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CULTURAL TRANSFER IN THE PRESENTATION OF SELF

The subject of the paper is cultural transfer. It is transfer of native culture interactional norms and social values. It involves also transfer of the strategies of self- and other-face maintenance. Although cultural transfer, unlike pragmatic transfer, is very difficult to detect, it can effect L2 learners' communication in L2 culture setting. The aim of this study is to analyse some cases of negative transfer of Polish face-maintenance strategies in the production of Polish learners of English as a second language. From the early childhood we are told how to behave, what to do or not to do. We learn how to perform even the most simple conventional acts, such as greeting, introducing oneself, or expressing gratitude, by observing how others do it, by listening to those others as models, and by noting the reactions of others to our performance and changing our behaviour accordingly (Corson, 1995). In this way we acquire the knowledge of interactional norms operating as regular modes of interaction in our culture.

1. Culture

The concept of *culture* is central for the studies of cross-linguistic and cross--cultural communication. It helps researchers understand the nature of social interaction. *Culture* is a very vague and broad term, defined in many different ways. For Lado (1957) it is "synonymous with the "ways of a people"", a structured system of patterned behaviour. But, certainly, there is much more to it. Ronowicz (1995: 2) defines *culture* in the following way:

> Culture in its broadest sense is a comprehensive view of a society's history. It encompasses politics, economics, social history, philosophy, science and technology, education, the arts, religion and customs, which can be studied either as they have developed over a long period of time in history or as they are or were at a given point of time. Culture includes the spiritual aspect of a society, embracing its ideological, artistic and religious trends. It is also its everyday life, including day-to-day activities, entertainment, fashions, living conditions, family and social relations, customs, beliefs, morality, behavioural patterns and rituals. Social consciousness is also part of culture expressed in the language, as are social values, art, institutions and organisations of a given society.

The aspects of culture that constitute a conceptual basis for the present study are social relations, morality, and social values, as they strongly influence the way members of a given culture behave, in other words, they play a very important role in the formation of behavioural patterns and interactional norms.

Social relations are part of social life which differs across cultures. The character of these relations depends on the role of an individual perceived in a given culture. Individualism-collectivism is the primary dimension that differentiates cultures in this respect.

Individualism "refers to the broad value tendencies of a system in emphasizing the importance of individual identity over group identity, individual rights over group rights, and individual needs over group needs" (Ting-Toomey, 1994: 314). *Individualistic cultures* (such as those in Australia, the United States) draw up the "I" identity as the prime focus, they are concerned with the authenticity of self-presentation style, they value autonomy, choices, and negative-face need (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Collectivism "refers to the broad value tendencies of a system in emphasizing the importance of the "we" identity over the "I" identity" (Ting-Toomey, 1994: 314). *Collectivistic cultures* (such as those in Japan and China) are concerned with the adaptability of self-presentation image, they value group goals over individual goals, interdependence, reciprocal obligations, and positive-face need (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Morality. "For Habermas (1975) interaction is the dialectic of the moral life; claims of right and wrong are implicit in all modes of communication" (after Penman, 1994: 22). The idea of right and wrong is central to the generation of a person's self-image. In Chinese culture there are two concepts of face, which are based on two distinct sets of criteria for judging human behaviour. The second understanding of the concept (*lian*) "represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community" (Hu, 1944: 45; after Ho, 1975). It is "both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction" (ibid.). Certainly, the criteria for the judgement of the moral worth differ across cultures.

Social values are attitudes or interests that people in a cultural group cherish for their own sake, or cherish instrumentally as something that is essential to the maintenance of the group itself (Corson, 1995). They provide guidance for human activities. Cultures "do not differ in kinds of values but in their intensity, salience and degree of importance attached to them" (Lubecka, 2000:37). Thus, "what is at issue is not just different cultural values. (...) The crucial fact is that different pragmatic norms reflect different hierarchies of values characteristic of different cultures" (Wierzbicka, 1991:61). These differences are also reflected in language. "The fact that two speakers whose sentences are quite grammatical can differ radically in their interpretation of each other's verbal strategies indicates that conversational management does rest on linguistic knowledge" (Gumperz, 1985:185–186).

Social values often translate into *interactional norms*, which determine communicative behaviour of members of a given culture.

2. Self-presentation

The concept of *self* presented by an individual in particular social interactions is called *face*. It is used in much the same way almost in every culture. Thus, many researchers consider it universal, although "its component elements differ in significance according to culture and societal context" (Earley, 1997: 37; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 1994; Jakubowska, 2006).

We can distinguish between "face tied to rules of conduct" and "face as a position in a social hierarchy" (Earley, 1997:55). In this sense, it is the image of self created on the basis of judgements concerning a person's adherence to moral rules of conduct and position within a given social structure. These judgements are both internal and external to the individual, as face reflects an interaction of self and others' perceptions and attributions (ibid.). It is not what one thinks of oneself, but what one thinks others should think of one's worth" (Lim, 1994:210). The claim for face does not necessarily refer to the real opinions of others, but to the manifested opinions of others. "In other words, the bottom line of face want is "no matter what you really think of me, you must act as if you respected me," so that the projected image can be preserved" (ibid.: 210). Thus, face is a public property, determined by the participation of others and earned through social interaction (Goffman, 1967; Lim and Bowers, 1991, Mao, 1994; Jakubowska, 2006).

Lim says that "face is in terms of social values" (1994:210, Goffman, 1967), and it is as complex as the value system of a society. Goffman (1967:5) defines face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself" or "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes". So face is focused only on the positive social values, and it differs across cultures as systems of values do (Lim, 1994).

To gain and maintain our own face (*self-face*) and the face of other participants (*other-face*) we engage in *facework* involving verbal and non-verbal action. Facework strategies are used to "diffuse, manage, enhance, or downgrade self and/or other's face" (Ting-Toomey, 1994). While there is no doubt that the concept of face is universal, facework strategies are both culture and language-specific (cf. ibid.).

3. Second culture acquisition

Second language acquisition does not involve only the mastery of L2 linguistic patterns of behaviour, which would not ensure effective communication in the target language. What is necessary to achieve is communicative competence, or *sociolinguistic competence* (a narrower term). Hymes (1972, 1977) sees it not only as a knowledge of abstract rules for understanding and producing referential and social meaning of language. He stresses also the importance of "the rules of speaking", the patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour (e.g. knowing how to open and close a conversation, knowing which address forms should be used) (cf. Chomsky, 1980; Sajavaara, 1981; Saville--Troike, 1982; Gumperz, 1985). Important is also the knowledge of the social norms

and hierarchy of values of the target language culture. Edmondson (1981) introduces the concept of *social competence*, reflected in the use to which the speaker puts his communicative competence in a conversation "to achieve goals without endangering face" (ibid.:7; cf. Oleksy, 1980; Richards and Sukwiwat, 1983; Canale, 1993), i.e. without violating the norms stating what is and what is not socially acceptable behaviour.

This knowledge is very often neglected both by second language teachers and learners. This is due to the fact that it is considered to be of secondary importance both in the second language acquisition and in cross-cultural communication. Another reason for neglecting it is the difficulty in the perception of this knowledge application in second language communication settings. Besides, knowing social norms and values of the target language culture and being aware of differences between native and target cultures may not stop L2 learners from unconsciously transferring native speech patterns and cultural values (Liu, 1995).

"Second language learning in some respects involves the acquisition of a second identity" (Brown, 1986:33). By analogy to the native culture situation, in the target culture situation the L2 learner should create his self-image according to the norms and values of the target language culture. Unfortunately, L2 learners very often concentrate on the grammatical correctness of their utterances and the appropriateness of the chosen speech act realisation patterns, neglecting completely the so-called "deep-structure" social differences between the native and target cultures and transferring native interactional norms and social values. This may cause conflicts or even breakdowns in cross-cultural communication.

4. Cultural transfer

Transfer plays an important role in shaping *interlanguage* (IL). The occurrence of transfer has also been noted at the pragmatic level. *Pragmatic transfer* is viewed "as transfer of L1 cultural communicative competence in performing L2 speech acts or any other aspects of L2 conversation, where the speaker is trying to achieve a particular function of language" (Beebe *et al.*, 1990:56). Pragmatic transfer has been examined by many researchers (Bloom-Kulka, 1982; Beebe *et al.*, 1992; Maeshiba *et al.*, 1993; Takahashi and Beebe, 1993, Jakubowska, 1997), they addressed mostly differences in speech act realisation patterns (e.g. different strategies used to express gratitude, to apologise, or to pay compliments). These differences are easily observable, and so is the transfer of speech act realisation patterns, called by Liu (1995) *"surface-structure" sociocultural transfer.* Liu (ibid.) differentiates this kind of transfer from *"deep-structure" sociocultural transfer* (called here *cultural transfer*).

Cultural transfer is the transfer of native culture interactional norms and social values. It involves also the transfer of the strategies of self- and other-face maintenance. Although cultural transfer, unlike pragmatic transfer, is very difficult to detect, it can effect L2 learners' communication in L2 culture setting.

5. Face maintenance in L2 culture

Even people who have studied the target language and been exposed to its culture for quite a long time may transfer the strategies of self- and other-face maintenance from their native language. This happens also to Poles learning English as a second language.

Cultural transfer, like other types of transfer, may be positive or negative. Positive cultural transfer is almost completely unobservable and results from similarities between the native and target cultures, and has positive effects on the production of second language learners. While negative transfer results from differences between the cultures, and has negative effects on the production of second language learners. This kind of transfer will be discussed here.

The aim of this study is to analyse some cases of negative transfer of Polish face-maintenance strategies in the production of Polish learners of English as a second language.

The main reason for the occurrence of this kind of transfer in the fact that Polish culture and, generally understood, Anglo-Saxon culture, even though both being part of European culture, differ a lot in the hierarchies of values they cherish and the norms they adhere to.

6. A comparison of Polish and Anglo-Saxon cultures

Polish culture is *collectivistic*. It values respect, interdependence, reciprocal obligations, emotionality, intimacy, modesty and positive-face need (Lubecka, 2000; Wierzbicka, 1991).

Respect is marked by large power distance and the ascribed status. It is achieved by the use of appropriate forms of address, the number and intensity of politeness expressions, "the speakers' nearly self-effacing presence in requests and apologies to superiors (age, gender and status)", and age- and status-oriented politeness (Lubecka, 2000:54).

Emotionality, derived from femininity, is expressed as genuine expression of feelings, sincere interest in the interlocutors' life, spontaneity, high value put on relationships (importance of friendship and family), hospitality (invitations, party rituals) and directness of self-expression (ibid.).

Modesty is marked by lack of self-confidence visible in the responses to compliments (most often they are played down), "timidity and lack of assertiveness visible in the way self-presentations are made and compliments are received (inappropriateness of stressing one's virtues and successes)" (ibid.: 54–55).

Positive-face need is in conflict with modesty, but to a certain extent they are complementary. Positive-face need is expressed by means of different positive face--saving devices, such as compliments and congratulations on the interlocutor's appearance, possessions, good work, achievements, expressions of gratitude and good wishes.

Anglo-Saxon culture is *individualistic.* It values individuality, autonomy, choices, respect rooted in the conviction of equality of people, moderate emotionality, promotion of success and of solidarity, and negative-face need (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Lubecka, 2000).

These differences in the values cherished in these two cultures help us understand the reasons for the occurrence of cultural transfer of Polish face-maintenance strategies in the production of Polish learners of English as a second language.

7. Cultural transfer of Polish face-maintenance strategies in the production of Polish learners of English as a second language

This study is based on introspection and on a long term observation of advanced learners of English as a second language, students of English at the University of Silesia, and other Polish users English, possessing a very good command of this language.

The majority of differences arising from cultural transfer were noticed in the ways Polish speakers of English express requests, criticism, disagreement, opinions, express emotions and feelings, talk about their achievements, respond to compliments, congratulations and to how-are-you-type questions, and express food offers and respond to them.

As Searle (1979:6) claims "(...) ordinary conversational requirements of politeness normally make it awkward to issue flat imperatives or explicit performatives". In Anglo-Saxon culture people choose indirect requests to avoid the threat both to self-face and other-face. In spite of the fact that most of advanced Polish learners know about that, they tend to utter direct requests (see examples 1 and 2).

(1) *Open the door, dear.*
(2) *Open this box, please.*

Criticism is for the person criticized a threat to his positive face. Criticising somebody we let him know that we do not approve of his behaviour or do not like any of his characteristic features, or any of his belongings. Deserved or not criticism may cause an offence. Direct criticism does not give the person criticised the choice to interpret it in a different way, that is why to be polite and not to threaten his positive face openly people resort to indirect criticism. This is true both in Anglo-Saxon and Polish culture. However, the Poles tend to be more direct and their utterances are easier to interpret as words of criticism.

Even though advanced Polish learners of English perform indirect acts of criticism in Polish and know that they are performed indirectly in English, in their English production they use the simplest direct forms. Thus confirming the stereotype of the rude and irrational Pole (see examples 3 and 4).

(3) *I don't like the way you treat him.*
(4) *You spoiled our party.*

The same tendency can be observed in the situations when Polish learners of English express opinions (example 5) and disagreement (example 6–8). In this case they follow the pattern of behaviour based on sincerity, highly cherished in Polish culture. It is much more valued than face. As Ronowicz (1995) says, when people do not agree about a point, they do not "beat about the bush" in Polish. However, in more formal situations disagreement may be expressed in a more polite ("more indirect") way. This is also visible in the Polish learners' production in English.

(5) *I'm absolutely sure that she was lying.*
(6) *No!*
(7) *I don't agree!*
(8) *It's nonsense!*

Polish learners of English express emotions and feelings and talk about their achievements in a different way that Anglo-Saxons. The general rules of politeness in the case of responses to **compliments** and **congratulations**, on the one hand require that the receiver should agree with the compliment, while on the other hand require that he should avoid self-praise (cf. Owen, 1983). In Polish culture the second requirement is of higher priority, being in accordance with the maxim of modesty (cf. Leech, 1983). Self-praise avoiding responses are prevalent, especially those which downgrade the praise of the receiver, or which reject the compliment or disagree with its force. However, in recent years Poles (especially the young ones) show a growing tendency to agree with compliments. This is also visible in the production of Polish users of English (Jakubowska, 1999).

Poles complain very often about the insincerity of English conversational routines, especially of the formula **How are you?** and similar ones (e.g. *Nice to see you; Lovely day, isn't it?*) (cf. Braun, 1988:46). These phrases are used either just after the initial greetings or stand for greetings themselves (cf. Goffman, 1981:47). *How are you?* as a conversational opening cannot be treated as a concerned inquiry about H's health. Asking the question S merely complies with the rules of politeness. In Anglo-Saxon culture the answer to this question is expected to be "brief, elusive, and as positive as possible" (Ferrara, 1980:333).

The Polish formulae beginning with *jak tam* and *co* are very similar in their meaning and use to English *How are you?*, but the responses to these questions differ. The Polish responses do not have to be "as positive as possible" at all. On the contrary, there is a strong tendency to downgrade the positive self-report. Such is also the majority of the responses made by Polish users of English. The Polish responses often imply "I am not (quite) well". However, with the political and economic changes in Poland in recent years some Poles have changed also their way of presenting self-image. Their responses to the above-mentioned questions now tend to be more often positive (Jakubowska, 1999).

When it comes to celebrations at which food is served, Poles differ in their behaviour from native speakers of English. Polish **food offers** expressed during parties and various celebrations are very direct. This is connected with the concept of traditional Polish hospitality. Another helping is treated by the host as a must (see also Jakubowska, in press).

(9) *You must have another piece of cake.*
(10) *Try this salad.*

Poles transfer these patterns of behaviour to the English language used in the English culture settings. This kind of behaviour is treated there as an imposition and an attack on the guests' personal freedom. In other words, the autonomy of an individual is threatened (cf. Wierzbicka, 1997; Lubecka, 2000). In Polish culture this kind of imposition is considered very polite.

Polish hosts tend to be very insistent that their guests eat and drink a lot, but it is polite for the guests to turn the offer down with *dziękuję* repeated several times, before accepting it finally. This ritual can be explained by timidity and lack of assertiveness deeply rooted in Polish culture. While English hosts serve their guests once and expect sincere responses, *no, thank you* always means sincere turning down the offer (cf. Klos-Sokol, 1994). Even highly competent Polish users of English fall into the trap and use the Polish ritual in the Anglo-Saxon culture settings.

These are only the most striking instances of the occurrence of cultural transfer of Polish face-maintenance strategies in the production of Polish users of English as a second language.

Conclusions

In all the above-presented situations the occurrence of cultural transfer was caused by differences in social norms and values between the two cultures. The instances of cultural transfer involved also the strategies of self-face and other-face maintenance. Its occurrence was noticed in the case of:
- requests
- expressions of criticisms
- expressions of disagreement
- expressions of opinions
- self-presentation
- responses to compliments and congratulations
- responses to how-are-you-type questions
- food offers and responses to them.

Cultural transfer helps explain why some L2 speakers who possess a very good command of the target language and have pragmatic competence in the language still cannot communicate appropriately in it.

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