

# THE FIRST IMPRESSION MATTERS: THE ART OF MALE ROMANTIC COMMUNICATION IN AMERICAN MEDIA DATING CULTURE

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## **Abstract**

The study investigates the communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’ within the communicative style and tradition of Masculine Romantic Discourse at the stage ‘Initiation of Romantic Relationship’. The masculine communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’ is aimed at achieving the communicative goal – to impress a female addressee for a limited time. The research demonstrates the potential of the complex approach to the study of interpersonal communicative effectiveness and the causes of communication failures. It comprises interdependent variables such as the objective and the subjective integrative features, as well as the strategic ways, namely what should be said (semantics) and how it should be said (discourse features via verbal means). The initial dyadic interaction was implemented by masculine communicative moves within pragmatic communication models. The masculine communicative moves were sourced from an American dating and relationship reality television series *The Bachelorette US* released from 2012 to 2018. The results revealed that the successful pragmatic communication model included relevant and variable masculine communicative moves, providing the pragmatic foundations of the relationship.

## **Keywords**

making the first impression, male romantic communication, American dating culture, communicative effectiveness, strategic ways of achieving romantic communicative goals, communication failures

## **1 Introduction**

Attachment, close relationships, marital and family ties as well as mutual support are universally approved as central social needs for optimal living (Ryff & Singer 2000). Interpersonal communication is a prerequisite for satisfying social needs in particular ways regarding social and cultural standards. It is also defined as a complex, continuous, collaborative process of verbal and nonverbal meaning-making between people who are willing to impress the potential partners (Stewart et al. 2005). Communication competence helps communicators successfully achieve their communication goals, detect deception, avoid stereotypes, and reduce conflict (Jones 2013: 45). Accordingly, it is necessary “to have an effective repertoire of interpersonal skills” (Hargie 2011: 2). Interpersonal skills involve “a process in which the individual implements a

set of goal-directed, inter-related, situationally appropriate social behaviours, which are learned and controlled” (Hargie 2006: 13). As a set of interpersonal skills, effective communication encompasses interdependent variables such as the context (objective integrative features: place, setting, time, frequency, etc.) and the communicators (subjective integrative features: gender, age, education, previous experience, cultural background).

We already know a lot about interpersonal communication, various aspects of representation and interpretation of meaning in different genres of spoken and written discourse (Edmondson 1981, Schiffrin 2000, Dontcheva-Navratilova & Povolná 2012, Jones 2013). Yet, there are still questions that are not being asked. What is much less understood is how to master effective interpersonal skills to achieve communicative goals or how interdependent variables can influence the choice of strategies and dynamics in relationships. Also of interest are ways of providing effective communication as well as causes of communication failures.

The current paper is a part of an academic research project devoted to effective communication within feminine romantic discourse and masculine romantic discourse at different stages of romantic relationship development. According to the research, romantic discourse is perceived as “an interactive communicative-pragmatic and cognitive activity regulated by cooperative strategies and tactics through communicative moves, and characterised by the interdependent variables (objective and subjective integrative features)” (Romaniuk 2017: 378).

## **2 Rationale for the study**

A great variety of theoretical approaches to the study of the interpersonal aspects of language can be adopted and applied: interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982), gender studies (Lakoff 1975, Tannen 1996), (critical) discourse analysis (Brown & Yule 1983, Stubbs 1983, Coulthard 1985, Weiss & Wodak 2003), conversation analysis (Sacks et al. 1974), interpersonal pragmatics (Locher & Graham 2010, Culpeper & Haugh 2014), etc. In this paper, I argue that the investigation of interpersonal communication across different kinds of relationships with their dynamics, cultural and social backgrounds should be based on a complex approach. The interdependent variables such as the objective and the subjective integrative features as well as the strategic ways of increasing communicative effectiveness are considered. Moreover, I demonstrate the potential of the complex approach combining the communicative-pragmatic sphere labelled as ‘the external context’ and the cognitive sphere labelled as ‘the internal context’. This provides some answers to the questions raised above. However, my intention of proposing the complex approach to interpersonal communication is not to replace the existing ones but to suggest that they can be brought together as a coherent whole, providing the kind of theoretical grounding that is still missing in much of the research on romantic relationships.

The development of romantic relationships proceeds according to the well-defined stages (cf. Taylor 1968, Knapp 1978, Fisher 1994, Crenshaw 1997); the most relevant within this research is, however, a division into three corresponding stages: (1) *Initiation of Romantic Relationship*, aimed at getting relationships started by making the first impression ( $M_{\text{time}}=30$  seconds), (2) *Pragmatics of Romantic Relationship*, aimed at providing dyadic romantic pragmatics ( $M_{\text{time}}=3$  weeks), and (3) *Limerence*, aimed at the manifestation of permanent matrimonial relationships ( $M_{\text{time}}=5$  weeks) (Romaniuk 2018). The focus of the current research was on the strategic ways of making the first impression at the first stage ‘Initiation of Romantic Relationship’ within the masculine romantic discourse.

According to the Popularity of reality TV genres in the U.S. (The Statistics Portal 2016), the statistics and studies from more than 22.500 sources, the subgenres such as cooking, competition, documentaries, supernatural, hidden camera, makeover, travel, and dating shows are of interest to a wide range of viewers. The dating show provides an analytical framework for the research of romantic communication as it is built on romantic relationships between contestants. This is based on their feelings of mutual attraction, affection, passion and love. The scientific interest of the media characters is based on the same principles that point to the real social connections (Rubin & McHugh 1987, Hoffner & Cantor 1991). Moreover, the international dissemination of the dating show arouses scientific interest in terms of cross-cultural interpersonal relationship standards along with the criteria revealing the effectiveness of romantic communication.

Thus, the dating show has already been described in terms of its content and viewer perception (Ferris et al. 2007), the media consumption and reception activities of the audience (Brophy-Baermann 2005, Hall 2005). All these scientific attempts were basically focused on the audience perception of the media characters. However, the dating show has not been described in terms of romantic communication effectiveness and the causes of communication failures based on the female and male romantic corpora presented by the female and male contestants respectively. An analytical framework for the research of male romantic communication is an American dating and relationship reality television series *The Bachelorette US* released from 2012 to 2018 (*The Bachelorette US* 2012-2018). The male romantic corpus was compiled from the initial dyadic interactions of the male contestants within the dating show *The Bachelorette US*. The subsequent research has proved this framework to be quite robust, and the male romantic corpus analysed for the present study likewise confirms its scientific validity.

To the best of my knowledge, this research represents the first work on interpersonal communication competence of making the first impression within male romantic communication based on media behaviours in American dating culture. This aspect of male romantic communication has not been thoroughly investigated, which accounts for the novelty of the research.

### **3 Making the first impression within initial and cross-cultural interpersonal interactions**

According to the social penetration theory provided by Altman and Taylor (1973), interpersonal communication changes as relationships develop along two related dimensions: (i) the *breadth of penetration* understood as the amount of interaction, information exchange, etc., per unit time (e.g. the amount of communication per week), and (ii) the *depth of penetration* understood as the degree of intimacy of a typical interaction or exchange (cf. Taylor 1968: 79). Thus, interpersonal communication starts with initial face-to-face interactions aimed at getting a relationship started by making the first impression.

Recent empirical studies of the initial face-to-face pragmatics have addressed a broad range of issues, comprising cultural standards, linguistic traditions, gender characteristics, workplace contexts, and types of interpersonal relationships. Such examples include doctor-patient interactions in medical discourse (Iranian) (Ramazani et al. 2017), telephone calls between employees of the bank and clients (Italian) (De Stefani 2018), dyadic conversations between unacquainted people (Japanese, American English) (Usami 1993), conversations between unacquainted interactants in relation to the ways in which humour arises (Australian English) (Haugh 2011), interlocutory scripts of the first encounter subsequent to an incident (Italian, French) (Agnoletti 2003), and self-disclosure practices in initial interactions (Australian and American English) (Haugh & Carbaugh 2015), etc.

However, reviewing prior research on initial and cross-cultural interpersonal interactions, it turned out that romantic interpersonal relationships had received less attention (Saint-Dizier & Agnoletti 2010, Eaton et al. 2015, Dewaele & Salomidou 2017, Romaniuk 2018). Dewaele and Salomidou (2017: 116) claimed that “language and cultural differences among cross-cultural couples made emotional communication more difficult”; they “experienced emotional communication problems at the start of their relationship”. Eaton et al. (2015) analysed scripts for three types of encounters (dating, hanging out and hooking up). Romaniuk (2018) studied the feminine communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’ within female romantic communication. Saint-Dizier and Agnoletti (2010) examined interlocutory scripts specific to flirtatious encounters.

The first impression is a complex psychological phenomenon that includes sensory, logical and emotional components (Bodalev 1982). Making the first impression is a strategy used to increase communicative effectiveness, since it sets “the general tone in only a tenth of a second and is almost impossible to change” (Wargo 2006). By contrast, first impressions have been characterised as difficult to overturn, still, “they can be reversed through reinterpretation after a two-day delay following the initial formation” (Mann & Ferguson 2017). Pham and Miyake (2010) provide the strategic, systematic and practical advice on the use of the environment and culture in favour of making the first impression that lasts only 30 seconds. Similarly, Houpert (2018) makes a list of thirteen habits that can help make the first impression. Undoubtedly, the aforementioned habits and practical advice are important to impress a partner, yet there is still a chance of failure. This is because the role of language in interpersonal pragmatics is fundamental (O’Driscoll 2013). Consequently, it is essential to master the strategic ways providing the relationship development. Moreover, the cross-cultural awareness of effective romantic communication is mutually beneficial for both native speakers and non-native speakers. This helps easily overcome communication barriers and develop greater self-confidence of romantic partners, reducing the risks of ruining the romantic relationship.

The aim of the paper is twofold. I intend to undertake a clear theoretical assessment of the criteria providing the communicative effectiveness and the practical approach of how making the first impression may be implemented within male romantic communication. This increases the chances of achieving the communicative goal.

#### **4 Research methodology and data**

Reality TV shows are recommended to be discussed “as discourse rather than genre, since they have developed into different genres themselves and show a great degree of hybridity” (Lorenzo-Dus & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013: 15). Consequently, the study of male romantic communication is carried out according to the communicative style and tradition of the masculine romantic discourse. Accordingly, the key components of the masculine romantic discourse relevant to this study include:

1) *the objective integrative features* (romantic place, setting, time, frequency of dates, etc.). The designed structure of the dating show *The Bachelorette US* corresponds to the objective integrative features: a bachelorette is expected to choose a potential husband among 25 male contestants while they are on romantic dates. The dates take place in the most romantic places in the world: in a restaurant, on an island, on a yacht, high in the mountains, etc. If the bachelors fail to impress the bachelorette, they are eliminated (henceforth *the losers*); the

ones who have impressed the bachelorette stay for the next stage (henceforth *the winners*). The first stage ‘Initiation of Romantic Relationship’ took place during the first episode ( $M_{time}=80.3$  minutes,  $SD=7.6$ ) of the dating show *The Bachelorette US 2012-2018* (Seasons 8-14). Thus, the total collection of the videos under study was  $\Sigma_{7episodes}=562$  minutes (9 hours and 37 minutes). The initial romantic encounters were presented in the whole ( $M_{interaction}=30.6$  seconds,  $SD=13.2$ );

2) *the subjective integrative features* (gender, place of residence, age, occupation, etc.). All male contestants were US residents from different regions: The West (37%); The Midwest (27%); The South (20%); The North (16%). Their age ranged from 25 to 41 ( $M_{age}=29.1$ ,  $SD=2.8$ ). The winners’ age ranged from 25 to 37 ( $M_{age}=29$ ,  $SD=2.6$ ); the losers’ age ranged from 25 to 41 ( $M_{age}=29.4$ ,  $SD=2.3$ ). The most popular occupations were in the fields of Economics, Sports, Art, and Law;

3) *the strategic ways* are assumed as what should be said (semantics) and how it should be said (discourse features via verbal means). The male contestants ( $N=186$ ) took part in one of the latest seasons of the dating show *The Bachelorette US*: Season 8 ( $N=25$ ); Season 9 ( $N=25$ ); Season 10 ( $N=25$ ); Season 11 ( $N=26$ ); Season 12 ( $N=26$ ); Season 13 ( $N=31$ ); Season 14 ( $N=28$ ). However, only 75.8 per cent ( $N=141$ ) impressed the bachelorettes, so their means are assumed to be strategic.

The masculine romantic discourse was implemented by a minimum significant functional and structural discourse unit – a communicative move (verbal/non-verbal action of one of the contestants), developing interaction, promoting communication to achieve a communicative goal (Edmondson 1981, Schiffrin 2000). The minimum unit of analysis is *a masculine communicative move*. The study was carried out on *the male romantic corpus* compiled from the masculine communicative moves ( $N=759$ ) and implemented by the male contestants. The most extensive discourse unit is a complex unity of the linguistic form, meaning and action, which could be described by the concept of the communicative event (van Dijk 1981: 121-122). The most extensive discourse unit of analysis is *an initial romantic encounter* sourced from the dating show *The Bachelorette US*.

More specifically, to meet the aim of this study the main research question was put forward:

RQ: What ways of the masculine communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’ can be regarded as strategic within male romantic communication?

The main research question was then operationalised in three sub-questions:

RQ1: What masculine communicative moves were implemented by the whole group of the male contestants at the first stage ‘Initiation of Romantic Relationship’?

RQ2: What are the semantic groups and discourse features of the masculine communicative moves realised by the winners and the losers?

RQ3: What is the successful pragmatic communication model of the masculine communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’?

The studies of the masculine communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’ proceeded in six stages:

I. In order to determine the relevant area in the theoretical and practical aspects, there was an analytical review of: (i) traditional theoretical approaches to the study of the interpersonal aspect of language; (ii) theoretical sources concerning the initial interaction and making the first impression issues; (iii) relevance and features of the dating show *The Bachelorette US*; (iv) stages of romantic relationship development. As a result of the analytical review, the masculine communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’ was defined as a central object of the current research. Within this stage the general methods of analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, and generalization were used;

II. The second stage was dedicated to the collection, processing and transcription of the male romantic interactions. The method of the theoretical sample was used to select initial romantic encounters;

III. Within the third stage, the basic research descriptive and typological methods, as well as sociolinguistic, conversational and cognitive analyses were used to identify the objective/subjective integrative features;

IV. At the fourth stage, the cognitive-communicative method was used to analyse the communicative-pragmatic and cognitive spheres. Consequently, the algorithm was made up to determine: 1) communicative goal of the masculine communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’; 2) masculine communicative tactics and their intentions; 3) masculine communicative moves and the frequency of their usage in order to reveal the most relevant ones; 4) semantic groups, discourse features and verbal means of the masculine communicative moves; it should be noted that the lexical means of expressing emotions within this research were listed in descending order of their frequency revealed by the corpus-based analysis of the male romantic corpus. The obtained data were analysed using AntConc software version 3.4.4w (2014). At this stage, the intentional, context-situational, pragmatic, lexical, grammatical and stylistic analyses were used as well as the content analysis method and the quantitative data processing method;

V. The modelling method enabled to reveal pragmatic communication models of the masculine communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’ presented by the winners and the losers of the dating show *The Bachelorette US*. The masculine communicative moves affected the female partner’s choice

differently. Therefore, the quantitative data processing method was applied to define the relevant and variable masculine communicative moves of the successful pragmatic communication model. Worthy of note, the variables were standardised for all figures;

VI. At the sixth stage, the methods of the inductive and deductive analyses as well as the method of cognitive-discourse interpretation were used to determine the criteria for effective romantic communication and the causes of communication failures as well as the theoretical generalization of the data and formulation of the conclusions.

## 5 Results and discussion

To make the first impression the male contestants used three communicative tactics aimed at achieving different communicative intentions: (1) to get conversations started (*Small Talk*); (2) to reveal personal information consciously and intentionally (*Self-Disclosure*); (3) to make a partner wish for the further interpersonal relationship by arousing interest and curiosity (*Emotional Adjustment*) (Table 1).

Masculine communicative tactic	Masculine communicative move	Abbreviation in models and examples	Frequency n (%)
<b>Small Talk</b> <i>n</i> = 387	Greeting	Grt	181 (23.8)
	Identification	ID	152 (20)
	Emotional State	ES	54 (7.1)
<b>Self-Disclosure</b> <i>n</i> = 82	Self-Praise	SP	25 (3.3)
	Place of residence	Rsd	24 (3.2)
	Profession	Prof	16 (2.1)
	Family	Fm	10 (1.3)
	Hobby	Hb	7 (0.9)
<b>Emotional Adjustment</b> <i>n</i> = 290	Continuation of the relationship	ContRl	119 (15.7)
	Compliment	Comp	105 (13.8)
	Intrigue	Ig	66 (8.7)

**Table 1: Frequency and percentage of the masculine communicative moves**

Accordingly, the communicative strategy ‘Making the first impression’ was realised by eleven masculine communicative moves and the corresponding semantic groups (Table 1). The discourse features of the masculine communicative moves implemented by the whole group of the male contestants were analysed, and the results are presented in Table 2.



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Discourse features <i>n</i> (%)	Masculine communicative moves													Total (%)
	Small Talk				Self-Disclosure					Emotional Adjustment				
	Grt	ID	ES	SP	Rsd	Prof	Fm	Hb	ContRI	Comp	Ig			
Attitude to the content	Positive	11 (6.1)	17 (11.2)	49 (90.7)	25 (100)	-	14 (87.5)	10 (100)	7 (100)	119 (100)	105 (100)	66 (100)	72.3	
	Neutral	170 (93.9)	135 (88.8)	-	-	24 (100)	2 (12.5)	-	-	-	-	-	26.8	
	Negative	-	-	5 (9.3)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.9	
Means of realisation	External	-	2 (1.3)	2 (3.7)	2 (8)	2 (8.3)	-	-	-	-	-	5 (7.6)	2.6	
	Internal	111 (61.3)	146 (96.1)	49 (90.7)	23 (92)	19 (79.2)	16 (100)	10 (100)	7 (100)	110 (92.4)	105 (100)	50 (75.8)	89.8	
	Combined	70 (38.7)	4 (2.6)	3 (5.6)	-	3 (12.5)	-	-	-	9 (7.6)	-	11 (16.6)	7.6	
Means of expression	Explicit	181 (100)	152 (100)	54 (100)	25 (100)	24 (100)	16 (100)	10 (100)	7 (100)	102 (85.7)	105 (100)	66 (100)	98.7	
	Implicit	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17 (14.3)	-	-	1.3	

Table 2: Discourse features presented by the whole group of the male contestants

### 5.1 Small Talk as a masculine communicative tactic

The analysis of American national and cultural communicative features (Bosrock 1999) along with the research data established that *Greeting*, according to the traditional speech-etiquette formulas, usually begins with the greeting words ‘Hi!’/‘Hello!’. The etiquette phrases ‘How are you (doing)?’/‘How is it going?’ are used to provide a dialogue with the further development. Based on the results, *Greeting* was characterised by a neutral/positive attitude towards its content and realised explicitly through internal/combined motivation (Table 2). Moreover, to adjust the interpersonal relationship to a friendly atmosphere, *Greeting* also includes a female address as a communicative unit. The male contestants chose to address the bachelorette by her first name using: a) the full form (18.2%), and b) the short form (69.6%), i.e. ‘a moniker’. The latter is aimed at establishing a close emotional connection between the partners, e.g. the male contestant Nick used the moniker ‘*Des*’ in place of ‘*Desiree*’:

- (1) M: *Hi, Des! (mGrt) I'm Nick. (mID)* [The Bachelorette US, 2013]

The male contestants occasionally (12.2%) used the bachelorette’s title, appealing to an unmarried woman as ‘*Miss*’. The male contestant Marquel showed respect towards the bachelorette via the title ‘*Miss Andy*’ and intensified good manners using a polite form of addressing a woman ‘*mam*’:

- (2) M: *Miss Andy! Hi! How are you? (mGrt)*  
 F: *Good, and you?*  
 M: *Fine, mam. (mGrt)* [The Bachelorette US, 2014]

Similarly, the respectful communicative behaviour was implemented by the request form, expressed by the modal verb ‘*may*’. This is perceived as a non-traditional way of greeting people within an informal conversation. The request form along with the formal way of addressing a female partner distinguished the male contestant Cody from the others:

- (3) M: *Sorry, may I approach the bachelorette? (mGrt) I'm so nervous. I have butterflies inside my stomach. (mES)* [The Bachelorette US, 2014]

Thus, the non-standard communicative behaviour contributed to the intensification of the female partner’s interest and, consequently, predetermined the pragmatic foundations of the romantic relationship.

According to the traditional way of greeting people, after the speech-etiquette formulas the interlocutors introduce themselves through *Identification*. It was

characterised by a neutral/positive attitude towards its content and realised explicitly through internal/combined/external motivation (Table 2). *Identification* was expressed by the standard syntactic constructions 'I'm + name' (61.9%) or 'My name's + name' (32.9%) (Example 1), usually followed by the elliptical construction 'Nice to meet you'.

Trying to attract the female contestants' attention, the male contestants occasionally (5.2%) implemented the method of phonetic associations with their names. The male contestant Emil attracted the girl's attention by forming a phonetic association with his name that was intensified by a fairly vulgar association accompanied by a humorous tone (Example 4). However, the audacious format of *Identification*, on the contrary, increased the communicative distance between the partners, leading to the communication failure:

- (4) M: I'm Emil. (**mID**)  
F: Like 'Amil'?  
M: Yeah, 'anal' with 'm'. Just remember that.  
F: I will never forget that. [The Bachelorette US, 2014]

*Emotional State* was characterised by a positive/negative attitude towards its content and realised explicitly through internal/combined/external motivation (Table 2). The excessive excitement was often expressed by stylistic devices (Example 3). Occasionally, the male contestants were indecisive and overly focused on their emotional state:

- (5) M: Oh, my Gosh! I am so nervous. (**mES**)  
F: Don't be.  
M: I'm *shaking a little bit*. (**mES**)  
F: Well, put your hands out. Are you as nervous as I am? (**fES**)  
M: Yeah, *really nervous*. (**mES**) [The Bachelorette US, 2014]

Consequently, Small Talk was characterised by: three semantic groups (Grt, ID, ES); discourse features (addresser's positive/neutral/negative attitude towards the content expressed explicitly through internal/combined/external motivation); verbal means: 1) lexical means of expressing emotions: a) contain positive 'ecstatic', 'happy', 'glad', 'excited', 'awesome', and negative evaluation 'nervous', 'weird', 'embarrassing', 'awkward'; b) combine with adverbial intensifiers 'so', 'really', 'quite', 'kind of', 'pretty'; c) idioms 'to have butterflies in one's stomach'; 'to be over the moon'; 'to be on cloud nine'; 2) informal colloquial contractions and discourse markers; 3) different ways of expressing the present: a) usage of verbs in various tenses: *Present Simple*, *Present Continuous*, *Present Perfect*; b) modal verbs 'can', 'may'; 4) stylistic devices: 4.1) tropes:

hyperbole ‘*it’s the first time in my life I feel so excited*’; 4.2) schemes: a) omission (ellipsis ‘*I am*) *So nervous*’); b) repetition (anaphora ‘*I am...I am so happy to meet you*’); c) structures of balance (climax ‘*I am really happy, I am ecstatic, gosh, I am over the moon*’).

## 5.2 Self-Disclosure as a masculine communicative tactic

Self-Disclosure is the process of revealing personal information. Involving an element of self-presentation, “self-disclosure is not always open and honest but may involve a conscious and intentional decision to reveal positive rather than negative aspects of self in order to be perceived as attractive and rewarding” (Kim & Dindia 2011: 157-158). Self-Disclosure is aimed at revealing personal information that can be shared with a partner, affecting the feelings of intimacy (Greene et al. 2006). The topics are generally restricted to: 1) place of residence and commuting; 2) work; 3) the (history of the) subjects’ name; 4) setting talk; 5) prepared topics (Usami 2002: 115). However, making the first impression the male contestants chose the following masculine communicative moves: *Self-Praise, Place of residence, Profession, Family and Hobby* (Table 1).

*Self-Praise* was characterized by a positive attitude towards one’s approval or admiration regarding physical, intellectual, moral, social and other personality traits. It was expressed by varying degrees of objectivity and subjectivity (Example 7).

The figures in Table 2 show that *Place of residence* was realised explicitly through internal/combined/external motivation and expressed a neutral attitude towards its content by the standard syntactic constructions ‘*I am from + city/state*’ or ‘*I live in + city/state*’:

- (6) M: *I am a dentist (mProf) and I am from California. (mRsd)* [The Bachelorette US, 2015]

*Profession* was characterised by a positive/neutral attitude towards its content and realised explicitly through internal motivation (Table 2). Neutral self-disclosure of *Profession* was presented by the standard syntactic construction ‘*I am + profession*’ (Example 6). Apart from the standard syntactic construction, the male contestants used expressions of satisfaction in combination with the adverbial intensifiers to emphasise their professional obsession:

- (7) M: *I’ve been working on improving my golf swing. Indeed, I’m obsessed with playing golf. That’s why I’m the best professional golfer so far (mSP+mProf). So, I’d like to teach you to play golf. (mContRI)* [The Bachelorette US, 2014]

*Family* was characterised by a positive attitude towards its content and realised explicitly through internal motivation (Table 2). The male contestants preferred to talk about paternal love for their children, good family relationships and how ideal parents' relationship affected their love life.

*Hobby* was defined by a positive attitude towards its content and realised explicitly through internal motivation (Table 2). It showed the male contestants' enthusiasm for activities such as travelling, skydiving, car racing, rafting, collecting and even cooking, which were used in combination with Stative Verbs:

- (8) M: *Have you ever heard that the Chinese eat almost everything that has four legs, except tables, and everything that can fly, but not airplanes? Aha, I am a fan of Chinese cuisine and I love to cook Chinese food (mHb) I can't wait to invite you to dinner. (mContR)* [The Bachelorette US, 2014]

Thus, Self-Disclosure was characterised by: five semantic groups (SP, Rsd, Prof, Fm, Hb); discourse features (addresser's positive/neutral attitude towards the content expressed explicitly through internal/combined/external motivation); verbal means: 1) lexical means of expressing emotions: a) satisfaction in combination with adverbial intensifiers: '*Indeed, I am obsessed with ...*', '*I am really into...*', '*I genuinely enjoy working with...*', '*I am deeply involved in...*', '*I absolutely get a kick out of...*'; b) preferences by means of Stative Verbs '*to like*', '*to love*', '*to enjoy*', '*to prefer*', '*to adore*'; c) idioms '*I literally eat, sleep and breath computers*'; 2) informal colloquial contraction and discourse markers; 3) different ways of expressing the present: a) usage of verbs in various tenses: *Present Simple, Present Continuous, Present Perfect*; b) modal verbs '*can*', '*may*'; 4) stylistic devices: 4.1) tropes: a) hyperbole '*I am the best professional golfer so far*'; 4.2) schemes: a) omission (ellipsis '*(I am) Really obsessed with*'); b) repetition (anaphora '*I love computers...I love playing computer games*'); c) structures of balance (climax '*I literally eat, sleep and breath computers*').

### **5.3 Emotional Adjustment as a masculine communicative tactic**

As evident from the figures in Table 2, *Continuation of the relationship* was characterised by a positive attitude towards its content and realised explicitly/implicitly through internal/combined motivation. The intention to continue the romantic relationship was expressed implicitly utilizing the verb 'to teach' (Example 7). In addition, the male contestant Andrew expressed implicitly his intention to continue the relationship, emphasising that the combination of the contestants' names made up an interesting phonetic association of the dyad:

- (9) M: *You probably have **one of the most adorable smiles** I've ever seen in my life. (mComp) It's just knocked me down and I think **Andy and Andrew sounds interesting.** (mContRI)*  
 F: *I like it.*  
 M: *Yeah, not bad. It **seems** like you're a very **gifted girl** with a **sexy voice.** (mComp) [The Bachelorette US, 2014]*

*Compliment* was characterised by a positive attitude towards its content and realised explicitly through internal motivation (Table 2). *Compliment*, helping to reduce the communicative distance, was divided into three semantic subgroups (Examples 9 and 10): 1) *appearance* (88%), aimed at paying a compliment on a girl's smile, eyes, hair and lips; it was often verbalised by the combination of the verb 'to look' with the positive connotative adjectives 'beautiful', 'sexy', 'hot', 'amazing', 'great', 'fantastic', 'nice'; 2) *voice* (6%); it was often expressed explicitly by hyperbole; 3) *personality traits* (6%); all positive connotative adjectives were basically accompanied by the verb 'to seem', which implies uncertainty about the utterance since the male contestant saw a girl for the first time.

*Intrigue* was used to arouse curiosity employing the following formula: *communicative hook (coded message/information) + addressee's wish to receive an answer*; intensification of partner's interest occurred by holding the key fact. The male contestant Jason intensified his partner's interest through the communicative hook that confused and puzzled the female addressee, thereby maintaining the effectiveness of *Intrigue*. In addition, the female addressee's confusion was expressed by simple, one-word statements. This demonstrated the communicative tension and intention to force the speaker to make the next move, which would clarify the key information:

- (10) M: *I'm a doctor (mProf), and I've learned some special skills being a doctor. (mIg)*  
 F: *Okay.*  
 M: *One of those being is that I can make a diagnosis. (mIg)*  
 F: *Really?*  
 M: *Yeah, just by looking at somebody. (mIg)*  
 F: *Oh, my Gosh!*  
 M: *So, I think... I think you have a fever (mIg) because you look really hot. (mComp)*  
 F: *Seriously?! Oh, that's really good.* [The Bachelorette US, 2014]

The figures in Table 2 show that *Intrigue* was characterised by a positive attitude towards its content and realised explicitly through internal/combined/external motivation.

Overall, Emotional Adjustment was characterised by: three semantic groups (ContRI, Comp, Ig); discourse features (addresser’s positive attitude towards the content expressed explicitly/implicitly through internal/combined/external motivation); verbal means: 1) lexical means of expressing emotions: a) contain positive evaluation ‘*beautiful*’, ‘*great*’, ‘*hot*’, ‘*sexy*’, ‘*amazing*’, ‘*gorgeous*’, ‘*fantastic*’; b) combine with adverbial intensifiers ‘*so*’, ‘*really*’, ‘*incredibly*’; 2) informal colloquial contractions and discourse markers; 3) different ways of expressing the present and the future: a) usage of verbs in various tenses: *Present Simple*, *Present Continuous*, *Future Simple*; b) modal verbs ‘*can*’, ‘*may*’; c) construction ‘*to be going to*’; d) verbs ‘*would like*’, ‘*plan*’, ‘*want*’, ‘*mean*’, ‘*hope*’, ‘*expect*’, ‘*look forward*’, ‘*wish*’, expressing male contestants’ intentions; e) combination of the negative form of the modal verb ‘*can*’ and the verb ‘*wait*’ with various actions ‘*to talk to you*’, ‘*to get to know you*’, ‘*to meet you*’; 4) stylistic devices: 4.1) tropes: hyperbole ‘*You probably have one of the most adorable smiles I’ve ever seen in my life*’; 4.2) schemes: a) omission (ellipsis ‘*(I) Look forward to seeing you again*’); b) repetition (anaphora ‘*I’d like...I’d like to teach you that*’); c) structures of balance (climax ‘*your smile, your lips, your eyes...I think I’m going crazy*’).

#### 5.4 Successful pragmatic communication model

The communicative effectiveness of the first stage ‘Initiation of Romantic Relationship’ within the Masculine Romantic Discourse implies achieving the communicative goal – to impress a female addressee for a limited time. Both the winners and the losers were quite similar in their choice between three masculine communicative tactics, and a graphic depiction of the data is given in Figure 1.

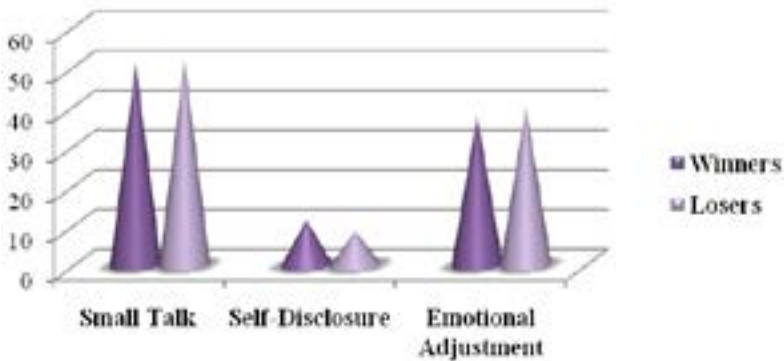


Figure 1: Masculine communicative tactics’ ratio

Although self-disclosure plays a crucial role as romantic partners intentionally reveal personal information along with motives, desires, feelings, thoughts and experiences (Altman & Taylor 1973, Fisher 1994, Greene et al. 2006), the male contestants were rather reserved. Moreover, not being fully aware of advantages and strategic ways regarding self-disclosure, the winners and the losers preferred Small Talk and Emotional Adjustment over Self-Disclosure (Figure 1). However, the early stages of male romantic communication presented by the superficial self-disclosure change into the intimate one as a result of the relationship development (Altman & Taylor 1973, Greene et al. 2006). Indeed, its extensiveness and intensity increased dramatically during the following stages of the romantic relationships.

In addition, comparison of the semantic groups and discourse features implemented by the winners versus the losers (cf. Tables 2 and 3) made it possible to reveal the strategic ways of the masculine communicative tactics:

I. **Small Talk:** semantic groups (Grt, ID, ES); discourse features (the addresser's neutral/positive attitude towards the content expressed explicitly through internal/combined motivation) (Table 3). The strategic ways were implemented via verbal means (lexical means of expressing emotions which contain positive evaluation and combine with adverbial intensifiers, idioms, informal colloquial contractions, discourse markers, different ways of expressing the present and stylistic devices).

II. **Self-Disclosure:** semantic groups (SP, Rsd, Prof, Fm, Hb); discourse features (the addresser's positive/neutral attitude towards the content expressed explicitly through internal/combined motivation) (Table 3). The strategic ways were realised via verbal means (lexical means of expressing emotions which emphasise expressions of satisfaction in combination with adverbial intensifiers, and describe preferences by means of Stative Verbs, idioms, informal colloquial contractions, discourse markers, different ways of expressing the present and stylistic devices).

III. **Emotional Adjustment:** semantic groups (ContRl, Comp, Ig); discourse features (the addresser's positive attitude towards the content expressed explicitly/implicitly through internal/combined motivation) (Table 3). The strategic ways were implemented via verbal means (lexical means of expressing emotions that contain positive evaluation and combine with adverbial intensifiers, informal colloquial contractions, discourse markers, different ways of expressing the present and the future and stylistic devices).



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Discourse features		Frequency		Distribution of the discourse features				
		W	L	W	L	W/L Mean	W/Mean	L/Mean
Attitude to the content	Positive	347	76	246	169	207	119	81
	Neutral	259	72	184	160	172	107	93
	Negative	-	5	-	11	6	-	200
Means of realisation	External	-	13	-	29	14	-	200
	Internal	537	109	381	242	312	122	78
	Combined	69	31	49	69	59	83	117
Means of expression	Explicit	593	149	421	331	376	112	88
	Implicit	17	-	12	-	6	200	-

**Table 3: Discourse features presented by the winners/the losers of the dating show *The Bachelorette US***

(Note: W = Winners (n=141), L = Losers (n=45))

The masculine communicative moves realised by the male contestants in the initial romantic encounters were arranged in the pragmatic communication models of making the first impression. The distribution of the masculine communicative moves within the pragmatic communication models was characterized (Table 4).

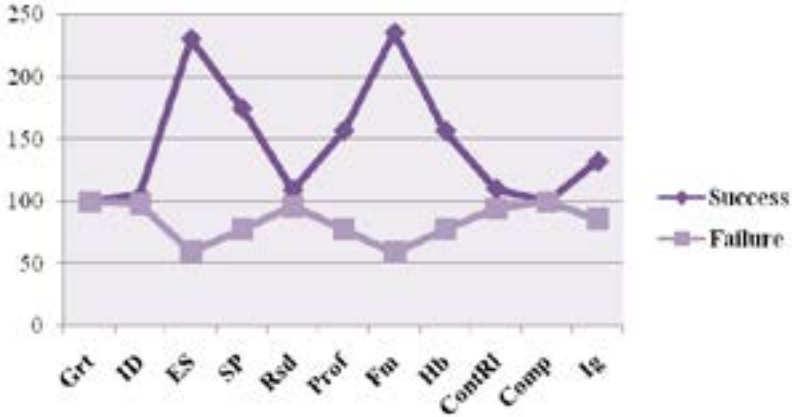
Masculine communicative tactics	Masculine communicative moves	Distribution of the masculine communicative moves in models				
		S	F	S/F Mean	S/Mean	F/Mean
Small Talk	Greeting	100	100	100	100	100
	Identification	92	88	90	105	98
	Emotional State	37	16	27	231	60
Self-Disclosure	Self-Praise	16	9	12	175	73
	Place of residence	14	13	14	109	96
	Profession	9	6	8	157	78
	Family	7	3	5	236	59
	Hobby	5	3	4	157	78
Emotional Adjustment	Continuation of the relationship	65	56	69	110	95
	Compliment	57	51	63	100	100
	Intrigue	37	29	36	132	86

**Table 4: Pragmatic communication models**

(Note: S = Success (n=127), F = Failure (n=32))

As evident from the figures in Table 4, the masculine communicative moves such as Family, Emotional State, Self-Praise, Profession, Hobby, Intrigue, Continuation of Relationship and Place of residence had a significant effect

on the positive romantic relationship outcomes. However, the masculine communicative moves such as Identification, Greeting, and Compliment did not affect the romantic relationship. Figure 2 gives a graphic depiction of the linear association between the masculine communicative moves in the pragmatic communication models.



**Figure 2: Linear association between the masculine communicative moves in the pragmatic communication models**

Consistent with this observation, the present results suggest that the successful pragmatic communication model of making the first impression included eight relevant (i.e. Family, Emotional State, Self-Praise, Profession, Hobby, Intrigue, Continuation of Relationship and Place of residence) and three variable masculine communicative moves (i.e. Identification, Greeting, and Compliment) (Figure 2). In addition, in the initial dyadic interactions the winners utilized different number of the masculine communicative moves within the successful pragmatic communication models ( $M=4.57$  moves,  $SD=1.24$ ,  $Mode=5$  moves [appeared 36 times],  $range=2-8$ ). Thus, to maximise the effect of making the first impression for a limited time, the best number of the masculine communicative moves should be equal to five (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Successful pragmatic communication model**

Based on the above findings, there were similarities and differences between the strategic ways of making the first impression used by the winners and the losers:

I. Masculine communicative tactics were quite similar in terms of their relevance/variability; cf. Small Talk (51% vs. 52%), Self-Disclosure (11% vs. 8%), and Emotional Adjustment (38% vs. 40%) (Figure 1). Thus, the winners and the losers implemented two relevant (Small Talk and Emotional Adjustment) and one variable (Self-Disclosure) masculine communicative tactics. The variability of Self-Disclosure demonstrated the male partners' unwillingness to reveal their personal information at the first stage 'Initiation of Romantic Relationship'. On the other hand, the relevance of Small Talk and Emotional Adjustment showed the eagerness to get the conversations started and the wish for the development of romantic relationships arousing interest and curiosity.

II. Masculine communicative moves were also fairly similar in terms of their frequency, cf. Grt (21.9% vs. 25.2%), ID (20.2% vs. 22%), ES (8.1% vs. 3.9%), SP (3.4% vs. 2.4%), Rsd (3.1% vs. 3.1%), Prof (2.1% vs. 1.6%), Fm (1.6% vs. 0.8%), Hb (1% vs. 0.8%), ContRI (15.9% vs. 16.5%), Comp (13.8% vs. 15.7%), Ig (9% vs. 7.9%). However, the subsequent analysis confirmed a statistically significant difference between the masculine communicative moves presented by the winners versus the losers within the pragmatic communication models (Table 4). As a result, the masculine communicative moves differed noticeably in terms of their relevance and variability (Figure 3).

It may be concluded that according to the successful pragmatic communication model of making the first impression, the female contestants primarily preferred the men who: (1) told them about family (Fm); (2) shared their feelings and emotions (ES); (3) expressed positive attitude towards one's approval or admiration regarding physical, intellectual, moral, social and other personality traits (SP); (4) revealed personal information on the profession (Prof) and (5) hobby (Hb); (6) intrigued them arousing interest and curiosity (Ig); (7) outlined the probability of the further romantic relationships (ContRI);

(8) revealed personal information on their place of residence (Rsd). The aforementioned list of the female contestants' choice is presented in order of preference (Figure 2).

Although the media characters showed the eagerness to get the conversations started (ID, Grt) and paid compliments (Comp), these moves did not have a significant effect on the positive romantic relationship outcomes. Therefore, they are considered to be variable. Overall, the revealed successful pragmatic communication model of making the first impression provides the effectiveness of male romantic communication;

III. The analysis (cf. Tables 2 and 3) showed a difference in the discourse features presented by the winners versus the losers: (1) the addresser's attitude towards the content: positive (11.9% vs. 8.1%), neutral (10.7% vs. 9.3%), *negative* (not found in the winner-bachelorette interactions); (2) means of realisation: *external* (not found in the winner-bachelorette interactions); internal (12.2% vs. 7.8%), combined (8.3% vs. 11.7%); (3) means of expression: explicit (11.2% vs. 8.8%), implicit (not found in the loser-bachelorette interactions). Based on the results reported above, a negative attitude towards the content as well as external means of realisation might be regarded as the causes of communication failures.

IV. Verbal means of the masculine communicative moves were almost identical, apart from the lexical means of expressing emotions containing negative evaluation and external motivation. They were presented by the losers and resulted in communication failures.

The analysis of the masculine communicative strategy 'Making the first impression' also enabled us to outline the causes of communication failures: (i) deviation from the objective/subjective integrative features; (ii) omission of Small Talk and Emotional Adjustment; (iii) semantic groups and discourse features non-compliance with the strategic ones (cf. Tables 2 and 3); (iv) ignorance of the successful pragmatic communication model of making the first impression (Figure 3).

## 6 Conclusion

The male romantic communication with its dynamics, cultural and social backgrounds was investigated by the complex approach combining the communicative-pragmatic sphere and the cognitive sphere. The focus was on the strategic ways of increasing the communicative effectiveness considering the objective and the subjective integrative features. The analysis explored the semantic groups and the discourse features in order to reveal differing preferences between the winners and the losers of the dating show *The Bachelorette US*

(2012-2018) within the romantic dates regarding the strategic ways used to make the first impression.

To sum up, there are three main findings to the research questions:

1) the masculine communicative moves implemented by the winners and the losers were different in terms of their relevance/variability; according to the successful pragmatic communication model of making the first impression, the effective communication included eight relevant (Family, Emotional State, Self-Praise, Profession, Hobby, Intrigue, Continuation of Relationship and Place of residence) and three variable (Identification, Greeting and Compliment) masculine communicative moves;

2) there was a noticeable difference in terms of the discourse features implemented by the winners versus the losers; consequently, within the effective communication the following predominant discourse features were assumed as strategic: a) *Small Talk* (addresser's neutral attitude towards the content expressed explicitly through internal motivation); b) *Self-Disclosure*, and c) *Emotional Adjustment* (addresser's positive attitude towards the content expressed explicitly through internal motivation);

3) the strategic ways were implemented via verbal means: lexical means of expressing emotions containing positive evaluation, combining with the adverbial intensifiers; idioms, informal colloquial contractions, discourse markers, different ways of expressing the present and the future, and stylistic devices.

## **7 Implications**

Based on the above findings, it may be claimed that the revealed strategic ways of the masculine communicative strategy 'Making the first impression' provide the effectiveness of the male romantic communication in American media dating culture. Further research is needed to understand the extent to which the revealed strategic ways and the successful pragmatic communication model of making the first impression are related to actual dating behaviours. Therefore, the current paper can be considered as important complementation to the overall research project of effective communication in Romantic Discourse.

These findings of the interdisciplinary research apart from practical implications have important theoretical implications. The latter makes a contribution to the study of interactional sociolinguistics (the language in its social context used in interaction by observing a certain speech event in a particular community), gender studies (language and gender alignment), conversation analysis (structural organisation of spoken interaction), discourse analysis (genres of discourse and discourse units: communicative moves, tactics

and strategies), interpersonal pragmatics (pragmatic communication model of interpersonal relationship development), cross-cultural communication (cross-cultural awareness of interpersonal communication).

The findings reported in this study may also point to some implications while teaching Communication and Discourse courses, as well as clearly assisting textbooks developers to include information on how the application of the successful pragmatic communication model of making the first impression affects communicative effectiveness.

### Limitations

The data analysed for this study provides only a relatively small depiction of effective romantic communication; its size and scope are restricted due to subjective integrative features (i.e. gender, place of residence, age, occupation) of the dating show *The Bachelorette US* contestants. It should also be admitted that the evaluation of effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the romantic communication is prone to a certain level of subjectivity.

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Editors of the academic journal *Discourse and Interaction* and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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