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The communicative hindrances arising in the course of communication between representatives of Russian speaking and English speaking linguistic cultures, and training in ways of their overcoming

The article in question represents the results of a practical research of various categories of communicative obstacles and barriers which occur in the process of intercultural communication between representatives of the English speaking and Russian speaking linguistic cultures. The results are contrasted and compared, explained and analyzed with the description of their cultural specifics and also their possible reasons. In conclusion various ways and methods of overcoming communicative barriers in the process of intercultural communication are explained that can be used in teaching foreign languages to secondary school and university students.

Key words: Intercultural communication, intercultural understanding, communicators, communicative barriers, communicative situation, English speaking and Russian speaking cultures, non-verbal communication, tolerance, cultural background, stereotypes.

In the present day world the issues of intercultural communication have become of a special importance due to the broadened contacts among people from different countries.

Communication as an exchange of information is possible only when its participants use the same methods of information encoding. But knowledge of lexical units is not always enough as a result of various reasons, among them social, political and age peculiarities.

If such peculiarities are not observed social and psychological communicative barriers might occur. Social barriers appear when there is no unanimous understanding of a communicative situation due to differences between partners. Psychological communicative barriers result from individual psychological features of communicators or psychological relations between them.

The problem of communicative barriers has been researched for several decades and its detailed studies were completed by V.G.Zinchenko, O.A.Leontovich, S.G.Ter-Minasova, E.Hall [1–4].

I.A.Feshkina stresses that obstacles in intercultural communication are caused by different mentalities, behavior, perception and evaluation of reality among representatives of diverse social and ethnic groups. She points that obstacles which cannot be eliminated at once are called communicative barriers [5; 143].

V.M.Shepel highlights six main communicative barriers:

- discomfort in the surroundings where communication occurs;
- preoccupation with issues different from points of conversation;
- aversion to thoughts and stereotypes of others;
- language barrier;
- professional antipathy;
- rejection of a communicator's image [6; 61].

F.I.Sharkov classifies communicative barriers into technical, psychological, psychophysical, social and national [7; 248]. S.P.Bobrova and E.L.Smirnova write about geographical, historical, political, institutional, economical, technical, terminological, linguistic, psychological and resonance barriers [8; 41].

Our research was aimed at identification of various communicative barriers which occur during intercultural interactions between representatives of the English speaking and Russian speaking cultures and highlighting the main strategies of their elimination. The subjective approach was employed as a research strategy while analyzing how instances of intercultural communication got reflected in the minds of the research participants with the stress on interpersonal interaction.

The study was based on interviewing 80 people aged 18–30 from Russia, the USA and Great Britain who already had some experience of intercultural communication which had occurred both in their native countries and abroad. Russian participants were 40 students of the Chuvash State Pedagogical University who had taken part in exchange programs in the USA and Great Britain. Among the foreign participants were 30 people from the USA and Great Britain who had previously communicated with Russians.

The investigation included a survey which was conducted in March 2014 and analysis of its results. Questions of the survey corresponded to various barriers that exist due to the differences between in the language and non-verbal systems and also between diverse linguistic views of the world.

The questionnaire for the speaker of English was as follows:

1. *Have you ever communicated with a person whose native language is Russian?*

- a. Yes
- b. No

2. *Did you have any linguistic problems with understanding them?*

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. It depends

3. *If you did, what was the main obstacle? (You may choose several options)*

- a. Phonetical errors in their speech
- b. Lexical errors in their speech
- c. Grammatical errors in their speech
- d. Mishearing
- e. Wrong understanding of the meaning of some words
- f. Violation of the logic of the whole speech
- g. (your variant) _____

4. *What was the main psychological obstacle? (You may choose several options)*

- a. Unexpected reaction of the interlocutor;
- b. Excessive emotionality of the interlocutor;
- c. Too high/low self-esteem;
- d. Disrespect to you;
- e. Violation of physical borders of your «private space»;
- f. Well-known Russians' «unsmiling»;
- g. (your variant) _____

5. *What was the main cultural obstacle? (You may choose several options)*

- a. Differences in Russian and American mentalities;

- b. Differences in perception of space and time;
 - c. Stereotypes about Russians;
 - d. Differences in value priorities;
 - e. Differences in presupposition and background knowledge;
 - f. Differences in understanding humor and jokes;
 - g. Not using politically correct words or euphemisms (an innocuous word or expression used in the place of one that may be found offensive or suggest smth unpleasant);
 - g. (your variant) _____
6. *Which stereotypes about Russians seem to be true? (Please write the answer below) Why?*
 7. *Which stereotypes about Russians appeared to be false?*
 8. *What is the best thing when talking to a Russian?*
 9. *What is the most difficult thing when communicating to a Russian?*
 10. *Your age*

Analysis of the responses concerning the problems in communication and their influence on its success provided an informative interpretation of linguistic barriers which occur between speakers of English and Russian. Moreover, content analysis enabled to obtain certain data on the number of instances when the 'problem zones' were mentioned and their representation in the minds of the respondents.

Out of 80 respondents 69 people faced linguistic barriers in communication during their first contact with foreigners. Reasons of these barriers were of different nature. Nevertheless it should be stressed that in the majority of cases variations in styles of verbal communication didn't hamper intercultural interactions. The most typical reaction was adaptation of a respondent to a new linguistic situation, tolerance to unknown stylistic features of speech.

The respondents stress that they had experienced more serious problems with intercultural communication due to semantic barriers. Interaction with representatives of other cultures displayed differences in cognitive schemes which in some instances can result in misunderstanding between communicators. Peculiarities of phonetics, morphology, vocabulary and syntax of the languages cause difficulties in translation and reproduction of exchanged utterances.

Having analyzed the results of the survey we distributed them according to the categories of verbal barriers and tried to determine which category was the most problematic for the speakers.

At the phonetic level difficulties mainly occurred because the respondents were not able to decipher some sounds and pronounce them correctly or to pronounce and interpret prosodic characteristics of speech. For example the respondents mentioned difficulties in understanding foreign accents and slang as they can differ greatly from Standard English or RP used in textbooks. Most of the speakers felt certain uneasiness when needed to check back or repeat their questions.

The respondents, however, had almost no problems on the graphical level. Some of them pointed that had had difficulties with reading and understanding graphic abbreviations as it usually requires some background cultural knowledge. Intercultural barriers also occurred when non-native speakers created their own abbreviations which didn't actually coincide with the existing ones. English-speaking respondents had problems with the Russian italics. They stress that such way of writing made it especially difficult for them to comprehend written texts and messages.

Native speakers of English as well had lots of problems with the Russian morphology. American respondents pointed at a great number of root morphemes and affixes in the Russian language which can be easily mixed up.

The biggest number of communicative barriers happened on the lexical level. Most of the Russian speaking respondents pointed at communicative problems which happened due to the poor/not good knowledge of the English vocabulary. They felt uneasy and depressed being afraid of misunderstanding.

The respondents stress specific features of oral communication in direct and indirect styles. They differ from each other in the way the express speakers' intentions in speech acts. In the indirect style such intentions are not demonstrated overtly. When the direct style is used messages reflect real goals, needs and wishes of a speaker. These stylistic differences are most noticeable when Russian and English verbal communicative styles are compared, the latter characterized by a greater degree of honesty and openness.

The American respondents mention that when Russians politely answer 'Yes, yes' they only demonstrate their polite attitude, not their understanding, which hampers evaluation of the possible degree of misunderstanding.

The survey also brought to light distinctions between English and Russian in personal and contextual styles. They employ language structures which stress either an individual or his role or status in different ways. English is traditionally oriented towards an individual. Equality of partners and symmetrical distribution of power in a communicative situation is stressed by the use of the pronoun 'you' when addressing any person. Contextually or status oriented style underlines the importance of formal relations which are characterized by asymmetrical distribution of power. In this case language structures reflect hierarchic social order.

For example, Russian respondents note that in Russia the distance between students and professors is quite big, while in England she felt no communicative barriers while talking to teachers because she used just one pronoun 'you' to address them.

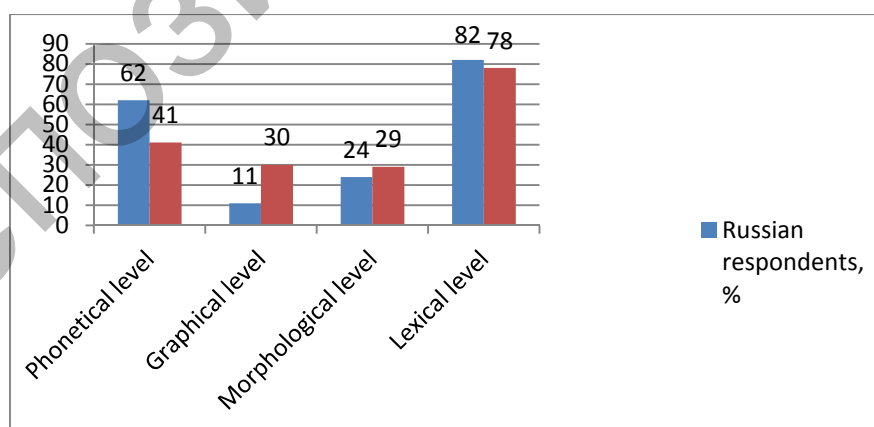
Describing the semantic barriers which the respondents came across during intercultural communication we should say that they fall under five main categories.

The first category comprises the situations when culture-specific terms were used in communication. This barrier was mostly mentioned by the American participants who tried to explain American realia to Russians. The second group consists of words which have different scopes of meaning in English and in Russian like the word 'credit'. In the third group are verbal expressions which can be interpreted ambivalently in different cultures. The respondents mentioned the expression 'to have some coffee'. For Americans it means to go to a café and have a talk, while Russians treat it more directly as an offer to drink coffee. Barriers determined by shades of meaning are in group four. The survey highlighted certain difficulties that the Russian respondents had with the word 'clever' not considering its negative connotations. Finally a great lot of semantic barriers are connected with the use of dialectal, slang and idiomatic expressions. Several Russian respondents experienced lack of personal fulfillment caused by the poor knowledge of spoken idiomatic English. Though they know the language well enough for effective communication, they felt they could have conveyed their ideas better if they had mastered not only bookish expressions and phrases.

Some respondents, mostly those for whom it was the first experience of intercultural communication, pointed at incongruity of verbal communication in the Russian speaking and the English speaking cultures. In such situations tolerance of communicating partners, their power of observation and readiness to follow the standards helped to avoid problematic situations.

Analysis of the problems caused by differences in language systems mentioned in the survey proves that they produce certain problems for intercultural communication. As A.P.Zabrovsky states, any language reflects mental schemes, models of reality perception and experience of exploring the world, which are accumulated in culture [9; 89]. The biggest number of the barriers mentioned were the lexical ones. As it is shown on diagram 1, 82 % of the respondents named them while describing the most difficult situations they had to face. In the majority of cases these differences caused surprise, seemed strange and unusual. Under some circumstances they became barriers which hampered understanding between partners.

Diagram 1



Non-verbal communication plays an important role in the process of intercultural communication though its symbols can have different meanings for communicators. Its incongruity may influence effectiveness of interaction. The results of the survey were analyzed to find out which non-verbal communicative barrier posed the most serious problems for the speakers.

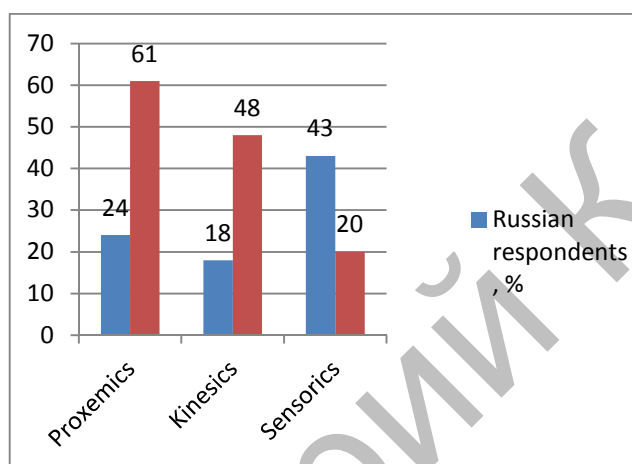
Meaning of many symbols in Russian and English cultures are in opposition to each other. It reflects in paralinguistic characteristics, body language and context of communication. Most of the English speaking

respondents noted that they had problems with their personal space which speakers of Russian were eager to intrude. American respondents also stress that they gesticulate actively while speaking.

Meanwhile despite the clear differences in non-verbal behavior of communicators representing different cultures non-verbal barriers are not perceived as seriously hampering intercultural communication. Non-verbal distinctions when met for the first time were reasons for surprise and anxiety, slight shock. They seemed strange and unusual. However the partners got used to them in the process of communication and even began reproducing them. It can also be explained by the speakers' tolerance to unusual behavior of their partners and understanding the role of non-verbal symbols in intercultural communication.

The survey indicated that the greatest number of non-verbal communicative barriers occurred because of sensorial perception of representatives of other cultures. Diagram 2 shows the percentage of non-verbal barriers noted by the respondents. The English speaking respondents felt discomfort mostly due to intrusions into their personal spaces (61 %) or lack of communicator's response (48 %).

Diagram 2



On the whole we can say that the total number of non-verbal barriers was less than the number of verbal barriers in communication between speakers of Russian and English.

Another factor which creates barriers for intercultural communication is stereotypes. Specific features of national and ethnical consciousness of people from the English speaking and Russian speaking cultures may become obstacles for intercultural interaction.

According to A.P. Pavlovskaya, one can stress the following aspects of consciousness:

1. tendency towards ethnocentrism when representatives of other cultures are estimated negatively as compared to the native culture of speakers;
2. stereotypization of ethnic consciousness which is revealed in formation of simplified images of representatives of the native and other cultures;
3. prejudice as a result of selective inclusions of sensorial perception or negative experiences from the past into intercultural contacts, etc. [10; 74]

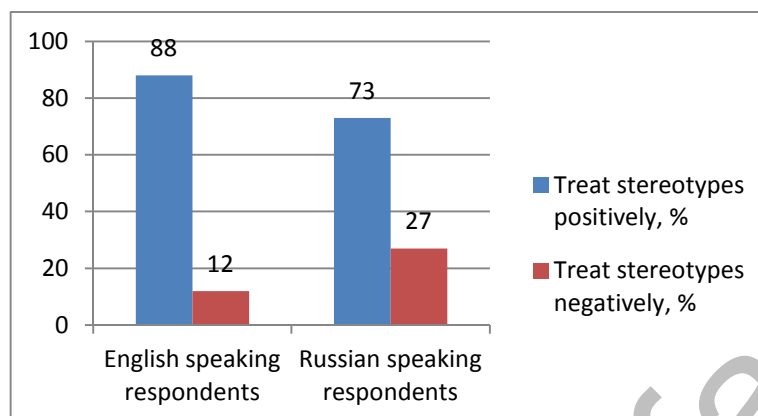
These phenomena are of a special importance as they pose a potential threat at the initial stage of intercultural communication when there is no complete information about the partners. Expectation of greater differences in communication with representatives of other cultures as compared with the native culture results in limitation of contacts with the 'others'. Being shielded from the new information people only enforce their prejudices and lose the ability to realize falseness of some stereotypes.

Almost all the respondents pointed that stereotypes about other cultures influenced the process of intercultural communication. Only 7 people denied this fact as a result of their skeptical attitude to stereotypes and a broad experience of intercultural interactions.

Stereotypes of the English speaking respondents about Russians are of a special interest. They say that Russians are usually described as 'crazy guys and like mafia ppl. With blowing up things!', 'are blunt and straight to the point in conversations', 'A lot of people think Russians are mean or aggressive but most of these people have never even met one', 'False is how they are big and mean!'. Meanwhile all the British and American respondents stress that in real life Russians turn out to be not like this. Most of them consider Russians to be smart and friendly.

Diagram 3 presents the percentage ratio of the English and Russian speaking respondents about stereotypes. 12 % of the speakers of English suppose that stereotypes make it easier to comprehend the Russian culture, while 88 % are sure that stereotypes hamper the correct evaluation of a communicator. More speakers of Russian (27 %) think that stereotypes are positive for intercultural communication.

Diagram 3



Barriers in intercultural communication gave way to the following aspects of cognitive schemes:

1. Stereotypes about Russia existing in the consciousness of people from other cultures. Russian respondents were slightly shocked by the negative image of Russia in the minds of Americans and Britons. One of the respondents didn't like a lot the fact that many stereotypes were applied to him a Russian though soon he managed to convince his partners that the stereotypes were not true.

Almost all the respondents who faced heterostereotypes as simplified images of Russian and Russians were displeased with it and tried to change such images and views.

English speaking respondents noted that they were not surprised to hear stereotypes about themselves and they, as well as Russians, tried to show that stereotypes can't be trusted.

2. Stereotypes in the minds of the Russian participants as simplified images of representatives of other cultures (British or American) which were formed under the influence of other Russians, literature, mass media, own past experience.

It is important to notice that during intercultural communication the degree of changes of the initial stereotypical images varied from one respondent to the other. It depended mostly on whether the features of their communicators coincided with ones formulated in stereotypes.

Practically all the Russian respondents stressed that Americans are indeed always very cheerful and like to eat junk food from fast food restaurants. There were fewer comments about Britons. Russian respondents only noticed that Britons always drink tea, are very pedantic and cowardly. They pointed that the stereotype about 'stupid Americans' is not true.

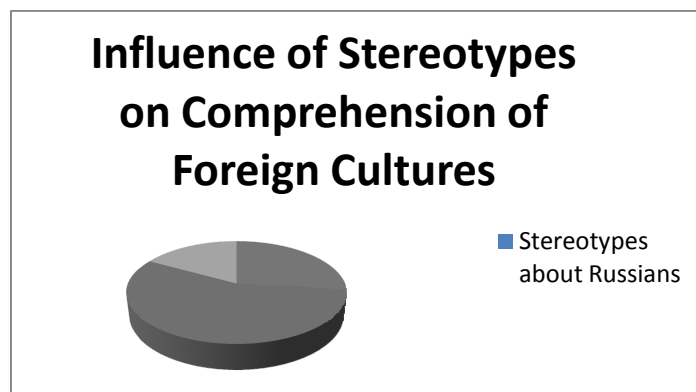
The respondents who came across stereotypization said that it is especially important as a potential barrier at the initial stages of intercultural communication.

Diagram 4 represents the influence of stereotypes on comprehension of foreign cultures and intercultural communication.

Long-lasting and intensive intercultural communication often eliminates this barrier. The survey couldn't show such results because it was set in a limited social environment which consisted mainly of students and university professors.

These circumstances didn't allow relations between the communicators become interpersonal. Impersonality characterizes initial stages of interaction when partners, knowing little about each other, use stereotypical images about a standard behavior of certain groups of people. Only when relations become interpersonal and individual characteristics of participants are taken into account communication is successful.

The results of the survey clearly reflect the present day situation with intercultural communication where stereotypes are serious and important barriers of understanding between people of different cultural and ethnical background. Russian respondents named negative stereotypes about Russia as the greatest obstacles on the way to intercultural understanding. This factor became even more salient when Russians had only positive intentions for contacts.



Both speakers of English and Russians suggest broadening of intercultural ties and mutual respect of other cultures effective tools in eliminating the number and degree of communicative barriers. In addition to these A.A. Brudny suggests using a neutral space for communication and speaking an intermediary language [11; 59].

In accordance with the ideas of O.A.Leontovich we would suggest some more methods aimed at optimizing the process of intercultural communication. They include a high degree of explicitness, excessiveness, parallelism, ample use of feedback [2; 286].

Unlike communication within one culture with a high degree of implicitness, in the process of intercultural communication one cannot rely on implicit information that is meant but is not expressed overtly. It happens so because of the differences in presuppositions, background knowledge, etc. That is why the biggest portion of the information should be expressed explicitly, at least at the initial stages of communication.

Quantitative measures of information are different for a native speaker and a foreigner. That is why effective intercultural communication as a rule requires excessiveness which means explanation of unknown lexical units, use of complete grammatical structures instead of elliptical ones, repetitions, explanations and culture commentaries, and also employing of non-verbal communication.

Using various channels of information, e.g. voice, mimics, gestures, smells, tastes, is essential for effective intercultural communication. Body language is used for compensation. It explains the fact why people tend to speak louder when talking to foreigners, especially in cases of misunderstanding.

It is a common knowledge that communication is inconvertible though it can certainly be corrected. Skillful using of feedback in intercultural communication makes it one of the main factors of its success because feedback enables a communicator to make conclusions whether information is interpreted correctly. Optimization of feedback presumes development of sensor acuteness and flexibility of a communicator, obligatory verification of information with the help of echo-questions, attention to verbal and non-verbal reactions of interlocutors.

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И.Н.Мартынова

Орыстілді және ағылшынтілді лингвомәдениеттер өкілдерінің арасындағы мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынас барысында пайда болатын коммуникативті кедергілер мен оларды жеңу әдістері

Мақалада орыстілді және ағылшынтілді лингвомәдениеттер өкілдерінің арасындағы мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынас барысында пайда болатын коммуникативтік кедергілердің әр түрлі санаттарына жасалған тәжірибелік зерттеудің нәтижелері көрсетілген. Алынған нәтижелерге салыстырмалы-салғастырмалы талдау жасалып, олардың мәдени ерекшеліктері мен пайда болуының мүмкін болатын себептері көрсетілген. Автор орыстілді оқушылар мен студенттерге шетел тілін оқыту барысында қолдануға болатын мәдениетаралық кедергілерді жеңу тәсілдері мен әдістерін ұсынған.

И.Н.Мартынова

Коммуникативные трудности, возникающие в процессе общения между представителями русскоязычной и англоязычной лингвокультур, и способы их преодоления

В данной статье представлены результаты практического исследования различных категорий коммуникативных помех и барьеров, возникающих в процессе межкультурной коммуникации между представителями англоязычной и русскоязычной лингвокультур. Приводятся обоснование и сравнительно-сопоставительный анализ полученных результатов, раскрываются их культурно-специфические особенности, а также возможные причины возникновения. Автором описаны приёмы и способы преодоления межкультурных барьеров, которые могут быть использованы в процессе обучения иностранным языкам русскоговорящих учащихся и студентов.

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