SPANISH COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN TEACHING OF SPANISH TO RUSSIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract

When studying Spanish Philology, Russian university students often reach good levels of speaking, writing, and translating. To avoid an inevitable “foreignness” in their everyday Spanish communication skills (which are influenced by their native Russian communicative style), and to develop the abilities necessary to interpret literary texts, it is very important to focus on Spanish communicative strategies. The field of comparative communication studies in Spanish and Russian aims to prevent psychological discomfort and misunderstandings in intercultural interactions.

Culture is connected to communicative strategies in a broad, anthropological sense, and conditions them. Communicative strategies clearly emerge in speech etiquette, as ritualized forms of verbal behavior that are considered polite and socially acceptable. Politeness is a socio-cultural phenomenon with numerous facets revealed by comparative intercultural studies. In terms of contrasts and conflicts between Russian and Spanish communication strategies, we must remember that the Spanish-speaking world is very diverse, encompassing more than 20 countries. Hence, the Spanish communicative style is not a singular phenomenon. On the contrary, it includes various communicative styles and strategies. And it is quite logical. The formation of norms and ritualized rules of communicative strategies, as well as the canons of speech etiquette, influence how nations form, national character, and cultural trends of the linguistic worldview; they also relate to preferences and avoidance in the collective socio-cultural experience. Behavioral prescriptions are projected onto kinetic (gestural) rituals, as well as canons and formulae of speech etiquette. The development of the information society has led to new conventions of verbal communication.

The following communicative situations and their correspondent formulae seem most relevant for intercultural comparisons and teaching:

- Pronominal forms of address and their differences in Spanish-speaking countries.
- High style connotations of vosotros in Latin American Spanish.
- The wide range of the tú address in Spain.
- Lexical forms of address. From a lexical and semantic point of view, nouns used as a form of direct address are universal. These include proper names, kinship terms, zoomorphisms, abstract concepts, age and sex nominations, and professional titles. However, per standard situations and in combination with pronominal forms of address, their distribution in Russian and Spanish usage is unique and worthy of minor commentary.
- Other areas where intercultural interference is more likely to occur include the following:
  - Spanish-speaking people usually perceive Russians as too direct due to the Russian preference of the direct imperative. On the other hand, native Russian speakers tend to find indirect Spanish forms of request misleading.
  - Russians give too much advice.
  - In general, Latin Americans give compliments, especially to a woman they do not know. Russian women usually reject compliments or justify them, saying that the compliment is not true.
  - Spanish-speaking people use forms of address denoting the addressee’s age, sex, and internal and external features more frequently than Russians; meanwhile, Russians apply a wide range of proper name modifications.

Keywords: communicative strategies, Spanish, Russian, politeness, speech etiquette, communicative style, intercultural interactions, translation.
1 INTRODUCTION

The cross-cultural approach examines communicative strategies as socially formed ways of formulation of communicative intentions, thus, giving a fuller picture of their intra- and extra-linguistic peculiarities. One of the very interesting and inexhaustible problems of cross-cultural analysis of a dialogue, is the way in which different speech communities express the same functions and emphasize different ones from the point of view of speech politeness.

In language pedagogy, the knowledge and awareness of speech politeness, its prescriptions and communicative strategic regularities of the language under study, enriches the possibilities for self-expression in the language under study as well as it contributes to avoid misunderstanding and communicative fallacies in intercultural communication. Politeness is a socio-cultural phenomenon with numerous facets revealed only by a comparative intercultural study. While studying any foreign language, the intercultural pragmatic interference is inevitable. Intercultural pragmatic interference is based upon divergences of the rules of conversational interaction and socially approved politeness prescriptions. So, the cross-cultural approach to communicative strategies, enables to foresee and to avoid the intercultural pragmatic interference. The data used in this study were obtained from the modern Russian, the Peninsular Spanish and the Mexican Spanish, as well as from the author's more than 30 years' experience in teaching of Spanish to Russian University students and Spanish-Russian translation experience.

2 METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we use the dialogic approach to communicative strategies based on the analysis of modern discourse by researchers of different types of communication and intercultural interaction [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]. The guiding principle of this study is that of integration and incorporation into a broad cultural context. Objective regularities of Russian and Spanish communicative styles are being approached through their cross-cultural comparison and contrastive analysis. Such essential elements of a dialogue as forms of address, personal pronouns, phatic units, emphasizers, reveal through the contrastive analysis their peculiar verbal manifestations and pragmatic variations of communicative means. Examining in the first instance the dialogues of the traditional situations of speech etiquette as ritualized forms of verbal behavior that are considered polite and socially acceptable, and their corresponding language units, we'll focus on problems at the level of sincerity in the dialogue, means of maintaining contact with the interlocutor and on the tendencies of the usage of the above mentioned universal elements of a dialogue and their incorporation in teaching of Spanish to Russian University students.

3 THE DIALOGIC APPROACH

The outstanding Russian linguist and philosopher M.M. Bakhtin, stated in his magnificent work “The Aesthetics of Verbal Creativity” [6], that in the interactions of cultures one culture puts questions to another one, and due to such questions, one culture opens its depths to another one. Following this dialogical approach, we’ll discuss some aspects which arise during the interaction of Russian and Spanish communicative cultures with a high degree of probability, be it face to face interactions, reading and translating fiction or movies. Such cases of intercultural communication are involving a specific kind of a dialogue, as Mikhail Bakhtin put it “ventriloquizing”. This means that one culture “ventriloquizzes” through the individual voices of the actors in the intercultural communication.

The comparative analysis of Russian and Spanish communicative styles reveals significant differences that can be seen in the structure, vocabulary and ways of conveying meaning within the dialogue and through the communicative strategies. Within a cross-cultural approach to a dialogue, based on Russian and Spanish conversational data, we have proceeded from the ethnical observations proper for the situations of Russian and Spanish communicative cultures interaction.

In addition to the inner language observation and interpretation of communicative styles in both languages, we consider the perception of Spanish communicative culture through Russian eyes and the Russian one through Spanish native speakers’ eyes. Relevance is given to the data related to the translation of dialogical units in fiction.
4 SPANISH AND RUSSIAN VERBAL COMMUNICATION

4.1 General Remarks on Spanish and Russian Communicative Cultures

4.1.1 Spanish Communicative Culture

As the contemporary Spanish Philology perceives the Spanish language as a set of parameters of divergence and convergence, we have to take into account that despite the existence of grammar and vocabulary common standard, each Spanish speaking country has its unique properties of communicative culture. They were formed along with the formation of the Spanish speaking nations and their mentality, reflecting certain speech preferences and prejudices proper to them and sometimes quite differ from each other.

4.1.2 Russian Communicative Culture

Overall, Russians prefer directness. In Russia, the collectivist values have traditionally prevailed, contrary to the Western style with its respect to the individuality and privacy. One of the consequences of the collectivist values is that the individual is usually seen as subordinate to a social group. That’s why, for instance, Russians often seem to the foreigners too direct and rather inflexible in certain communicative contexts.

4.1.3 Pronominal Forms of Address

In grammar resources of both Russian and Spanish languages as well as in Russian and Spanish communicative cultures there are in use different pronominal address systems.

   Russian: ты (“ty”, informal to one person), Вы (“Vy”, “polite” to one person), вы (“vy”, plural of both “polite” to one person and to a group of persons).
   Peninsular Spanish: 2d person: tú (singular) – vosotros (plural); 3d person: usted (singular) – ustedes (plural).
   Mexican Spanish: 2d person: tú (singular); 3d person: usted (singular) – ustedes (plural of “usted”, but also used to a group of persons, to each of whom is applied the “tú” form).

Using languages with differing pronominal systems, Russian and Spanish native speakers are sensitive about the pronominal forms of address. And in fact, forms of address necessarily come into play in any verbal interchange and play a large part in modeling the communicative scope.

The difference between the Mexican Spanish, as part of Latin American Spanish, and the Peninsular one is that Latin American Spanish doesn’t use the familiar plural vosotros (you). The high style connotations of vosotros in Latin American Spanish, on the whole, are reserved to religious discourse and to the texts of national anthems, as it does the Mexican national anthem:

   Mexicanos, al grito de guerra
   El acero aprestad y el bridón,
   Y retiembre en sus centros la tierra
   Al sonoro rugir del cañón [7].

In his “Complete course for beginners of Latin American Spanish” Juan Kattan-Ibarra explains that “Latin Americans on the whole are more formal than Spaniards and they use the polite forms of address much more frequently than in Spain. Unless you are speaking to children or friends, it is best to use the usted rather than the tú form when you first meet somebody, then wait and see what the other person is using and do likewise” [8].

In Mexico, everyday politeness is observed in the predominance of polite «Usted» form. A consideration of «Usted»-form preference is the expression of asking again «Mande (Usted)» - «What did you say? » used while addressing in «tú»-register, but grammatically related with the 3d person singular:

   Enc. ¡Ah! Te digo, tía, ¿cuándo empezaste a pintar?
   Inf.B. ¿Mande?
   Enc. ¿Cuándo empezaste a pintar?
Another consideration of “Usted” forms usage is, probably, the postfix «le» related from the grammatical point of view also with the «polite» 3-d person singular. In everyday conversations, such forms are used in the speech acts of order, encouragement and approval not only with the verbs in the third person, but also with the verbs in the second person singular like in the examples of our notes of Mexican colloquial speech:


Such examples should be attentively commented on to Russian native speakers studying Spanish. With the Russian polite address form Vy ‘you’ denoting one person, it is obligatorily combined a special Russian model of addressing people formed by the given name and the patronymic, or the father’s name in a specific grammatical form. This creates a somehow risky zone of cross-cultural communication.

The perception of Spanish pronominal forms of address depends on the listener’s mental and cultural preparation. On the other hand, the Russian communicative style is rather inflexible with the pronominal forms of address. The fact that the Russians feel subordinate to a social group, is embodied in a very rigid university communication. Russian University students always stick to the Russian pattern of addressing the university teachers, which never permits tú-address, possible in peninsular communicative culture. The pattern of the distance among lecturers and students is so rigid, that even when the former students become the colleagues it’s scarcely probable that they quickly switch to a more informal and intimate form of addressing, equivalent to the Spanish “tú” and using the given name, but not the name with the patronymic.

The reducing of distance is expressed by the strategy of raising the status of the interlocutor. That’s why standard polite Russian university communication proposes the teachers to address their students using formal “VY”, meanwhile, for instance, in the peninsular Spanish standard the tú and vosotros forms are usual, like in the examples from our notes of the lectures in the University of Valencia:


4.1.4 Pronominal Forms of Address in Textbooks

Another interesting feature of communicate strategies verbalization in the academic communication is the data of forms of addressing in the textbooks. In terms of M. Bakhtin, such forms of addressing are “conditional” or “semi conditional”, but they origin in the real verbal interaction [6]. Spanish and Mexican student textbooks reveal both tú and Usted forms, as shown by examples taken at random from the textbooks of Spanish for foreigners, published in Spain and Mexico:

Señala el género de estas palabras. Clasifíca todo el vocabulario de la actividad 1.3. en su lugar correspondiente [10].

Relaciona cada palabra con la definición que le corresponda.


Haz lo que se te pide [12].

Russian textbooks permit only Spanish equivalents of usted-ustedes address, a fact which has to be taken into account while teaching Spanish to Russian University Students.

5 VERBALIZATION OF EMOTIONS

Verbalization of emotions occupies an important place in communicative strategies and language pedagogy. One of the notable phenomena associated with the verbalization of emotions by Mexican people, and Latin American people in general, are the diminutive forms. Their excessive use, from the point of view of peninsular Spanish speakers and Russian speakers also form a risky zone of communicative strategies interpretation. A repeatedly stated point of view, however, having its opponents, connects the high frequency of Mexican diminutive forms with the influence of the Indian substratum, primarily with the Nahua language, with its inherent highly developed suffixation. Diminutive forms such as mejorcito (“better”), ahorita (“now”), bastantito (“enough”), lueguito (“afterwards”), from the logical point of view do not contain the idea of diminution, but their pragmatic essence serves the purposes of emotional impact on the addressee and the aims of maintaining communication in a positive tone and sincerity. There are numerous cases of penetration of diminutive
suffixes into written speech possessing a certain conservatism. In written speech, the diminutive forms most typically refer to a mass addressee and create a special expressive colouring of speech and a confidential tone. Emotively coloured speech etiquette formulae based on colloquial recourses have a considerable divergence in Spanish speaking countries [13] and serve to the polycultural Spanish language learning.

6 METAPHORICAL COMPETENCE IN COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES

In this paper, we use the dimensions of metaphorical competence, according to M. Danesi, as the ways in which a culture organizes its world conceptually. As truly points out M. Danesi, “students ‘speak’ with the formal structures of the target language, but they ‘think’ in terms of their own native conceptual system: that is, students typically use target language words and structures as ‘carriers’ of their own native language concepts” [14]. Much interest present the data of literal equivalents of nouns used as forms of address and their “destiny” in Spanish and Russian communicative cultures, as their perceptual ground is never the same, as we previously revealed the role of Spanish-Russian literary equivalents of Forms of Address and their facets in the dialogue of Spanish and Russian languages and Hispanic and Russian cultures [15].

6.1 Metaphorical competence in kinship terms as lexical forms of address

Speaking about the terms of kinship, we should admit that meanwhile their denotation can be easily established, their connotations are significantly different in Russian and Spanish. That’s why they are worth to be commented during teaching of Spanish as Foreign Language to Russian Students. The transferred terms of kinship imply in the Spanish communicative culture mainly the sex of the addressee, and not his age, meanwhile in Russian, the transferred terms of kinship conserve the elements of the age and the sex.

In this sense of great interest, it seems to be the novel «Cinco horas con Mario» (“Five Hours with Mario”) by the Spanish writer, Miguel Delibes and its translation into Russian. In the imaginative conversation of the protagonist of this novel, Carmen, with her husband, there are more than 500 forms of address to him. 14 % of those are expressed by the term of kinship “hijo”, “son”, which becomes purely emotive, mainly ironic and sarcastic, form of address:

...que no se te podía ocurrir nada más original, hijo de mi alma... [12].

porque se dice pronto, hijo mío, las horas muertas que te has pasado en este despacho... [12].

As in the Russian communicative style a literal equivalent of the word “son” is quite rare as a direct form to a son and is a rather low-colloquial address to an unknown boy or young man, no wonder that such forms of address are rendered into the Russian text by nouns of other semantic fields, based first on the word “friend” in its ironical and sarcastic use, or just omitted. This commentary is important during translation classes for Russian University students.

Other interesting examples related with terms of kinship present the Spanish nouns “tío” with the lexical meaning “uncle” and “tía” (“aunt”). In the Peninsular Spanish, these nouns come into play like informal forms of address to the addressee of the same age.

¡jo cómo está el tráfico tía! ///qué asco! [17].

The scholars from Valencia indicate that the noun “tío” is used as a colloquial equivalent of the word ‘man’:

El tío ese, la persona en cuestión [18].

A textbook of Spanish for foreigners also includes this nomination in a colloquially oriented exercise:

¿Es importante para vosotros el aspecto físico?

Y las chicas, ¿os fijáis más en los “tíos buenos”? [19].

Such nominations are alien to the Mexican Spanish. But there, the term “mano”, an apheresis of “hermano” (“brother”) is frequently used as an informal form of address.

So, the competence in this basic vocabulary used in communicative strategies seems to be extremely relevant.
6.1.1 Metaphorical competence in terms denoting sex and age as lexical forms of address

Another interesting field of metaphorical competence is the one of the terms denoting sex and age. Now I would like to start with the Spanish equivalents of the nouns “man” / “woman”, i.e. “hombre” / “mujer”.

The Russian native speaker is usually impressed by the frequency of these nouns in the informal register of speech:

M.: (...) / porque la tela es mona ¿eh? / la tela es mona y el (()) ¿se lo hace todo?
A: hombre / claro
Isaac, oye, ¿cómo te va por allá, hombre? [17].

As the specialist on colloquial Spanish, Salvador Pons Bordería puts in his minute study of Spanish connectors, the word hombre ‘man’ permits diverse combinational possibilities and occupies the area between connectors and interjections [20]. But the semantic structure of this word is so elastic that it permits its use in the speech acts directed to a woman, which is a real cultural shock for a Russian native speaker. The emotive content of the Spanish hombre and its expressive and evaluative overtones differ a lot from the corresponding Russian noun which is used as a direct form of address in very popular and rather “impolite” contexts. In literary discourse, the Spanish form of address hombre finds rather rigid regularities in translation into Russian. I’d like to illustrate it with the brilliant Russian translation of the novel “Niebla” (“Fog”) by the great Spanish writer and philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno. Through those fragments of the text which are based on the resources of spoken language, the words hombre, ‘man’, as well as the address form mujer, ‘woman’ or ‘wife’, are widely used. The word “hombre” ‘man’ is typically omitted in the Russian translation, as the “voice” of the Russian communicative culture prohibits the use of its literal equivalent as a direct form of address in a similar situation:

– Es preciso a que te decidas, Mauricio. – Пора уже тебе решиться, Маурисио.
– ¿Pero a qué, rica mía, a qué? – На что решиться, любовь моя?
– ¿A qué ha de ser, hombre, a qué ha de ser? ¡A que nos casemos de una vez! [21].– Как это на что? Бу́дто ты не знаешь? Пора нам наконец пожениться! [22]

6.1.2 Metaphorical competence in abstract nouns as lexical forms of address

Many interesting data present Spanish communicative strategies of forms of address expressed by abstract nouns, like amor, cariño ‘love’, mi amor ‘my love’, mi vida ‘my life’ and the nouns denoting “organ of feeling”, such as corazón ‘heart’, alma ‘soul’.

// y claro se acercó Mari Ángeles/ y ¡CARIÑO!/ y ¡CARIÑO!/ y él / se abrazó a su madre/ [17].

Cariño, he visto un traje oye precioso [18].

The frequency of such forms of address in the Spanish communicative culture is somehow puzzling for the Russian native speaker and creates certain problems in film translation, especially in the one of Latin American “telenovelas”, where they are usually substituted by the proper names.

6.2 Zones of confrontation of Spanish and Russian Communicative Strategies

Let’s mention several zones where the intercultural Spanish-Russian interference is more probable. Spanish speaking people usually perceive Russians as too direct, because of the Russian preference of direct imperative. It seems that the Russian people always give orders. On the other hand, such form of a request as ¿Quiere cerrar la ventana? literally “Do you want to close the window”, is misleading for Russian native speakers.

Latin Americans, on the whole and Mexicans, in particular, say compliments, especially to an unknown women. Russian women usually deny compliments or justify themselves, saying that the compliment is not true.
Quite different are zoomorphisms used as forms of address. Spanish speaking people use forms of address denoting age, sex, inward and outward addressee's features more frequently than Russians [15], meanwhile Russians apply a wide spectrum of proper names modifications.

7 CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, the subject of intercultural communication is never complete. The observation of Spanish communicative strategies in teaching Spanish as a foreign language to Russian University students provides certain general principles of dialogue among languages and cultures on the personal, social, and professional levels.

Misunderstanding and communication fallacies should be perceived as constructive and beneficial conditions of communication, learning and teaching communicative strategies, since the perception and utilization of these strategies depends on mental and cultural preparation.

Accordingly, how can a harmonious interaction of cultures and cultural voices, in a Bakhtinian sense, be achieved through communicative strategies in language pedagogy? By being receptive, relying on benevolent foreign language speakers, being attentive, and tolerant, these modules also work in developing production skills.

Given the multiple possibilities of Russian University students studying Spanish Philology for self-expression in Spanish, we must adhere to polycultural Spanish language teaching and increase students’ metaphoric competence skills. In addition, we should remember that not everything that sounds natural for native speakers appears the same when a non-native is speaking. To avoid communication fallacies, it is better to be unbiased and tolerant always.

REFERENCES


