

**NININS 2020****International Scientific Forum «National Interest, National Identity and National Security»****LACUNAE IN LANGUAGE AND SPEECH:  
INTERCULTURAL AND TEXTUAL ASPECTS**

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**Abstract**

The aim of the article is the analysis of the basic communicative principles underlying intercultural communication as a practice of the interrelations between the speakers of different languages and as an autonomous theoretical discipline. These principles are covered in the light of the lacuna theory, the most recognized research field in psycholinguistics. The lacunae are understood as the phenomena which reveal systematically the differences in cognitive structures characteristic of various languages and cultural traditions. The lacuna theory is used in the article as the powerful tool of explaining the intercultural dissonance arising while interpreting the contemporary literary texts. Semantic and text-forming functions of the speech and cultural lacunae of the first-person narrative are revealed. For the multidimensional analysis of the social and pragmatic principles the theory of classical rhetoric is involved, in particular, three intrinsic components of the classical rhetoric – ethos, logos and pathos which define the system of comprehension and beliefs characteristic of interlocutors in the course of interaction between the author, the reader and the text. It is deduced that these kinds of lacunae predetermine the intercultural character of such literary text functional domains as intratextual, contextual, metatextual, interpretative and interpersonal. These domains in their turn are analyzed in terms of the communicative cooperation between the author and the reader as the bearers of different cultural traditions.

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## 1. Introduction

In theoretical terms, intercultural communication as a research field explores the cognitive-pragmatic principles and specific contexts that underlie the maintenance of phatic contact, as well as direct and indirect interpersonal dialogue between speakers of different languages. The application of universal sociopragmatic principles of interpersonal interaction sheds light on the importance of acts of individual speech since they have a dominant influence on everyday communication based on the actualization of the meanings of the used words, phrases and structures. In other words, a basic communicative space is created in every natural language, every speech act and cultural context not only to transmit relevant information but also to ensure mutual understanding of the interlocutors.

The key concept under consideration is culture, which predetermines the corresponding communicative roles of lingual society members. Culture influences the form of viewing the surrounding world; it is a national specific model of world perception and its subsequent interpretation. Language is described in the paper as an originally social phenomenon that is naturally interconnected with culture, embedded in it, and therefore the meanings of a single linguistic unit can be exhaustively identified taking into account the cultural context (Gavrilova, 2015).

## 2. Problem Statement

Culture is realized in terms of diverse ideas, verbal/non-verbal behavior, and attitudes toward the world. In the context of any given community, many individual mental representations are found, a certain subset of which can be clearly expressed in the language and language artefacts. Consequently, such representations acquire a socially significant character and are involved in the communication process among members of a lingual society. Frequently socially significant mental representations, in turn, form cultural knowledge (Azarova & Kudriashov, 2016). The fixation of the moment when a certain mental representation becomes cultural suggests the beginning of a cultural interpretation and therefore there is no clearly defined division between mental, social and cultural representations.

Representatives of a particular culture, in the aspect of their values, norms, and traditions definition, are influenced by social and cultural factors. This influence is most consistently realized through the language used by members of a society in the acts of everyday communication. Language as the most effective means of communication, transmission of relevant information and establishment of phatic contact occupies a dominant position in any culture. Language is the primary device of acquiring knowledge about the world, forming mental representations, and endowing them with social and intersubjective significance. However, language functions as a tool for categorizing cultural experience and behavior. Therefore, language and culture interact most intensively at the level of lexical semantics: the vocabulary of a language reflects the culture in the form in which native speakers see it.

Oposing views are expressed in the framework of the theory of linguistic relativity: the lexicon of the language, linguistic structures affect the individual's way of thinking, the formation of his/her worldview and behavior. The thought that a native language appears as a constructive source of cognitive and behavioral predetermination has its roots in German idealistic philosophy and was most consistently

formulated by von Humboldt, who propagated the idea, that language as a system of cognitions reveals autonomous creative symbolic organization – “energeia” (Kislitsyna, 2018).

In modern linguistics, it is widely recognized that the spiritual structure of the language multifacetedly reflects the specifics of mental processes in the minds of representatives of a particular society, each language functions at the junction of objective reality and conceptualization of this reality in the minds of the native speakers.

Intercultural communication can be viewed as a symbolic process, including the “appropriation” of meanings and senses in the act of everyday communication between representatives of various cultural traditions. Bearers of one culture produce a message whose consumers are bearers of another culture. With a more precise definition, intercultural communication reveals the specifics of interaction between the interlocutors, the cultural perceptions of reality, value and connotative systems of which differ from each other, which inevitably has a significant impact on communicative events in the form of communication dissonance or “clash” of two cultures. Consequently, the development of theoretical basis of intercultural communication determines the foundations of successful interaction between representatives of various cultures that have different lifestyle patterns, ideologies and values.

In Russian linguistics, the following approaches to the study of problems of intercultural communication are revealed:

- contrastive approach that analyzes intercultural interaction based on the communicative perspective of the participants in this interaction (Mogilevich, 2008);
- structuralist-semiotic approach that considers communication as a manifestation of discursive activity (Martynova, 2006);
- lacunar approach that focuses on semantic “gaps” that can lead to misunderstanding, misinterpretation of certain concepts in an intercultural context (Savitskaia, 2013);

The decisive factor in intercultural interaction is the perception of diverse concepts and the situational relevance of the semantic content of these concepts in each sociocultural community. The cultural context creates conditions that are optimal for introducing some common universal values or at least shared fragments of value systems into communication, based on which the speaker and the listener, the writer and the reader use the opportunities for implementing the category of politeness.

Dissimilarities in the worldviews of speakers of different languages result in the fact that heterogeneous concepts exist in the minds of these speakers. Cultural gaps between different languages can theoretically be “smoothed out” on the basis of ethnographic knowledge. In a broad cultural aspect, meanings and senses are interpreted as contextually determined and constructed phenomena. This idea has its roots in the views of Russian formalists, the Prague Linguistic School, the American sociology of language, the theory of speech acts and discourse analysis. In particular, in the contemporary linguistic tradition, which is influenced by the ideas of the ethnographer Malinovsky, language is interpreted as a “language event”, and the meanings of any phrase, utterance or statement is defined in terms of its direct functioning in the context of a particular sociocultural situation. In the light of modern linguistic theories and applied linguistics, the concept of a speaking individual as a bearer of intercultural competence, possessing knowledge of cultural equivalents, connotations and rules for code-switching in communication is considered.

If intercultural communication appears to be a relatively determined area of scientific research with a stable tradition, intercultural linguistics is still a less accurately designated area of research in relation to both the object of study and the general methodological foundation. Potentially defined as a culturally oriented linguistics, this branch is interpreted as partially autonomous, since it is interdisciplinary in nature and it extensively uses information from the humanities such as anthropology, ethnolinguistics, psychology, communication theory, etc. Despite the widespread use of the intercultural approach in contemporary humanitarian knowledge, some researchers still deny the need to distinguish intercultural linguistics as an independent branch. In particular, in some areas of pragmatics, an attempt has been made to exclude the cultural aspect from the actual sphere of research. Grice's maxims can be seen as a vivid illustration of the definition of universals of discourse in isolation from their cultural orientation.

At the same time, theorists are fruitfully moving towards the formation of the culture-focused linguistics. In Russian linguistics, the intercultural aspect is consistently manifested in research works dedicated to communication, translation theory, cognitive analysis, since the linguistic picture of the world as an integral part of the cultural heritage a priori includes the axiological (connotative) and ideological aspects.

The following areas are of a particular scientific importance in intercultural linguistics:

- cultural theory (Palmer), in the framework of which successful attempts are made to synthesize anthropology and cognitive linguistics (Palmer, 1996);
- intercultural pragmatics and semantics (Wierzbicka), exploring the problem of misunderstanding of implicit meanings, predetermined by intercultural factors (Wierzbicka, 2003);
- cultural and comparative linguistics (Kniffka), treating linguistics as an integral part of cultural research (Kniffka, 1995).

The basic sociopragmatic principles of intercultural interaction include the interlocutors' focus on equal and constructive cooperation. The equality of the interlocutors is interpreted as the implementation of a communicative behavior characterized by an alternative voicing of personal considerations while taking into account the addressee factor. The image of the "other", the interlocutor, is predetermined by the fact that the speaking individual inevitably experiences a certain degree of control from the side of the listening individual. Constructive cooperation is based on confirmed mutual expectations of social involvement in the communication process, the realization of emotions and interests, which are the basis either for isolation or integration of a person within a particular community.

The sociopragmatic principles we have analyzed are culturally determined. The degree of understanding of a particular speech act is based on the optimal balance of equality and parity cooperation characteristic of a particular culture and the relevance of certain communicative behavior manifestations. As a cultural phenomenon, relevance necessarily arises as a consequence of the functioning of both basic social norms and individual preferences.

Intercultural linguistics contributes to the study of those communicative principles that create a solid foundation for communication between speakers of different languages; therefore this scholarly

discipline is interpreted as the optimal theoretical basis for the realization of effective intercultural communication which inevitably involves vivid lacunar phenomena.

### **3. Research Questions**

#### **3.1. Lacunae as markers of unconscious semantic problems in intercultural communication**

Following the definition of linguistic lacuna, given by Sorokin and Markovina, we believe that these are the verbal phenomena which regularly occur within the framework of one culture and do not have equivalents within the framework of another culture (Sorokin & Markovina, 1987). Lacunae are specific artefacts that reflect objects, events, processes and situations that do not find a match in the cultural experience of a native speaker of another language, and therefore are perceived in a different linguistic tradition as something “unpredictable”, “incomprehensible” and “exotic”.

The systematic study of lacunae sheds light on those phenomena of one culture that are not exhaustively perceived by representatives of another culture (do not find correspondences in their cultural experience), require additional ethnolinguistic commentary, therefore they are often defined in research works as “vague or unclear elements”, “zero equivalents” (Anokhina, 2013), or “gaps” (Ertelt-Vieth, 2003) since the specificity of one culture does not find systemic (exact/approximate) equivalents in another culture.

In current linguistic studies of an intercultural communicative nature (Kislitsyna & Agapova, 2020) the following parameters for determining a lacuna are specified: elements or aspects of the text that do not find correspondence in the cultural experience of speakers of other languages; understanding of texts in the broadest sense, including their cultural component; the clash of two cultures at a certain point of communication; differences in cognitive structures that cause the emergence of lacunas: “Lacunae are phenomena that show how languages and cultures differ in their cognitive structures. They are lexical entities that belong only to a certain culture and language and do not have equivalents in other cultures and languages” (Kazazi, 2014, p. 353).

It should be noted that depending on the semantic content mental lacunae, activity lacunae and lacunae manifesting objects are distinguished, and axiological lacunae are based on culturally specific connotations and evaluations. In addition to considering lacunae in the light of the linguistic-cultural approach, active research is being conducted in the field of lexicographic representation of these units and their linguodidactic significance in the development of foreign languages and cultures (Bykova, 2006; Szerszunowicz, 2015). The studies strongly emphasize the need to consider the linguistic aspect of the functioning of lacunae, since they are directly related to conscious and unconscious “semantic gaps” in texts. In the process of intercultural verbal interaction, lacunae give rise to surprise, curiosity, admiration and even annoyance of the addressee.

#### **3.2. Classification of lacunae as a tool, reflecting lacuna-determined interdisciplinary problems**

In the theory of translation, the concept of lacuna is defined as the absence of reference in the language into which the text is translated, which entails a completely logical characteristic of the lacuna as a marker for the problematic search for equivalence (Panasiuk, 2009). To solve the problem of an

incomplete, limited understanding of source texts due to the presence of lacunae, scholars propose various tactics and techniques: “transpositions, substitutions or modulations” (Pym, 1993, p. 34).

Markovina (2011) contrasts linguistic and cultural lacunae; this subdivision forms the basis for her classification. Linguistic lacunae, in turn, are divided by the author into language and speech ones; cultural lacunae include ethnopsychological ones, lacunae of communicative activity and cultural space.

Supporting the point of view of Markovina, Schröder (1995) argues that lacunae are grouped into two categories – linguistic and cultural ones and Dellinger (1995) presents a modified categorization of lacunae. That is, cultural lacunae are divided into (1) subjective (“national psychological”); (2) of communication activities; (3) of cultural space; and (4) textual.

These categories, in turn, are detailed into:

- (1.1.) Mentality lacunae; (1.2.) Syllogic lacunae; (1.3.) Cultural and emotive lacunae; (1.4.) Humor lacunae;
- (2.1.) Mental lacunae; (2.2.) Lacunae accompanying verbal behavior (i.e., kinetics, gestures, body movements, etiquette);
- (3.1.) Perceptual lacunae; (3.2.) Ethnographic lacunae; (3.3.) Lacunae of the cultural fund; (Dellinger, 1995).

Textual lacunae will be analyzed further in the work in terms of the author’s vision of the world and its realization in the text and the possibility of its interpretation by the reader.

Thus, the designations of every item of various classifications of lacunae can be viewed as an indicators or tools for identifying and solving the problem caused by the existence of lacunae in texts.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main aim of the article is the analysis of the basic communicative principles underlying the intercultural communication as a practice of the interrelations between the speakers of different languages, on the one hand, and, on the other, as an autonomous theoretical discipline. The purpose of the study is to illustrate the realisation of lacunae deliberately introduced by the author for the stylistic purposes in contemporary literary texts and the possibility of writer-reader conceptual cooperation in the process of coding/decoding the lacunae.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The main methodological principle of the paper is the lacuna theory, the most recognized research field in psycholinguistics. The lacunae are understood as the phenomena which reveal systematically the differences in cognitive structures characteristic of various languages and cultural traditions. The lacuna theory is used in the article as the powerful tool of explaining the intercultural dissonance arising while interpreting the contemporary literary texts.

For multidimensional analysis of the social and pragmatic principles the theory of classical rhetoric is applied, in particular, three intrinsic components of the classical rhetoric – ethos, logos and pathos. They determine the system of understanding, comprehension and beliefs that is characteristic for interlocutors in the process of oral or written communication:

1. Ethos is directly related to the ethical attitudes of the speaker, to the correspondence of his oral message or the written text to the truth and the previous experience of communication;

2. Logos lies at the foundation of the logical structure of the oral message or written text, its internal consistency and integrity;

3. Pathos is associated with the emotional state of the speaker, his/her ability to arouse the sympathy of the interlocutor, to generate specific ideas and images in his/her mind.

Analyzed in the aforementioned manner, ethos and pathos are presented as purely subjective categories that are inevitably introduced into the cultural context of communication; logos is a category that sheds light on an objective evaluation and quality of communication, to a certain extent showing similarities with the transactional content of the current relationships between the interlocutors.

The semantic and text-forming functions of the speech and cultural lacunae of the first-person narrative are revealed. It is deduced that these kinds of lacunae predetermine the intercultural character of such literary text functional domains as intratextual, contextual, metatextual, interpretative and interpersonal. These domains in their turn are analyzed in terms of the communicative cooperation between the author and the reader as the bearers of different cultural traditions.

## 6. Findings

The systematization of ideas about lacunae sheds light on two fundamental areas – ideas about the objective and subjective world and knowledge of the language; it also provides an optimal methodology for a variety of fields in humanities that highlight the problems of intercultural communication. In particular, these ideas turn out to be fruitful for the study of modern literary texts, which are rich in linguistic and cultural lacunae which frequently encode semantic ambiguity and fuzziness. In this regard, the lacuna is interpreted in the paper as a semantic entity, a contextual cultural invariant that provides certain degree of incompatibility between two or more semantic systems. Lacunae, as we have already indicated, are being investigated on the basis of two perspectives – linguistic and cultural ones. In the literary text, they are actualized as a result of opposition, a clash between two systems and contexts.

Linguistic lacunae are formed due to the words and phrases that are closely correlated with the cultural realities of the language community, within the framework of which a literary text was created. These groups of words and expressions can reflect the inner world of the author of the text, be generated and adapted by him/her in various contexts, and serve the stylistic purposes:

(1) “Но когда я опять посмотрел перед собой, то чайник был совершенно пуст, заварку я из него вылил всю – **желторжавая** лужица стояла на стальном поблескивающем дне раковины” (Kononov, 2000, p. 26). – “But when I again looked in front of me, the teapot was completely empty, I poured the whole tea out of it – a **yellow-rusted** puddle stood on the steel gleaming bottom of the sink”;

(2) “Глаза его тепло и **сливочно** улыбались” (Prilepin, 2018, p. 10). – “His eyes smiled warmly and **creamily**”;

(3) “Мы сели и с **равнонеискренними** улыбками уставились друг в друга” (Prilepin, 2018, p. 92). – “We sat down and stared at each other with **equally insincere** smiles”;

(4) “А слезы ведь на то и слезы, что их льют, останавливая, оставляя, так сказать, на это проливное время все другие деяния, льют, проживая именно таким **дождевально-ливневым**”

*способом свою жизнь” (Kononov, 2000, p. 111). – “And the tears, after all, are the tears that they pour, stopping, leaving, so to speak, all other deeds for this torrential time, pour, living their life in such a **sprinkling-and-rainfall** way”.*

The underlined highlighted adjectives and adverbs are not found in the dictionaries of the Russian language as they do not exist in Russian language, they reflect the sphere of author's speech creativity, which uniquely captures the characteristics of the subjective perception of the external and internal world. Being a stylistic means of a subjective-author's vision of reality, linguistic lacunae in a contemporary literary text are used to instantly reflect the results of the current perception of oneself and others; they create the dynamic pictorial and figurative images of surrounding objects in parallel expressing one's attitude through latent connotations (mostly negative or ironic). Such lacunae consistently reflect the post-modern picture of the world, introduce the blurring of the axiological level of the literary narrative, which, in turn, is a consequence of the postmodernism's declarative rejection of traditional value systems, the search for other forms of expression of self-consciousness.

According to our observations, linguistic lacunae turn out to be the most frequent in the first-person narrative, in which the narrator, in fact, disputes the basic principles of a realistic style of writing, introducing a special aesthetic experience of comprehension of the surrounding reality. Taking the reader to the most remote realms of the imaginary world, linguistic lacunae significantly expand understanding of the cognitive horizons of the narrator's awareness and consciousness; the creator of the text destroys conventional (typified in a realistic tradition) frames and scripts which traditionally describe the environment. By coining and actualizing these lacunae words and lacunae phrases in the narrator's speech, modern authors implicitly tell the readers information about unstable everyday life, its chaotic ambiguous nature. Linguistic lacunae graphically represent the continuous thinking processes in the narrator's mind.

Cultural lacunae are constructed in literary texts basing on an allusion, in particular, on an implicit reference to songs or poems known to the majority of native speakers of this language:

(5) “... – в валик, в трудно скатываемый валик своих коричнево-рыжих химических кудряшек, которых не берет из-за обилия седины хна, не вонзить туда **чуть пока-чи-ива-аясь в ритме-тьме-тма-тмо-та-та таан-гоо утомленаээ солнце**, простите, золотые шпильки?” (Kononov, 2000, p. 158) – “... into the roller, into the hard-to-roll roller of their brown-red chemical curls, which henna does not change due to the abundance of gray hair, it is not possible stick there, **swi-ngi-ng a little in the rhythm of tme-tma-tmo-ta-ta-taan-goo the tired sun**, sorry, golden hairpins?”;

(6) “Включил комп, снова залез в ссылки по велемирской истории. **Ищут пожарные, ищут милиция**... Всё то же самое, ничего нового” (Prilepin, 2018, p. 51). – «Turned on the computer, again got into links on Velimir history. **Firefighters are looking, the police are looking for ... Everything is the same, nothing new**”.

Underlined highlighted cultural lacunae create the ambiguity of the literary text, make it possible to decipher what was previously perceived as incomprehensible and even meaningless. This type of lacunae functions primarily as a reference realizing an implicit meaning, producing a humorous effect.

The cultural context of the narrative transforms the original image of the narrator, gives rise to new meanings based on the integration of the narrator's ideas about the current situation with an allusive

concept. Cultural lacunae reflect not only the author's sociocultural stereotypes, but also the national self-consciousness sometimes incomprehensible for speakers of different languages and cultures. The narrator's story reveals a vertically horizontal (synchronous-diachronic) semantic model that represents the text as a cultural and discursive phenomenon.

## 7. Conclusion

Linguistic and cultural lacunae enrich the literary text with implicit meanings, giving rise to semantic ambiguity to the whole piece of art, play a constructive pragmatic role in convincing the addressee to accept the position of the narrator, behind which the implicit author is hiding. The author's activation of the lacunae determines the intercultural nature of the following functional domains of the literary text:

- 1) intratextual domain: deautomatization of reader's attention on text segments;
- 2) contextual domain: the generation of the stylistic and connotative potential of the whole text, the semantic ambiguity of its individual segments;
- 3) metatextual domain: assessment of information relevant to the reader against the background of cultural values that are valid for the given language community;
- 4) interpretation domain: complicating the cognitive processing of information for the reader, stimulating the reader to comprehend the virtual world generated by the author;
- 5) interpersonal domain: maintaining communicative contact between the author, storyteller and reader, revealing the author's world of knowledge, beliefs, values.

The intratextual domain is directly related to the promotion of relevant information to a strong position based on stylistic means; the contextual domain reveals the effectiveness of the author's implicatures; the metatextual domain sheds light on the specifics of coding the author's assessment in the narrator's story, the interpretative domain creates the conditions for establishing and maintaining communication between the author and the reader through the mediation of the narrator; the interpersonal domain reflects how the author perceives the reader ("the implicated reader"), and the reader sees the category of the author ("the implicated author") in the image of the narrator.

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