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SURVEY AND ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN BULGARIA AND ABROAD

Gergana A. Andreeva¹, Andrey I. Andreev²

¹ NATIONAL MILITARY UNIVERSITY – SHUMEN gerian8@abv.bg

² SHUMEN'S UNIVERSITY andreev_an@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: *The membership of Bulgaria in NATO and the European Union brings new challenges and tasks to the Bulgarian Armed forces in the complex and dynamic security environment. The participation of military forces from the Bulgarian Army in international joint operations and missions led by NATO, the EU and the UN, transforms English language fluency into an important aspect of improving our operational interoperability with allies and partners. Teaching English is a priority for the modernization and transformation of the Bulgarian Army.*

The system of education in English does not exist in isolation and is influenced by a number of factors that affect the force as a whole. It is a process that spans a long period of time and does not give quick results. This feature poses one of the challenges facing the system of English language training for the introduction of new effective forms of communication. In this respect, it is topical to explore and analyze opportunities for the introduction of Intercultural Communication in language learning groups within the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense.

KEY WORDS: *Intercultural Communication, Monochronic, Polychronic, Military Culture.*

Survey and analysis of Intercultural Communication

Intercultural Communication is a relatively new trend in the field of the humanities. It combines the positive qualities of human culture and the rich possibilities of communication in the past and today.

Intercultural Communication does not lose its relevance but is becoming more attractive for representatives of different scientific fields. Philosophers, sociologists, linguists, psychologists, cultural anthropologists and many other specialists are interested in its application. Many scientists try to explain the mechanism in terms of

their object orientation and give instructions to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the communicative process. Others use multidisciplinary approaches in order to find solutions to the problems that occur during the study of this complex phenomenon. [4],[8],[9],[10].

Definitions of the term "Intercultural Communication"

In English the basic concept is "Intercultural Communication" and it is often used as a synonym for "cross-cultural communication". In Bulgarian it is translated as интеркултурна, межкултурна комуникация. In English and

American scientific production, some authors distinguish between "Intercultural Communication" and "cross-cultural communication". According to William B. Gydukunst the term "Intercultural Communication" generally includes face-to-face communication of people belonging to different national cultures, but the term is often used in relation to various aspects of the research in the field of culture and communication. Second, he accepts that "cross-cultural communication" is a part of "Intercultural Communication". The term "cross-cultural communication" is a subsidiary and has less generalizing ability than the concept of "Intercultural Communication." "Understanding the cross-cultural communication is a prerequisite for understanding Intercultural Communication." (Gydukunst vii)[5]. According to this author "cross-cultural communication" is more interested in how different communication occurs in different cultures and examines the impact of culture on communication.

Defining Culture

Culture is all around us and between us. Culture is a set of "tools" that have shaped us in a way as to be a part of society. In the last few decades, many definitions of culture have been developed: Parsons explains culture as "patterned systems of symbols that direct the orientation of action"; According to Kluckhohn.

Culture consists of patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted

mainly by symbols, consisting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments and artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.(Hofstede, 2001, 21) [7];

Hofstede defines culture as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" [7]; Michael Minkov sees culture as "shared" according to him.

Culture is a group-level construct. Individuals are usually studied in terms of what is called "personality," not individual culture. The term "culture" applies to groups, such as tribes, ethnicities, nations, or national subsocieties. Once the group is defined, it is possible to measure to what extent a particular cultural element – value, norm, or other – is shared by group's members. (Minkov) [11]

One general definition that manages to cover everything is given by D. Brown an anthropologist from the University of Santa Barbara, California: "Culture - patterns of doing and thinking that are passed on between generations through learning." (Brown) [2]. Edward Hall defines culture as: "The medium evolved by the human species, the one which characterizes the human species" (in Bennet) [1]. He says: "Culture hides much more than it reveals, strangely enough, what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants." (Bennet) [1].

Patrick L. Schmidt compares culture to an iceberg (see fig. 1.1.).

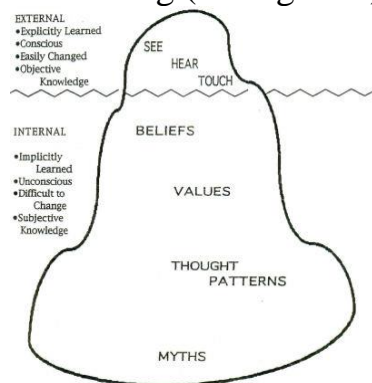


Fig. 1.1

Fig. 1.1 Culture as an Iceberg;
Institute of Community Cohesion;
cohesioninstitute.org.uk; Web; 10.
Feb. 2013.

In his book *In search of Intercultural Communication*, he explains his hypothesis that the greater part of the iceberg is underwater and above the surface, the superficial things like food, rituals, clothing, newspapers, mannerisms and gestures, monuments and sights are seen. Underneath remain the most and more important phenomena such as philosophy, history, religion, patriotism of the nation; the communicative style, decision making and problem solving styles, the importance of friendship, the role of social status, the principles of breeding and upbringing of children, attitudes to sex and intimate relationships, hygiene and cleanliness, time management and maintenance of public spaces. According to him, culture has two faces - tangible and intangible. Material objects are the artifacts - the visible objects and elements of everyday life like the tie, the pen, the book, the business building, etc. Non-material is found in

the contents of books and songs, in the theories and the ideas that they have; the stories that are read to us as children, our overall spiritual values and attitudes to people, to the world and life. And if the visible could be changed relatively quickly, the invisible is sustainable for decades, even centuries.

Edward T. Hall (1914 - 2009) was an American anthropologist, who introduced the first theoretical model of differentiation of cultures.[6] He first realized that the individual traits of culture should be seen as parts of a larger system. Today Edward T. Hall is recognized as the patriarch of intercultural studies. His most significant books are *The Silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimension* and *Beyond Culture*. According to Hall "Culture is a system for creating, sending, storing, and processing of information".

By looking at how people from different cultures communicate, Hall divides them according to two criteria:

- In terms of communication - High and Low context.
- In terms of time – Polychronic and monochronic.

High and low context communication is the difference between direct and indirect communication. High context is implicit, coded; there are many uncertainties and unspoken things. The main feature of this style is the achievement / preservation of the harmony in the relationships. This style is very common among East Asian cultures, where the direct

confrontation and the rebuff are not accepted. High-Context Cultures tend to attribute behavior according to the situation or factors that are external to the person.

Low context is explicit, direct, without any subterfuges. The purpose of communication is not the maintenance of harmony and good relations, but the formation of clarity and impact. It is not considered inappropriate to declare one's opinion, even if it is not like the other's side. Examples of such societies are English-speaking countries and the Netherlands.

How we use time is one of the most unbiased and reliable ways to define cultural differences according to Hall. Monochronic societies like the U.S., Scandinavia, Britain and other industrial countries, see time as a valuable and limited resource. The English say "Time is money." Work is planned in advance and the plan is followed. Monochronic societies are usually oriented towards the achievement of goals and high efficiency in the workplace.

Polichronic societies are at the opposite pole. They live more slowly, mindful of the natural biological rhythm of humans; for them it is acceptable to perform several tasks at once. The emphasis is on people and good relations, not on the achievement of higher and perfect performance at all costs. In this environment, people are usually interested in how others are and how their families are united by the things beyond their professional roles and

obligations, they share their personal experiences and feelings.

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist, born in 1928. His research on intercultural differences is fundamental to the entire discipline. While working for IBM, in 1968 and 1978 Hofstede undertook a major survey of work values in 53 countries where the company has offices, including approximately 116,000 employees. Then he noticed that there was a correlation in the responses of some items in the questionnaires. By examining the correlations and using factor analysis, he found independent dimensions of cultures. According to him all cultures have four main elements: symbols, heroes, rituals and values (see fig. 1.2).

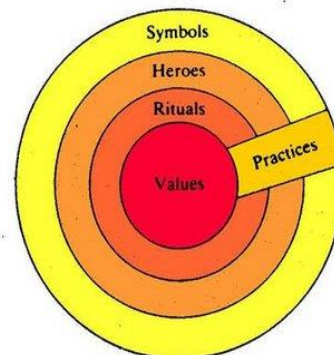


Fig. 1.2 Geert Hofstede's model of the „Cultural Onion“; laofutze.wordpress.com, 28 Aug. 2009; Web: 10 Feb. 2013

Hofstede presents them as four concentric circles. Inside the core are the Values. These are the deepest, most enduring beliefs and convictions transmitted across generations. They are followed by the Rituals – the collective activities that are socially important and through which we can read the cultural values. For example: how people greet, religious

ceremonies, etc. Third are the Heroes, these alive or dead people who possess the characteristics that are considered particularly valuable in a culture, and their behavior serves as role models to the members of that culture. The last circle are the External symbols – words, gestures, images and objects through which members of a society, a culture medium, can be understood. Symbols are the last element because they are the easiest to change.

In his remarkable research Hofstede found that different cultures have different values, rituals, heroes and symbols and that the transition from one culture to another can cause culture shock.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's theory is constantly evolving, but it finally took shape in 1980, when he first introduced the four dimensions of culture. Today the dimensions of culture in Hofstede's theory are six:

Individualism - Collectivism describes whether one's identity is defined by personal choices and achievements or by the character of the collective group to which an individual is more or less permanently attached.

Power Distance- the degree of inequality among people that the populace of a country considers normal

Uncertainty Avoidance is the degree to which people in a country prefer structured over unstructured situations. Structured situations are

those in which there are clear rules as to how one should behave.

Masculinity - Femininity is the degree to which values like assertiveness, performance, success, and competition (associated with the role of men) prevail over values like the quality of life, maintaining warm personal relationships, service, care for the weak, and solidarity (which associated with the role of women).

Long - Short Term Orientation is based on the values stressed in the teachings of Confucius. Long-term orientation focuses on the degree to which a culture embraces, or does not embrace, future-oriented values, such as perseverance and thrift.

Indulgence – Restraint. Indulgence stands for a society that allows free gratification of basic and natural human drives and enjoying. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by strict social norms. Hofstede understands culture as "collective programming of the mind." (*Culture's consequences*). This means that personality is largely formed in childhood under the influence of the family, the surrounding neighborhood the school. During this period the child "absorbs" the specific elements of culture. Hofstede's cultural dimensions can be used to explain differences in communication across cultures; they exist at both levels - cultural and individual.

Military culture
As this survey analyzes Intercultural Communication in language learning in military

environment, military culture should be seen as culture within culture.

Military organizations are unlike any other public or private institution, even the ones sharing the same fundamental cultural influences as other organizations within a given country. They view themselves, and are viewed by others, as very different. As Soeters points out, "Uniformed organizations are peculiar. They represent specific occupational cultures that are relatively isolated from society" (Soeters) [14]. The principal mission of the military sets them apart from the civil and public institutions within a society. The military remain alone in their primary purpose - war fighting or defending or maintaining peace either within or outside of national boundaries by the use of arms.

Snider defines four essential elements of military culture: ceremonial displays and etiquette; discipline; professional ethos and cohesion; esprit de corps [13]. Schmid's layers of culture could be recognized in these elements. The ceremonial displays may relate to the most visible, external aspects (artifacts) and esprit de corps and ethos to the least visible internal aspects (basic underlying assumptions) of culture. To sum up the core elements of military culture are rooted in history and tradition. They are conservative, based on group loyalty and conformity oriented toward obedience to superiors therefore a potential gap between military and civilian culture exists.

The military share common elements, beliefs and ideas but not all military cultures are the same, these military intercultural differences are important to consider; otherwise, they can lead to problems and issues in the successful conduct of multinational operations.

Military Culture and Hofstede's Dimensions

Soeters conducted research applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions to the military. He questioned officers of military academies and formations from different countries. The results confirm the obvious differences between civilian and military organizations. In the military, power distances and hierarchies are more elaborated and fundamental to the structure of the organization than in the civilian sector. Collectivism as group orientation, interdependency and cohesion in the military is a more important concept than among civilian organizations. Finally, in the military the economic part (salaries and merit) is not valued as high as it is in business. The dimension of uncertainty avoidance as rule orientation, formalization, the desire to continue to work for the military showed mixed results depending on the military system and laws of defense.

These results clearly demonstrate that in the military, contrasted to the civilian organizations, a supranational culture exists. This military culture is more hierarchical and collectivistic but less money-driven than the civilian business culture. The

consequence of this is that military personnel of different origins and cultures can function and communicate with each other without many problems using the official language of multinational operation which is English.

Communication

Bulgarian military forces are increasingly required to operate in multinational environment. This may be in multinational North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) teams, where soldiers from different nations work together for common goals, or in non-traditional missions such as peacekeeping and disaster relief, where soldiers work closely with local population. In such force major situations, people from different cultures are put into close contact. Relationships could be torn if miscommunication is considered. Having been socialized in different cultures, soldiers in multinational teams bring in interactions diverse ways of communicating and understanding communication. Different cultures have different values, communication styles, norms, and behavior, all of these can lead to problems in communication.

Communication is critical and one of the most pressing difficulties affecting team efficiency and effectiveness. Since the use of multinational teams and group interactions is increasing and likely to continue in the future, it is important for the Bulgarian army to understand how and why miscommunication arises and ways that it can be avoided.

Communication problems in Multinational environment

Cultural diversity in multinational groups can be seen as strength. Research suggests that multinational teams can operate more successfully than homogeneous teams. On the one hand team's cultural diversity can improve creativity and decision making by displaying various perspectives, world views, and experiences as well as the second-language acquisition may improve problem-solving abilities. On the other hand teams made up of military from different cultures can be superior to homogeneous teams but they can also experience hardship if the cultural peculiarities are ignored. Indeed, due to cultural factors, communication problems can be the main barrier to multinational military team performance and effectiveness.

Lack of Language Fluency

One of the most common cases of miscommunication in multinational settings is due to the lack of fluency in the operational language. Communication could be hard for non-native speakers when the speech is fast or too soft, when the speaker uses many acronyms or when using dialect or slang. Speaking in English or American regional accent can make communication difficult. Research shows that listeners from intercultural groups could recall only 50% of the information that was sent, as compared to 75% in intracultural situations. This means that language ability alone does not ensure effective Intercultural Communication. This finding has implications for

Intercultural Communication training to be introduced in the existing curriculum: language training per se is not enough. Participants in multicultural operations need to be aware that even if they are fluent in the language, miscommunication is highly probable. To communicate successfully, one needs to understand not only the language but cultural differences in communication, as well.

Features of the military environment and the need for Intercultural Communication

Foreign language training and especially the learning of English, as an operational language- has become increasingly important within the armed forces after the Cold War. Due to the increasing number of peace-support operations, the enlargement and partnership activities language training became NATO's main objective in both Allied and Partner countries where it is a national responsibility.

Language training has been particularly acute in Bulgaria as well as in all former Warsaw Pact countries where US Defense Language Institute and Peacekeeping English Project of the British Council have been working for improving English language skills of the Army since 1990s.

“Linguistic interoperability is as important for ensuring effective participation in both NATO missions and wider Alliance activities as any other form of interoperability” (Crossey) [3].

While the language skills of deployed forces in peace-support operations are generally sufficient for the tasks they face, many officers and enlisted men have reported experiencing difficulties in contributing sufficient linguistic expertise to operate to maximum efficiency. The situation appears most serious in those peace-keeping operations that are staffed by a large proportion of senior officers who have struggled to get to grips with English. The situation is usually much worse in the lower ranks where some non-commissioned officers may have had no formal English training. Another difficulty frequently encountered by non-native speakers of English is the strong regional accents of many of the native speakers with whom they work. They have greater problems understanding the English of native speakers than of non-native speakers, complaining that native speakers are never trained to modify their speech when talking with their non-native peers. In other words, native speakers rarely recognize that the common working language in peace-support operations is international English, as opposed to their own version of the language. Another example of this gap between classroom and target language use is the tendency to teach a rather academic form of English.

Intercultural Communication is used as a base for effective communication in many spheres of life. Many scientists analyze, explain and find solutions to the communication problems. The need

for effective Intercultural Communication is particularly acute in peace-support operations where linguistic misunderstandings may lead to making mistakes, which in turn, might in a worst-case scenario, result in casualties.

Intercultural Communication education is new to the Bulgarian Army structures but some research made show that such training will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of communication in multinational team operations.

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