

Psychotherapy Guidebook



**TRANSACTIONAL-
SEMANTIC
PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Theodore Chemodurov

Transactional-Semantic Psychotherapy

Theodore Chemodurow

e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *The Psychotherapy Guidebook* edited by Richie Herink and Paul R. Herink

All Rights Reserved

Created in the United States of America

Copyright © 2012 by Richie Herink and Paul Richard Herink

Table of Contents

[DEFINITION](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[TECHNIQUE](#)

[APPLICATIONS](#)

Transactional-Semantic Psychotherapy

Theodore Chemodurow

DEFINITION

Psychotherapy depends upon communication between the therapist and his patients, and the therapist's tools of trade are verbal and nonverbal language. Transactional-Semantic Psychotherapy treats the individual in terms of his total communicative functioning. It is a dynamic technique the therapist can use to discover and reveal critical interactions quickly and objectively, which enables him to select and focus on overt interactions and on those crucial nonverbal, covert, subtle, disguised, or concealed influences that determine what is going on in a person and the reciprocal process between people. The therapist then can effectively correct specific areas of the patient's communicative process that prevent or interfere with his having meaningful interpersonal relationships.

Transactional semantics is concerned with the individual's thoughts, feelings, and behavior as they relate to reaction, interaction, and transaction through verbal and nonverbal language, and emphasizes the "transactional whole" of communication. It utilizes syntactics, semantics, pragmatics, general semantics, and incorporates the concept of "transaction in process,"

while recognizing the organized patterned communicative processes that surround and influence the individual.

Compared with other types of psychotherapy, psychiatric, and psychological treatment, Transactional-Semantic Psychotherapy greatly increases the psychiatrist's efficiency. In this writer's experience in private psychiatric office practice during the past several years, seven out of ten persons previously requiring hospitalization can now be treated on an out-patient basis, with treatment time shortened, and the cost reduced by about 50 percent for the individual and for couples with marital problems.

HISTORY

The dynamics of communication and of the interactions between therapist and patient have been thought of in terms of isolated separate, independent elements. In 1968 this writer developed a unifying theory of human behavior and therapy entitled "Transactional Semantics," which clearly defines how the patient's development is influenced.

The goal of Transactional-Semantic Psychotherapy is to unify concepts of the influence that interact dynamically through verbal and nonverbal language with the individual, bringing them together into a single concept of the total transactional process. "Transaction" describes the continuing exchange of communications between individuals, groups, or other systems

with continuous ongoing feedbacks, resulting in changes and developing patterns from the subsequent responses of each person or system. The emerging communicative pattern determines context and, in turn, influences meaning. A “system” is a process that influences the individual through its repetition of communicative pattern, composed of interrelated parts or “subsystems.” At this point, the individual may be viewed as a “system in process of communicative transaction.”

In studying human interactions through communication, general semantics correlates and integrates syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics into a unified whole, emphasizing the influence of language on thinking, social and individual behavior, and the influence of communication upon thoughts, feelings, and actions of both the sender and the receiver.

Studies in kinesics indicate that body motion and linguistics are equally important infracommunicational systems. The linguistic, kinesic, and ethologic relationships, with each other and with comparable systems from other sensory modalities, make up the communication system and are interdependent functions of an integrated process. While language includes all of these part-processes, their relative importance, significance, and meaning vary. Context conveys meaning. This point becomes more obvious and understandable when the entire family and its process system of communication is studied as a unit, often revealing that a twitch, frown, or

grunt controls all of the family members.

TECHNIQUE

The therapist and his patient must “speak” the same language, conveying their thoughts and feelings to each other with the same words (signs, symbols), meaning the same to both. But in therapy, conveying the same mutual understanding of meanings is not enough. The therapist and patient must have the same convictions about their meanings.

In the process of formulating clear, precise thoughts, we use language. In communicating, our language conveys the contents of the thought processes, and formulates thoughts in the process of reflecting objective reality through subjective cognition and the social communication of one’s thoughts about reality, attended by his subjective related feelings, actions, connotations, and meanings from experiences within a particular (family-social-cultural-economic) context.

This definition of language emphasizes the connection between language and thinking, the functions of language in the process of reflecting objective reality in the external material world (extra psychic) and the world of man’s intrapsychic experiences. Language also serves a communicative function in the sense of a social transmission of results from the cognitive process and the person’s subjective thoughts, feelings, actions, experiences. In

the intrapsychic sense, language gives one the ability to conceptualize, think, predict, plan ahead, and communicate, which is fundamental to learning and to the structuring of personality.

Language and communication transmit the influence of dynamic events of various patterned systems processes in transaction with one another, reflecting the objective reality of extrapsychic events through subjective cognition and the intrapsychic. The ego functions as a final common pathway into and out of the person, with language as the dynamic relating and integrating force between the intrapsychic and extrapsychic.

“Semantic positioning” describes all of the transactional communicative forces that set up and control the behavior of the individual and family group, including all the verbal and nonverbal forces that are consciously or unconsciously applied within a family to determine each member’s reactive behavior. Characteristic and specific interactional patterns for semantic positioning emerge from these operating forces as they structure the framework and boundaries within which the individual operates and develops.

To institute and maintain family unity and solidarity, the dynamic vectors of the family communicative system train, mold, station, and maintain each of its members in a designated position within the system. An

individual's relegated position within the family's interlocking pattern decides his status, dominance, and his control by other members. Often, the most powerful determinants are nonverbal (facial expressions, tones of speech, gestures, groans, hesitations, silences). These communicative forces govern what each individual member of the family actually feels, thinks, and does.

The interpersonal relationships of a family often set up a system of communicative patterns that determine the future behavior of the individual. Throughout his life span, a person may tend to seek out only those he might train in the reactive responses that allow him to function within a framework of communicative patterns stemming from his semantic positioning during infancy and childhood. This search for familiarity may govern him in selecting a mate, friends, and associates in later life. Characteristic interactional patterns of communication set the individual patient apart and constitute diagnostic categories for various types of psychiatric disorders.

APPLICATIONS

The art of psychotherapy is governed by the therapist's personality, orientation, and communicative competency (whether verbal or nonverbal, active or passive). The therapist should be aware of what he is, what he is doing, and what is actually going on in the therapeutic situation, rather than

using an intuitive approach or to unknowingly influence by chance. His influence upon the patient must follow a logical and planned course of treatment. To manage, control, and direct the therapeutic process, the therapist should be trained to be aware of all the critical transactional-semantic interchanges during treatment.

The focus of the therapeutic effort in individual therapy is on developing the communicative process between therapist and patient. In therapy with married couples, the focus includes both partners as well as the therapist. In treating a multiperson system or family, the focal point is on interlocking and interactional patterns of communication within the family system as well as with the therapist. In each of these different situations, focus must also include each patient's communications with his system of relationships, recognizing the interplay, feedbacks, and resulting effects each has with the other. Understanding the total complex of these various and continuous transactional, interrelated communicative system processes constitutes transactional semantics.

An accurate appraisal of the nature and quality of this transactional-semantic system and its technical mastery is necessary to achieve therapeutic progress. The psychiatric patient's intrapsychic communication and his communication with others are impaired. The therapist, too, may have problems with his communication and be unaware of some of his own

nonverbal messages. His own conscious and unconscious attitudes and values are conveyed to the patient (even if he consistently tries to hide them), as well as his overt intentions, nonverbal intentions, and his reactions to the patient's reaction to him. The spoken word is only a part-process in the extremely complicated reciprocal patient-therapist relationship. The context and nonverbal language is of equal or even greater importance.

The therapist is much more involved in the therapeutic process than previously recognized, especially with his nonverbal communications. To achieve his maximum effectiveness in Transactional-Semantic Psychotherapy, the therapist must understand and become more aware of his own personality and communicative process, making them essential, therapeutic tools — selectively, consciously, and deliberately applied. The transactional communicative processes between patient and therapist should be a conscious target for improvement, instead of being overlooked or merely incidental.

All forms of psychologic treatment are shortened when the therapist recognizes crippled communications and directly improves and corrects them consciously and specifically. Transactional semantics can be utilized for intensive short-term therapy.

