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Interdisciplinary approach to cross-language and cross-cultural communication studies

Анотація. Стаття торкається актуальних проблем, пов'язаних із необхідністю застосування міждисциплінарного підходу до вивчення міжмовної та міжкультурної комунікації. Особливої актуальності ця тема набуває в епоху глобалізації. В статті розглянуто зміст термінів на позначення мови, культури, міжмовної та міжкультурної комунікації, їхнього взаємозв'язку і особливостей застосування в усіх сферах людської діяльності. Окрему увагу приділено типам спілкування та їхній специфіці. Вказано на необхідність при вивченні міжмовної та міжкультурної комунікації спиратися на досягнення різноманітних наук, щоб не лише подавати аналіз і вказувати на її характеристики, але й виробити ефективні комунікативні стратегії та рекомендації щодо їхнього успішного застосування на практиці.

Ключові слова: глобалізація, мова, культура, міжмовна та міжкультурна комунікація, вербальне й невербальне спілкування, поведінка, стратегії.

Abstract. The present paper touches upon topical issues connected with the necessity of using interdisciplinary approach to cross-language and cross-cultural communication studies. Modern world is based on communication which presupposes the process of sharing meaning through verbal and non-verbal behaviour. It's a matter that requires very serious and complex handling especially in the time of globalization. Explanation of the terms denoting language, culture, cross-language and cross-cultural communication, their interrelations and peculiarities of usage in all spheres of human activities is given in the paper. Special attention is paid to the communication types and their peculiarities. Our cultural understanding of the world and everything in it ultimately affects our communication style, and nowadays we face hybrid, changing and conflicting cultures, where we are expected to become pluricultural individuals. Effective communication with people of different cultures and languages is especially challenging. If people recognize and understand differing world views, they will

certainly adopt a positive and open-minded attitude towards cross-cultural differences. By accepting people, their differences and acknowledging that we do not know everything will make us open up to people and their differences resulting in using contextual information for better understanding. Seeking feedback and taking risks to open up channels of communication and being responsible for our feelings as well as actions, will go a long way in ensuring that miscommunication is mitigated. Therefore, to avoid miscommunication, much effort and willingness on the part of people representing different cultural and educational background is needed. Understanding of these aspects of cultures will help better coexist and cooperate despite all difficulties, conflict situations as well as negative attitudes. In this respect of primary importance is to apply interdisciplinary approach to cross-language and cross-cultural communication studies in order to work out effective communicative strategies to be put into practice.

Keywords: globalization, language, culture, cross-language and cross-cultural communication, verbal and non-verbal communication, behaviour, strategies.

Introduction. Nowadays the world is based on communication which presupposes the process of sharing meaning through verbal and non-verbal behaviour. In our time of globalization, we have more to be exposed to and share with than ever before in terms of culture - beliefs, worldviews, values, attitudes and ideologies - but at the same time much of them remains different and unshared, which is enhanced by raising people's awareness of cultural, ethnic, and religious identities. The Internet and modem technology have opened up new marketplaces, and allow us to promote our businesses to new geographic locations and cultures. Today, we communicate beyond the national borders by e-mailing, chatting, blogging, web browsing besides speaking and writing. In these days of global networking, we are thrown into the society of hybrid, changing and conflicting cultures, where we are expected to become pluricultural individuals. In the light of cross- cultural communication, the language policy and planning of the Council of Europe is a grand experiment based on plurilingualism and pluriculturalism.

Effective communication with people of different cultures is especially challenging. Cultures provide people with ways of thinking - ways of seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. Moreover, the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even when they talk the "same" language. When the languages are different, and translation has to be used to communicate, the potential for misunderstandings increases.

Material and methods. Our cultural milieu shapes our world view in such a way that reality is thought to be objectively perceived through our own cultural pattern, and a different perception is seen as either false or 'strange'' and is thus oversimplified. If people recognize and understand world views which are not the same as theirs, they will usually adopt a positive and open-minded attitude towards cross-cultural differences. A close-minded view of such differences often results in

the maintenance of a stereotype - an oversimplification and blanket assumption. A stereotype assigns group characteristics to individuals purely on the basis of their cultural membership.

The stereotype may be accurate in depicting the "typical" member of a culture, but it is inaccurate for describing a particular individual, simply because every person is unique and all of a person's behavioural characteristics cannot be accurately predicted on the basis of overgeneralized median point along a continuum of cultural norms. To judge a single member of a culture by overall traits of the culture is both to prejudge and to misjudge that person. Worse, stereotypes have a way of potentially devalue people and separate them.

While stereotyping, or overgeneralizing, people from other cultures should be avoided, cross-cultural research has shown that there are indeed characteristics of culture that make them different. Learners and teachers of a foreign language need to understand cultural differences, to recognize openly that people are not all the same beneath the skin. There are real distinctions between groups and cultures. We can learn to perceive those differences, appreciate them, and above all to respect and value the personhood of every human being.

Learning as well as teaching a foreign language implies some degree of becoming aware of a foreign culture, and it is important to understand what we mean by the process of cultural learning. Many students in foreign language classrooms learn the language with little or no sense of the depth of cultural norms and patterns of the people who speak the language. Culture learning is a process of creating shared meaning between cultural representatives. It is experiential, a process that continues over years of language learning, and penetrates deeply into one's patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. Moreover, the second language learning involves the acquisition of a second identity. This creation of a new identity is at the heart of culture learning, or what some might call acculturation. By culture a shared background (for instance, national, ethnic, religious) resulting from a common language and communication style, customs, beliefs, attitudes and values is meant. Culture refers to the informal and often hidden patterns of human interactions, expressions, and viewpoints that people in one culture share. This part of culture is sometimes compared to "an iceberg, most of which is hidden underwater. Like the iceberg, much of the influence of culture on an individual cannot be seen. The part of culture that is exposed is not always that which creates cross-cultural difficulties; the hidden aspects of culture have significant effects on behaviour and on interactions with others" [1, p.2].

Furthermore, we communicate so much information non-verbally in conversations that often the verbal aspect of the conversation is negligible. This is particularly true for interactive language functions in which social contact is of key importance and in which it is not what you say that counts, but how you say it— what you convey with body language, gestures, eye contact, physical distance, and other non-verbal messages. Non-verbal communication, however, is so subtle and subconscious in a native speaker that verbal language seems, by comparison, quite

mechanical and systematic. Language becomes distinctly human through its non-verbal dimension, or what Edward Hall called the "silent language." The expression of culture is so bound up in non-verbal communication that the barriers to culture learning are more non-verbal than verbal.

A methodology for investigating how an individual uses language and other semiotic activity to create and use new models of conduct and how this varies from the cultural norm should be incorporated into the study of language socialization. The study of languages other than one's own can serve not only to help one realize what we as humans have in common, but also to assist in the understanding of the diversity which underlines our languages' methods of constructing and organizing knowledge. Such understanding has profound implications with respect to developing a critical awareness of social relationships. Understanding of the latter and the way other cultures work is the groundwork of successful globalization processes functioning.

Results and discussion. Cross-cultural communication as a field of study is a combination of many other scholarly disciplines. They include anthropology, psychology, linguistics, communication, pragmatics and cultural studies. Cross-cultural communication requires an interdisciplinary approach. It involves literacy in fields such as anthropology, cultural studies, pragmatics, psychology and communication. The field has also moved both toward the treatment of interethnic relations, and the study of communication strategies used by co-cultural populations, i.e. communication strategies used to deal with majority or mainstream populations.

Cross-cultural communication is a field of study that looks at how people from various cultural backgrounds communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves, and how they endeavour to communicate across cultures. It brings together the relatively unrelated fields of cultural anthropology with established areas of communication. At its core, cross-cultural communication involves understanding the ways in which culturally distinct individuals communicate with each other, and it also includes communication that is influenced by cultural values, attitudes, and behaviour as well as the influence of culture on people's reactions /responses to each other. Its charge is to produce some guidelines with which people from different cultures can better communicate with each other. Intercultural communication is a related field of study.

Cross-cultural communication refers to interpersonal communication and interaction across different cultures. This has become an important issue in the age of globalization and internationalization, Effective cross-language and cross-cultural communication is concerned with overcoming language and cultural differences across nationality, religion, borders, culture and behaviour. Furthermore, culture is a way of thinking and living whereby one picks up a set of attitudes, values, norms and beliefs that are taught as well as reinforced by other members in the group. This set of basic assumptions and solutions to the problems of the world is a shared system passed on from generation to generation to ensure

survival. A culture consists of unwritten and written principles and laws that guide how an individual interacts with the outside world. Culture influences the words we speak and our behaviour. All communication is cultural because it draws on ways we have learned to speak and give non-verbal messages. Communication is interactive, so in this respect, culture does not only dictate who talks what, to whom, how, and why, but also helps determine how communication proceeds, and how messages transmit the intended meanings.

Members of a culture can be identified by the fact that they share some similarity: they may be united by religion, geography, race or ethnicity.

Our cultural understanding of the world and everything in it ultimately affects our style of communication as we start picking up ways of one's culture at around the same time we start learning to communicate.

Cross-cultural communication thus refers to the communication between people who have differences in any one of the following: styles of working, age, nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. It can also refer to the attempts that are made to exchange, negotiate and mediate cultural differences by means of language, gestures and body language. It is how people belonging to different cultures communicate with each other.

Each individual can practice culture at varying levels. There is the culture of the community he/she grows up in, there is work culture at his/her workplace and other cultures to which one becomes an active participant or slowly withdraws from. An individual is constantly confronted with the clash between his/her original culture and the majority culture that he/she is exposed to daily. Cultural clashes occur as a result of individuals believing their culture is better than others.

Cross-cultural communication has been influenced by a variety of academic disciplines. It creates a feeling of trust and enables cooperation. The focus is on providing the right response rather than the right message to avoid misunderstandings that can lead to conflicts between individuals or groups. Among the most essential cross-cultural communication needs to be taken into account in order to reach mutual understanding one can mention listening and speaking skills (to be able to read between the lines, to empathize, to use positive speech, such as encouragement, affirmation, recognition, phrasing requests clearly, expressing opinions sensitively), observation (much cross-cultural information can be read from people's dress, body language, interaction, behaviour, manners and attitudes, asking questions expands one's cross-cultural knowledge), patience (people should recognize that sometimes the observed cross-cultural differences are annoying and frustrating, and only through patience, respect is won,and cross-cultural understanding is enhanced), flexibility, adaptability, open-mindedness. Taken together, all these needs allow us to improve the lines of communication, ensure better cross-language as well as cross-cultural awareness and successful cross-cultural relationships.

The key to effective cross-cultural communication is knowledge. First, it is essential that people understand the potential problems of cross-cultural

communication, and make a conscious effort to overcome these problems. Second, it is important to assume that one's efforts will not always be successful, and adjust one's behaviour appropriately.

When two people of different cultures encounter each other, besides having various cultural backgrounds, their systems of turn - talking also differ. Cross - cultural communication is more effective and easier if both the speakers have knowledge of the turn - taking system used in the conversation (one person should not monopolize the conversation or only one person should talk at a time). Seeking feedback and taking risks to open up channels of communication and being responsible for our feelings and actions will go a long way in ensuring that miscommunication is mitigated. One more issue meriting our attention is the context which is also perceived differently by the communicants. It plays an important part in the cross-cultural communication procedure. The idea of context in culture was advanced by the anthropologist Edward T Hall who divided culture into two main groups: high and low context cultures. He referred to context as the stimuli, environment or ambiance surrounding the environment. In his opinion, low-context cultures assume that the individuals know very little about what they are being told, and therefore must be given a lot of background information whereas high-context cultures assume that the individuals are knowledgeable about the subject and have to be given very little background information.

Stella Ting-Toomey describes three ways in which culture interferes with effective cross-cultural understanding. First is what she calls "cognitive constraints." These are the frames of reference or world views that provide a backdrop that all new information is compared to or inserted into. Second are "behaviour constraints." Each culture has its own rules about proper behaviour which affects verbal and non-verbal communication. Whether one looks the other person in the eye-or not; whether one says what he/she means overtly or talks around the issue; how close the people stand to each other when they are talking—all of these and many more are rules of politeness which differ from culture to culture.

Stella Ting-Toomey's third factor is "emotional constraints." Cultures regulate the display of emotions differently: some get very emotional when they are debating an issue, others try to keep their emotions hidden, exhibiting or sharing only the "rational" or factual aspects of the situation. All of these differences tend to lead to communication problems. If the people involved are not aware of the potential for such problems, they are even more likely to fall victim to them, although it takes more than awareness to overcome these problems and communicate effectively across cultures.

Language socialization can be broadly defined as an investigation of how language both presupposes and creates anew, social relations in cultural context. It is imperative that the speaker understands the grammar of a language, as well as how elements of language are socially situated in order to reach communicative competence. Human experience is culturally relevant, so are the language

elements. One must carefully consider semiotics and the evaluation of sign systems to compare cross-cultural norms of communication. There are several potential problems that come with language socialization, however. Sometimes people can overgeneralize or label cultures with stereotypical and subjective characterizations. Another primary concern with documenting alternative cultural norms revolves around the fact that no social actor uses language in ways that perfectly match normative instructions.

Furthermore, communication is the lifeblood of an organization. The success of the latter depends on its successful internal and external communication. As an organization becomes larger and geographically dispersed, it increasingly faces the problem of cross-cultural communication. Such organizations require effective cross-cultural communication to meet the needs of global customers, to create a harmonious and effective environment, to provide a successful realization of far-going cooperation and mutual benefit, to enrich the business and to avoid misunderstanding as well as disappointment. In the age of globalization, the success of both everyday life and business largely depends on possessing knowledge of cross-language and cross-cultural differences in terms of national identity, religious beliefs, human values, traditions, customs, age and gender peculiarities, etc. If people harmoniously communicate with each other, a comfortable and productive work can be achieved. Therefore, people need to be familiar with the cultures the ones they communicate with, otherwise the instances of miscommunication may occur.

Wrong interpretation of verbal as well as non-verbal communication usually happens when people from different cultural and educational backgrounds establish different kinds of relationships. Such a wrong interpretation leads to misunderstanding and miscommunication within and outside all spheres of human activities. To avoid miscommunication across cultures, much effort and willingness on the part of people representing various cultural and educational backgrounds is needed. Understanding of these issues of languages and cultures will help better coexist and cooperate regardless of certain difficulties, conflict situations and negative attitudes.

Conclusions. With increasing globalization and international trade, it is unavoidable that different cultures will meet, conflict, and blend together. People from different culture find it difficult to communicate not only due to language barriers, but they are also affected by culture styles. For instance, in individualistic cultures, such as in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe, an independent figure or self is dominant. This independent figure is characterized by a sense of self relatively distinct from others and the environment. In interdependent cultures, usually identified as Asian, Latin American, African, and Southern European cultures, an interdependent figure of self is dominant. There is a much greater emphasis on the interrelatedness of the individual to others and the environment; the self is meaningful only (or primarily) in the context of social relationships, duties, and roles. To some degree, the effect brought by cultural

difference override the language gap. This culture style difference contributes to one of the biggest challenges for cross-cultural communication.

Effective communication with people of different cultures is especially challenging. Cultures provide people with ways of thinking—ways of seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. Thus, the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even when they speak the "same" language. When the languages are different, and translation has to be used to communicate, the potential for misunderstandings increases. The study of cross-language and cross-cultural communication is a global research area. As a result, cultural differences in the study of cross-cultural communication can already be found. For example, cross-cultural communication is generally considered part of communication studies in the US, but is emerging as a sub-field of applied linguistics in the UK.

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