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The category of time in Russian and American cultures

This work is devoted to research into the key features of the perception of time in American and Russian cultures. If you are going to communicate with a representative of another country, you must consider the cultural context of the perception of time.

Communication and understanding of people largely depends on their attitude to time and on which lexical means they use. They depend on the culture in which a speaker was brought up and they usually become the cause of serious misunderstandings, which can happen with English and Russian speakers.

People from different countries are in disagreement on the meaning of such a simple expression as «just a minute». A minute is a unit of time, consisting of 60 seconds, but Russians attach a different meaning to the analogous Russian expression «одну минутку». There is an idea of a fixed concept of time in America and a fluid concept of time in Russia. Time is an extendable concept in Russia. For Russians, time is measured more in days, weeks or months than in minutes or hours.

Edward Hall, an American anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher, categorized cultures by their members' attitude to the concept of time. According to his theory, there can be monochronous and polychronous cultures. People from monochronous cultures usually do one thing at a time. One of these countries is the USA. In polychronous cultures human interaction is valued over time and material things. Russia is one such culture.

«Time is money» is a phrase coined by Benjamin Franklin. Yes, time is money for some nationalities, along with punctuality and virtue. Americans prefer to negotiate an agreement speedily, schedule an early start on the vertue, begin on time, meet production deadlines, complete the work as promptly as possible, and show early results or profit. On the other hand, Russians are notoriously late. They need more time to get organized and there can be a lot of delays and postponements. They are less concerned with immediate results but, of course, the job will be completed .

This fatalistic fear to plan for the future and insecurity came from the Soviet Union. It reinforced the native Russian disrespect for time because there was no incentive to do things on time. In Russia time is not a vital commodity and people do not fear about accepting delays. They are accustomed to contemplating. And Americans do not understand that way of living because they believe that they manage events and can foresee and plan out the future. If there are cooperative efforts, there will be some difficulties because of such divergent views of time. The result will be obtained only after considerable prodding from the American side.

But it must be admitted that Russian businessmen began to adopt the American punctuality in regard to business appointments. If a business associate is late because he has got into terrible traffic, his explanations are met with extreme disapproval. It is assumed that people have to take road accidents and other obstacles into account and to head to a meeting beforehand.

As far as ordinary life is concerned, people in America do not need to call up the day before a meeting to check the time or the place. Russians usually use one vague verb – «созвониться», which has no exact equivalent in the English language. An American cannot understand if he has to call or his interlocutor has to. What is the reason for this proposal? An American may think that his interlocutor cannot inform him of fixed time of the meeting or whether he will come or not. In English there are two ways to say it. They are «we will call each other» and a colloquial version «we will be in touch». If a Russian insists on «the control call» (calling to confirm), the best way to say about it is to say «I will call you a day before just in case anything unexpected comes up to an American».

It is important to be frugal with your own and other people's time. From an American ethics' viewpoint it is impolite to invite guests on the same day or one hour before lunch or to go uninvited to someone's house. It represents the total disregard to the daily routine of others. That's why it is difficult to find a similar English equivalent to the common expression in Russia «заглянуть на огонек» - «to drop in on the spur of the moment, without calling».

In this way, one of the most important problems which can suddenly come with talking to people brought up in different countries, is the various attitudes to time. Understanding different points of views and positions promotes good cross-cultural communication.

Литература

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