CULTURAL CODES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *Cultural codes refer to the symbols and systems of meaning that hold particular significance for individuals belonging to a specific group or society. The author examines various definitions of the cultural code put forth by linguists and semioticians, analyzing and comparing them. Different aspects of this concept are identified and described, highlighting the connections between cultural codes and individuals' worldview.*

Keywords: *cultural code, picture of the world, semantic variability, cognitive system*

Culture, according to A. Karmin, is closely connected with a special way of the mind "to extract, understand and use information," and then encode it in special signs. This process gives rise to an information environment, which refers to the world of objects and phenomena where information is encoded in signs. In essence, this information environment serves as the foundation of culture. Within this information environment, signs and symbols emerge and acquire meaning, playing a crucial role in every stage of cultural development. It is through the meanings of these signs and symbols that cultures distinguish themselves from one another. By combining these meanings into a unified semantic whole, culture takes on a living, organism-like entity. Language, as a practical tool that is generated and employed by culture for self-preservation, serves as the carrier and expression of its semantic integrity, capable of generating a vast range of semantic variations. These variations serve as the backdrop against which culture evolves. In order to express itself, solidify its identity, and function effectively within a specific space, culture creates semantic fields through semantic variations that align with its needs for self-expression, consolidation, and successful operation. These semantic fields interconnect, forming enduring and fixed semantic units, which then become the basis for the establishment of cultural codes.

Cultural experts argue that the cultural code is not a fixed entity but rather comprises the accumulated cultural experience of a society. V. Telia describes the cultural code as the foundation of cultural texts, a collection of cultivated ideas about the world, encompassing natural objects, artifacts, phenomena, as well as their spatial, temporal, and qualitative-quantitative dimensions. Similarly, V.V. Krasnykh

defines the cultural code as a framework that culture imposes on the surrounding world, providing division, categorization, structure, and evaluation. According to Yu. Lotman, the cultural code consists of a system of images associated with specific cultural domains or artifacts, serving as signs. N. Alefirenko emphasizes that the cultural code encapsulates the essence of cultural meanings and values, concentrating their content. In essence, the cultural code represents the existential-philosophical strategy of a society, expressed symbolically and functioning as a semantic system. The cultural code serves to identify and store social memory, operating as a meta-level within the semiotic space. Moreover, the core codes of culture tend to evolve slowly and persist over long periods, often taking centuries to fully mature. These codes, though sometimes challenging to discern and reflect upon, play a crucial role in shaping cultural identity and change at a leisurely pace.

Culture creates a space of values and meanings, with codes acting as carriers and reflections of its content. The essence of a code lies in its ability to concentrate the meanings and values of culture, and it is individually "read" at the level of understanding, comprehension, and interpretation. Language, as a tool for expressing codes, becomes a sign-semantic phenomenon within culture. According to Yuri Lotman, language serves as the most effective means of conveying cultural meanings. Its primary purpose is to reproduce cultural codes through various forms of mental and linguistic activities, supporting and protecting them from being substituted by foreign cultural codes that may interfere with a different cultural semantic space. When perceiving and interpreting a foreign cultural text, it's important to acknowledge that difficulties in understanding can arise due to the different qualities it possesses for individuals from another culture. However, it is not culture itself that directly influences the understanding of a foreign cultural text, but rather its manifestation within the reader's mind.

The process of maintaining the code and preventing its replacement by a foreign code becomes possible due to the formation of its own linguistic cultural background, within which semantic variability arises: "understanding a foreign cultural text is characterized by a high degree of polyvariance. The recipient understands the text due to the peculiarities of personal/linguistic consciousness, worldview, associations, etc." (Stepkin) In addition, the process of perception of a foreign cultural text is also associated with "the background of a person's communicative culture, his individual cognitive style, the level of development of cognitive and metacognitive competencies, the level of formation of subject, interdisciplinary knowledge and metasubject competencies (cognitive,

communicative and regulatory), factors of value orientation and many other characteristics" (Korchazhkina).

Andrev Simpson notes that language influences how people perceive the world (Simpson, 2019).

The semantic variability of language is complex and constantly evolving, representing a continuous process within the semantic system that generates an infinite number of variations. Semantic fields can contain language units with multiple meanings and can intersect and associate with other semantic fields. As a result, the linguistic cultural background is dynamic and subject to change, while cultural codes tend to be relatively stable. In practice, we have both stable and relatively stable cultural codes, as well as a dynamic and continuously changing linguistic cultural background. This implies that there is semantic stability in the cultural codes, but we cannot ignore the potential for semantic cultural variability. Culture, akin to a living organism, exists within the environment of its linguistic background. As a result, constant connections and interactions occur between the culture as an organism and its linguistic environment. They cannot exist independently and are interdependent in their development. Culture, as an organism, adapts to its linguistic environment, but the language background, as the environment, can also influence the state of the cultural organism. Cultural codes, in a way, adjust themselves to the linguistic cultural background. Thus, the semantic variability of language and the cultural semantic field are correlated with each other. These connections can either be persistent and fixed or unstable and transient. A stable connection arises when the generated cultural code aligns with the linguistic background or the variable semantic field of the language. In this case, the culture code and the meaning of the linguistic variation field are in harmony and mutually reinforce each other. This connection is typically stable and resistant to change, as it is regulated by the fixed code within the culture. This indicates a correlation between the meaning of the code and its content.

If, at a particular point in time, the semantic variability of the linguistic background does not align with the existing cultural code, the connection between them becomes weak or even non-existent. This dynamic interaction indicates that the code becomes vulnerable, as its meaning fails to determine the content in relation to the linguistic semantic background. According to Andrew Simpson, language variation and change are linked to social structures and the expression of group and personal identities. David Hyatt suggests that language variation is associated with different ways of "being". In such cases, there are two possibilities for code holders, whether it be individuals or society as a whole.

Firstly, if the meaning of the code somehow coincides with certain elements of the linguistic semantic field of a foreign culture, content variability may occur within the code. This is because the content is borrowed from the semantic field of the foreign culture. Over time, this external influence can modify the code, change its content, and alter its meaning. Such changes are often observed in cultures with weakly expressed or underdeveloped core semantic codes.

The second scenario involves what neuroscientists refer to as brain distortions. These distortions can occur in both intercultural and intracultural communication when individuals have limited linguocultural competence. They can be attributed to the weak correlation between the meaning of a code and its content, where the meaning is not adequately supported or weakly supported by the content. As a result, researchers suggest that even in ideal circumstances with mutual understanding and compatibility between communicators in terms of worldview and other important factors, there is still approximately a 25% error rate in information transmission. This can be explained by the unique characteristics of the brain's functioning, particularly in terms of how thinking processes information.

From birth, individuals are immersed in a logical space that teaches the brain to process differentiated and clear information effectively. When a strong correlation is present, the brain processes it with minimal distortion. However, when faced with a weak correlation, distortions become inevitable. The brain must simultaneously operate in different registers, which can lead to distortions in either the meaning of the code or its content.

Furthermore, the way communicants from different cultures perceive reality must be decoded through meaningful forms of language and culture that connect individuals with the world of ideas, images, and values specific to their ethnocultural consciousness. All of the phenomena described here are closely tied to the functioning of the human cognitive system. Cultural codes are subject to some distortions or interpretations in the human cognitive system, which are associated with its psycho-emotional characteristics. With repeated repetition of such linguistically coded information, for example, in an artificial information space - the media, social networks, distorted codes are remembered. Paul Simpson also points to the influence of ideology on the human cognitive system. In his view, speakers and writers linguistically encode their beliefs, interests, and prejudices through the full range of media (Simpson, 1993). According to Alefirenko, it is necessary to correctly recognize the code of culture, "since the images of past cultural layers are erased over time, and the semantic fields of discursive thinking of contexts are expanding" (Alefirenko, 2020:19).

Cultures belonging to different language families, when in contact with each other, do not create any semantic fields. The perception of cultural codes depends only on the flexibility of the cognitive systems of communicants and the plasticity of their brains. In such a model, perceptual and empirical connections are unbalanced - either the perceptual connection or the empirical connection dominates.

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