

INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATICS AND UNDERSTANDING AS THE BASIS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНАЯ ПРАГМАТИКА И ПОНИМАНИЕ КАК ОСНОВА МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО ОБЩЕНИЯ

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Abstract. The article considers the issue of intercultural pragmatics and comprehension difficulties, based on peculiarities of perception, interpretation and assessment of certain social realms. This problem manifests itself in communication between the representatives of different cultures, and it often leads to misinterpretation of the interlocutor's verbal and non-verbal behavior, as well as to drawing improper conclusions in the process of communication. The authors claim that in the process of teaching students intercultural communication language and cultural differences should be taken into account. The paper proves that teachers should raise students' awareness of pragmatic differences that are utterly important in the process of learning a foreign language.

Key words: intercultural communication, intercultural pragmatics, language and cultural differences, awareness, understanding, pragmatic competence, personal perception.

Understanding is the basis of cross-cultural communication as it helps people to solve different problems, encompassing different spheres of life: political, social and cultural. Intercultural communication is based on the awareness of the differences and peculiarities of behavior in certain cultures; and the main goal is to achieve mutual understanding. That's why it is important to teach students to understand representatives of different cultures and to be aware of cultural variations to make intercultural communication a success. It is very particularly important for learning a second language.

The process of intercultural communication may become ambiguous because of the differences between languages (linguistic, paralinguistic, sociocultural and those connected with a peculiar way of thinking). That's why the interlocutors may understand one and the same context differently. Thus, understanding implies not only "the conformity of information, coded in the message of the addresser and decoded by the recipient" [6, p. 88] but also the ability to understand the motives, intentions and feelings of the interlocutor, as well as the message implications, i.e. everything that was

Аннотация. Рассматривается проблема межкультурной прагматики и трудностей понимания речевого сообщения в межкультурном общении, связанного с различиями восприятия, интерпретации и оценки окружающей действительности, что, соответственно, проявляется в коммуникативном поведении представителей разных культур и приводит к неправильной оценке людей, их вербального и невербального поведения, ошибочным выводам и умозаключениям. Подчеркивается роль понимания прагматического значения речевого сообщения, и необходимость развития прагматической способности, осознания прагматических различий в разных культурах.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация, межкультурная прагматика, языковые и культурные различия, осознание, понимание, прагматическая способность, восприятие личности.

meant but was not said based on the intercultural and ethnic and psychological peculiarities of a native speaker. In other words, it implies mediation for oneself and mediation for others.

B.L. Whorf believes that particular languages channel the perception or thought in particular ways, and the speakers perceive the reality in relation to the language of the perceiver [6]. It results from more or less correct situational assessment, which uncover informants' perceptions of context-external factors pertaining to the given situation, such as the interlocutors' status and familiarity (dominance and social distance), their rights and obligations, and context-internal factors relating to the degree of imposition associated with a certain goal, the likelihood for the addressee to comply with, and the difficulty for the speaker to perform it [3, p. 50]. It means the ways in which the speaker articulates their awareness for the meaningfulness of pragmatic differences in the contexts of cultural variation.

Thus, understanding brings a certain situational assessment marked with correct or incorrect per-

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ception of the interlocutor's personality. The situational assessment and the personality perception are influenced by the perception of the outer world, which is refracted in human consciousness through the prism of culture modified on the basis of the personality perception. Correspondingly it is conveyed by certain categories of reality, such as time, space, peculiar concepts and background knowledge. All of this reflects definite realities, means of information coding and a definite degree of implicit and explicit meaning. The latter influences understanding and causes difficulties at various levels. They are as follows:

- physiological level, comprising speech or hearing impairment;
- language level, encompassing phonetic, lexical and grammar mistakes in speech; paralogism, incorrect speech comprehension or semantic interpretation of language units; inability to perceive the text as a whole;
- behavioral level, such as incongruity between behavior and intention; inability to listen attentively to the interlocutor; the use of non-verbal signs which do not correspond the verbal ones; inadequate behavioral reaction to the interlocutor's utterance;

- psychological level, such as negative features of character (unsociability, reticence, suspiciousness), prejudgement, inadequate expectations, excessive emotionality, overestimation or underestimation, etc.;

- cultural level, comprising differences in mentality and national characters, discrepancy in language perception of the outward world images including time and space; cultural skewness, i.e. a definite correlation between language systems (in phonetics, grammar, semantic word structure, etc.; the use of a native or foreign language); cultural stereotypes, differences in values; incongruity of cultural language norms, presupposition and background; different perception of humor; peculiar non-verbal means of communication, different communicative strategies [4, p. 279] and especially pragmalinguistics conventions which differ from culture to culture. That is to say, it is the lack of experience in defining certain cultural differences in language use, and the inability to get insight into the culturally determined nature of language in use. In Clark's terms, the latter can be of two types: conventions of means and conventions of form. Conventions of means determine the kinds of sentences that are normally used as indirect requests. For example, it is a convention of means that questioning the listener's ability is a standard way of requesting indirectly. Conventions of form specify the exact wording used. The use of "can you" in questioning ability (instead of "are you able to") is a convention of form [2]. Moreover, according to the conventional standard ways of requesting in Russian to express politeness the word "please" is often used and the speech pattern of requesting is of imperative mood and sounds more like a command rather than a request, i.e. "Give me some water,

please" which doesn't sound and is not perceived as impolite for a Russian speaker in comparison with the English one "Can you / would give me some water?"

Very often all of these difficulties can lead to superimposing of one's own emotions, thoughts and feelings on others, i.e. the speaker erroneously presupposes that his interlocutor understands, thinks and interprets the information in the same way as he does and draws the conclusions complying with his own ones. Moreover, in intercultural interaction transference of cultural values and peculiarities of behavior also takes place. It results in interference of one culture into the interpretation of another and correspondingly to a wrong personality perception of a native speaker - the assessment of other people, their verbal and non-verbal behavior; and, therefore, this leads to wrong conclusions. These differences may be accounted for by the directness and indirectness of the utterance. Thus, a Russian speaker is not as direct as a native speaker of English due to some cultural peculiarities and cultural-specific assumptions about directness and indirectness that can lead to pragmatic ambiguities and hence to wrong interpretation and misunderstanding.

The pragmatic ambiguities occur between sentence meaning, utterance meaning and speaker's meaning. Let's take invitations. A Russian speaker doesn't know that in the English-speaking culture there are two types of invitations: definite and indefinite. The first one includes time or date, a place and yes / no questions asking if a person can come. Indefinite invitations do not include a specific time and place and may not include a yes / no question. When a Russian speaker says: "We really should get together sometime" or "I have a lot to talk to you about. I think we should have lunch together sometime soon" he /she thinks that he /she is sure to be invited and is usually offended when in fact he /she is not. (Compare: "Can you come to my house for dinner Friday night?" or "Are you and your family free to come over Sunday morning" which is a sure sign that you are invited). In other words, it shows that learners construct awareness of cultural variation in pragmatics both for themselves and for their interlocutors in the wrong way.

Another case of pragmatic ambiguities is as follows: in English and American cultures it is important when and to whom one can give a piece of advice. In these cultures, it is not expected that a person who has been given advice should follow it. Quite the contrary, a person will listen to your advice and then will do as he /she thinks he /she should, which is quite an unusual thing in the Slavonic-speaking cultures. In a conversation a native speaker of English tries to avoid phrases and expressions like: "Let me give you advice / a piece of advice." "Listen to me". Usually the following phrases and utterances are used: "If I were you, I would... I think you should... Why don't you... I suggest that you should... Could I make a suggestion?" etc. As you see, phrases and utterances for

giving advice in English are used in subjunctive mood whereas in Russian in most cases phrases and utterances for giving advice are more often used in imperative rather than subjunctive mood: "You have to read more books in original if you want to know English well", "Go and see a doctor" or "Why don't go on a diet if you want to lose some weight" etc.

All of these pragmatic ambiguities are evoked by transfer of feelings and thoughts onto others that is often called "projections of a self" [5, p. 53] when people tend to project feelings about themselves onto others. For example, people who are threatened view others as more threatening. It means that a speaker believes falsely that his interlocutor perceives, comprehends, thinks and makes similar conclusions as he /she does himself / herself. Moreover, it concerns not only the transfer of feelings, emotions and thoughts but also modes of behavior, communicative factors, patterns and strategies. In fact, negative pragmatic transfer or cultural pragmatic interference can occur. Unlike positive pragmatic transfer which results in communicative success, negative pragmatic transfer causes misunderstanding and even miscommunication. In general, actual dissimilarities of cultural assumptions, ways of structuring information, speech conventions, and reciprocity of conversation cause mismatches between what had been anticipated, what happened, and how events were interpreted [5, p. 61]. To avoid the cultural pragmatic transfer in a conversation, each partner should

- check the other's purpose and cultural assumptions about the conversation; each should learn about the diverse ways people structure information;
- learn the different meanings associated with different ways of speaking and different forms of interaction;
- learn to anticipate and engage in reciprocal and non-reciprocal forms of speech;
- be aware of the differences between the communicative factors in different cultures and acquire new modes of communicative behavior.

The perception of the interlocutor's personality plays an important part to reach understanding and the right assessment of the situation. In psychological terms, people develop schemas through which to perceive, organize and interpret social events and people - just like they do with visual arrays. Cues and values associated with them affect first impressions. These first impressions affect subsequent evaluations of other people, their behavior and related situations, which in turn affect how other people are treated. In fact, this influences not only the perception and understanding of speech actions and communicative behavior of a native

speaker in general - it may be considered as the main point to provide intercultural mediation and understanding.

Thus, to participate successfully in cross-cultural communication speakers must be able to use adequate communicative strategies and project themselves in the target language; to be aware of speech utterance modality, linguistic form and context information. As this pragmatic knowledge can only be partly conscious, it ought to be developed as a certain pragmatic ability, i.e. pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence entails a variety of abilities concerned with the use and interpretation of language in contexts. It includes the speaker's ability to use language for different purposes – to request, to instruct, to effect change. It includes the listener's ability to get past the language and understand the speaker's real intentions, especially when these intentions are not directly conveyed in the forms, such as indirect requests, irony and sarcasm. It includes command of the rules which are strung together to create discourse. This apparently simple achievement to produce coherent speech itself has several components, such as turn-taking, cooperation and cohesion [1, p. 43]. Pragmatic knowledge is not explicit, it is implicit, as it is connected with customs and traditions, cultural assumptions and ways of communicative behavior. So pragmatic competence "involves the relation between a set of linguistic forms and the meanings intended by those forms in specific contexts. The representation that underlies this performance consists of a relation between a meaning and a range of possible forms that give rise to that meaning. Selecting the appropriate form requires an assessment of contextual and social factors. Thus the mapping is ... between form and social context, with the meaning held constant across the intentions within a socially defined situation" [1, p. 51]. In cross-cultural communication it means pragmatic adaptability, i.e. control of processing and attention to appropriate context information, the listener's perception, intention, choosing the appropriate linguistic form and speech utterance. It also means intercultural mediation that involves awareness of one's own cultural practices and expectations in relation to the aspect of language use being mediated as well as their knowledge of the target culture.

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