

International Conference on Research Paradigms Transformation in Social Sciences 2014

Russian-German immigrants in Germany and their intercultural communication

Svetlana Dementeva^a *, Coletta Maria Franzke^b, Olga Loyko^c

^a Tomsk Polytechnic University, Lenina Avenue 30, Tomsk 634050, Russia

^b Technische Universität Chemnitz, Straße der Nationen 62, Chemnitz 62 09111, Germany

^c Tomsk Polytechnic University, Lenina Avenue 30, Tomsk 634050, Russia

Abstract

Global Migration processes illustrate and show the urgent need for action on understanding each other to better. Due to the increased and deliberate exchange between people from different cultures a significant contribution to mutual understanding and to the development of mutual tolerance and intercultural exchange should or even must be made. Interesting examples for this are Russian-Germans who immigrated from Russia to Germany in the 1990s. These Germans have a very long time lived in Russia and thus developing a sense of cultural belonging to the Germans, as to the Russian culture. After their return to Germany, the parties of native Germans as the immigrated Germans agreed that there were great cultural differences between them. It was hard to deal with these cultural differences and to understand each other. The following paper will first explain background of the Russian-Germans. Then it discusses their return to Germany. The main part of this thesis deals with the challenges of cross-cultural understanding between native Germans and Russian-Germans as well as the reasons for these challenges. Furthermore the main part of this article shows on why intercultural understanding and tolerance between cultures is important.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of Tomsk Polytechnic University.

Keywords: migrations, intercultural communications, challenges of cross-cultural understanding

1. Immigration to Germany and cultural shock

Germans in Russia tried during the whole time they were living abroad not to lose their identity and culture. Many Germans in Russia wished to live among other Germans and to be free of cultural, linguistic and religious discrimination. This was an important reason for the return migration to Germany. The difficult living conditions in the Soviet Union, but also the fear of cruel events of the past could be repeated, gave motivation for leaving Russia. Other motivations were the hope for a better future for the family and living together with family

* Dementeva Svetlana. Tel.: +7-913-820-7240
E-mail address: dementeva@tpu.ru

members who moved already to Germany (Fabritius, 1990). In Germany after the collapse of the Soviet Union Russian emigrants were taken that are proven German descent. Immigration of Germans started from 01. July 1990. That day a law came into force which was allowing ethnical Germans from the former Soviet Union to immigrate to Germany. The reason for this law was that the German Federal Government is committed to the special responsibility to accept ethnical German immigrants as citizens with full constitutional rights (Conrad, 1993). After coming to Germany and getting the Germany citizenship immigrants got some help in order to build up their new life in Germany successfully. The German Government offered them starting aids such as social counseling, provisional accommodation, material and financial support, language training and educational or vocational training (Baumann, 1993).

Even under the greatest difficulties Germans from Russia tried to keep up with their German customs, traditions and values as well as it was possible to maintain them. But after arriving in Germany they had to face that the traditions in Germany had changed a lot. The traditions which they had expected to find had changed over generations and several traditional ways of behavior were no longer valid. Instead of the home which immigrants hoped to find in an ethnical way, they had to discover a modern, industrialized nation. Immigrants had to face modern lifestyles and behaviors that were unknown by them. Also they were facing a completely alien political and social system. Many of these emigrants stayed unemployed for a long time. Immigrants who found an employment usually had to take low paid jobs for which no professional qualifications were needed. Another difficulty for the immigrants was that their Russian education diplomas and professional qualifications were not accepted in Germany. So that many immigrants were not allowed to continue to work in the professions they were used to. In addition a lot of Germans from Russia were not accepted in the society because of their poor German language skills. In Germany they are often called “The Russians” in a negative sense though they are Germans. Today there are over two million Russian-German living in the Federal Republic of Germany. Most of them live under the difficult social and economic conditions.

2. Intercultural Communication between German immigrants from Russia and Germans in everyday life

The life of Germans who lived in the Soviet Union was heavily influenced by Russian culture. The survey clearly shows, however, that the Germans have tried preserving their German culture. For that reason many Russian-Germans felt belonging to both cultures, the German and the Russian one already in the time of Soviet Union. And many of the immigration who came to Germany still have such a feeling today. They lived and life between two cultures. So when it comes to a meeting between Russian-Germans and native Germans it is like a meeting between two ethnical groups and it can be spoken of intercultural communication. To make it clear what that means and to show up what kind of difficulties this can cause the following part of the paper describes some everyday situations in which this country communication problems or even misunderstandings between ethnic German repatriates and late-ethnic and native Germans may arise. Also the following part will describe possible ways to prevent such problems and misunderstandings.

2.1 Perception

Personal perception is the first stage of interpersonal interaction. In perception of the interacting partner can be already made up first conclusions or can be recognized hidden character traits. This happens whether through sight, hearing or even smelling. Through prejudices about interaction partners as stereotyping them is a try to simplify the perception from the outset. Prejudices are in contrast to stereotypes only negative or negative opinions about people of a culture. A prejudice against the Germans is, for example, that they are the trailer of National Socialism. A stereotype about Russians and Russia German is, they are drinking vodka constantly. Stereotypes arise from characteristics of another, foreign culture with an over - generalization. Examples of this are the punctuality of Germans and the hospitality of the Russians. However, these ideas do not always coincide

with the characteristics of the interaction partner. The perception of people can be influenced by expectations, knowledge, mood and impressions of the interaction partners (Lüsebrink, 2005).

2.2 Language

For encounters between Russian Germans the use of language plays a major role. The interaction partners usually do not speak the same native language. This means that at least one of the partners must use another language than their mother tongue. Although the language skills of German people talking Russian language are rather poor. It is common that an attempt to get in contact with each other and communication is done in German language. So while having such conversations local German people have the edge over the German immigrants (Heringer, 2010). German language is, however, transliterated using the Latin. For Russian language Cyrillic letters are used. Compared to the German alphabet the Russian one has some special features. The Russian alphabet consists of 33 letters in total. It includes five vowels, each with two graphemes, 21 consonants and two special characters, which do not represent sounds, but show the softness or hardness of the consonant. In German language there are three so-called 'Umlaute': Ää, Öö, Üü. These letters do not exist in Russian language. Also, grammatically, there are numerous differences between the German and the Russian language. Russian nouns are written in lower case, the only exceptions are proper names and sentence beginnings. In German language all nouns must be starting with a capital letter. In Russian language, there are no certain indefinite articles. In German language there are three of them. Many German immigrants from Russia translate the languages word by word. Due to the large differences between these two languages and the rather poor language skills caused by faulty translations misunderstandings can easily appear (Jedik, 2001).

2.3 Communication channels

In collectivist cultures, the so-called high-context communication or indirect communication style is often used. In this type of communication very little is explicitly formulated. The interaction partners assume much of the information by the context of the situation and that what is already known. In such high-context cultures there are close relationships between people, so that messages do not need to be explained in detail in order to understand their meaning. By contrast in the German culture, which is an individualist one, the so-called low-context communication and direct communication is the main style of communicating. In this culture interpersonal relationships are of lesser importance. To make a message expressing information, the information must be expressed explicitly and precisely. In low-context cultures, silence is also often perceived as unpleasant. In high-context cultures however, nothing needs to be said if no information needs to be exchanged. Therefore the use of two different communication styles can cause difficulties of understanding between Russian-Germans and native Germans.

2.4 Greetings and salutations

In the Russian culture, men greet each other with a handshake. Women usually greet with a hug and cheek kisses. Women are not necessarily welcome first. In German culture, a handshake is enough to welcome people. Handshakes are given to and between men and women. More rarely, women who are welcomed is given a kiss on the cheek. The German welcoming manner is often perceived as callous and cold-hearted in other cultures. The usual form of address in Germany is the surname, preceded provided the word Ms. or Mr. Also the 'you'-form is used. In Russia, the salutation is much more complicated. The form of address consists of the name of the interaction partner and the father of this person name. However, a final syllable is attached at the Father's name. For female names the final syllable is '-ovna' and for male names '-owitsch'. However Russian-German immigrants do usually put no value to the Russian title of their names (Heringer, 2010).

2.5 Invitations and presents

Intercultural contacts often lead to invitations. Again, it is important to observe certain behaviors. In both cultures, in German as in Russian, a guest gift is appropriate. For such a gift flowers, quality food or alcoholic beverages are popular. In Germany it is common that for a lunch or dinner soup is served as a starter, followed by a main dish with a green salad and a dessert. As drinks soft drinks, but also wine, liquor, a digestive liquor or beer are served. To finish a meal a cup of coffee is offered, this is the end of a meal. In the Russian culture, hospitality traditionally plays a very important role. Russian-German hosts offer their guests a plethora of different foods and drinks. In case of a meal with guests, the table is full of bottles, plates and bowls. There are several vegetable salads with cucumbers, tomatoes and various fish delicacies. As a main dish borscht (a Russian soup) is served usually. After that cakes or pies and pastries are served with a cup of black tea. While the food is eaten, alcohol is served. As a tradition mostly vodka is drunken with guests at a meal. For every glass of vodka a toast and a bite of the rich food is included. Of course, there are also offered non-alcoholic drinks or wine. Eating and drinking is seen as a get-together, which can last for quite a few hours. In the Russian culture, it is also common that visitors take off their shoes before entering the apartment. The hosts usually offer slippers.

3. Conclusion

Intercultural encounters take place every day in today's German society, whether in kindergarten, school or the profession, but also during shopping, on public transport or in everyday situations. Every day individuals can talk to people of other cultures. This requires an awareness, mutual understanding, respect and tolerance for cultural differences in perception take, thinking, feeling and acting. This intercultural competence among other occupational groups of the public service of great necessity, as most are administrative staff, educators or teachers, the first contact of immigrants. Due to the centuries-mediated German customs and traditions and the prolonged stay in the former Soviet Union and its successor states Germans living there became a special group of people. German initial settlers and repatriates tend to have a non-unique cultural affiliation. Scientific literature makes clear that the majority of Russian-Germans feel belonging to both cultures, the Russian and the German cultural. So they are kind of between these two cultures. A successful communication can lead to an understanding between Russian-Germans and native Germans. Therefore requires not only language skills, but also a certain sense of cultural specificity and diversity.

The present work shows that cultural differences between Russian Germans and native Germans prevail and can be pre-bend. Despite everything, there are both, differences and similarities, and regardless of culture, we are all human. The history Germans who lived a long period in Russia and who were coming back to Germany in the 1990s is a good example for one part of the process of globalization. Current problems of intercultural understanding between these German immigrants and native Germans are a good example of difficulties of interactions between people in the time of global processes. With a view to our globalized life people of our time should be aware of differences between the cultures and the knowledge about other cultures as the ability to understand and deal with them should be improved. This is important as being the key for having a peaceful daily life and also to live in a peaceful world in general.

References

- Fabritius, R. (1990). *Angekommen – Angenommen. Die Integration der Aus-siedler in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, in: *Fremd in der Heimat. Aussiedler aus Ost- und Südosteuropa unterwegs nach Deutschland* (pp. 127-140). Published by: Engel, Walter.
- Conrad, T. (1993). *Schwerpunkte der Aussiedlerpolitik in Deutschland*, in: *Zuwanderung und Eingliederung von Deutschen und Juden aus der früheren Sowjetunion in Deutschland und Israel* (pp. 38-43). Published by: Bade, Klaus J. Troen, S. Ilan.
- Baumann, J. (1993). *Das Zusammenwirken von Bund, Ländern und Gemeinden bei der Aussiedlereingliederung in Deutschland (Aufnahme, Unterbringung, Integration)*, in: *Zu-wanderung und Eingliederung von Deutschen und Juden aus der früheren Sowjetunion in Deutschland und Israel* (pp. 49-54). Published by: Bade, Klaus J. Troen, S. Ilan.
- Lüsebrink, H.J. (2005). *Interkulturelle Kommunikation: Interaktion, Fremdwahrnehmung, Kulturtransfer. (Eds.), Metzler, J B; Auflage: 1 (September 2008).*
- Heringer, H. J. (2010): *Interkulturelle Kommunikation. Grundlagen und Konzepte. (Eds.), UTB, Stuttgart; Auflage: 3., durchges. Aufl. (17. November 2010).*
- Jedik, L (2001). *Die russlanddeutsche Migration in der Sprachbehinderten-pädagogik. Geschichtlich-theoretischer Hintergrund und praxisrelevante Forschungsergebnisse für das sprachbehindertenpädagogische Handlungsfeld durch konfrontierende Sprachanalyse.*

(Eds.), Aachen: Shaker (2002), 316 P. Pfeil auf den Link. Verfügbarkeit Zugl. Köln, Univ., Diss., 2001.
Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.Jan. Lokales Denken, globales Handeln. Interkulturelle Zusammenarbeit und globales Management, 5. edition, 2011. Klein, Hans-Michael: Cross-Culture – Benimm im Ausland. Internationale Businessetikette. Länderbesonderheiten.