SSOAR

Open Access Repository
www.ssoar.info

Macro-reasoning and cognitive gaps: understanding post-Soviet Russians' communication styles

Fell, Elena

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Fell, E. (2017). Macro-reasoning and cognitive gaps: understanding post-Soviet Russians' communication styles. *ESSACHESS - Journal for Communication Studies*, *7*(1), 91-110. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-52967-7

Nutzungsbedingungen:
Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/1.0/deed.de

Terms of use:
This document is made available under a CC BY-NC Licence (Attribution-NonCommercial). For more Information see: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/1.0

gesis Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Macro-reasoning and cognitive gaps: understanding post-Soviet Russians' communication styles

Doctor Elena FELL
Tomsk Polytechnic University
RUSSIA
elena.fell@ntlworld.com

Abstract: Russians and Westerners access, process and communicate information in different ways. Whilst Westerners favour detailed analysis of subject matter, Russians tend to focus on certain components that are, in their view, significant. This disparity makes it difficult to achieve constructive dialogues between Western and Russian stakeholders contributing to cross-cultural communication problems. The author claims that the difference in the ways Russians and Westerners negotiate information is a significant cultural difference between Russia and West rather than an irritating (and in principle amenable) lack of analytical skills on the Russian partners' part. Understanding the reasons behind the Russian-specific approaches to dealing with information would be a positive step towards a more effective cross-cultural communication, important in business situations and essential in diplomacy.

Keywords: Russians, post-Soviet Russians, cross-cultural communication, Russians and Westerners, communication problems

***

Macro-raisonnement et lacunes cognitives:
les Russes postsoviétiques et les problèmes de communication interculturelle

Résumé : Les Russes et les Occidentaux accèdent à, traitent et communiquent l'information de différentes façons. Alors que les Occidentaux préfèrent l'analyse détaillée de la matière, les Russes ont tendance à se concentrer sur certaines composantes qui sont, à leur avis, importantes. Cette disparité rend difficile l'établissement de dialogues constructifs entre partenaires russes et occidentaux et contribue aux problèmes de communication interculturelle. L'auteur suggère que la différence dans la façon dont les Russes et les Occidentaux traitent l'information est une différence culturelle significative entre la Russie et l'Occident plutôt qu'un manque irritant de compétences analytiques sur la partie des partenaires russes – les compétences que les Russes peuvent supposément apprendre. La compréhension des rai-

eISSN 1775-352X © ESSACHESS

sons qui sous-tendent les approches russes du partage de l'information serait une étape positive vers une communication interculturelle plus efficace, importante dans les situations commerciales et essentielle à la diplomatie.

Mots-clés : russes, russes postsoviétiques, communication interculturelle, russes et les occidentaux, problèmes de communication

***

Introduction

Chronic communication failures between Western, predominantly English-speaking stakeholders and their Russian counterparts are frustrating in business and alarming in diplomatic negotiations. These failures could be partly due to Western negotiators' lack of understanding Russian specific cultural undercurrents that shaped Russian people's communication styles, especially their leaders'.

The aim of this paper is to explore Russian specific communication patterns by tapping into deeply rooted cultural stereotypes, which influenced the post-Soviet Russians' social development during their formative years in the late XX century. The author claims that the understanding of that particular period is crucial for the understanding of the contemporary discourse that involves post-Soviet Russia because people who currently occupy leading positions in Russian society were brought up in the late XX century Soviet Union.

This article contributes to ESSACHESS – Journal for Communication Studies, Special Issue "Rhetoric and Peace at Crossroads: Public and Civic Discourse, Culture and Communication Perspectives" as a practical attempt to counteract the peace threatening division between Russia and the West. Engaging theoretically with Russia's important cultural traits that feed into Russian people's specific communication behaviour could improve Western readers' understanding of international communication situations that involve Russia. Inasmuch as this paper accounts for Russian people's attitudes to their country and their identity as Russians this discussion is relevant to the Special Issue's theme of "nationalism as cultural or political paradigm of national identity".

In terms of communication behaviour that manifests culture-specific ways of accessing, processing and communicating information, when dealing with the matter in hand, Western traditions prescribe paying mindful attention to detail, meticulous planning and verbalisation of every possibility, acknowledgement of every fleeting phenomenon. Russians, on the other hand, practise the opposite approach: they lend their attention to what they consider important and worthy of attention, leaving out gaps of unacknowledged eventualities, circumstances and potentialities. These cognitive lacunae, when confronted with Western negotiators' expectations, cause tension in communication. Understatements, overstatements, conceptual leaps and patchy silences obscure important areas and leave the unexplained subject matter, which Westerners would normally want to acknowledge and duly address.

In order to capture the problematic difference between Russian and Western cognitive approaches to the matter in hand, which affects the quality of their intercultural communication, the author suggests the terms "macro-reasoning" and "micro-reasoning". She draws on Tim Peake's observation of the difference between the American and the Russian space suits to illustrate this point: "The Russian space suit … doesn't fit very well," he says. "They've only got three sizes of glove [small, medium, large] so it is quite cumbersome and difficult to do tasks of high fidelity. Whereas the American suit has 46 sizes of glove…" (Lougher, 2014).

In the object where Americans find it appropriate to identify 46 features, Russians see only three. Westerners train their minds to explore subject matter in depth under a mental microscope, so to speak, whilst Russians tend to mentally condense reality into series of substantial, meaningful elements and disregard what they consider trivial. Thus, a significant portion of reality remains verbally unacknowledged, and this is especially true of the dynamic fragments of reality (including social reality) and processes that Russians leave to unroll themselves. In Russian-style communication, many elements are just expected to happen, much of unacknowledged content is accepted by default, and this makes it difficult for outsiders to understand what exactly is happening in the Russian-speaking environment and why.

It is tempting to suggest that once the above discrepancy is identified, it should be relatively easy to correct: detailed reasoning is an educable skill, and Russians would want to learn it as soon as this gap in their development is revealed. However, the author insists that macro-reasoning as a cognitive approach to reality is not an oversight of Russian education, but an entrenched feature of the Russian character that was purposefully taught, encouraged and nurtured during the course of the XX century and beyond.

Drawing on the detailed analysis of various cultural and literary phenomena, the author aims to explain the mechanisms of social valorisation of Russian-style macro-reasoning and cognitive lacunae that are significant for evaluating communication situations.

1. Russians versus cyborgs: callous rationality and emphatic intuition

Russian's identity and perception of themselves qua Russians often fall back on the opposition between callous rationality and emotionally receptive, intuitive insight. Russians attribute the latter to their own ways of negotiating reality and associate the former with Western communication styles.

This opposition, deeply entrenched in the Russian culture can be traced back to Russian folklore tales originated in the pre-Christian era (Zipes, 2012, p. 61) and collected by Afanasyev between 1855 and 1863 (Afanasyev, 1855—1863).

In many of these tales, the intuition - rationality opposition takes the form of a conflict between Ivan the Fool, a young peasant with learning difficulties, and his older, "clever" brothers. In numerous stories, industrious and practically minded, Ivan's brothers fail when they face an extraordinary and unexpected challenge. Ivan the Fool, aided by magical forces and using his own (inexplicable) insight, completes the challenge, wins a fortune and glorious, marries the princess.

In Ivan the Fool narratives, both narrator's and reader's sympathies lie with Ivan, who breaks the rules and the monotony of ordinary respectable life, and whose concealed wisdom shines in critical situations.

Clever brothers display characteristics favoured in the West – rationality, diligence, reliability, and Ivan boasts idleness and inability to complete mundane tasks. However, the older brothers' practical and rational approach harbours obtuseness, inability to think outside the box, self-centredness. Pragmatic and callous, they are ever ready to harm their younger brother in order to prevent him from overshadowing their own performance.

Through these and similar stories, XX century Russian pre-school children learned to value wit and intuitive insight as preferred epistemological faculties and as foundations of morality. They also learned to treat rationality and premeditated planning, which allegedly entail obtuseness and emotional detachment, with suspicion and distrust.

Metaphorical riddles, liberally offered in Russian fairytales, test Ivan's and other characters' wisdom and wit. By solving riddles, fairy tales protagonists gain power and wealth, and young children in XX century Russia regularly received a powerful dose of these accounts as Russian fairy tales, edited by Afanasiev (1957-1958), were a major source of pre-school reading in the second part of the XX century.

The author recalls teaching Russian to a British GCSE student who was unable to understand the meaning of a metaphorical riddle in Russian, even after extensive explanations. The riddle was: "Two brothers live on opposite sides of the road yet never see each other." The answer to the riddle was "eyes" but the fifteen-year-old who was a pupil at a selective school at the time and subsequently became an undergraduate student at Cambridge University and a legal professional afterwards, hopelessly failed to see the connection between "brothers" and "eyes". "If some things are eyes, they cannot be brothers, and if some things are brothers, they cannot be eyes", she insisted. To her, who approached every piece of information with meticulous scrutiny, the metaphor riddle presented an unmanageable conceptual leap.

Russian children in the XX century were exposed to hosts of metaphor riddles and from early years could effortlessly make an immediate conceptual connection between a white tablecloth and snow; running horse and thunder; white sheep and teeth; black cow and nightfall. Intuition, mental sharpness and wit, the spectacular instantaneity of producing a unique and unexpected, correct answer—these were cognitive qualities that riddles advocated. Inability to appreciate or engage with this

form of wisdom was seen negatively from the Russian perspective. The English student would probably understand the meaning of the "eyes as brothers" riddle after a lecture about the nature, purpose and structure of metaphor riddles. This, however, would still be disappointing to a Russian because the latter would expect her – or any other reasonably intelligent person – to grasp such things intuitively and instantly, and someone requiring tedious and detailed explanations would be seen as obtuse, slow thinking, dull-witted and small-minded.

The valorisation of intuition (backed by common sense), as opposed to excessive (insensitive, obtuse) reasoning, is not uncommon in the West where it typically appears in science fiction narratives as human – cyborg oppositions. Gene Roddenberry's Star Treck stories rehearse this theme in situations where the capacity of artificial or dehumanised intelligence to negotiate typically human situations is put to the test.

Android Lieutenant Commander Data, borg Seven of Nine, holographic characters may display an enhanced capacity for information processing and superior practical problem-solving skills, but they lack intuitive insight, sensitivity and compassion when it comes to interacting with humans on an emotional level. Human beings and cyborgs do not connect intuitively; they do not gel in the way humans do with each other. Cyborgs fail to appreciate this side of humanity as humans remain, in the artificial humanoids' view, illogical, self-contradictory, dysfunctional and inefficient.

Star Treck romantic scenes are the catalysts of choice that reveal the discord between human and artificial minds: whilst humans wish to carefully explore an emerging romantic involvement with their would-be artificial partner, the latter asks blunt questions that embarrass the human, overtly comments on the stages of human mating rituals or directly invites their human would-be partner to copulate. This rationalisation of the sensitive subject matter destroys any possibility of a genuine romance. Paradoxically, the cyborg tries to negotiate the matter responsibly and meticulously, but his or her tactless logic and excessive rationalisation make them fail. Cold and insensitive, albeit intelligent, cyborgs clash with endearingly fallible and emotional humans and fail the "humanity" test.

When Russians deal with Westerners, they often feel like Roddenberry's humans dealing with mechanistic cyborgs. During negotiations, Russians may be uneasy about Westerners' insistence on paying attention to details in assessment and planning, and their preference for unnecessary rationalisation and tendency to verbally acknowledge every element in a process, as a computer would do. A similar cognitive clash repeatedly appears in Start Treck episodes when Data annoyingly offers excessive details to his human colleagues, when they expect to receive only essential information.

Just as humans in Star Treck, Russians prefer to acknowledge only those items that are, in their view, worth their special attention. The meticulous and painstaking

working out of practical details is a culturally repulsive practice for the Russians as a less-than-human, desensitised, computerised approach to the matter in hand.

2. Good versus rational: valorisation of intuitive approach in literature

Whilst discussing Russian management culture, Holden Cooper, & Carr confirm that even in business Russians "base their decisions on intuition" and this "seriously conflicts with the western approach which emphasizes the gathering and analysis of hard facts" (Holden, Cooper, & Carr, 1998, p. 37).

In a more recent account, a well-travelled corporate manager usefully observes that "Russians do not tend to make a distinction between hard logic and emotion, which governs the Western culture. They value intuition rather than rationality" (Asefeso, 2013, p. 37).

Indeed, Russians prefer to leap mentally from one important issue to another, leaving gaps of unacknowledged, unplanned and unforeseen material. Hamburg & Poole (2010) confirm deep philosophical roots of Russian preference for intuition which goes hand-in-hand with "the apparent Russian aversion to handling detail" (Holden et al., 1998, p. 160) and extends into all areas of Russian social life.

Numerous Russian cultural and literary phenomena that Soviet children and young people were exposed to in the XX century reinforce Ivan the Fool's preference for intuitive perception where the "good versus evil" opposition shifts towards "genuinely spirited versus callously rational", with the "good" being synonymous with "genuinely spirited" and the "evil" being associated with callous rationality and emotional detachment.

This opposition between practical, instrumental rationality and sincere intuitive insight is fiercely promoted in Russian classical literature, where authors ally themselves with those characters who display deep emotions and follow their heart. Russian writers portray practical, rational characters as insincere, incapable of commitment and loyalty but capable of treachery instead. The authors strive to demonstrate that emotional detachment that accompanies rationality renders someone unfeeling, non-compassionate, and this desensitising effect of the rational approach to reality leads to immoral actions.

Count Leo Tolstoy towers over the XX century's country known to its citizens as "the state of workers and peasants", his characters exemplifying values that were consistently promoted in soviet education. Pierre who acquires wealth by the only morally permissible method i.e. receiving it unexpectedly; Andrey who discovers the futility of social ambitions as he, wounded on the battlefield, gazes in the sky and, of course, Natasha, elevated to an ideal of femininity reiterated in the tonnes of 10th grade's school essays.

Tolstoy's most loved female character, neither intelligent nor beautiful, but ill-mannered, impulsive, openhearted, charming and deeply emotional is opposed in *War and Peace* to her sister Vera—reasonable, practical, intelligent, well-mannered and diligent but abhorrent because she is cold, unloving, and because she makes sensible and impartial remarks, which make other people feel uncomfortable.

Natasha's every fault is excusable by her sincerity and capability for self-forgetful love, and everything that Vera does is repugnant because her actions are calculated and purposeful; she is heartless. Even when Tolstoy follows the narrative of Natasha's betrayal of her fiancé Andrey with seducer Anatol, the reader shares, anxiously, Natasha's moods, doubts and her subsequent shame, and sympathizes with her. However, when the author depicts newly married Vera's respectable house party, he demonstrates that the very fact that she and her husband make conscious efforts to plan and manage the event in the best possible way renders it shallow, pitiful and lifeless.

XX century's Soviet teenagers knew Natasha as the ideal woman, and Rostovs' household, with the exception of emotionally impoverished Vera, as the ideal family, where relationships were sincere, natural and based on disinterested love and unbounded parental generosity, without as much as a hint of practicality and calculation.

The Rostovs lose their fortune partly as a direct consequence of the head of the family's impracticality and lack of managerial skills. The moral of the story, however, is not that this approach is not good for the wellbeing of a family. Rather the true wellbeing of a family, founded on spontaneity, disinterestedness and love, not on strategic planning and calculation, is paramount and if losing one's financial stability is the price to be paid for happiness, than so be it.

In Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (studied in the 9th grade by sixteen-year-old students), the opposition between benevolent intuition and malevolent rationality is pushed to its very limits. Student Raskolnikov commits a crime—kills a ghastly pawnbroker—in order to test a philosophical theory (whether he is an extraordinary or ordinary man). This evil act directly derives from his intellectual search. However, his better, warm and kind-hearted, non-intellectual but conscientious and loving self compels him to confess his crime and crave the punishment he deserves.

Turgenev specifically addresses the intuition—rationality opposition in *Rudin* where the eponymous character manages to destroy another man's romantic relationship by engaging the latter in the excessive rationalisation of both lovers' feelings:

> Rudin … destroyed my happiness … Rudin had no wish at all to do me any harm – quite the contrary! But because of his damned habit of pinning down every motion in life, his own as well as others, as if he were pinning down a butterfly, he set about explaining to both of us or own selves, our

> relationship, how we should behave, despotically forcing us to give an account of our feelings and thoughts, praising us, blaming us, even starting a correspondence with us – imagine that! Well, he finally drove us completely out of our senses! (Turgenev, 1975, p. 101).

Turgenev, a XIX century Russian aristocrat, who spent much of his time in France, Britain, and Germany, reinforces his allegiance to Russian values in *Home of the Gentry*. In this novel, (another piece of compulsory reading for Russian teenagers in the late XX century) he demonstrates that the bearers of potentially malignant, mechanistic rationality do not deserve the honour of being called true Russians – this evil comes from the West:

> Ivan Petrovich returned to Russia an Anglomaniac. … [A] sour expression on his face, something both brusque and negligent in his manner, the pronunciation of words through his teeth, a sudden wooden laugh … — everything about him literally reeked of Great Britain (Turgenev, 2007, pp. 54 – 55).

The author strives to show that adopting the Western tendency to critically evaluate phenomena is destructive for one's identity as Russian. Corrupted by the West, Turgenev's character Ivan Petrovich falls out of love for his home country as "he was very dissatisfied with everything he saw – the absence of system particularly aroused his bitter animosity" (Turgenev, 2007, p.55). Turgenev, following other Russian writers, endorses a view that rationalisation is not benign; it is destructive to one's soul.

Russians link morality with empathy, and empathy with intuition, an unmediated emotional connection with others and with the world. Rationality, analysis corrupt this intersubjective fusion, create a fissure between the perceiver and the perceived and endow the perceiver with the capability of emotional freedom, freedom from compassion and empathy. This emotional detachment makes someone free to choose whether to be moral or not whilst the immediate emphatic connection does not give a human being that choice and guides him or her to moral actions.

3. Love and pigeons: rationality versus sincerity

In the Soviet era, the opposition between rationality and intuition continued as a major theme underpinning Russian culture, but contrasting Russian and Western ways in this context would not have been possible because there were no adequate personal contacts with Western people to exemplify this contrast. Instead, in the Soviet culture, urban and rural people embodied the opposition between reason and intuition. Coarse, sincere peasants, engaged in hard physical labour and partaking of the simple and palpable goodness emanating from nature and domestic animals were shown to have a moral superiority over sophisticated and polished, yet unnatural, demanding and cold-hearted city professionals.

In the film *Love and Pigeons* (1984) Raisa Zaharovna, personnel officer and a classy, cultured woman seduces Vasiliy, peasant and factory worker. Vasiliy, impressed by his sophisticated lover's accounts of fashionable city life leaves his wife and three children and moves in Raisa's apartment. Eventually, he realises that a worthy and happy life is not possible with sleek and glossy Raisa but only with his peasant wife Nadezhda (whose volatile character had contributed to him falling for Raisa's city charm in the first place). The plot intensifies as Nadezhda has blazing rows with polite Raisa, and Vasiliy tries to win Nadezhda back. The film demonstrates an absolute moral superiority and spiritual beauty of grossly ignorant, squealing and rude but honest and genuine Nadezhda over the refined, polite and well-mannered, underhanded seducer Raisa.

This much-loved film and many others confirmed to Russian younger viewers that sincerity and spiritual goodness may be incompatible with politeness because sincerity is validated by the spontaneity of expression, and politeness is a feature of controlled, rationally choreographed behaviour; politeness, thus understood, equals falsehood and hypocrisy.

In accordance with this worldview, Western-style courtesy, controlled facial expressions (e.g. social smiling) and wordiness are questionable as qualities of an underhanded "serpent" that employs mind-manipulating techniques, whilst a person of integrity would speak plainly, openly and to the point because he or she has nothing to hide.

Western culture is not a stranger to the similar vision of social posturing, where being honest with one's feelings, and one's endearing simplicity and naiveté are valued over intellect and self-control. In the recent remake of *Dad's Army* (2016), Rose Winters, intellectually superior and sleek German spy, loses to the group of old, naïve but righteous Home Guards and their unfashionably dressed wives. Think of this unlikely story, and possibly of Bridget Jone's parrhesiastic honesty delightfully clashing with Mark Darcy's dry comportment, remove the humorous element, and you will get close to the Russian culture's perspective on social values and communication patterns.

4. Macro-reasoning versus micro-reasoning

Westerners make great efforts to focus on the matter in hand and explore it fundamentally. Processes that lead to results are as important for Westerners as results themselves; the result appears to be part of a process, its final stage. Russians value results over processes and, whilst focussing their attention on the result they, from the Westerners' point of view, fail to take into account important details of the process or muddle those details up. As Holden et al. note, "Russians, even at the height of negotiation, are easily swung into conversational digressions; or they go off into 'non-listening' mode" (Holden et al., 1998, p. 155).

Russians may offer proposals or plans containing conceptual leaps, and Westerners may become increasingly frustrated when their attempts to seek out clarifications are met with the impossibility to fill these cognitive lacunae because Russian-style communication has no provision for verbalising that much material but allows for unacknowledged elements to remain unacknowledged. Westerners' attempts to communicate and discuss situations, plans or events on a detailed level are challenged by Russians ignoring the detailing, skipping particulars, jumping to conclusions, refusing to elaborate important finer points and failing to engage adequately with Westerners' information material taking no account of important nuances and misinterpreting data.

As far as Russians are concerned, Westerners' communication skills need improving, not theirs. From Russian stakeholders' position, the discrepancy affecting communication between Westerners and themselves is due to the former demonstrating a frustrating cognitive deficiency whereby they seem to fail to grasp instantly and intuitively obvious things that should require no specific verbalization. Russians are bewildered by the Western-style preference for detailing and their "obtuse" demands for the explanation of the obvious. Whilst Westerners think that they are being thorough, Russians think that the Westerners procrastinate, create unnecessary and lengthy information processing activities, which result in delays and increased financial cost.

Symbolic communication-related imagery that appeals to the Russian way of reasoning would include Occam's razor, calling spade a spade, cutting the Gordian knot, and Crystal Mark; also, "Speech is silver; silence is golden" is one of their favourite proverbs. However, it would be wrong to assume that the key feature here is the oversimplification of subject matter and that Russians favour a primitive vision of social reality while Westerners develop an elaborate view. Rather it could be said that Russians mentally condense reality into clotted material, and give their mindful attention to clots but not to the surrounding fluid.

Westerners tend to mentally dilute reality expanding their vision of it to include finer details but this approach is not justifiable, as far as the Russians are concerned. Where a Russian, armed with common sense and trust in his or her intuition, would (metaphorically speaking) make a step, a Westerner would want to account for leg muscles making certain contractions; the colour of the clothing that envelopes the legs; knees and ankles circumference and so on—a fatiguing list of facts, which are all relevant to someone making a step, but which should be disregarded as discussing them interferes with the very act of making a step.

5. Motherland as a cognitive lacuna

Cognitive lacunae as epistemological gaps corresponding to the unacknowledged subject matter in Russian style communications do not constitute a cognitive vacuum. These gaps are not gaping wounds in the fabric of thought and communication;

they are filled with emotions, feelings, instinctive or learnt motor activity, imagination, abstract ideas, opinions and beliefs.

The largest cognitive lacuna that Russians themselves are immensely proud of (and fervently protect from rationalization) is the idea of Russia itself. Winston Churchill could not have found a better way to flatter Russians than saying that "[Russia] is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" (Churchill, 1939). Grand, spanless, powerful and essentially unfathomable—these are concepts that reflect the Russians' own vision of their country.

Rather than engaging rationally and critically with Russia' role and her history, Russians refer to their country mostly in grandiloquent terms drawing on Tyutchev's poem written in 1866:

> Russia is a thing of which
> the intellect cannot conceive.
> Hers is no common yardstick.
> You measure her uniquely:
> in Russia, you believe!
>
> (Tyutchev, 2000)

"Motherland" was one of the first words that all 1st grade 7-year-old children in late XX century Soviet Russia learnt to write, and the first meaningful texts they mastered were these: "Our Motherland is USSR" (Mikhalkov, 1985, p. 3) and "USSR is the Country of the Soviets. In our country, all are equal. The Country of the Soviets is great and beautiful. Glory to the Country of the Soviets!" (Mikhalkov, 1985, p. 54). The glorification of Soviet Motherland continued throughout all years of mainstream education warranting unqualified love, trepidation and lifelong devotion.

Motherland, in its XX century Russian interpretation, appears as a depersonalised geo-political, spiritually superior heterogeneous unity that manifests the ultimate universal goodness, embodied in the gems of Russian literature, art and scientific achievements, natural world and mundane objects: soil, trees, fields, water and air, food, elements of material culture.

As far as the XX century Russian educators were concerned, the ultimate unsurpassable goodness of Motherland permeated all levels of reality and included the government structure, wealth of natural resources, outstanding natural beauty, the vastness of space, glorious history, Russia's special role in the world, the martyrdom of her heroes and her moral and spiritual supremacy on the world stage.

It may seem odd that is was – and still is – possible to prevent Russian people from taking a critical, rational approach to such an important subject matter as their own country. The answer to that is that the glorification of Russia as heterogeneous unity directly reflects on Russian persons as integral components of that heterogene-

ity. The greater Russian people's pride in their country is, the more important they feel as concrete individuals, as Russian citizens.

Honneth emphasizes the importance of societal recognition for a person's well-being asserting that "a recognitional stance enjoys a genetic and categorical priority over all attitudes towards the self and the world" (Honneth, 2005, p. 109).

Russian people's communication behaviour proves Honneth's point, as the glorification of Russia elevates its citizens to great heights qua Russians, fills them with unbounded pride in themselves and the feeling of existential and moral superiority – satisfaction so strong and jubilant, that Russian people resist any external influence that could undermine this empowering, addictive feeling.

Russia is often personified as "Mother". Russian people – "her children" – are expected to love Mother Russia wholeheartedly, with trepidation and gratitude.

In the Russian worldview, it would be a blasphemy for children to think rationally and critically about their Mothers, who suffered for them in childbirth, cared for them and sacrificed everything for them. The feeling of one's guilt and debt owed to one's parents, especially Mother, was purposefully cultivated in the XX century Russian culture, as seen from the words of a widely performed song "Parental home" (Lev Leschenko - Roditelskiy dom, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTnOPUJRhBk):

> Bow down to the ground to your Mother,
> And to your Father, you must bow too.
> We owe them, and this debt is unplayable.
> Remember this faithfully all your life.
> (M. Ryabinin, translation mine – E. F.)

The debt to one's Mother is impossible to repay, and this impossibility asserts the child's perennial guilt on a metaphysical level. Mother's sacrifice and suffering make her morally superior to her children, and render anything she may do to them, not only excusable but also justifiable. The children must constantly try to redeem themselves from their guilt by indisputable submission to her will and unqualified devotion.

By associating Russia with Mother, Russian people are forced to remember everything they owe to their country, and this guilt-laden, euphoric love in itself excludes the possibility of a rational approach. Even when Mother Russia is not kind to her children, she is worshipped by them as they are obliged to accept everything that emanates from her without questioning:

> Mother Russia! For you are my songs!
> Silent, stern mother,
> Let me cry over my wretched life
> Here in deeper darkness, in darker obscurity.
> (Belyiy, *1908,* "*From the train window*". Translation mine – E. F.)

The only way to redeem oneself completely from the metaphysical guilt of being a child is to give one's life whilst defending one's Mother from her enemies. Thus the most honourable and dominant position in the Soviet society was reserved for the military whose noble role was to defend the Motherland from potential outside invaders and to be ready to sacrifice their lives for her.

6. Regimental style communications

Mandatory military service meant that in the Soviet Union, being a true man was synonymous with being a soldier. Boys from early years were prepared for the two-year military service, and those who successfully completed it were given preferential treatment when applying for prestigious university places and typically had smoother career paths than other categories of Soviet citizens.

Many professionals who currently occupy influential positions in Russian society, had acquired their managerial and communication styles in the Armed Forces and subsequently used them in their workplaces, with other people copying their behavioural patterns.

Russian society today displays a regimental character with military style communications dominating both professional world and civic discourse. These types of communications presuppose a downward dissemination of information, from the leader to his or her subordinates and exclude (or make very difficult) spontaneous communications (such as feedback) upwards. The leader is vocal when he or she issues an order. Subordinates are expected to respond by following the order, without discussion, and this type of relationship contributes to further communication gaps, which are filled with subordinates' actions rather than their words.

Speaking of cross-cultural communications, Holden et al. note that Russians' aim is to achieve an absolute advantage, rather than consensus, in negotiations:

> As in their political and military behaviour, so in their international business activities, Russians seek to secure and keep absolute advantage. … Russians … can only conceive of negotiating on a win-to-lose basis. The notion of negotiation as a means of sharing benefits with business partners is far from being a commonly accepted principle (Holden et al, 1998, p.161- 162).

Whilst Holden's discourse primarily concerns international business, his observations can be confidently applied to Russians' intracultural communication.

On the level of personal interactions, where those occupying leaders' positions verbally assert their domination, functional and satisfying dialogues between people are a luxury; a lot of talking can be heard in the Russian environment but these are mainly monologues, not dialogues. Information moves in unidirectional streams: from the leader to subordinates; from writer to readers; from parent to child; from teacher to pupils. At times no verbal response or feedback is expected at all, and

listeners (e.g. in meetings) would listen attentively and absorb information. It is often expected that information will be acted on, not responded to verbally. This highlights another trait in Russian people's communication behaviour: they have at their disposal a limited range of communication patterns, as many communications (including in the family) are hierarchically structured and discourage the possibility of a dialogue that would generate genuinely new, unexpected meanings rather than evoking expected and prescribed responses.

Moreover, in Russia, interlocutors tend not to adjust the tone of their voice to another person's tone, which creates awkwardness and stops the conversation from progressing. Holden's observation that in communication, Russians stakeholders' aim not to reach consensus but gain an absolute advantage, correlates with the fact that Russians like to respond abruptly to questions. They feel that by killing a conversation, they have achieved an absolute advantage over another party, and this kind of situation happens in both formal and informal settings. As far as Russians are concerned, killing a conversation by putting someone in their place constitutes success in communication, not a failure.

7. Shared spiritual medium and shifts of meaning

How do Russian people communicate with each other and what makes their communication work? Rather than investing most of their communicative efforts in dialogues and words that convey and generate new meanings, as Westerners do, Russian people fall back on non-verbal communication, which largely consists of actively sharing the same spiritual medium. Russians' sense of unity is achieved by the shared euphoric feeling of belonging to the unique, great and sacred country; by gathering around a festive table with family and friends; by jointly enjoying the atmosphere of a public event. Sharing food, in particular, is a powerful communication tool. This kind of communication is prior to any specific conversations and is more metaphysical and existential than rational and logical. This metaphysical communication, communication via belonging counterbalances deficiencies of verbal communication and dissolves to some extent internal societal conflicts between different categories of Russian people.

As Holden et al. note, "Russian hospitality is legendary" (Holden et al. 1998, p. 158). Sharing and appreciating the same type of food (and vodka drinking) creates a common spiritual medium that can instantly transform an outsider into an ally. Accepting and praising the food that has been offered instantly creates a sense of harmonising unity capable of dissolving the awkwardness that the lack of the constructive dialogue creates.

On the other hand, if a Western guest remains emotionally reserved whilst eating food, this creates awkwardness and hinders cross-cultural communication. Russians' striving to achieve absolute advantage can be uncovered here: by offering best possible food to Western guests, they strive to defeat them spiritually, as the guests are

expected to surrender their will to the host's. Therefore, "[e]xuberant hospitality; sudden displays of emotion; descent into sentimentality; seemingly inexplicable switchings of position and mood" (Holden et al. 1998, p. 164) are amongst notable features of Russian partners' mindset that should be taken into account by Western stakeholders.

Shared spiritual media that unite Russians include the Russian-specific vision of the world and communications between people, heavily loaded with emotive connotations. These emotive connotations are not separated from objective data and appear to the Russians as part of the objective characteristics of subject matter. The structure of the Russian language, which is itself a spiritual medium uniting all Russian speakers, facilitates this approach. Russian is an extreme example of a synthetic fusional language (Shalonova, 2009) and as such entails the possibility of infinite words formation via adding suffixes and prefixes to the word root, which creates a multitude of words merging one's emotive responses with the subject matter.

Russian language word formation allows portraying one's subjective view as the object's objective properties. For example, one of the Russian words for vodka "vodochka" contains "vod" the word root that denotes the substance and "chka", a diminutive tenderising suffix that reflects the speaker's loving attitude to the substance. However, in the Russian mindset, it is not the speaker's attitude to the substance that the word "vodochka" denotes but the property of the substance, which is objectively appealing and lovely.

The Russian linguistic division of nouns into masculine, feminine and neuter contributes to the mix-up of emotions and facts by "animating" the world in which Russian people live as most objects and phenomena are either "he" or "she" to the Russians who, from their early years, learn to see masculine virility and feminine grace in inanimate world. In later years, Russian people learn to dissociate grammatical gender from biological sex to some extent but this dissociation is often dissolved in their vision of the world. The Russian catchphrase "War has no female face" is due to this mix-up of grammatical gender and biological sex : Russian word "war" "voyna" is feminine, so Russians would normally expect it to display feminine features and the fact that it does not seems to be an abnormality that requires a special acknowledgement.

The inadvertent blending of emotions and facts in linguistic exchanges contributes to emotional bonds that resist rationalisation. This works especially well when the emotive response that corresponds to the person whom the speaker is addressing is overtly assigned to the object that the speaker talks about instead. The example below demonstrates the difficulty of translating and hence understanding these important subtleties.

Let us consider two Russian phrases, which contain an offer of a glass of milk.

1. Пей молоко. [Pey moloko] 2. Попей молочка. [Popey molochka]

Both these phrases can be translated literally as "Drink milk". Their core grammatical structure informs that the offering is made to one person who is addressed informally. The situation could refer to Mother offering a glass of milk to her son. However, the two phrases are loaded with different connotations. A more precise, grammar-sensitive translation would be this:

1. Drink milk. 2. Have a little drink of nice milk.

The first phrase is stern, uncaring. The second phrase entails diminutive and tenderising elements incorporated in the words referring to the act of drinking and the milk. But it is not the milk or the act of drinking that Mother thinks tenderly of, but her son. However, as per the Russian cultural and linguistic tradition, the love for her son is not expressed in tender words directed to him but in tender words directed to the milk. This shift of emotive connotation from the person to an object remains unacknowledged and both the Mother and her son would say that she refers tenderly to the milk. Her tenderness for her son thus falls in the cognitive lacuna filled with a warm, cosy feeling enveloping them both. If the first phrase is used, the son instantly knows that there is something wrong, perhaps he is in deep trouble as the insensitive and stern reference to milk is actually directed to him. This blending of facts and emotions combined with the unacknowledged shift of reference from the designated object to environment contributes to the further refutation of logic, structure and analysis being applied to human interactions.

If the translator of these phrases ignored grammar and decided to offer a culture-sensitive translation instead, he or she would uncover this shift by translating these phrases like this:

1. Drink your milk. 2. Have some milk, darling.

However, a translator would typically prefer to be faithful to the grammar and language overtly displayed, and so generally, translations from Russian into English strip Russian phrases of their important intracultural meaning, as this example demonstrates.

8. A glimpse into the future and concluding remarks

As new generations of young Russians become more socially and politically active, will the cultural features that shaped post-Soviet Russians' communication styles lose their significance and will the communication problems associated with these features eventually expire?

Post-Soviet Russians who were brought up in the XX century Soviet Union and who dominate the Russian society now, do not just do business and politics; they also teach children and young people. How do their students respond to their teaching?

Russian young people's opinions about their country, recorded in a sociological survey of 2015, could be useful in our trying to get a glimpse of Russia's future. Students (predominantly 18-21 year-olds) from nine universities across Russia were asked to define "patriotism" – one of the key concepts that permeate Russian education culture – by using available options. "Being proud of Russia's culture" was the leading answer selected by 45.6% of the respondents, with 40.1% selecting "Pride in great achievements of their country". "Obeying laws and fulfilling civic obligations" was selected by 35.3 %, and 32.5 % defined patriotism as "defending their country with arms in their hands". 24.5% of the respondents chose "active fight against internal threat" and 22.3 % selected "having a belief in the great future of their country". The least popular answer was "experiencing nostalgia when far away from Motherland" (5.1%), and this seems to be the only significant difference between Soviet people's attitude towards Motherland, which they reportedly longed for when abroad, and the young Russian citizens of the globalized world. However, as other responses indicate, Russia's young people effortlessly engage with the nationalist rhetoric initially endorsed by the culture of the XX century Soviet Union (Nauchno-tekhnicheskii otchet po sotsiologicheskomu oprosu «Issledovanie budushchego», 2016).

The author also asked educators from three institutions in St. Petersburg (State Government-funded Establishment of General Educational, Secondary School № 643 and Youth Centre Ligovo youth clubs "Alpha" and "Mayak") to find out how school age children engage with the concept "Motherland". Seventy pupils aged six to thirteen produced their responses, which included references to visual imagery, concepts, spontaneously generated statements. The responses, collected in January-February 2017 individually in order to prevent the children from influencing each other, were as follows.

52 pupils' responses included geographical references such as "birthplace", "home", "my city", "St. Petersburg", "Russia". Six children associated Motherland specifically with "Mother"; six linked this concept with "family" and one with "school". Nature-related imagery, including "silver birch tree" (which appeared 7 times), "fields", "snow", "blue sky", were present in 12 pupils' responses. The "defence of Motherland" theme, reflected in such concepts as "soldiers", "tanks", "ships", "great power" appeared in the responses of 9 pupils, predominantly boys. This latter theme was demonstrated most notably in an 8-year-old boy's response who said: "[Motherland is] where I live, your home, for which you are prepared to give your life so that your descendants would know that they too will be able to give their lives for their Motherland" (Translation mine – E. F.)

We can see that Russian children and young people, despite the diversity of their responses, readily engage with the nationalist rhetoric that defined XX century Soviet culture. According to Russian teachers, the idea of patriotism is currently being reinforced in education programs. Interestingly, the Russian word "Motherland" appears in Russian native language usage 30 times more often than the word "homeland" in English (Radbil, 2010, p. 118).

Conclusion

It is possible that the cultural features that determined post-Soviet Russian people's worldview and communication style will not necessarily expire as the young generations of Russians supposedly acquire new cultural traits. It is possible that the Soviet legacy will live on, and if this is so, then understanding Soviet culture and values will remain important for years to come.

The author would like to end this paper by presenting two examples of Russian children's artwork that depict their country and its history.

Figure 1. *"Mother Russia" by A. Schukina, 13 y.o. (2016). Saint Petersburg Youth Centre "Ligovo", club "Alfa" (teacher T. V. Orlovskaya)*

Figure 1. *"The heroic days of the siege" by A. Kudinova, 10 y.o. (2016). Saint Petersburg Youth Centre "Ligovo", club "Mayak" (teacher I. V. Mirenkova)*

Acknowledgements

The research was completed as part of the state assignment № 27.4344.2017/5.1

The author owes a debt of gratitude to Nadezhda Iliynichna Schukina (Head Teacher, State Government-funded Establishment of General Educational, Secondary School № 643, Saint Petersburg); Irina Vladimirovna Mirenkova and Tamara Vladimirovna Orlovskaya (teachers, Saint Petersburg Youth Centre "Ligovo", Russia); the students' collectives of Youth Centre "Ligovo" club "Alfa" (teacher T. V. Orlovskaya) and club "Mayak" (teacher I. V. Mirenkova).

References

Afanasyev, A. (1855—1863). *Russian Fairy Tale*. Vol. 1—8. K. Soldatenkov and N. Shchepkin.

Afanasyev, A. (1957—1958). Narodnyie russkie skazki A. N. Afanaseva. Moscow: Goslitizdat.

Asefeso, A. (2013). *CEO Guide to Doing Business in Russia*. lulu.com.

Belyiy, A. (*1908). From the train window*. Retrieved February 18, 2017 from *https://stihi-russkih-poetov.ru/poems/andrey-belyy-iz-okna-vagona*.

Benson, R. C. (1973). *Women in Tolstoy*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Churchill, W. (1939). *The Russian Enigma*. Broadcast 1st October 1939.

Dostoevskiy, F. (1989). *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*. F. M. Dostoevskiy. Sobranie sochineniy v 15ti tomah. Leningrad: Nauka.

Hamburg, G. M. & Poole, R. A. (Eds.). (2010). *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*. Cambridge University Press.

Holden, N., Cooper , C. L. & Carr, J. (1998). *Dealing with the New Russia: Management Cultures in Collision*. John Wiley & Sons.

Holden, N. & Michailova, S. J. (2014). A more expansive perspective on translation in IB research: Insights from the Russian Handbook of Knowledge Management . In Int Bus Stud (2014) 45: 906. doi:10.1057/jibs.2014.10.

Honneth, A. (2005). Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View. In *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. Delivered at University of California, Berkeley, March 14 -16, 2005.

Lev Leschenko - Roditelskiy dom. Retrieved February 18, 2017 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTnOPUJRhBk.

Lougher, S. (2014). Live From Space season: Gravity was such a blast, says astronaut Major Tim Peake as Channel 4 prepares for take-off. Retrieved February 18, 2017 from http://metro.co.uk/2014/03/12/gravity-was-such-a-blast-says-astronaut-major-tim-peake-as-c4s-live-from-space-prepares-for-take-off-4531533/#ixzz4LkCyln6t.

Lukianova, N.A. (2005). The role of a myth and utopia in formation of state ideologies. In *Science and Technology, KORUS 2005. Proceedings. The 9th Russian-Korean*

International Symposium, pp.1010-1013, doi: 10.1109/KORUS.2005.1507957. Retrieved on 08/02/2017 from http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?tp=&arnumber=1507957&isnumber=32300.

Lukianova, N. & Fell, E. (2015). Meaning Making in Communication Processes: The Role of a Human Agency. In *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 200*: 614–617.

Mikhalkov, S. V. (Ed.). (1985). *Bukvar*. Moscow: Prosvescheniye. Retrieved February 18, 2017 from http://ussr-lib.com/pochitat/dokumentyi/bukvar-sssr-pervyiy-nash-uchebnik/.

Nauchno-tekhnicheskii otchet po sotsiologicheskomu oprosu «Issledovanie budushchego». Retrieved February 18, 2016 from http://tpu.ru/today/tpu-structure/instituty-fakultety-kafedry/isht/sk/md/.

Radbil, T.B. (2010). *Osnovyi izucheniya yazyikovogo mentaliteta*. Moscow: Nauka.

Shalonova, K. (2009). Towards Learning Morphology for Under-Resourced Fusional and Agglutinating Languages. In *IEEE Transactions on Audio, Speech, and Language Processing* 17: 5. DOI: 10.1109/TASL.2009.2015694 http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/5076131/.

Shipunova, O. D., & Kuznetsov, D. I. (2015). Communication and the Natural Social Order. In *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* Vol 6 No 3 S (May 2015): 251-260. Doi:10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n3s3p. https://yadi.sk/i/W26DYS5fgAE8z.

Tolstoy, L. (1996). *Voyna i mir*. L. N. Tolstoy, Sobranie sochineniy v vosmi tomah. T. 3,4. Moscow: Leksika.

Turgenev, I. (1975). *Rudin*. Transl. Freeborn, R. Penguin Classics.

Turgenev, I. (2007). *Home of the Gentry*. Transl. Freeborn, R. Penguin Classics.

Tyutchev, F. I. (2000). The Complete Poems of Tyutchev In An English Translation by F.Jude. Retrieved February 18, 2017 from http://www.ruthenia.ru/tiutcheviana/publications/trans/jude.html.

Zipes, J. (2012). *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton University Press.