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The Application of Transactional Analysis in the Editorial Process: Communication, Relationships, and the Dynamics of Author – Editor Interactions

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Abstract

The author of this article analyses patterns of communication within the author – editor relationship from the perspective of Transactional Analysis (TA). Referring to the course of the editorial process, she describes typical models of interaction, paying particular attention to conflict situations in which the author, as an expert in a given field, transfers the status of their substantive expertise to the sphere of language and editing, thereby questioning the editor's legitimate interventions. The interpretation of interactions within the publishing process presented in this article demonstrates how communicative behaviours rooted in the Critical Parent or Rebellious Child ego states may lead to crossed transactions and the emergence of the psychological game "Yes, but...", thus contributing to the escalation of tension. The author proposes strategies aimed at resolving conflict situations, including maintaining interactions at the Adult – Adult level, jointly establishing an editorial contract, relying on objective linguistic norms, and providing substantive justification for editorial interventions. The key recommendation is to strengthen the partnership between editor and author by applying clear principles of cooperation and drawing upon the assumptions of Transactional Analysis (e.g., responding from the Adult ego state and offering recognition) in order to improve the effectiveness of the editorial process.

Keywords: Transactional Analysis, TA, communication, relationships, author, editor, ego states, transactions, conflicts, editorial interventions, linguistic norms, psychological games.

Introduction

The editorial process in every publishing house should always be grounded in close cooperation between the author of a text and the editor responsible for its editorial refinement. Owing to the particular sensitivity of the issues involved, the course of such cooperation within academic publishing requires special care. The author submits a manuscript containing substantive content, while the editor polishes it linguistically and editorially, ensuring full compliance with prevailing publishing standards and accepted linguistic norms. In practice, however, tensions of varying intensity frequently arise, as authors – being experts in their respective fields – may extend their expert status to the domains of

language and editing, thereby questioning the editor's interventions, even when these are fully consistent with established linguistic norms. In this sense, the editor serves as a "guardian of linguistic standards", guided by the objective of ensuring the highest possible degree of correctness in the text.

The aim of this article is to apply Transactional Analysis to describe the dynamics of communication between authors and editors. Particular emphasis is placed on situations marked by conflict arising from the aforementioned extension of perceived competence. TA makes it possible to identify the ego states (Adult, Parent, Child) adopted by both parties, determine the types of transactions (complementary and crossed), and recognise behavioural patterns (psychological games and life scripts), while also developing strategies for improving communication within editorial work.

1. Fundamental Assumptions of Transactional Analysis

According to Eric Berne's theory, every individual possesses a tripartite internal structure consisting of three ego states: Parent, Adult, and Child. The Parent ego state accumulates a set of norms, principles, and behavioural patterns acquired during childhood from significant adults (one's own parents or caregivers). Two forms are distinguished: the Nurturing Parent, characterised by support and guidance, and the Critical Parent, which criticises and imposes rules and standards. Within communication, the Parent ego state manifests itself, for example, through statements of an authoritarian nature, based on commands and judgments.

The Adult ego state, by contrast, represents rationality and objectivity. It processes information from the external environment, analyses situations without prejudice, and makes decisions on the basis of facts. Messages conveyed from the Adult ego state are logical and emotionally neutral.

The Child ego state reflects emotions, needs, and reactions of a more primal character resulting from childhood experiences. Like the Parent, the Child is divided into several forms: the Natural Child (spontaneous and expressive), the Adapted Child (submissive to rules, prohibitions, and norms), and the Rebellious Child (defiant and resistant to imposed order). The Rebellious Child "sulks and has moods"; this state may, for example, characterise an author who insists on preserving their own solutions and opposes the editor's proposed revisions.

At this point, it is worth recalling the classification of ego states developed by Jorge Oller-Vallejo. He distinguished the so-called basic functional ego states, namely the Caring Parent, the Individuating Adult, and the Child Receiving Care (Jagiela, 2012, p. 33; cf. Oller-Vallejo, 2006, pp. 20–24; Oller-Vallejo, 2003, pp. 162–167), which constitute the foundation of the functionality of the respective ego states.

A fundamental concept within this methodological perspective is the transaction, defined as an exchange of messages between two individuals. TA distinguishes three basic types of transactions: complementary, crossed, and ulterior.

In a complementary transaction, a message originating from a given ego state receives the expected response from the corresponding ego state of the other person (e.g., Adult – Adult). Such transactions do not lead to conflict and bring satisfaction to both parties, since communication proceeds in a factual and appropriate manner without generating negative emotions in any participant.

Crossed transactions arise when the response comes from an ego state other than the one expected (e.g., communication at the Adult - Adult level transforms into Parent – Child communication). In such circumstances, conflict and communicative blockage occur. Ulterior transactions, in turn, contain simultaneously verbalised and overt messages as well as hidden messages operating in parallel.

Within the editorial process, a complementary transaction at the Adult – Adult level directs communication towards constructive discussion: the editor justifies revisions by referring to linguistic and editorial norms, while the author responds rationally, accepting necessary changes. However, if the editor raises an issue concerning the text and the author reacts emotionally (e.g., stating, "I disagree, and that's final"), a crossed transaction emerges and conflict ensues.

People frequently fall into established patterns known as psychological games, through which they organise communication according to hidden motivations. In the author – editor relationship,

such games may include the “*Yes, but...*” game, in which the author responds to every proposed revision put forward by the editor (operating from the Adult or Nurturing Parent ego state) with apparent approval while simultaneously pointing to the specificity of the language used within their discipline and the impossibility of implementing the suggested change – even when that change is fully consistent with linguistic and editorial standards. In essence, this process serves to defend one’s own position.

Such games may be triggered by unconscious life scripts formed during childhood, driving behaviours that once brought approval from others (see Berne, 1998, pp. 45–46; Jagieła, 2006, pp. 365–374; Matkowski, 1995, pp. 81–88; Pankowska, 2010, pp. 72–80; Pierzchała, 2010, pp. 69–82; Wieczorek, 2017, pp. 145–156; Gębuś & Jagieła, 2016, pp. 179–197; Łęski & Pierzchała, 2014). For example, an author may possess a reinforced life script stating: “I am the expert, and nobody will correct my work”, which manifests itself through the Critical Parent ego state directed toward the editor. Understanding such interdependencies facilitates the transfer of communication to the Adult – Adult level, which is crucial for resolving disputes.

2. The Editorial Process and the Roles of Its Participants

The publishing process encompasses several stages: manuscript submission by the author, scholarly peer review, preliminary editing, language editing together with proofreading, and final editorial preparation for publication. Typically, the publishing editor (or, in the case of multi-author monographs, the scientific editor) coordinates these stages and collaborates with authors, reviewers, and members of the publishing team (SGH, 2019).

In practice, the role of the language editor is performed by a specialist in linguistic correctness (usually a Polish philologist or an experienced editor), while the proofreader is responsible for verifying final details. Good communication and clarification of the scope of editorial intervention at the outset of cooperation minimise misunderstandings (Tańska, n.d.). Editors are responsible for ensuring that texts comply with prevailing linguistic norms and publishing standards. The work of a language editor is based on the necessity of “refining the text in terms of linguistic correctness, conformity with norms, and accepted publishing standards”. Less experienced authors, however, often regard these issues as secondary details.

It should be emphasised that, according to widely accepted publishing procedures, authors themselves are obliged to submit material prepared in accordance with established standards. For example, the guidelines of the SGH Publishing House state: “The Author is responsible for preparing the text in accordance with the Publishing Standards [...], making use of the recommendations contained in the Instructions for the Preparation of Authorial Materials [...] and the recommended Linguistic Norms” (SGH, 2019). This means that authors are expected to be familiar with and comply with applicable norms. Consequently, editors’ insistence upon their observance should not be interpreted as excessive zeal or an attempt to diminish the author’s contribution.

Although editors work primarily at their computers, their success depends to a considerable extent on interpersonal and communication skills. Once editorial work has been completed, the manner in which revisions are communicated to the author becomes crucial. Editors must be able to “justify their revisions clearly and substantively” and remain prepared for dialogue with authors. At times, authors become strongly attached to their texts to such an extent that they perceive interventions affecting the content as attempts to dismantle their scholarly concept. As Monika Tańska notes, editing may become difficult when authors regard their texts as “perfect” and treat them almost like their own children (Tańska, n.d.).

In such situations, argumentative competence grounded in the Adult ego state proves indispensable. Editors should clearly demonstrate how a given modification contributes to improving the text, for example, by ensuring grammatical correctness, stylistic fluency, or communicative precision, while striving to maintain an Adult – Adult stance throughout the interaction (Tańska, n.d.).

3. Applying Transactional Analysis to Author–Editor Interactions

In editorial interactions, both parties may adopt different ego states. In an ideal situation, editors operate predominantly from the Adult ego state: they evaluate content objectively and propose revisions based on evidence (grammatical rules, publishing guidelines, etc.). They may also function within these interactions from the position of the Nurturing Parent, encouraging authors to cooperate and suggesting solutions (e.g., by clarifying ambiguities). Editors may adopt this stance when they seek to explain the purpose of revisions with care and support rather than through rigid demands for change. If the author responds in an equally supportive manner, the relationship remains complementary.

In more challenging situations, editors should avoid assuming the role of the Critical Parent (characterised by unjustified humiliation and reprimand) and instead strive to maintain the perspective of the Adult. Authors, in turn, may function from several ego states:

- Adult – when they approach the editorial process rationally, accepting and considering revisions. Adult – Adult communication facilitates the efficient negotiation of the text.
- Critical Parent (authoritarian) – in this case, the author may adopt the tone of one who imposes norms, questioning the editor’s expertise, for example: “I am an expert in my field; I know this text better than anyone else”. This reflects the essence of the Critical Parent—commands and evaluative judgments. In such a transaction, an editor functioning from the Adult ego state encounters the author’s Critical Parent, which often results in disagreement and conflict.
- Rebellious Child – the author may react emotionally: “I disagree. Absolutely not!” or “I do not need comments like these. What do you know about legal language?”. These messages originate from the Rebellious Child ego state, disregarding argumentation and expressing resistance to perceived coercion. The editor then faces an Adult – Child (or Critical Parent – Child) transaction and must attempt to redirect the dialogue to the Adult level.
- Adapted Child – less frequently encountered; the author may accept revisions submissively and without objection. In such circumstances, the editor and author maintain a complementary relationship, and the work progresses very quickly.

Analysis of ego states therefore enables the anticipation of potential conflicts. For example, if an editor proposes a revision, an author who regards their work as their own “child” may respond from the position of the Critical Parent (“That’s nonsense! I hope you take into account what other sources say!”) or as a Rebellious Child (“You’re changing this again? It was perfectly fine as it was!”). In both cases, the transaction becomes crossed, generating tension. Table 1 presents examples of typical ego states and corresponding editorial situations.

Table 1

Ego States in Transactional Analysis and Exemplary Behaviour in the Author – Editor Relationship

Ego State	Type of Communication	Course of Communication
Nurturing Parent	Supportive, advisory (“always remember to...”)	The editor explains revisions politely, for example: “I suggest simplifying this sentence to make it more comprehensible” – a supportive tone. The author accepts the comment as assistance in improving the text (M. Tańska, <i>Relacja...</i>).
Critical Parent	Critical, directive (“this cannot remain as it is!”)	The author adopts the stance of the Critical Parent: “ <i>I am the expert—I do not need these changes; the editor may not understand my speciality</i> ” (judgmental and prescriptive) (Tańska, n.d.).
Adult	Factual, analytical (“let us verify the facts”)	The editor analytically explains the revision (“According to the linguistic norm, it should appear in quotation marks”), and the author responds substantively (“Indeed, I confused the forms”). The relationship remains complementary, and the author and editor work efficiently together.
Rebellious Child	Defiant, emotional (“I do not agree with such interference!”)	The author reacts impulsively: “ <i>Why are you changing this? You are not the author of my book!</i> ”—an emotional tone expressing opposition. The editor temporarily loses the fluency of the conversation; to reduce tension, they must return to the calmness of the Adult ego state and redirect communication toward Adult–Adult interaction.
Adapted Child	Submissive, compliant (“Of course, I will change these passages immediately”)	The author accepts revisions without objection (“All right, let us change it to this form”) and does not engage in discussion. The editor can efficiently introduce the necessary changes, as Adult – Adult interaction is not threatened by conflict.

Source: author’s own elaboration.

According to TA, complementary Adult – Adult transactions contribute to mutual understanding because the editor presents arguments based on objective evidence (linguistic norms and publishing principles), while the author responds with maturity. For example, the editor explains a grammatical correction, and the author acknowledges its validity. Such interaction fosters the development of a partnership-based relationship.

In practice, however, crossed transactions are common: the editor, speaking from the Adult ego state, points out an error, while the author responds from the position of the Critical Parent (“How dare you question my authority?”) or the Rebellious Child (“You cannot impose your own ideas on me!”). Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that “the author feels offended by the correction”, and communication ceases to be constructive. At times, authors employ ulterior transactions (thus developing a game): they verbally express agreement, while their body language or hidden emotions reveal resistance that is postponed until a later stage of the editorial process.

As noted above, avoiding the role of the Critical Parent and moving toward the Adult ego state is fundamental to effective communication. Editors should endeavour to respond to crossed transactions from the Adult position as well, explaining revisions objectively (e.g., by referring to specific norms). In this way, they can “shift” the discussion to a more constructive level. It is equally important to provide positive strokes. If an author convincingly justifies a particular wording or sentence structure, the editor may acknowledge this contribution (Nurturing Parent – Nurturing Parent), thereby building trust.

The author – editor relationship frequently resembles the psychological games described by Berne. One example is the game “Yes, but...”. The editor proposes a revision (offering a solution, e.g., “Perhaps we could clarify this phrase...”, constituting a complementary Adult – Adult transaction), to which the author responds with “Yes, but...”, invariably introducing a reason why the revision is unnecessary (“I see a different meaning here” or “my version better conveys the essence”), thereby introducing an element of dispute.

Another example is the game of “Explanation”: the author, operating from the Critical Parent ego state, exerts pressure, while the editor explains from the Adult position. The author then criticises the proposed solution again, seeking support or identifying flaws in the editor’s reasoning (for instance, repeatedly posing trick questions). Editors should remain sensitive to such patterns – for example, by responding specifically and closing the issue, rather than postponing editorial decisions or losing confidence by reversing the transaction. Table 2 presents selected concepts of Transactional Analysis alongside concrete examples drawn from editorial practice.

Table 2
Examples of the Application of Transactional Analysis Concepts in the Author – Editor Relationship

TA Concept	Characteristics According to TA	Example from Editorial Practice
Complementary transaction	Congruent communication (I-message → you-response), without conflict.	The editor (Adult) explains the reason for a correction (“According to the norm...”) and the author responds equally rationally (“You are right; I was unaware of this rule”). The dialogue remains smooth, and work on the text is constructive.
Crossed transaction	A response from an unexpected ego state leading to conflict.	The editor (Adult) asks about the source of a statement, and the author responds (Critical Parent): “Have you even read my work, Editor?”. Communication breaks down, and intervention becomes necessary.
Critical Parent	A critical, evaluative authority.	During a dispute, the author states: “How can you arbitrarily alter my formulations?!” - an attacking and confrontational tone. The editor must respond with the calmness of the Adult ego state.
Rebellious Child	Emotional resistance against commands and expectations.	The author rejects a correction with dissatisfaction: “I do not want to revise this! I rescued this construction after translating it!”. The editor maintains an Adult tone in order to reduce tension and persuade the author through constructive arguments.
The “Yes, but...” game	A recurring conflict in which the author undermines every editorial suggestion.	The editor proposes modifications to certain formulations, while the author continually rejects them, arguing: “Yes, but I have done it this way for years” or “Yes, but my discipline follows different rules”. The editor should bring the game to a close by referring to facts or by acknowledging the author’s perspective.

Source: author’s own elaboration.

4. Authors' Attitudes and Their Influence on the Editorial Process

In publishing practice, situations frequently arise in which authors – as recognised specialists in their fields – place their own expertise above the competencies of editors. They feel that they “know their subject better than anyone else” and that “nobody will correct their style” (Tańska, n.d.). From the perspective of Transactional Analysis, this constitutes a manifestation of the internal Critical Parent ego state (the authoritative figure), which assumes that the editor is not sufficiently competent to introduce revisions.

Such authors may even depreciate the importance of linguistic correctness, treating it as secondary to their own stylistic preferences. As a consequence, conflict intensifies. Communication then often assumes the form of a crossed transaction (author – Critical Parent directed towards editor – Adult) or even Parent – Parent communication (in its critical form), which is a toxic situation based on mutual evaluation, instruction, and rivalry. In analysing interactions between authors and editors from the perspective of TA, one may also refer to the concept of the life script (Jagięła, 2023, pp. 257–258). Authors with high self-esteem may possess a firmly established script stating that “The expert is always right” – a belief that they must dominate communicative situations.

Within the editor – author relationship, this script manifests itself through the constant imposition of one's own conditions and the rejection of editorial intervention. From the editor's perspective, recognising such attitudes and preventing the escalation of tension – and ultimately conflict – is of paramount importance. Aware that the author is functioning in the role of the rule-imposing Parent, the editor may deliberately adopt the Adult stance and, when necessary, temporarily assume the position of the Nurturing Parent. It is crucial not to respond to Parent with Parent – that is, with negative evaluations or a desire for confrontation. In conflicts of this kind, editors should strive for Adult – Adult transactions by explaining norms (e.g., through reference to dictionaries or linguistic guidelines) (cf. Tańska, n.d.).

An example of such conflict is discussed by Jerzy Jarniewicz, who describes a situation in which the Polish edition of Nabokov's *Lolita* included the disclaimer: “published without editorial revision by the publisher” (“wydanie bez redakcyjnego opracowania wydawcy”). This statement most likely reflects a dispute between the editor and the translator and may be regarded as analogous to the author – editor conflicts discussed in the present article:

This is not a neutral note; such brevity conceals strong emotions: impatience, anger, resentment? One might suppose that there was no editorial revision because the publisher was eager to publish the novel quickly and therefore failed to complete the editing of the translation in time, but this seems unlikely. Such a note is more likely to indicate a conflict between editor and translator, while the note itself constitutes an attempt to protect against potential accusations that the publisher failed to ensure that the translation appeared in a carefully prepared form (J. Jarniewicz, 2025).

In his review of the edition in question, Lech Niedzielski, writing in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, criticised the language of the translation as “bizarre Polish” filled with “absurd expressions” (L. Niedzielski, 1991, cited in: J. Jarniewicz, 2025).

The conclusion is clear: the absence of cooperation between editor and translator resulted in negative linguistic consequences. In terms of TA, the translator most likely behaved toward the editor as a Rebellious Child, leading to a breakdown in communication.

In this context, another highly significant issue must be emphasised. When there are no substantive reasons to alter an author's style, the final decision belongs to the author, whose stylistic sensitivity remains decisive. Monika Tańska explicitly notes this point. However, when editors possess a clear and unequivocal argument (e.g., one based on grammar), the scope for discussion becomes radically limited (Tańska, n.d.).

In summary, authoritarian attitudes on the part of authors complicate the relationship; nevertheless, the concepts offered by Transactional Analysis make it possible to analyse these interactions and redirect them toward a more harmonious course.

5. Conflict Resolution Strategies and Recommendations for Editors

According to Transactional Analysis, the most effective means of resolving conflict is to shift communication to the Adult – Adult level. Consequently, editors should above all maintain calmness and objectivity, avoiding critical tones and personal remarks. Concrete strategies in this regard include the following:

- Relying on norms and authorities – when justifying revisions, editors should refer to authoritative sources (dictionaries, editorial manuals, recommendations issued by the Polish Language Council) or to the publisher's internal standards. This demonstrates that the correction is not the result of personal preference but rather a consequence of accepted norms.
- Explaining the purpose of the revision – instead of merely introducing changes, editors should justify them: "I changed this form in accordance with the new linguistic norm...". Such an approach directs the discussion towards substantive issues.
- Providing recognition – editors may emphasise the strengths of the text and acknowledge the author's expertise, for example by saying: "Congratulations on this insightful analysis. I did, however, draw attention to this phrase because it might benefit from greater clarity so that readers have no doubts about its meaning". Such a message, originating from the Nurturing Parent, may help overcome the author's resistance.

It is worth emphasising that, before the editorial process begins, it is advisable to establish the principles of cooperation and the scope of revisions with the author. It is best to indicate clearly that the manuscript will undergo language editing and to discuss the anticipated degree of intervention (as Monika Tańska (n.d.) advises: "warn the author that you will correct more than just full stops and commas").

Another good practice involves providing authors with preferred models of textual organisation (i.e., author guidelines), thereby enhancing the transparency of the publishing process. The clarity of the editorial contract minimises interpretative discrepancies regarding its implementation and directs editor – author interactions toward a partnership model. The essence of a constructive editorial process lies in concentrating on shared goals and maintaining a collaborative attitude. A common sense of purpose ensures that even difficult negotiations retain a constructive character. By emphasising the role of a "good craftsman" who supports the author, the editor avoids adopting the confrontational stance of the Critical Parent.

If the author disagrees with a particular revision, the editor may propose alternative solutions whenever possible: "We could formulate this differently so as to preserve your style while avoiding the error. Which version do you think would be preferable?". Such an approach activates the author's capacity to make decisions from the Adult ego state and reduces resistance originating from the Child. What, however, should be done when authors continually reject revisions despite rational arguments?

In such cases, involving a third party with an established position – for example, a subject editor, reviewer, or editor-in-chief – may prove helpful. Such a mediator, being both emotionally distanced from the situation and committed to ensuring the publication of the most accurate version of the text possible, can facilitate compromise. This constitutes, in a sense, an intervention by an external Adult interrupting the cycle of the game. Such measures should not, however, be employed prematurely. Editors and authors should first be given an opportunity to resolve disagreements without resorting to "external" authorities.

It should also be stressed that non-verbal communication (tone of voice, posture, demeanour) on the part of the editor plays an enormous role in publishing interactions. Speaking calmly and precisely (from the Adult ego state) reduces the likelihood of triggering defensive reactions in authors.

Conflicts usually escalate through reciprocal attacks originating from the Critical Parent ego state. Editors should therefore avoid commanding or accusatory language (e.g., "you must" or "you cannot write like this") and instead employ language that fosters dialogue. Another important aspect in this context is editors' reflection on their own ego states. Editors who notice that they themselves are slipping into the role of the Critical Parent (for example, experiencing irritation and expressing it

through an imperative tone) should consciously shift into the Adult ego state. This means focusing on facts and allowing themselves a moment before responding, in order to regain composure and maintain professionalism.

Training in assertiveness and techniques derived from Transactional Analysis may support self-regulation. It is therefore worthwhile for editors to equip themselves with the tools offered by TA.

In summary, practical recommendations include:

- establishing clear conditions of cooperation;
- justifying revisions by referring to linguistic norms and publishing principles;
- emphasising the shared purpose of the editorial process;
- maintaining the Adult ego state throughout interactions.

Such an attitude minimises the potential threat to the effectiveness of the publishing process represented by the adversarial dynamic of “author versus editor”.

Conclusion

Transactional Analysis offers a valuable conceptual framework for understanding and shaping author – editor interactions. Applying the concepts of ego states, transactions, and psychological games makes it possible to identify communicative patterns that frequently disrupt the editorial process.

In particular, situations in which authors, as substantive experts, adopt the position of a critical authority toward editors may be interpreted as Parent – Adult or Parent – Child transactions that lead to conflict. Editors who strive to resolve such conflicts from the Adult ego state are more likely to reduce tensions effectively. Equally important is the establishment of clear publishing norms and procedures, as well as fostering a culture of communication grounded in mutual respect.

The key recommendation emerging from this analysis is therefore the strengthening of partnership within the editor – author relationship. By maintaining Adult – Adult communication, providing recognition, clarifying expectations, and grounding editorial interventions in objective standards, participants in the publishing process can significantly improve both the effectiveness of editorial work and the quality of professional cooperation.

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