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**VERBAL BEHAVIOR CONTROL AS A MEANS OF EVALUATION SCALE
QUALITATIVE CHANGE: FROM AFFECTIVE
AND EVALUATIVE TO OBJECTIVE AND CATEGORICAL***

SUMMARY. Different people react to the same event in different ways since every person has one's own settled reactions to situations and their objects based on one's own life experience which results in attributing subjective meaning to these events.

Deadaptive behavior which is connected with settled emotional reactions to negatively evaluated situations can cause a considerable psychological problem. That explains growing demand for psychological self-help techniques which stabilize or neutralize one's emotional state and contribute to a higher level of adaptability.

The article considers the results of self-help technique empirical tests based on verbal behavior control. The authors have verified the assumption that verbal behavior control and conscious suppression of negative evaluation statements results in interrupting one's settled reaction to a situation (an event). This brings about qualitative changes of categorical scales: situations and events that were previously perceived as negative ones are evaluated using the objective categorical scale.

KEY WORDS. Verbal behavior control, categorical scales, self-help technique.

Abstract. Different people react to the same event in different ways since every person has one's own settled reactions to situations and their objects based on one's own life experience which results in attributing subjective meaning to these events.

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Any contacts of an individual with the environment develop a set of standard reactions to situations or its objects. People respond differently not to different events but rather tend to attribute to the same event a subjective meaning which results in different reactions to a similar occurrence. For instance, for one retirement means the end of the career, whereas for another it is quitting a boring job, yet for the third one it is just a new beginning.

A reaction can be divided into several stages: a cognitive evaluation of the situation, the emotional reaction, the subjective perception, physiological mechanisms, mediating and supportive emotional reactions, behavioral expressions, including expression and verbal behavior [1].

The evaluation is based on bringing the current situation into correlation with the subjective necessities which a person has acquired during the lifetime according to his/her own stereotypes and priorities, i.e. according to the levels of relevance [2], [3], [4].

G. Kelly proved that people found their image of reality based on the individual system of categorical scales which other researchers among others call "guidelines", "habits", "a coding information system", "a mythological layer of consciousness". Categorical scales can consist of connotative (emotional) or denotative (descriptive) components [5], [6]. As A.G. Shmeliev points out, the more a characteristic is closer to an end of the categorical scale, the more deadaptive (or accentuated) one's behavior is [7; 94].

De-adaptive behavior, caused by stable reactions to negatively evaluated situations, can lead to a rather serious psychological problem. That explains *growing demand for psychological self-help techniques which stabilize or neutralize one's emotional state and contribute to a higher level of adaptability*.

In 2006, W. Bowen suggested a kind of psychotechnics which, as he supposed, contributed to one's positive emotional state. The psychotechnics included the control of one's verbal behavior which comprised abstaining during twenty-one days from all negative statements which W. Bowen called "complaints, gossip and criticism". In order to control one's verbal behavior, a subject was supposed to place a silicone bracelet from one wrist to the other every time s/he verbalized a negative statement. Then s/he had to start counting the number of days over until s/he had the bracelet on the same wrist for twenty-one days in a row.

Analyzing the experience of people who succeeded in abstaining from negative statements for twenty-one days, W. Bowen described the following phenomenon: "... your mind has finally stopped generating negative thoughts. Since you don't verbalize and don't vent them, your "complaint factory" is closed. You have cut off the faucet – and the source has dried up. By changing your words, you have altered your mindset" [8; 164]. In other words, the subjects didn't just avoid negative statements, moreover, they didn't disapprove a situation preverbally, i.e. even while evaluating it. After

applying the psychotechnics for a long time, the people and events that used to be evaluated mostly using the connotative (emotional) scale were assessed differently.

W. Bowen explained the result with the fact that our abilities and skills are first of all a consequence of a multiple action; i.e. the skill of negative statements control just becomes a subconscious competence [8]. Speaking about the phenomenology of his experiments, he refers to the skill theory described by G. O'Connor and G. Saymor and comprised four stages of competence [9].

At the same time, the cognitive psychology can interpret those results as a dramatic decrease of emotional and valuative semantic units along with an increase of descriptive ones which can be explained by a qualitative change of categorial scales caused by shifting semantics from its connotative element to the descriptive one. "A person's mind is simultaneously affected by the two categorial systems of different levels which "results in" a particular cooperation of the affective and connotative one and the objective and categorial one" [10; 92].

The assumption was that while one controls his/her verbal behavior and avoids negative statements, there is a shift toward the predominant use of the objective and categorial scale for the events and situations that were previously evaluated negatively.

Empirical research.

To prove the assumption that control of one's verbal behavior and avoiding negative statements results in a qualitative change of the categorial scale, i.e. a shift from the connotative semantics component to the descriptive one, an experiment was carried out which included twenty subjects (fifteen female and five male aged from 20 to 40). Only nine of them held out till the end of the experiment.

The procedure. For twenty-one days, the subjects were supposed to avoid judgmental negative and emotional statements which were defined as "complaints, gossip and criticism". To control one's verbal behavior, a subject was supposed to place a silicone bracelet from one wrist to the other every time s/he verbalized a negative statement. Then s/he had to start counting the number of days over. The experiment was considered completed if a subject had avoided judgmental negative statements for twenty-one days.

During the experiment its participants could discuss their experience and feelings in a social network group.

S. Rosenzweig's method of frustration reactions [11] was applied **to control changes**: measurements were taken before and after the formative stage of the experiment. The purpose was to determine the number of connotative (evaluative) and denotative (descriptive) responses to frustration reactions.

During processing, responses that had an evaluative component (i.e. "Oh, that's awful!") were classified as belonging to the connotative scale, whereas informative responses (i.e. "I will come to you tomorrow") were considered denotative. The number of each subject's responses of both types were compared before and after the experiment. *Statistica* program and the T-Wilkinson criterion were used to test the data statistical significance.

After the experiment, to analyze all the details, all the participants were subjected to a *depth interview*.

The results.

The statistics demonstrates that the number of descriptive responses before and after the experiment differs reliably ($p=0.0117$) which *proves* that the number of denotative (descriptive) responses to the stimulus material of S. Rosenzweig's method increased after the formative experiment.

The interpretation of the results. Since the S. Rosenzweig's frustration reactions method includes 24 situations (images) which represent an obstacle (hindrance, confusion, resentment) and situations when a subject is blamed for something, the more descriptive statements a subject uses, the more inclined s/he is to use the subject and categorial scale. On the contrary, the affective and evaluative scale is used less frequently.

We analyzed the results of the S. Rosenzweig's frustration test reactions to determine the most dramatic changes of the categorial scale (table 1).

Table 1

Examples of statements before and after the formative stage of the experiment

Statements before the formative experiment	Statements after the formative experiment
What a terrible hat: I can see nothing because of it.	Yes. I'll ask to take it off.
It's nonsense!	Tell her that the plane won't wait for us. We should go to the airport.
I am such empty-headed!	Let me see; maybe I have left the key in the car.
You have let me down as always. I knew that I couldn't rely on you. You are such a liar.	Would you please next time let me know beforehand.
Ira drives me mad. She even doesn't think that is making us wait for her. She isn't out in the rain. Why should we wait for her?	Let's give her a call and then the two of us go together.
What a jerk! He has messed up all my plans!	When could I come next time? Just set up an appointment.
What stupid rules! I cannot come to you every day!	Ok. Then I'll take this and that ones.

This testifies to subjects' different reactions to the same situations. As S. Rosenzweig put it, the subjects started to consider a situation *impunitively* as something insignificant, unavoidable or transient; nobody is blamed for a situation.

This is the phenomenology of the last subconscious stage of the experiment described by W. Bowen: "The less one complains, the less angry s/he becomes (...) Now you focus not on what you like, but rather on what you want (...) Your focus has just been changed" [8].

Therefore, both phenomenological results and statistics fully prove the assumption that the control of verbal behavior and avoiding negative statements results in a person's qualitative categorial scale change, i.e. a shift from evaluative semantics to its descriptive component.

The results of depth interviews.

The interview of a subject can testify to the change (the key points are in bold):

*"At first I found it difficult to replace the bracelet every thirty minutes. It was uncomfortable. It took me three or four days to make the periods longer. Later, after ten days, all criticism or complaints came to mind and disappeared; I was under the impression **they just stopped**. The bracelet was not put on the other wrist as often. A complaint went away and I didn't need it.*

Then, about two weeks later, the bracelet was mostly on the same wrist. I managed not to switch it for 14 days.

*As to my thoughts, they got way more positive, as if colors became brighter. I perceived some situations more easily and positively. Now, if I have any negative or critical thoughts, **they just appear for thirty percent and then vanish**. I don't dwell on them and don't verbalize them, **they just disappear as unnecessary**.*

I want to point out that at the beginning of the experiment I distinctly noticed not only my own complaints but also complaints of others. They were irritating as I thought that people were always complaining. Now I am more tolerable to others' complaints, I just try not to dwell on them and not to let them in. I just think that people have to learn to live without complaints and to enjoy their lives. They have a long way to go."

The subject notes that at the beginning of the formative experiment the negative evaluation of a situation slowed down (*criticism or complaints came to mind and disappeared; I was under the impression they just stopped*), later this process stabilized (*they just disappear as unnecessary*). It is caused by a changing process of categorization and evaluation: the subject was experiencing a shift from the affective and evaluative scale she was used to. After the experiment and conscious control of her verbal behavior, she mostly used the system of subject and categorial scales.

This results in a subject's different evaluation of situation that s/he used to perceive negatively even if a situation was neutral. As the subjects point out it helps them to stay neutral or positive and increases the level of awareness and control of their lives.

It is worth noting that the subjects of the experiment themselves notice the changes and phenomenologically describe the shift from evaluative scales to descriptive ones as focusing "not on what I dislike but rather on what I want". It is interesting that "changed thoughts" bring about a subjective evaluation of one's emotions as more positive. This can be the topic of the next research on the verbal behavior control.

Conclusions.

1. Control of verbal behavior (when one consciously refrains from evaluative negative statements) interrupts the person's reaction to a situation (event) which results in different evaluation of this stimulus due to the conscious categorization.

2. Conscious control of verbal behavior leads to qualitative changes in categorical scales, i.e. a tendency to using the subject and categorical scale to evaluate situations that were previously perceived as negative ones.

3. The results of the research can be used to substantiate psychological self-help techniques based on control of verbal behavior as part of individual consultations or group therapy.

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