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## The Methodology of Intercultural Competence Development on the Basis of a Cognitive Style-inclusive Approach

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### Abstract

The author's view of the problem consists in the integration of cognitive, learner-centered and intercultural approaches to teaching intercultural communication. The paper shows that cognitive style is involved in the picture of the world's formation. The analysis of the intercultural communication phenomenon from the position of cognitive science reveals that one of the most essential conditions for effective intercultural communication is the cognitive readiness for intercultural communication that comprises of cognitive and communicative abilities to participate in the intercultural dialogue and can be improved by the development of a wider range of cognitive strategies utilized by a person in the learning process.

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*Keywords:* Cognitive style approach; strategies; cognitive readiness; intercultural communication

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, many research papers and manuscripts have been published on the implementation of cognitive style theory into the foreign language teaching process. The emphasis was put on learning strategies as the demonstration of the learner's cognitive style which should be taken into consideration to practice individualized modes of teaching and introduce differentiation in teaching foreign languages (e.g., Avdeeva, 2005; Chechik, 2005; Dornyei, 2005; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Ginnis, 2002; Liver, 2000; Riding, 2002; Zhirnova, 2011). While researchers stress the importance of allowing for learners' cognitive styles, the methodologies providing each student

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with assignments according to their styles were not widely adopted, as they require a special teacher training and psychological follow-up.

Moreover the research conducted by the author of the paper has revealed that the cognitive style also determines the communicant's perception of another culture, thus influencing the effectiveness of the intercultural communication process which can be constrained by such cognitive parameters as stereotypes, rigidity, intolerance to unrealistic experience, concrete conceptualization, etc. (Obdalova, Soboleva, Nayman, 2013). Conventional intercultural competence training methodologies appear to lack the theoretical and empirical bases to acknowledge the important role played by the cognitive processes in intercultural communication.

The aim of the paper is to consider the relationship between cognitive style and intercultural communication performance and to suggest some practical ways in which foreign language teachers can adopt students' cognitive strategies in the teaching process to develop intercultural communication skills more effectively.

## **2. Cognitive dimension of intercultural communication**

Besides the individual's perception of reality being determined by his background, prior experience, personal interests, education, needs and other personal characteristics, it is shaped by the process of an active interaction of an individual with the surrounding cultural and social environment. The impact of a cultural aspect on perception is particularly apparent when it comes to communication between people from different cultures. This is due to the fact that, when interacting and communicating with each other, people from different cultures take different perceptual experience as a premise. Thus, in monocultural communication the link between background and new experience serves as a cognitive basis for establishing cohesion between them, allowing to avoid fails in communication, while the incongruity of individuals' cognitive structures often leads to misunderstanding and intercultural conflicts in intercultural interaction.

On perceiving the outside world our brain actively constitutes meanings, filling information gaps on the basis of prior knowledge and assumptions. The dominant aspect of perception that influences the expectations and affective evaluation is causal attribution or the process by which individuals explain the causes of behavior and events. Though the process of attribution participates in human's analysis of diverse social phenomena in the interpersonal communication theory, the emphasis is put on the behavior of a partner in communication. According to Sadokhin (Sadokhin, 2005), the perception of a partner in communication performs by way of "reading" his inner world and personal characteristics with the help of some external signals, mainly nonverbal and paraverbal, effective evaluation, undertaking an attempt to understand the logic of his thinking and behaviour and basing your future performance on the knowledge derived. Research has revealed that people tend to overvalue dispositional or personality-based explanations for behavior while undervaluing situational explanations. This phenomenon is referred to as the fundamental attribution error. Thus people tend to attribute their own aberrant actions to the situation and others aberrant actions to their personality. Research by Elizarova (Elizarova, 2001) proved that the attribution in the process of intercultural communication can lead to interpreting events and the behaviour of people from different cultures on the basis of their own cultural categories. When meeting representatives of other peoples and cultures, people usually have a natural disposition to perceive their behaviour from the position of their own culture, leading to a distorted interpretation. This determines the main psychological difference between intercultural communication and communication within one culture when attributing own categories doesn't impede but promotes communication.

Attribution is closely connected with the process of socialization. It stems from social interaction and is based on the cognitive process of categorization as the causes of behavior are often explained based on a person's professional, gender, ethnic and other identity. Categorization is the process in which ideas and objects are recognized, differentiated and understood. Scientists prove that people are unable to analyze new stimulus and new situations every time in a new way and thus perform a unique reaction at a wide range of segmental and separated elements. The input information coming from the outer world is systematized and arranged by a human in the most favoured way on the basis of breaking up the surrounding things, people, events, relations and phenomena into relative groups, classes, types or categories. Facets of the process include information selection and transformation, decision making, generating hypotheses and making meaning from information and experiences. Within one

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