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ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR AS A MECHANISM OF PERSONAL SELF-DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In present-day globalized world there is a distinct increase of students studying abroad. When encountering the representatives of other cultures, they experience the discrepancies between cultural phenomena of one's own culture and the foreign become more evident, because as the touchstone of behavior and communication one tend to regard cultural stereotypes, that are gained through socialization. Staying inside the boundaries of one's own culture can create an illusion that the world view of this particular culture is the only one possible. The study explores the interactions between "Our" and "Their", home and host culture. The consolidation of these extremes and mutual acceptance of cultures is seen as a modern day requirement. The result of the study is represented in theoretical models that observe how cross-cultural factors influence students' behavior. These relations are observed as a power that affect identities and behaviors of the students studying abroad during their adaptation in the high school context.The study raises awareness about the need to support students psychologically and pedagogically during the process of their social adaptation competence being shaped. The study also promotes the understanding of social support in cross-cultural situation as a building of the third culture with the potential for multicultural identities and adaptive behavior as a self-development mechanism. The results contribute to cross-cultural adaptation literature.

Keywords: Adaptation, social support, self-development, multicultural identity.

1. Introduction

The focus on competences in higher linguistics education presented the objective to develop each student as a person who can show empathy and mutual respect in cross-cultural communication and adapt to multicultural society just as well. Besides, the system of students' professional training at the university could be seen as a socially determined communicative environment, which can provide the students with either professional growth or improvement of their social adaptation skills.

The context of present-day globalization established a flourishing environment for people of different cultural background to build the unique third culture with new cultural norms and new multicultural identities.
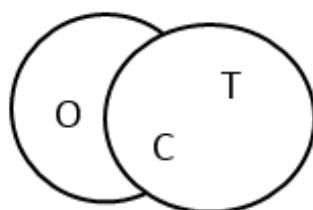

Figure 01. Home culture, host culture ("Our", "Their" and "Common")

2. Problem Statement

As modern society shapes into more globalised one, a multitude of cultures begin to influence the development of personalities leading to a change of national and cultural identity of people. Alongside with that, new cross-cultural behavioral and cognitive patterns of interaction become to form the basis of successful cultural adaptation. As noted by A. Appadurai, this means that people now possess several identities that can't be detached cultural dimensions anymore, therefore they become more hybridized, flexible and versatile. (Appadurai, 1996). However, traditional higher education, as well as almost all of modern learning theories leave out to account students' peculiarities of intercultural thinking and behavior. As a result of such approach the number of military conflicts based on interethnic violence is still rising. There are still many occasions when young people behave disharmoniously and asocially in multicultural setting. As our work experience have shown, Russian universities are in desperate need of implementation of educational strategies which can help a teacher to create a course sequence that, firstly, would be personalized to students' cultural identity; secondly, would realize students' adaptive behavior strategy as a mechanism of self-development; thirdly, would implement modern approaches to education (competence approach, constructivist approach etc.); finally, would meet the requirements of Russian higher education system. Among all these points we consider students' adaptive behavior and social support as the most topical issues. By social support we imply "verbal and nonverbal communication […] that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experience" (Albrecht &Adelman, 1987, p. 19)

Not least important is intra-group interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds, specifically visitors, i.e. foreign citizens who is temporarily staying in another country. This group in particular faces the hardships of being in foreign country, because the time needed to adapt to the cultural

568

norms and values of a host culture is limited. Students who leave to study abroad also belong to this risk group. Their degree of adaptation to a new cultural environment depends entirely on the level of their social adaptation competence, which includes empathy, self-development skills and readiness to cross-cultural communication.

Thus modern academic society foregrounds the need to support students psychologically and pedagogically during the process of their social adaptation competence being shaped. This competence supports the development of self-regulation and self-development of the student's personality. The academics researching intercultural communication in the field of psychology and pedagogy confirm the need to study the issues of multiculturalism, multicultural adaptation, hybridized identity, the creation of a model of the third culture and self-development of the individual (Chen, 2015;Qadeer, 2016;Sokolsky, 2016; Korneev, 2014; Streltsova, 2014; GlickSchiller, 2015; Rodrigo-Alsina&Medina-Bravo, 2016).

3. Research Questions

In order to address the problem adequately, it is essential to identify the perception models of home and host culture, because they directly influence thinking and behavior. For instance, students unconsciously realize behavior patterns that are products of culture. An individual is unable to identify the process of percepting another culture on their own, because this process is carried out at a subconscious level and manifests itself only in contacts with other cultures, when unusual and peculiar situations occur. As the researchers note, personal development and personal becoming of each student arise from interaction with the surrounding world, where elements of home and host culture are intertwined, selected and integrated with elements of the surroundings. This brings up two questions. The first is about interaction models between home and host culture: what kind of interaction models are there? And the second is: how do these models affect the student's adaptive behavior?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze relations between home and host cultures, based on looking into the different cultural identities. The elements of such cultural features as identity and stereotyping are analyzed as factors influencing the behavior of students studying abroad during their adaptation to high school context. The result of the study is theoretical models that observe how cross-cultural factors influence students' behavior. In addition, the study is designed to understand social support in cross-cultural situation.

5. Research Methods

The current study uses Casmir´s third culture theory as a framework to explore social support during adaptation of the university students in multicultural groups. According to Casmir, third culture is "… the construction of a mutually beneficial interactive environment in which individuals from two (or more) different cultures can function in a way beneficial to all involved" (Casmir, 1997, p. 92). This theory represents an alternative model as a unique socially determined communicative space that is created when

individuals from different cultures form hybrid identities, cognitive schemas, patterns of behavior, and relationships within a new cultural context (Sobre-Denton, 2017). As such, we apply this model to educational context to provide support in developing students' multicultural identities and their mechanism of self-development during adaptation processes in today's globalized world. Thus, the current research is also based on constructive approach to social support to the students within the dynamics of cross-cultural relationship-building in educational discourses.

6. Findings

During communication people tend to perceive and judge each other from point of view of their home culture and consciously (or unconsciously) make assumptions based on their previous experience. Alongside with this, the representatives of different cultures possess different experience of cross-cultural communication. As the touchstone of behavior and communication people tend to regard both innate and acquired factors, e.g. cultural stereotypes, that an individual gain through socialization from the moment when they start identifying with a particular culture and find their own level in it. If an individual has basic stereotypical core of knowledge that is repeated in the process of socialization in a particular society, we determine them as part of a particular culture. Staying inside the boundaries of one's own culture can create an illusion that the world view, the lifestyle, etc. of this particular culture is the only one possible and acceptable. All peoples tend to recognize their home culture as natural and true, see the customs of their society as universal and believe that their norms and values are absolutely right.

However when encountering the representatives of other cultures, the discrepancies between cultural phenomena of one's own culture and the foreign become more evident. The ethnocentric evaluation of home culture makes it possible to unconsciously separate the bearers of one's culture from another's. Consequently, the contacts between different cultures tend to display the opposition known as "Our" and "Their".

The concept of "Our" means phenomena of the surrounding world that are characterized by an individual as familiar, safe, habitual, self-evident. In this study we associate "Our" with a home culture.

The opposite concept is "Their" that is associated with various notions: outworld, foreign, beyond the borders of home culture; peculiar, anomalous, contrasting with the common and usual; unidentified, supernatural and inaccessible to knowledge. "Their" is also connected with interaction and communication. In this study we associate "Our" with a host culture.

The comprehension of the concept of "Our" inevitably touches upon the problems of cultural identity, the main point of which is the individual's conscious acceptance of corresponding cultural norms and patterns of behavior, values and language, the understanding of one's self from the standpoint of those cultural characteristics that are accepted in a given society, in self-identification with the cultural examples of this particular society. Cultural identity has a decisive influence on the process of cross-cultural communication. It is comprised of a set of certain long-standing qualities, due to which particular cultural phenomena or people can evoke a feeling of sympathy or antipathy. According to this, the communicant chooses the appropriate type and style of communication. Cultural identity performs a dual function: on the one hand, it helps the communicants to form a decided opinion on each other, predict each other's behavior

reciprocally, that is, to ease the process of communication. On the other hand, because of cultural identity's restrictive nature, the communication process may create confrontations and conflicts.

According to R. Nestvogel, (2000) the relations between home culture and host culture can be cast into three models. The first model represents an easy transition from home culture to host culture and vice versa. The second model demonstrates an unambiguous strict separation between "Our" and "Their". The third model displays the mutual acceptance of cultures, their consolidation.

Let's present the models of the relations between home and host cultures in the form of schemes. These models represent the patterns of thinking, behavior, emotional states that, in a certain way, influence the view of one's home and host culture. These models of relations between "Our" and "Their" represent the natural biophysical processes that are necessary for life, for example, eating or satisfying one's natural needs. But even at this level, the simplest procedures (e.g. personal hygiene, food consumption, etc.) has culturally specific character. The presented models explain the process of student's adaptation as a process of self-development in interrelation with the socially conditioned social environment of another culture.
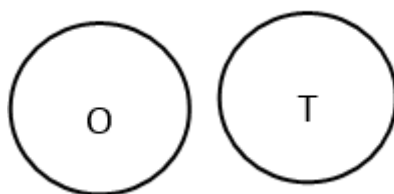

Figure 02. [Separation between home culture and host culture]

7. Conclusion

The model where "Our" is within "Their" and "Their" is within "Our" displays a lot of dimensions. The model implies that there is an intercultural field, a network of relations with nods and joints, which have arisen as a result of historically, politically, economically, socially established relations between home and host cultures. Throughout history, the notions of "Our" and "Their" went through several symbioses, which sometimes were made voluntarily and sometimes forcibly. As a result, something new was born, that was understood as either "Our" or "Their". Thus the relations between home and host cultures are diverse, flexible and conform to historical and social changes. Along with consolidation of "Our" and "Their", there are also clear boundaries between cultures. But separations and consolidations often can't be measured by categories of ethnicity, nationality, religion, culture or skin color. Separations and consolidations of "Our" and "Their" spring up and disappear. They interact between and through each other of "Our" and "Their", they besiege, but don't eliminate their intercultural differences, they have their intracultural non-unity that seems larger than it appears in such simple models. It is necessary to further reflect on historical and cultural variations of relations between "Our" and "Their", on what has come and what is borrowed from "Their". The development of each person is based on their experience with multicultural society. According to what was mentioned above, we can distinguish between two forms of "Their": "Their" within "Our", that belongs to its own inner horizon, and "Their" outside "Our", that belongs to its outer horizon. The external "Their" is different from the internal, it refers to everything unknown, but

still looks "familiar". This internal isolation and simultaneously occurring external alienation, corresponds to our multicultural society.

Let us turn to the second model. This model is characterized by a clear boundary between "Our" and "Their". The construct of "Our" seems as if it has nothing to do with the construct of "Their". "Their" is denoted as other, something incomprehensible, unclear, unexplained. In this type of relations there are no contacts between "Our" and "Their". Because of the lack of internal relations between home and host cultures, they establish various stereotypes. In this case, host culture creates a contrast, despite the fact that the identity of cultures can be confirmed biologically, as well as with socio-cultural factors that emanate from racist, anti-Semitic, gender discriminative sections.

The third model is characterized by the denunciation of borders, the dissolution of "Their" in "Our". The consolidation of these extremes becomes a modern day requirement. The process of expanding the cross-cultural relations and interdependencies of different cultures embrace various areas of life.

To summarize all the mentioned above, we need to emphasize that the statement of theoretical problem of adaptive behavior as a mechanism of self-development in the context of the dialectic interaction of "Our"-"Their" is extremely important for the professional training of specialists in foreign languages. This study demonstrated the interconnection between home and host culture, as well as the impact of culture on adoption. However, the development of social adaptation among university students and the development of behavior strategies that can be used effectively in the process of adaptation as a mechanism for self-development still requires further researching. It is hoped that future cross-cultural studies would incorporates empirical testing of the suggested method of building the third culture among students who study at Bachelor and Master educational programs.
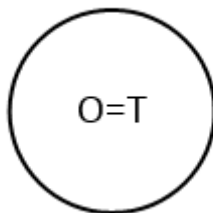

Figure 03. [Home and host culture overlap, consolidating into third culture]

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