

**Marina Sternina**  
**Iosif Sternin**

Russian and American  
Communicative  
Behavior



Voronezh  
2003

*Communicative behavior*

**Marina Sternina  
Iosif Sternin**

**Russian and American  
Communicative Behavior**

**Voronezh  
2003**

Voronezh State University, Russia  
English Department for Science Students  
Department of General Linguistics

The book presents the results of contrastive studies of Russian and American communicative behavior.

It is based on the results of the studies within the joint project of two TESOL sister affiliates – the Voronezh chapter of NATE Russia (National Association of Teachers of English in Russia) and NYS (New York State) TESOL on comparative studies of Russian and American communicative behavior for teaching purposes (1998 – 2001).

Special attention has been paid to the relevant differences of two communicative cultures and methods of their description.

Detailed description of American communicative behavior in the main communicative spheres and standard communicative situations can be found in two Russian editions: “An Essay on American Communicative Behavior” and “American Communicative Behavior”, both published in Voronezh in 2001.

The book is intended for Russian teachers of English, American teachers of EFL to Russian speakers, teachers of Russian as a foreign language to Americans and all those, who are interested in the problem of intercultural communication.

*The book is published at the expense of the authors.*

Marina Sternina, Iosif Sternin. Russian and American  
Communicative Behavior. Voronezh: Istoki Publishing  
House, 2003. – 94 p.

ISBN

© Marina Sternina, Iosif Sternin, 2003

## Introduction

### Communicative Behavior as an Object of Studies

Communicative behavior is defined as *a system of norms and traditions of national communication* and is built up by a number of national communicative rules. The importance of studying communicative behavior of different nations can hardly be overestimated.

We would like to start with an example to show the importance of communicative behavior for interpersonal communication and understanding.

An American worked at a Japanese newspaper as a foreign reporter in Tokyo. One day he was working in his office. He finished his manuscript and decided to submit it to the printing-works immediately. The printing-works was on the ground floor of the building and his office was on the eleventh floor. The American went out to the elevator to go down, and at the door of the elevator he met his Japanese colleague. While waiting for the elevator, they found out that both of them were going the same way. The American decided to save time and said: "Since you are going down, could you possibly take my manuscript down too?" The Japanese looked terribly shocked. The American later said that the Japanese looked as if he were told to immediately throw himself out of the window. There was a pause, and then the Japanese took the manuscript and rushed down the stairs, forgetting he could use the elevator.

The American was at a loss and could not understand what had happened, but his Japanese colleagues told him: "You have made a grave mistake. You have insulted your colleague. How could you address such a request to a person well advanced in

age, the father of two sons! You addressed him like a simple message-boy!”

Certainly the American had no idea that such a request was an offense, for such things are quite possible in American communication. But the American failed to observe one of the important taboos of Japanese communicative behavior, and this caused a problem.

It should be emphasized that the American spoke good Japanese, he had no language problems, but he happened to have a problem with the Japanese communicative behavior. This example shows, that good command of main language skills such as reading, speaking, listening, writing and translating can not fully guarantee a foreign speaker effective communication with native speakers, as grave mistakes may arise due to communicative ignorance of the speaker.

It should be mentioned that if a Russian were in the place of this American, he could very easily make the same mistake, for our communicative behavior in this particular situation is very much similar to that of the Americans.

As we have just seen, mistakes in communicative behavior may cause mutual misunderstanding and even ethnic conflicts. That's why we argue that communicative behaviour is an important component of foreign language acquisition and should be considered an aspect of foreign language teaching.

Communicative behavior is built up by a number of national communicative rules. These rules fall into two principal types: rules which are obligatory for fulfilment (e.g. rules of polite speaking, verbal etiquette) and rules, which are not obligatory though they are maintained by the majority of people (e.g. traditional topics of communication in certain situations). The rules of the first type are *communicative norms*, those of the second type – *communicative traditions*.

Description of national communicative behavior includes verbal behavior, nonverbal behavior and social symbolism.

Verbal behavior is a system of rules defining what to say and what not to say in certain situations. Therefore we deal with *communicative imperatives* (what to say) and *communicative taboos* (what not to say). Imperatives and taboos can be both strict and mild. They can also be speech and thematic.

Speech imperatives are words and expressions, which must be used in certain situations. For example, greetings, apologies, words of condolence. Speech taboos are words and expressions that are excluded from usage in certain situations, e.g. swear words.

Thematic imperatives are topics which are to be touched upon in certain situations, for example - "*How do you like this country?*" to a foreigner, a question about health - to an elderly person and so on. Thematic taboos are topics avoided in communication / e.g. topics of income, politics, religion in American formal table talk, asking a woman her age/.

Nonverbal communicative behavior deals with the national peculiarities of gestures, body language, physical contacts and distance in communication. One should know how to stop a taxi, how to show nonverbally one's respect to the partner, how to use pointing gestures, how to count with one's fingers, etc.

Social symbolism deals with national peculiarities of understanding certain material objects and phenomena /e.g. the so-called cultural meaning attached to flowers, numbers, colors, certain presents, types of clothing, cars, etc./. In Russia, e.g. the richness of the table reflects the degree of respect of the host to the guest, while in the US the meals mainly reflect the real income of the host-family and not their attitude to the guests.

The description of communicative behavior as a system of norms and traditions should by all means be comparative: the teacher must be able to contrast the native communicative behavior of the student to communicative behavior of the people whose language is studied. Therefore contrastive studies of communicative behavior are most important.

It should also be emphasized that all generalizations that can be made should be viewed as **relative**, for they strongly depend upon the cultures compared. A parallel can be drawn with some traits of national character: for example, Russian hospitality is well known and acknowledged as an important component of Russian mentality. But this is a European view, and if we compare Russian hospitality with that in the Caucasus, Russians will look less hospitable. Aspects of communicative behavior are also relative which should always be borne in mind.

Voronezh linguists have been studying communicative behavior of different communicative cultures for about 10 years and have worked out a model of its description. In December, 1997 a joint project «Communicative Behavior of Russians and Americans: Cross-Cultural Description for Teaching Purposes» was launched between the Voronezh Chapter of TESOL-Russia and NYS TESOL. The results of this joint project – two Russian editions: “An Essay on American Communicative Behavior” and “American Communicative Behavior” were published in Voronezh in 2001. The first of the above mentioned publications was granted a Diploma of the All-Russia Exposition Centre (Moscow) in October, 2002.

Two basic models of description of communicative behavior were suggested: situational and parametric / I. Sternin. Models of description of communicative behavior. Voronezh, 2001 (in Russian)/.

The use of the situational research model made it possible to thoroughly describe American communicative behavior both in standard communicative situations (like greetings, invitations, congratulations, etc.) and the main communicative spheres (certain everyday situations where national specificity of communicative behavior is revealed, e.g. communication between men and women, communication with strangers, official communication, etc.).

The research also made it possible to reveal the principal features of American communicative behavior and to compare them with Russian ones.

The present publication in English is aimed to describe the principal features of both Russian and American communicative behavior and to compare them within a parametric model.

Parametric model presupposes the description of communicative behavior by means of a certain number of communicative factors, communicative parameters and communicative features.

Communicative factors are the most general relevant characteristics of communicative behavior of a nation.

Communicative factors used for the present description are as follows:

1. Communicative contact
2. Formality and informality
3. Communicative self presentation
4. Politeness
5. Regulation
6. Conflict management
7. Contents of communication
8. Orientation to the interlocutor
9. Communicative self control
10. Communicative reaction
11. Volume of communication
12. Non-verbal communication

It should be noted that though the set of communicative factors for different communicative cultures is supposed to be principally the same, their number and list is to be discussed and may be altered in further investigations. At present our description is based upon the factors enumerated above.

Communicative factors, parameters and features constitute a certain hierarchy where a more general item is composed of less general ones.

Thus the **factor** “communicative contact” includes such communicative **parameters** as *Sociability, Emotions, Sincerity, Frankness, Easiness of entering communication, etc.*

The **parameter** *Sociability* in Russian communicative behavior includes such **communicative features** as: *easy start of communication with a stranger; touching as a form of establishing contact; barring the way as a form of establishing contact; absence of formal ceremony of making acquaintance; possibility of introducing oneself; intolerance of silence; tradition to talk to fellow travelers on the train and others.*

Parameters in the communicative cultures being compared may both coincide and differ; the same should be said about communicative features, which in practice differ greatly. While communicative factors in different communicative cultures are mainly the same, certain parameters and features may be present in one communicative culture and absent in the other. The comparative description of communicative behavior of two or more cultures presupposes comparison of communicative parameters and communicative features of both cultures within the framework of communicative factors, which serve the basis of comparison.

We would like to pay a tribute to our American colleagues – the members of the American research group Pamela Martin, Ann Wintergest, Tom Toomey, Richard Daigle, Dorothea Heberle, Sheila Campbell, Amy Finegold, Mary Carpenter,

Brian Drier, Sylvia Lane, George Morris, Elizabeth Lunsford. Our special thanks to the two co-heads of the project from the American side – Drs. Ann Wintergest and Pamela Martin.

American participants verified some communicative facts, concerning American communicative behavior, distributed and processed about 30 questionnaires generated by members of the Voronezh chapter, each focusing on different areas of American pragmatic behavior, etiquette, and social norms.

We would also like to pay a special tribute to all Russian members of our research group – K. Shilikhina, O. Voevudskaya, I. Basistaya, O. Vysochina, I. Pravshina, A. Pravshin, E. Khaustova, L. Marchenko, O. Marchenko, L. Dobrynina, Yu. Tarantsey, L. Tsurikova, E. Chernyshova, O. Artemova, A. Stebletsova, A. Maltsev, J. Kulagina, N. Khrenova, L. Lukina, E. Leonova, M. Strelnikova, I. Fomina, L. Obukhovskaya, T. Styopkina, A. Bolkhoeva, N. Sharova, M. Vorotnikova.

Members of the Russian research group fulfilled the great part of research work at the initial stage of the joined project, namely, the description of American communicative behavior in different communicative spheres and standard situations. They also participated together with us and under our guidance in the preparation of the two Russian editions mentioned above.

Special thanks to the experts – prof. of Omsk State University O. Issers, associate prof. of Voronezh State University A. Leonov and Dr. I. Chernikova, the University of Akron, USA, who read the Russian manuscripts and verified the data.

The present publication is the next step in our studies: it includes systematic description of Russian and American communicative behavior as well as detailed comparison of the two communicative cultures.

## Chapter 1.

# The Principal Features of Russian Communicative Behavior

The *principal features* of communicative behavior are those, which are revealed by the majority of people speaking the given language in practically all communicative situations and spheres. These features build up the national peculiarity of the given communicative culture, differentiating this culture from other ones.

For the principle communicative features of Russian communicative behavior the following factors and parameters appear to be relevant:

### Communicative contact

*Sociability*

*Expression of emotions*

*Easiness of entering communication*

*Sincerity*

*Frankness*

*Speech mood*

*Desire for permanent circle of communication*

*Attitude to group communication*

## **Formality and informality**

*Communicative democracy*

*Attitude to small talk*

*Priority of heart-to-heart talk*

*Priority of informal communication*

## **Communicative self presentation**

### **Politeness**

*Attentive listening*

*Acceptance of rudeness*

*Attentiveness to strangers*

*Politeness to strangers*

*Politeness to acquaintances*

*Politeness to elderly people*

*Politeness to kids*

*Politeness of kids to parents and adults*

*Politeness to women*

*Politeness to schoolchildren and students*

*Politeness to teachers*

*Politeness of the serving staff*

**Regulation***Interference with other people**Possibility of modification of other people's behavior***Conflict management***Debate addiction**Attitude to compromises**Public discussion of disagreement**Acceptance of emotional argument**Categorical expression of difference of opinions**Love to criticize**Tradition to raise serious problems in everyday communication**Acceptance of conflict themes in communication**Insistence on one's point of view**Categorical formulation of problems**Attitude to dissidence**Concentration of argument on solving the problem***Contents of communication***Scope of information discussed**Scope of reported information**Intimacy of inquired information*

*Intimacy of reported information*

*Desire to constantly get new information*

*Love to verbal evaluation*

*Thematic limitations*

*Importance of humor in communication*

### **Orientation to the interlocutor**

*Communicative dominance*

*Orientation to 'saving the face' of the interlocutor*

*Interruption of the interlocutor*

*Insistence on getting information*

*Frequency of using compliments*

### **Volume of communication**

### **Non-verbal communication**

*Smiling in everyday life*

*Tolerance to silence*

*Desirable size of communication group*

*Distance of communication*

*Physical contact of the interlocutors*

*Intensity of gesticulation*

*Amplitude of gesticulation*

*Emotions in gesticulation*

*Sincerity of face gestures*

*Loudness of speech*

*Possibility of increasing loudness of speech*

*Speech tempo*

*Possibility of increasing speech tempo*

Now we proceed to the description of the principal features of Russian communicative behavior according to the above mentioned factors and parameters.

## **Communicative contact**

*Sociability*

Russians are very sociable, communication with other people is considered in Russia to be one of the main life values.

Russians start communication easily, they don't hesitate to start conversation even with a total stranger. There are many excuses to start a conversation in Russia – it might be any kind of question, a request, an advice, an offer to treat oneself, etc. In order to get in contact a Russian may touch another person, take him/her by the elbow or even bar the way.

There is no formal ceremony of making acquaintance in Russian communicative behavior. It is quite possible to introduce oneself without the help of other people – one may come up to a person he/she wants to get acquainted with and say something like “I'd like to get acquainted with you. I am ....”

Having got in contact Russians usually try to transfer from formal procedure of acquaintance to sincere emotional talk as soon as possible.

Great level of sociability of Russians is revealed in such an important feature of Russian communicative behavior as intolerance to silence while being in a company or in a group. It is not accepted to be silent in a company, at table, while being on a visit to somebody. If a person is silent for some time he/she might be asked about the reason of it.

It is customary to speak to fellow travelers on a train. Deviation from communication may be considered to be a sign of disrespect and arrogance.

Russians like people who speak well, who can entertain the company. Communication dominates in interpersonal relations in Russia. Russians are fond of all kinds of feasts, but the main aim of such feasts is communication, eating and drinking constitute the background. A visit to somebody is valued in Russia first of all from the point of view whether communication there was interesting and entertaining. If a person was treated very well but communication was formal and dull, he/she will by all means evaluate such a visit negatively.

Sociability of Russians is also revealed in a strong tendency to ask intimate questions – those of salary, age, family status, etc. A Russian may ask a stranger whether he/she has children or not (if not – what is the reason for it), where he/she lives, what profession he/she has, where he/she studied. Questions about religion and those who the person voted or is going to vote for are also possible. While in American and other Western cultures such questions are tabooed, Russians consider them to be a manifestation of a friendly interest to the other person's life and demonstration of respect.

### *Expression of emotions*

Russians are very emotional in communication. Emotions are manifested in speech irrespective of the age, sex and social status of the speaker. Russians usually very emotionally respond to all kinds of reprimands.

Foreigners are surprised that Russians can speak emotionally for a long period of time. They also note that Russians very often change their mood during the conversation. The latter can be explained by the fact that it is not acceptable in Russia to hide one's emotions, so change of mood during the conversation demonstrates immediate emotional reaction of the interlocutor.

### *Easiness of entering communication*

A Russian may interfere with a talk of the strangers, may tell his/her opinion or suggest something even if he/she is not asked to.

It is possible to interrupt a conversation of other people to ask a question. In offices it is quite common when a member of the staff interferes with a talk of another staff member with a client.

A Russian may address a stranger with a reprimand, advice or a warning like "*Your coat is dirty*", "*Your purse has dropped out of your bag*", etc. It is quite possible to address practically any kind of request to a stranger.

A Russian may start a conversation with both an acquaintance and a stranger irrespective of the fact whether the person is free or busy, silent or speaking to other people.

Unlike Western countries in Russia practically every phrase may serve as the starting point of the conversation.

### *Sincerity*

Russian people are extremely sincere. They usually don't conceal their mood, their faces reflect their real feelings. Lack of emotions in communication is condemned.

The sincerity of Russians in showing their emotions, absence of tradition to demonstrate formal friendliness in communication helps foreigners to correctly determine the attitude of Russians to each other and to foreigners.

### *Frankness*

Russians are usually very frank in communication and tell many facts about themselves. Foreigners note that very often Russians tell them facts that they don't want to know about.

Russians are often very frank even with people whom they don't know very well and might tell the latter about very intimate details of their life. Such behavior is considered to be a manifestation of trust to the interlocutor and desire to become friends with him/her.

### *Speech mood*

Russians are communicative pessimists: when asked "*How is life?*" or "*How things are?*" they usually say "*Normalno*" (*normal*)<sup>1</sup> or "*Nitchevo*" (*so-so*), the last response means literary "nothing" and is also usually interpreted by foreigners as an abbreviation for "nothing bad". Answers like these are so common in Russia that some people even greet others not with the usual question "*How is life?*", but with "*How is your nichevo? (How is your so-so?)*" and are greatly surprised when the answer is "*Well*" or "*Fine*".

---

<sup>1</sup> Y. Richmond translates it as "not too bad". (Richmond, p. 41)

Indeed, it is very odd in Russia to answer something like this. But if people do answer in such a way they are by all means supposed to explain the reason of such an answer. A Russian teacher of English recalls the reaction of her colleague when, having a good mood after a very successful class, she answered the usual question “*How is life?*” saying not “*nichevo*”, but “*wonderful*”. Her colleague was so startled that couldn’t speak for several minutes.

Communicative pessimism of Russians is also revealed in the Russian tradition to complain of hard life to the visiting authorities and journalists.

### *Desire for permanent circle of communication*

Russians, especially those of middle age and senior citizens, like to communicate with old friends and acquaintances, school and college mates, people who they used to be in friendly terms with. They usually feel uneasy if they haven’t been in touch with their old friends for a long time.

There is a well-known saying in Russian that an old friend is better than two new ones.

A very popular theme in communication in Russia is recalling friends in common. In a company they usually ask questions of the type “Have you heard about Sergey?”, “Has anything been heard about Ann?”, “Where is Pete? How are things going with him?”

As for youth, they, like young generation all over the world, prefer new contacts and new acquaintances.

### *Attitude to group communication*

Love of group communication is an impressive feature of Russian communicative culture. If communication on a visit is dull, if people communicate with difficulty, a Russian would

prefer to leave such a company. Communication is the main purpose of paying a visit in Russia. If communication wasn't entertaining Russians would consider such visit not to be successful.

Group communication in Russia should be permanent, nobody in the company is allowed to seek solitude, to sit apart from others. It is not accepted to eat or drink individually. Toasts play a consolidating role in Russian table talk, they unite people sitting at the table as well as make others – those whom the people at the table recall during the conversation - a part of the company.

The table the company is sitting at should by all means be united, it isn't customary to sit at separate tables – either at home (Russians would always find an additional table, attach it to the main one and cover both with one tablecloth) and or in a restaurant (in this case they would push tables together).

## **Formality and informality**

### *Communicative democracy*

While communicating with both acquaintances and strangers Russians strive for simplicity in communication and communicative equality.

Russians like to speak quite informally, they demonstrate friendliness and openness from the very beginning of the conversation, motivating the interlocutor to do the same.

Russian people like to establish faithful, friendly relations with the interlocutor irrespective of the length of their acquaintance. A Russian person tries to use the pronoun of the second person singular (*ty*) instead of that of the second person

plural<sup>2</sup> in conversation with a stranger as soon as possible, thus showing his/her regard and friendly feelings to the interlocutor. Such kind of communication (using the pronoun of the second person singular) is considered to be more desirable for Russians and more natural for them.

During communication a Russian may come up very close to the interlocutor, may touch him/her to establish a friendly contact.

Formulas of politeness in Russian communication are very short, the same should be said about the forms of excuse.

### *Attitude to small talk*

Russian people dislike small talk. They consider it to be insincere and try to avoid it if possible. The best kind of communication for Russians is informal as it allows discussing personal issues.

### *Priority of heart-to-heart talk*

Russians highly value the so called 'heart-to-heart talk'. It is an informal talk between 2 people, which usually takes place in the kitchen, so it might be also called a kitchen talk. The atmosphere of the talk is informal and friendly, people are dressed informally and even casually, the talk isn't limited in time. Both people complain of hardships of life, seek sympathy and meet it.

### *Priority of informal communication*

As it has been already stressed, informal communication is greatly valued in Russia. Formal talk, on the contrary, is

---

<sup>2</sup> In Russia it is considered polite to address a stranger with the pronoun of the second person plural (vy).

considered to be insincere and emotionless. Russians think that formal talk is too ceremonious and does not lead to real contact. Due to this it is usually valued negatively and is considered to be not more than an inevitable and forced step. The phrase "*We had a purely formal talk*" has negative connotation, the sentence "*I am speaking to you formally*" means that the people speaking to each other have strained relations and the talk isn't going to be friendly.

Informal communication in Russia is much more effective than formal. While making business in Russia one should first get acquainted with the business partners, establish personal relations and make friends with them.

The effectiveness of informal communication in Russia is very well described by Yale Richmond. He arrived at a Moscow hotel late in the evening. He was very hungry and wanted to have a snack before going to bed. But to eat at the hotel buffet he had to change dollars into rubles. So he approached the person on duty for his floor (an old lady) and inquired about the location of the currency exchange office. The lady answered that it had closed for the day. To his question what to do in this situation she shrugged her shoulders and looked him over indifferently.

"From my past experience in Russia I knew not to retreat, so I stood my ground, changed the subject, and began to converse with the old lady. We talked about my long trip from the States, the purpose of my visit, the Moscow weather, where I had learned to speak Russian, her children and mine, and how nice it was for me to be back in Russia again. After a while, I returned to the subject of my hunger and asked if she had any suggestions as to what I might do before the snack bar closed for the night.

"I'll lend you some rubles", she replied, reaching for her satchel under the desk, "and you can pay me back tomorrow".

My approach had worked. A kind old Russian grandmother had taken pity on a hungry American and lent him a few of her

own rubles so he could get some bread, cheese and tea before retiring for the night.” (Richmond, p. 2-3)

“Russians, - writes Y. Richmond, - respond to a human approach, and they can be warm and helpful once a good interpersonal relationship has been established. When that point is reached, their word is good, *nyet* becomes *da*, and deals can be done. This is the key to understanding the Russians.” (Richmond, p.3)

## **Communicative self presentation**

Russians are very reserved in self presentation. Unlike an American, who might describe him/herself as the best specialist in a certain sphere, a Russian would prefer to be more modest. Foreign businessmen often note that their Russian partners are too shy to advertise themselves, too modest in selling themselves at the labor market. Russians usually try to sell the results of their work, but not themselves as professionals. They allow their partners to evaluate them as specialists, but don't try to form a high estimate of their work themselves.

## **Politeness**

### *Attentive listening*

Attentive listening in Russian communicative behavior is desirable, is always called for, but actually isn't kept.

Foreigners are very often surprised that at many official meetings Russians do not listen to presenters and speak to each other instead. This is due to the fact that Russians consider official meetings as a sort of a ritual, where one should take part just for the sake of mere formality. As it has been

mentioned above, Russians dislike formal communication and think that the main thing in such situations is not attention, but the very fact of participation.

Actors and singers are usually listened to attentively, it is considered impolite to speak, eat or drink during the performance.

In interpersonal communication and group discussions Russians can't be considered to be attentive listeners. Communicative dominance, sociability, emotions and negative attitude to compromises usually motivate Russians not to listen to their interlocutor, but rather to interrupt the latter, trying to argue, to express their own point of view and insist upon it.

### *Acceptance of rudeness*

Many foreigners note that Russians may be sometimes rude to their interlocutors. This may be explained as a consequence of their emotionality and negative attitude to compromises. After being rude to each other Russians may continue their talk with less emotional tension, having said something like "We both have been too emotional".

It is quite possible in Russia to be rude to one's kids, a chief may be rude to his/her subordinate, a wife and a husband may be rude to each other. In public places one may hear unprintable language, which is condemned by the public opinion but is practically not protested against, especially by men.

Though rude speech is blamed by Russian cultural norms, it is very widely spread in communication in Russia. Russians are quite tolerant towards it, it is considered to be a forced and thus a possible means of pressure.

*Attentiveness to strangers*

Russian communicative tradition presupposes warning strangers about possible troubles, disorder in clothes, possible material losses, etc. It is allowed to give advices to strangers.

Questions how to get to this or that place may be addressed to any person, not only to officials like militiaman or postman. The person addressed to usually gives detailed information, shows the way or may even take the stranger to the necessary place. Being unable to help a Russian would feel ill at ease and would certainly give an advice whom to ask to get the necessary information.

*Politeness to strangers*

In comparison with representatives of Western cultures Russians are less polite in everyday life. Being rather attentive to strangers, they are nevertheless less polite to them than to their acquaintances. Speaking with strangers they may not demonstrate speech etiquette, may use impolite forms of address and rather rude answers. They might even push a stranger and not apologize.

*Politeness to acquaintances*

As we have already mentioned, Russians are much more polite to their acquaintances and friends, and much more courteous.

*Politeness to elderly people*

As for attention to elderly people, it is much greater in Russia than in the Western countries. Russians usually help elderly people to cross the street, to carry bags, a Russian usually gives

up his/her place to an elderly person in public transport, might invite an elderly relative to live at his/her place. But as for politeness to elderly people, it is rather low. One may be rude and demanding with old people, children and even grandchildren may cry at them, may ignore their requests and not answer their questions.

Old people are often not spoken much to in their families, they are not considered to be interesting and worthy interlocutors. It should be noted that elderly people themselves usually support such situation, saying something like “It’s not interesting to talk to us, talk by yourselves”.

To sum it up, we should say that elderly people in Russia are taken care of, helped with money if necessary, but are not treated politely in their families.

In public places elderly people are treated more politely, with more etiquette.

### *Politeness to kids*

Politeness to kids in Russian communication is not obligatory. It is considered that kids should obey their parents, and there is no need for the latter to be polite to them. Very often parents cry at their kids as at subordinates. Politeness to unfamiliar children is usually higher, but it is guided by the main principle that a grown-up is always right. Kids can be addressed with any reprimand, their possible retorts are usually stopped by means of the following arguments – “*I know better*”, “*You are too small to understand it*”, etc.

### *Politeness of kids to parents and adults*

Kids are usually polite to adults, especially those under 11-12. As for teenagers and senior children they may allow themselves

to speak to parents as to equals, be impolite to them, not to fulfill their parents' requests and orders.

Unfamiliar adults are usually treated by kids much more polite than their parents and relatives.

### *Politeness to women*

Foreigners note that Russian men are very polite to unfamiliar women, try to be attentive, to help them physically, to give a good account of themselves by their polite communication. However in family life Russian men are much less polite to their wives.

### *Politeness to schoolchildren and students*

In Russian pedagogical tradition a teacher stands much higher than a pupil, a University professor is much higher than a student. Due to this fact communicative behavior of a teacher in Russia has some features of dominance and presupposes implicit fulfillment of the teacher's demands connected both with studies and discipline. Politeness to pupils is desired but is not obligatory, there may be exceptions. A teacher may raise the voice, may be emotional, categorical, use imperative constructions in speech, and may violate "adult" norms of politeness.

Teachers usually justify violations of norms of politeness in communication with pupils by the traditional stereotypes of the type "I lack patience", "They drove me to an extreme", "They don't understand otherwise", etc. Kids are displeased with impoliteness of teachers but accept it as a tradition of pedagogical communication.

University professors are much more polite to their students than school teachers.

*Politeness to teachers*

Impoliteness to teachers is considered in Russian communication as a gross violation of communicative norms and one's behavior. It usually requires immediate investigation and punishment. Politeness of schoolchildren and students to their teachers is maintained in Russia by tradition, public opinion, parents and teachers themselves. A teacher is considered to be a person who it is prohibited to be rude to.

Thus we may say that politeness in pedagogical communication is the so-called "one way only". It is obligatory and usually kept to when communication is from below, when it is a pupil or a student who is speaking to a teacher, while in communication from above, when a teacher is speaking to a pupil, there may be exceptions.

In Russian communicative culture teachers are not criticized. Authoritarian relations between teachers and pupils still remain a tradition in Russian school.

*Politeness of the serving staff*

Throughout decades of the XX century politeness in service sphere in Russia has been desirable and has always been called for. (There was a constant appeal to salesmen and customers to be polite to each other.) Despite all these efforts politeness in this sphere in Russia still remains low.

There are still many cases of indifference and rudeness to customers in Russia. The root of this phenomenon lies in the privileged position of salesmen during the long years of shortages in the former Soviet Union. Nowadays, due to the changes in Russian society, politeness in service sphere in Russia has raised a lot, though it is still less than in the Western countries where the main principle of this sphere is "The client

is always right”. One may predict that market relations would lead to increase of politeness in Russian service sphere.

Many foreigners consider Russian serving staff to be impolite due to the fact that salesmen and clerks don't smile to the customers. This however shouldn't be viewed as impoliteness – as it will be shown below, smile in Russian communication isn't connected with the category of politeness.

## **Regulation**

### *Noninterference*

Noninterference as inadmissibility of unsanctioned intrusion into the private life of the interlocutor is practically absent in Russian communicative culture. In fact every Russian may speak to any person, may interfere with other people's business, which manifests the communal spirit of Russian mentality.

It should be noted that noninterference is often condemned by Russian mind – it is considered to be necessary to step in, help, improve activities and behavior of other members of the society.

It is also considered necessary to make reprimands to those who violate public norms and laws, irrespective of the fact whether these people are acquaintances or strangers. It is accustomed to take care of other people's safety and warn them about possible danger. It is necessary to help people if they are in trouble – a popular Russian proverb says that there is no alien grief.

### *Possibility of modification of other people's behavior*

Russians like to modify other people's behavior. They constantly tell kids (both their own and unfamiliar) what to do

and what not to do, give advises to their acquaintances, make reprimands to strangers.

A Russian may openly express dissatisfaction with both acquaintances and strangers, he/she may demand from them adherence to certain norms and rules, saying something like “*Why don’t you ...*”

From the point of view of representatives of Western cultures Russians constantly interfere with other people. As one Englishman noted, there is always a Russian who imagines him/herself to be in charge of all others and regulates other people’s behavior, criticizing them and telling them what to do and what not to do. As a rule, these are elderly ladies – grannies, as Russians call them. A Peace Corpse volunteer working in Russia said that every granny would curse her if in cold weather she hadn’t put on her warm clothes.

Yale Richmond puts it like this: “Russians seem compelled to intrude the private affairs of others. Older Russians admonish young men and women – complete strangers – for perceived wrongdoings, using the impersonal term of address, *molodoy chelovek* (young man) or *dyevushka* (girl). On the street, older women volunteer advice to young mothers on the care of their children. American parents in Moscow have been accosted by Russian women and accused of not dressing their children properly for the severe winter. One American, whose child was clad in well-insulated outwear, would respond by unzipping her child’s jacket and inviting the Russian women to feel how warm her child’s body actually was. In a collective society, everybody’s business is also everyone else’s”. (Richmond, p.19)

Russians very often modify the behavior of the strangers by making them reprimands and giving directions like “*Go ahead!*”, “*Stand aside!*”, “*Move your bags!*”, etc. A German girl, having returned home after 8 years of studies in Russia (5 years of University plus 3 years of post-graduate studies)

merely shocked her German colleagues by saying on a tram *“Why are you standing? Go ahead!”*

Modifying of other’s behavior is possible (and in a way acceptable) in the following situations: in public transport, in a line, while taking seats in the theatre and cinema.

An important manifestation of modification of behavior in Russian communication is the existence of such speech act as reprimand and its high frequency. American communicative behavior lacks such an act.

One more form of modification of behavior in Russian communication is the tradition to warn strangers about possible troubles. It is customary to warn people about possible troubles with kids (*“Your kid might lose his glove”*), disorder in clothes (*“Your coat is dirty”, “Your raincoat is worn”*), possible material losses (*“There is a hole on your plastic bag – you might lose your things”*), etc. There is also a custom to recommend where to sit or to stand in transport, how to better locate one’s luggage and kids (*“You’d better put your bag on the upper shelf”; “You’d better take the boy on your knees”*).

## **Conflict management**

### *Debate addiction*

Debates traditionally play a great role in Russian communication. Love to debates is one of the most striking features of Russian communicative behavior. Russians like to dispute about very different problems, both general and concrete. A Chinese interpreter noted that Russians may dispute about very abstract questions – how to bring up children, whether it is necessary or not to make the land private, etc.

Russians are easily got involved in disputes, they are always ready to express their opinion on practically every problem.

They do not try to avoid arguments, they may debate even when they are at a party. A Russian may interfere with an argument of strangers if he/she thinks that they are wrong.

Russians like to witness debates and evaluate them. They like to clear up who is right and who is wrong. They might even discuss the results of debates like the results of sports competitions.

A rather popular speech genre in Russia is the so-called “elucidation of attitudes” – a very emotional argument with recrimination.

Foreigners are usually surprised that Russians might argue with each other passionately but such argument wouldn't lead to offence or breaking down the relations. After a heated discussion the participants might again sit down at table and continue friendly communication. A Chinese interpreter noted that after such an argument Chinese people wouldn't speak to each other at least for a year. A British teacher said that in his country such argument would lead to a fight between its participants.

### *Attitude to compromises*

Russians show negative attitude to compromises. Uncompromisingness is one of the essential features of Russian mentality, which is vividly revealed in communication.

Foreigners note that Russians always try to show that they are right, try to win in the argument, make the interlocutor take their point of view.

A Russian feels uncomfortable if he/she hasn't finished the argument, hasn't proved that he/she is right. Russians like to witness arguments, quarrels and conflicts, discuss them and evaluate who argued better and who won.

If a person's point of view isn't accepted he/she might be seriously upset and even offended. It should be noted that in such

situation when it turns out that two people have different points of view they might consider that they have quarreled and might be offended with each other.

Many Russian people seriously consider that not to win in an argument means “to lose one’s face”. A person who has lost in the dispute often takes it close to the heart, other people usually feel sorry for that person and try to console him/her, saying something like “*You are absolutely right, but it’s no use disputing with him – he won’t listen to any arguments*”.

Russian communicative conscience hardly differentiates whether this or that issue is a matter of principle or not. As a result all arguments are potentially considered to be of the first type.

Unlike representatives of Western communicative culture Russians are in the habit to directly and categorically express their point of view, not trying to soften it.

Compromises are considered in Russia to be unworthy, they are believed to be a manifestation of absence of guiding principle.

“The Anglo-Saxon instinct,” writes George F. Kennan, American distinguished diplomat and historian, “is to attempt to smooth away contradictions, to reconcile opposing elements, to achieve something in the nature of an acceptable middle ground as a basis for life...The Russian tends to deal only in extremes and is not particularly concerned to reconcile them” (Kennan, p.528)

It should be noted that a Russian expression “*a non-conflict person*” has negative connotation and is a synonym of a weak-willed person, incapable of insisting on his/her point of view and principles. The notion “tolerance” is also very often considered by Russian mind to be a negative quality and is associated with absence of principles.

Negative attitude to compromises in Russia is vividly reflected in the existence in the Russian language of the word

*enemy* for denoting people whom a person has a conflict with. In many other languages this word isn't used to denote interpersonal relations, but only those between countries. Americans, for example, prefer to call the person they are in bad terms with not an enemy, but rather *a person who dislikes me*.

#### *Public discussion of disagreement*

Russian communicative culture permits open public expression of one's disagreement with the interlocutor. It is quite possible to say "*I am against it!*", "*I don't agree with you*", "*I'll never agree with you*" and the like, which is impossible in the majority of Western cultures.

Russians communicants, unlike Englishmen, Finns and representatives of many other cultures are ready to openly demonstrate their contradictions.

#### *Acceptance of emotional argument*

Emotional argument in Russian communication is more than possible. As it has already been stated, demonstration of emotions is one of the most vivid features of Russian communicative behavior. Emotional argument may last in Russia much longer than in other European countries and it does not necessarily presuppose any kind of physical insult or fight. After rather long (from the Western perspective) argument Russians may calm down and continue their talk less emotionally.

#### *Categorical expression of difference of opinions*

Russian communicative behavior permits not only to categorically formulate one's opinions and points of view, but also to categorically demonstrate difference of opinion.

Russians very often use such words and phrases as “No!”, “Never!”, “Definitely not!”, etc.

*Love to criticize*

Russian talk is very critical. This Russian communicative feature is very noticeable for Americans, who note that Russians like to criticize very much and criticize practically everything. Some foreigners note, that Russians like to criticize their own industry but don't want it to be done by foreigners. If the latter happens Russians immediately start defending their country.

*Tradition to raise serious problems  
in everyday communication*

Unlike Western cultures Russian communicative culture is characterized by the tradition to raise serious problems in everyday communication. One may propose difficult themes, put questions which might lead to heated argument.

Even at guests Russians discuss too serious problems, which usually surprise foreigners a lot. The problems which may be raised at guests are those of bringing up children, political and moral ones, i.e. those which are not directly connected with everyday life of the people. E. Roberts notes that “Russian conversation is never trivial. Within minutes, the subject is the meaning of life and philosophical discussion”. (Roberts, p.60)

Russian communicative behavior permits revealing one's problems in communication and shifting the responsibility of solving them on to other people: “I don't know what to do”, “What should I do?”, etc. The popular Western answer “It's your problem” is not accepted in Russian communication in such situations.

*Acceptance of conflict topics in communication*

While people in the USA, Great Britain, Germany and many other countries prefer to choose topics which would not lead to a conflict or the ones, like British talk about weather, where it is customary to agree with the interlocutor, Russians practically don't have thematic taboos of such kind. Any topic in Russia, which is of interest to at least one of the participants of the talk, may be the theme of communication irrespective of the fact whether it might cause an argument or not. Only intellectuals may sometimes try to avoid conflict topics saying something like "Let's change the theme".

*Insistence on one's point of view*

Insistence on one's point of view is very popular in Russia. It is considered to be a desire to defend one's principles during the debate. Very often the opposite point of view is completely rejected, which is considered to be a form of defending one's interests. Due to this very vivid communicative feature the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Soviet Union Andrew Gromyko got his nickname 'Mr. No'.

*Categorical formulation of problems*

Formulation of problems in Russia is very often categorical. People are asked to choose between only two possible variants – *either... or, yes or no*. The possibility to formulate a compromising solution is neglected.

### *Attitude to dissidence*

Russian society demonstrates negative attitude to dissidence. Expressing of not commonly accepted point of view might make people be on the alert, cause incomprehension and even hostility. Such reaction is due to communal spirit of Russian mentality – a Russian thinks that the group, the majority is always right and can't be mistaken. It is extremely difficult for a Russian to disagree with a group, with the majority, the more so – to express a political idea which differs from the accepted one. A Russian should better second the common opinion than defend his/her own point of view.

Dissidents are treated in Russia with certain compassion – as people who don't understand the obvious. Russians consider dissidents to be like white crows; people feel pity for them and suspect them to be abnormal. It's no wonder that political dissidents in the former Soviet Union were usually put in the lunatic asylums.

As Y. Richmond writes, "In Russia, creating a consensus, whether in religion or politics, has been seen as desirable, and dissidents somewhat strange – if not at times insane – for refusing to join it." (Richmond, p. 30)

### *Concentration of argument on solving the problem*

Though many Russian arguments of course lead to solving certain problems, quite a number of them are arguments on abstract topics, which do not refer to the sphere of immediate practical interests of its participants and are not aimed at solving concrete practical tasks. Russian argument very often does not presuppose immediate practical reaction of the participants but is rather oriented to solving global problems, crucial for the country and mankind.

A Russian person often interprets an argument not as a means of finding the truth but rather a mental exercise and a form of emotional and sincere communication. It's due to this fact that the sides in the argument often deviate from the initial theme.

Discussion of many problems at production meetings in Russia is often completed by accepting very general resolutions like “*to increase*”, “*to strengthen*”, “*to pay special attention to*”, etc. Sometimes resolutions are carried not for fulfillment, but just for report, to show that the problem has been discussed - as Russians put it, “*for the minutes*”.

## **Contents of communication**

### *Scope of information discussed*

Russians show great interest to the wide range of problems. Questions addressed to the interlocutor are not thematically limited and may concern different spheres of life. The topics discussed might include politics, moral problems, economy, elections, crime, bringing up children, education, etc.

Russians are very inquisitive and show a strong desire to be well informed. They usually ask many questions, especially to foreigners and people whom they just got acquainted with. The most inquisitive is rural population, less educated people and female neighbors.

One of the manifestations of the desire of Russians to be well informed is the tradition to discuss other people. Having discussed their personal news the interlocutors would go on speaking about their friends in common, asking each other questions like “*Have you heard about Sergey?*”, “*How is Ann?*”, etc.

A common strategy in a talk with a new acquaintance in Russia is trying to find people whom they both know. Having

just got acquainted with a person a Russian would ask him/her questions like “*Do you know Mr. N? He seems to be working at your office*” or “*I heard you work at the University. I know Mr. N. who works there. Do you know him?*”.

Russian communication is practically not tabooed, especially if compared with that in the West.

Russians are characterized by readiness to discuss a great amount of questions and the ability to show certain knowledge in a great variety of topics. Foreigners note that Russians usually have their own opinion on the majority of topics that might be the subject of discussion.

Russians are always ready to share the information, they willingly inform their surroundings about interesting facts and latest news. The desire of Russians to know more than they really need is a striking feature of their communicative behavior. Due to this feature of theirs Russians are much more informed on the wide variety of topics than Western people are. Russians usually know a lot about the world, other countries, their culture and traditions, as well as about their colleagues and neighbors.

Russian communication is characterized by situational and thematic freedom – communicative topics are not assigned to concrete communicative situations. Foreigners are very much surprised by the fact that Russians are used to speak about their work and problems connected with it at home and to discuss family news while being at work.

It is quite possible to phone home to somebody on business and to discuss problems, connected with his/her work, while in many other countries it is prohibited.

### *Scope of reported information*

A Russian may be very sincere and talkative while speaking even to slightly known people. Even not being asked to Russians

may tell a lot about themselves regardless of the fact whether the interlocutor is interested in it or not. Without any leading questions they might share with the interlocutor the information which they possess and which in their opinion might be interesting for the latter.

### *Intimacy of inquired information*

If compared with the West a Russian is usually eager to get from the interlocutor very intimate information.

It is accepted and possible in Russia to ask about one's age, salary and political preferences, inquire who the person voted or will vote for, whether he/she is married or not, if he/she has children, a car and a summer cottage, where he/she lives and what kind of apartment has. Possible are questions about religion – one may be asked what confession he/she belongs to. If the interlocutor is a teacher it is quite possible to ask about the subject he/she teaches.

Topics about the person's state of health and diseases are rather rare though not prohibited.

### *Intimacy of reported information*

Many foreigners note that Russians may share their personal information even with a stranger. They might tell the latter about their age, family status, possible problems with kids, the sum of their salary, place of work, additional earnings, etc.

### *Desire to constantly get new information*

Russians constantly share the new information they have got and expect others to do the same.

*Love to verbal evaluation*

In communication Russians constantly give evaluations – to events, situations, other people and even their interlocutors. Such evaluations are very frequent and both positive and negative. It should be noted that all evaluations including negative ones are given openly, without being softened.

Very often Russians divide people into categories and call them according to their qualities – an impudent fellow, an egoist, a fool, an ass, etc. If compared with Western communication Russians give negative evaluations and recall negative facts more frequently. It is possible to negatively evaluate the situation and leave there one's interlocutor.

Russians are in the habit of evaluating everything only into two categories – good or bad. In the well-known poem of Vladimir Mayakovsky “What Is Good and What Is Bad”, which is read by all Russian kids, a small son comes to his Dad and asks him what is good and what is bad, as it is supposed to be nothing between them.

*Thematic limitations*

Russians do not have as many thematic and speech taboos as representatives of other cultures. It should be also noted that existing taboos are rather mild.

One shouldn't smile and laugh being among people who have difficult problems (say, with their own health or that of their relatives), shouldn't speak about sex in the presence of kids, about problems with digestion while being at table. While being in a company it isn't accepted to speak about mental and sexual diseases of the common acquaintances.

If there are men at the table women are not supposed to tell anecdotes and to toast.

Alongside with it the following isn't tabooed:

- talking about business problems at home and discussing family news while being at work
- calling people home on business and calling at work on personal issues
- questions about age, family status, whether the person has children or not, where he/she lives, what kind of apartment he/she lives in, whether he/she has a summer cottage or a car
- questions about profession and position of the interlocutor, his/her relatives and kids
- questions about the interlocutor's parents, their health, place of residence
- questions about political views and preferences, who the interlocutor voted or will vote for
- questions about the interlocutor's salary and additional earnings
- questions concerning religiousness of the interlocutor – whether he/she is religious, what confession he/she belongs to.

Not prohibited, though rare, are questions about the person's state of health, height, weight and diseases.

It should be noted that all these topics are tabooed (either strictly or mildly) in the Western communicative tradition.

### *Importance of humor in communication*

Humor plays an important role in Russian communication. If Americans are characterized by everyday situational humor and constant kidding everywhere – at home, in the family, at office, Russians consider such behavior to be silly. Constant wit is not valued by Russians, people who demonstrate it are considered to be light-minded. But in another situation, when everybody is resting and sitting at table, people of such kind are admired. Russians are merry and cheerful people, but to

reveal these qualities they need certain conditions – good mood and a good company. Under such conditions Russian communication becomes merry, friendly and witty.

Russians greatly value humor while being at guests, they are fond of people who are merry and witty, who tell anecdotes. Such people are usually considered to be “the soul of the company”. The party itself is regarded as successful if there were many jokes and anecdotes, a lot of fun.

## **Orientation to the interlocutor**

### *Communicative dominance*

During communication a Russian tries to attract the attention of the interlocutors, tries to show himself as a clever and interesting person.

Being in a company Russian people try to impress the audience, they speak much about themselves, their experience, trips, prestigious friends and acquaintances. One may say that a Russian expresses him/herself mainly in communication, in company. (As for everyday life, he/she tries to be modest and not to stand out against others – see above in the section on self presentation)

### *Orientation to ‘saving the face’ of the interlocutor*

In Russian communicative practice interlocutors very often don’t give each other a chance ‘to save the face’ in the argument and gladly leave the other side in defeat. It isn’t customary to console the interlocutor after an argument or debate, to pay attention to his/her feelings.

Russian language doesn't have special phrases to politely state differences in opinion, the only phrase of such kind is "I still adhere to my own opinion".

### *Interruption of the interlocutor*

Though being considered impolite and even insulting, interruption of the interlocutor in Russian communicative practice is witnessed very often. In Russia you may interrupt the people who are speaking, may address a question to one or both of them. It is equally possible to interrupt both strangers and acquaintances. It is necessary to apologize while interrupting the person, but interruption itself is quite possible.

### *Insistence on getting information*

Russians are very sincere when they tell about themselves, but they usually wait for the same frankness in return.

If the interlocutor doesn't answer the questions frankly a Russian gets offended and may be rather straightforward saying something like "*I see you don't want to tell where you work*" or "*Well, if you don't want to tell how much you earn I'll do without it*".

Sometimes at the end of the conversation a Russian may suddenly say "*You haven't told me where you work*". This means that he/she hasn't got return frankness and sincerity he/she hoped for.

### *Frequency of using compliments*

Compliments in Russian communication are not very frequent and are used mostly by highly educated people. Compliments are considered in Russia to be mainly the

prerogative of communication between men and women and are supposed to be usually paid by men.

Russian people are not very good at paying compliments and as a rule use standard forms like *“You look fine”*. As for the people who are being complimented, they usually have difficulties in finding speech formulas for the adequate reply. As it turns out, the Russian language doesn’t have any other speech formulas to politely accept the compliment except the standard *“Thank you”*.

Compliments are considered by many Russians to be the manifestation of insincerity, they regard compliments as insincere praise. Due to these factors compliments turn out to be alien to Russian culture. In Russia it is possible to denounce the compliment, saying *“Thank you for the compliment”* or *“You are good at paying compliments to women”*. Phrases of such kind show that the speaker doesn’t consider the compliment to be true and sincere.

## **Volume of communication**

Russians like long talks with each other. If they have limited time for conversation they usually express regret for it.

Short conversations are considered better than none, but regret will still be expressed: *“It’s a pity, we have no enough time for a talk”*.

Russian dialogues as well as monologues in everyday speech are rather long. Russians like to express their opinion, to speak and to be listened to.

Russians have very low tolerance to silence. There is a concept *“an inconvenient pause”* – a pause which happened in group talk. It is necessary to immediately fill this pause, to keep conversation going. Traditional topics for it are meals which are on the table or children and pets, who are present in the room.

## **Non-verbal communication**

### *Smiling in everyday life*

Non-smiling in everyday life is one of the most prominent features of Russian communicative behavior.

In Russian communication smile is not a sign of politeness. In Western countries smile usually symbolizes politeness. The more the person smiles while greeting you and speaking to you, the more politeness he/she demonstrates. In Russia, vice versa, a smile for the sake of politeness may put the interlocutor on his/her guard. The phrase “He smiled to be polite” has a negative connotation in Russian.

Constant polite smile is considered in Russia to be run-of-the-mill. Russians value it as insincere, suspicious and consider it to be a sign of unwillingness to show one’s real feelings. A Russian teacher of English, who, like Americans, always kept smiling, annoyed her Russian colleagues greatly and was always asked to take off the smile from her face.

Russians do not smile at people whom they do not know. Smile in Russia is addressed mainly to one’s acquaintances. This is one of the reasons why salesgirls in Russia do not smile at customers – they don’t know them.

It is not customary in Russia to return a smile. If a stranger smiles at a Russian, the latter wouldn’t smile in return but would rather seek for a reason of the smile, trying to recall whether he/she has met the stranger. If it is an acquaintance who smiles at a Russian, the latter wouldn’t automatically smile in return either, but would consider the smile to be an invitation for a talk.

Unlike Americans, Russians do not smile at people after an eye contact with them, on the contrary, they try to divert their glance.

Russian smile does not fulfill the function of preventing the interlocutor from distress. In some cultures, e.g. Chinese, smile

has such a function – A Chinese speaks about his grief with a smile in order not to disappoint the interlocutor.

Russian smile is a sign of personal disposition to the partner. It demonstrates the person it is addressed to the speaker's sympathies. That is the reason why Russians smile only at their acquaintances – why should they feel sympathy to strangers?

It is not customary to have a smile on the face when at work or at serious business. It is also one of the reasons why Russian customs offices, salesgirls, waiters and representatives of other professions of this kind do not smile.

Kids at school are not allowed to smile at lessons – they should be serious because it is their work. The most common reprimand of teachers in Russian schools is “Don't smile – write!”

A Russian person should have a serious reason for a smile and this reason should be evident for other people. In Russia they may ask a smiling person: “What are you smiling at?” Yale Richmond describes an episode which happened to an American scholar when he brought shoes to a Moscow cobbler for repair. “Entering the shop smiling, as he would at home, he presented his shoes to the cobbler. “What are you smiling at?” barked the cobbler angrily”(Richmond, p.41).

Only sincere smile is favored and “allowed” in Russia, if one's life is hard, he/she is by no means expected to smile, such smiles are “out of law” (“Her husband divorced her, she has no work and no money to live on. And she is still smiling!” - such condemning utterances may be heard in Russia.)

Russians do not differentiate smile and laughter. Smiling in Russia is associated with laughter and laughter without an understandable reason is considered to be a sign of silliness or mental sickness. (There is a popular Russian proverb which says that laughter without a reason is a sign of foolishness.)

It should be noted, however, that in spite of the fact that Russians usually do not smile in everyday life, they are not gloomy, but usually merry, cheerful and witty.

### *Tolerance to silence*

Long pauses in Russian communication are not permitted. Communication should go on uninterrupted, both in dialogues and group discussions interlocutors should be constantly involved in talk. A pause in communication is considered to be awkward, it should be eliminated as soon as possible otherwise all participants of communication feel ill at ease as the contact in communication has been lost.

### *Desirable size of communication group*

Groups of communication may be of the following type: super small (1-2 interlocutors), small (3-5 interlocutors), medium (6-10 interlocutors), and large (more than 10 interlocutors).

Intelligentsia and senior citizens prefer super small and small groups of communication, young people – medium and large ones, middle aged people – those of small and medium size. On holidays Russians prefer medium and large groups, elderly people – small and medium ones.

In general Russian communicative culture may be characterized by preference to small and medium communication groups.

### *Distance of communication*

If compared with the distance in Western cultures, Russian communicative distance is short. Some foreigners even call it very short. Americans would feel ill at ease if the distance

between them and the person speaking to them is less than 12 inches (30 centimeters). Many Russians in such situation will feel quite comfortable.

*Physical contact of the interlocutors*

Russian communicative culture is a contact one. During a talk Russians may touch the interlocutor's hand, arm or shoulder, embrace or half embrace the interlocutor, (especially if the latter is a young person or a woman), take him/her by the hand.

Physical contact in Russian communicative behavior is of rhetorical character. All the nonverbal signals described above demonstrate positive emotions, the desire to show to the interlocutor the speaker's positive attitude and wish to get in contact. Such nonverbal behavior also aims at intensifying the emotional influence of speech addressed to the person and making it more sincere.

Unlike Western cultures, it is quite possible in Russia to touch a person by one's trunk in transport or in a line –it would neither be regarded as the violation of the person's privacy, nor as a signal to any action.

“Physical contact with complete strangers – anathema to Americans – does not bother Russians, - writes Y. Richmond, - In crowds, they touch, push, shove, and even use elbows without hard feelings” (Richmond, p.17). “Accustomed to close physical contact, Russian men, as well as women, hold hands while strolling the streets and touch when talking. Women dance with other women if there are not enough men to go around or if not asked by a man for a dance. Russian men embrace and kiss each other on lips as well as on cheeks, as I learned once when I had a male kiss planted on my lips, much to my surprise, at the end of a long and festive evening” (Richmond, p.18).

### *Intensity of gesticulation*

The intensity of gesticulation in Russia is medium. But if compared with gesticulation of the majority of West Europeans, as well as Americans, Russian gesticulation would be very noticeable.

### *Amplitude of gesticulation*

In comparison with European communicative culture the amplitude of gesticulation in Russia is wider. Many Russian gestures are fulfilled with the arms at full length, but not semi bended as in Europe. Russians have fewer gestures around the face and the head, and more around the chest and the trunk.

### *Emotions in gesticulation*

There are quite a number of emotional gestures in Russia and it should be noted that in general they are more emotional than in Europe.

### *Sincerity of face gestures*

Russian face gestures are very sincere. One can practically always understand by the expression of the face the attitude of the person to his/her interlocutor, as well as the person's mood. Any face signals hiding the real emotional state of the speaker are not typical.

Non sincere and reserved expression of the face is condemned in Russia. If a person is characterized by the phrases like "*His face doesn't express anything*", "*Not a single muscle in his face moved*", "*He wouldn't move his eyebrow*", etc., it means that the person is considered to be insincere.

People might think that this person is hiding something from the others, and his/her behavior would be blamed.

### *Loudness of speech*

Europeans usually pay attention to the loudness of Russian communication.

It is noted that the loudest speakers in Russia are teenagers, women and adults while speaking to kids.

### *Possibility of increasing loudness of speech*

Many people note that Russian communication may be very emotional – there may be long emotional dialogues and discussions, during which people speak very loudly for a rather long period of time.

Rise of loudness reflects in such cases an increased emotional status of communication, but not necessarily its authoritarian and hostile character.

### *Speech tempo*

If compared with West European communicative traditions Russian speech tempo may be defined as medium. Scandinavians and Baltic people speak slower, Frenchmen – quicker.

### *Possibility of increasing speech tempo*

If loudness and degree of emotions in speech in the Russian dialogue may be spontaneously increased, the tempo of speech is raised very rarely. Long talk in the increased tempo is not common for Russian communication.

At the end of our description of Russian communicative behavior we should emphasize that the enumerated features are principal ones and are revealed by the majority of Russians in the main communicative situations and communicative spheres.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **The Principal Features of American Communicative Behavior**

For the principle communicative features of American communicative behavior the following factors and parameters appear to be the most relevant:

#### **Communicative contact**

*Sociability*

*Accessibility*

*Expression of emotions*

*Situational dependence of emotional behavior*

*Friendliness*

*Speech mood*

*Tendency to be impersonal*

*Trust to oral speech*

#### **Formality and informality**

*Communicative democracy*

#### **Communicative self presentation**

*Mode of self presentation*

*Love to self advertising and demonstration of personal success*

**Politeness**

**Conflict management**

*Attitude to compromises*

*Tolerance*

**Contents of communication**

*Straightforwardness in communication*

*Business-like character of communication*

*Inquisitiveness*

*Thematic limitations*

*Importance of humor in communication*

**Orientation to the interlocutor**

*Frequency of using compliments*

**Communicative self control**

**Communicative reaction**

## **Non-verbal communication**

*Smiling in everyday life*

*Noisiness in communication*

*Tolerance to silence*

*Eye contact*

*Distance of communication*

Now we proceed to the description of the principal features of American communicative behavior according to the above mentioned factors and parameters.

## **Communicative contact**

*Sociability*

Americans are very sociable, they usually get in contact very easily. Having been just introduced to a person, they would treat him/her very friendly, as if they have known this person for a long time. But this sociability of Americans is of a formal character – Americans are equally friendly with everybody. Their sociability does not demonstrate their personal respect to the interlocutor and having turned aside, an American would immediately forget about the latter.

*Accessibility*

This feature of American communicative behavior usually surprises foreigners a lot. Practically all rooms in American houses, except bedrooms, have no doors. Very often rooms

have no walls either – the kitchen would smoothly turn into the sitting room. Sometimes walls are made of glass.

Many foreigners are usually surprised to see that in an office colleagues might come to each other without knocking at the door or leave the room not bothering to shut the door. Only very important negotiations may be an exception – in this case Americans would insist not to be disturbed.

Due to the struggle against sexual harassment it is customary nowadays that the boss should not shut the door while speaking with an employee, irrespective of the sex of the latter.

### *Expression of emotions*

Unlike representatives of many other cultures, for instance, Asian, Americans don't bother to hide their emotions, they are very spontaneous. Positive emotions may be publicly expressed by very emotional interjections, screaming and crying. Joy and excitement are demonstrated by Americans willingly and very often in an ecstatic way. The passengers of an aircraft might scream in chorus after the announcement about complimentary champagne on board. Trying on clothes in the fitting room in a store you might very often hear the scream from the neighboring one "Oh, I like it!".

Negative emotions are also expressed openly – by rude words and expressions.

Americans themselves explain their emotional communication by the fact that most of the people, especially those, living in big cities, live in constant stress. To overcome its consequences people should behave emotionally.

In general Americans can't be called reserved; they are noisy, emotional and energetic.

*Situational dependence of emotional behavior*

Emotional communication of Americans with their interlocutors is rarely long. Emotions are often dependent on the situation and meet etiquette requirements.

Americans usually seem very friendly but, having turned away from you they would immediately forget about you. Foreigners accustomed to more sincere emotional relations in communication are usually very much surprised when the next day after the party their new acquaintances or the hosts meet them without any emotions, as if they have never seen them. The thing is that for Americans yesterday's emotions are not supposed to be prolonged for the next day.

*Friendliness*

In the early times due to the low density of population in America people tried to help each other, and this trait still remains in the USA.

American communicative behavior may be characterized even by extreme, demonstrative friendliness. An American is always ready to help. Friendliness to customers is a must, the most common question in a shop or an office is "Can I help you?" It should be noted that this constant question addressed to customers irritates many foreign guests.

To be friendly is a positive quality, highly valued in America.

*Speech mood*

Americans are communicative optimists. The usual answers to the question "How are you?" are either "Fine" or "It's O.K."

It is a must for an American to be merry and optimistic, to greet his/her acquaintances with enthusiasm. An American

should always be in good mood and demonstrate it to everybody. He or she shouldn't complain or look depressed. To be gloomy at work is considered to be the same as to be dressed in dirty clothes

Americans are always smiling, demonstrating politeness, optimism and good health.

### *Tendency to be impersonal*

Americans try not to discuss personal problems, not to interfere with one's privacy. Every person is considered to have the right for personal immunity and the questions which might deprive him/her of such immunity shouldn't be asked. That's why despite their general openness Americans are rather reserved in certain situations:

- in case the theme being discussed is considered by them to be too personal (e.g. sexual problems, personal defects);
- in case they don't want to fulfill a certain request but at the same time don't want to insult their interlocutor;
- in case they don't know their interlocutor well enough to discuss personal problems with him/her;
- if in a conversation with an intimate friend they are afraid to wound his/her feelings while discussing a delicate problem.

### *Trust to oral speech*

Americans are fond of all kinds of discussions and talk shows. An important feature of American business communication is the fact that Americans trust the agreements made orally. Oral agreement may even have some priority if compared with the written one. Americans try to discuss orally as

much as possible - such form of discussion saves time and thus is considered to be more effective.

Americans trust oral speech and due to it are subjected to oral persuasion.

## **Formality and informality**

### *Communicative democracy*

Americans are very democratic in communication. It should be noted that democracy in communication becomes apparent not only in horizontal<sup>3</sup>, but in vertical<sup>4</sup> communication as well. Thus an American kid may ask an adult to move away to let him/her enjoy the landscape. It is also customary to call the boss by a nickname.

Douglas Stevenson in his book “American Life and Institutions” explains American informality in communication as a consequence of the historical evolution of the country. “Thrown together in a new world, most immigrants watched the familiar societal distinctions of the old world become blurred. The Revolution had abolished titles of nobility, and state laws did away with the traditional passing on of wealth and land from father to eldest son. As a result, there was never a hereditary aristocracy in the U.S. ... Immigration, the Revolution, and the frontier experience broke down many traditional class barriers which elsewhere remained socially effective much longer. As a result, Americans have always felt less constrained and more informal in their social and professional lives” (Stevenson -1987, p.109).

---

<sup>3</sup>Horizontal communication is that between people of equal age and/or social status.

<sup>4</sup> Vertical communication is that between people of different age and/or social status.

Democracy of Americans is very vividly manifested in the way they dress. A well-dressed elegant woman may cause a question like “Are you having anything special tonight?” When Russian visiting scholars who were invited to a party put on the clothes which they thought were appropriate for the occasion, their colleague, an American teacher of Russian met them with the question “Why have you dressed up?”

Informality of American communication may be also seen at table. Americans usually feel free to taste dishes from the plate of his/her companion and are ready to offer the latter to do the same. One of Russian scholars was dining with his American colleague in an Italian restaurant and as there was some food left on his plate the waiter offered him to take it home in the so-called “doggy-bag”. The Russian professor refused, but to his great surprise his American colleague said that he would take it. The next morning the Russian professor got a call from his colleague’s wife who said: “Wed ate your pasta for breakfast, it was very tasty”. In another restaurant after finishing dinner an American pointed to a piece of fish left on his plate and offered his Russian companion, whom he had got acquainted with several hours before to take it home, explaining his offer by the fact that he was leaving that place the next day and that’s why wouldn’t need the fish.

The habit of informality, the ease with which Americans speak to people they’ve only casually met, as well as the habit of Americans of roughly the same age group and social status to use first names in communication surprises foreigners a lot. But it should be noted that the latter doesn’t symbolize the same degree of intimacy in communication as using first names and pronouns of the second person singular in Russian.

## Communicative self presentation

### *Mode of self presentation*

Americans do not suffer from extreme modesty; they always want to show themselves favorably, to be notable and to draw attention of others.

Americans usually introduce themselves to their interlocutors, and especially to potential employers in the superlative degree. They may say something like “*I am extremely good at doing this or that*”, “*I am an excellent specialist*”. Such utterances can never be heard in European and especially in Asian communication.

It should be noted that such behavior is brought up in American kids since early childhood. The child is taught – if you want to succeed in life, they should notice you. This is the main rule at the labor market.

### *Love to self advertising and demonstration of personal success*

From the point of view of foreigners Americans usually boast of their successes. (As for Russians, they are more inclined to boast not of their successes, but those of their children.)

Americans like to boast of their house, their car, promotion, their town, state and America in general.

It should be stated that Americans’ love to boasting is based on their pride of what they have done themselves, by their own hands.

## Politeness

Americans are traditionally very polite to strangers. They are usually ready to answer questions addressed to them and

offer strangers their help. At the same time it is not usual to do something for the stranger if not being asked for. You may be going along the road in the rain and the passing by cars won't stop to pick you up unless you thumb a lift.

American smile is an obligatory component of politeness to strangers in every situation.

Americans listen attentively. It is customary to smile when listening to your interlocutor – it is considered to be a signal of politeness.

American politeness does not exclude kidding. In communication with acquaintances it is traditional to joke. The atmosphere of kidding is traditional for American families and does not mean impoliteness, as Russians may think – it is polite to be good-natured and democratic to those whom you speak informally with.

American serving staff is traditionally very polite to the customers.

Teachers and university professors are polite to their students. Unlike Russian teachers, they are usually not pedagogically dominant and allow themselves only mild and humorous reprimands. Even home tasks at school are given in a non insistent form, a teacher says something like “*You might want to do this exercise at home*”.

It is not considered impolite to eat, drink, walk around the classroom during classes, and sit in a relaxed posture in front of the teacher.

Americans are polite to their kids. Kids are viewed as equal partners in communication and adults are as polite to them as to other adults. Kids also view adults as equal partners and speak to them as to equals, without special respect.

There is no tradition to show special politeness to women. Men usually do not offer their seats to women. The same may be said about elderly persons – it is considered that there are enough special places for them in public transport.

Rudeness is considered as impoliteness but at the same time Americans in some situations may be rather rude and may use swear words. Such behavior is considered to be excusable: it is believed that a person has a right to react emotionally in stress situations. Nevertheless immediate apologies for emotional outbursts are necessary.

Americans apologize much. It is traditional to apologize if you go the wrong side of the street, if you approach or may approach a stranger too close. Apologies are usually accompanied by smiles.

American politeness excludes many topics of communication which might cause conflict or disagreement. It is polite not to ask many questions. Nevertheless it is not considered impolite to ask one-word questions of the type: “*What?*”, “*Who?*”.

It is polite to react verbally to what is said by the partner – absence of verbal reaction is considered as a sign of embarrassment or hostility.

An important sign of politeness on the part of a guest is to send a “bread and butter” letter to the host after the visit.

It may be said that Russian politeness is more formal and is based mainly on polite words which should be said in proper situations. American politeness is rather informal and allows on many occasions a democratic way of speech and conduct. Being polite for Americans is first of all being friendly to the communicative partner.

American politeness is also based on privacy: being polite means not only being friendly but also presupposes noninterference with others person’s business.

## **Conflict management**

### *Attitude to compromises*

Americans are not aggressive in everyday life. Like Englishmen, they say “Sorry” to the person who bumped into them. They always try to find a compromise – in communication, in interpersonal relations, in business; they would rather say not ‘my enemy’, but “the person who doesn’t like me”.

Americans would openly discuss their problems and disagreements, but would try not to demonstrate any kind of confrontation and would try to find the decision which would satisfy everybody.

### *Tolerance*

Americans are very tolerant. The opinions of the interlocutors or the presenter and the audience may differ greatly, but everybody will be calm and will listen to all points of view very attentively. Public speeches and political meetings in the USA are usually peaceful and well-organized. The only exception was the Democratic Party Congress in 1968.

American sport fans are famous for being reserved which favorably distinguishes them from other spot fans. American audience is in most cases polite to presenters.

Americans usually give their interlocutor an opportunity to “save face” during the argument. They are tolerant in communication with national minorities, mentally and physically disabled. An American driver would patiently help a disabled man to get into the bus regardless of the time it might take. The passengers in their turn would patiently wait till the end of the procedure and would never show any sign of impatience or displeasure, though some of them might be late due to this delay.

At the University lectures in intercultural communication students discuss how to communicate with the disabled (e.g. whether it is possible to ask them about the cause of their disability), how to communicate with sexual and national minorities, people of different races. Students freely discuss these issues, the mixed national structure of the audience doesn't prevent them from expressing their opinions and emotions. Such discussions teach students to effectively communicate with representatives of other cultures.

Americans are also tolerant to violation of language norms. They can forgive their interlocutor poor language knowledge, rude expressions. It should be noted that there is no cult of proper language use in the USA. When the first lady Laura Bush was asked whether her husband's grammar mistakes irritate her, she answered "He doesn't make that many" (Newsweek, April 2001, p.13).

The owners of small firms are usually tolerant to their employees and ready to forgive them their mistakes and defects.

A special way of expressing tolerance is political correctness – a rather new phenomenon in American social life which nevertheless has already become quite popular. Political correctness may be explained as taboo on using words and expressions which might insult a person. Tabooed are the words naming people belonging to certain races. Thus, it is customary to use *Afro-American* instead of *Negro*, *Arab-American* and *Asian* instead of people who have come from Arab and Asian countries.

The names of certain professions are also influenced by political correctness. Thus, the words with the root *man* are substituted by words neutral in gender – *mail carrier* instead of *postman*, *athlete* instead of *sportsman*. Even such a typically American word as *businessman* is being substituted by *entrepreneur*.

There are almost anecdotic cases – thus, instead of the word *fat* it is considered to be more politically correct to use the expression *horizontally challenged*, instead of the word *tall* – the expression *vertically challenged*.

It should be noted that political correctness is an essential element of American way of life. Communicative behavior is regulated by political correctness – in communication, in everyday life Americans try to avoid themes of race, sexual and religious minorities. When in spring 2000 a delegation of an American city came to a Russian city Voronezh, one police officer said in a private talk that almost 90% of crime in his state is committed by black Americans. Later he several times stated that such situation is not typical for the USA, that it was his personal opinion. In the long run he took his words back as he was afraid to be misunderstood. It should be noted that though he told the real facts, he might be dismissed if he had said it officially.

## **Contents of communication**

### *Straightforwardness in communication*

Practically in all situations Americans prefer to straightforwardly discuss their problems, they try to avoid all kinds of ambiguities. It is quite natural for an American to go straight to the essence of the matter; they do not bother to look for the words that their interlocutor might like. Such straightforwardness often leads to rather hot discussions. But it should be mentioned that Americans are always ready to admit that other people might have different points of view.

It should be also mentioned that straightforwardness is equally relevant for American business and everyday life communication. In everyday life Americans also try to be very concrete, to precisely formulate their thoughts.

American kids are challenged to express their opinions and persist on them, they are welcomed to participate in solving family problems.

One more manifestation of American straightforwardness is the tradition not to conceal personal problems during discussion, the tradition to openly speak about one's difficulties. Thus, an American woman might tell a total stranger that she has cancer and should put on weight in order to have enough to lose when her condition worsens, an American man might quite openly say that his daughter has problems at school, etc.

### *Business-like character of communication*

Americans always pretend to be busy. One may say that practical nature prevails over all the rest human qualities of Americans. All business problems are discussed very quickly, agreements are also signed (or rejected) quickly.

One should stress the great role of telephone and electronic communication in America. Quite a number of problems are solved via telephone, fax or e-mail. Such kind of communication saves time and time is money.

Americans usually do not waste time on etiquette formulas. If an American offers you something, you shouldn't think that it is just a polite gesture; you may feel free to accept what he offers. Thus if in a restaurant you are told that you can order anything you like, or in an American house you are offered to take any food you like from the refrigerator, just do it. The host knows what he says – he has thought everything over and has come to the conclusion that he can afford it.

One shouldn't be offended if an American gives monosyllabic replies. Such briefness isn't an insult, it is due to the practical nature of Americans and their desire to save time.

### *Inquisitiveness*

In general Americans are non inquisitive, they are usually not interested in the life of foreign countries; their interests cover exclusively their home country and state. Russian journalists V. Peskov and V. Strelnikov wrote that they were struck by non inquisitiveness of the majority of Americans. During their journey across America, Russian journalists had a lot of conversations with American people, asked them a lot of questions. Americans also had an opportunity to ask the journalists any questions, but practically none of them used this opportunity to learn more about another country.

A University teacher of English from Russia, after participation in the conference in New York traveled for 4 hours across New York State with 3 colleagues - teachers of ESL. During the trip she asked them a lot of questions and learnt a lot about the peculiarities of teaching English as a second language in New York State, about the possibilities of in-service training for teachers, but didn't get a single question in return.

Americans usually discuss their local idols – great baseball and football players, actors, writers, journalists, film stars. The priority is always given to local news.

### *Thematic limitations*

An average American has deep knowledge only within his/her specific professional sphere and is able to communicate profoundly only within the scope of his/her professional or private interests. They are not ashamed to answer “I don't know” to any questions of the interlocutor.

Americans usually know very little about other countries. An American student during the years of perestroika in Russia said to a Russian one “I heard Berlin Wall fell in your country.”

A famous Russian humorist M. Zhvanetsky wrote in his essay "I play America": "I don't read books, I read only newspapers" – they speak proudly about it. "There is a man over there, he reads books, so you'd better ask him. There is a mathematician over there, he might know ... These people read books, those people make money, others design aircrafts and the rest know only where to press and how to turn off. Nobody knows how everything is done. It is known only to some guys in Houston, so you'd better ask them".

### *Importance of humor in communication*

Humor and laughter constitute the essential part of American communication at any level. Jokes in the USA are a means of a social test of the interlocutor, a means of passing information and a means of maintaining communication. Comprehension of American humor in a concrete situation demands certain skills. In general Americans like to pretend that they are worse than they really are, joke at themselves and watch the reaction of others.

There is an atmosphere of kidding in any American family and every American company, and such atmosphere is considered to be normal. Lack of kidding and picking on in a group is on the contrary considered to be a signal that something is wrong.

Humor in America is an important positive quality of a political figure, a teacher, a University professor. Humor is a must for any public speech, a presentation in the USA may even begin with a joke.

In many cases American jokes are rather simple. They are mainly practical and are accompanied by gestures or practical actions. Americans still greatly enjoy jokes of a 'pie-in-the-face' type, while Russians as a rule find them not so funny.

## **Orientation to the interlocutor**

### *Frequency of using compliments*

It is customary in America to compliment and praise each other, speak about each other's success. Teachers praise kids to their parents in written form – they might write that the kid is the best forward, he or she draws very well, etc. If there is nothing to praise of, they might write that the kid eats best of all in class.

## **Communicative self control**

Americans control their communication more than Russians. They may allow themselves to be emotional and aggressive only for a short period of time. As we have already mentioned, it is believed that a person has a right to be emotional in stress situations, but emotional outbursts can't be long and presuppose immediate excuses.

Americans try to be polite in all situations, especially to strangers, in offices and formal situations. In general Americans apologize much more than Russians.

Americans frequently use dictionaries, spell words and ask questions about word meaning and word usage.

They usually try to control their own mistakes in speech.

## **Communicative reaction**

American communicative reaction is mostly reserved. Both positive and negative reactions can be expressed only for a short period of time.

American reaction in the dialogue can not be called sincere – it is expected, formal enough, and follows the etiquette rules.

Americans usually try to be tolerant and control their communicative reaction.

It is considered totally impolite to interrupt a person talking to somebody else.

If the theme of conversation is uninteresting for an American, he/she will nevertheless listen to the interlocutor very patiently.

If the partner demonstrates rude behavior or uses swear words the reaction of an American is usually reserved.

Americans positively react to praise and compliments and rather tolerantly react to speech mistakes and misbehavior of both strangers and familiar people.

## **Non-verbal communication**

### *Smiling in everyday life*

Americans are smilers, Russians are not. Russians think that Americans smile too much and on too many occasions. M. Gorky wrote that when you meet an American, the first you notice of him is his teeth. M. Zadornov, a contemporary Russian writer, called the American smile “chronic”. The writer M. Zhvanetzky wrote that “all Americans smile as if they are plugged in the electric socket”. This is traditional Russian attitude towards those who smile too much.

Russians and Americans smile differently: Russians smile with their lips, Americans smile with both lower and upper teeth.

Russian and American smile has different functions in communication. American smile has two principle meanings: politeness, addressed to the partner, and positive self presentation (“*I’m OK*”). It is customary to smile at children, pets and strangers that look at you. All these functions of the smile are absent in Russian communication.

*Noisiness in communication*

Compared with Europeans and people from Asia Americans speak very loudly. It is especially noticeable in transport and public places where Americans can speak very loudly not bothering whether it might interfere with other people. Some scholars explain such loud behavior of Americans by the fact that Americans don't consider it to be impolite to draw attention of other people.

Russian writer Vlas Doroshevitch wrote in 1907: "A typical American does two things: he makes money and he makes noise. He can't leave without doing any of these 2 things. ... He can't do anything without noise. He shouts at the top of his voice, when he sits down on a chair, it creaks. When he puts down his snuff-box on the table, the ladies quiver."

Americans are very noisy at picnics, when they are resting. They like to produce noise in groups. Noise makes them feel better and be in good mood. That is the reason why the so-called cheer leaders at sports competitions appeared in America.

Americans are also very noisy at party congresses, where they shout very emotionally and wave American flags.

*Tolerance to silence*

The greatest part of Americans hates silence and considers it to be awkward. They try to fill in every pause in conversation. The most popular topics of chattering in America are weather, films, books, family and social events. Conversations on these topics can be heard in America everywhere – at a party, on a bus, in the supermarket, at a sport competition.

Americans like to accompany their activity by different sounds – students would study to the accompaniment of a player, a housewife would fill in the so-called "sound pause" by TV. Almost all Americans turn on the radio when they go to work in

their cars. Very many of them listen to the books recorded on tapes when they are going somewhere. The latter becomes more and more fashionable as you kill two birds with one stone – the tape keeps you awake and you save time for reading the book at home.

### *Eye contact*

It is not accepted in America to look at strangers as it is considered to be the violation of one's privacy. But if an American incidentally fixes his eyes upon a stranger he/she should smile at the latter. Such smile is obligatory and is considered to be a sign of friendliness and desire to get in contact.

It should be noted that while in the United States fixing one's eyes upon an interlocutor for some time is a means of getting in contact, in Russia it doesn't have such a meaning and is usually valued negatively, causing hostility to the interlocutor.

### *Distance of communication*

American distance of communication is rather long, a too short distance in America is associated with infringing on one's personal space, aggression or sexual harassment.

Distance of communication is kept to by Americans very strictly. It should be noted that shortening the distance of communication in America does not symbolize friendly attitude, as it is in Russia.

The most common distance in American communication is that of 1- 1, 5 meters. Friends may come closer to each other - at the distance of 0, 5 -1, 2 meters.

The comfortable communicative zone for an American is that of not less than half a meter. The comfortable distance is

especially important for an American if he/she is in a crowd or in a place where there are too many people. In this case the latter would prefer to stand by him/herself.

In an elevator where the demands of the social distance can't be kept, Americans would go to the opposite sides of the elevator car and not look at each other.

Summing up the enumeration and description of the principal features of American communicative behavior we should stress that it would be quite natural if some representatives of American communicative culture don't demonstrate all of them in certain situations. But in most communicative situations and communicative spheres these features are usually revealed.

## Chapter 3.

# Comparative description of Russian and American communicative behavior

### 1. Problems of comparative description

In this chapter we describe the main differences of Russian and American communicative behavior. The comparison is made in a tabular form to make the differences more evident. We tried to concentrate our attention predominantly on the differences because it is mostly interesting for the reader and is also more important didactically. Some parameters show no difference between the cultures, but if these parameters are important, they are also reflected in the comparative tables.

It is most important to point out that the estimates for concrete parameters of Russian and American communicative behavior are *relative* and are characterized as *high, low, pronounced, fairly high, weakly expressed, etc.* only in respect of the compared communicative culture. In respect of other cultures these estimates may (and certainly will) appear different.

One should also bear in mind that the estimates in the tables should not be treated rigorously – they mainly show the tendencies in communication.

It is usually very difficult to make generalizations in communicative studies and twice as difficult to name these generalizations, to entitle them. This should also be taken into account while reading this chapter – many characteristics used in this chapter may seem debatable and should be taken as such, for this is the first attempt of systematic comparative

description of two verbal cultures and the terminology of such description has a long way to go in its development.

In the tables below we compare Russian and American communicative behavior within 12 principle communicative factors, each consisting of several generalized communicative parameters, the greater part of which is briefly outlined above in chapters 1 and 2.

Each communicative parameter in its turn generalizes a number of communicative features, which are not included in the tables to make the description more general. (It should be noted that communicative features are revealed by the situational model of description of communicative behavior while the present publication uses the parametric one.)

The estimates of parameters in the tables are relevant only for the description of Russian and American communicative cultures, but the parameters themselves may be applied to comparison of any other cultures.

## **2. Parametric description of Russian and American communicative behavior**

<b>Parameters</b>	<b>Russian Communicative Behavior</b>	<b>American Communicative Behavior</b>
-------------------	---------------------------------------	--

### **1. Communicative contact**

<b>Sociability</b>	Very high	High
<b>Expression of emotions</b>	High	Fairly high

<b>Easiness of entering communication</b>	High	Low
<b>Easiness of getting in contact</b>	High	Not high
<b>Sincerity</b>	High	Not high
<b>Frankness in communication</b>	High	Fairly high
<b>Friendliness</b>	Reserved	High
<b>Friendliness of greetings</b>	Reserved	Pronounced
<b>Speech mood</b>	Pessimistic	Optimistic
<b>Communication in groups</b>	Admired	Irrelevant
<b>Accessibility</b>	Below average	Above average
<b>Tendency to be impersonal</b>	Absent	Present
<b>Situational dependence of emotional behavior</b>	Low	High
<b>Trust to oral speech</b>	Average	High
<b>Desire for permanent circle of communication</b>	High	Not expressed

## 2. Formality/Informality

<b>Desire to substitute formal communication for informal</b>	Pronounced	Not expressed
<b>Priority of heart-to-heart talk</b>	Present	Absent
<b>Communicative democracy</b>	Noticeable	High
<b>Desire for informal communication</b>	Noticeable	Expressed
<b>Priority of informal communication</b>	Noticeable	Not expressed
<b>Attitude to small talk</b>	Negative	Positive
<b>Effectiveness of formal communication</b>	Low	Fairly high

## 3. Communicative self presentation

<b>Mode of self presentation</b>	Diffuse	Aggressive
<b>Self presentation of successes</b>	Reserved	High
<b>Love to self advertising</b>	Below average	High

#### 4. Politeness

<b>Imperativeness of etiquette norms</b>	Below average	Expressed
<b>Acceptance of rudeness</b>	Noticeable	Noticeable
<b>Attentiveness to strangers</b>	Noticeable	Weakly expressed
<b>Politeness to strangers</b>	Low	High
<b>Politeness to acquaintances</b>	High	Noticeable
<b>Politeness to kids</b>	Low	Ordinary
<b>Politeness to elderly people</b>	Allows exceptions	Ordinary
<b>Politeness of kids to parents and adults</b>	Allows exceptions	Ordinary
<b>Politeness of kids to unfamiliar adults</b>	Noticeable	Ordinary
<b>Politeness to women</b>	Increased	Ordinary
<b>Politeness to teachers</b>	High	Ordinary
<b>Politeness to schoolchildren and students</b>	Below average	Ordinary
<b>Politeness of the serving staff</b>	Below average	Increased
<b>Attentive listening</b>	Below average	Expressed

## 5. Regulation

<b>Interference with other people</b>	Possible	Non desirable
<b>Possibility of modification of other people's behavior</b>	High	Low
<b>Pedagogical dominance</b>	Very high	Absent

## 6. Conflict management

<b>Debate addiction</b>	Increased	Medium
<b>Attitude to compromises</b>	Negative	Positive
<b>Public discussion of disagreement</b>	Widely spread	Rare
<b>Acceptance of emotional argument</b>	High	Not high
<b>Categorical expression of difference in opinions</b>	Increased	Very low
<b>Love to criticize</b>	Increased	Absent
<b>Acceptance of conflict topics in communication</b>	High	Not high
<b>Categorical formulation of problems</b>	High	Low

<b>Attitude to dissidence</b>	Negative	Respectful
<b>Concentration of argument on solving the problem</b>	Low	High
<b>Tradition to raise serious problems in everyday communication</b>	Increased	Low
<b>Insistence on one's point of view</b>	Common	Rare
<b>Tolerance</b>	Low	High

## 7. Contents of communication

<b>Scope of information discussed</b>	High	Not high
<b>Scope of reported information</b>	High	Low
<b>Business-like character of communication</b>	Below average	High
<b>Straightforwardness in communication</b>	Below average	High
<b>Intimacy of inquired information</b>	High	Extremely low

<b>Intimacy of reported information</b>	High	Low
<b>Inquisitiveness</b>	High	Absent
<b>Desire to constantly get new information</b>	Noticeable	Weakly expressed
<b>Love to verbal evaluation</b>	High	Noticeable
<b>Importance of humor in communication</b>	High	Very high
<b>Thematic limitations in communication</b>	Low	Noticeable
<b>Requestivity of communication<sup>5</sup></b>	High	Low

## 8. Orientation to the interlocutor

<b>Orientation on “saving the face” of the interlocutor</b>	Absent	Medium
<b>Insistence on getting information</b>	Noticeable	Low

---

<sup>5</sup> Requestivity of communication – the level of saturation of speech with requests

<b>Frequency of using compliments</b>	Low	High
<b>Communicative egocentrism</b>	Noticeable	Not expressed
<b>Communicative dominance</b>	Noticeable	Not expressed
<b>Interruption of the interlocutor</b>	Possible	Not possible

### 9. Communicative self control

<b>Fixing one's communicative mistakes</b>	Weakened	Medium level
<b>Loss of communicative self control</b>	Possible	Possible, should be accompanied by immediate excuses

### 10. Communicative reaction

<b>Extent of sincere reaction to communicative actions of the interlocutor</b>	High	Medium
<b>Ability to control one's reaction</b>	Low	High

<b>Reaction to conflict communicative behavior of the interlocutor</b>	Mainly reflective	Mainly reserved
<b>Reaction to an uninteresting theme of communication</b>	Inattentive listening	Patient listening
<b>Reaction to errors in speech</b>	Reserved	Reserved
<b>Reaction to praise and compliments</b>	Weakly negative	Positive
<b>Reaction to communicative behavior of strangers</b>	Verbal reaction is possible	Verbal reaction is prohibited

### 11. Volume of communication

<b>Length of the dialogue</b>	Priority of long dialogues	Priority of brief dialogues
<b>Length of the monologue</b>	Increased	Priority of brevity

### 12. Non-verbal communication

<b>Smiling in everyday life</b>	Absent	Pronounced
<b>Eye contact</b>	Obligatory	Not obligatory
<b>Distance of communication</b>	Short	Long

<b>Physical contact of the interlocutors</b>	Fairly widely used	Rarely used
<b>Emotions in gesticulation</b>	Medium	Medium
<b>Intensity of gesticulation</b>	Medium	Below medium
<b>Amplitude of gesticulation</b>	Increased	Medium
<b>Intensity of facial gestures</b>	Increased	Medium
<b>Sincerity of facial gestures</b>	Very high	Not high
<b>Loudness of speech</b>	Noticeable	Increased
<b>Possibility of increasing loudness of speech</b>	Fairly high	Low
<b>Speech tempo</b>	Medium	Medium
<b>Possibility of increasing speech tempo</b>	Low	Low
<b>Tolerance to silence</b>	Low	Expressed
<b>Noisiness in communication</b>	Medium	Increased
<b>Desirable size of communication group</b>	Small and medium	No preference

As the comparison shows, there are quite a lot of differences in Russian and American communicative behavior. This however does not imply that these two communicative cultures

are greatly different - first, because the majority of common features are not reflected in the comparative tables, second, because the majority of the revealed differences refer to the degree or extent of a certain communicative fact, but not to its essence.

It's needless to say that effective intercultural communication presupposes awareness of the revealed differences, but one should emphasize that the charm of American – Russian intercultural communication lies both in the differences and common features of the two communicative cultures.

## Conclusion

Our publication is intended to reveal the concept of *communicative behavior* and describe the methods of its contrastive studies at the example of comparison of Russian and American communicative cultures.

We want to emphasize that communicative behavior is an important integral component of communicative competence of a foreign language speaker. The latter should know not only how to use the language adequately, but also how to organise his/her verbal and non-verbal behavior in this or that communicative situation.

We are fully aware of the difficulties which await everybody who steps on the path of intercultural comparison. We view our publication as a first attempt of a systematic comparative description of two communicative cultures and would gladly accept different opinions, possible criticism and amendments. We would especially appreciate opinions and amendments of our American colleagues.

We would also like to ask the readers not to be too strict to possible language mistakes as the book is written by non native speakers of English without an English language editor.

Iosif Sternin,

Doctor of Philology, Professor, Head of the Department of General Linguistics, Voronezh State University

e-mail: [sternin@phil.vsu.ru](mailto:sternin@phil.vsu.ru); [sternin@box.csp.ru](mailto:sternin@box.csp.ru)

<http://www.comch.ru/~rpr/sternin/>

Marina Sternina,

Doctor of Philology, Associate Professor, English Department for Science Students, Voronezh State University

e-mail: [sternina@vmail.ru](mailto:sternina@vmail.ru)

<http://www.comch.ru/~rpr/sternina/>

## Literature

1. Althen, Gary. American Ways Intercultural Press, Maine, 1988.
2. Berg, Elizabeth. Family traditions. USA, 1992.
3. Bovee, Courtland L., Thill, John V. Business Communication Today. McGraw-Hill, Inc., USA, 1989.
4. Brosnahan, Leger. Russian and English Nonverbal Communication. Moscow, Bilingva, 1998.
5. Broukal, Milada, Murphy Peter. Introducing the USA. A Cultural Reader. USA, 1993.
6. Business Communication Today. McGraw-Hill Inc., USA, 1989.
7. Celebrate! Holidays in the USA. Washington D.C. , 1993.
8. Ertelt-Fieth, A. Kulturvergleichende Analyse von Verhalten, Sprache und Bedeutungen in Moskauer Alltag. Frankfurt am Mein, 1987.
9. Fleckenstaein K., Sternin I. Studien zur Kontrastiven Lexikologie und Phraseologie. Halle, 1989.
10. Gaston, Jan. Cultural Awareness Teaching Techniques. Vermont, 1984.
11. Gerhart Geneva. The Russian's World Life and Language.- 2nd ed. Orlando, 1995.
12. Graham, John. The Influence of Culture on the Process of Business Negotiations: an Exploratory Study // Journal of International Business Studies", XVI, № 1 (spring 1985).
13. International Student's Guide to the USA. USA, 1996.
14. Kennan, George. Memoirs, 1925-1950. Boston, 1967.
15. Lanier, Alison R. Living in the USA. Yarmouth, 1996.
16. Laura M., Lynn, Sarah. Business Across Cultures. Effective Communication Strategies. Longman, N.Y. , 1995.
17. Lebedko Maria. Cultural Bumps: Overcoming Misunderstandings in Cross-Cultural Communication. Vladivostok, 1999.

18. Levin, Deena R., Buxter, Jim, McNulty, Piper. The Culture Puzzle. Prentice Hall Regents, 1987.
19. Littlejohn Andrew. Company to Company. Cambridge University Press, 1988.
20. Loughheed Lin. Business Correspondence. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993.
21. Making America. Ed. by Luther S.Luedke. Washington, D.C., 1991.
22. Monahan, Barbara. A Dictionary of Russian Gesture. Tenafly, 1983.
23. Oberg, Kalervo. Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Environments // Practical Anthropology. 1960, № 7, p.177-182.
24. Richmond, Yale. From nyet to da: Understanding the Russians. USA, 1992.
25. Roberts, Elisabeth. Xenophobe's Guide to the Russians. Oval Project Ltd., London, 1993.
26. Ruch, William V., Crawford, Maurice L. Business Communication. MacMillan Publishing Company, USA, 1991.
27. Seelye, H. Ned. Teaching Culture. Strategies for Intercultural Communication. Lincolnwood, Illinois. 1993.
28. Sternin I. Kommunikatives Verhalten der Russen und das Erlernen des Russischen als Fremdsprache // FMF/FIPLV - Kongreß. Hamburg 94. Kurzfassungen der Vortrage. Hamburg, 1994 - S. 140 - 141.
29. Sternin I. Probleme einer Beschreibung des Russischen Kommunikations-verhaltens mit didactischer Zielstellung // Sprache, Literatur und Landeskunde slavischer Volker. Peter Lang, 1994 - S. 205 – 212
30. Sternin I. Communicative Behavior as an Aspect of Language Teaching // The Pleasures and Joys of TESOL. Voronezh, 1997, p.5 –6.

31. Sternin I. Das kommunikative Verhalten im Russischen - ein wichtiger Aspekt bei der Vermittlung und Aneignung der russischen Sprache // Fremdsprachen ausbildung a der Hochschule. Göttingen, 1997, S.52-53
32. Sternin I. Non-verbal means in communication.// Klangsprache im remdschprachenunterricht.Woronesh, 1998. S. 2.
33. Sternin I., Sternina M. Contrastive studies of Russian and American Communicative Behavior // Idiom. New York, Vol.27, 1998. No.4, p. 1, 12.
34. Sternin I., Sternina M. Studies in Communicative Behavior / Language and Communication. Issue 1. Rostov-on-Don, 2001. - P.12-16.
35. Stevenson, D.K. American Life and Institutions. Washington, D.C., 1987.
36. Stevenson, D.K. American Life and Institutions. Revised edition. Washington, D.C., 1998.
37. The Culture Puzzle. Englewood Cliffs, 1987.
38. Tiersky, E. and Tiersky, M. The USA: Customs and Institutions. Prentice Hall Regents, New Jersey, 1990.
39. Tomalin, B. and Stempleski, S. Cultural Awareness. Oxford University Press, 1996.
40. Tubbs S., Moss S. Human Communication. N.Y., 1987.
41. Абросимова Елена, Кейгел Патрик. Здравствуйте, американцы! Саратов, 1997.
42. Балдвин А.О сходстве и различии менталитета и поведения российских и американских студентов // Профессионалы за сотрудничество.- Вып.4.- М, 2000, С. 368-387.
43. Верещагин Е.М., Костомаров В.Г. Язык и культура. М., 1990.
44. Жванецкий М. Я играю Америку // «Неделя», 1988, № 40.
45. Корявин Л. Тысяча и один день в Америке. М., 1990.

46. Лебедева Н.М Введение в этническую и кросс-культурную психологию. М., 1999.
47. Мруць Н.А. Профессиональный менталитет и профессиональное коммуникативное поведение // Язык и национальное сознание. Воронеж, 1998 - С. 27-28.
48. Национально-культурная специфика речевого поведения. М, 1977.
49. Национально-культурная специфика общения народов СССР. М, 1982.
50. Николаев В. Американцы. М., “Советский писатель”, 1985.
51. Очерк американского коммуникативного поведения. /Под ред. Стернина И.А., Стерниной М.А. Воронеж, 2001.
52. Американское коммуникативное поведение. /Под ред. Стернина И.А., Стерниной М.А. Воронеж: ВГУ – МИОН, 2001.
53. Прохвачева О.Г. Лингвокультурный концепт «приватность» (на материале американского варианта английского языка): Автореф. дисс. ... канд. филол. наук. Волгоград, 2000.
54. Прохоров Ю.Е. Национальные социокультурные стереотипы речевого общения и их роль в обучении русскому языку студентов-иностранцев. М., 1997.
55. Селезнева Г.Я. Коммуникативное поведение русских в ситуации приветствия и прощания // Язык и культура. Воронеж, 1996. -С. 20-21.
56. Серебрякова Р.В. Особенности восприятия комплимента мужчинами и женщинами // Гендер: язык, культура, коммуникация. М., 1999. - С.89-90.
57. Сопер П. Основы искусства речи. М., 1992.
58. Стернин И.А. О понятии коммуникативного поведения / Kommunikativ-funktionale Sprachbetrachtung. Halle, 1989. - S. 279 – 282

59. Стернин И.А. Русская невербальная коммуникация. // Актуальные проблемы включенного обучения: организация, научно-методические основы. Воронеж, 1989. - С.188-200.
60. Стернин И.А.. Коммуникативное поведение и обучение языку // Aktuelle Probleme der Beschreibung einer Sprache als Fremdsprache. Halle,1991. S. 3 – 13.
61. Стернин И.А. Очерк русского коммуникативного поведения. Галле, 1991.
62. Стернин И.А О некоторых особенностях русского общения // Болгарская русистика - 1992 - №2. - С. 54- 57
63. Стернин И.А. Улыбка в русском общении // Русский язык за рубежом - № 2 - 1992. - С. 54 – 57.
64. Стернин И.А. Коммуникативное поведение и национальная культура народа. // Филологические записки. -1993 - №1 - С.180-186.
65. Стернин И.А. Русское общение // Fremdsprachenunterricht. 1994, № 2. S.134 – 135.
66. Стернин И.А. Коммуникативное поведение и национальная культура // Вестник ВГУ. Сер. Гуманитарные науки. -1996 - № 2. - С. 45-64.
67. Стернин И.А. Коммуникативное поведение в структуре национальной культуры.// Этнокультурная специфика языкового сознания. М., 1996. - С. 97-112.
68. Стернин И.А. Почему русские мало улыбаются? // Практика, 1996, № 2. С. 5 –6.
69. Стернин И.А. Коммуникативное поведение и межнациональная коммуникация. // Этнопсихолингвистические аспекты преподавания иностранных языков. М., 1996. С.75-81.
70. Стернин И.А. Национальная специфика коммуникативного поведения // XII международный симпозиум по психолингвистике и теории коммуникации. М., 1997. - С. 147-148.

71. Стернин И.А. Коммуникативное поведение как предмет описания // Тверской лингвистический меридиан. - Вып. 1. - Тверь, 1998 - С. 93-98.
72. Стернин И.А.. О понятии менталитет //Язык и национальное сознание. Воронеж, 1998, с.24-26.
73. Стернин И.А. Модели описания коммуникативного поведения. Воронеж, 2000.
74. Стернин И.А. Русское коммуникативное поведение // Проблема национальной идентичности в литературе и гуманитарных науках XX века. - Воронеж, 2000. - С. 95-128.
75. Стернин И.А. О понятии коммуникативного сознания // Культура общения и ее формирование. Вып. 8, Воронеж, 2001, с. 55-59.
76. Тер-Минасова С.Г. Язык и межкультурная коммуникация. М.: Слово, 2000.
77. Уфимцева Н.В. Человек и его сознание: развитие подсознания и коммуникации // Язык и сознание. М. 1993. - С. 59-75.
78. Формановская Н.И. Употребление русского речевого этикета. М., 1984.
79. Этнопсихолингвистика. М., 1988.

## Contents

Introduction. Communicative Behavior as an Object of Studies	p.3
Chapter 1. The Principal Features of Russian Communicative Behavior	p.10
Chapter 2. The Principal Features of American Communicative Behavior	p.52
Chapter 3. Comparative Description of Russian and American Communicative Behavior	
1. Problems of comparative description	p.74
2. Parametric description of Russian and American communicative behavior	p.75
Conclusion	p.86
Literature	p.87
Contents	p.94

Russians and Americans. Information-processing Related Problems. In a cross-cultural communication setting, an extremely important factor is how one's messages and behaviors are interpreted by the other person. Specifically, as relates to this case, how a U.S. business representative processes the Russian representative's communicative acts will influence. The following are examples of normative Russian communicative behaviors that can become pitfalls in a cross-cultural environment. Communication style is not targeted at reaching a consensus. At least that is how it may. Key words: Communications behaviour, proprieties in communication, speech strategies. INTRODUCTION. Intercultural textbooks, currently used by educators in college classrooms in America, discuss a variety of aspects dealing with communication among international cultures as well as communication among co-cultures in the United States. The proprieties in American and Russian societies were found to be more similar than different in the majority of areas investigated in this research.