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COMMUNICATIVE STYLE OF GERMAN-SPEAKING SWITZERLAND

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Abstract

The paper is concerned with the analysis of the term of "communicative style" as a stable combination of communicative ideas, rules and norms determined by cultural dominants that form the ethnocultural specificity of the phenomenon under consideration. Among these dominants that determine the communicative behaviour of a particular ethnosocium, the politeness category plays an important role. Politeness maxims form, along with other communicatively relevant cultural dominants, the national communicative style of a particular linguistic culture. Despite the close interconnection of the politeness category and cultural dominants, the communicative styles of ethnosociums, united by common cultural dominants, can vary significantly, determining communicative conflicts. The article defines the main characteristics of the German communicative style, emphasizes the fact that the German communicative style is not a homogeneous phenomenon and is characterized by different speech dominants and rules in the lands of West and East Germany, despite the decades that have passed since the unification of Germany. The article also discusses the problems arising in intercultural communication and determined by the differences in national communication styles, using the example of communication between residents of Germany and German-speaking Switzerland, united by the cultural dominant "Ordnung", but showing different national communication styles. The communicative style of the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, in contrast to the more explicit and categorical German style, can be defined as mitigatively marked, specified by increased attention to politeness strategies, uncategorized, attention to the interlocutor, focus on compromise. This, in turn, is characteristic of high context cultures.

1. Introduction

It is known that there are certain rules in all cultures of the world that allow the successful behaviour of communication and impress certain norms of behaviour to the communicants. Such norms and rules, based on particular cultural properties, are reflected in the structure of the communicative realization of representatives of a specific ethnic society in terms of communicative categories and concepts determining national communicative behaviour (Chłopicki & Laineste, 2019; Klotz, 2017; Lü, 2018 etc.). Kulikova (2009) specifies the national communicative style as a settled complex of communicative representations, norms and rules mediated by culture as a communication macrocontext, apparent in the choice of language means, the setting of meaning and nationally marked communicative behaviour of native speakers.

2. Problem Statement

In this vein, the role of research devoted to the study of the national specifics of communicative behaviour of speakers, determining the dominant speech behaviour of a particular language culture, by which, after Larina (2017), we understand the speech features characteristic of representatives of a particular ethnic group, manifested in different, but similar communicative situations, increases. These dominants are closely associated with the category of politeness characteristic of a particular linguistic culture, formed as a result of the regular use of communicative strategies and tactics prescribed by maxim of politeness, which therefore allows us to esteem the category of politeness as a regulator of communicative behaviour (Beeching & Murphy, 2019; Blitvich & Sifianou, 2019; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holtgraves & Perdew, 2016, Song, 2017, etc.).

3. Research Questions

Despite the universality of the basic rules of polite communication, the norms and postulates of verbal behavior turn out to be largely culturally conditioned and bear the imprint of the society in which one or another language functions. Politeness is not a static set of normative rules of communication. Like the norm itself, the politeness that defines the normative behavior in communication varies depending on the time and territorial-cultural affiliation. Thereby, on the one side, politeness is the basis of the formation of the national communicative style, on the other side, it is itself determined by the cultural values and ethical norms of a particular linguistic culture. But is the national communicative style always characterized by common features within the framework of one ethnosocium or ethnosociums, united by common cultural dominants? Consider this issue on the example of the German communicative style.

4. Purpose of the Study

Ethnic and cultural differences associated with communicative dominants and an understanding of what is polite and cooperative in communication can complicate communication in situations of intercultural contact. However, problems associated with the national specifics of the communicative styles of speaking subjects can arise not only in situations of intercultural communication, but also in

situations of alleged intracultural communication, causing in this case a much greater communicative shock and cognitive dissonance, as communicants are not ready for such conflicts in communication with speakers of, it would seem, the same language and the same culture as they are. That which is probable, expected in intercultural communication, and thus easily forgiven for representatives of another ethnosocium, is much more difficult to perceive in relation to "ours". However, this aspect of the communicative style and communicative behaviour remains, unfortunately, much less studied.

5.   Research Methods

Let us consider the main characteristics of German communicative behaviour in situations of intracultural communication of representatives of a united Germany and in comparison with the communicative style of the inhabitants of the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland.

6.   Findings

In studies of German communicative behaviour, the last is traditionally specified as direct and explanatory, and such characteristics of the German communicative style are highlighted as: content orientation, self-orientation, directness, explicitness, categoricity, and German culture is characterized as status-oriented and low-context (Pache, 2019). In our view, such characteristics of the German communicative style are closely linked to the concept of "Ordnung", which can be defined as the cultural dominant of German linguistic culture.

At the same time, the analysis of German communicative behavior still does not give due attention to the fact that Germany for almost half a century was divided into two states, the development of which took place under the influence of two different socio-cultural attitudes: individualistic - in West Germany, and collectivist - in the East, which led to the formation of various communicative stereotypes in both states. On the problems encountered in communication between West and East Germans, in a united Germany, the communicative shock in the process of seemingly intracultural communication is much more dramatic than in situations of intercultural communication of residents of different countries. Different value systems and various mental models of behavior, including communicative ones, cultivated for more than forty years, as a rule, are not recognized by the interlocutors, who proceed from the a priori community of the cultural context, which actually turns out to be different. So, in particular, for those who were born and raised in eastern Germany, the priority is to focus on maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships. Therefore, representatives of the East German communicative culture are much more careful and cautious in relation to each other in communication, avoiding conflicting topics. While escalation of tension in West German discursive practice, communicative conflicts are perceived more as a factor that can help in solving the problem.

The indicated differences in the mentality of East and West Germans are also noted in the study Willmeroth and Hämmerli (2009):

"…Mehr als vierzig Jahre praktizierter Sozialismus haben eben ihre Spuren in der Mentalität der Menschen hinterlassen. Solidarität wird immer großgeschrieben. … Noch heute sind Mitgefühl und Hilfsbereitschaft im Osten Deutschlands mehr als leere Worthülsen" (p. 152).

Based on the above, we can assume that that these features of the West and East German communication styles in the period of divided Germany, and especially in the recent years that have passed since its unification, have had a significant impact on the change of speech and behavioral stereotypes in German linguistic culture, which is also reflected in polite behavior strategies.

No less problems arise in communication between residents of Germany and German-speaking Switzerland, as evidenced by numerous manuals and articles by coaches on intercultural communication, indicating differences in the communicative norms of these ethnic societies. Cultural differences are manifested, in particular, in the fact that German-speaking Swiss, unlike Germans, are oriented towards maintaining consensus in communication, avoid conflicts and prefer an indirect style when formulating directives and criticisms, which brings them closer to high-context oriental cultures (Hain, 2014).

Werlen (2017), analyzing the interconnection of language, communicative culture and mentality, as the main characteristic of the mentality of German-speaking Swiss regarding communication, emphasizes the increased attention to the level of relations that underlies the above-mentioned communicative norms. The communicative maxims proposed by the author, which determine the communicative style of the German-speaking Swiss, deserve special attention:

1. Maxim of internal orientation

„Mit dem Begriff Binnenorientierung bezeichnen wir die Haltung, die eigenen Werte anderen Werten vorzuziehen, die eigenen Leute bevorzugt gut zu behandeln, und den *swiss way of life* als moralisch hochzuschätzen. … Der Glaube an die eigene Gutheit führt dazu, dass die schweizerische Mentalität durch eine *Ethnizismus* auszeichnet. Wir leiten diesen Begriff vom Konzept der Ethnizität ab: von der Eigenschaft einer Gruppe fähig und willens zu sein, sich positiv als Gruppe zu begreifen, etwa als „Fähigkeit zum Wir-Gefühl" (Werlen, 2017, p. 215), represented by the following precriptions:

 - Focus on the group!

 - Hide your special features!

 - Show solidarity with the group!

These prescriptions are detailed in such communicative rules as the choice of suitable communication topics, restraint in self-esteem, observance of unwritten rules, etc.

2. Maxim of symmetry, consisting of the following precriptions:

 - Constantly demonstrate readiness for cooperation!

 - Be democratic!

According to this maxim in communication, conflicts, direct criticism, sticking out of one's ego are unacceptable.

3. Maxim of attentiveness, represented by precriptions:

 - Be attentive to others!

 - Save the face of the Other!

 - If you have any power, do not show it!

4. Maxim of readiness for adaptation, which includes only one prescription - Talk about yourself so that it does not damage the face of others! (Werlen, 2017, p. 221).

It should be noted that all the aforementioned maxims and prescriptions are characteristic of high context cultures (E. Hall), that pay special attention to the context of the message, to whom and in what situation communication occurs, which is manifested in giving special significance to the form of the message. In communication, the specified specificity of highly contextual cultures leads to the prevalence of non-categorical forms of utterance, the active use of modal and semantic operators that reduce the intensity of the illocutionary force of formed utterances.

At the same time, the cultural dominant "Ordnung", which determines the German communicative style along with other cultural dominants, plays no less, and perhaps even more, role in the life of the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland. Thus, in many reference books and linguocultural studies, extreme love for order and intolerance of uncertainty among representatives of this ethnosocium is noted. Willmeroth and Hämmerli (2009) analyzing the basic characteristics of life in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, note that:

"Möglichst alles im Leben muss genau sein und deutlich voneinander abgegrenzt werden – das hat der Eidgenosse gern: viele Schubladen und Grenzen. …Zumindest versucht er, möglichst viel Nicht-Vorhersehbares von vornherein zu verhindern. Die Pedanterie und die kollektive Angst vor Unvorhersehbarem führen leider manchmal dazu, dass die Vorfreude im Keime erstickt, angesichts der aufkeimenden Sorgen darüber, was alles schieflaufen könnte" (pp. 123-127).

Fantl (2013), in her study on the potential of intercultural conflicts in communication between residents of Germany and German-speaking Switzerland, concludes that differences in communicative behavior do not automatically imply differences in cultural values.

7. Conclusion

Thus, summing up the comparative analysis of the communicative behavior of representatives of one ethnosocium and two different ethnosociums, united by common cultural dominants, we can conclude that despite the significant influence of key cultural dominants on the formation of the national communicative style, this relationship is not automatic and unambiguous. This fact clearly confirms the comparison of the communicative behavior of the inhabitants of Germany and German-speaking Switzerland, for which "Ordnung" is the common cultural dominant. In contrast to the direct, explicit German style, the communicative behavior of the German-speaking Swiss is characterized by increased attention to the interlocutor, an orientation toward the cooperative course of communicative contact. The characteristics of the communicative style of German-speaking Switzerland presented above are quite consonant with mitigative predictions of anti-conflict, non-categorical and non-positive (Takhtarova, 2017), which allows us to define the communicative style of representatives of the analyzed ethnosocium as mitigatively marked, that is, non-categorical, anti-conflict, oriented towards, and in turn, characteristic of high context cultures.

Acknowledgments

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