

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A CULTURAL AWARENESS

У статті були проаналізовані теоретичні аспекти проблеми міжкультурного спілкування, розроблені правила для забезпечення його більшої ефективності та запобігання конфліктів. Основні з них: активне слухання та розвиток соціокультурної компетентності, що включає обізнаність щодо існуючих цінностей, традицій, правил етикету інших країн тощо.

Ключові слова: культура, міжкультурне спілкування, конфлікти, міжкультурна компетентність, етикет, ефективне спілкування.

В статье проанализированы теоретические аспекты проблемы межкультурного общения, разработаны правила для обеспечения его эффективности и предупреждения конфликтов. Основные из них: активное слушание и развитие социокультурной компетентности, что включает осведомленность о существующих ценностях, традициях, правилах этикета других стран и т.д.

Ключевые слова: культура, межкультурное общение, конфликты, межкультурная компетентность, этикет, эффективное общение.

In this article were outlined the scientific approaches into the problem of intercultural communication, selected and described the rules of minimizing the risk of making the elementary mistakes and improving intercultural communication. Among them are: listening carefully and development of intercultural competence that includes being well aware of other countries' values, traditions, etiquette etc.

Key words: culture, intercultural communication, conflicts, intercultural competence, etiquette, effective communication.

Actuality of investigation. Communication is a critical part of our lives. It supports us in our own development, it influences the quality of the relationships we have with others, it informs us and it is a way to understand the world in which we live. Being able to communicate effectively can be challenging even when we are familiar with the content and context of the information being communicated and when we have similar backgrounds with our conversation partners. There are degrees of diversity within cultures and this level of diversity increases when we cross cultures. As the degrees of diversity increase, the level of complexity increases as well, causing communication to be more challenging. Nevertheless, the richness of the outcomes from communicating across cultures when we have intercultural diversity is often worth the investment in bridging any communication difficulties that may arise.

The problems of culture, intercultural communication and conflicts were also studied by Geert Hofstede, Edward T. Hall, Glenn Fischer, Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, Iryna Sokolets and others.

The aim of the work is to explore ways in which we may prevent and lessen the incidence and intensity of conflicts that may surface as a result of intercultural communication.

The field of intercultural communication is just more than 50 years old and was initially established by Edward T. Hall as a way to improve the performance and relationships of US diplomats as they interacted around the world. The first text in the field is «The Silent Language», which places a heavy emphasis on the nonverbal aspects of communication (how direct is eye contact, the nature

and degree of facial expressions and the amount and nature of gestures used to express a point) and how communication is impacted by differences in the perception of space and time [2, 3].

People from different cultures develop different worldviews because they are shaped by different cultural influences. Worldviews influence how we live in and make meaning of the world in which we live. Glenn Fischer refers to this as a mindset and it is made from our education, family life, community, religion, values, geographical location and psychological influences among others [1].

Geert Hofstede, a social psychologist, identified four cultural dimensions. He later added a fifth dimension based on research he conducted in China. These dimensions measure the following: *power distance*, which reflects how power is distributed and the beliefs of the people within a context that they have equal access to it; *individualism & collectivism*, which measures the degree to which individuals are integrated as members into groups; *masculinity & femininity*, which measures the degree of difference between men's and women's role behavior; *uncertainty avoidance*, which is the degree to which a culture is comfortable and more tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity; and *long-term and short-term orientation*, which addresses the values attributed to both ways of thinking and acting [4].

Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner have showed the different layers to culture: the *outer layer* (consists of observable characteristics, the artifacts used by a culture such as food, language, houses, shrines and so on); the *middle layer* (reflects the norms and values of a culture, defines what is right and wrong, good and bad); the *core layer* (the matters of existence, the meaning of life, relationships with the environment, people and community). At the outer layer we can most easily measure similarities and differences between cultures and where stereotypes are formed. Stereotypes are what we assume to be characteristic of and true about all members of a particular group based on what we observe about a large portion of that group [6].

Communicative interaction between people-representatives of different cultural communities is functionally specified as ***Intercultural Communication***. Speech partners in intercultural interaction may have different worldview, way and style of life, and models of speech and non-speech communication. There are ways that may help prepare ourselves for intercultural communication and facilitate understanding. First of all, a key to effective cross-cultural communication is formation of ***Intercultural Competence*** that means a cultural awareness, characterized by a new vision of one's existence and personality and intermediary position between the native and foreign cultures. This awareness, produced by knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation – similarities and distinctive features – between the «world of origin» and the «world of the target community» includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds. It is the ability to understand other ways of life, other values, and to approach one's own values differently, refusing existing stereotypes and prejudices. In a person's cultural competences the various cultures (national, regional, social), to which that person gained access, do not simply co-exist side by side but are compared and contrasted and they actively interact to produce an enriched, integrated «pluricultural» competence, indispensable for effective intercultural communication [5].

It is important to understand that language not only accumulates and preserves the culture of the nation and transfers it to other generations but it also actively impacts its user, forming him, forcing him its unique vision of the world, characteristic of the language and culture of human relations and reflected and preserved by this language. For example, in the UK and Commonwealth countries the word «compromise» has a positive meaning (as a consent, an agreement where both parties win something); in North America and Ireland it may, at times, have negative connotations (as both parties lose something). So, language is not only words and rules to combine them in speech but it is also a bearer of culture and, for instance, such «trifles» as inadequate expression of introduction, apology, agreement, etc. may result in an intercultural conflict, in the loss of a contract or a reliable partner. Therefore successful participation in intercultural communication presupposes knowledge of the national specific rules of behavior, speech behavior including.

«Interculturally competent» person also should be well aware of politeness strategies, which

differ from culture to culture, since they are formed within different social and cultural backgrounds and are a frequent source of misunderstandings.

For instance, In Mediterranean European countries, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, it is normal, or at least widely tolerated, to arrive half an hour late for a dinner invitation, whereas in Germany and in the United States this would be considered very rude. If invited to dinner, in some Asian countries it is well-mannered to leave right after the dinner: the ones who don't leave may indicate they have not eaten enough. In the Indian sub-continent, Europe, South America, and North American countries this is considered rude, indicating that the guest only wanted to eat but wouldn't enjoy the company with the hosts. In Italy and Guatemala is common for people in gatherings to say goodbye many time when they leave, for example, someone could say goodbye in the living room and the chat for a while, the say goodbye in the door, and chat a little more, finally say goodbye in their car's door and then chat a little more until people leave.

Another essential component of intercultural communication, to which due attention should be paid, is non-verbal behavior that includes body language (gestures, facial expression, posture, eye contact, body contact and proxemics), and extra-linguistic speech sounds, carrying conventionalized meanings (e.g. 'sh' – requesting silence; 'ugh' – expressing disgust), and prosodic features: voice quality (gruff, breathy, piercing, etc.), pitch (growling, whining, screaming, etc.), loudness (whispering, murmuring, shouting, etc.) and length (e.g. *ve-e-ery good!*), which separately and in combination help produce paralinguistic effects, important not only in intercultural communication, but also in communication in general [5].

For example, non-verbal behavior can be interpreted differently: showing the gesture «thumb held upwards» in the Americas, especially Brazil and the United States, means «everything's ok», while it is understood in some Islamic countries as a rude sexual sign. «Everything ok» is shown in western European countries, especially between pilots and divers, with the sign of the thumb and forefinger forming an «O». This sign means in Japan «now we may talk about money», in southern France the contrary («nothing, without any value»), in Eastern Europe and Russia it is an indecent sexual sign.

In Africa, avoiding eye contact or looking at the ground when talking to one's parents, an elder, or someone of higher social status is a sign of respect. In contrast, these same actions are signals of deception or shame (on the part of the doer) in North America and most of Europe.

Moreover, in North America as well as in Arabic countries the pauses between words are usually not too long, while in Japan pauses can give a contradictory sense to the spoken words. Enduring silence is perceived as comfortable in Japan, while in India, Europe and North America it may cause insecurity and embarrassment. Scandinavians, by Western standards, are more tolerant of silent breaks during conversations.

It is essential that people research the cultures and communication conventions of those whom they propose to meet. It is also prudent to set a clear agenda so that everyone understands the nature and purpose of the interaction.

We have selected and described the rules of minimizing the risk of making the elementary mistakes and improving intercultural communication:

- avoiding using slang and idioms, choosing words that will convey only the most specific denotative meaning;

- listening carefully and, if in doubt, ask for confirmation of understanding (particularly important if local accents and pronunciation are a problem);

- recognizing that accenting and intonation can cause meaning to vary significantly;

- respecting the local communication formalities and styles, and watch for any changes in body language;

- investigating resipient's culture;

- investigating resipient's perception of your culture by reading literature about your culture through their eyes before entering into communication with them. This will allow you to prepare yourself for projected views of your culture you will be bearing as a visitor in their culture;

being well aware of politeness strategies and etiquette.

If it is not possible to learn the other's language, it is expedient to show some respect by learning a few words. In all important exchanges, a translator can convey the message.

When writing, the choice of words represent the relationship between the reader and the writer so more thought and care should be invested in the text since it may well be thoroughly analyzed by the recipient.

Effective intercultural communication
can allow for more efficiency, with less misinterpretations and more productivity;
prevents conflict;
saves time, and
saves emotional energy.

When intercultural communication is effective, there is more richness from the diversity different cultural viewpoints can bring. When not effective, there are chances for misunderstanding and conflict, which inhibit productivity and may deteriorate into harming relationships.

There are ways that may help prepare ourselves for intercultural communication and facilitate understanding. First of all,

Conclusion. In this article we have explored the ways in which we communicate across cultures; outlined the scientific approach into the problem of intercultural communication; identified main types of intercultural misunderstanding; highlighted the value of effective intercultural communication and explored the ways of its improving.

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