



Research Article

© 2019 Takhtarova et al.
This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Communication between Population of Germany and German-Speaking Switzerland: Intra- or Intercultural Communication?

Svetlana Salavatovna Takhtarova

Darya Leonidovna Abuzyarova

Olga Dmitrievna Kuzmina

Kazan Federal University

Doi: 10.2478/ajis-2019-0024

Abstract

The relevance of the research is determined by the contemporary interest to the intercultural communication in the context of the anthropocentric paradigm of modern linguistics. The article is devoted to the analysis of the peculiarities of communicative interaction between the citizens of Germany and the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland. The systematic analysis of studies on the communicative styles of Germans living in Germany and Switzerland allowed us to determine their main features. The study showed that the communication between the analyzed ethno-cultural communities is complicated by a number of linguistic and culturally-conditioned problems. While the inhabitants of Germany demonstrate the characteristic features of the low-context culture, the communicative style of the German-speaking Swiss is mitigative as they are referred to the high-context culture. The socio-cultural differences in the mutual perception of the analyzed ethnosocial groups lead to the formation of stereotypes and clichés which influence the intercultural communication. The materials of the paper may be used in comparative cultural linguistics, country and cultural studies.

Keywords: linguistics, learning, speaker, communication, language, communicative, style, mitigation, ethnosocium

1. Introduction

In modern linguistic studies of the communicative behavior of an ethnosocium it is generally recognized that all communicative processes are largely determined by the cultural context in which they take place, and the individuals' communicative behavior is, therefore, determined by the sociocultural and linguistic community they belong to. National communicative behavior is traditionally defined as a set of norms and rules of communication of a certain linguocultural community [Prokhorov and Sternin, 2006]. These norms and rules, based on cultural values, are reflected in the structure of the communicative consciousness of representatives of a particular ethnosocium in the form of communicative categories and concepts which determine the national communicative style. This predetermines the interest of researchers in analyzing the national specifics of the communicative behavior of individuals, determining the dominants of the verbal behavior of a particular linguistic culture and problems which arise in situations of intercultural communication and are usually associated with differences in ethno-cultural norms and rules of communication [Zare, 2015; Kabayeva et al, 2018; Bentley & Bossé, 2018].

However, it should be noted that these problems associated with the national peculiarities of the communicative style of the representatives of a particular ethnosocium can arise not only in situations of intercultural communication, but also in situations of intracultural communication,

causing much greater communicative shock and cognitive dissonance. The communicators are not ready for the emergence of such conflicts in communication with speakers of the same language and representatives of the same culture as they are. Everything anticipated in the process of communication and easily forgiven for the representatives of another ethnosocial group is much harder to perceive in relation to one's own culture. However, this aspect of the communicative style and communicative behavior requires a thorough study.

2. Methods

To reveal the peculiarities of the communicative interaction of the population of Germany and the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland we performed a systematic review of recent works of the European researchers who study the German communication style and the communicative behavior of German-speaking citizens of Switzerland.

3. Results and Discussion

In the studies devoted to the German communicative behavior little attention is paid to the fact that Germany was divided into two states for almost half a century. Their development was influenced by two different social and cultural systems: individualistic, in West Germany, and collectivist, in East Germany, which led to the formation of different communicative stereotypes in both countries.

In the book devoted to the study of the problems of mutual (non) understanding of West and East Germans O.G. Klein lays emphasis on the fact that in the united Germany a cultural, or rather, a communicative shock which occurs in the process of intracultural communication between representatives of the western and eastern parts has a much more dramatic character rather than in situations of intercultural communication between people from different countries [Klein, 2004].

Different value systems and various mental models of behavior, including communicative ones, cultivated for over forty years, as a rule, are not realized by interlocutors who belong to the same (German) culture, which actually turns out to be different. The author mentions a number of such discrepancies which cause communicative problems. For instance, in terms of communication the Western communicative culture is characterized by focus on individuality and success, whereas the Eastern culture – on collectivity and consensus.

The Western culture pays much attention to the status behind which the certain attitude is hidden: it is important to position yourself in time. People born and raised in East Germany are more focused on maintaining harmonious interpersonal relations. According to Sandra Willmeroth, socialism practiced in East Germany for forty years left its traces in the mentality of the German people. Solidarity, sympathy and readiness to help are still of great importance in the eastern part of Germany today [Willmeroth and Hämmerli, 2009]. Thus, the personal and substantive levels in the communication of East Germans are much more closely related than in the Western communicative context. Therefore, the representatives of the East German communicative culture are much more cautious and careful about each other in communication and avoid controversial topics, whereas in the West German discursive practice escalation of tension and communicative conflicts are perceived as a factor which helps to solve problems [Klein, 2004].

The study of the differences in communicative dominants and the problems they cause in communication between citizens of Germany and the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland who speak the same language and have the same national roots is of great interest as well. Dieter Hildebrandt's quotation "Die Schweizer haben mit den Deutschen Mühe, weil sie ihnen so ähnlich sind" (The Swiss have trouble with the Germans because they are so similar to them) – aptly reflects the paradox of the relationship between Germans and German-speaking Swiss complicated by the large number of not always positive stereotypes and clichés.

Thomas Küng remarks that the Swiss love free lifestyle in the French people, temperamental spontaneity in the Italians, and hate themselves in the Germans, namely in the German-speaking Swiss: "...das Verhältnis der Deutschschweizer zu den Deutschen ist ein spezifisch *deutsch-deutsches* (wie es früher hiess), nämlich ein gespantes. Wir sagten, es sei der Selbsthass, der den Schweizern die Beziehung zu den Deutschen vergällt. Und es ist der Neid. Beides zusammen gibt

eine unangenehme Mischung" [Küng, 2005].

The paradox of the negative attitude of the German-speaking Swiss towards the people of Germany despite and, perhaps, due to their cultural and linguistic unity is also pointed out by R. de Vek. He highlights the fact that France treats the French-speaking Swiss worse than Germany treats the German-speaking population of Switzerland, but the attitude of the French-speaking Swiss to France is paradoxically much better than the attitude of their German-speaking compatriots to Germany. The author asks a well-founded question: "Liegt der tiefere Grund darin, dass sich Deutsche und Deutschschweizer stärker ähneln, als ihnen lieb ist?" [De Weck, 2014].

P. Bichsel, noting the common historical roots of the Germans living in Germany and in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, explains the desire of his compatriots to distance themselves from the citizens of Germany by the guilt for the historical events: "Wir sind nämlich auch Germanen – wir Deutschschweizer –, und wir gleichen unserem Nachbarn in vielem. Aber sind eben *unschuldige Germanen*. Deshalb können wir uns die Dinge leisten, die wir den Deutschen übel nehmen würden. Wir leisten uns dann auch. Vielleicht können wir das nur, weil es sich die Deutschen nicht mehr leisten können" [Bichsel, 2007].

The paradox of relations between the ethno-societies under analysis is also proved by the fact that the inhabitants of Germany demonstrate much more positive attitude to their Swiss neighbours, which is surprising even to the Swiss themselves, but they are not ready to reciprocate: "Wie ein Wunder kommt uns Schweizern immer wieder vor, mir welcher Sympathie, ja Zuneigung uns die Deutschen, gerade die besten unter ihnen, begegnen, und dennoch sind wir zur Gegenliebe nicht bereit" [Vitali, 2007].

Analyzing the causes of problems in the German-Swiss communication, one should start with the language itself, which is native to both cultures. According to H. Lotscher, both ethno-cultural communities speak the same language, namely German, but they do it in a different way, which results in the new paradox: what was meant to unite them, in fact, separates them [Loetscher, 2007]. Moreover, according to M. Kutter, the very fact of recognizing German as the native language is rejected by many Swiss: "...dass ich einen Knacks in mir trage, der jedem Deutschweizer anezogen ist – ein problematisches Verhältnis zur eigenen Sprache. Natürlich ist die Beziehung der Schweizer zu Deutschland nicht nur der Sprache wegen schwierig, aber im Sprechen zeigt sich immer aufs neue jene Differenz, die manchmal so riesig erscheint. Wenn wir deutschsprachige Schweizer uns mit Deutschland konfrontieren, stellt sich uns immer die Frage nach der Identität. Wir definieren uns, indem wir uns abgrenzen" [Kutter, 2007].

Not without reason the literary German is defined in Switzerland as *Schriftdeutsch* (written German), which emphasizes its communicative limitations. Residents of the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland speak numerous dialects used even at schools. This phenomenon is similar to glocalization characterized by an interest in distinctive local differences and aimed at their preservation and strengthening [Solnyshkina and Ismagilova, 2015]. The diversity of dialects in the speech community complicates the mastery of the literary form of the language that is native, but causes as many difficulties in communication as a foreign one.

Thus, the language that was meant to unite people becomes the factor of communicative frustration: "...Das ist auch der Grund, dass wohl niemand so große Schwierigkeiten mit den Deutschen hat wie wir Deutschschweizer. Weil sie eine Sprache sprechen, die wir zu verstehen glauben, erschrecken wir so sehr, dass sie ganz anders sind. Wir freuen uns über das Anderssein der Amerikaner, der Franzosen – das Anderssein der Deutschen ist und bleibt ein Ärgernis" [Bichsel, 2007].

Besides the problems associated with the status of literary German and attitude towards it in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, the differences in the communicative norms and rules that determine the national communicative style influence the relations between two ethno-cultural communities. The German communication style is traditionally defined as direct, categorical and explicit, and the German culture is referred to low context and status-oriented cultures [Kulikova, 2006; Kotthoff, 2003; Günther, 2002; Khorrami et al, 2015].

Recent studies of German communication style in comparison with the communicative behavior of the German-speaking Swiss show that differences in the communicative styles of representatives of these ethno-cultural groups may cause communicative frustration and

communicative dissonance due to discrepancies in speech stereotypes. S. Willmeroth and F. Hämmerli mention such communicative norms and rules of German-speaking Switzerland as restraint and unwillingness to focus attention on their own person, increased attention to courtesy strategies, non-categoricalness, attention to the interlocutor, focus on compromise and the desire to save interlocutor's and their own face [Willmeroth and Hämmerli, 2009].

E. Werlen in her study on the language, communicative culture and mentality, points out that the main characteristic of the mentality of the German-speaking Swiss revealed in the process of communication is the focus on the level of relationships [Werlen, 1998]. The author proposes communicative maxims which determine the speech behavior of the German-speaking Swiss:

1. Maxim of inner 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, 1998]), represented by the following prescriptions: Focus on the group! Do not demonstrate your special features! Show solidarity with the group! These prescriptions are detailed in such communicative rules as the choice of suitable topics of conversation, restraint in self-esteem, following the rules, etc. The following rule is a clear illustration: “Wer gut Hochdeutsch kann/gut Hochdeutsch spricht protzt!” (Anyone who speaks Hochdeutsch (literary German) shows off).
2. Maxim of symmetry, consisting of the following prescriptions: Always demonstrate readiness for cooperation! Be democratic! According to this maxim, conflicts, direct criticism and the demonstration of your own ego are unacceptable in communication. Literary German is mentioned in one of the rules of this maxim as well: “Es ist undemokratisch, eine Sprache zu sprechen, die soziale Stigmatisierungen erlaubt/ermöglicht, d.h. meide das Hochdeutsch!”
3. Maxim of attentive attitude, represented by the prescriptions: Be attentive to others! Save the face of another person! 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 cause damage to the face of others! [Werlen, 1998].

4. Summary

Every language in the world is a treasury of the people's thoughts, mentality, traditions and culture [Babenko, 2015]. All above-mentioned maxims and prescriptions are characteristic of high-context cultures, in which particular attention is paid to the context of the message. Who is interlocutor and in what situation the communication takes place is significant, as well as the form of the message? In communication this peculiarity of high-context cultures leads to the prevalence of non-categorical forms of utterance, the active use of modal and semantic means which reduce the intensity of the illocutionary force of the utterances.

S. Willmeroth and F. Hämmerli, with a certain degree of irony, define this feature of the communicative style of the German-speaking Swiss as “Helvetic hypersensitivity”, manifested, among other things, in the tendency to interpret any utterance consisting of less than a conjunctive mood construction and a couple of words “bitte” (please) as an order [Willmeroth and Hämmerli, 2009]. In this regard, a crash course in Helvetic diplomacy, politeness and modesty is strongly recommended to all newcomers to German-speaking Switzerland.

The above-mentioned characteristics of the communicative style of German-speaking Switzerland are quite consonant with the mitigative prescriptions of non-conflictiveness, non-categoricalness and non-impositiveness [Takhtarova, 2008], which allows to define the communicative style of representatives of the analyzed ethnosocial group as mitigatively marked.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of linguistic and pragmatic features of communication between population of Germany and the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland showed that despite the fact that these ethno-cultural communities speak the common language and have common history their communicative styles are characterized by their own peculiarities.

In contrast to the direct, explicit and categorical style of low-context culture of Germans residing in Germany, the communicative style of German-speaking Switzerland can be defined as mitigative, that is, non-categorical, non-conflict and oriented towards relationships and compromise, which, in its turn, is characteristic of high-context cultures.

6. Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

References

- Babenko, O.V. (2015). "Language as a basic feature of ethnos uniting within the conditions of modern challenges", *Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 6, №3, pp. 168–170, 2015.
- Bentley, B., & Bossé, M. J. (2018). College Students' Understanding of Fraction Operations. *International Electronic Journal of Mathematics Education*, 13(3), 233-247. <https://doi.org/10.12973/iejme/3881>
- Bichsel, P. (2007). "Wie deutsch sind die Deutschen", *Kuhschweizer und Sauschwaben: Schweizer, Deutsche und ihre Hassliebe*. Wien, pp. 159–175, 2007.
- De Weck, R. (2014). "Wo ich Schweizer darf und Deutscher sein", *Sind die Schweizer die besseren Deutschen? Der Hass auf kleine Unterschiede*. Hamburg, pp. 138–150, 2014.
- Günther, S. (2002). "Höflichkeitspraktiken in der interkulturellen Kommunikation – am Beispiel chinesisch-deutscher Interaktion", *Höflichkeitsstile*. Hrsg. H.-H. Lüger. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang Verlag, pp. 295–314, 2002.
- Kabayeva, Z., Mussabaev, S., & Madaliev, Z. (2018). The formation way of independent Kazakhstan from the individualism and collectivism perspective. *Opción*, 34(85-2), 706-728.
- Khorrami, F. T., Fallah, M. H., & Abadi, H. Z. M. (2015). The Effect of Unconscious Influences of Satellite Channels on Attitude of Using Satellite. *UCT Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 3(1), 61-67.
- Klein, O.G. (2004). *Ihr könnt uns einfach nicht verstehen!* München, 2004.
- Kotthoff, H. (2003). "Aspekte der Höflichkeit im Vergleich der Kulturen Muttersprache", *Muttersprache*, №4, pp. 289–306, 2003.
- Kulikova, L.V. (2006). *Kommunikativny stil kak problema teorii mezhkulturnoj kmmunikacii*: diss. Doc.philol.nauk. Volgograd, 2006.
- Küng, Th. (2005). *Gebrauchsanweisung für die Schweiz*. Zürich, 2005.
- Kutter, M. (2007). "Schweizer und Deutsche: verschiedene Leute – wieso?", *Kuhschweizer und Sauschwaben: Schweizer, Deutsche und ihre Hassliebe*. Wien, pp. 35–60, 2007.
- Loetscher, H. (2007). "Sich ein Bildnis vom Nachbarn machend", *Kuhschweizer und Sauschwaben: Schweizer, Deutsche und ihre Hassliebe*. Wien, pp. 194–204, 2007.
- Prokhorov, Ju.E. Sternin, I.A. (2006). *Russkie: kommunikativnoe povedenie*. Moscow, 2006.
- Solnyshkina, M.I. Ismagilova, A.R. (2015). "Linguistic landscape westernization and globalization: The case of Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan", *XLinguae*, vol. 8, №2, pp. 36–53, 2015.
- Takhtarova, S.S. (2008). "Ethnokulturnaya kategoriya smyagcheniya v kommunikativnom aspekte", *Philologicheskie nauki*, № 4, pp. 55–61, 2008.
- Vitali, Ch. (2007). "Blanke Liebeserklärung", *Kuhschweizer und Sauschwaben: Schweizer, Deutsche und ihre Hassliebe*. Wien, pp. 218–220, 2007.
- Werlen, S. (1998). "Sprache, Koomunikationskultur und Mentalität", *Reihe Gremanistische Linguistik*, Tübingen, vol.194, 1998.
- Willmeroth, S. Hämmerli, F. (2009). *Exgüsi. Ein Knigge für Deutsche und Schweizer zur Vermeidung grober Missverständnisse*. Zürich, 2009.
- Zare, Z. (2015). The benefits of e-business adoption: an empirical study of Iranian SMEs. *UCT Journal of Management and Accounting Studies*, 3(1), 6-11.