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# CONTRADICTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION: OBSTACLES OR DRIVING FORCES?

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Contradictions are supposed to be the basis of human development process. The paper deals with the contradictions and paradoxes in a most important sphere of human activity: international communication. Different kinds of contradictions are to be discussed: general ones shared internationally, i.e. concerning every nation, language and culture as well as those which are specific to present-day Russia.

**Key words:** contradictions, globalization, equality, diversity, traditions, innovations, teacher-student relations.

Nowadays, we all happen to be fortunate witnesses — and users! — of unimaginably great inventions in the sphere of communication which have given birth to the era of globalization in the history of mankind. The eternal dream of mankind to live in peace and friendship with all the nations on the planet — sorry, in the Global Village! — is about to come true. But... Philosophers have been trying to convince us that the progress of mankind is a dialectical process based on the unity and conflict of contradictions.

These contradictions can be presented in two large categories or classes: 1) **general** ones, concerning the whole mankind, 2) **special** ones concerning some limited groups of people, for example, those who are united professionally.

In this paper I am going to mention the contradictions of the first — general — category and to dwell upon the second — our professional ones.

## **GENERAL CONTRADICTIONS IN THE EPOCH OF GLOBALIZATION**

General contradictions in the epoch of globalization may be summed up in the following way:

### **1. Contradictions between technical versus human factors.**

Indeed, modern high technology has already conquered both space and time, has solved the problems of distance separating people, and virtually has done its very best to bring people together.

Technical progress provides mankind with an ever-increasing variety of more and more powerful devices and forms of communication: tele-conferences, tele-bridges,

mobile phones, interactive boards, Skype, and — first and foremost — His or Her Majesty — the Internet!

Our planet has shrunk to the size of “a global village”, we can live in peace, doing everything together. But no! On the way to this global happy life a “small obstacle” has turned up — a human factor.

Indeed, “the human factor” presents a number of problems hampering the idea of international communication.

The happy global life in the global village is impossible without a global language which, undoubtedly, implies English. However, choosing one language as global or international implies giving up, rejection, and even *d e a t h* of national languages. And this is a sacrifice that no nation is ready to give [1].

No wonder, the reaction of the rest of the world has been contradictory. Instead of being overjoyed by the opportunities of international communication presented by new technology and a happy global life as its consequence most nations have a great reluctance to the idea of replacing their national languages with English. More than that. Even the nations that practically stopped using their own language like the Irish, for example, and have been using English as a means of communication (paradoxically, the language of their rivals and enemies) are now reviving indigenous languages or, rather, *l a n - g u a g e s a n d c u l t u r e s*, the latter being reflected and at the same time moulded by languages [2].

Thus, the most formidable obstacles on the way to intercultural communication and a happy life in “the global village” are national: languages and cultures.

## **2. Contradictions between the Internet and the development of international communication.**

The ever-increasing spread of the Internet has the most powerful influence on the development of international communication and it is again very contradictory both in its essence and its results.

Indeed, on the one hand, the Internet leads to a “global village”, a cosmopolitan society, a world wide web (www), an international Internet family where peculiarities of national mentality, ideology, culture, etc. are mixed, diluted, dissolved and may cease to exist.

In the Internet the International reigns supreme over the National.

The opposite trend of the Internet lies in its interactivity, its openness and popularity, its democracy. Unlike mass media which flood their recipients/clients with all kinds of message/impact-oriented information, the Internet involves all its users in communication, enables them to share their opinions and ideas with other participants of communication, and to discover like-minded people all over the world.

In other words, the individual person is the object of mass media activities and both the subject and the object of Internet communication.

### **3. Contradiction between the concepts of equality and diversity.**

This is a basic human contradiction: equality versus diversity (individuality). People are created equal, they want to enjoy equal rights but they also want to keep their individuality which implies diversity. The same refers to nations.

The Soviet Union can serve as an example. Indeed, the USSR was a great historical experiment — an attempt to equality. It was successful in many ways: the gap between the rich and the poor was minimized; equal rights to free education, health service and other important social spheres were provided. However, all these achievements in equality led to an obvious lack of diversity: levelling people, ignoring their individuality, their individual needs, problems, likes and dislikes. “We” almost entirely ousted “I”.

Thus, people and nations strive for somewhat contradictory concepts: equality and diversity. This is **contradiction № 3** in the course of the paper but **rather № 1** in its significance.

## **CONTRADICTIONS IN OUR PROFESSIONAL SPHERE: FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

### **1. A contradiction between traditions and innovations inherent in most spheres of human activity.**

A most obvious and vivid example is the tradition of *perfectionism* which implies something good and proper: to do one’s job thoroughly and give deep knowledge of the subject in question. It went very well with the motto of Soviet times: “Soviet means excellent”.

The idea to teach everything in full splendour was, actually, quite good in theory but impossible to be implemented. This nation-wide practice of trying to teach everything resulted most frequently (at secondary schools and all the innumerable specialized higher education institutions) in learning next to nothing [3].

Now in a different Russia, under new circumstances, theoretically (or idealistically) speaking, the good tradition is hampering the FL teaching progress. Indeed, from force of this — outdated — tradition teachers of foreign languages continue to emphasize grammatical — and phonetic — accuracy.

It is a delicate point which needs more explanation. We can strive for perfection, and the more we know about English grammar and phonetics the better. However, the perfect knowledge of these aspects is unreachable and *unnecessary*. A foreign accent and some inaccuracy in grammar — as long as it does not stop or mislead communication — are quite normal, acceptable and expectable. “There is nothing more suspicious than a foreigner who speaks your language the way you do” Dr. J.D. O’Connor, University College London, Lectures on English phonetics, 1973—1974.

Thus, nowadays — in the era of mass open international communication — overdoing this tradition of perfectionism deprives FL students of fluency and hampers developing communicative competence of students at all levels.

## 2. A financial conflict FL teachers are confronted with.

The financial conflict is provoked by a striking difference in salaries between state and private schools, on the one hand, and between teachers of English and teachers of other foreign languages, on the other hand.

## 3. A psychological contradiction between the volume of knowledge required from the FL teacher and that of the actual subject — the foreign language under study, the most pivotal problem of foreign language learning and teaching (FLLT).

Indeed, the discipline of foreign language teaching has the most complicated and frightening object of studies — an immense, unbounded world including both the outer and inner worlds of human beings reflected by their languages. These worlds are foreign, strange, alien and scary. It is like entering the jungle full of dangers. In this situation both teacher and student feel strained, tense, uncertain (if the teacher is non-native. Native speaking teachers have different weak points).

The position of a foreign language teacher is more difficult than that of a student because of the traditional position of a teacher as the boss who is supposed to know everything.

## 4. Teacher — Student Relations.

Traditionally, in Russia teacher — student relations have always been severe, rigid and distant. They have been based on the idea that the Teacher is the all-knowing God and Tsar while the Student is a humble believer and a slave.

This situation is abnormal and dangerous for the following reasons: **first**, because learning a foreign language, like no other subject, requires a special psychological approach, the atmosphere of relaxation, trust, even love and faith, **second**, because the era of intercultural communication revealed a purely Russian present-day problem: **a conflict of cultures between teachers and students** born in very different countries and diametrically opposed ideologies [4].

This kind of a clash of cultures is very dangerous because it is invisible, almost incomprehensible. A conflict of cultures here is worse than that between different nations. It is more dangerous than the latter because it is well-hidden: the conflicting communities use the same language and belong to the same nation. However, as has already been mentioned, they were born and **educated** in different countries — the USSR and Russian Federation — with different ideologies, value systems, etc.

Consequently, our very urgent task nowadays is to bridge the gap between the teacher and the student. To do this teachers must learn to be patient and caring for students, they must see students as personalities in their own right.

It was an eye-opening experience on my first visit to Britain more than 40 years ago. In London University I discovered that there were only two “marks” or comments given to students: “good” and... “to think about”. It became a symbol, a new — unheard of before! — kind of teacher-student relations, and its principle was: give support, do not frighten away!

Using our well-know metaphor teaching can be confined to either “light up the torch” or “fill in the vessel”. My appeal to all teachers is: “Do not put out the torch”, because then no one will be able “to fill in the vessel”.

Let us be humane to our students! (*humane* defined in dictionaries as: *showing-kindness, care and sympathy*).

The success of a teacher is based upon two Loves: Love for the subject of teaching and Love for the student.

A very recent comment, confirming this, came from a schoolboy, a participant of the on-line course on “Language, Culture and Intercultural Communication” who wrote:

*I wish school teachers were speaking about their subjects with the same kind of love! It was quite insulting to hear from my mum that I am an excellent student with an empty head. It was in the 5th form. Now that I am already in the 8th form it has become evident to me that school gives knowledge only on paper. That is why courses of this kind are so vitally important.*

The Russian version for the Russian audience:

*Если бы в школе учителя говорили с такой же любовью к предметам! Очень оскорбительно было слышать в 5 классе, от мамы, что я отличник с пустой головой. Теперь, к 8-му, самому стало очевидно, что школа знания дает только на бумаге и поэтому подобного рода курсы жизненно необходимы.*

This comment not only emphasizes the aspect of Love in teaching and learning but also reminds us of a very important additional factor that plays a great part in the system of education — **the parents!** Education of parents must become a must (an inseparable part of) in secondary school education.

An answer to the question in the title is clear: contradictions are both obstacles and driving forces ensuring the progress of mankind. Indeed, people have to think and work harder and harder in order to overcome obstacles on the way to a happy, peaceful life on the planet of Earth. Philosophers have been quite right with their dialectical approach to human problems.

The future of mankind depends largely on its ability to communicate.

As far as ensuring multilingual and multicultural forms of international communication (electronic or non-electronic) is concerned, a most effective and creative solution to the problem is to emphasize the part of Foreign Language Learning and Teaching, to develop language teaching strategies, to improve language teaching methods and techniques.

Again, Russia can offer its unique experience in attempting to overcome the contradictions and problems of Foreign Language Teaching under the circumstances of decades of complete isolation from the world where these languages have been naturally used as means of communication.

Thus, foreign language teachers must be regarded as missionaries bringing peace, tolerance and international cooperation to the world through the possibility of international communication.

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## ПРОТИВОРЕЧИЯ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В ЭПОХУ ГЛОБАЛИЗАЦИИ: ПРЕПЯТСТВИЯ ИЛИ ДВИЖУЩИЕ СИЛЫ?

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Предполагается, что противоречия составляют основу для человеческого развития. В работе освещаются противоречия и парадоксы в самой важной сфере человеческой деятельности — межкультурной коммуникации. Обсуждаются разные виды противоречий: общие, разделяемые во всем мире, то есть имеющие отношение к любому народу, языку и культуре, и характерные для современной России.

**Ключевые слова:** противоречия, глобализация, равенство, разнообразие, традиции, инновации, взаимоотношения учителя и ученика.