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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Analysis of cross-cultural conflicts by studying foreign languages

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with analysis of communicative behaviour in cross-cultural conflicts. The classification of reasons of cross-cultural conflicts is proposed. The outlined reasons (psychological, social, natural and cultural, linguistic) are supported by real examples in business sphere.

Keywords: training of future specialists, cross-cultural conflicts, psychological reasons, national and cultural reasons, social reasons, linguistic reasons

*How shall I talk of the sea to the frog,
if it has never left his pond?
How shall I talk of the frost to the bird of the summerland,
if it has never left the land of its birth?
How shall I talk of life with the sage,
if he is prisoner of his doctrine?
(Chung Tsu, 4th century B.C.)*

1. INTRODUCTION

Analysis of cross-cultural conflicts is considered in a psychological aspect of cross-cultural communication. Educators in all spheres have to teach their students to function in a complicated and constantly changing environment in order to identify multifaceted problems. It plays a significant role in training future specialists, especially managers, as the science of psychology explains the transition from the personal spiritual sphere to the economic one. Besides it reveals new ways of economic growth on the base of activation of a personality.

Studying foreign languages is always combined with the notion of culture. The psychological aspect reveals it in two courses. The first one deals with the inside peculiarities of individuals in the form of beliefs, values and models of interaction. The second course exposes some specific features that are beyond the individual. They are an atmosphere that encompasses religious beliefs, educational system, aesthetic sphere etc. Still namely the subjective culture is in the core of psychologists' attention. It is well-structured and normative. It is presented by a sum-total of "culture patterns" or models of human activity. Thus some models of behaviour in standard situations are fixed in people's consciousness. Later they define the norm for them. Knowledge accumulated both from personal experience of communication and other sources, is generalized and fixed in an individual's consciousness in the form of ascertained ideas, i.e. stereotypes.

In the frames of the psychological aspect a problem is solved concerning the limits of a "cultural unit" with the help of its characteristics by three dimensions: time (defining a specific historical period), place (emphasizing interpersonal contacts, political organizations etc.), language (defining the result of communication — understanding or misunderstanding). To adhere to this or that culture it is important to refer oneself to this culture as well as to do the activity stipulated by the origin of a personality and its culture.

As for a cross-cultural conflict, unlike other disciplines psychology pays attention to studying such aspects as realizing the conflict situation, its reasons and stages by its participants, defining the procedure of its solution, outlining social and psychological components which stipulate inside characteristics of a cross-cultural conflict. They are motives, interests and values that induce participants of a cross-cultural conflict to take part in solving contradictions. This process is referred to as self-regulated learning that leads to both academic and professional success [1].

Understanding the influence of cultural differences is especially important for analysts or practitioners of conflict resolution who work in cross-cultural contexts, since culture affects many of the communicational processes lying in the core of most conflict resolution techniques [2]. Awareness of peculiarities of cross-cultural conflicts brings forward reflection practices that may occur during the moment of practice or retrospectively [3].

2. RESULTS

On the base of psychological and pedagogical literature, a cross-cultural conflict is defined as collision of beliefs (thoughts, views), values (objects of material and spiritual culture), models of behaviour (actions, ways of living) in relations with representatives of different cultures. The aspect analysis of cross-cultural conflicts allowed to define their

common reasons (psychological, social, national and cultural, linguistic) experienced by managers while entering the international market.

Psychological reasons of cross-cultural conflicts are stipulated by distrust to a business partner, stereotypes, prejudice and ethnocentrism of communicators from different cultures. Analysis of psychological conflicts helps future specialists to realize the importance of managing their personal psycho-emotional states and communicative behaviour, direct thoughts in the non-conflict course, understand goals of the professional interaction, find common grounds which unite business partners from different cultures. The following examples illustrate psychological reasons of cross-cultural conflicts.

- Western managers-consultants failed to transfer know-how technologies into post-Soviet countries. Due to anti-Western propaganda, Western consultants were perceived as those who do not understand the situation and the ways of development, give preferences to economic problem solving, have covert motives (are involved in espionage in favour of a foreign country).
- Western firms opened their offices in post-Soviet countries that did not bring them the expected profit. It happened because Western countries demonstrated visible reluctance to appoint local people as senior managers. This fact was perceived by the latter as disrespect.
- An American telephone company tried to import products and services to Latinos with the help of a commercial in which a woman reminds her husband to call a friend and say they would be late to dinner. The commercial provoked vivid emotional and psychological reactions and failed shamefully. It is explained by the fact that in Latin-American countries a woman's status does not allow her to give instructions to a husband. Besides, time perception of Hispanics does not presuppose telephone calls about being late.

Social reasons are revealed in divergence of value orientations, needs, goals, communication etiquette, management styles, models and norms of behaviour that unify a business activity. Discussion of the social reasons of cross-cultural conflicts in the educational process stimulates gradual formation of social responsibility of specialists-to-be, comprehension of peculiarities of running business with representatives of other cultures. The following situations can be proposed for discussion in class as social grounds of cross-cultural conflicts.

- In Latin America advertising of cigarettes “Marlboro” was extremely unsuccessful. According to Latinos' perception, a cowboy is a representative of the lowest and poorest layer of the society who can afford cigarettes of the worst quality.
- The ad campaign of Proctor & Gamble (that was extremely popular in Europe) failed in Japan. A husband entering his wife's room and touching her was considered as an invasion of privacy, and thus estimated as inappropriate behaviour.
- To appeal to employees' loyalty and reduce the quantity of no-shows, an American manager-consultant in South America persuaded the administration to raise wages of the personnel. However the quantity of no-shows went up on the contrary, as the employees realized that with their increased wages they could provide for their families, even working fewer days a week.

Ignoring or neglecting the peculiarities of business partners define **national and cultural reasons** of cross-cultural conflicts. National and cultural reasons are manifested in neglecting or ignorance of national and cultural identification of business partners (specific features of world perception, namely manners, customs, traditions, values, beliefs, cultural realities), absence of mutual respect and tolerance, refusal to recognize interdependence of cultures. Preliminary studying of national symbols, customs and traditions of business partners is the base for effective cross-cultural interaction. Awareness of cultural globalization (in the process of which managers often are obliged to review traditional principles and values of their culture) and fostering tolerance to partners, helps to eliminate the reasons of cross-cultural conflicts. They may be found in the following examples.

- The agreement between a Spanish and Mexican firm as for selling to the latter a huge amount of corks for champagne failed. The Spanish firm dyed them wine-colour that is a colour of mourning for Mexicans.
- A refusal from a cup of coffee offered by a Saudi business person was considered to be rude and made business negotiations become stalled.

Incorrect interpretation of the means of verbal and non-verbal communication, code systems of communicators and application of verbal and non-verbal means of communication make up **linguistic reasons** of cross-cultural misunderstandings. Studying examples of linguistic reasons of cross-cultural conflicts promotes understanding of importance of the right usage of verbal and non-verbal means of communication, systems of signs and symbols in relations with business partners.

- A golf-ball manufacturing company packaged golf balls in packs of four for convenient transportation to Japan. The deal failed as the pronunciation of the word “four” in Japanese sounds like the word “death”, thus the items packaged in fours are unpopular.
- Polish trade mark “Uroda” which specializes on the women’s clothes failed in Russian-speaking countries.
- Soviet traders could not sell the car “Zhiguli” abroad as this name sounded the same as “zhigolo” for many European countries. Thus, the potential foreign clients hinted their colleagues to change the name. Soon the brand was renamed into “Lada”.
- When Pepsi entered the Chinese market, the translation of their slogan "Pepsi Brings you Back to Life" was a little more literal than they intended. In Chinese, the slogan meant, "Pepsi Brings Your Ancestors Back from the Grave".
- General Motors had a perplexing problem when they introduced the Chevy Nova in South America. Despite their best efforts, they weren’t selling many cars. They finally realized that in Spanish, “nova” means “it won’t go”. Sales improved dramatically after the car was renamed into “Caribe”.

Analysis of the presented reasons of cross-cultural conflicts refers to transformational and analytical stage of the pedagogical technology. Thus it presupposes analysing new situations in cross-cultural communication with the help of known methods, finding new ways to solve problem tasks [4].

3. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, by studying social behaviour of representatives of other cultures, cross-cultural communication is of utmost importance. It is interpreted as application of models of behaviour on the base of generally accepted norms, traditions, habits, religion; studying verbal and non-verbal behaviour, getting acquainted with sanctions directed at approval, appreciation, permission or (on the contrary) prohibition and punishment.

Studying the psychological aspect prepares students to perceive business partners of other cultures without estimating them by the general criteria, gives an idea about eventual psychological reactions in the situation of cross-cultural communication. The insight of future specialists into the psychological aspect contributes to mastering the necessary knowledge as for the essence and psychological peculiarities of the cross-cultural communication process. Besides it explains the mechanisms of forming prejudices, stereotypes and generalizations as the ways of perception of the social reality, the gears of psychological reactions during the interaction with other cultures.

Still, it should be noted that classification of cross-cultural conflicts into four proposed types is quite conventional. Each one may combine different grounds depending on the situation and its perception by participants. Awareness of reasons of cross-cultural conflicts, analysis of social behaviour of representatives of the culture where professional activity is going to take place, will help future specialists to find their bearings in conflict situations, manage cross-cultural conflicts and thus realize effective cross-cultural communication in the professional sphere. The skills to form business interaction based on trust will lessen the feeling of tension and psychological discomfort. Realization of the natural striving of peoples and ethical communities to save and protect their cultural and national values and inclinations will favour the tolerant attitude to cultural differences of partners and thus prevent the possible cross-cultural conflicts.

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