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FEATURES OF FRENCH, AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION

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Abstract

The article deals with the functioning of cultural stereotypes in French, American and Russian linguistic consciousness. Cross-cultural interaction is interpreted within the framework of mastering linguocultural communication codes and the worldview of allophones. The analysis of factual data is based on the linguosemiotic approach to its interpretation within a discursive utterance. The level of the relevant content of an utterance is interpreted as essential for defining the characterological traits of communication. Other levels are considered during the contrastive description of discourse and complement the essential parameters transmitted by the structure of the ethnocultural code underpinning the creation of utterances in the national language.

Keywords

Allophones – Linguistic culture – Cultural stereotype – Semiotics of intercultural communication

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Introduction

Human communication is, above all, an interaction of cultures whether it refers to individuals or other modes of communication. Content-wise, communication is thoughts and feelings, and form-wise, it is influence. Types of influence vary from culture to culture. An individual embraces the culture they belong to under the influence of historically formed language structures and the semiotic memory of society¹. One cannot realize one's identity in a certain social context without a sign system of a national language and communication. The semiotics of interpersonal communication is realized through the expression and content planes of a native language sign that possesses the operation parameters specific to every particular nation².

In this case, the sign is viewed as a dynamic structure in operation that requires the human factor and is "a dead letter" without it³. The addressee is always part of a particular linguistic culture and the way that the meaning of the message is interpreted and, consequently, the success of the communication depend on them.

Culture should be studied as a communication phenomenon and all its aspects should be considered in relation to how much communicative information they contain⁴. This is the essence of semiotic upbringing: every culture has its own code-message that is relevant only within this culture as it is the product of a social contract. Every people has its own differential code of communicative behavior. There are often differences in etiquette. Communicative behavior can be casual on a natural, unconscious level and etiquettical, ritualistic, intentionally trained⁵. In this regard, any type of discourse is considered a communicative structure which is the vector for individual and national particularities of communicative behavior. This viewpoint is connected to the cognitive-communicative approach to the interpretation of characterological parts of the text. If an utterance is a basic speech action then a coherent text comprised of a chain of utterances and unified by a common thought is a complex speech action. As E.A. Referovskaya fairly points out, a text is not just a sequence of utterances but a complex hierarchical system where every single utterance is subordinate to a larger speech unit (for example, a super-phrasal unity or a paragraph) and through it to the text as a whole⁶.

¹ N. R. Ershova, "Kommunikativnoe povedenie i dominantnye osobennosti obshcheniya russkikh, britantsev i frantsuzov", Vestnik Pomorskogo universiteta. Seriya "Gumanitarnye i sotsialnye nauki" num 3 (2010): 131-135; I. P. Konopelko, Nekotorye osobennosti russkogo i frantsuzskogo komunikativnogo povedeniya v sopostavitel'nom aspekte. Proceedings of the international scientific conference «Formirovanie obrazov Rossii i russkikh v zapadnykh diskursivnykh praktikakh XX–XXI vekov» (pp. 123-130). 2018 y L. V. Tsurikova, Problema estestvennosti diskursa v mezhkulturnoi kommunikatsii (Voronezh: Izd-vo Voronezh. un-ta, 2002).

² M. I. Pivovarova y I. P. Konopelko, "Nekotorye osobennosti reklamnogo teksta vo frantsuzskom yazykovom soznanii", Vestnik Voronezhskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriya: Filologiya. Zhurnalistsika num 1 (2019): 130-133 y V. N. Teliya, Vtorichnaya nominatsiya i ee vidy. In Yazykovaya nominatsiya (pp. 129-222). (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).

³ I. N. Gorelov y K. F. Sedov, Osnovy psikholingvistiki. Uchebnoe posobie (Moscow: Labirint, 2001).

⁴ E. A. Ukhnaeva; A. P. Sedykh; E. N. Legochkina; B. N. Kovalenko y O. I. Vorobyova, "Specific verbal representation of the time category", Amazonia Investiga Vol: 9 num 25 (2020): 126-134.

⁵ N. F. German, "Lingvokulturnaya identichnost subekta kommunikatsii", Vestnik Chelyabinskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta Vol: 11 num 149 (2009): 63–66 y V. V. Dementev, Kommunikativnye tsennosti russkoi kultury: kategoriya personalnosti v leksike i pragmatike (Moscow: Global Kom, 2013).

⁶ L. I. Grishaeva, Osobennosti ispolzovaniya yazyka i kulturnaya identichnost kommunikantov (Voronezh: VGU, 2007); E. A. Referovskaya, Lingvisticheskie issledovaniya struktury teksta

It is natural to assume that the most comprehensive analysis of linguistic units occurs in the text which can be a single utterance, a paragraph or a complete work. Semiotic characteristics of an ordinary text that are part of linguistic units at any discourse level are an important criterion for analyzing the functions of linguistic units.

Theoretical framework

Text theory as a comprehensive and generalizing field of study was created as a result of the integration of complementary fields: textology, linguistics of text, poetics, rhetoric, pragmatics and hermeneutics. However, despite the abundance of common areas with other fields of study, text theory has its own gnoseological status⁷.

During the linguistic decoding of the implicit meaning of the text that partially consists of the ethnocultural aspect of utterance semantics, the focus is on the duality of the linguistic sign⁸. It possesses both meaning and form and can be associated with other signs (meaning-wise or form-wise) within the same text or within other texts and correlate with other components of the text in the fragments of its substantive structure. The ways this interaction occurs can be considered both in the universal and idioethnic aspects.

In this study, when considering the formation dynamics of the ethnocultural structure of meaning, attention is paid to additional meanings of utterances and intertextual components that are characteristic of everyday speech and are formed according to the general laws of meaning creation.

The interaction between cultures starts from mastering the semiotics of communication and the worldview of allophones. Typically, the codes of national communication are based on national stereotypes of perception, in particular, of representatives of other cultures. Thus, the French often see the Americans in the following way: "An American is friendly and sociable, noisy, rude, intellectually underdeveloped, hardworking, eccentric, self-assured, full of prejudice, underestimating the achievements of other cultures, rich, generous, not fastidious and always in a hurry"⁹.

At the same time, this is how the Americans see the French, "Lazy people who do not speak English from ideological considerations. They are smug, impolite and inconsiderate, however, very attentive towards the ladies and artistic. It is very difficult to get close to them. The French live in a bureaucratic socialist state and are completely dependent on officials. They do not know how to fight, and the Americans twice had to save France in the 20th century. Moreover, the French are unclean, eat snails and frogs"¹⁰. For the correct interpretation of the semiotic cultural code and the success of communication, it is necessary to know how the members of other nations behave in identical communication situations.

(Leningrad: Nauka, 1983) y A. P. Sedykh; O. N. Ivanishcheva; A. V. Koreneva y I. V. Ryzhkova, "Modern philological knowledge: anthropocentrism and linguistic identity", *International Journal of Engineering and Technology (JAE)* Vol: 7 num 4.38 (2018): 447-451.

⁷ V. V. Vinogradov, "Osnovnye tipy leksicheskikh znachenii slova", *Voprosy yazykoznaniiya* num 5 (1953): 3-30 y V. G. Gak. *K probleme semanticheskoi sintagmatiki. Problemy strukturnoi lingvistiki* (pp. 367-395) (Moscow: Nauka, 1972).

⁸ A. P. Sedykh, "Spetsifika rechevogo vozdeistviya Zhaka Shiraka", *Politicheskaya lingvistika* Vol: 1 num 35 (2011): 24-29.

⁹ P. Baudry, *Français et Américains, l'autre rive* (Paris: Pearson Éducation France, 2007).

¹⁰ H. Rochefort, *French Toast* (NYC: Thomas Dunne Books, 1998).

One should remember that each culture supports its particular idioethnic format of communication.

Methods

Any type of discourse is part of the semiotic field of national linguistic culture. The linguistic culture acts as a social environment of national language speakers and members of the culture, inducing a certain type of linguistic behavior for all its members. Linguistic culture dictates the format of behavior during status-based communication. Status-based communication is always institutional. In the foreground is the function of self-presentation in relation to another communication participant. In this case, the communicant's linguistic arsenal can serve as an identification signal to determine their group (social, ethnocultural, political, ideological) affiliation. To achieve mutual understanding, the linguistic arsenal of communicants must be of the same type¹¹.

To comprehensively present and describe the dominant communication parameters of the cultures in question, a comparison will be carried out of the codes of interpersonal interaction that reflect the real communicative behavior of the French, Americans and Russians at the level of the typology of communication situations and axiology objects.

Communicative situations or parts of the system of values:

Conversation

The French

Taboo topics and questions: How do you make a living? How much do you earn? Are you married? Do you have children? How are you feeling? A forbidden topic, affecting the patriotism and prestige of the French and France, is World War II. "Safe" topics: art, culture, politics. Interruption of the interlocutor is allowed which indicates interest in the topic of conversation and the desire to express oneself as soon as possible. God forbid to hear the infamous "*Je m'en fous*" (I do not care), after that it is better to leave.

The Americans

In small talk, one should not talk about politics or religion. Among friends, any topics are discussed to the extent of their competence and interest. The famous American concept of a *casual friend* means one with whom you communicate, friends at work or the place of residence but after moving or changing work this type of a friend will usually be forgotten. (*Poster in a university cafeteria, "Fish and friends stay fresh the first three days!"*). The manner of conversation: short remarks, intolerance for interruption of the interlocutor (*small talk*). In a casual conversation with unfamiliar people, it is customary to discuss personal and family issues¹².

¹¹ V. V. Dementev, *Kommunikativnye tsennosti russkoi kultury: kategoriya personalnosti v leksike i pragmatike* (Moscow: Global Kom, 2013) y A. P. Sedykh, "Spetsifika rechevogo vozdeistviya Zhaka", *Politicheskaya lingvistika* Vol: 1 num 35 (2011): 24-29.

¹² O. A. Leontovich, *Russkie i amerikantsy: paradoksy mezhkulturnogo obshcheniya* (Volgograd: Peremena, 2002).

The Russians

There are practically no forbidden topics. Emotionality, an expectation of a response. Interruption of the interlocutor is allowed. The phrase “I’m sorry to interrupt” does not shock anyone. Frequent transition to patronizing tone and monologue-broadcast. The communicative goal is the modification of the behavior and state of the interlocutor.

Time

The French: Monochronous – the focus is on a single action or event per unit of time.

The Americans: Monochronous – the focus is on a single action or event per unit of time.

The Russians: Polychronous – the focus is on several actions at once, change of terms is acceptable, time is treated as an unlimited resource.

Interpersonal distance (proxemics)

The French: 40-50 cm.

The Americans: 60-70 cm. (“*spitting distance*”) – no closer than a stretched-out arm.

The Russians: There is no semiotic significance of personal space.

Work

The French: Formal-hedonistic attitude to work. The initiative is punishable but a constructive approach is welcome. Rationality and balance. Often excessive caution which makes the French not very successful businessmen. The French are not workaholics. There is a possibility (but not an obligation) of friendships after work.

The Americans: Competitive attitude to work. Initiative and independence in decision-making, but the final decision depends on a comparison of all proposals (*brainstorming is a method of generating ideas through a collective discussion of problems with complete freedom to propose solutions*). Americans are workaholics. It is not advisable to start friendships at work.

The Russians: Forced and often dismissive attitude to work. Lack of independence and initiative, dependence on superiors. Russians are rarely workaholics, more often not workaholics, as a rule, slob. Priority for establishing friendships at work.

Private life

The French: Respect for one’s privacy and the privacy of public figures.

The Americans: Invasion of privacy is acceptable especially when it comes to the privacy of public figures.

The Russians: Common invasion of privacy.

Complimentarity (*the feeling of mutual affection, respect, the possibility of cooperation based on irrational preferences +/-*).

The French: (+) the Russians, the Greeks, the Armenians. (-) the Americans, the Canadians, the Poles, the British, the Dutch, the Danes, the Swiss, the Belgians, the Germans, the French.

The Americans: (+) the Americans, the British. (-) the French, Latin Americans, black people, basically, the rest of the world.

The Russians: (+) Belarusians, the French, the British, the Armenians, the Ossetians, the Abkhazians, the Greeks. (-) the Poles, the Western Ukrainians, the Americans.

Results and discussion

Thus, let us comment on the above from the point of view of the specificity of cultural communication codes and parameters of some values for each of the considered linguistic cultures:

The French

It is well known that the French way of conducting a conversation is distinguished by sophisticated manners. Here are some thoughts of A.A. Herzen from the 19th century that concern not only the principles of French conversation. We believe that these thoughts have remained relevant to this day.

“The Frenchman participated in these matters in a different way <...> I got into an argument with him five minutes later; he answered evasively, cleverly, not yielding anything and being extremely courteous. <...> Indeed, it is only the French who know how to talk. The Germans can make declarations of love, confide their secrets, preach sermons or swear. In England routs are so much liked just because they make conversation impossible... there is a crowd, no room to move, everyone is pushing and being pushed, no one knows anybody. <...> In the diligence with us there was a full-bodied, middle aged abbe of stately deportment <...> began talking pleasantly and intelligently, with the classical correctness of the language of Port-Royal and the Sorbonne, and with many quotations and chaste witticisms”¹³.

“Moreover, I particularly disliked the tone of condescending superiority which Frenchmen assume with Russians: they approve of us, encourage us, commend our pronunciation and our wealth <...> The French overwhelm us with a flood of words, we cannot keep pace with them; we think of an answer, but they do not care to hear it”¹⁴.

“Moreover, it must be remembered that there are no people in the world with whom it is easier to strike up a nodding acquaintance than the French – and no people with whom it is more difficult to get on to really intimate terms. A Frenchman likes to live in company, in order to display himself, to have an audience <...> the Englishman is always asking questions, the Frenchman is always giving answers. The Englishman is always wondering,

¹³ A. I. Herzen, *Sochineniya v 4 t. Vol. 2. Byloe i dumy. Parts 4-5* (Moscow: Pravda, 1988).

¹⁴ A. I. Herzen, *Sochineniya v 4 t...*

always thinking things over; the Frenchman knows everything for certain, he is finished and complete, he will go no further: he is fond of preaching, talking, holding forth – about what, to whom, he does not care. He feels no need for personal intimacy; the café satisfies him completely”¹⁵.

As one can see, the provided quotations vividly show the key parameters of the actant (according to R. Barthes) codes of the French: sophistication in conversation, superficial acquaintances, self-admiration directed at self and the art of holding a conversation¹⁶.

Our observations indicate that when the French work, it would never occur to anyone that they are engaged in professional activities. It is not customary to show how hard they had to work to achieve success. The attitude towards work is very responsible, besides, the French have to follow a lot of workplace rules and formal orders, which they cope with brilliantly (*chose promise, chose due*). The workday begins and ends with handshakes (including female colleagues).

Along with strict observance of protocol rules and manners of communication, privacy is inviolable for French people. By the way, the French see clothes as part of the personal world and are never the subject of public assessments or even ridicule. The French, as always, dress tastefully and ingeniously but never make a cult of clothes. According to the French, clothing should correspond to the social and communicative situation in which the person is: wear shorts and sneakers for trekking in the mountains and at an official reception wear an evening dress, tuxedo and bowtie.

In any case, for the French, clothing has lost its status as an indicator of social or financial status. Watching how the French are dressed on the street, one can hardly determine their financial or social status. For the most part, Frenchmen, and indeed the Frenchwomen, dress modestly and functionally. They use hardly any makeup.

The love of the French for their language and France is well-known, it is not very well-known that the French often cannot stand their compatriots, especially abroad (*La France serait encore plus belle, s'il n'y avait pas de Français* literally 'France would be even more beautiful were it not for the French').

At the level of complementarity, the French are the more typical representatives of ethnocentrism. At the same time, having met a French person abroad, they do not seek to approach them unless it is inevitable. A French person would rather trust a foreigner than a compatriot. Among the nations on which the French can count, for example, in business, there are the Germans and the Dutch whom the French cannot stand but whose business qualities they appreciate. The Americans, the Canadians or the Polish are unlikely to be part of the list as, according to the French, they are completely immoral in business and lack a sense of moderation in everything else. The French are friendly towards the Russians as they have suffered a lot and continue to suffer. There is only one French phraseological unit related to Russians with negative semantics: *souffrir comme un Russe* (literally 'to suffer like a Russian', that is, to suffer excessively, brutally and endlessly). Nevertheless, this utterance

¹⁵ A. I. Herzen. *Sochineniya v 4 t...*

¹⁶ R. Barthes, Introduction à l'analyse structurale des recits. In *Zarubezhnaya estetika i teoriya literaturny XIX-XX vv. Traktaty, stati, esse* (pp. 387-422) (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1987).

ambivalently conveys a certain pity or, on the contrary, admiration for the “suffering Russia”. One can work with Russians, the French believe, but only in case of complete and unconditional submission to a representative of the Gallic rationalism.

At the level of workplace relations, the French are subject to the meritocratic principle of communication that involves an assessment based on merit and not on the occupied position. This does not mean that French organizations do not have high-profile workers but their value is known to everyone and does not cause respect among colleagues.

Thus, let us highlight the typological features of French communication:

- restraint;
- communicative determinism;
- latent dominance;
- personal world is closed to the interlocutor;
- non-categorical expression of agreement or disagreement;
- priority of institutional communication;
- increased attention when listening;
- selectivity of the information discussed.

The Americans

The Americans are a young and ethnocentric nation. What happens outside the United States is of little interest to the citizens. Personal initiative and innovation are welcome. Life priorities of the Americans: competitiveness, personal achievements and financial well-being. Americans are punctual and can only be late for a cocktail and for no longer than 10 minutes. They address each other by the first name. For an introduction, they choose the most sonorous and easily pronounced option of address.

The degree of acquaintance and relationship determines the type of greeting. In any case, the most common greeting in America is a smile accompanied by a nod, a characteristic gesture and the phrase “Hi! How are you?” which does not require long explanations about health or state of affairs. Strong handshakes are preferable at work. Pats on the back or hugs are acceptable between close or old friends.

American conversation is not characterized by sophisticated manners, which is one of the main coincidences with the parameters of Russian communication. The Americans prefer to look directly into the interlocutor's eyes which is regarded as an expression of sincerity.

An important aspect of the communicative behavior of Americans within a group (organization) is the category of “egalitarianism”. This type of organizational culture involves assessing a group member's quality of work by the level of their professional competence

and contribution to the common cause. It determines the level of salary and position, which is periodically verified in the form of various interviews.

American principles of communicative behavior:

- subjectivity and lack of restraint;
- communicative competitiveness;
- openness and peremptoriness in the expression of one's opinion;
- mental focus on practical action and result;
- pragmatic optimism;
- categoricalness and directness in expressing agreement or disagreement;
- priority of institutional communication;
- selectivity of the information discussed.

The Russians

The Russian communicative code involves both verbal and non-verbal pressure on the interlocutor. The social status or degree of acquaintance do not matter. However, this is not an obstacle to the variable use of any instruments of influence. This can be explained by the desire of Russians for uncompromising assessments of any actions or results, as well as the closeness and emotionality of communication.

In line with the concept by O.A. Leontovich, let us imagine the principles of “effective communication adopted among Russians through the lens of phraseology”¹⁷:

- high level of linguistic competence: *vladet slovom/darom slova; krepkoe/ostroe slovtso; yazyk khorosho podveshen; za slovom v karman ne lezet; paltsa v rot ne kladi* [have an excellent command of language/have the gift of the gab; strong/witty language; have a way with words; not be stuck for a response; sharp and not to be trusted];

- serious attitude: *shutki v storonu; blizhe k delu; skazano – sdelano; ugovor dorozhe deneg; byt svyazannym svoim slovom; ne davshi slova, krepis, a davshi, derzhis; gospodin/khozyain svoego slova* [jokes aside; to the point; no sooner said than done; a deal is a deal; be bound by one's word; if you give your word, keep it; master of one's word];

- straightforwardness, sincerity and truthfulness: *govorit bez obinyakov; vesti/gnut svoyu liniyu; stavit vopros rebrom; ponimat s poluslova; khleb-sol esh, a pravdu rezh; raskryvat/raspakhnut/izlit dushu; vyvorachivat dushu naiznanku; nazyvat veshchi svoimi imenam* [speak bluntly; go/follow one's way; put a question point-blank; finish each other's sentences; speak the truth no matter what; open one's soul/pour one's heart out; spill one's guts; call a spade a spade];

¹⁷ O. A. Leontovich, *Russkie i amerikantsy: paradoksy mezhkulturnogo obshcheniya* (Volgograd: Peremena, 2002).

- brevity and restraint in communication: *ukorotit/priderzhat/prikusit yazyk; skazal by slovechko, da volk nedalechko; skazannoe slovo serebryanoe, a neskazannoe – zolotoe; chya by korova mychala, a tvoya by molchala; yazyk moi – vrag moi; derzhat yazyk za zubami; esh pirog s gribami, a yazyk derzhi za zubami; molchanie – znak soglasiya; derzhat yazyk na privyazi; nastupit na yazyk; vzveshivat svoi slova* [tame/hold/bite one's tongue; walls have ears; speech is silver but silence is gold; pot calling the kettle black; my tongue runs away with me; hold one's tongue; keep your breath to cool your porridge; silence means consent; keep one's mouth shut; force to be silent; weigh one's words].

Conclusion

Thus, the identification of idiolectic and ethnocentric elements is associated with the concept of text space wherein native speakers' ideas of space are refracted and fixed in the linguistic picture of the world, predetermined by archetypes of national cultures. At the same time, the text is viewed as part of the socio-psychological space of society, onto which the associative-verbal model of the national language speaker's linguistic personality is projected. Spatio-temporal parameters of the perception of reality are nationally specific and are fixed in the preferred use of certain linguistic forms and structures.

From the point of view of communication in a group, the Russian type of relationship can be considered within the category of status. For the Russians, social status (position, degree, rank) is more important than an actual contribution to the common cause. Collegiality is also not welcome, although it is often officially declared.

The comments provided above do not feature the entire variety of manifestations of the ethnocultural specificity in communication. We merely attempted to describe the dominant intercultural differences between the three linguistic cultures: French, American and Russian. The choice of material is determined by our interpretation of the positions of these ethnic cultures in the development of world civilizations. Moreover, the results of the analysis are not considered to be the only true and comprehensive results, but only as versions for research prospects. In our opinion, the three superethnoses (Russian, French, American) have played, are playing and will continue to play leading roles in dialogues between representatives of most of the world's cultures.

The linguistic personality of a native speaker acts as an active element in the functioning of the discourse. At the same time, discourse is considered a phenomenon of communication. Everyday communication is carried out through text, which is interpreted as a multi-level communicative structure and a vector of not only idiolectic characteristics but also of national particularities of communication. The idiolectic and the ethnocultural are in a dialectic interaction, being part of the discrete process of actualizing the meaning of the utterance, therefore there is every reason to use everyday discourse as the basis for analyzing the characterological component of the utterance. At the same time, when analyzing any text, it is necessary to consider the extralinguistic factors related to the communicative competence of the recipient of the message.

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