Наукові інтереси: методична парадигма підготовки сучасного вчителя іноземних мов.

ENGLISH "CONVERSATIONAL ROUTINES": SPEECH ACT KNOWLEDGE AS PART OF AN EFL TEACHER INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Valentyna PARASHCHUK (Kirovohrad, Ukraine)

Стаття присвячена міжкультурним особливостям в реалізації стереотипних мовленнєвих актів в англомовних лінгвокультурах, знання яких входить до міжкультурної компетентності вчителя англійської мови як іноземної.

Ключові слова: стереотипні мовленнєві акти, культурно-зумовлені комунікативно-мовні особливості, міжкультурна компетентність вчителя англійської мови.

The paper explores intercultural variation in the realization of "conversational routines" – stereotyped speech acts in English lingua cultures the knowledge of which makes an integral part of an EFL teacher intercultural competence.

Key words: "conversational routines" – stereotypical speech acts, culturally biased communicative and linguistic peculiarities, EFL teacher intercultural competence.

Another culture can be different without being defective. R. H. Pells

New social priorities of our life in a "global village" (the term coined by Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian communications theorist and educator in 1962) have determined a major innovation into many national curricula of foreign languages instruction: *the concept of intercultural competence and awareness*, i.e. awareness and tolerance of other people's cultures, increased awareness of the learner's own culture and the learners' own ability to explain their cultural viewpoint or the sociocultural component [2; 6; 11; 12; 14; 17; 18].

EFL instructors of all levels – from a primary/elementary school teacher to a university professor – should take into account that: 1) *mastery/competence in cross-cultural communication and understanding* in "our global village" are skills sine qua non in postmodern pedagogy for foreign languages education, and 2) the *linguistic and didactic models* of intercultural competence consist of socio-cultural knowledge of the target language and culture, and intercultural skills the acquisition of which will form competent professionals with a cross-cultural personality able to express their own meanings without being hostage to the meanings of either their own or the target speech communities.

This paper aims to address the problem of intercultural variation in the realization of the so-called "conversational routines"– English *apologies, requests, compliments, greetings* – that are frequently expressed in English by highly predictable and stereotyped speech acts. The main objective of the paper is to depict culturally biased linguistic and communicative peculiarities of English speech acts which constitute part of an EFL teacher intercultural competence. Despite the fact that such speech acts have been the object of investigation in numerous research papers, the didactic model of intercultural variability of "conversational routines" has not been worked out yet in a coherent and systematic way for TEFL practices in Ukraine.

Communicating across cultural boundaries implies, first and foremost, an understanding of culture specific verbal means and the ability to use these in a culturally appropriate way. English lingua cultures have distinctive preferences for designing effective verbal messages. R. Zaharna singles out a set of cultural preferences of communication patterns American culture displays which, in our opinion, hold true to other English lingua cultures with minor variations: 1) simplicity for repetition; 2) accuracy for imagery; 3) understatement for exaggeration; 4) actions for words or symbols and 5) specific manner for a vague one (рос. «*хождение вокруг да около*») [19]. These cultural preferences in verbal message design make a cultural background of EFL teacher speech act knowledge thus requiring a closer look at them here.

Simplicity *vs.* repetition. Repetition in American English is decidedly a negative feature: to repeat something over and over again, or to be *wordy* or *verbose* – for Americans may have several implications: a) that the statement was not heard or taken seriously, and thus it is necessary to repeat it; or b) that the listener was not paying attention or perhaps it not mentally capable of

comprehending. Repetition, even as a rhetorical device in public speaking is used sparingly for emphasis in American English. From other cultural perspectives, it is common to find a string of descriptive phrases or words all referring to one phenomenon.

Accuracy *vs.* imagery. American speakers do not usually seek to engage the imagination and feelings of the audience and they tend not to be very generous in their use of descriptive adjectives and adverbs; they may insert facts and figures to illustrate a point instead of using creative metaphors, analogies and vivid examples to convey a point.

Understatement *vs.* exaggeration. Distinct cultural preferences exist regarding how much one may stress an *event* or *feeling*. Americans avoid using exaggeration as an instrumental means of constructing vivid powerful imagery. Americans tend to use understatements instead of exaggerations. Over-assertion may contribute to the American stereotypical perception of the speaker as insincere and boastful.

Actions *vs.* words. The American cultural preference tends to directly link words and actions. This is evident in many common American expressions such as *"Practice what you preach'*, *"Do what you say"*, and *"Walk the walk and talk the talk"*. Action appears preferable over verbal statement: *"Actions speak louder than words"*. If one does not fulfill a promised action, then one's words ring hollow. The word versus deed gap in the speaker's rhetoric may contribute to a stereotypical image of a lazy and dishonest person from the American cultural perspective.This rhetoric preference stems from the American cultural value orientation that emphasizes the importance of achievement, visible accomplishments. American culture places an emphasis on 'activity which results in accomplishments what are measurable' [16]. The proclivity toward "doing" is found in such common American expressions as *"How are you doing?"* or *"What's happening?"*. Opposite of the "doing" cultures are the "being" cultures, such as the Chinese, Japanese, Arab and to some extent Slavonic cultures. Achievement and development are not as important as an individual's birth, family background, age and rank [15]. For an individual of the "being" culture, *"what he is"* carries greater significance than *"what he does"*.

Specific *vs.* vague. The American cultural preference is for clear and direct communication as evidenced by many common American expressions :*"Say what you mean"*, *"Don't beat about the bush"*, *"Get to the point"*. The *direct style* strives to accurately represent fact, technique, or expectation, and to avoid emotional overtones and suggestive allusions Levine [13]. Also an American would tend to give the specifics and details, describing "the whole in terms of its parts". Americans tend to associate direct, frank and open communication with honesty [19]. In contrast, *"ambiguous communication* is more indirect and emotionally rich:... ambiguous styles would be more likely to conceal or bury the message.... Americans may perceive such ambiguity as frustrating, confusing and devious" [19]. For the American culture, " ... language appears to be a medium of communication used to convey information, and emphasis is on function and by extension substance, meaning, and accuracy...., a message may tend to be valued more for its content than style" [19 :252]. For other cultures (e.g. Arab), language appears to be a social tool used in the weaving of society, and emphasis is on form over function, effect over accuracy, and image over meaning [*ibid.*: 253]; ...accordingly, content may be less important than the social chemistry a message creates. The desire for precision in such cultures is not as important as creating emotional resonance..., this stems from the function of language as a *social lubricant* aimed at promoting social harmony: any direct question or answer could expose the other to a public loss of face [*ibid.* :254].

In sum, from an English (Western) historical perspective language is viewed primarily as a means for transfer of information, a tool for conveying information across time and space, and by necessity, the focus is on accuracy of content, style serves primarily as a means for enhancing accuracy and truth of substance. This historical root bears through today: most English lingua cultures view language as a medium for conveying or transmitting messages. In contrast, other lingua cultures treat language primarily as an art form, a religious phenomenon, and an identity tool and *a social lubricant*, e.g. oriental cultures and to some extent Slavonic cultures.

Although it seems that all languages share a similar inventory of *speech acts*, the realizations and the circumstances that are appropriate for each speech act may be quite different in different

cultures [7 :25] and an efficient EFL teacher needs to possess speech act knowledge as part of his/her communicative/intercultural competence.

The English "conversational routines" can be characterized in a most general way as speech acts that "... combine verbal material and social messages in patterns expressive of cultural values and sensitive to interactional context; ... and their appropriate use requires that speakers know rules dictating both linguistic form and situational relevance..." [4 :95]. Bonvillain argues, that although each type of routine has unique characteristics, they share several key features:

1) their primary goal is rather social than referential, in other words, their function in social interaction is to create, reaffirm and/or negotiate social solidarity;

2) they typically occur as sequences of exchanges between interlocutors minimally consisting of an utterance by the first speaker followed by a return or acknowledgement by the second speaker, e.g. i) *I'm sorry. – Don't worry, it's nothing;* ii) *That's a nice color. – Thanks.*

3) they are formulaic in structure: greetings, compliments, etc. consist of instances of patterned forms used by most speakers on most occasions [*ibid.:*96].

Michael Clyne [8 : 960-961] attempts at giving a typology of intercultural variations in the performance of speech acts. These are notably *requests, complaints, apologies, promises,* and *greetings, opening* and *closing routines.* Some of the differing features are most trivial but "...their absence or culturally inappropriate use can cause communication conflict as well as communication breakdown because they involve *politeness* and *face* [*ibid.:* 960]. Clyne's classification of contrasting intercultural variations includes:

1) **The presence or absence of a rule** — e.g. *'Смачного', 'Приятного аппетита', 'Malzeit', 'Bon apetit'* etc, corresponding to the English *'Enjoy your meal',* are said to mark the beginning of a meal in Ukrainian, Russian, German, French and other cultures; and the failure to observe this routine may be regarded as impolite by continental Europeans, Chinese, Indonesians etc. But there is an absence of this rule in English-speaking cultures.

2) **Formulas of completely different structures** to perform a speech act— the Ukrainian *'Будь ласка'* or the Russian *'Пожалуйста'* can be translated into English as *'Please', 'Here you are', 'You're welcome',* e.g. *'Дайте мені батон, будь ласка' (= please). – Будь ласка (= Here you are). Большое Вам спасибо. – Пожалуйста (= You are welcome)* The English *'excuse me'* can be used as an attention-getting device to attract the listener's attention, but as an act of apology *'I'm sorry/I apologize'* are used. When pronounced with a rising tone, *' ↗Sorry?'* in British English asks for repetition, in American English (*I beg your*) *↗Pardon?* is typically used in similar cases. While sneezing, the doer of the action says nothing in Ukrainian or Russian cultures, the hearers are to wish him or her good health. In English-speaking cultures, the roles are different: the doer of the action should say *'(I'm)* ↘ *Sorry',* the hearers typically say nothing or sometimes *'God bless you'* can be used in such situations.

3) **Formulas of opposite structures** employed to perform a speech act in different languages — e.g., English *'Is this seat taken?'* versus continental European *'Это место свободно?' (Is this seat free?).* This is likely to promote communication breakdown where speakers do not share a common language and their nods and head-shakes are based on different formulas.

4) **Formulas of corresponding structures employed to realize different speech acts** — e.g., American/Australian English *'How are you doing (going)?'* is often misinterpreted by Central Europeans as an inquiry about a person's well-being and the response can be considered by the native speakers of English longwinded and unnecessary. *'Have you eaten already? (Have you eaten rice?* in Korean),' a greeting used by many Chinese and Southeast Asians when speaking English, can cause either miscommunication or noncommunication or can be misinterpreted as an indirect invitation by some Central Europeans. The greeting *'Where are you going?'* used in English by Singaporeans is misunderstood to be an inquiry by speakers of British, Australian, or American English.

5) **Formulas of corresponding structures used to realize speech acts with the opposite intention,** e.g., *'Thank you'* is employed by English native speakers to denote the acceptance of an offer. People from some continental European backgrounds can use this speech act to mean the

rejection of the offer: '*Будеш тістечко? - Дякую.* ' (declining an offer). In English, to decline an offer, the right way is to say '*No, thank you*'.

6) **Direct** and **indirect** **speech act**s, e.g. the difference between the direct formulation, *'May I ask you to shut the door?'* (or simply *'Shut the door'*) and the indirect, *'Don't you think it's rather cold in here?'*. Hinting rather than directly requesting a favor is considered to be polite in Southeast Asian cultures. When similar communication patterns are employed in communication with Britons or Australians or New Zealanders, direct speech acts like '*May I ask you to shut the door?*' are more preferable. In some Asian cultures, it is not accepted to give direct refusals, e.g. Koreans, Japanese, Chinese people avoid saying direct '*No*' which is considered impolite, instead they use '*It may be so*', '*We will think about it*' etc.

Let us have a brief overview of forms and functions of some of 'conversational routines', or stereotypical speech acts the knowledge of which is relevant to EFL teachers.

Apologies have been widely studied as *speech acts*. The set of realizations for the *speech act of apologizing* consists of the following features [5 :66; 10]:

1) an expression of an apology: words like *apologize, excuse, be sorry, forgive (I'm really sorry I'm late);* 2) an explanation of the situation: *I had a lot to do;* 3) acknowledgement of responsibility: *I should have called you that I might be late;* 4) offer of repair: *Can we go there tomorrow?* 5) promise of nonrecurrence: *This won't happen again.*

The use of these moves in each apology depends on the severity of the offence and on intercultural uses of speech acts: the elaborateness of apologies tends to decrease with intimacy: the closer the speaker is to the listener, the more likely it is enough to say "*Sorry*" [*ibid.*:66].

The intercultural differences in the use of apologies can include the use of different strategies, for example, one study found an intercultural difference between the speakers of English and Italian [cited from Brown, Attardo 2000:66]: English speakers tend to prefer "*hearer-supported strategies*" such as admitting their own guilt and offering compensation or redress. Italian speakers tend to prefer "*self-supportive strategies*" such as providing an explanation and appealing to the interlocutor's leniency.

Requests. By making a request, the speaker infringes on the recipient's freedom from imposition. The recipient may feel that the request is an intrusion on his/her freedom of action or even a power play [3 :11]. Since requests have the potential to be intrusive and demanding, there is a need for the requester to minimize the imposition involved in the request One way for the speaker to minimize the imposition is by employing *indirect strategies* rather than *direct* ones (see below for levels of indirectness). The more direct a request is, the more transparent it is and the less of a burden the recipient bears in interpreting the request. Sh. Blum-Kulka *et al* single out the following three request-asking strategies characterized by the scale of directness: 1) direct strategies (marked explicitly as requests, such as imperatives), e.g. *Clean up your room. I'm asking you to clean up your room. I'd like to ask you to clean your room;* 2) conventionally indirect strategies (referring to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance as conventionalized in the language), e.g. *How about cleaning your room? Could you clean your room, please?;* 3) non-conventionally indirect strategies /hints (partially referring to the object depending on contextual clues), *You have left your room in a right mess. It's cold in here.* (when uttered as a request to close the window). *Do you have any money on you?* (when used as a request for a loan).

Requests usually include reference to the requester, the recipient of the request, and/or the action to be performed. The speaker can manipulate requests by choosing from a variety of perspectives [3] in making requests: 1) **Hearer-oriented** request strategies (emphasis on the role of the hearer), e.g. *Help me, please; Can you help me?;* 2) **Speaker-oriented** request strategies (emphasis on the speaker's role as the requester), *Can I borrow your notes from yesterday's class?;* 4) **Speaker-and hearer-oriented** request strategies (inclusive strategy), *So, could we tidy up the kitchen soon?;* 4) **Impersonal** request strategies , e.g. *So it might not be a bad idea to get it done soon.*

Different cultures seem to agree on general trends of situational variation. For example, a big favor usually comes with more indirect and/or polite strategies than a low-imposition request. Friends use more casual requests than acquaintances provided that the content of the request is the same. However, the specific directness levels appropriate for given situations might differ cross-

culturally. A certain language (like German) may tend to use more direct-level requests than other languages (like Japanese) equally in an appropriate manner within the culture. One more contrasting intercultural variation concerns the Anglo-Saxon cultural norm to avoid imperatives in particular social situations, e.g. *Bring me the menu please* (to a waitor in a reastaurant) would be inappropriate in English where *Could I see the menu, please?* is a typical request. In contrast, Ukrainian or Russian speakers typically tend to ask, e.g. *Принесіть меню, будь ласка. Принесите меню, пожалуйста.* According to T. Larina's estimations [1], 98 % of English speakers consider the speech act *Could I ...?* a natural form of a request, while only 40% of Russian speakers prefer a question-request *Можно мне...?* in a similar situation. 60% of them choose an imperative sentence (e.g. *Принесите, пожалуйста, ...)* instead.

Conventional indirectness may be universal, but English speakers are found to prefer conventional indirectness strategies most often and switch levels of directness less often than Russian, Ukrainian and speakers of other European lingua cultures, e.g. French, Spanish etc. In English, the most popular approach to requests is *speaker-oriented strategies,* the second most commonly used strategy is a conventionalized *impersonal construction* ('*is it possible to* '). Speaker-oriented requests avoid the appearance of trying to control or impose on the hearer and therefore seem to be more polite than *hearer-oriented* strategies which are more widely used in Ukrainian or Russian interpersonal communication.

Compliments belong to the cluster of speech acts where intercultural misunderstandings can happen over who compliments. There are *two basic things* that get complimented: *abilities* and *appearance/possessions,* and, as Brown and Attardo [5 :67] point out, in the United States, "...while anyone may compliment appearances or possessions, only someone of higher status may compliment someone's ability...". In English, compliments follow one of a number of syntactic patterns as follows: 1) Noun phrase *is/looks (really)* Adjective: *Your sweater is cute;* 2) I *(really) like/love* Noun Phrase: *I really like your idea;* 3) Pronoun *is (really) (a/an)* Adjective + Noun Phrase: *That's a great idea.* "*I really love your car!*" is an example of a compliment that contains a semantically positive verb. *Like* or *love* are used 90% of the time in this type of compliment. Some other semantically positive verbs that are used would be *admire* and *be impressed.*

There are various compliment response strategies: 1. Accept: 1.1. Appreciation Token (*Thanks/Thank you*); 1.2. Comment Acceptance (*Yeah, it's my favorite, too*); 1.3. Praise Upgrade (*Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?*); 2. Mitigate: 2.1. Comment History (*I bought it for the trip to New York)* ; 2.2. Shift credit (*My mother gave it to me/It really knitted itself)* 2.3. Questioning or Request Reassurance/Repetition (*Do you really like them?*) 2.4. Scale Down/Downgrade (*It's really quite old*). 3. Reject: 3.1. Disagreeing Utterance (A: *You look good and healthy.* B: *I feel fat*); 3.2. No Response. 4. Request Interpretation: 4.1. Addressee interprets the compliment as a request: (*You want to borrow this one too?*). It's interesting to note, that Americans rarely accept compliments due to the fact that deflecting or rejecting compliments negates the implication that the addressee is superior to the speaker in any way.

On the whole, speakers of English lingua cultures use the "addresee's positive evaluation" strategy more often (e.g. *It looks gorgeous/ fantastic/ wonderful/ superb / fabulous!)* than Ukrainian or Russian speakers. According to the communicative norms of English speaking cultures, such speech acts are typically not accepted as inappropriate, while in Ukrainian or Russian communicative practices frequent use of similar expressives may sometimes be branded as insincere.

The function of **greetings** is to begin communicative interactions or to acknoweledge the presence of others [4: 96]. Although their basic structure is stereotyped in each culture, different kinds of greetings are offered depending on situational context, status relationship between interlocutors and personal goals.

In conclusion, it should be highlighted that contemporary EFL teachers' communicative and intercultural competences should be grounded on the knowledge of the target culture communicative norms and rules and the ability to use them in a culturally appropriate way. The further perspective of intercultural variation of speech acts realization study can be made by a research of various speech acts used by the native English teachers in the classroom, e.g. speech acts of praise and criticism, classroom instructions and others.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Ларина Т.В. Категория вежливости и стиль коммуникации: Сопоставление английских и русских лигвокультурных традиций. – М.: Языки славянских культур, 2009. – 512 с.

2. Програма з англійської мови для університетів/інститутів (п'ятирічний курс навчання): Проект/ Колектив авт.: С.Ю. Ніколаєва, М.І. Соловей (керівники). - Київ. держ. ун-т., 2001. – 245 с.

3. Blum-Kulka Sh., Hause J., Kasper G. Investigating Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: An Introductory Overview // Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies. / Sh. Blum-Kulka et al.(Eds.). – Norwood: Ablex,1989. – P.1-34.

4. Bonvillain, Nancy. Language, culture, and communication: the meaning of messages. – 3rd edition. – Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2000. – 405 p.

5. Brown, Stephen, Attardo, Salvatore. Understanding language structure, interaction and variation. - Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2000. – 411 p.

6. Byram, Michael. Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. – Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1997. – 124 p.

7. Celce-Murcia, Marianne, Olshtain, Elite. Discourse and context in language teaching: a guide for language teachers. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. – 279 p.

8. Clyne, Michael. Inter-cultural communication at work: cultural values in discourse. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. – 250 p.

9. Gudykunst, William, Kim, Young, Yun. Communicating with strangers: an approach to intercultural communication. – New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992. – 304 p.

10. Kachru, Yamuna. Crosscultural Speech Act Research and the Classroom. Pragmatics and Language Learning. //Monograph Series. –Volume 5. – 1994. –P.39-51.

11. Kramsch, Claire. Context and culture in language teaching. – Oxford, New York: Oxford university press, 1993. – 295 p.

12. Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography /Edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. – 310 p.

13. Levine, Donald, N. The flight from ambiguity. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. – 248 p.

14. Mediating languages and cultures: Towards an intercultural theory of foreign language education./ Edited by Buttjes, D., Byram, M. – Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1991. – 124 p.

15. Okabe, R. Cultural assumptions of East and West: Japan and the United States// Intercultural communication theory /Edited by W.Gudykunst. – Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1983.

16. Stewart, Edward C., Milton J. Bennett. American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective. /Rev. ed. – Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1991. – 214 p.

17. The sociological and intercultural dimension of language learning and teaching /Edited by Michael Byram and Genevieve Zarate.– Strasbourg Cedex: Council of Europe, 1997. – 120 p.

18. Tomalin, Barry, Stempleski Susan. Cultural awareness. – Oxford: Oxford university press, 1994. – 160 p.

19. Zaharna, R.S. Understanding cultural preferences of Arab communication patterns//Public Relations Review. –1995. – Vol. 21.–No.3. – P. 241-255.

ВІДОМОСТІ ПРО АВТОРА

Валентина Паращук – кандидат філологічних наук, доцент, професор кафедри германської філології Кіровоградського державного педагогічного університету імені Володимира Винниченка.

Наукові інтереси: проблеми міжкультурної комунікації та лінгводидактики.