DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES TO DIMINISH THE THREAT OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT RISE

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Annotation. Each country's culture consists of a mosaic of specific ethnic subcultures. Each of these cultures has its value and standard systems, patterns of behaviour and worldview. Thus, it is no surprise that people representing various cultural groups inevitably conflict. This article discusses the nature of intercultural conflicts, the reasons of their rise and their types. Although often the difference of cultures is emphasized as a substantial reason of intercultural conflicts, in real life communicating individuals who differ by their character features and their cultural and intellectual levels cause conflicts. Besides, quite a vital social phenomena as superstitions exists – a tendentious and hostile preconceived attitude. Superstitions have a big emotional critical mass, which place phenomenon in a twisted light and form a negative aggressive outlook of them. Superstitions stimulate negative forms of internecine communication which spill out into ethnic and intercultural conflicts. A proper attention for the acquisition of intercultural competences can become an effective assumption to suppress intercultural conflicts and to stimulate a complete communication and collaboration of representatives from different cultures.

Keywords: intercultural competences, different cultures, intercultural conflicts, behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Every culture has the system of its values and standards as well as patterns of behaviour, world outlook and perception. Therefore, it is no wonder that people who represent various cultural groups unavoidably have conflicts. Conflicts can be *long-term* related to cultural superstitions that come from the mindset of a nation or a social group and *short-term* arising from change of conjuncture in relationship among nations, which are frequently induced by efforts of the ruling class to achieve their goals by making use of cultural differences. Under circumstances of globalisation, movement of labour force and capital from one country to another is increasing and, thus, traditional demographic view of the country is changing as well. There are more immigrants, who, having entered the new cultural environment feel not comfortable and are not always accepted by other people favourably primarily due to the fact that they become rivals in the local labour market and also by their different world outlook, which is reflected in their culture treated as hostile and hardly perceptible for locals. Such

encounter becomes a challenge for both locals and newcomers. Locals have to admit that that in order to get along with immigrants they need to get rid of earlier stereotypes and superstitions, to see positive aspects in newcomers' culture, not to ignore it. On the other hand, newcomers are supposed to perceive that they are guests who must take into consideration hosts' encouragement and not to show off with their behaviour. It seems obvious but in reality it is not easy to maintain good intercultural relationships with those who have been living in the country for a long time and have become its real citizens, foster their cultural traditions and values. A lot of researchers of different science branches, e.g. Banks James (2001); Giedrė Paurienė (2010); Eglė Kvieskaitė (2011); Loreta.Chodskienė (2012); Frese Michael (2015), Robert J. Taormina and Rail M. Shamionov (2016), etc. have paid attention to it. However, most attention was paid to impact of cross-cultural conflicts on patterns of mindset and behaviour of an ethnic group, individual and society. Significant researchers James W. Carey(2008), Beth Fisher-Yoshida (2010) Vilija Gudonienė (2013), Gintaras Stripeikis (2014), Gabrielė Kuraitienė (2015), Andrea Čajkova (2015), Michael B. Hinner (2017), Janete Schmidmeier (2018), Linda Jean Kenix (2019) and others while discussing intercultural conflicts thoroughly analyse their reasons and consequences that determine behaviour of nations and individuals. However, they do not analyse the importance of intercultural competences in more.

Meanwhile extent of cultural competence acquired (linguistic, communication, cultural) mostly determines possibilities, impact and vitality of conflicts. On the other hand, it becomes a rather specific factor that suppresses the conflicts. Thus, the aim of the article is to reveal the importance of intercultural competences in order to diminish the risk of intercultural conflict rise.

The objectives of the article are to find out a) nature of intercultural conflicts b) their causes c) expression peculiarities.

Research methods - the content analysis method of various authors' publications, of the reference sources.

INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS, CAUSES OF THEIR RISE

There are numerous definitions of the word ‚conflict'. In a general sense conflict is a situation when two individuals or two groups of individuals do not agree on actions taken by one of them or when he/she does not want the other one to undertake the action. Therefore, one can claim that a conflict is the discrepancy of interests, collision of incompatible tendencies

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causing strong unpleasant experiences (Lipskytė, 2018). As the object of the article is intercultural conflicts, attention is paid to the aspects that have impact on intercultural communication or, in other words, for conflicts that destroy this communication.

Conflicts have dynamic nature. They arise from a range of events which are induced by changing circumstances: situation of objects/phenomena – arising problem – conflict. Conflict does not mean that relationship between individuals ends. Rather an opportunity to change the pattern of communication emerges, which leads to subsequent development of relationship both positively and negatively. Following the theory of a positive conflict, conflicts are an unavoidable and compulsory condition of everyday life. It does not necessarily has to become a dysfunctional power.

Different approaches concerning motifs of intercultural conflicts can be found. The most dominant of them claims that individual's disposition against others and their unacceptance lies in human nature, his instinct not to accept the other person as hostile. Social Darwinists promoting this approach claim that the law of life is fight for one's existence observed in the animal world. It is also found in human society by conflicts of various nature. In other words, conflicts are unavoidable and even essential. During conflicts an individual develops and becomes mature as a personality. Thus, conflicts are perceived as necessity for one's social development. Special investigations deny this attitude. Hostility to people of other nations and ethnic communities is not universal. It is determined by causes of social nature (Fisher-Yoshida, 2010). The same can be said about intercultural conflicts. Their main cause is differences between nations, which can cause misunderstandings or even open collisions. As contemporary society with regard to culture is not and cannot be homogeneous, tension and conflicts arise between various cultural groups that foster their own values and standard systems acceptable not for all (Hinner, 2017). Many investigators notice that the range of intercultural conflict causes is rather wide but the prevailing are these:

- Special reliance on one's opinion and significance of one's culture (Kristic, 2017),
- Preconceived attitudes evaluating behaviour of the partner,
- Insufficient knowledge about the other culture and its peculiarities (Tučas, 2019),
- Evaluation of other cultural values, peculiarities of standards and behaviour through one's own cultural outlook.
- Culture anthropologists distinguish several types of intercultural conflicts:
- Conflicts between traditions and cultural innovations

- Conflicts among different ethnic groups and their cultures (f.e. between Sakartvelians and Ossetians, Lithuanians and Russians),
- Conflicts between religious groups (f,e. between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Orthodox and Units in Ukraine, Sunnis and Shiites in Islamic countries),
- Conflicts between generations that belong to different subcultures,
- Conflicts between different linguistic communities and their representatives (due to linguistic barriers and interpretation mistakes) (Banks, 2013).

It is notable that a conflict can be provoked not only by communication partner's insufficient knowledge of a language but also more serious reasons, frequently hardly perceived by communicating individuals. These reasons lie within sub-consciousness but, on the other hand, they often induce conflicts.

Conflicts cannot be evaluated as power of destructive communication process or in principle be rejected. Conflicts help better perceive one's identity and uniqueness. As they cannot last forever, it encourages to look for ways how to change the situation. It is true that not every conflict situation turns into a conflict. Transition from a conflicting situation into a conflict occurs via perception of communicating individuals that their relations are controversial and interests are different. In such a way a conflict becomes the acquired controversy. From this follows the fact that participants of intercultural conflicts are social actors. When they describe a situation as a conflict, one can speak about tension in their communication. It becomes conflicting and turns into the real conflict (Carey, 2008).

One of the main reasons for intercultural conflicts provided by investigators is personal qualities of communicators: superstitions, arrogance, inflexibility, career-driven nature and seeking power. Frequently intercultural conflicts are caused by social (interpersonal) relations, strong competition, insufficient acknowledgement of skills, insufficient support or preparation for compromises, contradiction between aims and measures to achieve these goals. The reasons of organizational intercultural conflict rise are heavy workload, inaccurate instructions, not clear competences or responsibilities, contradiction between the aims raised, regular change of rules when communicating with partners, deep changes, restructuring of positions and roles.

Conflicts often emerge between individuals who are closely related by various connections and interests (for example, business partners, friends, colleagues). The more close relations are (both formal and informal), the higher the chance that conflicts can arise. Thus, in

intercultural communication conflicts can be provoked not only by cultural differences but also the already mentioned personal, social and organizational reasons. One often likes emphasizing cultural differences as the essential reason of intercultural conflicts. However, it is obvious that in real life, although significant, but not cultural differences cause conflicts but rather individuals themselves who differ in their character qualities as well as cultural and intellectual level. These issues in their behalf become a significant obstacle to ensure efficient communication. On the other hand, there is a social phenomenon like superstitions that makes strong impact on the development of intercultural conflicts.

SUPERSTITIONS AS REINFORCEMENT OF INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS

Psychologists describe superstitions as a tendency and a hostile approach towards a nation or an ethnic group without any sufficient basis. In intercultural communication superstitions are expressed as hostile, open and not based objectively with regard to behaviour and social status of representative from another culture or cultural group. The main reason for occurring superstitions is inequality of ethnic group social, economic and cultural life conditions. It determines xenophobia for other nations and newcomers. Usually superstitions come from insufficient, frequently distorted awareness of the object. Superstitions are often identified with stereotypes, but it is not true.

Stereotypes are a reflection of certain features of one specific cultural group. One can claim that it is a specific summoned view of the group though it has no special emotional evaluation. Meanwhile superstition is negative, preconceived hostile evaluation of all group behaviour that has emotional aspect. The most prominent example of superstitions is racism, sects, homophobia, discrimination with regard to sex or age, etc. On the other hand, one cannot forget that superstitions like stereotypes are cultural phenomena. Their occurrence is determined not by biological but by social cultural circumstances. Superstitions take a significant position in the space of everyday culture. They are characterized by huge susceptibility and transferability, they are rendered from generation to generation. In their turn they are incorporated into culture as standard requirements, i.e. as strict directives on how to behave with regard to a certain social group or phenomenon. It is true that superstitions that have huge emotional critical mass make a significant impact on the environment. It is impossible not to notice them or not to respond. As it was mentioned before, superstitions

encompass a rather wide spectrum of phenomena, which includes separate objects, ideas and surely ethnic groups.

In psychology there are numerous theories that explain the origin of superstitions. One of them is frustration and aggression theory. In psyche of a human being the state of tension, i.e. frustration, is created due to various reasons and negative emotions. This state requires expression and any person can become its object. When a frustrating individual envisages reasons of his failure in any ethnic group, he/she expresses his preconceived dissatisfaction on its representatives he feels hostile towards. According to the theory, superstitions emerge as individual's effort to establish his/her relation with others, the other ethnic group and at the same time to set his/her own self above others. During such establishment process other's inferiority is demonstrated and hostility with his/her regard is shown.

Superstitions are acquired during the socialisation process when an individual takes over the values, standards, and behaviour patterns. Thus, here the parents' role is important. Individual superstitions arise not only from intercultural communication but due to spread of superstitions within the social group. Superstitions take a significant role in everyday life of human beings. By providing phenomena in the distorted way and developing an aggressive, negative attitude, superstitions provoke negative ways of communication, which turn into ethic and intercultural conflicts. Their scale in huge part depends on the type of superstitions (Lauren & Kramer, 2008). The following types of superstitions can be distinguished:

1) *unbiased* – when it is openly declared that representatives of the other group as well as their qualities are significantly poorer;

2) *symbolic* – they are based on negative superstitions with regard to representatives of the other group. Its values are considered as threatening.

3) "*long arm*" superstitions – when one behaves positively with representatives of the other group in certain situations (negotiation, formal meetings) though in everyday life hostility is demonstrated.

4) antipathy superstitions – a negative attitude is shown openly in cases when behaviour does not satisfy a representative of one's own culture.

Representatives of different classes and social groups are prone to superstitions. However, not all superstitions are equally affecting. Ethnic superstitions have strongest impact. The prevailing attitude towards certain ethnic groups changes very slowly. It requires a lot of time and effort. Numerous factors have impact on the change of superstitions, namely general

cultural background, openness of society, education policy, the media, which is supposed to ensure rendering of undistorted information though. Unfortunately, the media today frequently becomes the strongest transmitter of superstitions because in such a way it is trying to gain readers'/viewers' attention and popularity. Undoubtedly superstitions and stereotypes encourage rise of intercultural conflicts whereas in case of a conflict it must be resolved, i.e. take a certain position, determined by intercultural competences, i.e. whether they are possessed or not.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

In order to achieve mutual understanding, knowledge, abilities and skills which are known as intercultural communication competences are necessary. They show the level of interpersonal communication, which allows successful communication with partners and achieving goals by overcoming egocentrism and cultural closeness (Ilie, 2019). The opinion that intercultural competences can be acquired by knowledge gained via communicating with representatives of the other culture started to prevail. This knowledge in its turn was subdivided into *specific*, which mean specific culture, and *general*, which is related to one's ability to use such communication skills as tolerance, emphatic listening, general knowledge of cultural universals. Despite this subdivision, it is obvious that success of intercultural communication depends on acquisition of both types of the knowledge, in other words, on the ability not to identify but also accept and interpret new cultural knowledge and in such a way acquire a new culture (Zascerinska, 2008). Thus, an individual in intercultural communication is supposed to be able to:

- Have a friendly attitude towards different cultural phenomena and representatives of other cultures in order to understand it,
- Try to better perceive hostile culture so that one could evaluate one's own culture more critically and refuse prevailing stereotypes and superstitions,
- Adequately accept and interpret different cultural values,
- Try to deliberately overcome obstacles that separate different cultures and see in a different culture not only differences but also similarities,
- Be able to compare existing ethno-cultural stereotypes with personal experience and make independent conclusions,

- Be able to critically evaluate and change one's attitude towards hostile cultures by developing intercultural communication skills and experience,
- Systematize facts of cultural life,
- Synthesize and summarize one's personal experience of intercultural dialogue.

In intercultural communication linguistic competence means one's ability to choose appropriate linguistic tools when communicating and be able to repeat the already obtained experience in analogous situations. One must notice that linguistic competence though significant in intercultural communication, plays a relative part in intercultural communication due to several circumstances. Firstly, when evaluating linguistic competences representatives of different cultures use different criteria. For instance, Brits respond to language correctness rather sensitively whereas Americans see efforts to speak and communicate as more important. Secondly, in different cultures imagination what a correct use of a language is may not coincide. Thirdly, one must not forget that requirements for the use of one's native language are always higher than for a foreign language. It implies that knowing a foreign language will never be equal to the native language because there will always exist inborn priority of a native language. Lastly, levels of competence evaluation differ as well. A person can use a foreign language in his/her everyday life but have no competence for communication with his/her colleagues in a professional level. In such a situation a human being is forced to use everyday language and thus diminish the efficiency of communication. Thus, perfect knowledge of a foreign language is important seeking efficient communication though at the same time it is insufficient. Linguistic competence must be supplemented by communication competence.

Communication competence defines ways and strategies essential to ensure efficient communication. In other words, it is important not only to be aware of general laws of human life but also respond sensitively to the slightest changes of a partner when communicating. Elements of communication competence are composed of:

- Ability to make use of verbal and non-verbal cultural acceptance tools,
- Ability to adequately express one's ideas and understand the speaker,
- Ability to interpret specific signals of a certain culture by which a person expresses his/her intention to communicate (or not),
- Ability to guide oneself how much time one is supposed to devote to listening and speaking regarding the situation and cultural communication standards,
- Ability to address the language in the necessary direction,

- Ability to provide and interpret signals of communication roles and termination,

- Maintain the communication distance acceptable for a hostile culture,

- Ability to adapt to communicator's social status and intercultural distinctiveness,

- Ability to adjust one's behaviour communicating with partners in time (Wisenan & Koester, 1993).

It is no doubt true that the mentioned elements of communication competence require a lot of efforts and time. On the other hand, success of communication development mostly depends on individual's capacity to absorb hostile culture, acquire it, and make it a tool when reaching one's goals.

Cultural competence means one's ability to absorb new knowledge, values, common to the culture in communication. For this reason one must be able to extract necessary information from various cultural sources (books, films, political phenomena, etc.), differentiate them by significance for communication. It shows speaker's cultural literacy. If literacy of both partners is more or less the same, it only reinforces efficient communication. However, not always literacy of speakers is equal. If there is huge discrepancy, communication efficiency only deteriorates and partners feel certain inconvenience. Then the lack of cultural competence is frequently compensated by good language and communication skills. However, it is not always possible. Sometimes cultural tension-reality arises, and one must accept it. On the other hand, all cultures can survive only if tolerance is observed. In globalization there exists requirement for tolerance as objective necessity because the world is too various. All its processes are evaluated differently by different cultures. Each culture has such right and one must respect it, which means tolerate it by acknowledging the right to be different. Tolerant attitude towards intercultural communication means that some features of an individual or his/her group are one of the many and one cannot treat them as absolute or too significant.

Each of the mentioned competences has three level. The first level is general awareness of hostile culture and its difference as a fact, identification of this difference. The second level is one's attempt to compare this difference with his/her culture by identifying differences and similarities. The third level is one's attempt to understand the culture and its value for gaining acknowledgement from representatives of that culture.

Thus, each of the mentioned competence can be listed and defined in three levels. Presence of tolerant attitudes with regard to other cultures in intercultural communication shows maturity of individual's competences. On the other hand, it is obvious that cultural

competence for different groups can be different too. Certain requirements can be addressed for the manager, others for a lecturer or the director. Different levels of the mentioned competences necessary seeking comprehensive communication and understanding with people from other cultures are applied.

LEVELS OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES AND THEIR EXPRESSION

Linguistic communication. The first level. It means that a human being is able to use linguistic tools by which he/she is trying to establish communication relations with representatives of the hostile culture.

His/her knowing of a foreign language is based on the general knowledge. In other words, he has the basics of a foreign language but his knowledge does not let him freely render all nuances of the language. The second level implies that a person has well mastered a language and is trying as accurately as possible to get across his/her ideas, clearly separates his/her linguistic space from a hostile one. The third level means that a human being has fully mastered a foreign language, all its nuances, and not only does he/she feel well communicating with representatives of a foreign language but also he/she is perceived as a native. In other words, from linguistic point of view he/she is fully established.

Communication competence. The first level means one's ability to identify specific signals of a hostile culture's representative. The second level implies one's ability to adequately express his ideas and understand the speaker as well as to master the conversation with regard to the situation and cultural communication standards. The third level means one's ability to use verbal and non-verbal tools in order to adjust behaviour to that of partner's, maintain convenient and culture-acceptable communication distance and, thus, become welcome.

Cultural competence. The first level means one's ability to look for and find information about a hostile culture of a representative of which he/she is supposed to communicate. It is new knowledge, values, essential for communication with representative of a hostile culture. The second level implies one's ability to clearly distinguish peculiarities of one's own and hostile culture as well as to perceive and name them. The third level means one's ability to absorb the hostile culture at a maximum level and make it a tool to achieve one's goals when communicating with people from hostile cultures.

The mentioned competences and their consistent mastering on one hand reduce intercultural tension and danger of conflict rise. On the other hand, it makes assumptions and

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encourages seeking reasonable solutions acceptable for both sides. Thus, development of intercultural competences is important for every representative of a specific nation and ethnic group that seeks to efficiently communicate and cooperate with individuals of other cultures.

CONCLUSIONS

Each country's culture consists of a mosaic of specific ethnic subcultures. Each of these cultures has its value and standard systems, patterns of behaviour and worldview. Thus, it is no surprise that people representing various cultural groups inevitably conflict. The range of intercultural conflict rise is varied: preconceived attitudes when evaluating behaviour of an individual, insufficient knowledge of the other culture, evaluation of other culture's values through one's cultural glasses, reliance on one's opinion, significance of one's own culture.

Though one frequently tends to emphasize the difference of cultures as the essential reason of intercultural conflicts, it is obvious that in real life cultural differences are undoubtedly relevant. However, conflicts are caused by individuals themselves who differ in their character properties, cultural and intellectual level. There exists a widespread phenomenon known as superstitions. It is a tendentious and preconceived attitude without sufficient grounds. Superstitions that have huge critical emotional mass by introducing phenomena in a twisted light reinforce negative interpersonal communication forms that turn into ethnic and intercultural conflicts. Although the scale of conflicts depends on the type of superstitions, their solutions are significantly affected by intercultural competences. Thus, their development is an important goal of each representative of the culture. Only it can diminish the threat of intercultural conflict rise and create favourable conditions for cooperation by seeking reasonable and mutually acceptable solutions.

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