

Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism as Two Alternative Principles of Cross-cultural Communication

Boyko Yuliya¹, Sierhieieva Oksana², Kupchyshyna Yulia³, Matsiuk Olena⁴, & Dmytroshkin Denys⁵

¹ Doctor of Philological Sciences, Docent, Head of Department of Germanic Languages and Law Faculty of International Relations and Law Khmelnytsky National University Instytuts'ka Str., 7/1 Khmelnytsky, 29016, Ukraine

² PhD (Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences), Associate Professor Department of Germanic Languages and Law Faculty of International Relations and Law Khmelnytsky National University, 11, Instytuts'ka str., Khmelnytskyi, 29016, Ukraine

³ Candidate of Philological Sciences (PhD), Associate Professor at the Department of Germanic Philology and Translation Faculty of International Relations and Law, Khmelnytskyi National University, Instytutska 7/1 Khmelnytskyi 29000 Ukraine

⁴ PhS (Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences), Associate Professor Department of Germanic Languages and Law Faculty of International Relations and Law Khmelnytsky National University, 11, Instytuts'ka str., Khmelnytskyi, 29016, Ukraine

⁵ Senior teacher Department of Germanic Languages and Law Faculty of International Relations and Law Khmelnytsky National University, 11, Instytuts'ka str., Khmelnytskyi, 29016, Ukraine

Correspondence: Boyko Yuliya, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Docent, Head of Department of Germanic Languages and Law Faculty of International Relations and Law Khmelnytsky National University Instytuts'ka Str., 7/1 Khmelnytsky, 29016, Ukraine

Received: Spetember 6, 2022

Accepted: October 6, 2022

Online Published: October 6, 2022

doi:10.5430/wjel.v12n8p121

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v12n8p121>

Abstract

Globalization and integration processes in the modern world are developing very dynamically, which leads to the actualization of cross-cultural communication. Cultural relativism and ethnocentrism are the two fundamental principles that ensure the effective interaction of cultures. These two principles fully encompass both the material-rationalistic and the moral-spiritual components that shape the dialogue of cultures. Scientific exploration aims to develop theoretical-methodological and practically oriented guidelines, which will determine the positioning of the principles of cross-cultural communication and allow more effective use of their potential. The key tasks of the modern humanitarian-scientific discourse in the cultural dimension are the reorientation of all existing ideas, principles, and concepts of the synergetic model of development. The methodological arsenal capable of achieving the results of positioning ethnocentrism and cultural relativism in the processes of cross-cultural dialogue is divided into general scientific (analysis, classification, structurization), culturological (communicative linguistics methodology, semiotic), and philosophical (dialect). Prospective directions of research on cultural relativism and ethnocentrism are the search for balances in the use of these principles in the dialogue of cultures. So, in the course of the research, we distinguish the following models of the interrelation of principles of cross-cultural communication: conceptual-synergetic (relativism and ethnocentrism), procedural-dichotomous (relativism vs ethnocentrism), cultural-historical (from ethnocentrism to relativism). The modern interpretation of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism as principles of organization of cross-cultural communication should meet the requirements of the time, namely: dynamism, universality, pragmatism, identity, and efficiency.

Keywords: culture, ethnocentrism, relativism, the interaction of cultures, sociocultural space, synergetics

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

Cross-cultural communication is the most important segment of socio-cultural development. Globalization has prioritized an integrative model of relations between states, peoples, and communities. Since the mid-twentieth century, the scientific community has faced the urgent task of developing effective mechanisms of cross-cultural interaction. Scientists of cultural, sociological, historical, anthropological, and philosophical profiles began to form theoretical-methodological and practically oriented models of socio-cultural space. Currently, the current cultural problem is the search for new formats of cross-cultural communication. The present needs to harmonize the existing concepts of interaction between cultures.

Previous studies of the problems of cross-cultural communication have focused on characterizing relativism and ethnocentrism as self-sufficient formats. Another cluster of studies interpreted the dichotomous features of the opposition of these two models of cultural interaction. The modern scientific picture of the world is increasingly oriented to the synergetic paradigm, the task of which is to find common points of contact in the formation of effective cross-cultural communication. Synergetics is the methodological basis of globalization and provides its integrative potential. Consequently, the reorientation from dialectical to synergetic discourse in the

problems of cultural character is a necessary step. Therefore, if so far we have talked about relativism and ethnocentrism as two opposing principles, now a scientific and ideological paradigm of their combination as two alternative formats, interchangeable, is being formed.

The peculiarity of all modern cultural processes is the dynamism of their development. Therefore, the dominant hypothesis of scientific exploration is to establish different ways of communication of cultures (national, folk, regional, religious, etc.). The secondary hypothesis involves the identification and study of the elements of cultural identity, which require special attention in their inclusion in cross-cultural interaction.

Let us note that the consideration of communication between subjects of different cultures should be considered in the context of general civilizational development and features of the socio-cultural environment. The platform for the study of the problems of cross-cultural communication is both the general cultural planetary space and specific local manifestations of the relationship of bearers of culture. Hypotheses, which are proposed in scientific exploration, are actualized in both general cultural and local dimensions.

The principles of cross-cultural communication are based on theoretical-methodological and practically commonplace foundations. Studies of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism as ways of cultural interaction require a clear formulation of their functions and analysis of the effectiveness of their functioning. Among the key functions of cross-cultural communication, in which relativism and ethnocentrism find their expression, we note:

- informational
- broadcast
- establishing
- worldview
- value
- protective.

Regarding the practical application of the principles of cross-cultural communication, we can analyze the statistics of indicators of political, economic, and cultural integrative dimensions in the modern world. Today there is a tendency to increase the role of global processes on a planetary scale, which shows that relativism and ethnocentrism provide adequate support in terms of communication between cultures. However, there remain many aspects that further complicate the process of interaction between cultures, which requires further research on the development of synergetic principles of cross-cultural communication. Such an approach will provide a reorientation along the dichotomous dimension: relativism vs ethnocentrism to a synergistic paradigm: relativism & ethnocentrism. The combination of the key elements of these two cultural principles is not appropriate or even possible. Since the need to reduce tension between bearers of cultures in the presence of contradictions between them, which appear in the course of cross-cultural communication, the combination of alternative principles of relativism and ethnocentrism seems to be a promising direction.

1.2 Explore the Importance of the Problem

Now we have a large volume of objective indicators pointing to the dynamics of the growth of globalization processes. Scientific research quite actively characterizes the integration processes in the socio-cultural space. One of the directions of scientific interpretation of the interaction of cultures is the consideration of cross-cultural communication as a cluster of globalization. Cultural relativism and ethnocentrism are among the key principles of these processes. At the same time, it should be noted that the modern humanitarian-scientific discourse needs a new positioning of the ways of cross-cultural communication. The synergetic model, which provides for the construction of common settings for scientific research of integrative formats in culture, is relevant at present.

Scientific exploration aims to develop information and communication settings based on relativism and ethnocentrism, which will form a unified socio-cultural space, where there will be the format of prioritizing the principle of cross-cultural communication. The importance of this type of scientific research lies not in interpreting the specifics of functioning of the principles of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism, but in providing a theoretical and methodological basis for the effectiveness and relevance of these ways of cross-cultural communication.

1.3 Describe Relevant Scholarship

The problem of cross-cultural communication in scientific discourse began with the emergence of the cultural science cluster. Cultural relativism and ethnocentrism were interpreted scientifically in the twentieth century. However, we are interested in the characterization of these principles of cross-cultural communication in the context of globalization dimensions of modernity. Let us note that many works in the scientific cultural literature deal separately with relativistic and ethnocentric ideas in the context of cultural interaction. Mu-Hsin & Wang (2019) reveal the essence of ethnocentrism as a tool of cross-cultural communication. Ethnocentrism is examined in the context of the evolution of this principle from ideas of cultural closure to ways of seeking cultural interaction. Osterman (2021) highlights the mechanisms by which cultural relativism determines cultural differences between bearers of culture. At the same time, scholarly research on cultural relativism attempts to immediately adapt the features of this principle to processes of cross-cultural integration.

For a long time, these two principles have been polar in the scientific discourse, so there have been almost no works analyzing their incompatibility, let alone potential interaction. Attempts to identify common elements important for the optimization of cross-cultural communication have been made relatively recently and are due to synergetic trends in science and globalization trends in the

socio-cultural environment. AlSheddi, Russell & Hegarty (2021) revealed the essence of the problem of cultural bias and its impact on cross-cultural communication. The strategy of cultural relativism and liberal ethnocentrism applied in the Arab sociocultural space, where the problem of cultural identity partly becomes a factor of tension in cross-cultural communication, is a way to overcome the above problems. Popular now in the Western cultural tradition is the appeal to pragmatic anthropology (Figueiredo, 2022), where potential threats to cross-cultural communication are leveled by the supremacy of efficiency. In this context, cultural relativism and ethnocentrism are positioned not as opponents, but as units (along with objectivity and introspection) whose main goal is to ensure the interaction of cultures. Let us note scholarly studies in which one of the principles of cross-cultural communication acts as a protective element (Geissshuesler, 2021). Features of cross-cultural communication are highlighted in Aminova (2022). Paradoxically, for all the contradictions between cultural relativism and ethnocentrism, they retain the potential to complement each other's functionality.

2. Method

For a full-fledged study of the cultural problem, the entire methodological arsenal inherent in the humanities-scientific discourse should be used. An important aspect is considering the dynamism of the process of cross-cultural communication, which makes appropriate adjustments in the selection and combination of research methods.

2.1 Define the Subsections

The general scientific method of analysis is used in this study in the context of the methodology of communicative linguistics. Semiotic and content analysis provide the basis for the study of the content and form of cultural information transmission. Through pragmatic and structural analysis, the goal of investigating both general cultural phenomena and specific examples of cross-cultural communication is achieved. Propaganda and discourse analysis provide insight into the target dimension of cultural interaction. In addition, the methods of systematization and classification are relevant, which differentiate the information that is transmitted by the carriers of culture and form a relativistic and ethnocentric paradigm of cross-cultural communication.

A separate methodological cluster is the philosophical methods. Here we should note the dialectical method, which has long supported the positioning of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism as opposing principles. However, the recent trends in the sociocultural environment indicate the process of reorientation of cultural processes to the synergetic paradigm. Consequently, cultural relativism and ethnocentrism are principles that ensure cross-cultural communication, intersecting, and interacting.

2.2 Characteristics of the Participant (Subject)

The main subject of research is the bearers of culture - nation, state, ethnicity, professional community, religious community, etc. This, in turn, adjusts in the study of the peculiarities of cross-cultural communication. Let us note that in the cultural dimension, the bearers of cultural differences have a direct impact on the communication between each other, bringing their wishes into the principles of the organization of such interaction. For a long time, there has been a stereotype that ethnocentrism aggravates contradictions between bearers of culture, while relativism aggravates them. However, the sociocultural realities of the present argue to the contrary, since in the axiological dimension both principles pose threats to cross-cultural interaction.

3. Results

All attempts to build strategies of cross-cultural communication on the dominant element have failed. Neither ethnocentrism nor cultural relativism nor any other principle has been unable to fully ensure the theoretical-methodological and practical implementation of cross-cultural dialogue. The key reason for this has been the insane growth of the information and communication component of culture. If we add to this the ever-growing dynamism of cultural processes, there is a need for new models of organizing cross-cultural communication. Consequently, the scientific-cultural community has found itself facing the need for a synergetic interaction of all principles capable of ensuring the interaction of cultures. Therefore, when we consider cultural relativism and ethnocentrism as principles of cross-cultural communication, we should consider the evolution of the positioning of these ways in the socio-cultural space.

The analysis of the processes of cross-cultural communication highlights several models of the relationship between relativism and ethnocentrism (see Table 1).

Table 1. Formats of interaction between cultural relativism and ethnocentrism in the context of cross-cultural dialogue

cultural-historical	procedural-dichotomous	conceptual-synergetic
from ethnocentrism to relativism	relativism vs ethnocentrism	relativism and ethnocentrism

Source: author's development

Let us consider the cultural-historical dimension of the relationship between cultural relativism and ethnocentrism, which is characteristic of the twentieth century and was formed according to the principle: from ethnocentrism to relativism. Sociocultural realities dictated conditions for reorientation from ethnocentrism dominating since the 19th century to a new format through relativism. Replacing fundamentality with relativism was intended to form a sociocultural environment in which there would be no obstacles to cross-cultural interaction and integration. Clearly, ethnocentrism in its classical manifestation was a significant obstacle to this.

Bias is a value dimension that significantly complicates communication between cultures. It is worth noting the axiological sources that fuel bias against other (other) cultures. These are individual moral beliefs and global binding stereotypes. According to AlSheddi, Russell & Hegarty (2021), binding collective warnings (state policies, religious canons, social norms) are determinant in the development of

concepts that advocate cultural identity and do not support the absence of barriers to cross-cultural communication. Overcoming biases of various kinds in cross-cultural communication remains not in the ontological dimension, but in the anthropological dimension (Batiste, Denby & Brinson, 2022). Traditionally, principles of cultural identity have been associated with ethnocentrism. The popularity of this principle has a sinusoidal nature, rising or falling in the respective regions or time periods.

From another perspective, ethnocentrism centers around the notion of a belief in the privileging of culture (Etnison, 2018). Such culture-centrism implies an orientation toward cultural traditions rather than cultural development. However, even the minimal informational influence of the globalized cultural dimension completely destroys such notions. Consequently, there is room for the development of new possibilities for the integration and interaction of cultures.

If in the cultural and anthropological perspective ethnocentrism has a strong position, and in some regions or countries even dominant, then in the information and communication manifestation ethnocentrism is doomed to transformation and renewal. The cultural community has proposed an alternative in the form of cultural relativism as a renewal for ethnocentrism. Teira (2021) analyzes cultural relativism as a methodological strategy for correcting ethnocentric biases.

Thus, the prerequisites for the procedural-dichotomous dimension of the coexistence of ethnocentrism and relativism were formed. The globalization processes that engulfed culture in the second half of the twentieth century required a qualitatively new level of information and communication support. Therefore, the question regarding the opposition and further confrontation between ethnocentrism and relativism was obvious. This dichotomy was further aggravated by the cultural tendency to alienate the material and rationalistic and moral and spiritual components of culture.

Contemporary cultural historians and anthropologists note an ontological turn in humanities-scientific discourse (Figueiredo, 2022). Such realities lead to a strengthening of the role of relativism and ethnocentrism, above all their existential dimension. This means the loss of the dominant status of human dimensionality in the process of interaction between cultures. This approach provides a new - conceptual format for cross-cultural communication.

Cultural relativism relies mainly on rationalistic principles. At the same time, ethnocentrism traditionally actualizes the moral aspects. Cross-cultural communication, in addition to the means of its implementation, needs the need to study and understand the other culture. The search for understanding with representatives of other cultures requires an appeal to rationality (Österman, 2021).

Models of the coexistence of the principles of ethnocentrism and relativism indicated the potential for further development. As soon as the potential for proper cross-cultural communication was exhausted - the need for a change in the system of balances of information and communication principles was evident.

The modern world subordinates all cultural methodologies to dynamism. Consequently, traditional models simply do not have time to ensure the development of culture, and innovative strategies, supporting dynamism, lose axiological principles. Such realities entailed the actualization of the synergetic paradigm, which combines the necessary components of individual ideas, principles, or concepts. The principles of self-organization and interdisciplinarity allow ordering these processes without external interference within the sociocultural space and thanks to culturological methodologies. This ensures the autonomy of culture and allows the construction of progressive communications for the interaction of cultures. This is how the conceptual-synergetic dimension of the relation in the format: ethnocentrism and cultural relativism is formed.

One of the concepts which are offered for coordination of positions of ethnocentrism and relativism is the global social theory which forms the algorithm of the organization of cross-cultural interaction:

- linguistic conceptual schemes shape cross-cultural dialogue (Kuzio, 2014);

Cross-cultural communication produces reflexivity (existential, dialogical, holistic) (Kögler & Dunaj, 2018).

Respect is important in cross-cultural dialogue (Rozenberg, 2018). This concept extends to several manifestations of cross-cultural communication:

- respect for one's own culture;
- respect for another culture;
- existential dimension of respect for the global culture of civilization;
- the human dimension of respect between culture bearers.

4. Discussion

To understand the perspectives of relativism and ethnocentrism, let us turn to the specifics of the implementation of these principles in specific cultural and historical environments. While ethnocentrism is more characteristic of Eastern communities, relativism has become a symbol of the Western world. Since the old world, the ancient Oriental civilizations were characterized by closedness, while the ancient culture was characterized by cultural openness. This is how the principles of cross-cultural communication were formed in the East and the West. However, the socio-cultural expansion of modern Eastern states (first of all, China) testifies to the reorientation in the positioning of cultural principles of information and communication support. At the same time, subjects of the Western world are increasingly turning to ethnocentrism as an effective method in updating models of cross-cultural communication, because relativism does

not provide the necessary results of the information and communication paradigm. While having the absolute effectiveness of cross-cultural communication within the Western world, cultural relativism has proved to be too liberal a mechanism, unable to respond adequately to an aggressive or hostile cultural information and communication campaign.

The positioning of bearers (subjects) of culture in the system of cross-cultural communication remains a debatable issue. An important point today is the concept of inequality. William & Lynch (2019) characterize inequality as a challenge to the autonomous construction of cultures. The model of counter-ethnocentrism is realized in the social sciences and provides cosmopolitan tendencies (Benthall, 2021).

Note that both ethnocentrism and relativism, despite their informational and communicative capabilities, are among the main causes of disagreement between cultures. Moreover, it is often the communication component that becomes the factor provoking these misunderstandings. Consequently, if in the twentieth century the importance of these principles was determined by quantitative indicators, the twenty-first century focuses on the quality of these mechanisms in cross-cultural communication.

The present is characterized by multiculturalism and with it total universality (Aminova, 2022). This trend cannot but affect cross-cultural communication, subordinating it to the principles of universality. Modern multiculturalism has become a global platform where, in addition to the positive integration moments, the threatening phenomena are also actualized (Nganga, 2018). Cross-cultural interaction is a mechanism that realizes people's cultural expectations. That is why it is important to maintain certain balances between relativism and ethnocentrism. Above all, it is important to regulate the balance between the rationalistic principles of relativism and the moral-spiritual aspects of ethnocentrism. A cultural-historical excursion confirms that an unaltered dominance of one of these approaches leads to socio-cultural upheaval. Cross-cultural communication under such conditions does not fully perform its assigned functions, because all the potential channels of communication between cultures are not activated.

A pragmatic concept is promoted in the sociocultural space, the basis of which is cross-cultural communication competence (Mu-Hsin Lin & Wang, 2019). Universality in an axiological and moral context is a key regulating factor in cross-cultural communication (Oppong, 2019). While normative and legal elements are relevant to the state, religion, or community, they are ineffective in cross-cultural interactions because they can be in dispute with each other, effectively blocking communication.

A certain correlative between the paradigms of ethnocentrism and relativism is the concept of loyalty (Geissshuesler, 2021). This approach responds fully to the realities of our world's dynamism. The responsibility of having to make dogmatic choices is removed from the individual and replaced by an obligation to make choices according to circumstances. For cross-cultural communication, the principle of dynamism will always prevail over dogmatism.

When we actualize the notion of cultural meanings, a simplistic interpretation of culture is unacceptable (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022). The main goal of cross-cultural interactions is to avoid radicalization in any form. The information and communication component destroys natural ethnocentrism, preventing destructive national-centered tendencies. Encouraging the perception and understanding of another culture is a direct consequence of properly tuned and implemented cross-cultural communication. At the same time, we should caution against the negative manifestation of cultural relativism, which manifests itself in the devaluation of cultural identity and the value decline of culture as a whole.

Research in many areas of social engagement suggests that in the process of cultural interaction, differences and contradictions are quickly eliminated or do not arise at all (Fallace, 2019). However, this requires two key conditions: purposeful and organizational. If we extrapolate these principles to cross-cultural communication, we get roughly identical effectiveness. In the example of higher education, we see that cross-cultural communication demonstrates its relevance because the human desire for education breaks down all boundaries (material and spiritual), which confirms the priority of the goal over the process. Ethnocentrism and relativism are mechanisms that do not define culture but serve it.

Thus, the results of scientific reconnaissance indicate a reorientation of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism positioning in the system of information and communication to support of the dialogue between cultures. At the same time, the perspective model of correlation between these principles of cross-cultural communication, which is based on the synergetic paradigm, is being actualized. Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism form a system of balances, contributing to the establishment of effective communication between bearers of culture.

References

- Akkari, A., & Radhouane, M. (2022). Key concepts for intercultural approaches. In *Intercultural Approaches to Education*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70825-2_13
- AlSheddi, M., Russell, P. S., & Hegarty, P. (2021). Between cultural relativism and liberal ethnocentrism: What does Saudi Arabia tell us about cultural variation in moral identity and prejudice? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 51*(4), 384-398. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12742>
- Aminova, G. R. (2022). (2022). *Specifics of the modern cross-cultural situation in the social, cultural and business spheres of society*. Open Science Framework. <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/SQRB6>
- Batiste, H., Denby, R., & Brinson, J. (2022). Cross-cultural mentoring in higher education: the use of a cultural identity development model. *Mentoring & Tutoring, 30*(4), 409-433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2022.2091194>

- Benthall, J. (2021). The critique of ethnocentrism in retrospect. *Anthropology Today*, 37(3), 20-22.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12654>
- Etninson, A. (2018). Some myths about ethnocentrism. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 96(2), 209-224.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2017.1343363>
- Fallace, T. (2019). The ethnocentric origins of the learning style idea. *Educational Researcher (Washington, D.C.: 1972)*, 48(6), 349-355.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x19858086>
- Figueiredo, G. (2022). Towards a pragmatist anthropology: Objectivity, relativism, ethnocentrism, and intropathy. *Anthropological Theory*, 146349962110588. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14634996211058852>
- Geissshuesler, F. A. (2021). Loyalty to the cultural homeland (1960–1965): Critical ethnocentrism as an anticipatory defense against relativism and interpretative anthropology. In *The Life and Work of Ernesto De Martino* (pp. 122-145). BRILL.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004457720_009
- Kögler, H.-H., & Dunaj, L. (2018). Beyond ethnocentrism: Towards a global social theory. In *Social Theory and Asian Dialogues* (pp. 69–106). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7095-2_5
- Kuzio, A. (2014). *The exploitation of schemata in persuasive and manipulative discourse in Polish, English and Russian*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing
- Lynch, W. T. (2019). Between kin selection and cultural relativism: Cultural evolution and the origin of inequality. *Perspectives on Science: Historical, Philosophical, Social*, 27(2), 278-315. https://doi.org/10.1162/posc_a_00308
- Mu-Hsin Lin, M. H., & Wang, Y. H. (2019). *From Ethnocentrism to Intercultural Communication: The Hundred-Foot Journey*, 56, 24-31.
- Nganga, M. (2018). Cultural ethnocentrism in Europe. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3200161>
- Oppong, S. (2019). *Polish Psychological Bulletin*. Committee for Psychological Science PAS. <https://doi.org/10.24425/PPB.2019.126014>
- Österman, T. (2021). Cultural relativism and understanding difference. *Language & Communication*, 80, 124-135.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2021.06.004>
- Rozenberg, J. J. (2018). Corps raciology and cultural relativism. *Sociology International Journal*, 2(5).
<https://doi.org/10.15406/sij.2018.02.00074>
- Teira, D. (2021). On the limits of cultural relativism as a debiasing method. *Philosophy of Science*, 88(5), 1079-1089.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/714853>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).