Intercultural Communication in the Multicultural World

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Abstract

Today's intercultural communication forms the basis for designing the multicultural world, and represents an important and interesting area of research. This article focusses on the problems of modern intercultural communication and aims to determine and justify the role of intercultural communication in the construction of the multicultural world. This is achieved through the identification of the characteristics of intercultural communication, leading to the establishment of mutual understanding and the formation of solidarity. The theoretical significance of this article lies in its qualitative research based on the analysis of the literature on intercultural communication, clarification of the key concepts, and the formulation of conclusions. The article is devoted to the study of intercultural communication from the perspective of Lasswell's (1948) model, which distinguished the communicative act as based on five components: communicator, recipient, message, channel, and effect. The nature of intercultural communication is revealed through the analysis of these five components. The message, as a component of the communicative act, is understood as a message transmitted in a specific language. Communicator and recipient are considered as representatives of different cultures who may have diametrically opposing characteristics. The perspective channel of effective intercultural communication is seen as the increasing use of modern information technologies, whilst the effect is in constructive communication forming the basis of cultural integration.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, communication, culture, communicative act, national cultures.

Introduction

The modern world, apart from being extremely diverse, is also significantly disunited. Difficulties in finding and making common decisions, lack of practice (and sometimes desire) of dialogue and consensus building, push ethno-cultural groups to construct opposition to "others." At the same time, the development of the media space has led to an intensification of interpersonal contact, and consequently, to an increase in communication between the representatives of different cultures.

Non-western civilizations are increasingly included in international relations as direct subjects. Civilizations conduct dialogue with each other about the constantly redefined balance of our own and others' identity and otherness. Such dialogue of civilizations in many ways determines interethnic, intercultural, and ultimately, inter-civilizational interaction. Thus, intercultural communication is the basis for designing the multicultural world and has become one of the most important and interesting areas of academic research.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to determine and justify the role of intercultural communication in the construction of the multicultural world through the identification of its characteristics leading to the establishment of mutual understanding and the formation of solidarity.

The theoretical significance of this article lies in its qualitative research analysis of the literature on intercultural communication, the clarification of its key concepts, and the formulation of conclusions.

Discussion

The phenomenon of intercultural communication is complex, and representatives of various academic fields of scientific knowledge – philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, philologists, and culturologists – have studied it. This makes it possible to look at the phenomenon from various different points of view, and through comparing them, form a holistic view of this complex component of social reality.

Today, international trade is constantly developing, vast numbers of tourists are traveling, continental migration flows are increasing, international education programs are becoming increasingly popular, and numerous international conferences are held each year with participants of different nationalities and representatives of various cultural groups. As a result, there is an acute problem of a lack of tolerance and respect for other cultures, with a need to overcome hostility towards others simply because of their otherness. All this makes intercultural communication one of the most important and interesting topics for study.

Scientists believe that in the 20th century there was a so-called "cultural turn" – the result of a linguistic turn that designated a language as the main research theme of social sciences. Synthesis of sociology, anthropology and semiotics gave rise to new concepts. On society itself, its specifics, structure and its nature of social interaction, scientists have increasingly begun to determine based on culture and its features. The terms "values," "norms," "traditions," "stereotypes," and "national character," through which the interrelation of culture, language and ethnos are explained and peculiarities of intercultural communication are determined, are deemed of particular importance to the social sciences.

First, let us refer to the terminology itself. "Intercultural communication" is an adequate understanding of two participants of the communicative act, with each belonging to different national cultures (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1990). This definition can be supplemented with the possibility of there being more than two participants in the communicative act: it could equally be a group of people, and even the dialogue between civilizations also can be considered as a form of intercultural communication. The heart of the problem lies in some fundamental questions: "How do communicants with different ethno-cultural origins interact?" and "How do they reach mutual understanding?" No less interesting is the reverse side of the problem – the difficulties of intercultural communication, conflicts between the representatives of different cultures, their potential causes which can be used to overcome such challenges.

One point to consider here is to look at intercultural communication from the perspective of the model of Lasswell (1948), an American political scientist and sociologist, and one of the founders of the Chicago School of Sociology, who distinguished the communicative act to include five components: communicator, recipient, message, channel, and effect. Lasswell's (1948) model seems readily adopted within the literature as the most appropriate for the purposes of the current research due to its number of components, its implication of social context, and therefore does not stray beyond the scope of the current study.

Message

The message, as a component of the communicative act, is understood as a message transmitted in a specific language. Indeed, the most important function of a language is guardianship of the culture it represents. It follows, therefore, that language is inextricably linked with ethnos, formed through the storage and transfer of culture, traditions and public consciousness of a speech collective (Ter-Minasova, 2000). The features of thinking, fixed in a language and transmitted through messages, in turn affect the perception and behaviors of its carriers.

However, proficiency in the same language does not guarantee mutual understanding between different people, and the reason for the conflict may be due to cultural divergence. Sorokin (2006) stated that any society can only be fully described and understood through the prism of its inherent system of norms and values, i.e., its culture. Factually, native culture is a shield protecting the national identity of the people, and a solid barrier that fences off other peoples and cultures (Ter-Minasova, 2000). This does not mean that a communicator and a recipient belonging to different cultures cannot understand each other. However, for the construction of effective communication, it is also necessary to understand the cultural characteristics of each of its participants.

Communicator and Recipient

"Communicator" and "recipient" in intercultural communication are representatives of two (or more) different cultures who interact by means of messaging with a specific purpose.

Each culture has many symbols of its social environment, with both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication through which people orient themselves and act accordingly in their everyday life (Kochetkov, 2002). In this way, each message contains cultural context, caused by the belonging of the communicants to a particular culture, which

thereby determines their certain ways of thinking. Persikova (2008) distinguished the following components of the cultural context: communication and language, clothing and appearance, food and table rules, time and its perception, the nature of relationships, norms and values, the system of religious beliefs and perceptions, mental activity and methods of teaching, work organization and attitude to work. For example, each nation has its own system of gestures that other people can interpret directly opposite (for example, Bulgarians turn their heads from side to side to mean "yes," whereas in Russia and most other countries such a gesture means "no"). The difference in the lexical volume of languages is also obvious: some facts that in Russian can be explained within a few minutes may equally fit into just two or three sentences in the English language.

For some cultures, even food has a sacred meaning: for example, Hindus do not eat beef, whilst Muslims and Jews do not consume pork; and although Russians do not have food restrictions, they may refrain from certain foodstuffs during religious fasts. On the contrary, it could be suggested that Koreans eat, probably, almost anything. As to cultural attitudes towards time, it is sometimes said that Germans are very punctual, as they consider every minute, whereas the inhabitants of some regions of Africa in particular are guided by the rise and fall of the sun, and for them the concept of time has much less of a fundamental significance to life.

The misunderstanding of cultural differences can cause a sense of cultural shock in communicants, which arises as a result of comparing one's own culture with that of another, and an incorrect interpretation of that difference. According to Kochetkov (2002), there are six aspects to cultural shock; tension, a sense of loss or deprivation, a sense of rejection, a mix in roles, unexpected anxiety or disgust, and a sense of inferiority. However, the majority of scientists consider cultural shock to be a normal phenomenon, and a natural part of the process of individuals adapting to new conditions (Myasoedov, 2003), and can even be considered useful for personal self-development and for personal growth (Kochetkov, 2002).

Belonging to a national culture determines the national character of each communicant; such as certain socio-psychological traits accepted as specific to a given ethnic community. Among the many scientists who have studied the national character, Wundt (2010) and Lebon (2011) created ethnocentric concepts of national character. The views of Franz Uri Boas, a German-born American anthropologist and one of the founders of cultural anthropology, were, however, completely opposite – he was in a state of holy war against racism (Duke, 2001). National cultural imprint has a special power, because even if a person finds themself in a situation outside the realms of their own culture or familiar way of life, they are still able to follow certain canons inherent to their own culture. At the same time, it should be noted that national character is determined by certain social factors, and as the product of our social relations. Its formation is therefore influenced most by cultural components such as our traditions, customs, rituals, everyday culture, everyday behaviors, "national pictures of the world," and artistic culture.

There are various typologies of culture that can reveal their characteristics. One of the most famous is the concept of Hofstede (2008), which resulted from a study into the national culture of 64 different countries. Hofstede singled out five independent variables that explained the differences between our national cultures; distance of power, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, striving to avoid uncertainty, and long-term and short-term orientation. Distance of power is a representation of the "lower strata" of an unequal distribution of power "above." The highest is observed in Latin American,

Asian and African countries. Masculinity is an orientation to self-affirmation, with femininity is an orientation to preservation. The greatest indicator of masculinity is observed in Japan, combined with long-term orientation and the desire to avoid uncertainty. Similar indicators of different countries point to their common cultural past, a similar historical development.

American anthropologist Hall (2002), who was the creator of proxemics (the science of perception of space), divided cultures into two types: highly contextual (of the East) and low-contextual (of the West). In a highly contextual culture, a calm manner of communication, a large number of pauses made during conversation, the importance of non-verbal symbols, and avoiding conflicts are characteristic. Whereas a low contextual culture can be distinguished by expressiveness, avoidance of silence, preference for accurate and clear assessments, and the possibility of using conflict in order to find the right solutions.

Lewis (2001), on the other hand, distinguished three types of culture: as monoactive, polyactive, and reactive. Anglo-Saxons are representatives of a "monoactive" culture, as they perform their work clearly, without being distracted by other tasks. Latinos and southern Europeans belong to a "polyactive" culture, often doing many things at once, although they may not in actuality bring them to concise end. The culture of Asian countries, however, is "reactive," where activities are organized as a reaction to the ongoing changes in society.

Therefore, after examining three concepts, it can be seen that representatives of different cultures can have diametrically opposing characteristics. Together, these concepts can help us to understand our human behavioral features (the concept of Hall, 2002), the character and way in which we think (the concept of Hofstede, 2008), and the specifics of our actions (the concept of Lewis, 2001), for all participants of an intercultural communication.

No less important when considering national cultures are the stereotypes we apply as a social phenomenon. A person processes information on the basis of their own preexisting ideas about the surrounding world, and from their expectations held with regards to the representatives of different cultures. The incoming information passes through a "filter" of stereotypes and adapts, therefore, to preexisting representations. Stereotypes and a person's personal beliefs affect not only their interpretation of information, but also their ability to perceive it as a whole. Krasheninnikova (2007) identified two grounds for such stereotyping; the principle of saving effort and of protecting existing interests. Levada (2002) wrote that stereotypes are formed by the stream of public opinion and can simplify any social phenomenon right up to mythological schemes. Husserl (1999), followed later by his thoughts being continued by Schutz (2003), wrote that phenomena are endowed with meaning through human consciousness, therefore, it is necessary to reduce them to the natural attitude. Berger and Lukman (1995) determined the typing and formation of identity as elements of maintaining social order.

The ethno-methodological approach of Garfinkel (1968) helps to explain the work of stereotypes on the recreation of reality. He wrote that social reality is constructed, i.e., becomes possible, during the communication process, which is conducted according to certain rules. Each subject of the action has a background expectation – a kind of ruleset which is followed based on different situations. However, these rules themselves are born from the same subjective acts. Background expectations are the same stereotypes that form as a result of human interactions, and, in turn, determine, to some extent, the further

actions of the individual. Garfinkel (1968) conducted a series of demonstrative experiments, during which he and a group of scientists destroyed the normal course of interaction of individuals with the help of unexpected actions and nonstandard phrases. In this case, surprise or indignation was recorded for people who nevertheless tried to build a communicative process according to the scheme most familiar to them, i.e., they acted in accordance with their expectations. Thus, Garfinkel (1968) showed that social reality is reflexive, and that it arises in the course of subjective interpretation.

Channel

Today we live in a time when the development of information technology largely determines our way of life, the features of the perception of our surrounding reality and, of course, the ways and forms of our communication. The ubiquitous spread of the Internet has led to an intensification of interpersonal contact and the joint accumulation and use of intellectual capital. McLuhan (2005) was the first to study new communication channels, anticipating through his theory the events taking place today. He believed that the development of society is determined by the development of communication media, or rather, the way it is organized (McLuhan, 2005). Thanks initially to the spread of radio and television, and today the Internet, people exist within a "global village" type of society, where everyone interacts with everyone, even when staying at home. Digital communication today has certain characteristics: it is interactive, virtual, dispersive, hypertextual, modular, automated, and variable (Scolari, 2010). The main communication channel is a web of international computer networks, which are able to provide virtually instantaneous movement of any form of information between disparate parties (Sokolova, 2010). Internet services such as Web 2.0 allow people to participate in the creation of the information universe. In this, there are, however, certain pros and cons. As an unconditional pro (according to the research topic), it is today possible to locate information about almost any existing or preexisted culture. Therefore, having the desire for information means that a person can prepare in advance a good base for effective interaction with a representative of any culture. The more knowledge we possess, the more opportunities are opened for choosing the right tactics of communication.

Mead (1997), at the beginning of the 20th century, introduced the notion of "generalized other," which denotes the totality of rules and symbols that need to be mastered in order to interact with others. In the 21st century, thanks to Web 2.0 technologies (and soon Web 3.0), we are afforded the opportunity to learn a whole system of symbols and thereby to interact with any person, from virtually any location (of either party), and at any point in time. In addition, we have gained significant advantages from the development of science. For example, the president of the International Sociological Association M. Burawoy has offered to conduct regular online forums and webinars on global issues, in which scientists from around the world can participate (as opposed to in-person events that they would perhaps less-likely have traveled to attend). Nevertheless, there are also certain cons to these new forms of communication. The so-called phenomenon of "permanent partial attention," whereby a person does not stop to break their attention for a considerably long time whilst working, reading or otherwise engaged with something on the Internet, can lead to a person's dependence on the Internet; always needing to constantly look for something, watch something, or communicate with someone. A person appears to lose their natural information filters due to the constant practice of receiving information that, in real life, would never have been received (for example, due to

the preexistence of a negative idea about a particular culture). Also, it is deemed necessary to acknowledge the ever-growing power of the media's influence on both the individual and society, which from the means of information transfer become full participants in the interaction.

Modern societies continue to function in conditions when the formation of public consciousness shifts from the sphere of political institutions to the area of communication, mainly connected with the established media. In a broad sense, there is a substitution of political legitimacy by communicative tuning of public opinion in a networked society (Castells, 2010). Information that does not exist in the media cannot, therefore, be considered to be in the public opinion either. Hence, today's media forms the most important element of a system of checks and balances, and the guardian of the morality of power and its conformity to ideals. The media have the peculiarity of submitting information in a way that is convenient and beneficial to one or more influential parties.

Effect

Finally, the last item of Lasswell's model to be considered is the effect that is expected from communication. Furnham and Bochner (1986) describe four types of interaction of cultures; genocide, assimilation, segregation, and integration. The types suggested are the outcomes of the interaction, but in fact there is also something that precedes it. This is the process of intercultural communication (in one form or another), on the basis of which a final balance of force between communicants will be determined. Therefore, every communicative act has an effect, which is another "step" to one of the four proposed options for interaction. For example, nationalist communicative politics, conducted with the help of the media, noncompliance with the norms of political correctness, not to mention the propagation of hatred of other cultures – all this forms the basis of targeted genocide through communication.

As another case, a culture that has the largest number of channels of communication and is the most qualitative leads distribution of its own values and beliefs has every reason to win over more people. Assimilation may not be eternal, but may be expressed in the form of acculturation – this often happens abroad. On the other hand, modern communication channels, being highly globalized, at the same time reflect a tendency to increase segregation of the communicative space. This is expressed in the creation of a large number of closed thematic communities, television channels for representatives of different cultures and faiths, etc. Fragmentation of the media space leads to the development of cultural segregation. And, finally, constructive communication is the basis for the integration of cultures. A similar type of thinking, common value and belief does not and cannot exist, since all people are initially different. The integration of cultures assumes their compatibility, where different cultures retain their individualities and do not unite in the same society (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

Conclusion

Through the choice of the correct model for analyzing the role of intercultural communication in the multicultural world, we identified the characteristics of intercultural communication that affect the achievement of mutual understanding.

We considered intercultural communication from the perspective of Lasswell's (1948) model, which distinguished five components pertinent to the communicative act;

communicator, recipient, message, channel, and effect. The nature of intercultural communication is revealed through the analysis of these components. The message as a component of the communicative act is understood as a message transmitted in a specific language. Communicator and recipient are considered as representatives of different cultures who can have diametrically opposing characteristics: as in behavioral features (the concept of Hall, 2002), their character and way of thinking (the concept of Hofstede, 2008), and the specifics of their actions (the concept of Lewis, 2001) as the participants of intercultural communication. The perspective channel of effective intercultural communication is the increasing use of today's modern information technologies, and the effect of their usage – with constructive communication as the basis for the integration of cultures.

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