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**THE SPECIFICITY OF CONCEPTUALIZATION AND CATEGORIZATION  
OF CULTURE SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE WORLD,  
OR 'WHY DO THEY DISLIKE US SO MUCH?'**

Л. И. Гришаева (Воронеж, Россия). Специфика концептуализации и категоризации культурно-специфической информации о мире, или: *ПОЧЕМУ ОНИ НАС ТАК НЕ ЛЮБЯТ?* В статье обсуждаются вопросы культурной идентичности, восприятия инокультурного собеседника, а также когнитивных оснований для создания стереотипного восприятия представителей других культур. Основываясь на данных, полученных в ходе семинара с участием немецких и русских студентов, автор предлагает когнитивную теорию восприятия «своей» и «чужой» культуры. Оппозиция «свой – инокультурный чужой» является когнитивно важным фильтром, который определяет дальнейшие стратегии межкультурного взаимодействия.

**Ключевые слова:** межкультурная коммуникация, концептуализация, категоризация, стереотип, предубеждение

The paper discusses the issues of cultural identity, perception of people from foreign cultures, and cognitive base for stereotyping. The author uses data obtained from German and Russian students at the seminar held at Voronezh State University and offers a cognitive theory of perception of “one’s own” and “other”. The dichotomy “own – foreign other” is a cognitively important filter which determines further strategies of intercultural interaction.

**Keywords:** intercultural communication, conceptualization, categorization, stereotype, bias

It is a well-known fact that quantity inevitably grows into quality. This law of dialectics comes to mind every time my students, when reading current media texts about Russia, ask me the question: ‘*Why do they dislike us so much?*’ The most significant thing in this question is the word *so*, as its use reveals that representatives of the Russian culture are surprised or even shocked not so much by the very fact of someone’s dislike towards someone else, but by the intensity of this attitude. In all probability, the students are convinced that facts,

events, people or actions reported in the foreign media cannot possibly cause such deep dislike, and the only reason for it must be the reporters' prejudice. Taking into account the fact that this question is asked by students with very different qualities, different life and intercultural experience and in different periods of Russia's relations with other countries, we cannot but admit that it is no coincidence, and the question calls for a deep theoretical analysis.

The question which can take different forms and is asked by different students year and year again, makes us ponder over the issue that terminologically can be formulated as follows: the peculiarities of conceptualization of culture specific information about the world that is perceived by individuals with different cultural identities in the same time-space continuum. This kind of research objective requires us to consider the following issues which are related to the problem above:

- Perception and comprehension as interpretation.
- The individual's cultural identity and the related culture's typological features.
- The cognitive frame for perceiving information about the world and its parameters.
- Success conditions and risk factors in intercultural communication.
- Culture-specific methods of organizing interaction.
- Mental stereotypes and their influence on conceptualization and categorization of culture specific information about the world.
- Peculiarities of evaluative statements and means of their realization.

To answer the question in the subtitle it makes sense to analyse an illustrative example. I would like to note that the example under analysis shows two different ways to solve the same cognitive task, which is very productive for understanding how an interlocutor's cultural identity influences their choice of ways and means to fulfil cognitive and communicative tasks, or, in our case, evaluative statements about the perception of a different cultural reality.

***'Who are we? What kind of people are we?'***

*'Who are we? What kind of people are we? Wer sind wir? Wie sind wir?'* was called the Germany–Russia seminar conducted in May 2002 by Marina Boyko and Olga Scherbatykh, students of the Romance and

Germanic Philology Department, Voronezh State University, who had received a grant from the Theodor Heuss Fund (Germany). The seminar was devoted to the issues of intercultural communication (detailed information and report on the seminar can be found in Grishaeva 2002; Кто мы? Какие мы? Международный семинар 2002). The students' initiative was supported by consultations at Voronezh Center for Advanced Studies and Education (CASE) which actively researches intercultural communication issues. The organizers invited to attend not only seminar participants but also instructors who taught classes. As a CASE member, I also participated in the seminar together with German and Russian university and high school students. All the seminar participants had experience of living in a different culture – Russian or German – where they either studied at a high school or university, or stayed with their friends. That facilitated the atmosphere of trust and close relationships in the group which remained even after the seminar had finished. This fact is especially worth noting as once the Voronezh students turned to me with the question: *'Why do they dislike us so much?'*

The question was asked after an extremely interesting class conducted by a German colleague who specializes in intercultural communication theory, Leo Ensel (for details of the seminar, see Кто мы? Какие мы? Международный семинар 2002: 27-62). He asked the Russian and German seminar participants to 'erect' 'monuments' on the main squares of their capital cities: in the Red Square to Germans, and to Russians in Berlin in front of the Brandenburg Gate, respectively<sup>1</sup>. Admittedly, the task type was familiar to the seminar participants who had prepared a number of silent sketches from 'own' and 'foreign' cultures and, characteristically, showed enormous pleasure and enthusiasm in their work, looking forward to demonstrating their creative product to the others<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It's important to note that we should not consider this issue in the ethical perspective of intercultural contacts in order to understand the above mentioned aspect of the issue under consideration.

<sup>2</sup> It's important to mention here that the author of the task under discussion, L. Ensel, only described the results of the task completion (Кто мы? Какие мы? Международный семинар 2002: 30-31) without providing any generalizations or theoretical conclusions. I remembered about that seminar a few years later, when I was working with my colleagues on a project researching

An important factor was that the composition of the groups was identical in terms of the cultural background, as well as the task. This fact undoubtedly facilitated a comparative analysis of evaluative statements about a different cultural reality. Another factor to emphasize is that initially the interrelation was intercultural only in virtual space; it became intercultural in its true sense at the stage where the products of virtual activity were perceived. In other words, at the first stage information about 'foreign' culture stored in direct and indirect heterostereotypes was activated in each group. At the second stage all the participants perceived a complex of information about a different culture, activated by non-verbal means, through interaction with real representatives of that culture, which activated not only heterostereotypes but also autostereotypes in them.

First, the seminar participants could see the 'monument' the German participants suggested could be 'erected' in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. The composition consisted of three figures: a woman with her arms wide outstretched and her face radiant, a man playing the guitar, and another untidy looking man (his shirt unbuttoned and out of the trousers), drinking out of a bottle and hardly able to stand on his feet. The participants were in no doubt that the sketch represented a company of drunk people, though in fact the authors of the 'sculpture' had meant the female figure to symbolize Russian warm-heartedness and kindness, so much appreciated by representatives of the German culture. After the seminar participants had had a closer look at the 'sculpture', the 'sculptors' commented that they frequently saw such scenes not only in Berlin but also in other cities, so they only depicted what they could regularly see.

Then the 'monument' by the Russian participants was shown. One of them was sitting in a pose that reminded of *The Thinker* by Rodin while the other two were standing by his side, with one of them half-sitting to represent a short person. Two female figures near them – one crouching and the other deep in thought – didn't give the impression of being one whole with the 'monument'. After a close examination of

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success conditions and risk factors in intercultural communication (for the info summary, see Стратегии успеха 2005), and also after more and more frequent instances of questions like the one in the article subtitle asked by the students who had worked in the USA in summer on the 'Work and Travel' programme.

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the 'statue' both Russian and German seminar participants concluded that some outstanding representatives of the German culture were depicted, though they found it difficult to identify them. The 'sculptors' explained that they knew German people as a nation of thinkers and artists and that was why the sitting person symbolized all German philosophers and the standing ones – writers and poets. When creating the 'sculpture' they kept in mind the Goethe-Schiller monument that as they knew stands in Weimar.

It was during the lunch break that the Voronezh students asked me that question. My theoretical explanation detailing the nature of stereotypes brought only a certain degree of understanding but could not totally satisfy the students, who kept repeating perplexedly that Russia had not only drunkards and that it was world famous for its cultural and scientific achievements: *'we have Pushkin, Tchaikovsky, Dostoevsky, the Bolshoi Theater ballet; Gagarin is ours, too.'*

Generally, both the Voronezh seminar participants' question and their reaction to the 'monument' 'erected' by their German friends testify to the fact that representatives of different cultures apply the same information complex to different mental categories, and that they are stunned to realize this pattern, which for an intercultural communication researcher is a common one. The main point of interest here is not so much the question about the reasons for the obvious discrepancy in the choice of ways and means of dealing with the same cognitive task, but the very essence of the cognitive processes behind this question. Therefore it is essential to analyze those processes in order to understand the patterns that occur in intercultural communication.

### **Perception of information about the world as interpretation**

Before we move on to some comments on the example given above, let us consider a citation from A. A. Brudny on three functions of comprehension: cognitive, regulatory and ideological: "To comprehend means to discover knowledge. The knowledge that reflects the essence of things, connects what was previously unknown with what is already known, and transforms what was fragmented into a system <...> the system which incorporates the new knowledge is functional, operative. It is a system focused on knowledge application. In other words, comprehension acts as knowledge acquisition and its transformation into a component of the psychological mechanism that regulates activity according to the requirements of practice. The cognitive

function of comprehension consists in discovering certain knowledge about reality and applying it; as a result of comprehension the knowledge becomes part of an individual's inner world and influences the regulation of their activity” (Брудный 1991: 115-116).

This generalization helps to understand that before the seminar participants had to perform the task I have described, knowledge and knowledge application did not form a unity, which is why their knowledge of a different cultural reality could not become ‘the psychological mechanism that regulates the activity’ of subjects of knowledge and communication.

Analysis of the results of culture specific information perception – and in fact the ‘monuments’ I have talked about above are non-verbally encoded information about the views on ‘own’ and ‘foreign’ cultures that culture representatives have – reveals that objects of perception are in fact *essentially different* for each group of perceiving subjects. To fully understand this fact, which is not so obvious to interaction participants themselves, it is necessary to make a step-by-step comparison of phenomenological characteristics of an evaluation (in a broad sense): the subject of the evaluation, its object and basis, type, kind, character of the evaluation, – and also to accentuate the most significant parameters of the subjects of perception and the context in which the evaluation takes place – first of all, the type of the interactant’s identity, – as all these influence the understanding of what information is activated in interactants’ minds in the cognitive processing of information they perceive about the extra-linguistic reality.

Thus, in the case study in question in interpreting foreign culture reality the object of evaluation for the Russian participants of the seminar was high culture as a whole, spiritual culture, to be precise, which they esteemed highly; the evaluation was of the general type. For the German participants the object of evaluation was another part of culture – interactional culture<sup>1</sup>, where everyday culture was pre-

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<sup>1</sup> As opposed to the conventional division of culture into two parts: spiritual and material, we find it reasonable to single out another part – interactional culture which is understood as a complex of declarative and procedural information about ways and means of organizing interaction of different types in various circumstances. The reasoning behind this is that it is in interactions structured in a culture specific way that both material and moral values are created, and such principles and ways of interaction between culture repre-

sented in an everyday scene. The negative evaluation was related to a definite type of interaction and concrete types of representatives of the culture, i.e. separate **elements** of the Russian culture, but not to the Russian culture as a whole. In other words, the evaluation in this case was of the specific type. Differences can also be found in relation to other comparison criteria, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

<b>Criteria for comparison</b>	<b>Russian culture representatives</b>	<b>German culture representatives</b>
subject of evaluation	holder of collective identity	holder of personal identity
object of evaluation	High spiritual culture in general	interactional culture concrete element: one definite type if interaction
type of evaluation	general	Specific
character of evaluation	positive	negative
kind of evaluation	emotional	emotional
basis of evaluation	Mostly indirect positive heterostereotypes (about Germans and the German culture) Positive autostereotypes	Indirect and indirect negative heterostereotypes (about Russians) Negative autostereotypes
cognitive frame of perception	'own' – 'other'	'own' – 'foreign other'

representatives are worked out that are culture specific and regularly reproduced in various activities by interlocutors with different individual characteristics. It is in interaction that culture representatives that have heterogeneous characteristics use various instruments as artifacts and culture codes, access to which enables them as culture representatives to interpret each interactant's motives and aims, even if the former does not explicate the latter (for the theoretical substantiations of the theoretical interpretation above, see Гришаева, Цурикова 2008: 10-11, 29-32, 331; Стратегии 2005: 343-350, 351-353).

If we compare the ways and means of completing the same cognitive task by representatives of different cultures, we can clearly see two important factors in the reaction of the Voronezh students as representatives of the Russian culture. First, they perceive the specific evaluation given by representatives of the German culture to one particular element of their culture, as a general evaluation of the culture as a whole. Second, when perceiving the evaluation of their 'own' culture expressed by representatives of another culture, they see themselves as holders of collective identity. However, these characteristics of the phenomenon of 'evaluation' cannot be applied to similar objects when analyzing the results of the German culture representatives' perception. It is obvious that the explanation of this distinction lies in the fact that representatives of the Russian culture act in these cognitive acts as holders of collective identity; this activates in them the information encompassed in the knowledge shared by all representatives of the culture. At the same time, representatives of the German culture act as holders of personal identity in the first place and yet the knowledge shared by all representatives of the culture is also activated in them. The reason for this is that each holder of personal identity is at the same time a holder of collective identity.

Thus, the case study above demonstrates that, firstly, the actions of representatives of another culture are misinterpreted, which results in a substitution of concepts that goes unnoticed for those who give this misinterpretation. In this way they attribute their interpretations which have no objective ground to actions of representatives of another culture, and make assumptions about the motives of their actions based on the interpretations enrooted in their 'own' culture. Secondly, apparently, in the process of enculturation each culture representative acquires some specific strategies to conceptualize information about the world. By realizing those strategies s/he learns to categorize some information as vital for interaction, and consider other information as less important or even irrelevant for forming their judgment of a situation and choosing ways of interaction. In all probability, enculturation into the Russian culture leads its representatives to perceive one particular culture element in its close connection with the system of values, thus placing it into an evaluative context. It could also be that enculturation into the German culture teaches its representatives to perceive an element of reality in an interactional context. This can explain a certain contradiction between a high positive evaluation of

Russian culture representatives' sincerity and emotionality, on the one hand, and a negative evaluation of the reverse side of emotionality and openness they so highly appreciate, on the other<sup>1</sup>.

It is characteristic that the respective evaluations are prompted by the fact that their basis is formed by two different information complexes that are activated successively: auto- and heterostereotypes. In the first instance a positive evaluation of the achievements of the German culture overlays a positive evaluation of achievements of high culture in general and of the Russian culture in particular which is highly appreciated in Russian representatives' 'own' culture. In the second instance a negative evaluation of concrete actions overlaps negative autostereotypes about the type of interaction and violations of ethical, legal and any other written and especially unwritten rules and norms of interaction in different circumstances. This can also explain, at least partially, the reaction of representatives of one culture to actions of representatives of another, as described above.

### **Cognitive frame of perception**

The parameters of an evaluative statement we have singled out above do not provide an exhaustive explanation of the results of comprehending a complex of information about the world perceived by an interlocutor. To make the analysis totally comprehensive we have to take it into account that information about the world undergoes a selection process and that perception as a phenomenon is selective, emotive, subjective, teleological and context bound (Грановская 1981; Солсо 2002; Anderson 2001; and others). In other words, when analyzing the results of perception of another cultural reality we should consider the effect caused by the cognitive filters that information about the world is sieved through. The system of cognitive filters for selecting information about the world sets the plane and scope for the perception of all information about the world that has to be processed, thus enhancing its culture specific categorization and conceptualization. The cognitive strategies a subject of perception develops in the process of their enculturation structure the flows of highly varied information about the world; they facilitate the selection of cognitively

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, this generalization should not be absolutized as it needs verification by scientific methods that ensure reliable results.

and communicatively relevant properties of perceived objects of the natural and artificial environment from the information continuum the subject of cognition is immersed in; they minimize his\her cognitive efforts in the mental processing of the flow of heterogeneous, hetero-substance, and heterochronic information perceived by the subject in interaction; they also boost the effectiveness of his\her mental activity. Thus, cognitive filters perform a range of functions:

- abstraction through information selection and reduction in the number of incoming stimuli, which finally leads to a smaller amount of information that has to be processed;
- simplification of the information flow;
- association by searching for counterparts that are available to the subject due to his\her enculturation: preference (i.e. making a choice): (a) of the familiar to the unfamiliar, (b) of the pleasant to the unpleasant, (c) of something causing an emotional response to something emotionally neutral, (d) of something causing interest to something interest-neutral (for details, see Грановская 1981; Солсо 2002; Anderson 2001).

The processed data is grouped and classified on the basis of the similarity it has with the existing prototypes; information combination and transformation are nonlinear processes, either, as the same information is structured differently in different subjects' minds. According to J. Anderson, forms and objects are isolated at an early stage while their identification takes place at a later stage; when the perceived properties are analyzed, first properties and then are combination of properties are identified (Anderson 2001: 38, 39, 53).

In social perception the primary cognitive frame of perception is formed by the cultural anthropological factors 'own', 'foreign other' and 'other'. The 'own' factor is 'a culturally relevant and, as a rule, positively charged factor that is essential to primary and secondary socialization when recognizing an individual's cultural identity on the basis of a combination of heterogeneous culturally relevant properties: the subject of social perception is recognized as belonging to the same culture/subculture as the subject of cognition' (Гришаева, Цурикова 2008: 331). The 'foreign other' factor is 'a culturally relevant and, as a rule, (in a prototype case) negatively charged factor that is essential to primary and secondary socialization when recognizing an individual's cultural identity on the basis of a combination of heterogeneous culturally relevant properties: the object of social perception is recognized

as not belonging to the same culture/subculture as the subject of cognition' (Гришаева, Цурикова 2008: 333). The 'other' factor is 'a culturally relevant factor that is essential to primary and secondary socialization when recognizing an individual's cultural identity on the basis of a combination of heterogeneous culturally relevant properties: the object of social perception is recognized as not belonging to the same culture/subculture as the subject of cognition but is interpreted as a counterpart to 'own' (Гришаева, Цурикова 2008: 324). It follows from this view that the information selected through different cognitive frames of perception cannot be identical (see Table 2 for the results of the comparison).

**Table 2**

	'own' – 'foreign other'	'own' – 'other'
Degree of information abstractness	Information at a lower hierarchical level (more definite)	Information at a higher hierarchical level (more abstract)
Evaluative charge	Present: ranging from admiration to hatred with a different degree of scaling	None: a counterpart to 'own'
Functionality sphere	Limited Less differentiated	Broader Higher degree of differentiation

The noted qualities are due to the prototypical semantics of the 'own' and 'foreign other' factors: for the former it is 'familiar and hence safe', for the latter it is 'unknown and hence potentially (life) threatening' (for more details on the grounds for this distinction, see Гришаева 2006; 2009). This can be used as a basis to compare the characteristics of both cognitive frames (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

Cognitive frames of perception	
'own' – 'foreign other'	'own' – 'other'
Anthropological constant	Characteristic of a subject that can use cognitive and communicative strategies variably
Typical of any culture representative	
Probability that degree of in-	Possibility of subtle differentia-

tensity will vary and qualities of perceived objects will be scaled in accordance with the subject's properties, the context and the perceived object as well as peculiarities of the world view	tion in accordance with the intercultural experience and the degree of differentiation of the knowledge incorporated into the subject's world view
Possibility of the transition to the perception through the 'own' - 'other' opposition if experience - communicative in 'own' culture and intercultural - is enriched	Possibility of the reversion to the perception through the 'own' - 'foreign other' opposition

This comparison proves the logic behind the distinction between the cultural anthropological factors under discussion as:

- different cognitive foundations underlie each of the oppositions mentioned above;
- they have different application spheres in the process of perception and cognition;
- they display different degrees of semantic abstractness/definiteness, which is fundamental to the analysis of mental structures that are activated in acts of perception;
- they display different evaluative potential, which affects the results of the categorization of information that has been perceived and is being processed;
- subjects of perception (in a typical scenario) have different cognitive and communicative characteristics (rigidity vs. instability, ability/inability to vary patterns etc.);
- in the same communicative situations subjects have different sets of discourse and nominative strategies;
- different consequences occur for the result of interaction as a whole.

To sum up, the opposition of the 'own' - 'foreign other' factors forms a *primary* cognitive filter which determines the strategies of processing information about the world and thus strategies of interacting with an interlocutor, regardless of the characteristics they have, that the subject of cognition and communication chooses. In other

words, it sets the context, i. e. 'the minimum beyond which total uncertainty ensues in interpreting names, notions and predicates' (Кубрякова 1997: 174). At a later stage all the other cognitive filters are activated that heterogeneous and hetero-substance information about the world is filtered through before it undergoes any further cognitive processing.

### **Cultural identity and the choice of the way of interaction**

A subject's cultural identity is, in the final analysis, shaped by the type and kind of information the subject of cognition and communication has been receiving as it filters through a cognitive frame of a certain type. So it will not be an exaggeration to argue that cultural identity actually sets the parameters of the cognitive frame itself in some way or other (its 'depth' and 'width' in the first place, i. e. it determines the amount and quality of the information selected in an act of perception, and the scope and nature of information to undergo cognitive processing). A subject's cultural identity develops in the course of acquiring, first, personal, and then collective identity, i. e. in the course of his/her socialization into a society with certain preset characteristics.

Thus, a consideration of the way people from different cultural backgrounds approach the same cognitive task leads us to another important conclusion. For an adequate interpretation of situations similar to those described above, subjects of perception require a well-developed skill of recognizing integrative and differential properties of interaction and correctly identifying their correlation as observed in concrete circumstances of interaction between representatives of different cultures.

This makes so much sense because when there occurs a similarity of integrative properties of discursive events in the native and foreign language cultures (for instance, in the event of greeting, saying goodbye, apology, offer of food and drink, etc.), such properties are perceived as classificational properties as they cause new information to be placed into a familiar cognitive space, and activate certain complexes of information that allow for the categorization of the perceived information. Differential properties can be singled out on another basis which is not familiar to subjects of perception and activity. Meanwhile differential properties often fail to be grasped and are ignored as such, since a person from another cultural background does not pos-

sess any cognitive tools to analyze them. As a result, people who speak a foreign language perceive communicative situations and the occurring discursive events of the 'foreign' and native language cultures as absolutely identical. This leads them to interpret intercultural communication by the conventions of their own culture, without realizing it, because they see the way of communicating that they have internalized in the process of enculturation as the only possible and natural one.

Subconsciously predisposed to see 'sameness', these 'aliens' when they observe authentic communication in a foreign language or even find themselves in a related cultural and language environment, frequently prove unable to determine intuitively what makes the communicative events they take part in different in two cultures. The normal cognitively relevant expectations that are 'native' to their minds structure the incoming information, which as soon as it has been categorized in a specific way, is embedded into the patterns of their native language culture – in this case, these patterns are prototypical for the perceived reality.

Undoubtedly, what matters in cases such as those described above is if interlocutors can grasp that in fact there is a possibility to give *different* interpretations to the same act of interaction or actions and reactions that look identical at first sight. In other words, it is theoretically important to realize the necessity for cultural sensitivity as well as cognitive and communicative flexibility of interactants that come from different cultural backgrounds.

A person who has been immersed into a new, unfamiliar culture for a long time can believe s/he has adjusted to it well enough. What makes it possible is that in situations of intercultural interaction the similarity of the basic, or integrative, characteristics of communicative events in different language cultures gives them an opportunity for communication which looks successful at first sight. The consequences are twofold. First, this gives interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds an illusion of complete understanding since the two sides perceive the situation as familiar and identical for both. At the same time this renders it difficult to realize the existing differences or slight contrasts because differential properties of those events in two cultures are not seen as meaningful.

## **On the conflict of evaluations in intercultural communication and its cause**

It is interesting to note that the situations under discussion let us formulate a more or less probable correlation between cultural identity and a high general positive evaluation of a particular part of a culture. To put it another way, we can state that people from different cultural backgrounds give positive evaluations to different parts and elements of a 'foreign' culture. In all probability, there is a certain more or less fixed culture bound relation between the choice of the object of perception and the object of evaluation, on the one hand, and the nature of a collective subject's cultural identity, on the other, although individual representatives of this culture cannot but demonstrate their individual peculiarities of making evaluations in different situations of intercultural communication. A special note should be made of the fact that the scientific task as it has been formulated here has never been set in intercultural communication before and is still awaiting a solution, as well as the task of working out methods and techniques that could be used to verify the generalizations scientists arrive at.

It is highly probable that the above mentioned factors can account for the obvious conflict of evaluations that are given to the same object in the process of intercultural communication. As an example, a representative of one culture gives a very straightforward specific negative evaluation of a certain element of the material part of a 'foreign' culture, while this evaluation might be perceived as a general negative evaluation of the culture as a whole by their interlocutor. This kind of substitution of evaluations is likely to be determined by a number of factors related to each culture representative knowing the following:

- There is an object (or objects) in their culture that is chosen as an object of evaluation most often in communication with interlocutors from one's 'own' and/or a 'foreign' culture. In some cultures elements of their material culture get evaluated more frequently while in other cultures elements of spiritual culture do;
- The object that is evaluated has a certain status in one's 'own' culture and in a definite type of interaction. Naturally, this status doesn't have to be equal to the one in a 'foreign' culture;
- Evaluations related to people's actions, their motives, their appearances and qualities as well as objects and circumstances can be

made only by a person with certain characteristics, and only in certain circumstances;

- Normally the form and character an evaluation takes cannot contradict the conventions that exist in the culture. Otherwise, it will affect the communicant's future activities in their 'own' culture;
- An evaluative statement doesn't always evaluate a culture element. It can realize other discursive strategies whose functional potential is known to representatives of this culture but is unfamiliar to people from other cultural backgrounds.

As an example, a negative evaluation of elements of material culture (say, litter in the streets) made in front of a person from the same cultural background can be interpreted as a statement of fact while the same evaluation made by a 'foreigner' can be seen as displaying a negative and contemptuous attitude to the culture even if the fact itself is indisputable.

To sum up, in the study of intercultural communication theoretical importance can be attributed to the following parameters of interlocutors' evaluative activity:

- The absence/presence of an evaluative frame of perception in general and of social perception in particular;
- The charge the evaluation has;
- Its degree and character;
- Correlation/lack of correlation between these parameters in 'own' and 'foreign' cultures as applied to the same object of evaluation.

The potential conflict of evaluations of culture elements that an individual and/or collective subject's perception is focused on in intercultural interaction, and the concurrence/discrepancy of strategies of perceiving phenomena of culture by an individual subject and a collective one can be rightly considered as one of the risk factors in intercultural communication.

## **Conclusion**

Researching the reasons for some obvious differences in perception by people from different cultural backgrounds is a complex process that requires a researcher to take into account alternate heterogeneous factors. In this kind of analysis it is particularly difficult to make a step-by-step distinction between common and scientific interpretations, which unfortunately isn't always made even in specialist re-

search. A scientific study of the differences in the conceptualization and categorization of culture specific information about the world calls in its turn for an in-depth differentiation between phenomenological and gnosological characteristics of the object of analysis. This involves the need for a goal-oriented contrastive description of a phenomenon in each of its aspects successively. The results of this analysis should amount to a complex characterization of the phenomenon which demonstrates itself in culture specific ways.

Evaluative statements that are frequently used in interaction between interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds can be classified into a number of groups on the basis of six types of criteria: (1) explicitness / implicitness of an evaluative statement, (2) intentionality of the evaluative statement in discourse, (3) the subject of reception of the evaluative statement (one interlocutor or both), (4) the communicative role of the subject of reception (addresser or addressee), (5) cultural typological characteristics of the culture a communicant represents, (6) the type of interaction in which the evaluative statement is made and an evaluative assertion is generated.

A conflict of evaluations of culture elements as the most likely outcome of attempts to comprehend information about the world is caused by differences in the conceptualization and categorization of information by interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds, as well as by differences in methods and means of profiling information perceived in the same time-space continuum by holders of different cultural identities.

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