

Cultural Differences In Communication Styles Between Russian And Chinese: As Predictors Of Critical Incidents

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Abstrak

Terdapat 16000 mahasiswa Tionghoa yang belajar di Rusia per tahun yang mengalami berbagai kesulitan karena perbedaan budaya Rusia dan Tionghoa. dan membangun asimilator budaya bagi mahasiswa Cina yang belajar di Rusia. Ada lima tahap konstruksi asimilator budaya: pemilihan situasi konflik, konstruksi insiden kritis, pemilihan atribusi, konstruksi “atribusi yang salah”, konstruksi asimilator budaya. Tahap pertama pengembangan asimilator budaya, analisis literatur, telah dilakukan yang mengungkapkan 10 perbedaan antara gaya komunikasi Rusia dan Cina yang dapat memprediksi insiden kritis. 10 perbedaan ini harus digunakan dalam menyusun panduan wawancara untuk mengkonfirmasi apakah insiden kritis yang ditentukan secara teoritis dapat terjadi dalam kehidupan nyata.

Kata Kunci: Asimilator Budaya, Insiden Kritis, Gaya Komunikasi, Budaya Rusia, Budaya Cina

Abstract

There are 16000 Chinese students studying in Russia per year who experience various difficulties because of the differences between Russian and Chinese cultures.. The study aims to examine the differences between Russian and Chinese communication styles, to predict potential critical incidents on the basis of such differences and to construct the culture assimilator for Chinese students studying in Russia. There are five stages of a culture assimilator construction: selection of conflict situations, construction of critical incidents, selection of attributions, construction of “wrong attributions”, construction of a culture assimilator. The first stage of a culture assimilator development, literature analysis, has done which revealed 10 differences between Russian and Chinese communication styles which can predict critical incidents. These 10 differences should be used in composing the interview guide to confirm if theoretically determined critical incidents can happen in real life.

Keywords: Culture Assimilator, Critical Incidents, Communication Style, Russian Culture, Chinese Culture

PENDAHULUAN

Russia and China has a long story of relationship and cooperation. In 2001 Vladimir Putin and Jiang Zemin signed “The Convention of Good-Neighbourly Relations and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation” which is supposed to last for twenty years. Strategic partnership between Russia and China in the field of academia leads to increasing numbers of Chinese students who come to study in Russia. According to Areviev (2014), there was around 16 000 Chinese students studying in Russia in 2013 and during the next years even more students are expected to come. Chinese students who come to study in Russia find themselves in a new challenging cultural environment. A number of cultural theories (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1990; Schwartz, 1992; Trompenaars, 1993) argue that despite the fact that both Russian and Chinese cultures are collectivistic, they still differ significantly in many dimensions. That may explain the reasons why Chinese students experience difficulties during their stay in Russia.

Developing of a culture assimilator for Chinese students studying in Russia is an important practical aim of this study. Culture assimilators, which include descriptions of difficult situations occurring in cross-cultural interactions leading to misunderstanding (so called critical incidents) and explanation of such misunderstandings, are one of the most popular and effective methods of trainings preparing sojourners for life in a foreign country (Bhawuk, 2001). There are no studies dedicated to culture assimilators in Russian cultural context so such a research can serve as a useful base for future investigations.

Most of theoretically based culture assimilators were composed using the theory of individualism and collectivism by Triandis (1990). Since both Russia and China are collectivistic countries the individualism-collectivism theory doesn't seem to be suitable for our research purposes. Moreover, some researchers argue that in some conditions Chinese people can behave as collectivists whereas in other conditions they can demonstrate individualistic behavior (Fang, Faure, 2011). According to Chen (2001, 2002), Western world regards culture as a number of dichotomies, for example, collectivist versus individualist, feminine versus masculine, implicit versus explicit etc. Whereas Chinese view assumes that culture is an integral unite where different cultural aspects don't contradict each other but coexist peacefully as a combination of Ying and Yang (Chen, 2001, 2002). Therefore, it seems to be inappropriate to use Western culture theories (such as Hofstede, Triandis, Schwartz etc.) as a basement for a culture assimilator for Chinese students in Russia. Using of “emic” approach, i.e. examining differences between Russian and Chinese communication style and analyzing scientific literature in terms of cultural differences between China and Russia, seems to be more appropriate for our research purposes.

The research questions of this study are: what are the differences between Russian and Chinese communication styles? Which of these differences predict possible critical incidents?

METHOD

The method used in this research is literature study, namely a study whose object of research is in the form of library works, either in the form of journals or journals scientific articles, books, articles in the mass media, and statistical data. Literature will be used to

answer the research problems posed by the author in this case is the differences between Russian and Chinese communication styles to predict critical incidents, how to overcome it, As for the nature of the studies that carried out is descriptive analysis that is providing education and understanding to readers, and the type of data used in this study is secondary data.

Result and disscussion

The concept of culture assimilator

Cross-cultural training serves as an essential tool which helps people to adjust in another culture, that is why many researchers have been developing such a method in various directions for many years (Bhawuk, 2001). The literature analysis of cross-cultural trainings demonstrates that social scientists consider culture assimilators as one of the most convenient and developed instrument in cross-cultural trainings (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000; Landis & Bhagat, 1996), which efficacy and practical advantages were confirmed by various studies (Bhawuk, 1998; Harrison, 1992; Landis, Brislin, & Hulgus, 1985).

According to Bhawuk (2001), culture assimilator is the collection of real-life scenarios describing critical incidents (puzzling cross-cultural interactions) and explanation for avoiding misunderstandings.

Culture assimilator consists of critical incidents which are short stories about some cases of misunderstanding or conflict situations occurred in intercultural communication and caused by cultural differences (Wight, 1995). Since critical incidents are caused by differences between cultures, finding such differences would help in developing a number of critical incidents for a culture assimilator. Flanagan (1954) says that critical incidents should be easy to understand and provide full information about intercultural misunderstanding. In order to meet such requirements, culture assimilators should contain the following issues: (1) interpersonal attitudes which demonstrate how different cultures are from each other; (2) the cultural norms of the home culture; (3) the cultural values which contradict with each other; and (4) a number of settings and social contexts that people find themselves in the real life, such as school, work, shops etc. (Fiedler et al., 1971).

There are a few types of culture assimilators: culture-specific, general and theory-based assimilators. Culture assimilator has served as a successful training instrument for many years so a lot of culture-specific assimilators were constructed by various researches (Triandis, 1995; Tolbert, 1990; Vink, 1989). There was a suggestion to develop a culture general assimilator (Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie, & Yong, 1986) and such an assimilator was constructed. It was used as a training tool for people who are going to live in another culture helping to understand cross-cultural differences regardless of the country they are going to visit. However, in a general assimilator culture theories describing various cultural dimensions were not used (such as individualism and collectivism, high- and low-context cultures etc.). Bhawuk (1998) suggested to use the theory of individualism and collectivism by Triandis (1990) in general culture assimilator because it could explain and predict social behaviors in various cultures and, after all, to add new knowledge to the scientific field of cross-cultural training development. Such an assimilator, based on the theory of

individualism and collectivism, was constructed, and its effectiveness was confirmed empirically (Bhawuk, 1998).

We assume that cultural theories describing differences between cultures by cultural dimensions (such as individualism and collectivism, power distance etc.) would be inappropriate for a specific Russian-Chinese cultural assimilator because these countries mostly share scores by the same dimensions though they still differ in many other ways.

According to Triandis (1994), development of a theoretically based culture assimilator requires the review of anthropological literature which examines the target culture. The researcher should also analyse published resources in social sciences dedicated to the target culture, and mass media might be also reviewed as it can be useful for intercultural misunderstandings and potential conflicts identification. Triandis (1984) also suggested that a bicultural person who has a deep knowledge of both target and home cultures take part in a culture assimilator construction. Following his recommendation, we can assume that theoretically-based assimilator can be constructed using other sources apart from individualism-collectivism theory. There is no fixed number of topics for a specific assimilator as a number of critical incidents and their content may vary depending on cultures the assimilator is made for (Bhawuk, 2001).

Bhawuk (2001) argues that the main advantage of culture specific assimilators is providing a specific circumstances which may help sojourners to understand and learn behaviors of a new culture better, however the main disadvantage is the absence of a scientifically based explanations of cultural differences. We suggest to overcome such a weakness by using analysis of differences between Russian and Chinese communication styles examined in the scientific literature. Differences between Chinese and Russian social norms and values might have served as a solid basis for theoretical framework of a culture assimilator, however these concepts don't explain specific behavior patterns and it's difficult to verify empirically their connection with conflicts and misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, we suggest to use communication style as a main concept of theoretical framework for the culture-specific assimilator since such a concept reflects various types of behavior in real-life situations and can reveal potential critical incidents in cross-cultural communication.

Approaches to the study of culture and communication

The researchers define two main approaches when they investigate the subject of culture and communication: emic and etic (Gudykunst, 1997). The emic approach is used for describing specific features which can be found only inside of a certain culture and which don't belong to other cultures whereas the etic approach is used for comparison of a number of cultures on a certain parameters (for example, power distance, individualism and collectivism, long or short term time orientation etc.).

Etic approach was used by many researchers developing various cultural dimensions (Hofstede, Triandis, Bond and Leung etc.). We are not going to use these theories as Russian and Chinese cultures are similar in many positions according to these dimensions (for example, both of them are collectivists and have high power distance).

There is no single classification of communication styles for all the cultures. Lebedeva (2014) argues there are four dimensions of verbal communication style:

1. Direct and indirect.
2. Elaborate and succinct.
3. Personal and contextual.
4. Instrumental and affective.

Hall (1976) regarded cultures as low- and high-context in terms of communication. Low-context communication style suggested that information were coded and spread through explicit means (for example, words) whereas in high-context communication information is provided by implicit means or context which should be decoded and internalized by the person (Hall, 1976).

Altman and Gauvain (1981) studied the relationship among culture, human behavior, and home environment, proposing a dialectical perspective to the study of the three constructs.

They suggest that there are two dimensions which define how people from a certain culture interact with the environment: the identity-communality dimension and the accessibility-inaccessibility dimension.

The identity-communality dimension shows how personal identity is related with family and other people, their bonds and relationships, the structure of society in terms of the place of the individual in it.

The accessibility-inaccessibility dimension reflects how opened or closed the home environment is to outsiders, how easily an outsider can become a part of community.

The two-dimensional grid model describes four nonverbal styles: unique-explicit nonverbal style, unique-implicit nonverbal style, group-explicit nonverbal style and group-implicit nonverbal style.

Unique-explicit nonverbal style is a type of nonverbal behavior used to regulate individual privacy, as well as the use of expressive nonverbal gestures to signal immediacy, potency, and responsiveness.

Unique-implicit nonverbal style is used to protect individual privacy and at the same time for expressing gestures and actions to demonstrate liking and high power distance.

Group-explicit nonverbal style is used to support social norms and public face and express nonverbal gestures to show openness, activity and responsiveness.

Group-implicit style related to nonverbal behaviors used to support social norms and public face and yet to demonstrate relational liking and power distance.

Emic aspects of Chinese culture and communication style were examined by many researchers (Gao et al., 1996; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998, Chen 2008, 2009, Chen & An, 2009). We are going to use the results of their investigations for analysis of possible critical incidents.

There are very few studies dedicated to communication behaviors in Russian culture. There are studies which compare Russian and Western management styles which include some information about Russian communication style (Vollmer and Wolf, 2015, Puffer, 1994) and well-known business literature containing information about Russian culture (Lewis,

1996). We are going to use all the sources of information mentioned above for describing and analyzing Russian communication style.

Despite the fact that emic and etic approaches are regarded as opposite in scientific literature, they still might be combined. Triandis (1972) argues that emic and etic approaches should be integrated as it would improve the quality of a culture assimilator significantly. Since there are no studies which compare Russian and Chinese communication styles and analyse interaction between people from these countries we are going to follow Triandis's recommendation and combine emic and etic data because it would be useful for our research purposes. We are not going to follow a single theory or classification, instead we suggest to consider such theories and emic aspects of both cultures which would help us to find potential misunderstandings and critical incidents between Chinese and Russian people.

Chinese communication style

First of all, we would like to examine general characteristics of Chinese communication style (etic approaches) and then to describe its specific aspects (emic approaches).

Chinese verbal communication style can be described by Lebedeva's (2014) classification of verbal communication styles:

1. Indirect (verbal messages that hide and suppress speakers' desires, for example, their purposes, expectations and intentions in communication).
2. Succinct (the use of understatements, pauses, and silences in everyday conversation).
3. Contextual (the use of verbal means to express the position in community, such as role, status, gender etc.).
4. Affective (the receiver-oriented language usage).

Nonverbal communication style in China can be described as group-implicit according to the classification by Altman and Gauvain (1981). It means that Chinese people tend to pay attention to social norms and public face while and operate with implicit means of behavior to show relational liking and power distance.

Emic aspects of Chinese and Russian communication styles were explored by many researchers. Gao and colleagues (1996, 1998) examined cultural features related to Chinese Confucian tradition. They defined five characteristics of Chinese communication style (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Gao et al., 1996): implicit communication (*hanxu*), listening-centered communication (*tinghua*), polite communication (*keqi*), insider-communication (*zijiren*), and face-directed communication (*mianzi*).

1. Implicit communication (hanxu)

Hanxi suggests a type of communication (both verbal and nonverbal) which is indirect, discreet, implicit, concealed. According to this principle, one should not express all his intentions and needs directly but to give the listeners space to guess and interpret his intentions. The listener should be able to understand the "unspoken" by himself (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

2. Listening-centered communication (tinghua)

Tinghua can be interpreted as "listen talks." In Chinese culture it is important to be an active listener. Speaker is a privileged role in many conditions which usually belongs to the most respected members of society. That is why speaking is associated with authority,

wisdom, power, high status and knowledge. This sort of attitude leads to considering listening as the main and salient part of the conversation (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

3. *Polite communication (keqi)*

The word keqi can be translated as “behavior of guest” or somebody who behaves in a polite, humble, understanding and nice manner (Yao, 1983). Chinese people behave in accordance with the keqi principle in their daily life. Keqi might be expressed in a different way depending on the communication with in-group or out-group members. Being modest and humble is one of the most important Chinese values which is reflected in keqi principle (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998).

4. *Insider-communication (zijiren)*

In Chinese language zijiren is translated as “insiders” (verus wairen “outsiders”). For Chinese people it’s easy to start and keep conversation with their in-group members whereas they usually avoid communication with out-group members who are perceived as strangers (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). The status of the interlocutor – insider or outsider – is salient in Chinese culture and the language and style of communication depends in that status (Gao et al., 1996).

5. *Face-directed communication (mianzi)*

Supporting the face (mianzi, lian) is a salient characteristic of Chinese communication style which shows the respect to another person and keeps his or her status and self-esteem (Hu, 1944). Face is related with both personal characteristics of the individual and his or her in-group membership, business and relation with in-group members. Since Chinese culture has relationship orientation and collectivistic values, face is an essential part of Chinese communication style (Gao et al., 1996).

According to Lewis (2006), Chinese communication has the following characteristics:

1. Hierarchy is important, behavior is according to the rank. During formal meetings they prefer to be formal, they dress according to their status, they sit according to their hierarchy. The senior man must be shown great respect. Subordinates are not allowed to make decisions.
2. The pace of negotiations is slow. The process of negotiation goes step by step. They dedicate a lot of time just to form and develop relationship with their new partners.
3. Saving face behavior. Confrontation must be avoided. Politeness with everybody is a must, though they prefer arm’s length politeness.
4. Chinese never say direct “no”, they only hint at difficulties. They are not straight-forward.
5. Decisions and relationships have long-term orientation. They prioritize mutual trust in the long-term and show reliability.
6. They express generosity with the guests. Gift-giving is an important feature in social relationships. Gifts are given according to the rank as well.
7. The Chinese don’t believe in absolute, scientific truth, they prefer harmony of Ying and Yang.
8. They consider themselves extremely experienced, knowledgeable and shrewd.
9. They don’t show anger or upset.
10. They don’t ignore other people in their presence at the meeting.
11. Modesty is an important value in Chinese culture. They never boast.

12. Chinese have respect for privacy when possible and maintain a distance of more than one meter in conversation.
13. Chinese are extremely punctual and avoid of wasting anyone's time.

Russian communication style

At first, we would like to examine general characteristics of Russian communication style (etic approaches) and then to describe its specific aspects (emic approaches).

Russian verbal communication style can be described by Lebedeva's (2014) classification of verbal communication styles:

1. Direct mostly (verbal messages that express speakers' desires, for example, their purposes, expectations and intentions in communication). Though in formal situations Russians tend to use mostly indirect language.
2. Exacting style (information is provided in a way which is neither overwhelmed nor lacking, just something that is necessary in a certain situation).
3. Contextual (the use of verbal means to express the position in community, such as role, status, gender etc.).
4. Instrumental (the language usage which is sender-oriented).

Nonverbal communication style in Russia according to the classification by Altman and Gauvain (1981) has two contextual characteristics: in formal situations it tend to be group-implicit (expressions of saving face, behavior according to the rang and power distance) and in informal situations it tend to be group-explicit (nonverbal gestures to signal immediacy, potency, and responsiveness).

Zhang (2013) describes Russian people from the Chinese perspective as brave, persistent and dauntless. According to him, Russians share the following characteristics:

1. Russian tend to forget about small things but care about important things. They worry about the development of Russia and can face challenges when the situation becomes critical.
2. Brave spirit is a salient part of Russian culture and Russians raise their children to be fearless. Along with that, Russians is a proud nation and it's difficult for them to admit mistakes.
3. Russians tend to avoid praising foreign things and other countries. They are stubborn and have sensitive self-esteem.
4. Russians don't like smooth and gentle approach to solving problems, they prefer to take extreme actions.
5. Politeness in an important part of Russian culture. They are usually attentive to manners and men care about women, for example, they let ladies first when they enter a room (Zhu Daqiu, 2009).

Zhang (2013) argues there are some characteristics of Russian communication which may cause misunderstandings and conflicts in interaction with Chinese people:

1. Russian are more focused on logic and verbal expression of their ideas while Chinese are more concentrated on intuition, harmony and integrity.

2. Russian culture is more individualistic and, therefore, individual judgment and personal interest predominates there. Whereas Chinese culture is more collectivistic so Chinese people value adaptation to different circumstances and dominance of collective.

According to Lewis (2009), Russian communication style has the following characteristics:

1. Russians can't accept changes or new ideas easily as they should be approved by authorities.
2. Russians tend to treat compromising as a weakness and, thus, compromising rarely.
3. They tend to wait until the problem will be solved by itself or by someone else.
4. They push forward if the other side retreats.
5. Communication style is emotional. They like to stress human side: emotions, hopes and aspirations. They like to talk about private life and soul-searching philosophy. They also like express kindness, humanity and sympathy.
6. Authority and status are important. They respect old people.
7. Their approach to agreement is conceptual, not step-by-step.
8. Personal relationships can solve problems. They appreciate personal recommendations instead of official directive.
9. They prefer long-term relationship, mutually beneficial. They are people-oriented.
10. They want to preserve their face. They are sensitive to any signs of contempt because they are proud people.
11. They are not egalitarian, fair and open to straight-forward debate.
12. When they touch another person it's a sign of confidence.
13. They rebel in case of too much pressure.

Bergelson (2003) describes politeness related issues of Russian communication style by comparing them with Americans. According to her, Russian communication style has the following characteristics:

1. They express positive politeness (support of the face).
2. They express emotions without hesitation.
3. Their communication style is direct with familiars because it is associated with sincerity.
4. They use different language styles depending on the type of relationship with a person. They have a lot of linguistic means to express warmth and closeness for people they love.
5. They can preface corrections with negative remarks.
6. They can show patronizing attitude.
7. Friends are considered as intimates.
8. They don't show politeness to strangers.
9. Apologizing is the expression of compassion (not taking responsibility) for Russians.
10. Communication style is not targeted at teaching consensus. Their speech often starts with "no" even when Russians agree with another person.
11. They give advices instead of giving information they were asked for, especially between equals. This is another example of patronizing attitude.

12. They don't provide information without additional urging. Even being provided, the information may be inexplicit and incomplete. You have to ask many questions to get the information.
13. They mistrust of "objective truth", novelty, preference to old ways of doing things.
14. They can do several different things at a time which might be regarded as bad listening habits.

Predictors of critical incidents

Analysis and comparison of Russian and Chinese communication styles allow us to reveal some differences between them which might cause potential misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication and also serve as material for critical incidents in culture assimilator.

First, according to Lebedeva's (2014) classification of communication styles, Chinese style is indirect, succinct and affective, while Russian style is direct, exacting and instrumental. It may cause the following misunderstandings:

1. Chinese people tend to express their needs and intentions indirectly so it might be difficult for Russians to understand their true intentions.
2. Pauses and silence in Chinese speech might be misinterpreted by Russians as intention to stop conversation, lack of interest or any other explanation which is incorrect.
3. Chinese orientation to the receiver of information might be misinterpreted by Russians as weakness, shyness or secretiveness.

Second, according to according to the classification of nonverbal communication by Altman and Gauvain (1981) Chinese communication style is group-implicit and Russian style can be group-explicit in informal settings. Such difference might lead to misinterpretation in informal communication as Russian people might consider Chinese to be too formal and lacking of emotional responsiveness.

Third, analysis of various emic aspects and characteristics of both Chinese and Russian communication styles allows us to determine a number of differences which might predict potential critical incidents in Chinese-Russian communication:

1. Expression of emotions. Russian people prefer emotional communication style as it is associated with sincerity in Russian culture whereas Chinese prefer arm's length politeness and discreet style. Therefore, Russian might think that Chinese people are insincere and try to hide their real intentions, or not interested in communication at all. Also Chinese people usually don't express negative emotions while Russians do that quite often which might lead to conflicts.
2. Expression of disagreement. Russian people don't hesitate to express their opinion using negative remarks with is impossible for Chinese people. Chinese people might misinterpret such a situation as rude behavior of Russians or deliberate insult whereas Russians might regards Chinese as insecure and weak.
3. Expression of agreement. Russian people often start their speech with "no" even if they agree with the interlocutor. Chinese people might misinterpret "no" as a real disagreement in such situation.
4. Receiving information. Russian people in formal settings (especially with officials) don't provide information without additional urging which Chinese people are not aware of. It

- might be difficult for Chinese people to behave pro-active in a conversation and to ask many questions in order to get all the necessary information.
5. Compromising. Chinese avoid confrontation in communication whereas Russians like to push forward if the other side retreats. It might be difficult for Chinese people to defend their interests in communication with Russians.
 6. Gift-giving. In both Russian and Chinese cultures gift-giving is an important part of social relationship. However inappropriate gifts might cause social awkwardness and misunderstandings because Chinese and Russians are not aware of gift-giving traditions of each other.
 7. Modest behavior. Chinese people demonstrate modest behavior as wiliness to adapt to collective interests while Russians demonstrate more independent behavior and express personal interests more openly. Therefore, Russians might not notice Chinese interests at all whereas Chinese might regard Russians' behavior as egoistic and insincere.
 8. Distance in communication. Chinese people maintain distance of more than one meter in conversation and don't touch each other. Russians can touch another person as a sign of confidence. Such a sign of confidence might cause psychological discomfort to Chinese people whereas Russians might be offended because their trust was not appreciated.
 9. Time. Chinese people are usually punctual. Punctuality of Russians might depend on their status, people with high status can be late to show their power. Chinese people might consider such behavior to be rude.
 10. Problem solving. Russians tend to solve problems in extreme ways whereas Chinese appreciate harmony, intuition and integrity. Therefore, Chinese might think that Russians as inflexible and harsh and Russians might think that Chinese don't know what they really want.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of Chinese and Russian communication styles shows that they differ in many dimensions. We determined and described a number of such differences which can predict potential critical incidents:

1. Expression of emotions.
2. Expression of disagreement.
3. Expression of agreement.
4. Receiving information.
5. Compromising.
6. Gift-giving.
7. Modest behavior.
8. Distance in communication
9. Time.
10. Problem solving.

All potential critical incidents were determined theoretically on the basis of literature analysis.

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