

# *Intercultural Dialogue in Postmodern Conditions*

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**Abstract**—The dynamic development of modern society is associated with the intensification of integration processes, which, in turn, actualize the study of problems of intercultural dialogue. The author of the article attempts to analyse the problem of intercultural dialogue in postmodern conditions. The relevance of the study is determined by the necessity to eliminate the encountered obstacles of the effective intercultural interaction. The researcher identifies the factors contributing to the optimization of intercultural dialogue, including the adoption of common cultural prerequisites, the specific position of the participants in the dialogical relations, and openness. The scientist scrutinizes the possibilities how to realize these conditions in the postmodern time. Postmodernism is considered as the current state of culture where a certain type of personality is formed. Based on an analysis, the author concludes that the negative aspects of postmodernism create the personality that is unable to conduct a constructive dialogue. Besides the scholar suggests that mastering the culture of dialogue is significantly important now.

**Keywords**—tolerance; identity; narcissism; simulacrum; multicultural literacy

## I. INTRODUCTION

The dialogue creates the basic conditions of sustainable development and task solution of preserving the natural-cultural environment and cultural diversity. The dialogue is a tool and model for intercultural problems solving in the modern world, as well as a strategy for the state cultural policy. The UNESCO Constitution states, "... wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. <...> the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern; ..." In this regard, the activities of the UN and UNESCO are aimed at preserving peace through dialogue. Being aware of the relevance of the dialogue relations in the world, the United Nations declared International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001–2010). The decade has passed, but the problems of the intercultural communication still exist.

### A. Problem Statement

The crucial task now is to find mechanisms that contribute to the optimization of intercultural dialogue. Nevertheless, their understanding is sometimes accomplished without considering the conditions of the dialogical relations.

Therefore, conflicts are increasing despite the obviousness of the dialogue as the value of modern world civilization.

The aim of the study is to identify the opportunities for realizing the intercultural dialogue potential in the current situation, i.e. postmodernism conditions.

### B. Research Methods

The contradiction between the awareness of the significance of intercultural dialogue, its acceptance as a value and the growing conflict indicates the moral sources of this opposition and the need to analyse it on the basis of the cultural-anthropological approach. This methodological position allows us to consider the process of the formation of human consciousness in close connection with its sociocultural practice and to reveal the meaning of the modern era of postmodernism. This theoretical premise involves the use of a synergistic method that allows us to consider the nonlinear effects and the mechanisms of changes of unstable complex systems.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intercultural dialogue, according to V.M. Mezhujev, is not just idle talk or communication, but a way to reconcile particular points of view on what is considered true [1, pp. 69-74]. A prerequisite for the search for common grounds is the parity relationship between the participants in the dialogue, based on the recognition of the existence of different cultures and on their right to have their own values, ideas and norms. Such cultural relativism proclaims that people's way of life is perceived as it is, and a person, proceeding from such an understanding of the world, avoids value judgments and ideas. M.S. Kagan rightly notes, "The attitude to the culture as equal, interesting, essential, notwithstanding for all its differences, should be desired because of its dissimilarity and uniqueness. Only in this case the relationship between cultures arises, which we can identify as a dialogue" [2]. If monologue relations unify cultures according to the principle of "domination-subordination", then dialogical relations are based accurately on the recognition of otherness.

However, the absoluteness of the principle of cultural relativism leads to the breakdown of intercultural dialogue, and in the long term – to the transformation in socio-cultural orientation and the change of cultural code, as evidenced by the failure of multiculturalism in Europe. This implies that the dialogue participants' recognition of the principle of the

cultural equality and mutual respect will be necessary but not sufficient condition for building dialogical relations.

The position of every participant in the dialogue is important not only because of the relation to the other side as an equal partner, but also because of the awareness of his or her own interests. The cultural space cannot be hierarchical. Explaining this thesis by M.A. Blumenkrantz notes that the denial of hierarchy leads to the destruction of culture [3]. The priorities are own interests, otherwise positions of the participants in the dialogue are absent, and henceforth the dialogue itself does not exist. In any case, dialogue is a subject-subject relationship. The absence of one subject of any part turns the dialogue into cultural contact – subject-object relations.

Therefore, the cultural dialogue consecutively actualizes the problem of national identity, since it dominates among various types of social identities. N. Berdyaev's conclusions that humanity, extracted from the national entity, is an empty abstraction have not lost their significance today, because the universal human can manifest itself only through the national individuality. When an individual comes into the world, he "plunges" into a certain cultural "heredity" that he learns from the people around him. The national-ethnic aspect plays the leading role in this. The national self-identification is of particular importance in the process of personality formation, since it is possible on the basis of awareness of involvement in a particular national community. With the help of self-identification, a person determines his place in a multinational space; learns the ways of behaviour inside, and outside his group; distinguishes other nations from his own. Therefore, he can recognize the uniqueness of his nation, and therefore his position in the intercultural dialogue.

As a result, on the one hand, the optimization of intercultural dialogue presupposes the adoption of common cultural prerequisites; otherwise, mutual understanding will be difficult. On the other hand, national identity, the specific position of a participant in these relations, becomes one of the conditions of dialogical relations. Nevertheless, is a dialogue possible if its participants adhere to not only different, but also opposite positions based on diverse perceptions of the world, values, and worldview? The answer is obvious. In the system of intercultural relations, there must be the third element, which will be a measure of the compatibility of the two other components, without allowing each of them to become absolute. This element is openness. Having the opportunity to meet other cultures eliminates distrust, contributes to the awareness of universal kinship and involvement in the wholeness. Intercultural dialogue should be based on mutual acceptance of each other, i.e. on the principle of tolerance, which is characterized by the attitude towards a stranger as an equal-worth individual and is expressed in the conscious suppression of the feeling of rejection caused by everything that alien in the another person. A tolerant person tries to understand the subjective position of everyone. Moreover, according to the critical rethinking of this position he tries to change, supplement, transform his views, while preserving the

personal integrity. A tolerant person is able to influence the opinions of others, without causing moral and spiritual damage to them. Tolerance is a mechanism of self-regulation, which allows you to balance opposing trends, preserving the core of identity, not allowing diversity to "pull apart" the unitedness.

In this context, intercultural dialogue is the interaction of cultures, which involves the exchange of ideas and the recognition of differences in order to achieve a deeper understanding views and traditions of representatives of diverse cultures. Due to the culture diversity of the world, individuals are given the opportunity to constantly learn something new about each other. As D. M. Likhachov believed that people had created each other via communication. The more we learn about the Others, the better we distinguish the dissimilarities and our own uniqueness.

P. Grechko states that the participants of the intercultural dialogue should know each other as fully as possible and should not be afraid of dissonance [4]. Understanding another culture does not mean knowing or recognising it. As V.S. Bibler writes, "It means – to comprehend by intellect! – to treat it as something completely different than "I" than my thinking, my cultural being". The more I understand the different culture (the tragedies of Aeschylus, "Hamlet" by Shakespeare, "The Return of the Prodigal Son" by Rembrandt, "The Critique of Pure Reason" by Kant), the more I discover that it is incomprehensible to me, but necessary for my being and "my spiritual confidence". This paradox also exists in personal communication: understanding exists as long as there is a lack of comprehending, i.e. "the admitting that it is another person, a different spiritual universe, beyond the limits of my being" [5]. Analysing the essence of the dialogue, M. S. Kagan distinguishes interest in a new culture precisely because of its dissimilarity and uniqueness [6, pp. 213]. The interest in an unlikely and incomprehensible culture gives rise to a reflexive attitude towards it. At the same time, M. M. Bakhtin puts forward the idea of the unfinished dialogue. As the learning process has neither spatial nor temporal boundaries, the right to distinction leads to the recognition of culture.

According to Ch. Taylor, the important component of any dialogue is the mutual enrichment of its participants. This raises the question of the limits of cultural borrowing. It is well known from history that cultural contacts might have different consequences. The active intercultural communication, on the one hand, becomes a means of mutual awareness, optimizing intercultural relations, on the other hand, contributes to a critical change of the position, that leads to the enrichment of the own social experience.

Among the negative effects of cultural borrowing is the risk of losing cultural identity. At the same time, it is not important that one culture borrows from another, but whether it contributes to the cultural identity affirmation as a condition for its survival. Intercultural dialogue is extremely important,

as it is obligatory to take into account global trends in cultural development and the preservation of the national cultural identity.

Therefore, cultural universalization does not mean the reduction of the whole diversity of national cultures to a single sample. National cultures are not alternatives, but invariants of the development of world civilization of dialogue, which assumes, as V. M. Mezhuyev believes, "... not the elimination of different cultures, but free access to each of them by those who wishes. ... Globalization in the field of culture should not be considered as the emergence of some kind of a similar and obligatory culture for the whole world, but as a way of its functioning that allows every inhabitant of the planet to enjoy the benefits and achievements of any national culture". This is the universality of the new civilization, which does not eliminate the diversity of ways of life, but creates new forms of culture.

Therefore, the study of the conditions for optimizing intercultural dialogue based on synergistic methodology involves the use of R.G. Barantsev's systemic triad, which form nonlinearity, openness and coherence. It can be assumed, that the optimization of intercultural dialogue is possible with the harmonization of three elements: cultural equality (nonlinearity), cultural hierarchies (coherence) and tolerance (openness). The principle of "uncertainty – complementarity – compatibility" is based on the equality of these elements. The essence of which is that the limit of each element of the triad depends on the level of compromise between the other two. As a result, the elements are in dynamic equilibrium, while maintaining the integrity and stability of the system. For instance, the principle of equality and accessibility of cultures are in the ratio of complementarity, and the principle of the hierarchy of cultures does not allow the participants of the dialogue to dissolve in the dialogical cultural space. Thus, the system triad is a unity of equal elements that optimizes intercultural dialogue and asserts such features as integrity, harmony, solidarity, and tolerance. Their dominance in the public consciousness can lead to a new world community that can solve many pressing global problems and move from wars and misunderstandings to a culture of peace and harmony. In the postmodern conditions, it becomes possible to determine the analysis of the characteristics of the modern society development. The modern situation is determined by the acceleration of scientific and technological progress. The absolutization of innovation as a value of modern society has led to ambivalent results. The positive effects, in comparison with the negative aspects, do not need clarification.

The saturation of innovations has formed a sense of constant and continuous changes. The future is so unpredictable that it becomes controlled. The feeling of ephemerality and instability occurs. In the public consciousness, there are no ideas about the existence of some constants of reflecting and well behaving. Such an attitude gives rise to a negative perception of everything connected with tradition.

According to G. L. Tulchinsky, the basis of the demolition of the traditional cultural structures of postmodernism is "aggressive, sexually coloured, even obscene and pornographic values, going back to erotic violence and possession: to know how to understand, to master the truth, to discover how to demystify and reveal reality" [7]. The imposition of democratic principles has become a common example of violence in the intercultural communication. It is impossible not to agree with V. L. Inozemtsev, who believes that democracy should arise at a certain point from a conscious political decision, i.e. to establish democracy. It cannot enter the house by the back door [8]. Evaluating itself as the ultimate truth, democracy acts undemocratically, using the right of the strong. An aggressive attitude in social practice leads to suspicion, growth of the protest movement, terrorism, and therefore to the impossibility of intercultural dialogue.

In addressing issues, one of the most effective ways is to become the power, not the wisdom. It is not necessary to demonstrate the presence of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in modern society. The certain opinion prevails among the elite of the armed men: the semantic weapon is the most powerful according to the strength of the impact on society. This weapon is implemented by information means, for instance a false idea is introduced into the society, forming such changes, which instead of progress lead to devastation. The vivid confirmation of this is the struggle for the rights of sexual minorities unfolding in the West, which led to the destruction of family values.

Values become relative. Actually, defending freedom, postmodernist practices strive to destroy cultural foundations that form a stable society. Cultural space becomes badly structured. There are no semantically filled binary oppositions "high / low", "strong / weak", "male / female", "centre / periphery". Instead of hierarchy, we see chaos where values and landmarks are mixed. Therefore, a person in postmodern conditions falls into a disoriented space where he fails to distinguish Good from Evil. They also stop being opposite constants and become situational in nature. Who are the romantic characters in the movie "Natural Born Killers" by Oliver Stone, causing the audience sympathy? Killers! Whom does the viewer sympathize with; watching the adventures of the main characters of the film "Ocean's Twelve" by Steven Soderbergh? With robbers! Traditional cultural forms function in the unusual contexts. If intercultural dialogue is a way of searching for truth, then in the situation of postmodernism it turns out to be impossible because of the fact that Truth and Lie are indistinguishable, just as Good and Evil are undifferentiated. Therefore, postmodern space is the *post-truth* one (the word 'post-truth', according to one of the Oxford Dictionaries, became "the word of 2016"). In this space, truth loses its significance. Objective facts and rational evaluation give way to emotions and scandalous statements. This confirms M.A. Blumenkrantz's idea that in the situation of postmodernism word-idea is transformed into a word – a means of suggestion, manipulation of public consciousness.

Postmodernism is a state of fatigue due to rationalism, structured existence, tradition, and culture itself. Therefore, the description of the postmodernism practice is associated with the term “deconstruction”. Man destroys the established order and creates his own world and virtual reality.

A person who lives in the illusory world does not need to search the reality. He invents his own reality, where all his desires are fulfilled. In the film directed by Chris Columbus “Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone”, based on J. K. Rowling, there is such a *mise-en-scène* when the main character sits in front of the mirror, which reflects the deepest desires. The happy people see the reflection of themselves. The unfortunate, deprived, dissatisfied with his real life, see what he would like to get. Having learnt that Harry spends a lot of time in front of the mirror, Professor Dumbledore orders to hide it in the cellars of the castle. Otherwise, the boy can go crazy, i.e. destroy himself. In this world of phantoms, man ceases to be himself. The modern man seeks the world of illusions, where the dream comes true. However, such gaining freedom in the absence of moral guidelines leads not to creation, but to destruction.

The person who doubts himself and is therefore subordinate to the moral imperative has been replaced by a “dividuous”, a person without integrity, but “with a torn schizophrenic or paranoid type of behaviour ... a “willing machine”... a zombie with an infinitely weakening will blocked by circumstances” [9, 184, 64-65, 68]. “Dividuous” is distinguished by an extreme degree of instability; the fundamental uncertainty in the ways of its further development; sensitivity to external influences coming from society, and to internal impacts coming from feelings and emotions. This person does not have clearly understood political, economic, and ethical values. Therefore, he is ready to support any idea, even immoral.

A new world perception is being formed, the basis of which is not rational certainty, but a person’s reaction to what is happening. At the same time, the world is a chaos, disorganized, disordered, broken, contradictory, decentralized, and devoid of cause-and-effect relationships.

Postmodernism does not recognize the centre as an organizing principle, considering it in the context of “domination-submission” relations. The goal of decentralization is to eliminate the violence that comes from the centre. The deconstruction of the binary opposition “centre / periphery” takes subjects out of the dialogic space, since the subject is the centre, whose priority interest associates with its identification. Identity acquires indefinite and vague forms. As I.S. Semenenko rightly emphasizes: “As a system of socially significant landmarks of “recognizing” oneself, identity is constantly in the process of becoming and reconsidering its characteristics. However, in the information society, in the world of multi-level interdependence of social subjects and individuals, the reference points themselves become increasingly uncertain, blurred and changeable” [10]. Being constantly in a situation of choice, a person lives in the

present, without thinking about the future and relying on the moral foundations of the past. Immediate benefits bring to life a famous quotation of the French king Louis XV: “Après moi, le déluge” (“After me, the flood”). Postmodernism cultivates narcissism that explains the unprecedented popularity of Selfie (this word was declared as “word of the year” in 2013 by the Oxford Dictionary). At the same time, the position of “I” has nothing to do with identification; it is the position of an atomized being. Narcissists identifies themselves only with themselves. Self-centred interests and needs cause their social connections.

Meanwhile, professional activities that require an adequate complete education, give way to communication in social networks. Bloggers get the power and authority that were formerly inherent only to professionals [11]. Bloggers have neither fear nor embarrassment to the audience. The bright self-presenting and taking advantage of the design of their own image are the most important things for them [12]. As a result, the popularity of professional knowledge decreases, it becomes a simulacrum.

A network of simulacra, self-contained sign complexes, which do not have any correspondences in the real world any more, replaces the reality. Simulacra govern people’s behaviour, their perception, consciousness, which leads to the “death of subjectivity”: the human “I” also consists of a set of simulacra now [13]. The postmodern man fully corresponds to the bifurcation individual whose characteristics are described by V. P. Shalayev: he is “a person with a plastic, individually oriented, egoistic consciousness; an individualist, consumer and pragmatist in his relations with the surrounding society and people”. This person easily joins groups and disappears, changes jobs and occupation, leaves the family and creates a new one, establishes and breaks up friendly ties, becomes a member of various social movements, organizations and departs them.

Postmodernism has created a spiritual atmosphere when there is nothing sacred and lofty: everything is equalized and subjected to be ridiculed. Revealing the essence of postmodernism, S. Kornev characterizes the postmodern man as a person, “who cares only about himself and his faith, who wants to affirm himself, ignoring the faith of others” [14]. This person cannot be called tolerant. An example of such self-affirmation in the Internet space is trolling, i.e. inciting, and provoking conflicts or non-verbal skirmish.

Analysing communication in social networks, N.A. Martianov and M.V. Rubtcova notice that in order to increase the popularity and to shock the audience; communication participants use steady speech patterns and images, which discredit the opponents and their opinions, “as well as obviously ambiguous and provocative phrases, “meme” ..., animated pictures and abbreviations ...” [15]. A postmodern man is incapable, unwilling and unable to engage in the constructive dialogue.

### III. CONCLUSION

It is impossible not to agree with V.P. Shalayev, who believes that the dialogue is “a natural step towards a new value system and a new civilization, which, perhaps, will become the basis of another attempt to return to the unity of human essence and to restore the harmonious personality”. The success of this path of development depends on people’s ability to communicate and reflect. The new development paradigm also forms a new type of personality, which should correspond to the new principle of relationships – not rivalry (competition), but cooperation.

The intercultural dialogue requires understanding and respecting other cultural traditions, developing objective ideas about the world, understanding and interpreting the experience of other nations. The intercultural dialogue forms a multicultural and literate personality, who is able not only to speak, but also to listen. This personality might be characterized by the psychological readiness to accept a different opinion, a conscious attitude towards communication and the ability to reflect and search for alternatives.

An effective dialogue cannot arise on its own; its principles must be persistently studied. Mastering the culture of dialogue is a condition for strengthening adequate strategic thinking at the level of state leadership. Nowadays, the cognising of the mentality based on the principles of equality, mutual respect, is becoming a key precondition for an adequate response to the challenges of postmodernism.

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