

КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ФАКТОРЫ И РОЛЬ ПЕРЕВОДЧИКА, СПОСОБСТВУЮЩИЕ УСТАНОВЛЕНИЮ ДЕЛОВЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

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Основываясь на значимости языковой компетенции и серьезности переводческих практик, авторы статьи обращают внимание на феномен иноязычных реалий как специфическое отражение окружающей действительности. Язык является неотъемлемой частью национальной культуры наряду с другими определяющими элементами. В статье рассматриваются эти экстралингвистические факторы, а также иллюстрируются примеры их различий и воздействия на развитие деловой этики и международных отношений. Кроме того, авторы указывают на необходимость привлечения к переговорам профессиональных переводчиков, роль которых при заключении серьезных международных договоренностей трудно переоценить, поскольку их знания экстралингвистических реалий способствуют решению многих проблем в ходе реализации совместных экономических проектов.

Ключевые слова: национальная культура; экстралингвистические факторы; культурные факторы; иноязычные реалии; межкультурная коммуникация; профессиональный переводчик; деловые отношения.

CULTURAL FACTORS AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER CONDUCTIVE TO ESTABLISHING BUSINESS RELATIONS

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Based on the importance of language competence and the seriousness of translation practices, the authors highlight the phenomenon of foreign language realia as a specific reflection of the surrounding reality. Language is an integral part of national culture along with other defining elements. The article discusses these extra-linguistic factors and illustrates examples of their differences and impact on the development of business ethics and international relations. Furthermore, the authors point to the necessity of involvement in negotiations professional interpreters, whose role in the conclusion of serious international agreements cannot be overestimated, because their knowledge of extra-linguistic realia contributes to the solution of many problems in the implementation of joint economic projects.

Keywords: national culture; extra-linguistic factors; cultural factors; foreign language realia; intercultural communication; professional interpreter; business relations.

A language without culture generates fluent fools.

In recent decades, the world has entered a new stage of development, which has led to the growth of globalization and internationalization of the world market,

and this, in turn, requires new conditions for successful business activities. Nowadays, the prosperity of the company at the international level depends not only on economic and political settings, it is largely determined by the ability to establish intercultural contacts. The era of globalization and information technologies has brought new dynamics to the expansion of intercultural and business relations and opened almost unrestrained access to the achievements, ideas and images of any culture. However, this does not necessarily mean that along with the erasure of borders, communication problems are erased as well.

The importance of comprehension and acceptance of cultural differences in communication in general and in business creation in particular can hardly be over-emphasized. The primary and natural obstacle to effective international communication is a language barrier. At the moment, this problem is partially solved, with the English language having firmly established worldwide as the *lingua franca*. Many businessmen, entrepreneurs, economists, politicians master English to the extent acceptable for maintaining international contacts with their counterparts at a certain level. However, it is rather presumptuous to believe that this level of language proficiency is sufficient to communicate professionally with representatives of different cultures and build well-rounded relationship with them.

Though fundamental, language is only a part of national culture along with other defining elements such as traditions, rules, values, norms of behaviour, rituals, customs, symbols, and a lot more. In other words, these are such important extra-linguistic components that represent the integrity of culture, the awareness of which comes along only with professional or everyday experience, and then, not too early. Evidently, one can learn a great deal in the course of continual interaction with a particular culture, if you regularly visit the country, or, better still, live there for a while, and try to assimilate into this culture. However, the business world is dynamic, and is hardly restricted to economic ties with just one country and culture. Therefore, it is virtually impossible to get a full grasp of all the subtleties of extra-linguistic cultural factors of more than a few countries at once, neither in terms of time, nor scale. Sure enough, one cannot diminish the opportunity to “melt the ice” when, in the course of interaction with foreign partners, you address them in their native language, or maintain a casual talk in their mother tongue. This is an element of empathy, signaling to your partner your sincere interest in creating relationships; it is certainly a bonus to the treasury of strong business relations. However, the quintessence of success in intercultural business dealings is professionalism, so when conducting important negotiations, drawing up agreements, signing contracts it is strongly advisable that businesspeople should employ professional translators, and not rely on their own amateurish level of language proficiency.

In order to determine the importance of language competence and comprehension of the seriousness of translation practices, it is necessary to pay attention to the phenomenon of foreign language realia as a specific reflection of the surrounding realities and to the difficulty of their interpretation. In the theory and practice of translation, the realia are traditionally understood as vocabulary with a specific cultural flavor (i.e. culture-specific elements), but, in a broad sense, they are also extra-linguistic constituents, and the translation of both from one language into another is not an easy task to accomplish.

The problem of correlation and interrelation of language and culture has always aroused considerable interest among many linguists, who, despite the singu-

larity of approaches to this issue, regard culture and language in unity. Modern linguistics seeks to comprehend the cultural consciousness of a single nation through linguistic means. Most linguists, however, agree that, as a social phenomenon, language can and should be considered not only from the perspective of linguistics, but also, most importantly, from an extra-linguistic or cultural angle, because a language itself is a constituent element of culture in one way, and a mirror reflection of its originality and richness in another.

Due to the unlike perception of the world, when interacting with a foreign culture, the speaker transmits it through the filter of the ideas and attitudes, customary for his national philosophy and his own worldview, which in most cases entails misreading of specific facts and phenomena of another culture. Insufficient socio-cultural background knowledge about the country of the target language can set up a cultural barrier in communication, lead to language conflicts, and sometimes can induce a “cultural shock”, when the motives and goals of absolutely conventional behavior of other cultures carriers are wrongly perceived and misconstrued.

Undeniable is the fact that the language of each nation is a living organism, inextricably linked to the history, ethos and social life of the people. Speakers of different languages perceive the world through the prism of their own native language, which contributes to the formation of culturally-conditioned phenomena or realia specific to this language, and such phenomena are manifested in various spheres of human activity. Communicating, interacting with each other, individuals convey the culture of their nation through language, and *the key link of inter-lingual communication is the translator/ interpreter.*

For successful work, the translator, in his turn, needs not only excellent knowledge of grammar, phonetics, stylistics, and vocabulary of a foreign language, but he should also possess background knowledge about the culture and history of the target country, which is essential for understanding a foreign context. The components of this background knowledge are the realia. Deficiency of knowledge of the country’s history, the most important historical events, its major political and historical figures leads to a misunderstanding of allusions, idioms, comparisons, historical references, and ultimately, to linguistic and professional incompetence. Lack of “backstage” knowledge can also cause literalism in translation due to the inability to see the realia behind the apparently transparent phrase. In order to avoid purely linguistic errors, it is compulsory to be well conversant with the culture that acts as the backdrop of language constructions; otherwise the translator will have to seek help not only from a connoisseur of the realities of the country, but also from a general philologist.

Realia, reflecting the specifics of the national culture, may have connotations that create a vibrant image, not always intelligible to the representative of a foreign culture. Thus, the most important task of the linguacultural aspect in teaching language and translation is to reveal this image in all the fullness of national-cultural associations.

There is an expression “to kill a message, translate it”, so is necessary to warn against substitution of foreign-language realities in the process of translation. As was mentioned above, sometimes translators interpret the content of the original message as if through the prism of their own language and their own culture. But this kind of translation results in deformation of the original meaning and should be looked upon as an undesirable phenomenon in the theory and practice of language interpretation.

Translation does not lose relevance in the political, social, economic spheres, since these are the areas where representatives of different cultures interact most on a professional level. A qualified translator, being a guide between cultures, does not limit his knowledge and experience only by the level of language proficiency and the familiarity with terminology necessary for successful negotiations or a profitable business deal. Extra-linguistic factors are essential in agreements of different kinds, and it is impossible to overestimate the role of the interpreter in their construal. Misunderstandings often occur between people of different ethnic backgrounds. Party *A* encodes the message based on the attitudes and assumptions of their specific culture; party *B* decodes the message using a different set of assumptions. As a result, there remains an embarrassment, and an unpleasant “aftertaste”.

National culture acts as an environment in which the creation of economic and business relations functions as a subcultural formation. Therefore, it would be interesting to compare business cultures of some countries and to illustrate the impact of various factors of national culture on the development of business ethics and international relations.

For example, a sales representative of a European company, wishing to “melt the ice” and make a good impression on his Chinese business partner, gives the latter an expensive grandfather clock as a gift, but gains the opposite effect: the Chinese colleague is offended, since in China a clock or a watch given as a present has a bad sign, it symbolizes a wish for a speedy death of the one to whom it is intended. The explanation for this is a play on words: the phrase “give a watch” is consonant with the phrase “come to the funeral ceremony”. Of course, you can make allowances for the fact that the giver did it with the best intentions, yet it is unforgivable that he did not care to learn about the cultural symbolism of the “gift”.

Many problems arise from subconscious assumptions and nonverbal communication patterns. As was already mentioned above, representatives of different cultures differ in religious beliefs and convictions, as well as prejudices, in their concepts of social status, decision-making customs, they differ in their perception of time, personal space, body language, manners of behaviour on the whole.

In cultures with prevailing puritan ethic, it is believed that if you work hard and succeed, you have earned the favor of God, that material wealth is an indication of superiority, and the rich are slightly better than the poor; therefore, the person who works hard is better than the one who works less. This sounds quite logical, but it is not so unambiguous. In many cultures, one is not a natural consequence of the other: hard work does not necessarily reflect on the financial well-being, and, conversely, those who work less, often enjoy the fruits of other people's labor. This social injustice is caused not so much by religious principles as by the state system and many other cultural factors.

Status is also attached different meanings. For example, a big North American boss by status is required to have a luxurious office on the top floor, with carpets, exclusive or antique furniture, paintings and expensive accessories. In France, a senior executive may occupy a desk in the center of an open area, surrounded by his subordinates. In the Middle Eastern countries, luxury items are intended for the home, while business can be located in a fairly small, modest room. As you can see, for some cultures superfluity is a significant indicator of position in society, for others luxury can be a sign of profligacy, and even vulgarity. In this case, it is im-

portant not to make hasty and erroneous conclusions about the status of a person, based only on the external surroundings.

The internal organization of communication also has its own aesthetics. In the companies of different countries there exists either a centralized or decentralized system of information exchange and decision-making. In North America, centralization is combined with the provision of unhindered information exchange among all the hierarchical levels. The decisions on major issues are made fairly swiftly by senior management, while the employees of lower-tier work out the details. For a Greek businessman, such disregard for details on the part of the company executives may seem evasive and not credible; for him the sign of a reliable partnership will be the discussion of every minor clause of the contract and each step of transaction. Most Europeans will consider negotiations completed the moment the contract is signed, but in Greece a contract is perceived as a transitional stage in the negotiations, whose completion is ensured only by the work done. In the UK, management is characterized by intensive hierarchical-level communication, and the inter-level transmission of information is extremely limited. Management structures in Arab companies are almost completely devoid of the tradition of information exchange, while in China there is a strict pecking order in the management structures: information is dosed and fully controlled under austere centralized management. The Italian communication system works quite specifically: here information circulates within closed circles of separate structures, but there is practically no exchange of information between these hierarchical structures.

No less important is the fact *who* is responsible for decision-making in the organization, because this procedure differs from country to country in many ways. In some cultures, the decision is made solely by the CEO, who agrees or disagrees with each item of a deal. In other countries, however, such as China or Japan, a whole team of negotiators must reach a consensus through a long and elaborate discussion. There has to be general consent, and the *vote-by-majority rule* does not work. Moreover, the Japanese feel uncomfortable if the decision-making process is not laborious enough, and naturally any pressure on them in an effort to accelerate the conclusion of the transaction can cause quite the opposite effect and end in a fiasco. The way *how* decisions are made, i.e. the degree of involvement of all employees in this process, also depends on the level of personal responsibility, and often the attitude to work.

A flexible approach is also required in matters of dissimilar perceptions of time, since different cultures attach different importance to this factor. For some, Germans, Americans, British, Russians, for example, – punctuality is an indicator of politeness and interest in cooperation. If you are dealing with a Hispanic, though, you may be kept quite a long time in the waiting room, which cannot but cause irritation, as you may think that too little importance is given to your visit. Business people in Spain or Latin America are ready to spend as much time with their partners as it is dictated by the rules of politeness, but politeness and punctuality for them are completely unequal concepts, and, oddly enough, are not interrelated. Your impatience and haste can even be taken advantage of when negotiating. One Japanese quipped about this, talking to his American partners: “You, Americans, have a weakness. If we keep you waiting long enough, you'll agree to anything.”

Different sense of personal space can likewise cause difficulties in the process of communication. This factor is hardly paid serious attention to, as it is so sub-

tle a line that it is barely perceptible, and only on a subconscious level. People sometimes do not understand why there is awkwardness, irritation and a desire to quickly get away from the interlocutor. The feeling of physical and psychological discomfort in the presence of a potential partner is unlikely to be conducive to common business.

Another significant obstacle to productive communication is a variety of manifestations of ethnic superiority, beliefs in the exclusivity of one's culture in terms of intellectual, economic, aesthetic or power development. Such an approach is followed by negative consequences: distortion of perceived information, biased opinions and estimates, incompetence in accurate analysis of situations. Fruitful cooperation in this case is absolutely impossible.

Summing up the above, it is necessary to emphasize once again that in order to build a productive business relationship, many factors must be taken into account and special attention should be paid to cultural realia. However, it is impossible to cover the entire spectrum of extra-linguistic realia and anticipate the diversity of situations that may arise in the course of intercultural communication. And if in the language format there has been created a system of certain tools for the translation of non-equivalent words, extra-linguistic situations are largely definable at the level of feelings and a mere awareness that "we are all different." Proper behavior in these situations is attributable to ample life experience or profound knowledge of national realities, acquired in the course of professional and long-term study of the language as an integral part of culture. Prudent company heads can't fail to understand that professionalism is fundamental not only at the level of production or services, but also in the system of economic relations, be that marketing research, negotiating, creating advertising campaigns for foreign markets, signing contracts, conducting business correspondence and much more. Just as the head of the company will never think to hire a layman to draw up a business plan or a profit and loss statement, it will not occur to him to entrust serious translation to an amateur. Professional interpreters are aware of the consequences of their involvement and take business ethics extremely seriously. They are certainly devoted to the languages they work with, they are experts of these countries and cultures.

Therefore, entrepreneurs should not rely on their own thorough knowledge of business field and discard the services of professional translators. Only this symbiosis of professionals at the very stage of analysis of the cultural environment ensures the successful operation of the company and the solution of problems in the implementation of joint economic projects.