



On Communicative Failures in Cross-Cultural Discourse

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Abstract

The authors of the article address an urgent problem of communicative interaction in the context of existing discursive differences defined by characteristic intra-cultural methods of coding cultural phenomena. The fact that communicative failures are predetermined, first of all, by the asymmetry of evaluation and perception of cultural phenomena, which the representatives of different cultural and linguistic communities directly find in cross-cultural interaction, is undoubted. The paper provides insight on the potential of including data from the analysis of particular cases of knowledge about language and the surrounding world, which are used to identify a referent in the discourse by a speaker or a listener, when organizing cross-cultural communication within the framework of pedagogical discourse. The analysis of particular communicative failures in the process of cross-cultural natural language interaction allows for the creation and / or correction of tactics of verbal behaviour that can be effectively used in teaching Russian as a foreign language, for example, when studying a speech genre such as “congratulations”, as well as the communicative topic “Holidays”.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Communication; Linguistic Communities; Communicative Failures; Russian As A Foreign Language; Pedagogical Discourse.

1. Introduction

Today, the absence in the vast academic space of an unambiguous definition of the term “discourse”, which existed even in ancient philosophical science, but acquired a comprehensive scientific (and even subsequent every day) existence thanks to the work of French post-structuralists in the 1960s, is a gap indicating that the theory of discourse continues to be an actively developing area of modern linguistics. This, in turn, is due to the genetic connection of the concept of “discourse” with the concepts of language, society, knowledge, and ideology, the popularity of which does not cancel their vague content (Teun A. Van Dijk, 1998). Ambiguity was not originally inherent in this term: the etymologically Latin *discursus* (“running around, fussing around”) in the process of use takes on the predominant meaning today as “conversation, talk”, “speech, use of language” (<http://latinlexicon.org>). However, the metaphor – the rapid exchange of conventional wisdom between the discourses of participants in communicative interaction – is relevant to the theory of language and related cross-cultural research today.

According to the observations of Russian scholar V. Z. Demyankov, the word “discourse”, inextricably linked with the word “text”, “does not pretend to non-terminological status in modern Russian, it has become the term of the class “speech” (as in English), although the most common accent in Latin / French, and not English sample” (Demyankov, 2007). The author emphasizes that the use in everyday language extremely accurately distinguishes between the related concepts of “text” and “discourse”, where the first has subjective, and the second has procedural (being the “term of the sciences of human spirituality” (Demyankov, 2007; Ghasemi Mighani & Yazdani Moghadam, 2019) meanings, confirmed by their etymology. German scholar A. Landwehr, comparing the everyday usage of this word in (ancient) Latin and in (modern) English, has to admit that in German, despite the frequency of use, “this expression is already on the way to the ordinary word, at least in some speech situations, this impression emerges” (Farzadnia & Giles, 2015; Landwehr, 2010).



We draw attention to the universality of discourse as a communicative act, capable of expressing intangible ideologies, further linking the discourse with the concept of speech as an actual action, rather than text as an abstract grammatical structure. Being, according to T. A. van Dijk, the unity of linguistic form, meaning, and action (Teun A. Van Dijk, 1998), discourse as a communicative phenomenon formed by communication units – texts – nevertheless does not become the sum of those, since discourse in a specific communication situation is built from “macrostructures” (Term by Teun Adrianus Van Dijk & Kintsch (1983)), linking fragments thematically, eventfully and/or referentially in a broad socio-cultural context).

The hypothesis of this paper is that the analysis of the discursive content of specific communicative acts gives a positive effect and motivation to a deeper understanding of the meaning of speech interaction, avoiding stereotypical and/or erroneous interpretation of the content of the utterance, facilitating cross-cultural communication in general. The main attention in this work is drawn to the potential of communicative failures as any kind of discomfort in the process of realization of communicative intentions in cross-cultural communication, defined by special meanings, associations, and connections in the system of cultural representations and values of the conceptual sphere of the language (Salakhova et al., 2019).

2. Literature Review

There is a wide range of research and scientific resources to study the subject of this article. In this article, an attempt has been made to provide accurate analyses taking into account the views of different authors. According to Thomas (1983) model of pragmatic failure, cross-cultural communication refers to the messages transmitted between two or more interlocutors who do or do not share a common cultural or linguistic background. In other words, pragmatics goes beyond the meaning of syntactic form and semantics or as stated by Grice “the overt meaning differs from the implied” (1975, as cited in Hatch, 1992). Dash (2004) highlighted that interlocutors in cross-cultural communication are required to become culturally sensitive and objective, avoiding prejudice and stereotypical assumptions to prevent communication breakdown in CMC. Lin (2008), discovered that interlocutors from different social and cultural traditions tend to use their own cultural values and systems to comprehend and interpret new social situations. She stressed that it is impossible for ESL speakers to acquire all pragmatic rules but it would be beneficial if both native and non-native speakers were aware of linguistic multiplicity, which reaches beyond the spoken word. In more recent studies, McGee (2019) says in a study that the study of failures in intercultural communication due to misunderstandings in the linguistic field of pragmatics. It focuses on three areas of pragmatics; compliments, refusals and complaints and examines how cultural misunderstandings can arise in these areas with examples from different communities. The paper emphasizes that the study of pragmatics needs a stronger focus in the teaching and learning of languages in teaching materials, in classroom practice and especially in computer-mediated communication, particularly through social media. The researcher stresses that more research needs to take place into not only what pragmatic failures in communication occur and why they happen across cultures and language but also into how they can be repaired and mutual understanding restored.

Maliki, Housni, & Biad (2019) said: In a globalizing and rapidly changing world, meeting people from different cultural backgrounds has become more and more common. However, such cross-cultural contacts are not always without problems. Although intra-cultural communication, at least at face value, seems to be easy to handle, cross cultural encounters tend to be usually fraught with a variety of problems. If at all something can be inferred from this, it might be that the values of a society and the representations people have of themselves and the other influence the world view of members of that society and condition their communication and interpretation patterns. They are usually taught (by their culture) to react in a particular way to some events and behavioural patterns; however, when they encounter a different set of values and representations, they tend to develop misconceptions and feelings of contempt for the actors of the target culture. It, therefore, clearly appears that cross-cultural differences in such values and conceptions can lead to different reactions and judgements of the same symbolic event and can ultimately lead to misunderstanding or communication failure.

Jing, Ping, Yanjiao, & Othman (2019) said: Pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication mainly indicates that language failure is due to inappropriate language use of people from different culture backgrounds in the process of communication. Although there are many related researches about the reasons of pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication, the deep reasons are still need to explore. some cross-cultural communications. They use qualitative



study to summaries different types of pragmatic failure and tries to find solutions to solve the pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication. Although many things which result in pragmatic failure are various, the main reasons are linguistic knowledge, culture backgrounds and values and ethnical principle and so on. Declining and avoiding pragmatic failure play vital roles in achieving successful cross-cultural communication. Thus, we can improve pragmatic competence and Cultivate Cross-cultural Awareness.

3. Methods

The theoretical basis of the paper are the works by the scholars dealing with the problem of discourse (Benveniste, 1973; De Saussure, 2011; Karasik, 2002; Rowlands, 1998; Schiffrin, 1998; Sedykh & Kugan, 2015; Teun Adrianus Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) as well as relevant research in the field of the discursive component in teaching (Kertaeva, 2020; Kochetkov & Kovalevich, 2020; Ponomarenko, Zlobina, Galitskih, & Rublyova, 2017). The essential difference between cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) as interlanguage pragmatics (IP) lies in the perspective from which each view cross-cultural communication. CCP takes the point of view that individuals from different societies or communities interact according to their own pragmatic norms, often resulting in a clash of expectations and, ultimately, misperceptions about the other group. The misperceptions are typically two-way; that is, each group misperceives the other. In an age in which cross-cultural interaction is the norm not only across societies but also within them, different rules of speaking have the potential to cause stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination against entire groups of people. Research in the area of CCP can greatly aid in ameliorating these consequences. Recent studies that view CCP from this two-way perspective are the focus of this chapter. The overview of this body of research demonstrates the potential contribution of the field of applied linguistics to mutual understanding through the study of discourse issues in cross-cultural pragmatics (Boxer, 2002). In studies, the authors applied a comprehensive approach to analysis and description of the content of discourses within the framework of cross-cultural interaction through the use of a number of general scientific methods (Al Amrani, 2019; Yuliya Yurisovna & Rafisovna Alikberova, 2019): system analysis, comparison, abstraction, logical analogy, as well as particular methods of applied linguistics – axiomatic construction and description.

The authors sequentially used a contextual approach in describing the content of the discourse, which defines any utterance as a product of the interaction of social agents, acquiring a certain content only in a specific system of meanings, orienting communicants in relation to each other and the world around them. The following strategy was used to objectify the discourse analysis data:

- Fixation of empirical material and definition of its formal characteristics;
- Description, establishment and interpretation of the facts of speech interaction;
- Summarization and structurization of conclusions.

In interpreting the results, a typology of communicative failures, widespread in Russian linguistics, was used (Nonaka & Toyama, 2015). Failure in communication, it is important to remember, is a phenomenon that renders the pursuit of communication temporarily or definitely impossible. In other words, failures of communication are of varying degrees not only in terms of length or duration, but in terms of effects as well. There are short term failures and long-term failures. The former can be due to reciprocal problems of comprehension, rather than to the inability of production on the part of the speaker. In such cases, partners tend to use reduced and simplified means to maintain the conversation. The latter, on the other hand, usually correspond to what Giacomi et al. (1985) have called “dialogue de sourds”, in which participants are not in the “same wave-length”, with each of them displaying a series of coding and decoding activities, giving the impression that they are fully satisfying the conversational rules when in fact they are not and are talking at cross purposes (Wu & Stephens, 1991).

4. Results and Discussion

As previously noted, the asymmetry of ideas about the world of communicants, caused by multivariate national cultures, leads to communicative failures. Speaking about the specific situation of verbal communication, it should be remembered that not only mental models of fragments of reality, but also social statuses of communicants, and any malfunctions of perception, disparity in the conditions of place and time of communication can become additional factors of “mismatch”.

Professional communication in the “teacher-student” pattern is an initially disparate type of social interaction. For example, the student’s answer to the teacher’s question in recitation is binding, and its absence is accepted by both participants as a communicative failure. In a situation of intensified migration around the world, this is increasingly a cross-cultural interaction, for the communicants do not belong to one culture (Andrews, 2001; Kutuzova, 2016). Generally, the definition of cross-cultural communication is that cross-cultural communication occurs when a member of one culture produces a message for consumption by a member of another culture. More precisely, cross-cultural communication is communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event. Frequently, the term cross-cultural communication is used when referring to communication between people from different cultures. Because this term implies a comparison between cultures (for example, different styles of leadership), we find it too restrictive. That is to say cross cultural communication should concern more about the exchange information among different cultural systems within a common environment. Thus, the key point there is to understand the other cultural and give appropriate reply and if people distort the cultural difference, they may easily failure in the communication. The term “pragmatic failure” was first put forward by a British scholar Jenny Thomas. She points out that interference in communication is generally referred to as pragmatic failure, which has nothing to do with grammatical mistakes but comes from inappropriate ways of speaking or the unconventional expressions resulting from different perceptions of what is considered as appropriate linguistic behaviour, and she defines “pragmatic failure” as “the inability to understand what is meant by what is said” (Ghazzoul, 2019; Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003).

Many studies are very interesting as explorations of the most likely areas, topics and speech acts where pragmatic failure might arise, but they all have the disadvantage of dealing with just one language/culture pair at a time. This makes it difficult for researchers to gain an overview of the underlying theory behind pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication. Much of this Cross-cultural pragmatic failure by Peter McGee Training, Language and Culture 77research has been conducted in educational settings, using quantitative, test-based methods to identify where pragmatic failures occur, and interviews with conversation analysis to explore these instances in more depth. Some concern has been expressed about the dependability of test-based research, due to the practical limitations of the research activities involved (McGee, 2019). It is often argued that pragmatics tends to be overlooked in language teaching, and yet a proper study of what pragmatics is in terms of context and meeting truth conditions and an understanding of potential ambiguity are very important in helping students to avoid cross-cultural communication problems. Traditionally, students and teachers tend to focus on grammatical awareness, and this means that general awareness of pragmatic violations (another word for pragmatic failures) is not very high. Bardovi-Harlig (2019) suggests that teachers need to design and evaluate specific tasks which simulate conversations to enable second language learners to develop pragmatic competence, to measure pragmatic development, to manage the interface between grammar, lexicon and pragmatics, and to consider the effect of the environment on pragmatic development. There is an increased awareness of cross-cultural issues because of post-structuralism and multiculturalism in many societies, and research is finally beginning to address the needs of students and teachers for classroom resources and strategies for explicit and incidental pragmatics learning (Peter, 2019; Sinclair, 2019). Alternatively, Ifantidou (2013) suggests that genre-specific exercises should be used to help students gain pragmatic competence in pragmatically inferred effects, and suggests the use of different text-types exemplifying irony, humour, contempt, respect favouring or incriminating attitudes.

The potential of communicative failures that multiplies in this way is difficult to algorithmize. It should be remembered that the most essential pragmatic criterion for communicative interaction is the assessment of its “successfulness”, “felicity / failure”, based on (not) achieving the original goal of communication. It is important to note that to consider “success-failure” in terms of a fixed dichotomy would be an oversimplification, in so far as this arises from the assumption that only, “success” constitutes part of the dynamics of communication, whereas “failures” are treated as mere kinds of “dead moments”. This is not true, for, as Giacomi et al. (1985) pointed out, “success and failure” are not antonyms, but rather too equally important poles or extremes of a continuum within which communication oscillates. When exchanges are smooth and successful, communication is success-oriented. However, when communication problems arise, it is failure oriented. The result of the fluctuation or oscillation between the two extremes is what has come to be referred to as ‘intercultural communication’ or cross-cultural communication (Giacomi & Hereda, 1985).



We considered and analysed a specific case of cross-cultural communicative interaction with the following communicative factors:

1. Addressant – an initial teacher in the city of R** (Germany);
- Addressee – a foreign student having a sufficient level of German to interact, who is staying in a target-language country for more than eight months;
- Relationships between a speaker and a listener – official;
- Goal – the goal to reach out to classroom (organizational aspects of the beginning of a lesson), recitation of learners;
- Means of communication – Literary German;
- Communication – verbal, contact;
- Place of communication – classroom.

Description of the communicative situation: in the elementary school of the city of R **, the teacher (addressant) asks the following question, referring directly to the student (addressee): “***, please tell me, what is the date today?” The addressee answers with hesitation (lowering his/her eyes), and then refuses to answer, saying that he/she does not know. The addressant, having expressed dissatisfaction with the absent-mindedness of the addressee, having excluded the fact of not understanding the question by a foreign student who is from Russia, because the question is known to the student, and he/she has already shown a sufficient level of language competence for the correct answer, readdresses the question to other students in the class. After the lessons, the student motivated his/her refusal to answer not by his/ her not knowing the date, but by his/her considering the teacher’s question and the more the answer to be inappropriate, since it was about May 9 – the date which in the Russian discourse serves as a synonym for the name of the holiday – Victory Day, the mention of which the student considered to be inappropriate in the territory of modern Germany. The teacher’s remark about his/her abstractedness offended him/her extremely.

From our point of view, this case indicated a communicative failure that arose through the fault of the listener as a result of an incorrect assessment of the situation and the illocutionary goal of the speaker, which is conditioned by the difference in discourses. Namely, the addressee was not able to build his own adequate interpretation of the statement (in the theoretical works by M. Ringl and B. Bruce, this is connected with an incorrect reference setting, an incorrect understanding of a single word, etc., and is defined as communicative failures at the input level (Goodman, n.d.). As applied to the described situation, the student saw a provocation in the question of the teacher of the German school, relating the date of May 9 to the Victory Day holiday and the discourse about the Great Patriotic War, but the question did not contain the provocation. The latter is connected not only with the high ethical standards of pedagogical work in Germany, but also with the lack of tradition in the German discourse of parallel use in the nominative function of the name of the holiday and its date (for example, “March 8” and “International Women’s Day”, “February 23” and “Day of Defenders of the Fatherland”, “May 9” and “Victory Day”) – this tradition is absent in German speech culture, where the holidays have a verbal name and are not associated with a fixed date (even if this date is fixed and does not depend on calendar changes) . In addition, the day of the end of World War II in Europe (including Germany) is considered to be May 8, 1945 (<https://www.wissen.de>).

In a situation of overcoming communicative mistakes and / or neutralizing communicative failure in pedagogical communication initiated by the teacher, it is the addressant who plays an active role in resolving it: by verbal (or non-verbal) message of mutual misunderstanding. As we see in the analysed example of verbal cross-cultural interaction, the addressee student used his/her own interpretation of the teacher’s statement, but entirely inadequate for the meaning implied by the addressant. The resulting misunderstanding could be predicted by the addressant on the condition that the discursive field of the perceiving subject was taken into account, but it should be assumed that in the standardized situation at the beginning of the lesson, such “preparedness” of communication seemed unnecessary for the teacher.

Cross-culture communication is a subject which concerns many other subjects. As an independent academic subject, the history of cross-cultural communication is not so long, but as a social phenomenon, its history is as long as the human history and it can be dated from the era of tribes. In modern society, we all take the book of Hall, *The Silent Language*, as the beginning of cross-cultural communication. And from then on, anthropology, sociology, psychology and linguistics started to do research on cross-cultural communication and gave their own idea on it. So, the study on cross-cultural communication became more and more popular. As for the concept of cross-cultural communication, there

are kinds of opinions. We define cross-cultural communication as a subject which focuses on the communicative activities of people from different cultural background and the essence and rules of the communicative activities (Bosco et al., 2018; Ochoa, Cabrera, Quiñónez, Castillo, & González, 2016; Savolainen, 2017). And we must understand that “cross-cultural” not only means the communication of different countries, but also the communication of people from different nations, different social status and so on. Cross-cultural communication became mature with the depth of the study, and in 1970s, some scholars give the concept of cross-cultural communicative competence on the base of cross-cultural communication, so we can regard cross-cultural communicative competence as the practical usage of the cross-cultural communication theory (Hao, Farooq, & Sun, 2018; Warren, 2017). Culture transfer is the cultural interference caused by cultural difference. Generally speaking, it means that in culture communication, people use their own culture rules and value to guide their words and deeds, even thoughts, and they also use these as standards to judge the words and deeds of others. To analyse the forms and essence of cultural transfer, researchers should first define and classify culture. Culture contains the things people learn in their whole life, including languages, deeds, faith and the martial and spiritual base for living. The big concept of culture can be divided into three levels (Wenzhong, 2013): the first level is the material culture altered and processed by people’s subjective thoughts; the second level is the systematic culture including the political and economic systems, legal and artistic works and the deeds and habits of people; the third level is the psychological level which contains the life value, thought pattern, moral standard, religious feeling and so on. Though this classification is not specific and clear enough, it can show the essence of cultural transfer. According to the classification, culture transfer can be described as two kinds: surface-structure transfer and deep-structure transfer. The first and second culture levels belong to the surface-structure transfer, so if people care a little, they can find the differences of cultures in these aspects. The deep-structure transfer indicates the transfer of the culture in the third cultural level, and since it’s the psychological elements, it is difficult to feel.

5. Summary

The research vector, actualizing the anthropological and functional-communicative aspects in linguistics, has determined the deeper exploration of the problems of discourse and discursive interaction. As applied to various corpus of texts, it has been proved that the category of discourse itself goes beyond the narrowly linguistic field of knowledge, because the discursive approach is not aimed at studying “language for the sake of the language, the language in itself, but at the linguistic study of man and society” (Kress, 1985).

It should be borne in mind that the conditions of a particular discourse affect the nature of the interaction of communicants: we repeat that a student who is asked a question by a teacher is an exceptional example of a speaker without a free communicative intention. The addressee has to enter into communication on the basis of his own communicative status and communicative situation, and obviously coercion to speak or a provoked response. In such unequal communicative conditions, the causes of communicative failures primarily relate to the insufficient communicative competence of the addressant teacher who initiates communication within the framework of his/her own social status and a certain pedagogical situation. This is an extremely important difference in causation of communicative failure of a natural dialogue and a pedagogical dialogue at the lesson.

From a discursive standpoint, “common words” about the teacher’s cooperation tasks at the lesson and the capacity to turn communicative failures into successes do not evoke a sense of internal contradiction. In a global, multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional world, in the context of growing diversification, cross-cultural aspect of professional communication, including in pedagogical activity, acquire a new meaning.

The above-mentioned Russian-language tradition of the metonymic transfer of the name of the holiday to its date is quite widespread in the field of official (non-religious) holidays and related days off, extending to 5 of 6 such holidays (often to regional fixed holiday dates: for example, on August 30 – “Day of the Republic Tatarstan”). We mean the dates of February 23, March 8, May 1 and May 9, and also November 4. The exception is only June 12 (“Day of Russia”). This tradition has no analogues among European languages and cultures: for comparison in American variant of the English language, such a transfer only accompanies the date on July 4, in the tradition of naming official French holidays, the “event + year” construction is used twice in connection with the end of the First and Second World Wars (“*Armistice 1918*” and “*Victoire 1945*”), which cannot be considered a replacement of the name with the date of the celebration.



The empiric material of spontaneous pedagogical communication has corroborated theory-based features of the correlation of text previously (as formal consolidation of discourse) and discourse (as primary cognitive reality): the text always carries cognitive information about the speaker's worldview and interacts with other semantic codes of discourse to model a new discursive unity. Any system of signs provides material for constructing utterances, while the mechanisms of communicative interaction in cross-cultural discourse are determined by the communicative consciousness of communicants associated with different discourses. The latter, in turn, operate with intracultural communicative categories, and the latter determines a situation in which both sides cannot effectively realize their initial intentions (cross-cultural communicative failures).

6. Conclusion

In the present paper, the mechanism of discourse analysis of the situation of spontaneous communicative interaction realized within the framework of cross-cultural pedagogical discourse has been described in detail. Such a level of interpretation of the specifics of language functioning in a cross-cultural educational environment is associated with the referent or denotation of the utterance: the fixed forms of nomination reflect, on the one hand, the social context of the interaction of the communicants, and on the other hand, alternative cultural codes reconstructed in their speech.

The analysis of even individual and spontaneous cross-cultural communication interactions via a flexible strategic procedure for situational discourse analysis can demonstrate the real need to develop cross-cultural competencies that determine the asymmetry in the settled mode of thinking of communicants. The formation and analysis of the corpus of knowledge in the field of cross-cultural verbal and non-verbal asymmetry are obviously associated with the pragmatic need for effective strategies that minimize communicative failures, setbacks, and conflicts in an ever-expanding cross-cultural communicative space.

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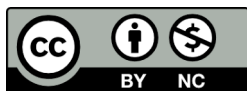
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