

Quantitative Aspect of Communication: Cross-Cultural Varieties

Fedyaeva Ye.V.

Department of Foreign Languages for Humanities
Novosibirsk State Technical University
Novosibirsk, Russia
fedyaeva@corp.nstu.ru

Ivleva M.A.

Department of Foreign Languages for Humanities
Novosibirsk State Technical University
Novosibirsk, Russia
m.ivleva@corp.nstu.ru

Abstract—The article is devoted to the quantitative aspect of communication content from the point of view of a national mentality specifics which finds its explicit expression in the ethnic communicative style. Special attention is paid to the quantitative aspect of communication through the prism of cultural axiological dominants influencing the process of communication within the Eastern and Western national cultures. The communicative conventions of the analyzed linguocultural communities determine the frequency of starting a communication, the duration of communicative contacts, the quantitative ratio of verbal and non-verbal information.

Keywords—*quantity, communication, culture, mentality, culture specific, verbal, non-verbal*

I. INTRODUCTION

Being a distinctive feature of modern science including linguistics and theory of cross-cultural communication, anthropocentrism involves integration of various fields of knowledge, thus, this principle is regarded to possess a significant explanatory potential. It results in data synthesis in the field of history and psychology of a people speaking a particular language and analysis of the life-sustaining activities caused by certain environments, i.e. data of extra-linguistic nature, which determine the specifics of the nation worldview and are reflected, primarily, in the language and in the process of communication.

The communicative situation is known to be regulated by the rules and conventions developed within a particular culture, and the communicative behavior of linguistic and cultural community representatives is determined by the significant component of the culture to which they belong. Therefore, national mentality is explicitly expressed in the communicative ethnic style defined as historically formed, predetermined by culture and fixed by tradition type of communicative behavior of the people manifested in the choice and preference of certain strategies and means of communication (verbal and non-verbal) which are used in the process of interpersonal interaction [1, p. 196]. Among other communicative conventions, the ethnostyle deals with the quantitative ratio of verbal and nonverbal information which is conditioned by the type of culture and its axiological dominants.

The present article will touch upon some aspects of the concept QUANTITY within one of the language main functions, that of communication.

II. QUANTITY VS COMMUNICATION

Since QUANTITY is the basic concept of human mind, it is known to permeate all spheres of human existence finding its detailed expression at all language levels and directly affecting the communicative situation itself.

The modern interpretation of QUANTITY was inspired by Aristotle: ‘Quantum’ means that which is divisible into two or more constituent parts of which each is by nature a ‘one’ and a ‘this’. A quantum is a plurality if it is numerable, a magnitude if it is a measurable. ‘Plurality’ means that which is divisible potentially into non-continuous parts, ‘magnitude’ that which is divisible into continuous parts [2]. The initial stages of this category comprehension are characterized by its perception as a vague and compound entity. Aristotle’s definition contains the basis for distinguishing between discrete, i.e. counted quantity, and continuous (non-discrete) i.e. measurable quantity. Pertaining to the communication process, this differentiation is expressed in two aspects characterizing communication process: the quantity of verbal/non-verbal information and the degree of the communication content intensity.

On the whole, QUANTITY is genetically related to one of the main properties of language: saving efforts at all language levels. In the process of information perception, the communicant tries to shorten and thus simplify it to make the information more accessible for understanding. The pragmatic potential of the code switching function in natural bilinguals (switching from one language to another) can provide an example in the field of saving efforts. This strategy saves not only the speaker’s internal mental effort, but also the time and length of the statement. In addition, language metaphor can also function as an efforts-saving mechanism, since its cognitive basis can be represented as “striving to reduce the number of mental operations leading to the fact that identification of each new knowable object or phenomenon is carried out via the search for analogues among already known objects and phenomena” [3, p. 24].

The optimization of the intercultural communication process in terms of quantitative communication aspect may require implementing of the so-called redundancy technique, which consists of various quantitative indicators of information for a native speaker and a foreigner. Redundancy is expressed in the explanation of unfamiliar lexical units, the use of

repetitions, clarifications and cultural comments and the active use of non-verbal means on the part of a native speaker.

III. QUANTITY OF VERBAL/NON-VERBAL INFORMATION

The quantitative ratio of verbal and non-verbal information depends on the unique mentality of nations formed in the process of historical development. Research in the field of cross-cultural communication theory shows that the quantitative aspect of communication plays a significant role. Thus, the combination of explicit and implicit method of information exchange is the basis for differentiation between societies with High/Low Context Cultural Patterns [4]. These two types vary in the amount of the expressed verbal/non-verbal information as well, thus making this distinction a criterion to refer a culture to a certain type. It also reflects the realization of iconicity principle, namely iconic quantity principle “*the bigger the form, the bigger the amount of meaning*” which represents the qualitative correlation of elements in terms of the signifier and signified [5].

It can hardly be doubted that socio-cultural dominants significantly affect the quantitative aspect of communication. It is believed that non-verbal means of communication are likely to be used unconsciously within the framework of common cultural traditions and conventions and play a crucial role in the communication process. The amount of verbally expressed information is reduced in conditions of Japanese culture, for example, since the phenomenon of ‘*silence*’ is historically interpreted as one of the main virtues and is considered to be a kind of communication art by representatives of this culture. It is noteworthy that many Japanese proverbs and idiomatic expressions are marked by a negative attitude towards the action of speaking. Thus, according to a study of 504 Japanese proverbs and sayings by Professor H. Katayama only 25% have a positive attitude towards speech, 63% of proverbs have a negative meaning, and only 12% are neutral [6, p. 75]. In general, Japanese verbal communication style is usually defined as short or compressed and manifests itself in the use of the necessary and sufficient minimum of statements to convey information.

In this regard, there are significant differences even in the same-type cultures belonging either to collectivist or individualist societies. Since Japanese people identify themselves primarily as members of the collective, rather than as individuals, the above-mentioned phenomenon of ‘*silence*’ plays a significant role in the formation of harmonious relations between the members of the collective and in the complete elimination of conflicts. Japanese cultural traditions prescribe avoiding direct oral utterances, especially expressing negative emotions such as anger, hatred or neglect. This also reduces the amount of verbally expressed information relying on the addressee's intellectual ability to “reveal” implicitly expressed information.

Though both Russian and Japanese societies are characterized by collectivism and togetherness, the amount of verbally expressed information is much higher in Russian culture. It can be explained by the high degree of emotional intensity of the Russian people who can spend their time “pouring out the heart” to the interlocutor. In addition,

establishing emotional contact with the interlocutor is of great importance in the Russian culture; consequently, politeness acquires a significant weight in view of potential psychological influence on the interlocutor. A large number of polite phrases takes time (and costs money), but for a Russian person this is not so important compared to the established contact [7, p. 235].

In contrast to Russia and Japan, German-speaking linguistic and cultural community communication process is determined by such culturally significant concepts as ORDNUNG, PÜNKTLICHKEIT, GENAUIGKEIT. German frugality also defines the quantitative aspect of communication. For example, when the Germans talk on the phone, they introduce themselves and say clearly what they want without wasting words.

Unlike representatives of the German nation, one of the characteristic features of the French is sociability, which is probably explained by the importance of the key concepts of the French culture JOIE DE VIVRE as a major attitude of the French towards life and the ability to enjoy it in all its manifestations, including the joy of human communication. This national trait is reflected in the language. For example, S.V. Belyaeva notes that the verb *discuter*, meaning “to discuss, debate, argue” is used in French more often than any corresponding verb of the Russian language [8, p. 35]. Thus, garrulity as a national character trait determines not only the high frequency of starting communication, but also the duration of communicative contacts, which is directly related to the amount of verbally expressed information.

IV. INTENSITY OF COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The ‘intensity’ as a particular manifestation of QUANTITY can also be a significant cross-cultural factor affecting the communication process as a whole. We understand ‘*intensity*’ in its broadest sense implying that not only the described phenomenon can be intensive, but the attitude towards it explicated by emotional expressive means can be intensive as well. The differences in the degree of intensity between certain cultures thus become the basis for addressing statement intensification as one of the quantity aspects.

Differences in cultural norms, communicative conventions and, consequently, in the use of language means for utterance intensification can be seen even within one language used by different nations. The intensity can be interpreted in its broadest understanding, since, according to Ch. Bally, this concept is contained internally in any juxtaposition of speech acts, provided that the term ‘intensity’ means all the differences that are expressed in categories of quantity, size, value, strength, etc., regardless of whether we are talking about specific representations or abstract ideas [9, p. 202-203].

Not only the described phenomenon can be intense, but also the attitude towards it: being internally anthropocentric, intensity may indicate an individual assessment that is formed within a particular linguocultural community characterized by specifics of world perception and worldview as well as by a common system of views, values and communication conventions.

Interpretation of the intensity category in the cross-cultural perspective allows identifying and analyzing cultural-specific

communicative regulatives that affect members of various linguocultural communities in the communication process and affect the choice of language means for expressing intensification / de-intensification.

The semantic classification of languages by Ch. Bally is important for ethno-linguistic analysis of utterances intensification. He distinguishes two opposite "psychological trends": the so-called, impressionistic characterized by a reflection of phenomena in terms of their perception, and analytical focusing primarily on a rationalistic view of the relationship between cause and effect. According to Bally, the Russian language belongs to the languages of impressionistic orientation, while English to those of analytical orientation. German is closer to Russian, and French is closer to English, i.e. more to analytical orientation [10, p. 203]. The differences in the degree of emotional intensity between certain cultures thus become the basis for addressing statement intensification in terms of ethno-cultural paradigm.

Russian, being a language of impressionistic orientation tending to the emotional assessment of the world, provides opportunities for detailed verbalization both on the lexical and grammatical level for a wide range of emotional states and personal experiences. The tendency to heightened emotionality and more open expression of emotions among representatives of Russian linguistic culture is also manifested in the personification of the surrounding world through the category of gender and in punctuation: the exclamation mark is used in Russian more often than in English [11, p. 151-159]. Another significant means of enhancing the emotional coloring of an utterance in the Russian language is a wide range of particles.

Representatives of the French nation are more restrained than Russians, and more rational. However, the cheerful frame of mind due to the culturally significant concept of JOIE DE VIVRE ("the joy of life") and the inconsistency of the national character result in the fact that emotions and their expression are widely represented in French.

V. G. Gak notes that Russian evaluative suffixes, particles and a sufficiently free word order are powerful means of attaining expressiveness, whereas French vocabulary compared to Russian is generally abstract and undifferentiated; as a result, French attains expressiveness in other ways: using words in a figurative meaning. The tendency towards using imagery in French is more widespread than in Russian on the whole [12, p. 258]. This tendency can probably be explained by the conscious desire of the French for the beauty of form (linguistic as well) as the national character dominant. In addition, the analysis of factual material indicates a sufficient number of adverbs, designed to regulate the degree of emotionality in French: *adorablement, affreusement complètement, totalement* etc.

On the contrary, English as a language of analytical orientation is fitted to rationalistic coverage of current events.

Scientists researching cross-cultural communication peculiarities highlight such typical British features as commitment to facts as opposed to opinions, respect for traditions, tolerance towards a different opinion, as well as restraint in expressing one's own judgments and, certainly, irony. It is a widely known fact that the communicative

conventions of British society prescribe restraint in the expression of emotions. As noted by A. Pavlovskaya, the book of good manners published in 1880 and entitled "Don't" strongly recommended to refrain from unnecessary affect in speech. The author advised: "Do not use extravagant adjectives. Don't say *magnificent* when a thing is merely pretty, or *splendid* when excellent or some other word will do. Extravagance of this kind is never in good taste" [13, p. 248-249].

The concept QUANTITY is also expressed in the culturally significant polar concepts UNDERSTATEMENT and OVERSTATEMENT, which determine the process of communication and are the communicative regulatives of the British and American linguocultural communities.

The culturally significant concept UNDERSTATEMENT determines the communication process as a whole; it is described in detail in the works of both foreign and domestic researchers [e.g., 15, 18] as a communicative regulator of British society. This cultural requirement explains the desire of representatives of British linguocultural community to avoid direct nominations and to resort to additional means of emotional intensity reducing. Here are some examples illustrating such a desire to de-intensify the emotional content of the statement:

1) *London, on the other hand, reminded her of being young again, when she had lived in a flat with two girlfriends near the Fulham Road and had been, in the phrase of the time, a bit of a goer* [14, p. 99].

2) *"To show how it works, however, I will take a relatively blatant example. My fiancé is a brain surgeon. When we first met, I asked what had led him to choose this profession. 'Well, um,' he replied, 'I read PPE [Philosophy, Politics and Economics] at Oxford, but I found it all rather beyond me, so, er, I thought I'd better do something a bit less difficult.' I laughed, but then, as he must have expected, protested that surely brain surgery could not really be described as an easy option. This gave him a further opportunity for self-deprecation. 'Oh no, it's nowhere near as clever as it's cracked up to be; to be honest it's actually a bit hit-or-miss. It's just plumbing, really, plumbing with a microscope – except plumbing's rather more accurate.' It later emerged, as he must have known it would, that far from finding the intellectual demands of Oxford 'beyond him', he had entered with a scholarship and graduated with a First. 'I was a dreadful little swot,' he explained"* [15].

In example (1), the used attributive de-intensificator is aimed at mitigating the categorical judgmental description of the protagonist's lifestyle.

The example (2) illustrates how the high personal erudition, competence and significant achievements in the professional sphere processed by communicative regulative UNDERSTATEMENT and the specific British humor 'work for' de-intensification of the statement intensity level in general as well as pseudo-veiling personal success in particular.

Differences in cultural norms, communicative conventions and, consequently, in the use of language means for utterance intensification can be seen even within one language used by different nations. Scientists researching cross-cultural

communication peculiarities highlight such typical American features as patriotism, optimism, impudence, self-assurance, striving for leadership, freedom of thought and emotions expression. It is these qualities of the American nation that are likely to explain the desire for OVERSTATEMENT as a culturally specific feature of the American communicative style. As a result, the American version of English enjoys a freer expression of emotions than the British one.

The motivation of the language means choice by the culturally significant concept of OVERSTATEMENT is manifested, for example, in the fact that certain words, combinations of words, several sentences and even a whole text can become the means of intensification. Creating the OVERSTATEMENT effect can be illustrated by the following examples:

3) *Judge Harrison took the envelope from the clerk, removed a sheet of paper, and began reviewing the verdict – heavy wrinkles burrowing into his forehead, eyes frowning as he pinched the bridge of his nose. After an eternity* he said, “It appears to be in order” [16, p. 14].

4) *One of Mr. Trudeau’s cell phones rang and he snatched it off the table. ‘Hi, honey,’ he said as he stood and walked away. It was (the third) Mrs. Trudeau, the latest trophy, a deadly young woman* whom Ratzlaff and everyone else at the company avoided at all costs [16, p. 24]

5) *Mrs Higglar was older than Mrs Bustamonte, and both of them were older than Miss Noles and none of them was older than Mrs Dunwiddy. Mrs Dunwiddy was old, and she looked it. There were geological ages that were probably younger than Mrs Dunwiddy.*

As a boy, Fat Charlie had imagined Mrs Dunwiddy in Equatorial Africa, peering disapprovingly through her thick spectacles at the newly erect hominids. ‘Keep out of my front yard,’ she would tell a recently evolved and rather nervous specimen of Homo habilis, or I going to belt you around your ear-hole, I can tell you.’ Mrs. Dunwiddy smelled of violet-water and beneath the violets she smelled of a very old woman indeed. She was a tiny old lady who could outglare a thunderstorm, and Fat Charlie, who had, over two decades ago, followed a lost tennis ball into her yard, and then broken one of her lawn ornaments, was still quite terrified of her [17].

The exaggeration of the time span in the example (3) is achieved with the help of the lexeme *eternity* which expresses the time interval perceived as something endless alongside the comparison with the limit of human life.

In example (4), the means of linguistic interpretation of the OVERSTATEMENT phenomenon in the field of assessing a person’s age is adverb *deadly* which in collocation with the quality adjective *young* forms the idea of the maximum degree of the feature intensity.

The integral image of an elderly woman in example (5) is formed on the basis of the OVERSTATEMENT phenomenon, and is actualized by the sequential implementation of various tools within the textual space. The linguistic interpretation of the ‘solid’ age is carried out, on the one hand, on the basis of comparison with time intervals, meaning a time interval of

geological history calculated in millions years in general (... *geological ages that were probably younger ..*), and, on the other hand, by employing repetition as the quantitative iconicity means (... *older than ... older than ... older than Mrs Dunwiddy*). Additionally, the comprehension of the vitality and energy of the character occurs on the basis of contrasting her modest ‘parametric characteristics’ with her intrinsic strength, commensurate with the force of the lightning (... *a tiny old lady who could outglare a thunderstorm*).

V. CONCLUSION

Summing up, it is important to note that the analysis of the quantitative aspect of communication content in the cross-cultural perspective allows identification of the main culture specific communicative regulatives that determine the communicative behavior of various linguocultural communities representatives in situations of intercultural communication.

Being the basic concept of human mind, QUANTITY is reflected twice in the communication process: on the one hand, it is reflected in the frequency of starting communication, in the duration of communicative contacts, in the number of verbally / non-verbally presented information, and on the other hand, in the degree of the utterance intensity. It is worth emphasizing that intensification is characteristic of almost any sphere of language functioning. Cultural norms and traditions, regulations in expressing the emotions of the linguocultural community largely determine the degree of emotional intensity in an utterance revealing differences in the communicative behavior of different linguocultural communities representatives. Thus, the communicative conventions of a certain linguocultural community influence the process of communication and determine the range of language means variation for the utterance intensification.

The most interesting phenomenon to observe is the linguistic representation of culture specific concepts UNDERSTATEMENT and OVERSTATEMENT which, it seems, can be viewed in terms of extreme points on the scale of intensification owing to the peculiarities of the respective national cultures mentality.

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