like him.

Linguodemagogy can be considered in relation to simulation, a phenomenon studied by a number of philosophers and semanticists (Heal 1986, Goldman 1995, Gordon 1995, Moltmann 2006). F. Moltmann, who has examined the logical and semantic aspects of the generic pronoun *one*, describes *one*-sentences in terms of simulation: "An agent generalizes an experience or action of his own by projecting himself onto any other person that might be in the same situation – and that meets certain normal conditions (or belongs to a particular contextually given group). That is, the speaker establishes a generalization about the experiences of others not by theorizing about them or observing them, but by *simulating* them, by putting himself into their shoes. Generic *one*-sentences [...] thus express what one may call *generalizing self-ascriptions*" (Moltmann 2006: 32).

The use of the linguodemagogical device reflects one's wish to enhance the significance of the utterance and make the other person think in one's own way by implying that the suggested view is shared by a multitude of people. This is a method of building up a semantic field of 'us', which commonly includes the addressee and is opposed to 'others'. The speaker's attitudes towards 'his like' and the 'other' are marked in different ways. Consider, for example, B. Russell's humorous paradigm: *I am firm. You are obstinate. He is a pig-headed fool.*

Our analysis shows that the linguodemagogical effect can be found in those cases when the interlocutors have unequal positions in the situation. In the first type of situations there exists no social inequality between the communicants, but there is difference in their perception and evaluation of the situation. On the other hand, there are other cases when the speaker and the hearer are socially unequal: one of them is dependent on the other.

When the asymmetry between the communicants is connected with difference in

attitudes, two pragmatic strategies can be distinguished: situational insertion and formulation of truisms and morals. The situational insertion is a kind of generalization which locates the speaker or any another person whom the speaker empathizes in a potentially repeatable situation. For example,

Well, one only has to stand near a local school for a couple of minutes. One realizes how our children talk. It's poor talk... (BBC)

The situation is presented as verifiable by anyone, therefore it is raised to the status of a universal truth and the individual's own experience acquires more weight. The speaker supposes that the addressee has had a similar experience and the latter's evaluation of the situation is identical to his own.

By formulating truisms and morals, one presents one's own participation in the situation as a particular case of the general norm or rule. For example,

Lord Goring: Mrs. Chevely! Great Heavens! May I ask what you were doing in my drawing room?

Mrs. Chevely: Merely listening. I have a perfect passion for listening through keyholes. One always hears   such wonderful things through them. (O. Wilde)

Caught 'red-handed', Mrs. Chevely tries to make the hearer believe that there is nothing unusual in eavesdropping, that others may behave in a similar way. She suggests a false, though a seemingly convincing, motivation for her actions.

The 'authorial' use of the generic-personal pronouns belongs to this category: the reason for communicative asymmetry is the fact that one of the interlocutors 'knows more'. Such use is typical of scientific speech and of the narrative text in fiction; the speaker/writer possesses – or thinks he does – some knowledge that the addressee does not have. The sender of the message, however, identifies himself with the receiver in order to show the latter that their common intellectual background is a sufficient basis for considering the given information from the same standpoint, and for drawing the same conclusions. The sender and the receiver of information are presented as 'co-authors' of the text. For example,

How, in the world of history and public events, does language serve to build up or extend our 'model of reality'? A good starting point is the language of newspaper headlines. One reads a headline "Another Constable Has to Change First Names', and without reading further one adds simething to one's store of knowledge and understanding. But this piece of learning, can only be explained in terms of our existing model of reality, as an increment to what we already know. (G. N. Leech, M. H. Short)

When the generic-personal pronouns are used in the narrative part of a work of fiction, the narrator generalizes either his own perception of the situation, or the observations of the protagonist. By presenting the attitude of the subject of consciousness as typical of any participant of the situation, the narrator enhances the trustworthiness of the given characteristics. For example,

We travel by plane, oftener than not, and yet the spirit of our country seems to have remained a country of railroads. You wake in a Pullman bedroom at three a.m. in a city of which you do not know and may never discover. ...Then you think happily that this is your country – unique, mysterious and vast. One has no such feelings in airplanes.

airports and the trains of other nations. (J. Cheever)

In the excerpt the author invites the reader to believe the objectivity of the given characteristics: any traveller is supposed to experience these feelings.

Now let us consider the type of communication with socially unequal interlocutors in which the linguodemagogical effect is realized. **In order to describe such cases we will make use of the notion of 'social role' which is defined as "behaviour which is approved by society and is expected from anyone who occupies the given social position" (Kon 1967: 23). In the current situation the communicants can have unequal social roles when one of them depends on the other. The situations like doctor – patient, parent – child, teacher – student are examples of such cases. The doctor, the parent and the teacher are socially superior to the patient, the child and the student. By using the inclusive pronoun** *we* **the communicant with the higher status 'condescends' to his interlocutor, thus neutralizing the distance between him and the addressee.**

For instance, by using *we* the doctor (or the nurse) sounds involved in the personal sphere of the patient and thus presents the given situation as common for both of them. Here are examples of 'doctoral' *we*:

(1) *(Wesley's hospital room)*
Doctor: How're **we** *feeling today?*
(Wesley looks at him)
Doctor: I know it's been very rough but I do have some good news.
(http://www.buffyworld.)
(2) *Nurse: It's time for* **us** *to take* **our** *medicine now. Shall* **we** *take* **our** *bath now?*
(Journal of Translation)

In the article "'I' and 'we': a concordancing analysis of how doctors and patients use first person pronouns in primary care consultations" the authors measure aspects of doctor – patient interaction through the deployment of the pronouns I and we. The research shows that doctors are more likely than patients or companions to use the inclusive we. The doctor's choice of I is connected with verbs of thinking, and of we with verbs of doing. These conclusions suggest the following pattern of interaction between the doctor and the patient:

Patient: I suffer.
Doctor: I think. We will act. (Skelton et al. 2002)

We see that the patient brings the problem; the doctor brings his expertise and offers partnership in action.

The linguodemagogical influence exerted by the doctor is supposed to result in the addressee's communicative satisfaction, because the doctor demonstrates solidarity with the patient and suggests that they together look for the solution to the problem. Ideally, the patient is supposed to feel relieved, but this reaction follows only if he accepts the conventional nature of such solidarity. If the sick person does not comply with the conventions of the interaction (in fact, both interlocutors realize that the doctor does not suffer like the patient), the dialogue may result in his communicative dissatisfaction. In this case, the doctoral we is likely to give rise to a new communicative act in which the

addressee rejects the offered partnership. Let us consider the following situation:

Doctor (to the patient): "How are we feeling today? Better?"
Patient: "No idea how you're feeling, doctor. I'm feeling just rotten…"[1]

The fact that the patient does not include the doctor in his use of we shows that he regards the latter only as the coordinator of care.

The mother uses the inclusive we in reference to the child because she feels responsible for the weaker creature and wishes to make sure that the child's interests will not be ignored.[2]

Here is an example of 'maternal' *we*:

Mother (to the father): Guess, what we did today, Daddy? We walked as far as the bathroom.

The mother functions as the child's spokesman, talking about the little one's achievements and anticipating the father's approval and praise.

In the teacher – student situation the student is the subordinate member, and the teacher has the right to induce the student to act. However, to show that he is not going to use the power presupposed by his status, the teacher can use the inclusive *we*, thus offering relations of partnership with the student. Here are examples of 'teacher's' *we*:

(1) *Teacher: We're not going to shout, we'll walk quiâtly to our places.*

(2) *"Shall we start reading?" Miss Robinson pointed at the shy boy sitting at the front desk.* (Journal of Translation)

The *one-/you-/we*-utterances are a form of communication in which several aspects can be distinguished. If we focus on the different interacting factors of the communicative process, we can distinguish the expressive, the evocative, the referential and the social functions of these utterances. The generalizations with these pronouns perform the expressive function, as the utterance is oriented to the sender: what is communicated is seen as an expression of his beliefs, views and opinions. The evocative function is realized, because the utterance includes the receiver. Communication is here regarded as directed towards evoking certain reactions on the receiver's part. The generalization serves to make him perceive or understand something, acquire certain attitudes, or perform a certain action. The referential function is performed, as the message of the generic statement has to do with objective or subjective reality. The speaker is concerned with how communication is used to refer and describe, to analyze, argue about, and explain things in the world. The social function is involved, because the generic utterance is concerned with the relation between the sender and the receiver. Communication by means of a generic statement serves to establish and maintain social contact between the communicating parties. The generic statements containing a truism can serve to realize the phatic function, often because the speaker feels obliged to avoid an embarrassing silence and in this way sustain communication. As can be seen in the following situation, these functions are interconnected:

"Harry," cried Dorian Gray…, "why is it that I cannot feel this tragedy as much as I want to? I don't think I am heartless. Do you?" … "It is an interesting question,"

*said Lord Henry, who found an exquisite pleasure in playing on the lad's unconscious egotism. ... "... **One** should absorb the colour of life, but **one** should never remember its details. Details are always vulgar."* (O. Wilde)

The girl whom Dorian Gray loved has committed suicide, and the young man knows that the reason is his cruelty to her. He feels uneasy that the tragedy has not affected him as it should and wants his older friend to confirm that he is not heartless. Lord Henry expresses his own views on how a man should overcome tragic events, explaining that sometimes they can be vulgar, thus providing Dorian with an excuse for his lack of sympathy. Both the referential and the expressive functions of the communicative process are thus performed. At the same time, Lord Henry imposes a certain rule upon Dorian and makes him follow this norm, exerting a strong influence upon the young man (the evocative function). In addition, the generic statement demonstrates the nature of the relations between the communicants (the social function): Lord Henry obviously feels like a mentor who has the right to instruct, while Dorian presents himself as someone who needs moral guidance. Moreover, by using a generic-personal pronoun, which includes the addressee, Lord Henry 'guarantees' agreement on Dorian's part.

Thus, we can conclude that the generic utterances containing *one, you, we* represent a special form of linguistic communication. Unlike other types of generic statements which do not presuppose the immediate involvement of the communicants, the *one-/you-/we*-utterances are communicatively-oriented. This feature is predetermined by the meaning of the generic-personal pronouns – they have an egocentric semantic component, and their referent is in the focus of the speaker's empathy. The utterances with *one, you, we* are multifunctional: by using a generic-personal pronoun the speaker describes a certain state of affairs (the referential function), expresses himself (the expressive function), exerts his influence on the hearer's opinion (the evocative function), and establishes social contact with the addressee (the social function).

Notes:
1.   The examples which have no special reference were adduced by informants.
2.   In the collected factual material we have observed certain gender preferences in the use of the inclusive *we:* a mother uses it more frequently than a father. This tendency might be attributed to the fact that women express their empathy more easily than men.

References:
1.   Atayan, E. R. (1981) *Communicaciya i raskrytie potenciy yazykovogo soznaniya.* Yerevan: Izdatel'stvo yerevanskogo universiteta.
2.   Cohen, A. (1999) *Think Generic! The Meaning and Use of Generic Sentences.* Carnegie Mellon University dissertation. Stanford: CSLI.
3.   Gasparov, B. M. (1996) *Yazyk, pamyat', obraz.* M.: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.

4. Goldman, A. I. (1995) *In Defense of Simulation Theory* // Mind and Language / Ed. by M. Davies, T. Stone. (7).

5. Gordon, R. M. (1995) *The Simulation Theory: Objections and Misconceptions* // Mind and Language / Ed. by M. Davies, T. Stone. (7).

6. Heal, J. (1986) *Replication and Functionalism* // Language, Mind, and Logic / Ed. by J. Butterfield. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

7. Kon, I. S. (1967) *Sociologiya lichnosti.* M.: Politizdat.

8. Moltmann, F. (2006) *Generic One, Arbitrary PRO, and the First Person.* Accepted for publication in Natural Language Semantics.
    http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/lingu/events/syntax_semantics/2006-spring/abstract/moltmann.pdf.

9. Nikolaeva, T. M. (1988) *Lingvisticheskaya demagogiya* // Pragmatica i problemy intensional'nosti. M.: INION AN SSSR.

10. Skelton, J. R., Wearn, A. M., Hobbs, F. D. R. (2002) *'I' and 'We': a Concordancing Analysis of How Doctors and Patients Use First Person Pronouns in Primary Care Consultations* // Family Practice. (19).

Ընդհանրական աստյւթները որպես հաղորդակցման ձև

One, you, we դերանուններով ընդհանրական աստւթները ունեն հաղորդակցման գործընթացին բնորոշ բոլոր հատկանիշները։ Ի տարբերություն գոյական պարունակող ընդհանրական աստւթների, որոնք արտահայտում են ընդհանրացում որևէ դասի վերաբերյալ, *one, you, we* դերանուններով աստւթները անպայմանորեն ներգրավում են հաղորդակցման մասնակից-ներին կամ այն անձին, որը խոսողի ուշադրության կենտրոնում է։ Տվյալ աստւթների միջոցով իրականացվում են խոսողի ինքնաարտահայտման, խոսող-լսող կապի ստեղծման և լսողի կարծիքի վրա ներազդելու գործառույթ-ները։