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The role of ethnic communicative competence in the development of cross-cultural relations

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Latvia is multi-ethnic state, where economical geography and history have led to a population of different ethnic groups. It is therefore important to pay attention to issues of inter-ethnic relations in Latvian society. Under modern social political conditions developing European citizenship it is important to study the most significant determinants of personality in inter-ethnic relations, to foster inter-ethnic tolerance, successful international co-operation and awareness of European identity.

The goal of this study is to determine the significance of the personality's ethnic and civic identity in the formation of inter-cultural communicative competence and their interrelations with the person's age, gender and educational level. The subject of the study is qualities of the personality's DEC indices. The object is the personality's DEC as a psychological phenomenon that arises in the process of inter-ethnic communication and cognition.

One can widely observe the processes characterised by individuals becoming aware of their ethnic identity, as well as development of inter-ethnic tolerance. Not only is belonging to a certain ethnic group part of the national conscience, but these are also thoughts, feelings and orientations that form the person's system of values and attitudes both towards their own and other nations.

Inter-ethnic tolerance is influenced by two factors:

- Specific elements of ethnocultural traditions (language, symbols, system of the nation's values and norms, specific forms and acts of communication etc.);
- Awareness of inner reference level; significance of one's own ethnic group in the life of the individual.

DEC can serve as an index for the individual's direction, attitude and characteristics in the communication of international relations, and for evaluating attitudes towards other ethnic groups.

At the first stage of the project was to:

1. Review the philosophical, ethno-psychological, cultural anthropological and socio-linguistic literature on the development of national cultural identity and the essence of inter-cultural communicative competence.
2. Develop criteria for ethno-communicative competence and state their significance in improvement of international relations.
3. Determine DEC correlations with social identity studied in the context of social cognition.
4. Analyse social-psychological conditions for DEC formation, stating social attitudes in the biggest ethnic groups.

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Tasks of the study

- To perform the assessment of personal DEC in inter-ethnic relations; to analyse language ethno-competence, attitude towards the language, assessment of language skill in inter-ethnic relations; to analyse indices of social adaptation in ethnic minorities;
- To analyse inter-ethnic social distance and its dependence on social competence and other indices.

Personal DEC is a personality's social-psychological quality that reflects the person's readiness, attitude and wish to be involved in inter-national communication, i.e. this is such an ethno-semiotic attitude that provides optimal interrelation of the personality's mutual relations with representatives of other cultures.

The results of the study reflect the contents of personal DEC and its quality criteria, show specific forms of ethnic communication, significance of inner reference and one's own ethnic group in the individual's life and social processes in the state. Personal DEC shows the personality's abilities to integrate into inter-national relations in the process of acculturation with the aim to create an ethnically integrated, socially structured and developed country. This process can positively direct further development and the formation of European civic identity.

The theoretical base of the study is formed by theories of formation of the European identity, comparative analyses of cultures and the necessity of fostering multi-cultural communicative competence in the changing multicultural society of modern Europe and the world (Allport, Bairam, Bem, Bruner, Edelhoff, Markus, Kitayama, Stemplesky, Tajfel, Turner, Triandis, Tomilin); theories on the strong relation between the mobilising power of national and ethnic identity and individual and collective memory (R. Kilis, P. Preston, A. Reatl, E. Smith, G. Soldatova, V. Stolins); theories and research on social and language communicative competence in international relations (Austin, Bachman, Brown, Chomsky, Halliday, Holmes, Holland, Hymes, Murby, Searle, Thomas, Widdowson etc.); theories on activity, attitudes and social-cultural aspects of ethnopsychology, developed by Latvian philosophers and psychologists (Apine, Dirba, Karpova, Lakis, Liegeniece, Shuvajevs, Vebers, Vidnere).

Social economical changes in post-Soviet society made researchers in Russia and new independent states deal with ethnic and social identity issues. These psychological issues have been studied by many psychologists in these countries: in Russia – Hotinec, Lebedeva, Sikevich, Soldatova, Stefanenko; in the Ukraine – Pavlenko, Shulga; in Byelorussia – Naumenko; in Kazakhstan – Muldasheva, Utapijeva; in Uzbekistan – Andrischaks; in Lithuania – Kasatkina; in Estonia – Kirhs, Valks etc.

The following empirical methods were applied in the study:

- 1) In order to determine the personality's ethnic and social identity correlations and interrelations with the person's age, gender and educational level, a survey of social-psychological indices with 42 blocks of questions was developed (Vidnere, Igonins);

- 2) An ethno-competence test (Vidnere, Igonins) to study language skill and attitude towards language acquisition;
- 3) A modified Bogardus social distance scale, in order to study attitude towards both one's own and also other nationalities;
- 4) Cultural value orientation (following Pochebut) in order to be aware of cultural types;
- 5) Personality adaptation in a new cultural environment (adaptivity scale, interactivity scale, depressive scale, nostalgia scale, alienation scale);
- 6) A personality 'Control Locus' (CL) – internal and external alternatives of CL;
- 7) All these indices and qualities of interrelation were analysed with the help of the statistical data treatment programme Statistika-6, that allows one to receive indices of multidimensional indices of high quality.

Study base

We received a total of 720 survey questionnaires (mostly Russian speaking people – 85%; Latvians served as a control group) from different regions of Latvia (Riga region – 230 questionnaires, Kurzeme region – 190 questionnaires, Latgale region – 300 questionnaires). Regional division was necessary, because the density of Russian speaking population in each region is different. From those, 647 questionnaires were valid.

The structure of main minorities living in Latvia was necessary for the analysis of Bogardus social distance scale.

The ethnodemographical structure of Latvia changed a lot in the Soviet and Nazi occupation periods. There were several reasons for this: population loss in the Second World war, mass deportations and genocide against the Latvian nation, repatriation of Baltic Germans, the holocaust – mass murdering Latvian Jews and Gypsies in the German occupation, the stream of refugees to the West at the end of war and intensive migration processes in the territory of the ex-USSR. In the Soviet period, the proportion of Latvians reduced rapidly (in 1939, Latvians made 77% of the total number of population, but in 1989 only 52%), but the proportion of Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and other peoples living in the ex-USSR increased.

In the present study, we were interested in the residents' attitude and distance in their own state – Latvia – towards the group of Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia, Poland); the block of European countries (EU countries), the USA and Canada; the group of Eastern countries (residents of other countries who could wish permanent residence in Latvia), as well as residents' attitude towards race.

| **Table 1. Division of respondents by gender, age and educational level**

| Gender | Age | Education | Number of questionnaires |
|--------|-------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| male | < 30 | lower | 60 |
| | | higher | 60 |
| | 31-55 | lower | 60 |
| | | higher | 60 |
| | 56 and more | lower | 60 |
| | | higher | 60 |
| female | < 30 | lower | 60 |
| | | higher | 60 |
| | 31-55 | lower | 60 |
| | | higher | 60 |
| | 56 and more | lower | 60 |
| | | higher | 60 |

Table 2. Ethnic composition of the population of Latvia (%)

| Ethnicity | 1939 | 1979 | 1989 | 1995 | 1999 | 2000 | 2003 |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Latvians | 77.0 | 53.7 | 52.0 | 54.8 | 55.7 | 55.8 | 55.7 |
| Russians | 8.8 | 32.8 | 34.0 | 32.8 | 32.3 | 32.0 | 32.2 |
| Byelorussians | 1.4 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.0 | 3.9 | 3.9 | 3.9 |
| Ukrainians | 0.1 | 2.7 | 3.5 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.9 |
| The Polish | 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.3 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.2 |
| Lithuanians | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| Hebrew | 4.9 | 1.1 | 0.9 | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Gipsies | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Estonians | 0.4 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| Germans | 3.3 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| other | 0.2 | 0.8 | 1.0 | 0.9 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 1.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

The DEC system includes language communicative competence; knowledge of Latvian culture and history in the European context, as well as attitude (emotional and behavioural components) in respect of Latvian and other nations' culture.

State civic identity is also expressed if the person does not accept values and symbols of Latvian culture as deeply significant for him/herself or emotionally touching; he or she has a neutral attitude towards the cultural-historical aspect of Latvian identity, however, he or she knows Latvian language and respects Latvian culture, being aware of and feeling like he/she is a part of the society of Latvia.

DEC formation to a great extent is determined by the individual's acquired total of social cultural knowledge, which states or emphasizes the role of the environment (M.Bronfenbrenner).

DEC criteria in inter-national relations in changing multi-cultural society

| | |
|---|--|
| Ethno-communicative competence formation criteria | Language communicative competence |
| | <u>Knowledge</u> : factological acquisition of culture and history of Latvian and other nations in the context of European cultures |
| | <u>Attitudes</u> emotional and behavioural (situational) components: respect of Latvian culture and other European and world cultures, acceptance of Latvian cultural values, tolerance against cultural values of other nations |

Language communicative competence (includes several components):

- I **Linguistic Competence**
 - Discourse competence (6 indices)
 - Grammatical competence (14 indices – 3 levels)
- II **Sociolinguistic competence** (21 index)
- III **Cognitive competence** (16 indices)
- IV **Pragmatic competence** (5 indices)
- V **Strategic competence** (10 indices)
- VI **Philosophy and attitude** (8 indices)

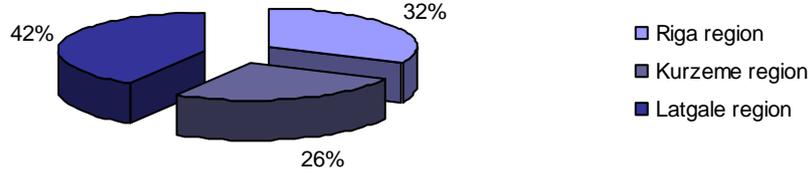
We added language usage philosophy, cognitive and social difficulties components to language communicative competence.

The first step; we explored social distance scale - Social tolerance (distance) scale – SDS.

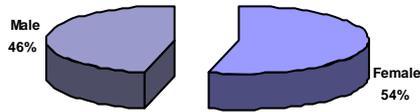
Modern Europe highly appreciates respect and tolerance towards other nations and cultures. Under the development of over-national political, economical and social unions, in order to cope with contradictions between new social ideals, traditional Latvian upbringing and unfavourable consequences of social changes, a model (survey questionnaire), where diversity of identities was respected, was created.

Data treatment

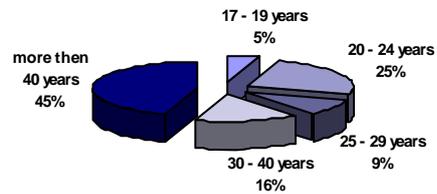
In the process of study, 647 valid questionnaires were obtained. For data treatment, factor analysis was used, to reflect hidden structures in data or classifications of variables. For treatment, we used all the questionnaires that were correctly filled in, even if separate answers were left out. Questionnaires classified as non-valid were those where there was no assessment dispersion or where more than 15% of the answers were lacking. We also didn't include such questionnaires where respondents, having ignored the instruction, gave more than one answer to every question. From those, 647 questionnaires were valid.



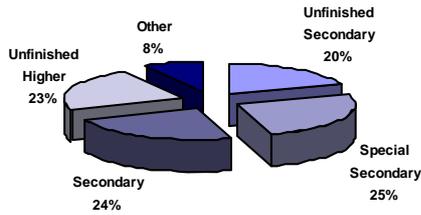
Gender



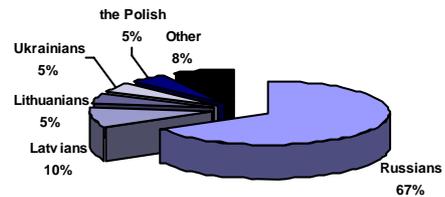
Age



Education



Nationality

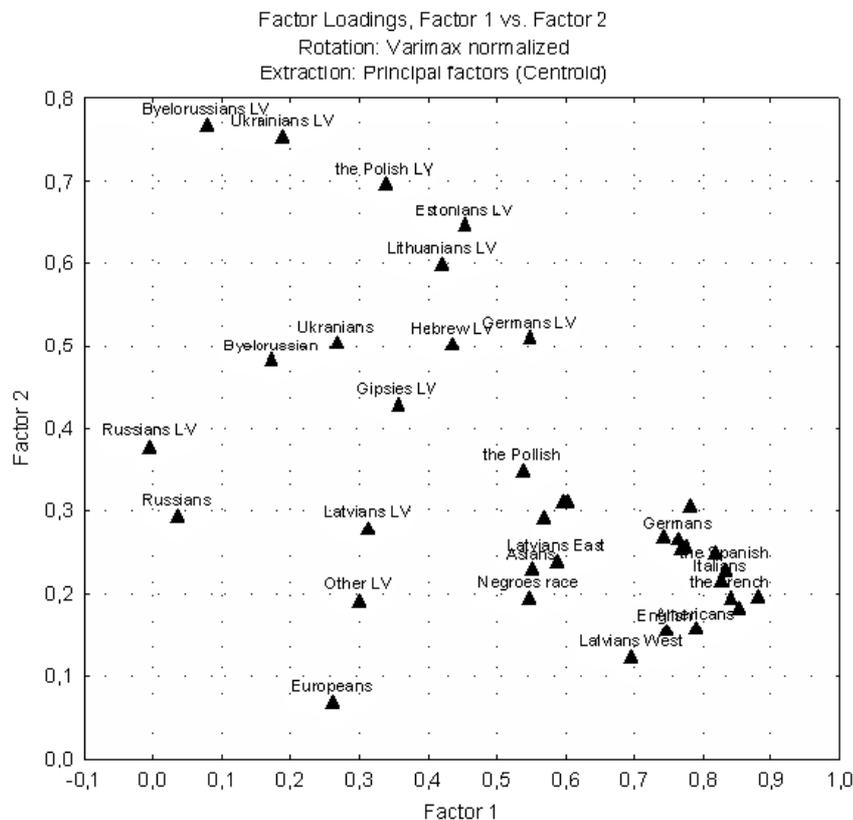


ECC Empirical Correlates

ECC is made operational and is measured in terms of language communicative competence in second language (L2), social tolerance, social adaptive skills, culture orientation and personal Locus of Control. Correspondents' subjective significance in the assessment of social tolerance (distance) criteria was sometimes beyond the limits of SDS parameters, giving an interesting reflection of the issue. Data factor analysis was performed with the help of DASystem STATISTICA 6.0 Stat Soft Corp, using data (orthogonal) VARIMAKS cut.

Results

In the result of the SDS scale treatment, we obtained two factors that clarify 49.6% of dispersion of the assessed data, besides the first factor explains 43.2% of the observed dispersion

Table3 - First Factor ‘the factor of positive attitude towards the peoples of the Old European states’

The first factor in the total factor interpretation shows that in general we can observe respondents' 'orientation towards the West', reflecting a high level of tolerance (e.g., in relation to the Dutch/Belgians – 0.88, Canadians – 0.852, French – 0.84). A lower level of this factor group is related to the English – 0.70, as well as to the group of 'Western Latvians' – 0.697. Low tolerance is related to Russians, independent of their place of residence. This factor can also be characterized as the opposition of the term 'Russia' to the rest of the world 'West' (Western Europe and North America).

In general, a conclusion can be made that SDS assessment in the analysis of the first factor reflects the respondents' orientation towards the West.

The second factor explains approximately 6% data dispersion, and it is less significant than the first factor. This factor reflects attitudes towards the nations that live near Latvia, also including those that in the process of historical development are most closely associated with Russians, e.g. Ukrainians and Byelorussians. This factor that can be called 'orientation towards familiar national neighbourhood' shows that the highest significance and social acceptance (favourability) is granted to ethnic groups living in Latvia (Ukrainians, Byelorussians, the Polish, Lithuanians, Estonians, Hebrews).

Therefore this factor reflects specific advantages for those ethnic groups that create minorities of the inhabitants of Latvian environment and reflect well a familiar social environment for the respondents.

Analysis of both factors allows us to conclude that the first factor reflects attitude towards representatives of other national groups on the basis of 'we know', not on 'we are familiar with'. It reflects a social tendency that has been formed on the experience the respondents have in relation to representatives of those ethnic groups, and in most cases this experience is based on very unsystematic and superficial relations, as well as the result of general social-economical and historical factors. This way it should be understood as the cognitive component of the social trend in relation to representatives of other social groups.

The second factor reflects another attitude – this is acceptance of other national groups by the residents of Latvia, which is determined by personal systematic experience and familiarity. This factor reflects not only cognitive, but also emotional and behavioural aspects in the trend towards other ethnic groups in Latvia.

In the total number of variables for factor analysis, we also included the factor 'Racial differentiation and national priorities', which reflects tolerance towards the three basic races – Caucasian, Afro-American and Asian. The results of the analysis show that the respondents have a neutral attitude towards this factor.

Discussion

Analysis of both factors allows us to suggest that the first factor reflects attitude towards representatives of ethnic groups. It can be interpreted as the factor of pro-western orientation of the respondents (90% of Russians) and reflects the high level of acceptance and association of representatives of the Western countries and Western culture. This is the product of positive components of the social attitude.

The second factor is different. It reflects acceptance of other ethnic groups by the residents of Latvia and is determined by factors of personal, systematic and many-sided familiarity with their representatives. We can expect this factor to reflect less cognitive, but more emotional and behavioural aspects of the attitude – experience-based.

Differentiation of racial and national preferences

In the total number of variables for factor analysis, we also included the factor 'Racial differentiation and national priorities', which reflects tolerance towards the three basic races – Caucasian, Afro-American and Asian. As one can see in the figure, the variable 'European' has little factor load on both factor axes. It shows indifference of the variable to these measurements. This result could be expected as most of the ethnic groups included in the analysis were representatives of this race and the observed dispersion of the obtained assessments can mostly be determined by the factors based on differences between representatives of different national groups of the Caucasian race. Two other factors take central place in the space of factors, and corresponding factor loads are practically the same. It can show respondents' neutral attitude towards these racial

groups. We can expect that tolerance towards representatives of these races corresponds to one they show towards representatives of their closest (in the factor space) ethnic groups.

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