Tamás Vrábel

The Culture of Speech in Cross-Cultural Communication

The article deals with developing the culture of speech of students studying cross-cultural communication. The author singles out the components that hinder and/or enhance the mastery of communication in cross-cultural context. The relation of the notion of speech culture to idiomaticity of speech as well as to communication culture is elucidated. Communication culture is viewed as not only the ability to use cultural concepts in speech; it is based on following all the rules of speech culture, necessarily includes the knowledge of etiquette, strategies and tactics of behaviour in situations of everyday and professional communication. Speech culture, therefore, is determined by the linguistic awareness of a person. By studying people's culture and speech we can determine their language awareness and the level of maturity of their language personality.

Key words: cross-cultural communication, speech culture, communication culture, idiomaticity of speech, norm, stylistic norm, linguistic awareness.

It is a well-known fact that the interaction of representatives of different language cultures in the process of cross-cultural communication is complicated by the national components of cultures including traditions, customs, way of life, everyday behaviour, national mentality, and psychology. The ability for cross-cultural communication is closely connected to the understanding of a different pattern of thought, tenor of life, ways of solving vital and business issues. The stability and welfare of the world depend on the ability of the young generation to show tolerance, respect towards the cultural and social peculiarities of other countries and nations and this fact preconditions the necessity to train specialists in cross-cultural communication.

One of the most important aspects enhancing the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication is the mastery of speech culture. In the linguistic aspect speech culture means “the speaker’s mastery of the literary norm, the ability to form stylistically correct utterances, i.e. use adequate language means in particular communicative situations, the ability to express one’s thoughts clearly and figuratively” (Fayenova, 1980, p. 4). This definition demonstrates a direct connection between the adequate use of language means and the clear expression of thoughts. Presumably, clarity and consistency of thoughts contribute to the clarity of their expression and vice versa, inconsistency of thoughts, irrespective of the high communicative competence, will hinder the culture of speech.

The culture of speech denotes a perfect mastery of the language and can be represented as a set of characteristics that any speech is to have to make the best possible influence on the addressee in a particular situation according to the aim put forward. Traditionally, the following characteristics are singled out: variety of speech, purity of language, expressiveness, correctness, functional stylistic adequacy, and imagery. Of great significance are also clarity or intelligibility, brevity, consistency, and richness of content. The latter are determined by the ability to express thoughts, i.e. by the culture of thinking.
There is no doubt that the basic characteristic of speech is correctness or
correspondence to the literary norm. In linguistic literature norm is interpreted as
an accepted use or a set of rules regulating the application of language means in
speech. Norm is formed as a result of selecting elements from those existing that
are most suitable for the communicative needs of the society. Norm is character-
ized by stability for the national character unites generations and provides for the
continuity of culture. At the same time, the notion of norm presupposes dynam-
ism, the ability to develop in accordance with the internal laws of the language
and the needs of the society. One of the most important aspects of speech culture
is the mastery of the stylistic norm regulating the correspondence of the language
means used to the communicative situations.

The notion of speech culture is closely related to the idiomaticity of speech. Speech is idiomatic if it is built not only in conformity with the rules of lexical
and syntactical combinability of the given language, but also taking into account
its use and its specific character in cross-cultural communication. Idiomaticity
of speech in a foreign language is achieved by means of using the following lan-
guage means: speech stereotypes, set phrases, speech etiquette formulas, idioms,
clichés, phraseological units, proverbs, collocations, and phrasal verbs. It should
be noted that in studying a foreign language students should not only understand
the meaning of idiomatic expressions, but also use them correctly in speech. Idi-
oms contain notions typical of the given nation’s language culture and represent
the pattern of thought of its speakers.

Besides correctness of great significance are: exactness, brevity, and expres-
siveness of speech. Exactness means correspondence of the sense of the utterance
to the rendered intention; it enhances clarity of speech which is interpreted as ease
of comprehending what is written, explicitness. Brevity, in its own turn, is defined
as absence of unnecessary words.

Rosental D.E. (1964) stresses the importance of expressiveness of speech
that is achieved by means of clear pronunciation, correct intonation, and properly
placed pauses. In achieving expressiveness of speech one should pay special at-
tention to speech tempo, voice power, and persuasiveness of tone. At the same
time, persuasive, clear and understandable communication of information should
be combined with objective and correct statement of facts, consistency, as well as
substantiveness of speech.

In a wider sense speech culture includes the speaker’s linguistic knowledge
that provides for the correct language use in the process of verbal communication.
Consequently, speech culture depends on the communicants’ background knowl-
dge, their vocabulary, thesaurus and socio-cultural knowledge. Therefore, speech
culture is viewed as an indispensable part of speech behaviour culture which is
determined by common cultural norms and the speaker’s social role. Speech be-
behaviour is understood as “all the speech acts and their forms viewed in the social
and communicative aspects” (Koltunova, 2000, p. 17). Besides speech culture,
the main components of the culture of speech behaviour include the culture of
speech etiquette, the culture of thinking, and the culture of somatic communica-
tion (Gutnova, 2000).

The notion of speech culture is closely related to the notion of communication
culture. Khytryk (2001) considers these two notions as similar for they form the
idea of some communicative perfection of speech – correctness, expressiveness,
adherence to the norm, i.e. correspondence to the phonetic, morphological, lexical, grammatical and other norms of the literary language. Khytryk interprets communication culture as the communicant’s knowledge of the signs of the natural language, following the rules of their combinability and application depending on the particular situation which the author calls ortological aspect of speech.

Fayenova (1980, p.22) interprets culture as “a well-developed skill to communicate according to the historically established norms of the society taking into account the psychological mechanisms of influence on the addressees as well as making use of the linguistic means of communication to achieve the best possible pragmatic result”.

We consider that communication culture is not only the ability to use cultural concepts in speech. It is based on following all the rules of speech culture, necessarily includes the knowledge of etiquette, strategies and tactics of behaviour in situations of everyday and professional communication.

Perfection of speech culture is attended by the formation of the students’ secondary language personality. There is no doubt that the speaker’s personality is revealed in speech. Social and territorial language stratification is revealed in pronunciation, vocabulary and syntax. On the other hand, age, education, profession, gender, culture, knowledge and personal characteristics of the person are also very important to understand speech.

Therefore, speech culture is determined by the linguistic awareness of a person. By studying people’s culture and speech we can determine their linguistic awareness and the level of maturity of their language personality. Speech culture is an important part of a person’s speech behaviour in the process of cross-cultural communication.

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