

THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract. *Today the term "intercultural communication" is often used to refer to the wide range of communication issues that inevitably arise within an organization composed of individuals from a variety of religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. In an era of interference, intercultural communication is timely and advisable. The article analyzes the relation between communication, language and culture in the Republic of Moldova. In this way, it is necessary to emphasize that the language is a part of culture and that it plays a very important role in it, including in Republic of Moldova.*

Keywords: *Intercultural dialogue, Eastern Europe, Republic of Moldova, communication, culture, language.*

Definition of the concept "Intercultural Communication"

Communication is a form of interhuman behaviour that arises from the need to relate to and interact with others. The communication process is, in fact, the key to positive interpersonal relationships which in turn are the source of the psychosocial development of both individuals and society.

Intercultural communication is a concept that besides the actual communication also includes the cultural and intercultural element. Today, several definitions for the concept of intercultural communication are proposed, representing the interaction between members of the different cultural groups.

Intercultural communication is the direct interaction between people of different cultures. Intercultural communication involves much more than understanding the norms of a group, it involves accepting and tolerating differences. Globalization has made intercultural communication an inevitable fact. Today's world is undergoing rapid change, the interaction between people is gaining new dimensions. Contact and communication with other cultures are the dominant characteristics of modern life (Giorgi, 2018: 8).

The idea of the intercultural dialogue must have as a starting point the recognition of diversity and the multiple perspectives and dimensions of the world in which we live. These differences of opinion, points of view, and even values do not exist only within a culture, they are even more visible in the disputes between different cultures.

Dialogue, intercultural communication aims to analyze these diverse perspectives with a specific purpose, namely to understand and learn from different intercultural experiences. It is obvious that in other cultures, reality is perceived differently, the way people interact is different, visions are different.

Professor Constantin Cucuș defines intercultural communication as "a value exchange or transaction, accompanied by an understanding of the adjacent meanings,

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between individuals or groups belonging to different cultures”. At the same time, exchanges can be made at the verbal, nonverbal, behavioral, physical, and object level (Cucos: 2000: 136).

The emergence of the concept

For the first time, the phrase intercultural communication was used in 1959 by the American ethnologist T. H. Hall in “The Silent Language”. Hall is considered the founder of “intercultural communication”. The conceptualization of the intercultural communication process and his contribution to the respective field laid the foundations for further research.

According to the conception of the American researcher in the intercultural communication, the dialogue partners use not only the language, but also nonverbal expressions such as gestures, mimicry, tone. Thus, we can see that in every culture, affirmation, denial or permission are accompanied by special gestures and tones (Hall, 1959: 15).

The study of intercultural communication in Europe

Intercultural communication has existed since the earliest times of history when individuals and groups from different cultures interacted in different contexts. As for the European culture, such contacts have been made since the Greco-Roman antiquity, either in the form of economic, commercial, cultural and artistic exchanges, or in the more aggressive form of the wars of conquering territories, populations, foreign cultures. In these forms, intercultural contacts continued in the following historical eras.

If in the past the concrete acts of communication between representatives of different cultures involved a relatively small part of the world’s population, in the contemporary era the realities of these communication processes have increased. This is possible due to the scientific and technical advances in the field of telecommunications, transport and, last but not least, the emergence and evolution of the “new media” of the 20th century: radio, television, the Internet.

The study of intercultural communication does not have its own history. Many researchers come from different fields and turn their attention to communication. Scientists from various disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology, communication, sociology and international relations, leave their field of research to venture into a new field that is at the “intersection of culture and human interaction”. (Hart, 1997: 2).

“Europe the continent of interculturality”

In terms of history, Europe has always been a multicultural area. In recent decades, the study of intercultural communication has aroused interest in scientific circles in Europe.

Today, the study of intercultural communication has a double trajectory: theoretical, research and application, intended for the preparation and practice of intercultural communication.

- The motivation for studying intercultural communication. In Europe, the research of intercultural communication has developed following the appearance of social and political changes caused by the influx of immigrants in the countries of industrialized Europe.

- At the center of attention is language. Among the reasons for the language emphasis is the situation of immigrants and their need to learn the language of the natives.

- The orientation towards language learning makes the field of intercultural communication in Europe become integrated into the language sciences.

- The dominant paradigm chosen by the European researchers of intercultural communication is the interpretive one. Culture is no longer seen as a reality outside the individual, but as a construction resulting from the social activity of individuals who communicate through the meanings. (Şerban, 2013: 7)

Factors influencing intercultural communication

Today there are several factors that have an influence on intercultural communication, among which we can list the following:

- Value systems, which are based on cultural evolution and determine the individual options that can generate tensions or conflicts impossible to mediate.

- Language - English internationally is the main language of communication in economic, diplomatic or cultural relations. Its influence stems from the fact that the countries in which this language is used as a mother tongue fundamentally influence the fields of use.

- Religion - the perception of the sacred, religious holidays, the influence of religion on the cuisine, daily practices, is a fundamental factor in intercultural communication. In countries where religion is clearly separated by state or politics, it has less influence, but in countries with no such separation, the influence on intercultural communication is decisive.

- Perception over time - the concept of “time is money” and an approach to punctuality totally influence communication in an intercultural context.

- Communication style - there are cultures in which the gestures that accompany the communication are of a complexity which serves as the key to decoding the verbal message (Băbuţău, 2014: 8).

Barriers to intercultural communication

Difficulties in intercultural communication are caused by cultural differences. In the communication process individuals “face a culture different from their own in terms of habits, values, standards and expectations”.

One of the main problems of intercultural communication is miscommunication or even misunderstandings.

Barriers to intercultural communication:

- Misunderstandings due to language – translation errors, vocabulary, punctuation, pronunciation and inability to communicate in the respective language deepen intercultural differences.

- Language misunderstanding.

- Cultural shock – the inability to understand or accept people with different sets of values, standards and lifestyles different from ours. This is just as important as the first factor, moreover, it is acting even within the same culture. It is about the lack of recognition of what other individuals consider important to them.

- Belief in the superiority of one’s own culture and disdain for other cultures.

- Low listening ability – lack of concentration needed for critical listening. The result is the misunderstanding of the message or messages received. People who speak English as a foreign language often tend to ignore words they do not understand if they listen to someone who speaks English. The influence of the accent in the use of a foreign language could also be mentioned.

- Ethnocentrism – the belief that one’s own culture is superior to the others. This barrier occurs when oral or written communication leads to an attitude of superiority. Usually people do not like to be humiliated or to feel that their ideas are interesting but wrong.

- Insensitivity – lack of interest in the needs and feelings of others. For many of the receivers, the transmitters appear insensitive when the communication is abrupt and expresses an aggressive or selfish attitude of the transmitter.

- Lack of sincerity - the feeling when the climate is too formal and people do not feel free to express their opinions openly. This type of communication causes the appearance of distrust, people can even believe that the information is hidden. To avoid or overcome this barrier it is necessary to create a feeling of mutual acceptance by providing a relaxed environment for intercultural exchanges. (Pascu, 2011: 9).

Intercultural Communication: the case of the Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova is no exception to the current trends of increasing social diversity, given the geographical, historical, and cultural context.

The Republic of Moldova is a multicultural state: 75.1% are Moldovans (2 068 058); 7% - Romanians (192,800); 6.6% - Ukrainians (181,035); 4.1% - Russians (111,726); 4.6% - Gagauzians (126,010); 1.9% - Bulgarians (51 867). (Population and Housing Census 2014, Republic of Moldova)

In the Republic of Moldova, multiculturalism is represented by traditional historical minorities, who live compactly (Gagauzians, Bulgarians) and minorities living throughout the country (Russians, Ukrainians).

The population speaks the following languages: 54.6% Moldovan, 24% Romanian, 14.5% Russian.

Religion - 96.8% Orthodox, 1% Baptists, 0.7% Jehovah's Witnesses. (Population and Housing Census 2014, Republic of Moldova)

In Moldova, the plurality of cultures is quite old. Thus, there are some problems attested in the historical context:

- the identity problem of the native people.
- the problem of communication language (minorities do not speak Romanian for the most part and are more oriented towards communication in Russian).
- the problem of naming the language of communication.
- the problem of segregating schools with instruction in the languages of national minorities.

Following the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Republic of Moldova became an independent state. The transformation of the former union republic into an independent state meant, first and foremost, the transformation of former Soviet citizens from its territory into a community of citizens of a new state. However, the disintegration of the USSR was accompanied by the deep polarization of the population of the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova on the basis of ethnolinguistic criteria. (Nantoi, Iovu, Boțan, Cantarji, Reabcinschi, Gremalschi, 2012: 8).

It should be mentioned that the Republic of Moldova was the first of the former Soviet states to adopt the transition of its national language from the Cyrillic to the Latin script. For Moldova, the transition to the Latin alphabet means reconfirming the Latin origin of the national language and its identity with the Romanian language, which was confirmed in the Law on the functioning of languages on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. (Lege Nr. 3465 din 01.09.1989)

If the problem of the status of the national language served as a unifying factor for the Romanian-speaking population of the Republic of Moldova and managed to create a consensus among the new politicians and the intellectuals of the country, we cannot say the same thing about the problem of the name of the language, determined by that of the identity. This became the reason for a deep split within the political and intellectual elite of the country in two groups, one of “pro-Romanian” orientation, and the other of “Moldovenism”.

The sociolinguistic situation in contemporary Moldova is quite complicated and with many uncertain aspects. Legislation in the linguistic field is imperfect, there is an escalation of language problems by politicians through extreme attitudes such as Moldovanism and Romanophobia, on the one hand, or Russophobia, on the other, but also the linguistic insecurity of a considerable part of the speakers, caused by insufficient knowledge of the norms of the standard Romanian literary language, thus people associate themselves with each other according to the spoken language. (Condrea, 2017:123)

In Moldova we can see two trends: the attempt by the majority ethnic group to assimilate minorities and the segregation of minority ethnic groups to preserve their identity. As a result, education is increasingly separatist, with few lines of intercultural communication. Therefore, intercultural interactions are insignificant. Moldovan students separate themselves from the Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauzians, Bulgarians, not only physically, but also culturally. Each of them learns their own culture, remaining indifferent to the culture of other ethnic groups.

Another problem in Moldova is the language of instruction for minorities. In the Republic of Moldova, an attempt has been made to protect the language of an ethnic minority through its territorialization. The officialization of the three languages in the territorial-administrative unit “Gagauz Yeri” only contributed to the perpetuation of the linguistic situation established in this region during the Soviet period. The solution of the three official languages could only be accepted for a transitional period, which would have allowed the derusification of Gagauzians.

In reality, however, the Russian language has not only retained its hegemony in the regional administration, but is still promoted within the education system, which is de facto the language of study not only of the Gagauz minority, but of all other minorities in the country.

De facto, studies in their native language are done only by Russian students. The Gagauzians, the Bulgarians, and most of the Ukrainians, did not choose the mother tongue as language of instruction, but they chose Russian instead. The reason for this choice lies behind the mentality of minority ethnic groups.

The percentage of students in higher education institutions, according to the language of teaching in 2018 is the following: 82.8% Romanian, 14.8% Russian, 1.5% English.

The law on the functioning of languages in the territory of the Republic of Moldova, which had the focus of attention on the problem of languages of national minorities, was supplemented by special decisions of the Parliament and the Government on measures to improve the study of Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian.

Respecting the cultural rights of minorities should not be an impediment to their integration into society, which can only occur if the representatives of these minorities know the official language of the state. Knowledge of the official language is a factor of social cohesion and is able to offer the persons concerned the opportunity to exercise the whole of human rights, on an equal basis with the other citizens of the state. This is the

reason why it is absolutely necessary for the students to study the official language as their second language, at all levels of the education system.

There are different ways to alternate the official language with the minority language in the education system:

- the minority language can be used as the language of study for all disciplines, while also studying the official language;
- the minority language can be the language of study only for some disciplines, others being taught in the official language (it is the case of bilingual education);
- the minority language can be used in the study of particular disciplines, such as language and literature, all other subjects being studied in the official language.

The situation in the Republic of Moldova is paradoxical, as the language of study in the schools of the Gagauz, Bulgarian, Ukrainian minorities is the language of another minority, and not the official one. Thus, the official language is reserved only third place in the succession of languages studied by these minorities, which creates difficulties in assimilating the official, state language.

In 2003, in the Republic of Moldova there was adopted “law no.546-XV regarding the approval of the Concept of the national policy of the Republic of Moldova”. The reason invoked was “the need to establish the principles and tasks of the national policy, in order to ensure the sovereignty and independence of the country and to create favourable conditions for the free development of the ethnic and linguistic communities of the Republic of Moldova”. (Law no.546-XV regarding the approval of the Concept of the national policy of the Republic of Moldova).

According to the authors of the Concept, this “represents all the principles, objectives and priority tasks regarding the integration and consolidation of the multicultural and multilingual people of the Republic of Moldova by harmonizing the general national interests with the interests of all the ethnic and linguistic communities in the country”. The basic idea of the Concept was to affirm the continuity of the Moldovan statehood, which, according to the authors, relies on the multiseular past of the Moldovan people and on its uninterrupted statehood in the historical and ethnic space of its national becoming. (Law no.546-XV regarding the approval of the Concept of the national policy of the Republic of Moldova).

The case of the administrative-territorial unit “Gagauz Yeri”

A special case is “Gagauzia”. On the territory of the administrative-territorial unit “Gagauz Yeri”, a trilingualism, the Gagauz, Moldovan and Russian languages being declared official, is adopted through the autonomy legislation. But in reality, the territory of the autonomy is a territory of bilingualism, only Russian and Gagauz languages being applied. Moreover, the contrast of the ethnic composition with the circulation of languages in the territory of the autonomy shows a strong disproportionality towards a massive use of the Russian language compared to the ethnic composition of the population.

According to the data of the study, carried out by researchers from the Republic of Moldova such as Oazu Nantoi, Andrei Iovu, Igor Boțan, Vasile Cantarji, Veaceslav Reabcinschi, Anatol Gremalschi in 2012, the Gagauz language is used in the family by 54% of the population of the region, although the Gagauz ethnic groups constitute 82% of this population. The transition of the Gagauz ethnic groups throughout their lives from the Gagauz mother tongue to the Russian one is also evident, since the first language they

learned was Gagauz in 62% of cases (compared to 54% currently spoken in the family). (Nantoi, Iovu, Boțan, Cantarji, Reabcinschi, Gremalschi, 2012: 108).

The Russian language is the mother tongue for 27% of the respondents and practically all the inhabitants of the region who currently speak a language other than their mother tongue “migrate” towards it. The Russian language is the language of communication in the families of 40% of the inhabitants of the autonomy. Reporting on ethnic composition shows the percentage of the population using it in the family is ten times bigger than the percentage of ethnic Russians in the region and twice as big as the one of ethnicities other than Gagauzians. (Nantoi, Iovu, Boțan, Cantarji, Reabcinschi, Gremalschi, 2012: 109).

Another comparison that would be of interest is that, according to the study, 21% of the respondents live in ethnically mixed families, a figure twice smaller than the families who communicate in Russian. Therefore, the degree of use of Russian in families in the region is caused by factors other than the need for interethnic communication. (Nantoi, Iovu, Boțan, Cantarji, Reabcinschi, Gremalschi, 2012: 109).

The languages circulating on the territory of the autonomy are very unevenly distributed among different socio-demographic categories. The state language is not used among any group in significant proportions. The highest percentage of respondents who speak this language in families register among the population of non-Gagauzian ethnicity, which is 5.4%. If we compare this percentage to the percentage of minority ethnic groups in the region, we find that the state language is spoken in families by over one third of the population belonging to an ethnicity other than Russian or Gagauzian. (Nantoi, Iovu, Boțan, Cantarji, Reabcinschi, Gremalschi, 2012: 109).

The Russian language is predominantly used among 18-29 year olds (49.6%), the population with higher education (56.5%), with a high socio-economic status (62%), in the urban environment (64, 7%) and among minority ethnic groups of the autonomy (65%). The Gagauz language is spoken more often by the population aged 46-59, 60 and older (57.2% and 64.6% respectively), with secondary education (66.6% and 57.3%), low and medium socioeconomic status (71.2% and 58.7%), rural population (68.2%) and Gagauzian ethnic groups obviously (65.4%). (Nantoi, Iovu, Boțan, Cantarji, Reabcinschi, Gremalschi, 2012: 109).

The state language is fluently spoken by only one in ten inhabitants of the Gagauz autonomy (11.6%). The Gagauz language is known by 80.8% of the inhabitants of the region, and Russian is known by the majority of the respondents (93.6%). (Nantoi, Iovu, Boțan, Cantarji, Reabcinschi, Gremalschi, 2012: 109).

The option of trilingualism is accepted by the population of autonomy, most of the respondents sharing the opinion that the youth in the region must know Russian (90.3%), Gagauz (84.3%) and the state language (79.1%). (Nantoi, Iovu, Boțan, Cantarji, Reabcinschi, Gremalschi, 2012: 112).

The Gagauz ethnic group is a very eloquent example. Being very compactly populated, with minimal contact with other ethnicities due to the way of populating (especially with the ethnic majority), a Gagauz ethnic is rarely mentioned under conditions when it loses competition due to the lack of knowledge of the state language. Only 5.7% of the respondents could not choose higher education institutions because of not speaking the state language. Only 3.5% did not get a job, 3.4% were disadvantaged in choosing the specialty etc.

Conclusion

Intercultural communication plays an important role because it prevents misunderstandings or mistakes in communication. Intercultural communication involves much more than understanding the norms of a group, it involves accepting and tolerating differences. Globalization has made intercultural communication an inevitable fact. Today's world is undergoing rapid change and the interaction between people is gaining new dimensions. Contact and communication with other cultures are the dominant characteristics of modern life, as the world seems to be unable to live without the benefits of technology any more.

“Intercultural communication explores those elements of culture that most influence the interaction between members of two or more cultures, when individuals are in situations of interpersonal communication.”

Today, the interaction between people from different cultures is an experience that almost every person goes through. Intercultural contact becomes functional only through communication, and communication takes place through languages.

At the same time, the importance of language and culture factors in analyzing intercultural problems should not be underestimated, because a harmonious cohabitation of different cultural and linguistic communities within a single state implies the mandatory presence of three components:

1. cultural identity
2. intercultural communication
3. a common political culture for all these linguistic and cultural communities.

It is important to mention that the identity discourse in the Republic of Moldova is focused on ethnic and cultural features. Identity arguments pervade around ethnic determinism: history, language, ethnicity, culture, territory.

Given that the Republic of Moldova is a multicultural state represented by traditional minorities, living compactly and throughout the country, the issue of interculturality and intercultural education is a priority within the sociocultural policies.

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