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THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF ACQUIRING COMPETENCE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN POLISH, ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN

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The importance of intercultural communication skills was appreciated a long way back in human history. In the first letter to Corinthians (9.19)[1], Apostle Paul explains that in order to persuade people of different ethnic origins and from different walks of life he framed his discourse so that he would sound as one of them. The work to be reported here falls within the framework of cross-cultural pragmatics defined as a field of inquiry which compares the ways, in which two or more languages are used in communication[2]. Cross-cultural pragmatics is an important new branch of contrastive linguistics because in any two languages different features of the social contexts may be found to be relevant in interpreting what can be expressed and how it is conventionally expressed. Cross-cultural communication involves awareness of the specificity of the two or more cultures involved (intercultural competence) and the ability to use language and body language in ways facilitating understanding and desired effect (performance).

Communication

Some scholars define communication as the transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, emotions and skills from one person or group to another (or others) through the use of symbols[3]. The issue here is whether this transmission is intentional or

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[1] *The Holy Bibl*e, Revised Standard Version, Cleveland and New York 1962: The World Publishing Company.

[2] A. Barron, *Acquisition in Interlanguage Pragmatics: Learning how to do Things with Words in a Study Abroad Context*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia 2003, p. 23.

[3] B. Berelson, G.A. Steiner, *Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings*, New York 1964, p. 257; G. Theodorson, *A Modern Dictionary of Sociology*, New York 1964, pp. 13-14;

not. Burgoon et al.[4] view communication as intentional, while Samovar et al.[5] find the concept of intentionality too limiting as they believe that "communication takes place whenever people attach meaning to behavior, even if the sender of the message does not expect his or her actions to be communicated". The latter view is especially important for studying intercultural communication.

Culture

Kroeber and Kluckhohn's[6] definition is possibly the most frequently cited one: Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action. It follows from the above definition that people identify reality and form expectations with respect to it by linking ongoing events with pre-existing stable patterns of behaviour.

Hofstede[7] defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another". Lederach's[8] definition is important for our further discussion as it states that "culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them". It follows from this definition that when people communicate, they, consciously or subconsciously, invoke and evoke cultural frames, schemata and scripts.

Spencer-Oatey[9] introduces the interpretative aspect of culture: "culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural norms, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behaviour and his/her

M.T. Motley, *On whether one can(not) not communicate: An examination via traditional communication postulates*, "Western Journal of Speech Communication" 54, 1990, pp. 1-20.

[4] M. Burgoon, F.G. Hunsaker, E.J. Dawson, *Human Communication*, Thousand Oaks 1994, p. 21.

[5] L. Samovar, R.E. Porter, E.R. McDaniel, C.S. Roy, *Communication between cultures*, Belmont 1998, p. 23.

[6] A.L. Kroeber, C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Cambridge 1952, p. 357.

[7] G. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Beverly Hills 1984, p. 51.

[8] J.P. Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, New York 1995, p. 9.

[9] *Culturally Speaking: Managing Rapport through Talk across Cultures*, ed. H. Spencer-Oatey, London 2004, p. 4.

interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour". The interpretative role of culture is especially important when considering cross-cultural interaction.

Miscommunication

Speech is produced mostly automatically, and understanding of it is apperceptive[10], or, to use a more up-to-date expression, is driven by expectations which, in their turn, are based on one's discourse and cultural experience. Therefore, transfer on the level of language and pragmatics is possible, which may result in misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Miscommunication occurs when, communicating cross-culturally, people are not aware of the fact that others might be applying differing rules for speaking[11] or cultural scripts (Goddard 2007)[12], or contextualization cues[13]. As Riley[14] puts it, "[p]ragmatic errors are the result of an interactant's imposing the social rules of one culture on his communicative behavior in a situation where the social rules of another culture would be more appropriate".

Recently, the idea of cultural scripts has been very popular in cross-cultural studies. Cultural scripts allow of explaining cultural differences in a very economical way. Thus, Donal Carbaugh very aptly explains why Finns are stereotypically labeled as silent by Americans. He describes the relevant cultural script in the form of 5 rules, but it might be enough to quote the first two:
1. One should not state what is obvious;
2. If speaking, one should say something worthy of everyone's attention[15].
Even these two "rules" can explain why Americans engaged in

 "small talk" may, to Finns, seem to be stating the obvious, and thus to be superficial.

Due to Anna Wierzbicka's influence, cultural scripts often get associated with the so called semantic/conceptual primes constituting Natural Semantic Metalanguage[16].

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[10]　L.P. Yakubinsky, *O dialogičeskoy reči*, [in:] L.P. Yakubinsky, *Yazyk i yego funktsionirovanie*, ed. A.A. Leontiev, Moscow 1923, p. 38.

[11]　N. Wolfson, *Compliments in cross-cultural perspective*, [in:] J.M.Valdes, *Culture bound: bridging the cultural gap in language teaching*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 112-120.

[12]　C. Goddard, *Cultural scripts*, [in:] *Handbook of Pragmatics*, online 2007, www.benjamins.com/online/hop.

[13]　J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, Cambridge 1982.

[14]　P. Riley, *"Well don't blame me! – On the interpretation of pragmatic errors"*, [in:] *Contrastive Pragmatics*, ed. W. Oleksy, Amsterdam and Philadelphia 1989, pp. 231-249.

[15]　D. Carbaugh, *Talking American: Cultural discourses on Donahue*, Norwood, NJ 2004, p. 42.

[16]　A. Wierzbicka, *Experience, Evidence, and Sense: The Hidden Cultural Legacy of English*, Oxford 2010, pp. 16-18.

Cliff Goddard[17], e.g., claims that because cultural scripts are written in semantic primes they have a great advantage over technical modes of description, especially when a field worker has to employ native speaker consultants. Well, it would be difficult to find any other application for NSM and semantic primes. If unacquainted with the works by Goddard and Wierzbicka, the reader would not be likely to guess what scripts their formulations in NSM stand for.

Cultural scripts are invoked and evoked by what Gumperz[18] calls contextualization cues, that is, "any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signaling of contextual presuppositions"[19]. Native speakers of a language are usually tolerant to foreigners with a poor command of their language, but if a fluent speaker of their language misuses contextualization cues, they attribute it to evil design. Responses to contextualization cues are automatic, and, what complicates the issue, conclusions are made not about the other person's use of language but about their intentions, and "inferences drawn from indirect interpretation of cues seem as "real" as those drawn from what is directly said"[20].

The contrastive studies mentioned above had been meant to expose the differences between various languages to facilitate foreign language learning. But it is only relatively recently that contrastive studies have reached the level of intercultural pragmatics.

Case Study

Description

The study reported here is based on an integrated approach where equal attention is paid to both pragmatic and language transfer. In such an approach, structure and action will be seen as two interpenetrating perspectives[21]. The matter is that speakers are constrained by the structure of their native language: in "constructing utterances in discourse one fits one's thoughts into available linguistic frames"[22].

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[17] C. Goddard, *op. cit.*, online 2006.

[18] J. Gumperz, *op. cit.*

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 131.

[20] J. Gumperz, D. Tannen, "*Individual and social differences in language use*", [in:] *Individual differences in language ability and language behavior*, eds. Ch. Fillmore, J.D. Kempler, W. Wang, New York 1979, pp. 305-325.

[21] P. Linell, *The Written Language Bias in Linguistics*, Oxford 2005.

[22] D.L. Slobin, *From Thought and Language to Thinking for Speaking*, [in:] *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, eds. J. Gumperz, S. Levinosn, Cambridge 1996, pp. 70-96.

Generally, the analysis was based on the slightly modified model of communication proposed by Lasswell, as in Burgoon et al.[23]: Who – Says What – To Whom – In Which Situation – With What Effect.

The study is a part of a project involving a contrastive study of some aspects of communicative behaviour of individuals representing the Anglo, Russian/Ukrainian and Polish cultures. Here it will be reported only the part concerning representatives of the Anglo and Russian/Ukrainian cultures.

To find out if there were differences and similarities in extending invitations and paying compliments, a questionnaire was prepared and responses to it were obtained from 50 speakers of American English. 20 speakers of Russian were asked to give responses in Russian. The number of Russian respondents who submitted compliments in Russian was small as there was a possibility to refer to previous research[24], According to Serebriakova's findings, the English and Russian compliments differed mostly in reference to 'appearance' (23% and 31%) and inner moral qualities (18% and 10%), respectively. Our figures were basically the same.

Such results do not give any cue to possible gaffes the English and Russians might commit in interactions between them. We made an attempt to find out if there were intercultural differences in the ends for which compliments are paid. The questionnaire included the question: "What is your purpose for paying compliments?" The answers were: to please someone – 95%, to ingratiate themselves – 15%, to cheer someone up – 15%, and as a prelude to asking for a favour – 10%. The latter feature, i.e. paying a compliment meaning to later ask for a favour, according to the results obtained by Anna Kuzio[25] and Anatolij Dorodnych and Anna Kuzio[26], is more characteristic for the Russian and Polish respondents rather than the English-speaking ones.

For the purpose of further insight into their performance in English, 50 Russian respondents (students of the Department of English Philology at National University in Kharkov) were asked to give English language versions of invitations and compliments in symmetrical (friend to friend) and asymmetrical (employer to employee, employee to employer) situations.

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[23] M. Burgoon, F.G. Hunsaker, E.J. Dawson, *Human Communication*, Thousand Oaks 1994, p. 25.

[24] R.V. Serebriakova, *Natsionalnaya spetsyfika komplimenta i pohvaly v russkoy i anglijskoy kommunikativnyh kulturah*, [In:] *Jazyk, kommunikatsyia i sotsyalnaya sreda. Issue 1.*, 2001, http://tpl1999.narod.ru/WebLSE2001/Serebr.htm [access: 12.04.2015]**.**

[25] A. Kuzio, *Exploitation of Schemata in Persuasive and Manipulative Discourse in English, Polish and Russian*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2014.

[26] A. Dorodnych, A. Kuzio, *The role of cultural scripts and contextualization cues in intercultural (mis)communication*, [in:] B. Kryk-Kastovsky, *Intercultural Miscommunication Past and Present*, Frankfurt am Main–Berlin 2012.

To make the analysis more objective, the versions of dialogues produced by non-native speakers of English were presented for comments to 10 native speakers of English (NS).

Discussion

The judges, members of Anglo-Saxon cultures, as we intuitively expected, marked as inappropriate the submitted English language versions of quite a few Russian respondents – 26 out of the total 50, i.e. 52%. The commonest error was the use of the same register for both formal and informal situations.

Invitations

Quite a few inappropriate versions were found in invitations and responses to them. For example, "May I invite you...?" addressed to a friend the judges found to be too formal, which the judges found to be too formal, another invitation (also to a friend), began with "Look here...", which a native speaker of English found inappropriate as it is normally used 'to emphasize a point, and yet another invitation (a male employer insisting on taking out his female employee) was characterized as sexual harassment.

Example 1: (1) *(Female friend to female friend):*
A: *What will you say about going to the party with me?*
B: *Oh, I like it.*
Comment by NS: "What would you say" strikes me as more correct, and the response should be "I would like it."

Example 2: (2) *(Female employee to female employer):*
A: *Hey, let's go to the theatre today.*
B: *I'm afraid I'll be busy today.*
A: *Sorry about that.*
Comment by NS: This would be too informal a statement for most employees. Unless employer-employee relationships were very relaxed in this particular company or business.

Example 3: (3) *(Female employee to male employer)*
A: *Don't you mind if I invite you to a restaurant to discuss some details of our work*
B: *I don't mind, but you'd better find out the best time at my secretary.*
Comment by JK: "Would you mind if I invited you..." would be more appropriate in A, and "from" should be used instead of "at" in B.

The matter is that, in English, negative interrogatives "challenge a negative expectation that has been assumed to exist in the context"[27]. Therefore, in many contexts negative interrogative would sound unacceptable.

Compliments

In the 'friend to friend' situation one compliment sounded too formal: '*May I …?*'. Some inappropriate compliments were addressed to an employer:

> Example 4: (4) *Female to female:*
> – *I would like to mention that this **brilliant** ring of yours is so splendid that I can't help looking at it with admiration. It is just for you and it stresses your charm and beauty.* [should be **'diamond'** – A.K.]
> Comment by NS: Sounds too effusive, my immediate response is "What a creep."

> Example 5: (5) *Male to female:*
> – *Mrs. Smith, you look just great! I always knew that I have the most beautiful boss.*
> Comment by a native speaker: What a creep! In many work environments this might well be seen as sexual harassment.

> Example 6: (6) *Female to male:*
> – *You look wonderful today. This suit fits you very much.*
> Comment by a native speaker: Rather personal, not sure about saying it to a boss – it depends upon the relationship.

Sometimes possible misunderstanding was due to a lexical error, like the compliment addressed to a friend: "You look very solemn in that suit" (bad translation of the Russian *toržestvennyi*) or "You look extravagant" (the Russian *ekstravagantnyi* is not at all the equivalent of extravagant).

The following example is a bit more difficult to explain:

> Example 7: (7) *Female employee to female employer:*
> A: *How can you manage to do all this?*
> B: *You're so delicate.*
> Comments by NS: 1) "Can" should be replaced by "do". "Delicate" is wrong, but I cannot work out what it should be. 2) Not a native speaker compliment phrasing. "How DID you manage to do all this [or 'get all this done']?" is more likely. The response is very odd. It has no clear meaning.

The possible explanation could be that in Russian the context requires the use of *lubiezny-*, and according to the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language*[28], it

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is synonymous with *obhoditelny*, which can be rendered as "considerate", while the more frequent meaning of "delicate" in English is "frail", and this would be far from the proper acknowledgement of the compliment. Maybe "You're so nice" would sound more appropriate.

That could be explained as language transfer can affect the socio-pragmatic aspect as well.

Example 8: (8) *Employer: Good work.*

Employee: Never mind.

NS comments: "This is just wrong", "improper". Obviously, the Russian speaker had in mind the Russian word *nichego*, which in this context should have been rendered as "not bad".

Conclusion

1. Much of the data from the studies on intra-cultural communication does not allow to conclude with certainty where to expect *faux pas* on the part of non-native speakers. Of more value are the results of studies on the ways NNS fare in encounters with native speakers.
2. Although the simulations of dialogues produced by Russian speakers in English cannot compare with observations of real intercultural communication, the method of soliciting comments by native speakers helps to make up for the artificiality of role-play, as such comments can be indicative of possible areas of miscommunication in real-life interactions with native speakers of English.

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Theoretical and Practical Problems of Acquiring Competence in Intercultural Communication in Polish, English and Russian

Summary. Human beings have a great need to be with people who are similar to themselves. This is because they share the same ways of doing things, the same values, as well as function by similar rules. When one is with people who tend to be similar to you, the ways of doing things just seem like common sense. However, sometimes one realizes that the situation appears to be more complex. When this happens one realizes that the issues that have been taken for granted about human interaction are not necessarily the same for everyone. The study reported here is based on an integrated approach where equal attention is paid to both pragmatic and language transfer. The study is a part of a project involving a contrastive study of some aspects of communicative behaviour of individuals representing the Anglo, Russian/Ukrainian and Polish cultures.

Keywords: intercultural communication, intercultural competence, discourse, deception in language

Teoretyczne i praktyczne aspekty nabywania kompetencji w zakresie komunikacji międzykulturowej w języku polskim, angielskim i rosyjskim

Streszczenie. Ludzie wykazują potrzebę przebywania wśród innych osób, które wydają się podobne do nich samych. Taka potrzeba uwarunkowana jest tym, że czują się pewniej wśród osób, które działają w podobny sposób, wierzą w te same wartości, a także funkcjonują według podobnych założeń zachowawczych oraz komunikacyjnych. Czasami jednak zdajemy sobie sprawę, że sytuacja komunikacyjna jest bardziej skomplikowana; często dzieje się tak, gdy mamy kontakt z grupami komunikacyjnymi z różnych środowisk kulturowych. Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje wyniki badań opartych na zintegrowanym podejściu, które uwzględnia w swoich wynikach aspekt transferu, pragmatyki oraz środków językowych, które są konieczne w procesie komunikacji interkulturowej. Badanie stanowi część projektu, który koncentruje się na analizie aspektów komunikacyjnych jednostek będących reprezentantami kultury anglojęzycznej, polskiej, ukraińskiej oraz rosyjskiej.

Słowa klucze: komunikacja międzykulturowa, kompetencje międzykulturowe, dyskurs, kłamstwo