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COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS NEGOTIATIONS (IBN) VIEWED SYNERGISTICALLY
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Ye.V. Tarasova. Communicative strategies of international business negotiations (IBN) viewed synergistically. The purpose of the paper is to excite theoretical interest in a synergistic approach to speech communication based on the principles of functional self-organizing systems operating in materially embedded ecological settings. The above approach is based on the principle of complex systems self-organization and their interaction with their extra-linguistic environment. Such systems, known in synergistics as "dissipating" or "embedded" (Prigogine1991) ones, are characterized by dynamic inner interaction of the components and integration, as subsystems, into more complex systemic entities. It is shown that in the process of the subsystems integration, their mutual accommodation is taking place, i.e. a balance is being established between their autonomy and their mutual dependence. It is claimed that the mutual adaptation principle also operates in the sphere of human interaction, cross-cultural communication including. The sphere if International Business Negotiations (IBN) is chosen as a specific example in order to illustrate how the above principle works in the concrete circumstances of cross-cultural communication, which can be described as a "give-and-take" process of mutual communicative adaptation. A survey of interdisciplinary IBN literature is presented and some basic assumptions that trigger off synergistic thinking about IBN are discussed. It is shown that within the general synergistic paradigm, the recently advanced Communication Accommodation Theory seems to provide the best-defined theoretical framework for studying IBN by integrating an interdisciplinary synergistic approach with a communicative focus.

Key words: Communication Accommodation Theory, functional self-organizing systems, international business negotiations, synergistic approach.

Е.В. Тарасова. Коммуникативные стратегии международных деловых переговоров в аспекте синергетики. Цель статьи – теоретическое обоснование целесообразности использования синергетического подхода к изучению речевой деятельности. Данный подход основывается на принципе самоорганизации сложных коммуникативных систем в их взаимодействии с экстралингвистической средой. Подобные системы, известные в синергетике как «диссипативные» или «вложенные» (Пригожин 1991), характеризуются сложным внутрисистемным взаимодействием компонентов и интегрированностью в качестве подсистемы в систему более высокого порядка. Показано, что в процессе интеграционного взаимодействия подсистем происходит их взаимная аккомодация, т.е. установление равновесия между автономией каждой из подсистем и их взаимной зависимостью. Утверждается, что принцип взаимной адаптации действует также и в сфере человеческой, в том числе, межкультурной коммуникации. В качестве примера самоорганизующейся коммуникативной системы рассматриваются международные деловые переговоры, представляющие собой межкультурный процесс «взаимных уступок» и, следовательно, динамичной коммуникативной адаптации сторон друг к другу. На основании сказанного делается вывод о целесообразности использования

синергетической теории речевой аккомодации в качестве теоретико-методологической базы для описания данной и подобных ей систем.

Ключевые слова: международные деловые переговоры, самоорганизующаяся функциональная система, синергический подход, теория коммуникативной адаптации.

О.В. Тарасова. Комунікативні стратегії міжнародних ділових переговорів в аспекті синергетики. Мета статті – теоретичне обрунтування доцільності використання синергетичного підходу до вивчення мовленнєвої діяльності. Такий підхід базується на принципі самоорганізації складних комунікативних систем та їх взаємодії із екстралінгвістичним середовищем. Подібні системи, відомі в синергетиці як «дисипативні» або «вкладені» (Пригожин 1991), характеризуються складною внутрішньосистемною взаємодією компонентів та інтрованістю в якості підсистеми в систему вищого порядку. Показано, что в процесі интеграційної взаємодії підсистем має місце їх взаємна акомодація, тобто встановлення рівноваги між автономією кожної з підсистем та їх взаємозалежністю. Стверджується, що принцип взаємної адаптації діє також і в сфері людської, в тому числі, міжкультурної комунікації. Як приклад комунікативної системи, що самоорганізується, наводиться сфера міжнародних ділових переговорів. Як теоретико-методологічна база для її опису пропонується теорія комунікативної адаптації.

Ключові слова: синергетичний підхід, функціональні системи, що самоорганізуються, теорія комунікативної адаптації, міжнародні ділові переговори.

The aim of this essay is to excite theoretical interest in the heuristic and pragmatic potential of a synergistic approach to speech communication based on the principles of functional units operating in materially embedded ecological settings. A core component of this approach is the concept of a *self- organizing system* conceived of as "an aggregate of interlocking parts" whose interaction is "triggered by difference" [Taylor 2001 : 59]. Interaction of parts, though, is not enough, as there is always a larger system of which the given aggregate is only a part. In synergistic thinking, non-linear, open entities – dissipative [Prigogine, Stangers 1977; Пригожин 1991] or autopoietic [Taylor 2001] systems, are not isolated entities: systems are linked to other systems, they exist in an environment from which they draw essential nourishment and to which they return the extrusions of their internal life [Хакен 1991, Режабек 1991]. Such (sub)systems are not indifferent to their environment, but dependent on it. The *internal* functioning of a system is determined by its own autonomous logic; its surviving in some environment is due to its "intelligent" responses to *external* conditions. This being the case, there must be a form of feedback by means of which self-correction is possible, so that the system can adapt flexibly to a variety of circumstances. In Taylor's [2001: 146] conceptualization, every system is "coupling" to its environment and the "coupling surface" that joins the system to its environment is an effect of progressive *mutual accommodation.* Because the system is adaptive, it can "learn". A self-organizing system, it follows, has a *regenerative capability* as a result of which the system and its environment continue to adapt to each other, evolving gradually to new patterns of co-association [Taylor 2001: 14]. Effective self-organization therefore requires management of a balance between autonomy and interdependence.

This kind of structural coupling, applied to society, is what is meant by *communication,* because human social (sub)systems also exist as unities of

components in the realm of language. Discourse is a socially and linguistically structured reality, for

- first, no message occurs in isolation; they are always components of a larger whole – a conversation, a campaign, a conference, a negotiation, etc.;

- second, the social meaning of a single message depends on the meaningful relations it has with other components of a larger whole;

- third, to successfully adapt to the complex "terrain" of interaction, communicators must manage their own needs, expectations, and desires while accommodating and adapting to the ever-changing interactional "landscape".

To generalize, the meaning of any component of language is always explained *functionally* [Chomsky 1965] by its place in the context of a unit larger than itself. The latter can be presented as a complex network of communicative (sub)systems, a network of operational wholes in which every change of relations of activity leads to further changes of relations of activity. In other words, communicative (sub)systems are also self-regenerative "autopoietic systems in each other's environment" [Taylor 2001: 15]. Each is characterized by its internal dynamics, and at the same time constitutes a source of "environmental perturbations" for the other. The result is "the embeddedness, the inextricable intertwinedness of cognition and communication. The structures of interaction penetrate into every warp of these apparently autonomous domains" [Schegloff 1991: 152]. Interaction and verbal communication are thus structural environments for action and cognition.

The identity of human social (sub)systems, it follows, depends on adaptation of human beings not only as organisms (in the general sense) but also as components of their linguistic domains. The same principle is applicable to individual communicators: the identity of each can be said to have two dimensions: on the one hand, as an organism with its own self-regulation and, on the other, as a personage whose personality is established in the process of communicative adaptation. Patterns of adaptation and adjustment "undergrid human interactions and relationships" [White, Burgoon 2001: 3], they form the basis of interaction and social order. Communication functions as reinforcement in the form of positive feedback for individuals who adhere to that order or as punishment in the form of negative feedback for members who deviate from the norms. Part of what we are as human beings emerges only in the interactive flow of exchange with other people, as well as the physical and social world we interact in [Drake 1995]. Hawes [1999: 247] calls this phenomenon "unfinalizable self" – an unevenly unfolding and always unfinished narrative". An understanding of patterns of adaptation is therefore essential for understanding communication and its role in social prosseses and we are convinced that insights into how the adaptation process works can best be gained by a careful synthesis of concepts and principles from the contemporary theories integrating a synergistic *system-in-environment perspective* with a *communicative focus.*

Although adaptation is present in all interactions, one way to explore the nature and impact of adaptation is to examine communicative *situations* where adjustment and accommodation may be difficult to manage. *International business negotiation*

(IBN) represents one such type of situation which has been chosen here as a specific example of field work to illustrate how the synergistic principles outlined above, work out in the concrete circumstances of communication. IBN is a unique interactive activity whose mechanisms are not yet fully explained. It is certain, however, that the aspect of accommodation is more important here than anywhere else because this kind of international activity inherently requires *co-participation* of communicators.

IBN literature is highly interdisciplinary, in which a number of different streams of inquiry have been converging. It has been drawing not only from business management, but also from psychology, international relations, law, political sciences, ecological psychology, cultural studies, and linguistics (see Cai and Drake [2001] for an apt summary of the current state of IBN research). The common factor connecting this literature, however, is an urgent need *to negotiate effectively across cultures.*

Up to now, the main research into IBN has focused on the Pacific Rim cultures (especially Japan and China). Only recently, has more attention been devoted to negotiating with companies in Eastern Europe and South America. Corporations with worldwide holdings and operations are redoubling their efforts to manage expansions, mergers, acquisitions, and licensing across those cultures more efficiently. The breakup of the former Soviet Union especially created a fervor of interesting potential trade opportunities among business professionals around the globe. The successful integration of such interests depends on successful cultural interface. It also forwards the assumption that cultural awareness leads to successful ends and that a primary responsibility of IBN scholar lies in distinguishing effective from ineffective communication. So, as we are now in the middle of the second decade of the 21-st century, broader knowledge of IBN will have increasing theoretical and practical value and together with other intercultural communication issues, will only receive greater attention as global markets and intercultural contexts continue to expand.

Naturally, communication is the life-blood of IBN vital in developing cooperation, forming alliances, and de-escalating conflict in the hope of fostering healthy business relations. In short, communication tops the list of factors crucial to IBN success. Negotiation is a bargaining process wherein two or more parties attempt to agree "what each shall give and take or perform and receive in a transaction between them" [Putman, Wilson 1989: 121]. As a give-and-take process in which each party can influence and accommodate, IBN provides a particularly interesting area in which to examine patterns of adaptation and adjustment. In this dyadic phenomenon, mutual accommodation and reciprocity are *negotiating norms* that appear viable in intercultural, as well as intracultural contexts.

Three basic assumptions serve as the springboard for synergistic thinking the about IBN.

First, because negotiation is dynamic and interactive, processes and outcomes are mutually determined. Interdependence characterizes negotiation in that negotiators must obtain the opponent's cooperation to reach a suitable agreement.

That is why, *adaptation* becomes, perhaps, the most essential feature of IBN. Intercultural negotiators, especially, implicitly understand that insistence on their own negotiating styles may jeopardize agreement. To avoid that consequence, each will adapt somehow to his/her opponent.

Second, negotiators must be aware of and attuned to a number of other exterior circumstances that shape business interaction, such as organizational considerations, societal (political and economic) constraints, or "how agreements are built (bottom up or top-bottom)" [Drake 1995]. Other contextual IBN intricacies reported by researchers are team size and makeup, power relations within and across negotiating parties, use of computer or other technologies, and negotiators' age. IBN "contextualization" by surrounding environment has been conceptualized by Fayerweather and Kapoor [1976] in their original "centric-rings model". In this model each set of constraints to be considered as the negotiator selects strategies are represented by surrounding circles. The most immediate ring encompasses "the four Cs": criteria, compromise, conflicting interests, and common interests. The next ring represents pressures, preplanned strategies, available communication channels, operational goals, respective legal systems, and perceived roles. The set of other questions about this part of the negotiating environment for the negotiators to take into account before taking action at the negotiation table, would include such factors as home advantage, bureaucracy, political system and ideologies. Testing "contextuality" would also require a complex enough set of controls and variables, such as power distance, sensitivity to time, emotionalism, risk-taking, and environmental factors, such as economic character and governmental controls. The outer ring represents the individual perspective.

Third, IBN produces *its own context*, which in turn generates information flows for its continuing reorganization into a distinct cultural (sub)system. It is not just the coupling surface for two autonomous autopoietic systems but *itself* manifests regenerative autopoietic properties. This idea is reiterated, in particular, in "third culture" theories [Hawes 1999; Cai, Drake 2001] whose proponents argue that in international settings, special cultural norms, different from those of either participant's home culture, prevail. Walker [1990: 101] amply observes that "international negotiation has developed into a culture of its own". Based on this rationale is also the concept of an "international mind-set" applied to IBN by Schwartz [1993]. This concept is defined as an "open-minded attitude toward conducting business in countries and cultures different from our own" and includes "flexibility, patience, and long-term perspective, as well as knowledge and appreciation of one's host culture" [Schwartz 1993: 1282].

Consistent with the synergistic assumptions of interdependence and mutual accommodation is also Weiss's [1993: 172] **RBC** model that represents links among the three basic components of IBN across relevant levels – interpersonal, inter-organizational, and intra-organizational. The **R** refers to "relationships", symmetric or asymmetric connections between negotiators, members of negotiation teams, or organizations who negotiate through agents. Encompassed into relationship category

are common interests, power, trust, and perceptions. **B** refers to "behaviors" – actions directed toward or affecting another party. Included in this category are information processing, judgment and decision making, planning, verbal styles, concession making, etc. **C** represents "conditions", i.e. the circumstances surrounding, stimulating, restricting or modifying the negotiation: specific events, available communication channels, political and economic environments, legal systems, etc.

Scholars have only recently began to assess the strength with which culture affects IBN, as compared with contextual, structural and other features of business negotiations environment. It has been well documented, however, that culture and national character comprise a range of values, preferences, and behaviors that differ across cultures [Gudikunst 1997, Ting-Toomy 1988, Hui 1988, Hofstede 1980, Triandis 1987]. These values range from emphasis on hierarchy to equality, from high to low power distance, from relationship building to deal making, from vague to precise language, from assertive to compromising conflict handling. In addition, cultures differ in their interpretation of the concepts of "compromise", "contract", "profit", and "negotiation". Empirical evidence also suggests that cultures prioritize different types of face-work and are identified by distinctive communicative patterns for handling conflict, affect displays, superior-subordinate relationships, argumentation, persuasion, system of logic and uncertainty reduction [Fransis 1991].

Most popular among cultural dimensions studied is the collectivism-individualism continuum [Walker 1990, Hofstede 1980, Hui 1988, Triandis 1987]. This cultural syndrome shows how members of individualistic and collectivist cultures define themselves differently in relationship to society and other human beings. A basic premise behind the individualism vs. collectivism approach is that particular psychological characteristics predominate in the given culture, and the culture's social structure permits ongoing expression of that psychology in culturally preferred negotiation styles. A brief summary of these characteristics is as follows.

Individualistic societies socialize persons idiocentrically, i.e. to value the interests and needs of an individual over the interests and needs of the group, community, or society. On average, members of individualistic cultures value personal autonomy, competition, self-sufficiency, and open conflict more than persons from collectivistic cultures. Additionally, individualistic cultures strive for linear logic, Aristotlean argument, and detailed, objective proof including statements of fact, statistic information, legality, or expert opinion. Individualists like to be in command of the relevant facts and details in a case. Persons who have "done their homework" are perceived as competent and efficient. The US is the most common representative of individualistic culture.

In contrast, collectivist cultures socialize persons allocentrically, i.e. to value the good of the community, group, or nation over the interests of individuals. Collectivists make the "we" more important than the "I", i.e. define themselves in terms of their membership within groups, sharply distinguishing these in-groups from outgroups of which the individual is not a part. Maintaining the integrity of in-groups is stressed so that cooperation, conflict avoidance, solidarity, and conformity are the

hallmarks of collectivist cultures. Collectivist cultures stress relational harmony and individuals' obligations toward others. They urge members to focus more on people than tasks. Collectivism stresses abstract, general principles over concrete specific issues. Reasoning is deductive, syllogistic and spiral. Arguments in support of a collectivist's position generally contain appeals to emotion, verbal embellishment, and imagery. Collectivist negotiator' assume that details can be worked out in the future if two negotiators can agree on generalities. China is commonly used to represent collectivist culture – see Triandis [1987] for a review.

Inevitably, negotiator's approach and interaction modes change significantly from intra- to intercultural contexts and each negotiator's familiarity with the other party's culture is an important determinant that dictates an appropriate strategy and appropriate interpretation of offers, counteroffers, and refusals. Negotiators assess unusual and unexpected behaviors and adjust their own behaviors and attitudes when encountering negotiators from other cultures. Thompson and Hastie [1990] report that negotiators who sought information about others' priorities achieved higher profits. Information seeking was positively and significantly reciprocated. Even when only one side shared information, joint profits improved. It has also been suggested that a negotiator who has moderate familiarity with the other's culture should adapt to his/her partner's scripted negotiation behavior. Accordingly, some IBN experts [Hu 1988, Triandis 1987, Fransis 1991] recommend that American business executives adopt native behaviors and values when negotiating outside the US, assuming that "doing as Romans do" will ensure success by increasing perceived similarity and understanding. They advise, for example, that when negotiating in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland, Americans should be prompt and efficient, but when negotiating in Mexico or Russia, Americans should "grant concessions that support the ego of the decision maker and handle problems in a personal (and emotional) rather than in a business manner" [Fransis 1991: 66].

When both participants are closely familiar with their counterparts' cultures, they should have sufficient flexibility to improvise a "shared" approach and create their own negotiation rules. Empirical investigation of the effectiveness of adaptation is particularly important given the emerging evidence that too much adaptation, or "acting the part" of a host culture member when one is merely a visitor, may be detrimental to effectiveness [Fransis 1991]. So, an important issue emerging from the available IBN research is that it would be more accurate to think of IB negotiators as *reflexive agents* – players, rather than as culture-bound actors.

In view of this fact and the topicality of the IBN phenomenon in general, there is a need to more carefully examine the nature and magnitude of adjustments that occur across different cultures and other environmental conditions, as at present we still know little about how negotiators react strategically to others or about the relationship between accommodation and successful outcomes. One potentially valuable perspective within the broad synergistic paradigm, which so far has not been applied to international BN research, is the recently advanced *Communication Adaptation Theory* (CAT) [Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, Ota 1995; Giles, Coupland,

Coupland 1991; Giles, Powesland 1975; Jones, Gallois, Barker 1999]. CAT is a context/environment-sensitive theory of language use which can explicitly address the issue of negotiator adaptation. Because CAT focuses on communication at the dyadic rather than individual level, it can explain how participants orchestrate negotiating behavior to meet aims and how they create interpersonal similarity by "converging" to approximate the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the negotiation partner. CAT also allows to assess cognitive and affective processes underlying the complex nature of IBN.

One undeniable strength of the theory is that it accounts for the *concrete strategies of adaptation.* Some versions of CAT [Burgoon, Stern, Dillan 1995] identify them as *approach, avoidance, reciprocity,* and *compensation.* Others [Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, Ota 1995; Giles, Coupland, Coupland 1991] distinguish between *speech convergence, divergence* and *maintenance* regarded collectively as strategies of *approximation.* Still others [Giles, Powesland 1975] prioritize *interpretability, discourse management,* and *interpersonal control.*

To conclude: one way or another, one thing seems certain: more substantial research is needed to examine the effects of such strategies. Further research that would explore successes and failures in business communication must provide a more complete description of the IBN communication patterns and the environmental constraints they are most and least responsive to. Such research based on CAT methodology will help to identify the features and explicate communicative designs from which adaptation emerges. Finally, the CAT perspective will, undoubtedly, help to illuminate such a critical issue as culture's effect on communication processes in negotiation as well as provide communication scholars an opportunity to regroup and set a course for further study in this fascinating interdisciplinary area.

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