INTRODUCTION

TOO MANY WALLS AND NOT ENOUGH BRIDGES: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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Alongside with globalization tendencies, the world still displays a lot of cultural differences, which separate people and create communication problems. Both scholars and teachers are now searching for guidance in the rapidly changing political, cultural, and educational environment. Over the last 30 years intercultural communication has attracted a lot of attention and has become an important object of interdisciplinary study, teaching, training, and practical activities. This interest is not surprising, as nowadays many people's professional or private lives bring them into contact with individuals from other cultures. Continuing worldwide travel, migration, business, education, sports, etc. result in increasing intercultural encounters. New technologies have made them accessible in daily practices. Therefore, it is critically important to grasp the implications of the existing intercultural communication theories and possible ways of applying them to real life.

The aims of the present issue are manifold: to reflect the scope of theoretical inquiry in the field of intercultural communication in Russia and abroad; to acquaint the Russian reader with Western approaches; to search for ways of teaching the subject to second language learners, as well as to specialists engaged in international relations; and to stimulate new ideas and possible cooperation between Russian and foreign scholars.

Communication in general and intercultural communication in particular is organically connected with pragmatics. To understand 'what is meant by what is said,' we

need to know the context, as it helps to assign the meaning to words. Scholars distinguish between different types of context: actual situational context and prior context. As Kecskes notes, "prior context is based on our prior experience, so it develops through the regularity of recurrent and similar situations, which we tend to identify with given contexts" (Kecskes, 2014: 215). He points out that through the interplay of prior context and actual situational context, individual and social factors of communication are intertwined [ibid.:133].

Communication is embedded in culture, which serves as its context and is based on the prior experience of a community. In intercultural relations culture is the most important extralinguistic factor shaping its members' communicative style and behaviour [Larina 2015]. The distinct features of each culture determine how the speakers express their thoughts: clearly or with ambiguity, in a concise manner or descriptively, freely express their emotions or restrain themselves, observe distance in communication or ignore it, etc. [Larina 2015: 200]. What is characteristic of one culture can often be unacceptable from the point of view of the other.

Specialists and researchers in the field of intercultural communication have collected a lot of data proving that language proficiency alone does not guarantee understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds [Thomas 1983, Ter-Minasova 2000, House 2003, Besemeres and Wierzbicka 2007; Leontovich 2005, 2011; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, Samovar et al. 2013; Leontovich and Yakusheva 2013, Kecskes 2014, Jandt, 2015]. As Kate Fox puts it, "your English may be impeccable, but your behavioural 'grammar' will be full of glaring errors" [Fox: 2005: 61]. Numerous problems stem from the fact that people behave according to their specific social and linguistic norms and their perception of *politeness* or *impoliteness*, which vary across cultures [Leech 1983, 2014; Matsumoto 1989, Wierzbicka 1991/2013, Sifianou 1992, Marquez Reiter 2000, Scollon and Scollon 2001, Pizziconi 2003, Watts 2003, Hickey and Stewart 2005, Leech 2007, 2014; Larina 2008, 2009, 2013; Culpeper 2011; Visson 2013, etc.]. The same verbal or non-verbal act seen as polite in one culture may be perceived as inappropriate or even rude in another one. As a result, people often misinterpret communicative intentions of foreign interlocutors and create stereotypes about polite and impolite nations which impede understanding and social harmony.

Studies also show that culturally conditioned differences in communication are not random but systematic and are defined by the type of culture, structure of society, its values, and other factors which impact communicative behavior and form culture-specific communicative styles. Intercultural Communication as a theoretical and practical discipline provides a second-language student with a systematic view of communication accumulating all the relevant data from other fields, such as history, culture studies, sociology, ethnology, psychology, literature, linguistics, etc., and paving the way for a conscious learning process.

While putting together this issue, we have come across reasons to contemplate and challenge a number of different theoretical standpoints. Scholars working in the field of Intercultural Communication are often criticized for a high level of generalization; they allegedly ignore the fact that persons and not cultures are participants of an interaction and possess their own individual manner of speech and behaviour. In re-

ality, this fact is not ignored: while focusing on the characteristics of culture-specific behaviours, we acknowledge the existence of individual and group differences and peculiarities typical of various social strata, with their own canons of communication. Nevertheless, it is possible to demarcate certain communicative dominants which distinguish the communicative behaviour of one ethnic group from another. The words of Kate Fox [Fox 2005] reaffirm this opinion. Pointing out that a "nation" is surely "a pretty artificial construct", she writes:

The trouble is that virtually all nations have a number of regions, each of which invariably regards itself as different from ... all others. This applies in France, Italy, the USA, Russia, Mexico, Spain, Scotland, Australia—and more or less anywhere else you care to mention. People from St Petersburg talk about Muscovites as though they were members of a different species; East-coast and Mid-western Americans might as well be from different planets, ditto Tuscans and Neapolitans, Northern and Southern Mexicans, etc.; even cities such as Melbourne and Sydney see themselves as having radically different characters — and let's not start on Edinburgh and Glasgow.... In all of these cases, however, the people of these admittedly highly individual regions and towns nevertheless have enough in common to make them recognizably Italian, American, Russian, Scottish, etc. [Fox 2005: 21].

The same can be said about individual differences. Every speaker combines universal, culture-specific and individual features. Intercultural Communication as a discipline is mainly focused on characteristics distinguishing one nation or ethnic group from another and thus shaping a peculiar communicative style. Without generalizations, any comparative study of languages and cultures would be impossible. This stance is a way to grasp the relationship between subjective experience and its communicability across cultures.

Nowadays Intercultural Communication is a multidisciplinary study of factors which unite or separate representatives of different cultures, the latter being understood as a broad, multifaceted phenomena, 'the ways in which one group or society of humans live that are different from the ways in which other groups live' [Guirdham 1999: 48]. It is important to emphasise that language is an essential part of culture for at least two main reasons: 1) the other elements, such as worldview, can only be transmitted through language and 2) language itself helps to mould the mentality of its speakers [Ibid: 50].

Intercultural Communication negotiates and incorporates the insights of many research areas, theoretical approaches, and scholarly ideas. The issue is structured along the following lines: 1) theory of communication, 2) social, cultural and interpersonal communication practices, and 3) intercultural communication teaching/training.

The first section of the issue in focused on the theoretical aspects of communication in general and intercultural communication in particular.

Steven Beebe's paper elaborates on how to adapt messages to other interlocutors. Proceeding from Aristotle's idea that rhetoric should be used to change or reinforce attitudes, beliefs, values and/or human behaviour, he suggests that a communication message should: (1) be understood, (2) achieve the intended effect, and, finally,

(3) be ethical. The Structure-Interaction Theory, which represents the core of his approach, proceeds from the assumption that effective and appropriate human communication can be placed on a continuum of its two basic constituents: Structure and Interaction. While structure is the inherent way in which a message is organized, interaction deals with the mode of sharing information as a give-and-take process. The proposed theory is intended to seek order in the chaotic world of meanings, which constitute the sphere and mode of human existence, and discusses interactions in the context of interpersonal, group, public, and electronically mediated communication.

Donal Carbaugh seeks to draw attention to the actual way intercultural communication as a social practice is carried out among participants. His perspective is to a certain extent a response to the wide-ranging models used to measure intercultural data via different dimensional models. Carbaugh's position on the question warrants special attention because it gives voice to communicators, rather than abstract figures and calculations. He engages the attention of the audience through a concise, readable presentation of factors grouped along three main lines: (1) the main constituent features of intercultural communication; (2) the essential modes in inquiry for his research; (3) the qualities in the types of insights relative to the first two groups. By framing his research within the context of critical analysis, Carbaugh's intention is to find out whose interests are being served in the process of communication. He believes that this approach advances better insights into the cultural peculiarities of social interactions.

Svetlana Ter-Minasova's article is based on the dichotomy between universal and culturally specific dimensions of international communication, which, on the one hand, create grounds for globalization, and, on the other, provide for the sovereignty of particular cultures. She argues that contradictions stimulate human development and trace them along the following lines: contradictions between technical versus human factors; contradiction between the concepts of equality and diversity; and contradictions in the professional sphere of foreign language teaching.

Olga Leontovich's paper discusses the reasons, types, and effects of cognitive dissonance emerging in the course of intercultural communication. Cognitive dissonance is viewed as a discrepancy between the ways of categorizing and conceptualizing reality through the prism of different languages and cultures. By showing the mechanisms of the phenomenon, the research highlights possible ways of harmonizing the mindsets of communicators interacting with representatives of an alien culture and overcoming communication breakdowns. These findings may lead to their practical application and help interpreters, translators, and intercultural communication specialists design and employ possible strategies to identify reasons for cognitive dissonance and find ways to bridge intercultural differences.

The impact of culture on language is addressed by **Anna Gladkova** who undertakes a contrastive analysis of Russian and English grammatical structures from a cross-cultural perspective. The article discusses how cultural information is embedded at the level of grammar, which is inseparable from semantics and pragmatics. The paper provides numerous examples illustrating the cultural significance of grammar viewed from the Ethnosyntax perspective. These investigations can be of particular importance to other areas of linguistics, including language teaching, as they can equip

cultural outsiders with more effective and successful tools of communication with representatives of a particular culture.

The second section of the issue sheds light on the social and personal communication practices, with further emphasis on the interplay of culture, language and communication**.**

The paper by **Arto Mustajoki** and **Ekaterina Protassova** examines the impact of Finnish views about Russia and Russians on the cross-cultural interactions between the two nations. Through a multi-layered study of the historical connections between them, the authors investigate the sources of their mutual perceptions and the dynamics of the relationship, including the immediate past and present political, economic and cultural processes. The authors' move to read across the cultures includes the discussion of the reciprocal influence of the two languages, prevailing values, consumer practices, as well as controversies and misunderstandings. They emphasize the role of linguistic and cultural competence in building effective cross-cultural communication between the two neighbouring countries.

Emotions constitute another important sphere of intercultural studies. It is not surprising: although human emotional endowment is largely innate and universal, people's emotional lives are shaped to a considerable extent by their culture [Wierzbicka 1999: 24]. The article by **Jean-Marc Dewaele** and **Israa Qaddourah** devoted to the language choice in expressing anger among Arab-English Londoners confirms this statement. The study replicates an earlier investigation by Dewaele dealing with the communication of anger among a large heterogeneous group of long-time multilinguals from all over the world (2013). The aim of the present paper is to determine whether similar processes can be observed in a relatively homogeneous linguistic and cultural group, namely 110 English-speaking Arabs living in London (UK). The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data shows that the factors influencing the choice of language for expressing anger include: the degree of socialisation, frequency of use of English, context, age, gender, education, religious beliefs, as well as cultural and ideological origins.

John Parrish-Sprowl's article draws the reader's attention to the problems of intercultural communication faced by the disabled who comprise 10% of the world population and are increasingly being mainstreamed both within their own cultures and in cross-cultural exchanges. In addition to the problems affecting all the persons involved in intercultural contacts, biases against people with disabilities existing in particular communities often result in insensitive, cruel, or discriminatory attitudes. Parrish-Sprowl believes that in order to develop appropriate communication skills it is expedient to use the approach called Communication Complex based on neuroscience research. This metatheory takes into account brain activity and other body experiences, the reflexive nature of conversation, as well as communication resources and practices. According to the author, communication has to be viewed as a "co-constructing process rather than simply a vehicle to convey a message from one person to another". The paper provides a set of recommendations and skills necessary for engaging people with disabilities in effective intercultural communication.

Three articles of the issue are devoted to the problem of politeness which is another significant field of research of intercultural pragmatics and communication. Linguistic politeness is an essential element of interactions in different settings.

While the world is becoming more culturally complex, the emergence and wide use of new media produce new challenges. **Zohreh R. Eslami** and **Wei-Hong Ko** examine how students actively manage facework in their interactions with faculty members when submitting their assignments through emails. Their exploratory study contradicts the opinion that computer-mediated communication is a medium which is not beneficial for establishing interpersonal connections. It proves that in their email communication students manage to attend to relational goals through the employment of openings, small talk and closing strategies. Drawing on the findings of politeness research, this paper seeks to build a model for analysing a 'non-face-threating' speech act and illustrate that facework can account for the use of linguistic strategies that maintain a harmonious relationship between the interlocutors.

Chantal Claudel analyses ways of expressing apologies and thanks in French and Japanese personal emails. The results of her study show that the number of different ready-to-use rituals is more important in Japanese rather than French emails. The diversity of formulae in Japanese is an indication of the importance of the relationship and of the need to act carefully in different kinds of computer-mediated interactions. The use of apologies and thanks in emails shows that neither of the two communities can be regarded as more or less (im)polite, but that the set expressions available in Japanese is more diversified than in French. The analysis reveals another interesting difference: while in Japanese attention to the addressee leads to the use of apologies, in French it apparently results in the use of thanks. This is another confirmation of the fact that the notion of *politeness* in French and Japanese is not entirely identical, even if some behaviours are shared or comparable.

Oxsana Issers and **Sandra Salvorson** have examined eleven intercultural textbooks in order to observe similarities and differences in Russian and American proprieties. The content analysis of the books and the use of a 29-item questionnaire allowed them to conclude that the similarities in the expression of proprieties outnumber the differences. The latter demonstrate that: a) Russians are less willing than Americans to speak about their ethnicity in public; b) in social situations Russians are more polite than Americans; c) Russians tend to speak their minds in public situations more often than Americans; d) Russians display more honesty in expressing their personal opinions than their American counterparts.

The third section of the issue addresses the problem of intercultural competence development with a particular focus on translation. **Robin Cranmer** and **Kaisa Koskinen's** papers constitute a highly successful attempt to bridge the divide between research and teaching of intercultural communication. They relate about a European Union project 'Promoting Intercultural Competence in Translators' (PICT 2012) conducted among translation teachers and students in seven European countries and devoted to the development of translators' intercultural competence.

Robin Cranmer's article examines how the teaching of translation at university level can come to include the systematic development of intercultural skills, presents the methodology and outcomes of PICT 2012, outlines its aims, context, and participants. It further explains the key theoretical principles which are embodied in a 'good practice

guide' at its conclusion. The three key outputs resulting from the project are a 'curriculum framework' (syllabus), teaching materials and assessment materials. By way of conclusion, Cranmer discusses perspectives, needs and limits of building intercultural competence of translators.

Kaisa Koskinen's paper seeks to further extend the findings to the analysis of superdiversity — the increased linguistic, ethnic and cultural hybridity of modern societies. Proceeding from the assumption that the knowledge of cultural facts cannot be equated with intercultural knowledge, she challenges the value of translators' invisibility and promotes the necessity of developing "their skills of empathy, compassion and flexible decision-making," their ability "to make informed and moral choices" in difficult situations.

We are grateful to all the contributors for their collaboration, remarkable creativity, attention to detail, and the high quality of their carefully crafted and thoroughly researched scholarly works. We would also like to encourage our readers to express their opinions about the ideas discussed in the issue and to share their observations and experiences dealing with intercultural communication.

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