

**Свирепчук И. А.**

*Национальный технический университет Украины «Киевский  
политехнический институт им. Игоря Сикорского»*

## **INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Depending on how culture is defined and which discipline one comes from, various terms are used to refer to communication between people who don't share the same nationality, social or ethnic origin, gender, age, or occupation.

The term 'cross-cultural' or intercultural usually refers to the meeting of two cultures or two languages across the political boundaries of nation-states. They are predicated on the equivalents of one nation-one culture-one language, and on the expectation that a 'culture shock' may take place upon crossing national boundaries. In foreign language teaching a cross-cultural approach seeks ways to understand the other on the other side of the border by learning his/her national language.

The term intercultural may also refer to communication between people from different ethnic, social, gendered cultures within the boundaries of the same national language. Both terms are used to characterize communication, say, between Chinese-Americans and African-Americans, between working-class and upper-class people, between men and women. Intercultural communication refers to the dialogue between minority cultures and dominant cultures, and are associated with issues of bilingualism and biculturalism.

Language is a guide to 'social reality'. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily

understood , but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression of their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that a 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.

The background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar, and differs, from slightly to greatly between different grammars. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organized it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.

Every student of language or society should be familiar with the essential idea of linguistic relativity, the idea that culture, through language, affects the way we think, especially perhaps our classification of the experienced world.

Much of our experience seems to support some such idea, for example the phenomenology of struggling with a second language, where we find that the summit of competence is forever over the next horizon, the obvious absence of definitive or even accurate translation (let alone the ludicrous failure of phrasebooks), even the wreck of diplomatic efforts on linguistic and rhetorical rocks.

On the other hand, there is a strand of robust common sense that insists that a stone is a stone whatever you call it, that the world is recalcitrant reality that imposes its structure on our thinking and our speaking and that the veil of linguistic difference can be ripped aside with relative ease. Plenty of subjective experiences and objective facts can be marshaled to support this view; the delight of foreign friendships, our ability to 'read' the military or economic strategies of alien rivals, the very existence of comparative sciences of language, psychology, and society.

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