

Linguistic Problems of Intercultural Communication

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Abstract: Intercultural communication is a complex process that involves the exchange of information and meaning between individuals from different cultures. This interaction is often fraught with linguistic issues that can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and conflicts. Effective intercultural communication can be enhanced through education, training, and the development of empathy for diverse cultural perspectives. By recognizing and managing these linguistic challenges, people can develop more meaningful and effective intercultural interactions.

Key words: pragmatics, intercultural communication, cultural context, idiomatic expressions, high-context cultures, low-context cultures, translation problems, cultural sensitivity, communication style.

Introduction

Intercultural communication refers to the interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. While language serves as a primary tool for communication, it also presents various challenges that can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. This article explores the linguistic problems associated with intercultural communication, highlighting key issues and offering insights into how they can be addressed. The term “language” may refer to spoken and written language (verbal codes) and nonverbal codes (e.g., body movements). Intercultural communication describes any interaction between two or more members of different cultural groups (international, interfaith, interethnic, interracial). Language and intercultural communication concerns core elements of language (e.g., phonology, pragmatics, semantics, syntactics) and their impact on intercultural communication. In relation to intercultural dialogue, this area of study explores such aspects as the relationship between language, worldview, and communication; the role of language and power in intercultural interactions; and the connections between language, culture and identity.

Methodology

The English language is so rich in phrases and set expressions that we face problems in correct choice in translation. A good translator should be aware of meaning of such phrases and set expressions. Some gestures, mimics can also be helpful for guessing the meaning which speaker wants to express by using them in his/her speech. Sometimes even words can't be translated from one language into another because they can be used in one language in metaphorical way and in the process of translation into another language they cause fun, surprise, misunderstanding and even offence. For example, when we ask someone “Are you a lark or an owl?” we mean a natural temper of a person who is more energized in the first half of the day (lark) or, on the contrary, a person who is active in the second half of the day (owl). If we translate these words into Uzbek and ask someone, it will seem funny. The English language is rich in phrases, clichés, speech formulas and set expressions which are registered in special dictionaries and are used in everyday speech for various communicative aims. English is learnt and taught in almost all countries of the world. Statistic data shows that more than 70% of English speakers are non-native. This means that English isn't their mother tongue. Perfect knowledge of English isn't enough for perfect communication between native English speakers and non-native ones. Why? The answer is vivid: they belong to different language cultures and are aware of their native language specifics due to historical, religious, cultural, national background of their language functioning. When an intercultural dialogue takes place between speakers of different lingual cultures

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there appears a definite misbalance between expressions in two different languages, e.g. English and Uzbek. We come across with difficulty in finding Uzbek analogical phrase of the English phraseological unit “zoo daddy”, which means “a divorced man with the right to see his child (children) on weekend and take them to zoo, park, etc.” The phrase consists of two common words which together make up a phrase that doesn’t match to Uzbek national culture. We can’t find similar phraseological unit in the Uzbek language because there is no such Uzbek phraseological unit which characterizes a divorced man with the right to see children on week-ends. In such cases we should only give lexical explanation of the English phrase. So, most of idiomatic expressions make translators feel baffled in the process of rendering them from one language into another. Idioms are expressions that don’t mean what they appear to mean. For example, when we say “It’s raining cats and dogs” we mean that “it’s raining heavily”. But we can’t use the same components of the phrase (cats and dogs) in Uzbek for characterizing a heavy rain. Like single words, idioms and fixed expressions may be culturally specific. Thus, in using various expressions in communication with native English speakers we should pay attention to national and cultural peculiarities of the English language culture and their function in speech act. It may happen that the same notions or even colours can express different meaning in various linguocultures. For example, there are red crosses in national flags of both countries: Uzbekistan and the UK. But they symbolize different features: in the flag of the UK Red Cross is presented as St. George’s Cross and takes its origins in the Crusades, when soldiers were identified by this red coloured cross on their white tunics. St. George was claimed to be the Patron Saint of England at that time, so the cross is associated with him. In the national flag of Uzbekistan two red crosses symbolize life and power. Animals also can be national symbols: bird “Humo” in the emblem of Uzbekistan is a symbol of happiness and peace. The Lion expresses bravery and depicts courage of English warriors in English emblem. Today, this animal remains the national emblem of the country as well as it is used extensively in sports: team’s names, icons and so on.

Results and discussion

When it comes to the matter of intercultural communication as it was mentioned before, we may experience lots of challenges in translating some words or finding their equivalents because their meaning relates to any cultural realia and has national specifics. Only in case when there are similar notions of a definite custom or tradition in both languages, equivalents can be easily found. In other cases when a custom is unique and nationally specific, it has no analogues in another linguoculture. For example, every year English people celebrate Halloween on the 31st of October. Halloween is originated as a pagan festival in parts of northern Europe, particularly, around what is now the United Kingdom. Many European cultural traditions hold that Halloween is a time when magic is most patent and spirits can maintain contact with the material world. The aim of this holiday is to create fun: pumpkin is the most important tool. Talking about this holiday, we can’t find a similar custom in our country. So, one should explain the details of celebration and origin of this holiday. One of the most significant challenges in intercultural communication is the presence of language barriers.

When individuals do not share a common language, it can lead to misinterpretations and confusion. Even among speakers of the same language, variations in dialects, accents, and vocabulary can create obstacles. For instance, idiomatic expressions that are familiar to one culture may be entirely foreign to another, leading to misunderstandings. Non-verbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language, play a crucial role in communication. However, these cues can vary significantly across cultures. What may be considered a positive gesture in one culture could be offensive in another. For example, direct eye contact is viewed as a sign of confidence in some cultures, while in others, it may be perceived as disrespectful. Misreading non-verbal signals can lead to significant misunderstandings. The context in which communication occurs is vital for understanding meaning. High-context cultures (e.g., Japan, China) rely heavily on implicit messages and shared experiences, while low-context cultures (e.g., the United States, Germany) prefer explicit and direct communication. Failure to recognize these differences can result in misinterpretation of intentions and messages. Pragmatics involves the study of how context influences the interpretation of meaning. Different cultures have unique pragmatic norms regarding politeness, formality, and indirectness. For instance, some cultures prioritize indirect communication to maintain harmony, while others value



straightforwardness. A lack of awareness of these norms can lead to perceived rudeness or insensitivity. Idioms and colloquialisms are often deeply rooted in a culture's history and values. When translated literally, these expressions can lose their intended meaning or become nonsensical to non-native speakers. For example, the English idiom "kick the bucket" means to die, but its literal translation may confuse someone unfamiliar with the expression. This linguistic challenge underscores the importance of cultural knowledge in effective communication. Different cultures have varying conversational norms regarding turn-taking, pauses, and interruptions. In some cultures, overlapping speech is common and signifies engagement, while in others, it may be seen as rude. Understanding these norms is essential for facilitating smooth interactions and avoiding potential conflicts. Developing cross-cultural competence is crucial for overcoming linguistic problems in intercultural communication. This involves not only language proficiency but also an understanding of cultural nuances and social norms. Training programs that focus on cultural awareness and sensitivity can help individuals navigate linguistic challenges more effectively. Empathy plays a significant role in intercultural communication. By actively listening and trying to understand the perspective of the other person, individuals can bridge linguistic gaps. Asking clarifying questions and paraphrasing can also help ensure that messages are accurately understood.

Conclusion

Linguistic problems in intercultural communication can pose significant challenges but are not insurmountable. By recognizing language barriers, understanding non-verbal cues, appreciating cultural context, and developing cross-cultural competence, individuals can enhance their ability to communicate effectively across cultures. Fostering empathy and active listening further contributes to successful intercultural interactions, paving the way for meaningful connections in an increasingly globalized world.

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