Problems and Discrepancies of Intercultural Communication in Russian and Foreign Science

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Abstract

The paper deals with analysis of the present problems of intercultural communication, such as its status among related sciences, different approaches to study this science, and its discrepancies in Russian and foreign science. Various approaches regarding the status of intercultural communication and its place among other sciences is examined. It has been shown that intercultural communication is at the intersection of numerous sciences and has a highly interdisciplinary status.

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1. Introduction

Intercultural communication is one of the most dynamic new sciences. In the context of globalization which has covered virtually all areas of our life, an effective interaction with other cultures is getting urgent. At the same time, as noted by many researchers, conflicts and misunderstandings occurring between people from different cultures are not connected with an insufficient knowledge of the language but with a lack of cultural knowledge. Knowing the language gives an appearance of understanding people of different cultures but does not give a sufficient knowledge about the foreign culture.

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Therefore, the ignorance of foreign culture is apparently the main cause of most cultural conflicts. All of this implies the need to learn the basics of intercultural communication, a science which helps educate an international person. Despite a great interest to the problems of intercultural communication, its status among other related sciences is not well defined. There is no standard and universally received terminology, no conventional theoretical foundation, no well-defined status of intercultural communication and its place among other sciences.

Researchers do not agree even in the definition of the concept of “intercultural communication”. In parallel, there is a large number of terms – “cross-cultural”, “multicultural”, “multiculturalism”, “intercultural”, “transcultural”, “countercultural” and there is no strict distinction between them.

In this paper we are analyzing different opinions about the place of intercultural communication among related sciences, attempting to clarify its status and outlining its perspectives in Russian and foreign science.

2. Problems and discrepancies of intercultural communication

2.1. The notion of intercultural communication

The term "intercultural communication" was coined in cultural anthropology school in 1954, in a book «Culture as communication» published by E. Hall and J. Trager. The ideas formulated by E. Hall were of great importance for further research in the field of intercultural communication (Kulikova, 2004; Mindess, 1999). Starting from the 1960s the intercultural communication has become the subject of many American studies. In Europe, an interest in intercultural issues appeared later, in the 1970s, and the establishment of intercultural communication occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. This was due to the integration processes, which led to the creation of the European Union and, consequently, to a large development of trade, tourism and economics (Leontovich, 2003; Grushevitskaya, Popkov, Sadokhin, 2003).

Many studies on intercultural communication theory focus on the history of intercultural communication mostly in the USA and Europe (Grushevitskaya, Popkov, Sadokhin, Kulikova, Leontovich). This is due to the fact that Western scholars became interested in the intercultural problems since the mid- 20th century, while Russian science took over intercultural communication only in the 1990s after the collapse of the USSR. It is no wonder that the Russian theory of intercultural communication is considerably influenced by foreign studies. Nevertheless, even Soviet science had works on the cross-cultural interaction problems.

Speaking of Russian (or Soviet) science it is important to mention the book by Vereshchagin and Kostomarov “Language and Culture: country studies in teaching Russian as a foreign language” published in 1973. It became a forerunner in the development of intercultural communication in Soviet Union. This book had a great influence on culture pedagogy in the USSR. It deals with Russian as a foreign language and teaching Soviet culture via vocabulary. Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (1973) focus on vocabulary studies as an important aspect of language teaching. Ter-Minasova calls this book “the Bible of Russian country studies (stranovedenie)”, and the authors as “the fathers of Russian country studies” (Ter-Minasova, 2000). This book mentions the term “intercultural communication” for the first time in Russian science. For these authors “intercultural communication” is “an adequate mutual understanding of two participants of the communicative act belonging to different national cultures” (Vereshchagin, Kostomarov, 1973). Although the authors do not write a lot about the relationship of language and culture, they mention that the culture is reflected in language. “The subject of language-related teaching in stranovedenie (country studies) is basically the culture of the country whose language is being learned. The teaching should demonstrate how this culture is reflected in the language” (Vereshchagin, Kostomarov, 1973). Another important conclusion made by the authors - "speech situations belong, in our opinion, to cross-cultural issues: firstly, they belong to extralinguistic reality, and secondly, usual phrases can not be obtained by a simple use of the internal linguistic mechanism and patterns. These customary phrases should be learnt in each case; they can not be deduced from language" (Vereshchagin, Kostomarov, 1973).

Though of Vereshchagin and Kostomarov’s theory was based on the Soviet society which has now disappeared, and is very Marxist-Leninist oriented, their book still remains relevant in Russian science. Their ideas of semantic and society-oriented culture pedagogy are interesting and innovatory. Moreover the idea of teaching culture via language and vocabulary is still important in Russia.
The work of Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (1973) became one of the first important works on intercultural communication in Russian science. Nevertheless, this discipline developed considerably only two decades later, after the collapse of the USSR. In the 2000s a large number of books devoted to intercultural communication were published in Russia. Their analysis shows that there is no unanimity among scholars about terminology, no unified theoretical framework, there is no unity in the interpretation of the concept of "intercultural communication". So, let us now consider the approaches of contemporary researchers regarding limits and status of intercultural communication.

2.2. Interdisciplinary status of intercultural communication

As mentioned above, intercultural communication as a serious and relatively independent scientific discipline had developed in the 1990s at the intersection of many disciplines. It was both an advantage and a drawback for the development of this science. Currently there is neither standard and universally received definition of intercultural communication, nor accurate idea about its status. The place of intercultural communication among other disciplines is highly debatable. The analysis of the scientific literature revealed a number of opposite views:

- Intercultural Communication ‘is a part of the general theory of mass communication’ (Vereshchagin, Kostomarov, 1973);
- it is an independent science with its own conceptual apparatus (Leontovich, 2007);
- it is a subsystem of human communication (Vasilik, 2003);
- it has an interdisciplinary status (Zinchenko, 2007);
- it is sort of cultural communication with a new quality (...) it can be defined as a compound systems in which the artifact turned into another form of development receives a new state and a new function (Elizarova, 2005).
- Intercultural communication is a highly interdisciplinary science (Bloommaert, 1991, op. cit. Mindess, 1999).

As evidenced by the above-mentioned views, there is no unity among scholars about the status of intercultural communication and its (in-)dependence. First scientific studies in intercultural communication were borrowed from a number of sciences, which contributed, on the one hand, to its eclecticism, on the other to its interdisciplinarity. Intercultural communication, according to De Carlo, has developed from the disciplines analyzing the concept of "culture" from different perspectives. Each of these disciplines has brought both new knowledge and new questions (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

Researchers have indicated the following disciplines related to intercultural communication: social psychology, ethnology, ethnic psychology, linguistics, cultural linguistics, sociology, political science, ethnocultural science, anthropology, pragmalinguistics, theory of communication, folklore, etc. (Vasilik, 2003; Golovleva, 2008; Zinchenko, 2007).

Thus, interdisciplinary research enriches intercultural communication but impedes its formation as an independent and coherent body of knowledge. In addition, the approaches of Russian and Western scientists to study intercultural issues are very different. It seems necessary to analyse them in detail.

2.3. Approaches to intercultural communication in Russian and foreign science

It should also be emphasized that intercultural communication is perceived differently in the Russian science and abroad. Intercultural communication in USA and Europe involves the following sciences: anthropology, communication theory, social and organizational psychology, sociology, marketing, management, foreign languages, applied linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis (Mindess, 1999).

According to Leontovich (2007), U.S. intercultural studies are mainly related to communication theory, but its linguistic aspects are not enough developed. The Russian science, on the contrary, there is a strong bias towards linguistics. In addition, Russian science has developed concepts such as linguistic identity, concept and conceptual sphere, which are virtually unknown in the United States. The unwillingness of many American scientists to see the close relationship between linguistics and intercultural communication theory seems unreasonable [...] they continue to insist that cultural linguistics and intercultural communication theory are “completely different” and thus, in our opinion, impoverish both sciences. It also appears that in spite of the high level of development of the intercultural
communication theory in the U.S. and other foreign countries, there is no serious research performed at the confluence of intercultural communication and linguistics (Kulikova, 2004).

Indeed, Russian science examines intercultural communication mainly through the teaching of foreign languages. Intercultural communication in Russia has been developing mainly in foreign language teaching. According to Ter-Minasova, a close relationship and interdependence between teaching foreign languages and intercultural communication is so obvious that it hardly need lengthy explanations (Ter-Minasova, 2000). Russian linguists were pioneers in intercultural studies: they were the first to realize the necessity of learning a foreign culture to communicate efficiently with foreign people.

Elizarova (2005) believes that Russian methods of teaching foreign languages has always been closely linked to the trends in linguistics. Consequently, since linguistics is actively investigating the interaction of language and culture, linguodidactics explores the same topic. However, intercultural linguodidactics in Russia is not sufficiently developed (Grushevitskaya, et al., 2003).

American researcher Anna Mindess argues that intercultural communication is closest to anthropology from which it stems, but is very different from it. Anthropologists are interested in one culture at a time: they are immersed in a culture and a detailed study of its traditions, features, language, etc. They do not investigate its interaction with other cultures, and that is exactly the main focus of interculturalists (De Carlo, 1998).

As noted by Leontovich the present state of intercultural communication is characterized by eclecticism and a lack of general bases of research and common conceptual approaches" (...) There is no universally received terminology or clear theoretical framework, no accurate definition of intercultural communication (Leontovich, 2003). Leontovich singles out three areas related to intercultural communication in Russian science: linguistic country studies, ethnolinguistics and cultural linguistics. Cultural linguistics studies the relationship of language and culture, linguistic country studies focuses on the relationship of language and culture in the applied aspect, ethnolinguistics is interested in the relationship of language and ethnicity (Leontovich, 2007).

Foreign researchers also emphasize the fragmentation of intercultural communication. There is a large number of cross-references and interdisciplinary research in such sciences as communication theory, psychology, business and management. This is a big disadvantage for the development of intercultural communication (Mindess, 1999).

Leontovich (2003) identifies two main areas of intercultural communication in the United States – international intercultural communication and internal ethnic communication. These directions are in some respects opposed to each other, the fact which is not quite justified. It turns out that there is an “intercultural division” in intercultural communication. The consolidation of two directions would create a unified theory of intercultural communication.

3. Conclusion

In the study, we examined the beginnings of intercultural communication in Russia and abroad. It was found out that the term "intercultural communication" was coined in cultural anthropology school in 1954 by Edward Hall. Hall’s ideas formulated were of great importance for further research in the field of intercultural communication.

It was shown that the interest in intercultural issues originated in the U.S. and Europe, while Russian science focused on intercultural communication only in the 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR. Because of this, the Russian theory of intercultural communication is considerably influenced by foreign studies.

We have examined the various approaches regarding the status of intercultural communication and its place among other sciences. We found that intercultural communication is at the intersection of numerous sciences and has a highly interdisciplinary status. Intercultural communication continues to exist by means of related sciences. Thus, interdisciplinary research enriches intercultural communication but impedes its formation as an independent and coherent body of knowledge.

It has been shown that the Russian and foreign scientist are interested in different aspects of intercultural communication and their approaches are very different. Russian scientist study intercultural communication mainly from the standpoint of linguistics and teaching foreign languages, the foreign scientists are more interested in cultural anthropology and communication theory.

Combining the efforts of Russian and foreign scientists seems promising for the development of this science. In general, intercultural communication is actively developing, but has yet to reach its perfection. Further research should foster the development of intercultural communication into a coherent and independent science.
References