

Communication Problems in Modern German Drama¹

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Abstract

The article discusses various aspects of the communication problem addressed by contemporary German-speaking playwrights. The development of history led to the fact that at the end of the 20th century, the borders between states were practically erased. The key has become the concept of globalization. Acutely reacting to the problems of modern society, the latest German-language drama reflects, among other things, the problems of the crisis of communication and self-identification that emerged at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries. The main content of the article is an analysis of plays by Swiss authors (“Room for Friends” by A. Jacques and “Yokoni” by Eugene), as well as plays “In Emergency” by the German playwright F. Richter. The plays were selected taking into account the fact that the problem of communication is considered in them from different angles. So in the play of F. Richter, a violation of communication within the family comes to the fore (problems of fathers and children, lack of understanding between spouses). The play by Eugene continues this theme, but in a slightly different vein (moving away from reality into virtual space). “Room for Friends” A. Jacques represents communicative failures at the level of intercultural communication. In these plays, the problem of communication is presented from different angles, which makes it possible to assess the scale of this problem.

Keywords: Drama; The Crisis of Communication; Self-Identification; German Drama; Swiss Drama.

1. Introduction

In the conditions of the constant development of globalization processes, in a few minutes, a person can receive any information, send the necessary message to the other end of the planet, become the owner of almost any data, including personal

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data of another. Thus, not only the external borders are erased, but the personal space of a person is also violated. This leads to a new round of anti-globalism movement and increased interest in the issue of national identity (Zinnatullina & Vafina, 2014; Zinnatullina & Khabibullina, 2015; Kor et al., 2019).

The excess of information, the high demands of others, the rapid development of the world entails a feeling of dissatisfaction with life. Often this leads to the loss of one's own identity, which, among other things, leads to a crisis of communication. It is this theme that is put at the forefront in many of the plays that young authors write today for the German-speaking theater.

2. Methods

In this study, a comprehensive descriptive text analysis was used as the main method. The author's point of view is revealed during the analysis of the problem-thematic, plot-compositional level of plays and means of artistic imagery. The interdisciplinary approach used by the authors also seems to be productive, due to the position of drama at the junction of two types of art - literature, and theater.

3. Results and Discussion

For the study were selected plays that reflect various aspects of the communication crisis. So, in the play of the Swiss author Antoine Jacques, "Room for Friends" ("Chambre d'amis", 2014), the question of intercultural communication is raised by the example of representatives of one generation. In the drama of another Swiss, Eugene, "Yoko-ni", the substitution of real communication with virtual is considered, while the problem of communication in the play is closely related to generational conflict and violation of family relationships. Continuing the topic of violation of family relations, we also turn to the play of the German playwright Falk Richter "In Emergency", where the conflict between family members and society and within the same family grows into a grotesque bordering dystopia during the play.

The characters of the play "Room for Friends" by A. Jacques are two young couples - Germans and French-speaking Swiss, representatives of the same generation, having the same social status. They belong to different, albeit close, cultures. And often this difference in cultures is not taken into account by the subjects of communication.

In the modern world, Europe is positioning itself as a single house, where there are no borders. Cosmopolitanism has become an integral part of the worldview of the inhabitants of the European Union. However, even despite such a harmonious, at first glance, the coexistence of representatives of different cultures, mental differences and boundaries still remain. This is what is discussed in the play Room for Friends. The protagonists (Germans - Tomà and Petra, French-speaking Swiss - Anna-Lisa and Jean-Paul) decide to spend a joint weekend in Cologne in the

apartment of a German couple. Toma and Anna Lisa once studied together in Switzerland, but they have not seen each other for many years. Their partners - Petra and Jean-Paul - see each other for the first time and do not speak the same language. And it is the language that becomes the first barrier to full communication. It is impossible to build a successful communication if its participants simply do not understand each other.

The play has many repetitions since the actors constantly have to translate phrases to their partners. This is due to the intention of the playwright. The original text of the play is presented in parallel in French and German. The translation is built into the plot and scenically justified. This presentation erases the language boundaries for the viewer. However, this also complicates the communication of the actors. In order to at least somehow understand each other, they have to not only repeat phrases but also resort to facial expressions and gestures: "I am an archivist. Archivist. Jean-Pierre archivist" (Jacques, 2017; Khabibullina et al., 2016; Millanei, & Khalili, 2016).

Successful communication is hindered not only by the language but also by the internal attitudes of the characters. So, through the whole play passes the idea of how important it is to have friends. To do this, you must make some concessions, open your borders, while respecting others, even if it is sometimes associated with leaving your comfort zone. Without effort, you can make imaginary friends, like Petra, or even live without them and be alone, like Jean-Paul. But only true friendship enables a person to be himself.

Cultural differences also stand in the way of understanding between young people. So, for a German couple, everything is planned out to the smallest detail; they responsibly approach the reception of guests. Petra specially prepared a room for them and calls her in the French manner "Chambre d'amis" ("room for friends"). In German, there is no such concept, in this meaning, the word "Gaestezimmer" ("guest room") is used. Thus, intentionally using the French concept, Petra emphasizes her disposition for the Swiss couple, her willingness to accept them as friends. However, such a manifestation of hospitality for the calm and somewhat reserved Swiss seems somewhat annoying. They would have been much more comfortable staying at a hotel, but they are too well-educated to say so. A contradiction arises: the Germans, having no concept of a "room for friends," accept the Swiss couple as friends, and the Swiss speaking French, on the contrary, behave detachedly, emphasizing their status as guests. The fact is that the Swiss from the French-speaking cantons are not inclined to associate themselves with the French, they strongly emphasize their "specialty". For them, the "room for friends" is only an established figure of speech and not part of their culture and mentality.

In the finale, when it seems that nothing will save this weekend and that everything will end in a grand quarrel, alcohol comes to the rescue. As you know, in a state of intoxication, people behave more relaxedly and, due to emancipation, even speak a foreign language more freely. As a result, the characters of the play, casting

aside all prejudices and forgetting about embarrassment, end up in the same bed. Such a finale, of course, is a parody. Alcohol here acts as a kind of *deus ex machina*, appearing in a seemingly insoluble situation and miraculously bringing deliverance to the heroes. But the author's irony is bitterness: a modern person is so constrained by the grip of prejudice, habits, rigid attitudes, his own individualism, that without doping he is not capable of normal human friendship or full communication. Therefore, the name "Room for Friends" acquires a metaphorical meaning in the course of the play.

Another aspect of the problem of communication in modern reality is considered in the play of Eugene "Yoko-ni". This is a substitute for real communication by virtual. The main character of the play is a young man named Yoko-ni. From the very beginning, it becomes clear that the whole action of the play "Yoko-ni" takes place in cyberspace (in network games). At first glance, the life of the protagonist is rich and diverse. He has friends with whom he embarks on adventures, he meets a girl with whom he finds a common language. However, he never met these people in real life. He did not go on a date to one of Tokyo's bars because he lives in France, in Bourg-le-Chan, he is 26 years old and his name is actually Gregory. The main character has completely replaced his real life with virtual adventures and friends. But the question arises: can virtual communication be called full-fledged when people are actually not familiar, have never seen each other and communicate with a kind of simulacrum?

In addition to replacing virtual life with a virtual one, the play addresses the problem of communication between parents and children. Yoko-ni, or Gregory, fled to the "other world" for a reason. It all started with the suicide of his father. This event shocked the young man, he needed to talk with someone about this, find support. However, his mother fenced off, pretending that everything was in order. It was more important for her to maintain a good reputation: "We are an ideal family. If only we forget that daddy technically hanged himself in the kitchen, while no one saw" (Yoko-ni Eugene, 2013). So the lack of frankness, lively and confidential communication with his mother pushed the young man to immerse himself in the virtual world.

The ending of this play is dramatic. The son will never be able to forgive his mother for removing his character from the game. It was all his life for him. They are unable to talk and forge a relationship, even though the mother followed Yoko-ni into the video game space. It all ends with Yoko-ni's mother and his friends finding Yoko-ni's motionless avatar. So it becomes clear that he is dead. His real body can be anywhere. And the mother can only be comforted in the fact that she can hug his character in the space of the game.

The problem raised in the play is extremely relevant today. The anonymity inherent in this kind of game gives young people confidence, helps overcome shyness and erases social norms and boundaries. Thus, there is a substitution of life for the game.

In the context of relationships within the family, the German playwright Falk Richter develops the communication problem in the play “In Emergency”. As researchers of modern German-language drama and literature as a whole note, following the changing role of the family in society, the image of the modern person also changes, which is manifested, *inter alia*, in his relations with his family and others (Voronova et al., 2015). The family today is only people living nearby, not interested in each other.

The characters of the one-act play by F. Richter - a family of three people - live in the elite village of “Celebration Community”, separated from the rest of the world by a high wall. There is everything you need for happy family life, as it appears from the pages of illustrated magazines. However, the list of actors already indicates a conflict within the family. The depersonalization of the heroes takes place: Husband, Wife, and Boy are not a family, but people existing next to each other, connected exclusively formally. The first scene confirms the existence of family conflict: communication between the husband and wife, and subsequent scenes show that between the parents and the boy, is broken. This is manifested not only at the plot level, but also at the level of building dialogs: short phrases, unanswered questions, reproaches, and subsequent retaliatory charges. There is a crisis in the family.

The plot is based on Wife’s fear of being expelled from the village due to the fact that Husband’s success at work is declining. An ideal, at first glance, the place is actually a cruel community. The wife does her best to restore her husband’s former self-confidence and desire to work, however, he does not share her desires, acts passively, constantly sleeps during their dialogs or pretends to be asleep and only once allows herself an emotional reaction in a request to leave him alone (Richter, 2011). Moreover, if the Husband, not sharing the desire of the Wife to stay in the village, behaves passively, then the Son definitely does not want to live in this artificial world, in every way resisting the system, as a result of which he probably dies. However, even his possible death worries little about his parents: his father’s apathy, like his mother’s fear, only intensifies towards the end of the play, and apart from personal emotions, they don’t care about anything.

One of the problems of modern society is that the information flow puts pressure on people who, unable to withstand it, not meeting the increasing demands made by public institutions, suffer from various kinds of mental disorders. Researchers note that pragmatism and utilitarianism of mass culture “are the primary factors of such destructive phenomena as identity crisis, estrangement and aggression” (Vyalova et al., 2015). The husband, wife, and boy in the play are on the verge of psychosis. They suffer from insomnia, suspect each other of lies, communication between them is broken, there is no trust.

Being in constant stress, the characters doubt themselves and their loved ones. At some point, the Wife loses confidence that in front of her is really her

husband, the Boy claims that he is not his father. The wife watches her husband, reads her son's correspondence and even hides under his bed, explaining this with a desire to protect them.

Thus, Falk Richter reflects in his play "In a state of emergency" the urgent problem of modern society - the problem of communication failure between members of the same family (Kuchumova, 2010). However, the main conflict of the play is not family, there is also a conflict between the individual and society. The community "Celebration community" is not just an elite village, providing its residents with everything necessary. With the development of the action, it turns into a closed space surrounded by a high fence, which is practically impossible to go beyond. It would seem that there is no need to go anywhere because there are not only schools, hospitals and places for organizing leisure activities. The village is a kind of anti-utopian state, the inhabitants of which live as if under a dome and under constant control and pressure of external forces that determine who has the right to stay in the village and who does not.

The play reflects the current trend in modern Western society: people equate personal happiness with success, which must be confirmed outside (Schröder, 2006). Striving for this success, they plunge into the race, forgetting what its ultimate goal is. Thus, the factor of external well-being has an impact on human inner life. And this, in turn, leads to a violation of understanding with the family, as well as internal conflict.

4. Summary

Thus, as a result of the study, we conclude that the crisis of communication is reflected in the plays of German-speaking authors of different contents. It can be a violation of communication between the average inhabitants of Europe, as in the play by A. Jacques, "Room for Friends," due to pressing social norms, individualism, which, it would seem, in the modern cosmopolitan world should recede into the background. The problem of communication can also be associated with a generational conflict that is timeless in nature, but which has a certain content in a specific historical period. So, in the plays of Eugene "Yoko-ni" and F. Richter "In Emergency", communication between children and parents is disrupted, which leads to the death of children. In these plays, there is a conflict between the individual and society, which is allowed by the death of the characters. In addition, the topic of going into virtual reality (in the play "Yoko-ni") or creating a parallel world ("Celebration community" in the play "In a state of emergency") seems to be important in the context of the communication crisis. It also seems important to conclude that it is impossible to resolve conflicts related to the communication crisis.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it should be noted that the conflict in all the plays discussed above is resolved tragically or remains unresolved. This emphasizes the hopelessness of the situation in modern society. Reluctance to hear other people, withdrawal into virtual reality, refusal to communicate builds a wall between close people, often between members of the same family. Today, people find it difficult to find a common language, although there are significantly more opportunities for communication.

Obviously, the problem of the communication crisis is of interest to modern playwrights, who, as a rule, quickly respond to the smallest changes in public life in their work. The article examined only some examples of the reflection of the above topics in plays.

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