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## **BELARUSIAN MENTALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: GROUNDS FOR PESSIMISM AND OPTIMISM**

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**Summary.** The article is devoted to the consideration of the factors which influence intercultural communication of Belarusians with people who live in the countries bordering Belarus (Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia) and some countries where English is used as the first official language (the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and Ireland). The objectives of the research were: to compare cultures of people living in Belarus, in the bordering countries and in the English-speaking countries; to describe the characteristics of Belarusian mentality which presumably create cultural barriers; and to determine the factors that facilitate intercultural communication of Belarusians with people under consideration. The research was based on the dimensions of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence (G. Hofstede). Using these criteria, the characteristics of Belarusian mentality were systematically presented; they include tolerance, collectivism, cautiousness, modesty, restraint, respect for traditions and pragmatism. The reflection of the distinctive features of the Belarusians' outlook in proverbs and behaviour illustrates the differences which can presumably cause cross-cultural misunderstanding. Also, the factors which promote intercultural communication are highlighted. The results of the research may be used in intercultural training of postgraduate students and in-service specialists in education and business.

**Keywords:** mentality; intercultural communication; power distance; individualism; masculinity; uncertainty avoidance; long term orientation; indulgence.

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the 21 century the problems of intercultural communication have become of current interest because globalization and social mobility require overcoming cultural barriers and using alternative communicative strategies in order conversational partners achieve their goals. It explains why any research in this field of study is topical nowadays.

The present study deals with the characteristics of the mentality of the Belarusians which influence the effect of intercultural communication. The mentality means a way of thinking (Collins English Dictionary, 2014); or the set of one's mind, view, outlook (Dictionary.com, 2017). According to Saphiere, Mikk and DeVries (2005), due to the fact that communication is

the exchange, transmission, or sending and receiving of thoughts and messages, through communication you mutually create or discover meaning – a more collectivistic mentality. Clark and Brennan (1991) assume that two factors are important for grounding in communication: the purpose – what the two people are trying to accomplish, and the medium of communication – the techniques available (Clark, 1991). Both these factors, which imply intentions and the words people actually say, are culturally dependent – they are the results of people’s way of thinking. As soon as one of the distinguished features of mentality is its “unconsciousness or semi-consciousness” (Шенкао, 2003), mentality is unconscious ground for communication: no one is able to escape from the culture in which she or he was born; and everyone chooses, applies and evaluates other’s behaviour upon her / his outlook.

In this research we proceed from the idea that understanding between people is dependent upon the degree of similarity of their belief systems (Morain, 1986, p.64). Understanding the peculiarities of one’s own and partner’s mentality promotes intercultural communication. Unfortunately, Belarus is still seen to the Western world as “an unknown land in so many respects” (Roberts, 2010, p. VII), though different features of the Belarusians were investigated by E. Babosov, E. Dubyanetsky, V. Kirienko, A. Melnikov, R. Smirnova, etc. (Бабосов, 2004; Дубянецкі, 1995; Кириенко, 2007; Мельников, 2004; Смирнова, 2015). They have proved that Belarusians have much in common with people in the neighbouring countries, at the same time their culture has its own cultural specificity which is distinctively reflected in the national character, strategies of behaviour and the language. Nevertheless, these attempts do not fully represent Belarusian culture as a system in terms clear to the western ethnographers and specialists of intercultural communication. It explains the need of this research which may be helpful to understand the Belarusian mentality, adequately interpret the situations of misunderstanding and modify the verbal and nonverbal behaviour to avoid culture barriers.

The aim of the paper is to specify the characteristics of the Belarusians, which have negative influence on intercultural communication with people who live in the countries bordering Belarus and in the English-speaking countries. The objectives of the research are: (1) to compare cultures of people living in Belarus, the bordering and English-speaking countries; (2) to describe the characteristics

of Belarusian mentality which presumably create cultural barriers and (3) to determine the factors that facilitate intercultural communication of the Belarusians with peoples under consideration.

The present research promotes a complex and systematic study of Belarusian culture in comparison with other cultures and results in its incorporation into the world cultural map, deeper understanding of the Belarusian culture, mentality and language. The results of the study may be used in intercultural training of postgraduate students and in-service specialists in education and business.

### **Methodology and research limitations**

Recognizing that different cultures represent distinctive national characteristics is a crucial building block for intercultural communication. The article combines a double approach, characterized by the employment of the theories in sociological and linguistic fields. The study was conducted in three phases:

- (1) the area of cultural portraits of Belarus, the bordering and English-speaking countries was explored by means of G. Hofstede's six-dimension model;
- (2) the characteristics of Belarusian mentality were specified in their relation to G. Hofstede's dimensions; and the empirical study was conducted by examining Belarusian proverbs and sayings: at this point their meaning was investigated in the context of the specificity of national mentality;
- (3) the statistics about non-significant differences on the Hofstede's dimensions between Belarus and the countries under consideration were examined.

During **the first phase of the research** we used Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. The dimensions include: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence. Power distance is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Individualism is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. The criteria of masculinity help to discover what motivates people: wanting to be the best (masculine culture) or enjoying what you do (feminine culture). Uncertainty avoidance reveals the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown

situations. The dimension of long term orientation indicates how a society maintains links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future. Indulgence is used to measure the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses (Hofstede, 2010).

To implement the cultural dimensions theory into practice, the Hofstede’s laboratory used the values survey module (VSM), that is a set of points with which cross-cultural researchers can compare Hofstede’s dimension scores (indexes) across different cultural groups. Table 1 provides an example of this model.

*Table 1.*

**Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory: example**

<b>Cultural dimension</b>	<b>Country A</b>	<b>Country B</b>	<b>Difference</b>
1. Power distance	42	35	7
2. Individualism	60	89	29
3. Masculinity	19	66	<b>  47  </b>
4. Uncertainty avoidance	65	35	30
5. Long term orientation	82	51	31
6. Indulgence	16	69	<b>  53  </b>

As one can see in the above table the six dimensions underline differences in each category. Two countries (A and B) are selected for comparison. As a result, one can identify the biggest deviations on cultural dimensions of indulgence (53 out of 100 points) and masculinity (47 out of 100 points). Thus country A demonstrates lower indexes of indulgence and masculinity compared to country B. It means that a resident of country A communicating with a person from country B must understand that the conversational partner may control the desires and impulses less, and favours competitiveness more. Consequently, in intercultural communication both the partners should choose appropriate strategies of behaviour and interpretation of the interlocutor’s actions and opinions. On the whole, the indexes for more than 70 countries can be automatically obtained by means of the VSM at the Hofstede’s website (Hofstede, 2010).

In the present study two criteria were used to choose the countries to compare with Belarus: (1) the common borders and intensity of economic,

political, cultural and personal contacts of Belarusians and (2) the language which is used worldwide. Therefore, in this research we considered two groups of cultures of the societies in the countries:

(1) bordering Belarus: Russia (Rus), Ukraine (Ukr), Poland (Pol), Lithuania (Lit) and Latvia (Lat);

(2) countries where English, as an international language, is the first official language: the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), Canada (Can), Australia (Aus) and Ireland (Irl).

Having obtained the score of each of the investigated country by means of VSM, we used the method of statistical analysis to compare cultures.

We agreed that "significant difference" means more than 50 points which is equivalent to 50 per cent of the total score. The difference between Belarus and another country on each dimension was found by subtraction of the adequate numbers (See the example above). To obtain the total difference for a country we summed up the differences on all the dimensions for that country. The average index of dissimilarity was calculated by dividing the total difference for a country into six (the number of dimensions). When the contrasting parameters were singled out, the hierarchy of the investigated cultures was established. The differences between Belarus and two groups of countries were found both on each dimension and on average. The classification of the dimensions on the criteria of probability to create cultural barriers was performed suggesting that there can be indexes of high (more than 50 per cent of difference); moderate (more than 30 per cent of difference), low (more than 10 per cent of difference) and non-significant (less than 10 per cent of difference) risk of cultural barriers.

During the **second phase of the research**, on the ground of the obtained results, the widespread characteristics of Belarusian mentality that presumably create cultural barriers in intercultural communication due to the detected differences were specified. To determine such characteristics, we analyzed the basic qualities of the Belarusian national character, presented in sociological papers, and correlated them with the statistics obtained during the first stage of the study.

In order to illustrate the reflection of the outlined characteristics of national mentality in speech, the textual analysis of proverbs and sayings was performed. The starting point here was the idea that the national language is

a system of recording, storing and reflecting mental constants (Сыромятникова, 2007). The corpus of 1,356 proverbs, citations and sayings was analyzed in the context of the theory of the relationship between culture and language (Тер-Минасова, 2000). 40 proverbs were chosen from Russian-Belarusian and English dictionaries (Иванов, 2007; Санько, 1991; Speake, 2008).

During **the third phase of the study** the analysis of the statistics of non-significant difference on the Hofstede's dimensions between the countries under consideration was performed. We found out the percentage of similarities for the compared groups of countries. Then textual analysis of proverbs was conducted.

Research limitations: (1) the Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory allows investigation of a culture using only six dimensions which is not enough to study such a complex phenomenon as culture fully; (2) the score for each dimension represents the average parameters of the respondents; therefore, the issues of individual culture and subculture are not taken into consideration; (3) the traditional characteristics of Belarusian mentality were considered without the influence of changes caused by social mobility.

## Results

### Background data

According to the first objective of the present research we examined cultures of people living in Belarus, the bordering and English-speaking countries. The use of VSM automatically provides us with the data about Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and Ireland on the dimensions of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence (Hofstede, 2010).

The scores of Belarus (the lowest line), Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia are presented in Figure 1.

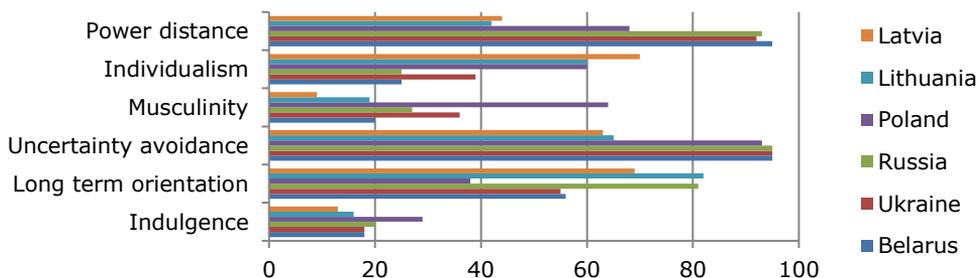


Fig. 1. Belarus and the bordering countries

The deviations of Belarus (the lowest line) from the countries where English is the first official language – the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and Ireland – are seen in Figure 2.

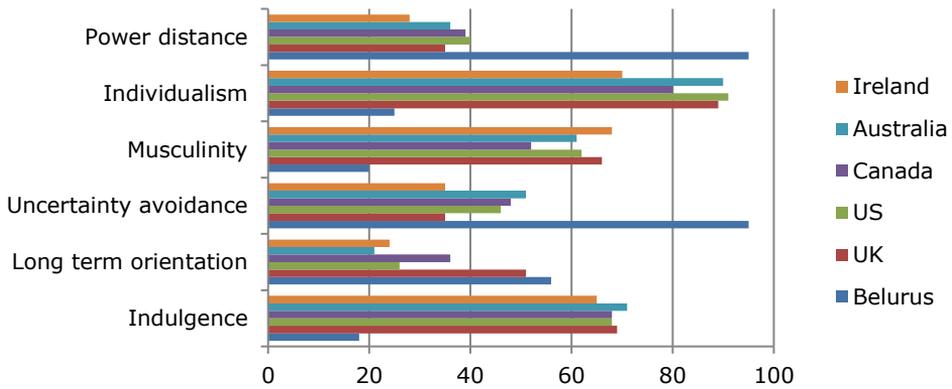


Fig. 2. Belarus and the English speaking countries

### The comparison of Belarus with the bordering and English-speaking countries

#### Statistics

Having compared the scores of the societies bordering Belarus, we found that on the whole there is no significant difference on all the dimensions except power distance – with Lithuania and Latvia. On the contrary, the results of the analysis of the data regarding the English-speaking countries present evidence that they considerably differ from Belarus except for long-term orientation and masculinity scores (Table 2).

Table 2.

#### Difference between Belarus and the bordering and English-speaking countries

Dimension	Belarus (score)	Bordering countries (score / difference)					English speaking countries (score / difference)				
		Rus	Ukr	Pol	Lit	Lat	UK	US	Can	Aus	Irl
1. Power distance	95	93/2	92/3	68/27	42/53	44/51	35/60	40/55	39/56	36/59	28/67

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Dimension	Belarus (score)	Bordering countries (score /difference)					English speaking countries (score /difference)				
		Rus	Ukr	Pol	Lit	Lat	UK	US	Can	Aus	Irl
2. Individualism	25	25/-	39/14	60/35	60/35	70/45	89/ <b>64</b>	91/ <b>66</b>	80/ <b>55</b>	90/ <b>65</b>	70/45
3. Masculinity	20	27/7	36/16	64/44	19/1	9/1	66/46	62/42	52/32	61/41	68/48
4. Uncertainty avoidance	95	95/-	95/-	93/2	65/30	63/32	35/ <b>60</b>	46/ <b>55</b>	45/ <b>50</b>	51/44	35/ <b>60</b>
5. Long term orientation	56	81/25	55/1	38/18	82/26	69/13	51/5	26/30	36/20	21/35	24/32
6. Indulgence	18	20/2	18/-	29/11	16/2	13/5	69/ <b>51</b>	68/ <b>50</b>	68/ <b>50</b>	71/ <b>53</b>	65/47
Total difference (points):		/36	/34	/137	/147	/157	/286	/298	/263	/297	/299
Average index of dissimilarity:		6	5.67	22.83	24.5	26.17	43.83	47.67	49.5	49.67	49.83

The comparison of the average indexes of dissimilarity of the bordering and English-speaking countries on the six Hofstede's dimensions – power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence – makes it possible to suggest the hierarchy of countries from the closest to the most distant to Belarus:

- (1) Ukraine – 5.67;
- (2) Russia – 6;
- (3) Poland – 22.83;
- (4) Lithuania – 24.5;
- (5) Latvia – 26.17;
- (6) The UK – 43.83;
- (7) The US – 47.67;
- (8) Canada – 49.5;
- (9) Australia – 49.67;
- (10) Ireland – 49.83.

We assume that the average indexes of dissimilarity of the compared cultures illustrate the degree of probability of cultural barriers in intercultural communication of Belarusians with people from these countries. It is seen that the countries where the Belarusians have the least risk of cross-cultural

misunderstanding include (in progression): Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. The higher probability of cultural barriers exists in communication with people from: the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and Ireland.

Having considered the deviations of the scores for each of the countries under consideration, we studied the difference and similarity on each dimension of two groups of cultures: societies in the bordering and English-speaking countries (Table 3).

*Table 3.*

**Difference between Belarus, the bordering and English-speaking countries on Hofstede's dimensions**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Countries bordering Belarus (difference)</b>	<b>English-speaking countries (difference)</b>	<b>Average difference</b>
1. Power distance	27.2	59.4	43.3
2. Individualism	25.8	59	42.4
3. Masculinity	15.8	41.8	28.8
4. Uncertainty avoidance	12.8	53.8	33.3
5. Long term orientation	16.6	24.4	20.5
6. Indulgence	4	50.2	27.1
On the average:	17.03	48.1	32.57

As a result, the ranking of the dimensions in accordance with the average difference can be presented in the following way:

- (1) power distance (43.3);
- (2) individualism (42.4);
- (3) uncertainty avoidance (33.3);
- (4) masculinity (28.8);
- (5) indulgence (27.1);
- (6) long term orientation (20.5).

We found no dimensions provoking high and non-significant risk of cultural barriers. As evident from the above list, a moderate risk of encountering cultural barriers can occur in intercultural communication due to the discrepancy on the dimensions of power distance (43.3), individualism (42.4) and uncertainty

avoidance (33.3). Low probability of cultural barriers is expected with regard to such issues as masculinity (28.8), indulgence (27.1) and long term orientation (20.5).

We also found out that the average difference: (a) between Belarus and the bordering countries constitutes 17.03; (b) between Belarus and the English-speaking countries reaches 48.1. The average difference between Belarus and all the countries under consideration is 32.57.

## Discussion

### Characteristics of Belarusian mentality: Grounds for pessimism

In accordance with the second objective of the study on the grounds of the obtained statistics the characteristics of Belarusian mentality were specified which can presumably lead to cultural barriers and, therefore, can become the basis for some pessimism.

Referring to the classification of the dimensions on the criteria of probability to create cultural barriers, two groups were singled out: provoking (1) moderate and (2) low risk of cultural barrier. Power distance, individualism and uncertainty avoidance belong to the first group. We further proceed the argument which characteristics of Belarusian mentality can cause the emphasized differences.

The biggest difference between Belarus and the countries under consideration were found out with regard to the criteria of **power distance** (43.3 on average). The highest scores were revealed in (in progression): Latvia – 51; Lithuania – 53; the US – 55; Canada – 56; Australia – 59; the UK – 60; Ireland – 67. In comparison with them, Belarus represents a high-power distance culture, where power holders are very distant in society. According to G. Hofstede, it means people accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has his/her place, and which needs no further justification (Hofstede, 2001, p. 83).

To find out the characteristics of mentality which can explain this standard of behaviour, we examined the sociological data. According to V. Kirienko, the list of dominant characteristics of the Belarusians comprises "hospitality, diligence, warmth and cordiality in relations between people,

conscience and compassion, collectivism, tolerance" (Кириенко, 2007, pp. 67–68). We assume that the differences on the dimension of power distance can be explained by such a characteristic of mentality as *t o l e r a n c e*. Tolerance is the willingness to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from one's own, although one might not agree with or disapprove of them (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus).

Belarusians are reputed to be tolerant (Кириенко, 2007, p. 66; Бабосов, 2004, p. 217; Дубянецкі, 1995, p. 20; Мельников, 2004, p. 44; Костюченко, 2003, p. 240). The first line of the hymn of the Republic of Belarus contains the description of the people who fully prove to be tolerant by nature: *"Мы – беларусы, мірныя людзі... / We, Belarusians, are peaceful people"* (the translation here and afterwards is performed by the author). Indeed, in everyday life many Belarusians follow the principle *"Абы была згода, было ціха / It is better to get agreement, let it be quiet"*. Tolerance is reflected in proverbs which are seen as people's wisdom and regulate people's behaviour. E. g., *"На непрыяцеля свайго кінь хлебам / Throw bread at your enemy"*.

Historically Belarusians who lived for a long time in great empires (the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the state of Rzechpospolita, the Russian Empire, the USSR) or under pressure of French and German conquerors had little power in the society. Therefore, the respect for authorities and power holders seems to have been genetically transmitted from generation to generation. Belarusian patience results in lack of ambition: people's peacefulness, their desire to live a quiet life is illustrated with the *"Будзем жыць, як набяжыць / Let's live life like it will be"*. It explains why tolerance may be a reason for intercultural misunderstanding with people from low-power distance cultures.

Another dimension distributed to the group of moderate risk of cultural barrier is **individualism** (42.4 on average). The list of the most distant countries on this index includes: the US – 66; Australia – 65; the UK – 64 and Canada – 55. Belarusians have a comparatively low score in this regard that is evidently reasoned by *c o l l e c t i v i s m* as an opposition to individualism. In the following set of Belarusian and English proverbs one can notice the contrast between collectivists and individualists in their evaluation of people who live nearby: *"Добра, як сусед блізка і пералаз нізка / It is good to have a neighbour nearby and low fences"* vs. *"Good fences make good neighbours"*.

So, the Belarusian proverb proves the ideals of sharing material and spiritual values with neighbours. On the contrary, the English proverb emphasizes the importance of independence and self-reliance of an individual.

Collectivism is reflected in the desire of people to live in a society where group relations have a greater value in communication (Triandis, 2004). In this regard Smirnova (2015) notes that in the Belarusian province 53.2 per cent of the respondents (1,459 people on the whole) constantly provide financial support to their neighbours; 44.1 per cent help each other by means of sharing food and clothes; 51 per cent do some work in the neighbour's yard; 31.1 per cent look after neighbour's children, ill and senior people; only 3.9 per cent do not help others (Смирнова, 2015, p. 26). Another sociological research claims that 1/3 of the Belarusian respondents (1,511 people) evaluate individualism as a positive feature, and 2/3 of them see it as negative. Meanwhile, 80 per cent of the interviewees regarded collectivism as a positive characteristic, 18 per cent as a negative one (Кириенко, 2007, p. 94).

Collectivism is reflected in people's verbal behaviour, e. g., in the communicative function of advice. It is noteworthy that the name of the former country *the Soviet Union* is the evidence of the importance of giving advice, because in the Russian language (which is widely spread in Belarus) the word *soviet* is homonymous to *advice*. Therefore, the USSR may be metaphorically called *a Country of Advice*.

We doubt that the Belarusian proverb "Ад парады язык не адваліцца і зубы не высыплюцца / *If you give advice your tongue and teeth will remain safe*" could be understood in the right way by proficient English speakers, because what is acceptable in Belarus is not always convenient on cross-cultural dimension. In this country it is acceptable to give advice to the conversational partner before he / she faces a problem in order to prevent him / her from getting into trouble. On the contrary, a person who favours individualism needs freedom to make an independent choice without being constantly guided. So, this difference on the dimension of individualism can lead to the evaluation of the behaviour of Belarusians as impolite, and the risk of cultural barrier exists.

In the group of the dimensions of moderate risk of cultural barrier, **uncertainty avoidance** (33.3 on the average) is the last one. According to this index the most distinctive countries are: the UK and Ireland – 60; the US – 55;

Canada – 50. Uncertainty avoidance is “the extent to which a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, suspicious, different from usual” (Hofstede, 2001, pp. XIX–XX). Belarusians have a high index on this parameter. We assume that such a feature of the Belarusians as *c a u t i o u s n e s s* explains the revealed discrepancy. Dubyanetsky notes that their national character traits include “distrust, secrecy and extreme cautiousness” (Дубянецкі, 1995, p. 41). Melnikov also highlights cautiousness as a typical characteristic of Belarusians (Мельников, 2004, p. 54).

Cautiousness is reflected in the proverbs which have a preventative function: “Хто ціха ходзіць, той густа месіць / *Who walks slowly, has a thick dough*”; “Паволі едзеш - далёка станеш / *If you go slowly, you will get far away*”; “Памаленьку далей зойдзеш / *You will go farther if you do it little by little*”; “Калі не ведаеш дарогі, не выязжай з дому / *If you do not know the road, do not leave home*”. Some of the traditional sayings sound like imperatives or orders to be cautious: “Завіхайся, але не спяшайся / *Be zealous, but don't hurry*”; “Спяшайся, але не дужа хапайся / *Be in a hurry, but not much*”, “Сваёй бяды нікому не кажы, бо добры злякнецца, а злы пасмяецца / *Don't talk about your trouble to anybody, because a kind person will become vicious and a wicked one will laugh at you*”; “Пана слухай, а свой розум май / *Listen to the master, but have your own mind*”; “Перш правер, потым вер / *Check before believing*”. They imply that people may feel threatened by ambiguous situations because they prefer to have solid background for their actions: therefore, cautiousness is able to create cultural barriers in intercultural communication.

In the group of the dimensions of low risk of cultural barrier **masculinity** comes first. There is no significant difference on this index with any particular country under consideration, and the average difference reaches 28.8 (See Tables 2 & 3). Traditionally, “masculinity” refers to the distribution of emotional roles between the genders, it opposes “tough” masculine to “tender” feminine societies (Hofstede, 2001, p. XX). The examples of high masculinity include: (a) boys and girls learn to be ambitious; (b) best students is the norm. Meanwhile low masculinity implies: (a) boys and girls learn to be modest; (b) average student is the norm (Hofstede, 2001, p. 306). Belarusian culture refers to the

feminine type, where standing out from the crowd is not admirable, people understate their personal achievements, contributions and capacities. Such behaviour is ensured by *m o d e s t y*.

The Belarusian researchers note that the modest standard of living is appreciated much. Smirnova shows that a number of values are underestimated by the respondents in the Belarusian province: career and high status in the society (7.2 per cent); opportunity to enjoy life and have fun (5.8 per cent); wealth (3.6 per cent); public recognition, fame, reputation (3.6 per cent) (Смирнова, 2015, p. 26). As a consequence of modesty, Kirienko proved that the Belarusian self-portrait is characterized by a low degree of competitiveness (10.2 per cent) and pushfulness (10.9 per cent) (Кириенко, 2007, p. 68).

A number of affirmative Belarusian sayings reflect the value of modesty in a person's character: "Вады ў лыжцы не замуціць / Will not muddy water in the spoon"; "Вока нікому не запарушыць / Will not engulf nobody's eye"; "Хоць у вуха кладзі / May put it into the ear"; "Хоць да сэрца (да раны) прыкладай / May enclose it to the heart (wound)". On the other hand, people who are not modest are made fun of: "Ведай, каток, свой куток / Remember, kitty, your corner"; "Не лезь, куды галава не лезе / Do not go where your head does not thrust". A number of sayings about immodest people produce a derogatory effect: "Высока галаву насіць / High-wear head"; "Шостам галавы не дастаць / It is impossible to get the head without a pole".

The reflection of modesty is vividly seen in the complimenting behaviour. The compliments are generally reputed negatively in the Belarusian culture, because due to modesty people understate their own achievements. The evidence of the negative connotation of compliments is found in the Belarusian folklore. We singled out 17 proverbs which unequivocally show mistrust to people who pay compliments (Иванов, 2007; Санько, 1991). Such a quantity of them says about a typical characteristic of Belarusians. Е. г., "Добра гаворыць, ды нядобра творыць / Speaks in a pleasant manner, but acts in a bad way"; "Мякка сцеле, ды мулка спаць / Makes a soft bed, but hard to sleep"; "Лёстачкамі дух займае, а чорта думае / Entertains the soul with flattery, but thinks of devil"; "На вуснах – мёд, а на сэрцы – лёд / It is honey on the lips, but ice in the heart"; "У вочы ліском, а за вочы пяском / Like a fox in the eyes, by sand behind eyes"; "У вочы «саколю», а за вочы солю / Like a falcon in the eyes, by salt behind eyes";

"У вочы катком, а за вочы варком / Like a cat in the eyes, with pitch behind eyes"; "У вочы з мілым тварам, а за вочы крутым варам / With a nice face in the eyes, with boiling water behind eyes"; "Вуснамі мёд разлівае, а за пазухай камень трымае / Spills honey with lips, but holds a stone in the bosom".

Thus, femininity of Belarusians can result in cross-cultural misunderstanding and a cultural barrier in communication with people who favour masculinity.

**Indulgence** is the second dimension which constitutes a group of low risk of cultural barrier (27.1 on the average). In theory, relatively weak control is called "indulgence" and relatively strong control is called "restraint". Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms. People with this orientation have the perception that their actions are restrained by social norms and feel that indulging themselves is somewhat wrong (Hofstede, 2010). The comparison of the countries where the distance exceeds 50 per cent resulted in the following list: the US and Canada – 50; the UK – 51 and Australia – 53. The low score of Belarus in this respect illustrates the r e s t r a i n e d n a t u r e of Belarusians.

The researchers note that the desire for personal freedom and independence is not a significant value (29.8 per cent) (Кириенко, 2007, p. 68). On the whole, Babosov underlines restraint as a national characteristic of Belarusians (Бабосов 2004).

Certain passivity is declared as a result of this characteristic (Дубянецкі 1995, 36). In this regard many people would be pessimistic and claim: "Мусіць, так і трэба" / Probably, it's a must" or "Вышэй ад сваіх пят не падскочыш / You will not jump above your heels"; "Вышэй носа не пераскочыш / You will not jump above the nose"; "Звыш лобу вочы не ходзяць / The eyes do not walk above the forehead". Some Belarusian proverbs are to regulate the emotional sphere of a person: "Не смуціся, страціўшы, не цешся, знайшоўшы / Do not get embarrassed when lost, do not rejoice when found"; "Згубіўшы, не тужы, знайшоўшы, нікому не кажы / Do not grieve having lost, tell nobody having found". A number of sayings deal with the necessity to keep silent in a conversation: "Трымай язык на прывязі / Keep your tongue on a leash";

"*Маўчы ды патаквай / Keep silent and agree*". On the whole, the restrained nature of the Belarusians is not the main reason for cultural barrier, though certain specificity may cause misunderstanding.

**Long term orientation** is the third dimension in the group of low risk of cultural barrier (20.5 on average). G. Hofstede claims that it is "the extent to which a culture programs its members to accept delayed gratification of their material, social and emotional needs" (Hofstede, 2001, p. XX). The examples of low long term orientation are as follows: (a) respect for traditions; (b) most important events in life occurred in the past or occur in the present. Meanwhile high long term orientation means: (a) adaptation of traditions to new circumstances; (b) most important events in life will occur in the future (Hofstede, 2001, p. 360). Belarusian culture with the score of 56 does not express a clear preference on this dimension. It means that Belarusians are characterized by a combination of *r e s p e c t f o r t r a d i t i o n s* and *p r a g m a t i s m*.

The sociologists prove that the Belarusian youth respect their national traditions (97 per cent) (Бабосов, 2004, p. 212). Dubianetsky underlines Belarusians' conservatism, reluctance to radical changes, the wish "to live according to the laws of ancestors" (Дубянецкі, 1995, p. 40). At the same time the researcher claims they are characterized by pragmatism in life and irresistible optimism in any circumstances (Дубянецкі, 1995, pp. 32–33).

The double nature of Belarusians is revealed in a variety of proverbs. In the next pair of them a positive attitude to the old and the necessity of changes are emphasized: "*І ў старой печы агонь добра гарыць / The fire is good in an old oven too*" vs. "*Абы як жыць – толькі неба капціць / To live a moderate life is like to smoke the sky*". The optimistic nature of Belarusians is reflected in the proverbs like: "*Чорная хмара белым воблакам абернецца / The black cloud will transform into a white one*"; "*Будзе і на маім рынку торг / It will be the bargain at my market too*"; "*Загляне сонца і ў наша аконца / The sun will look into our window too*". So, the dimension of long term orientation represents little danger in intercultural communication of Belarusians with peoples under consideration.

Keeping in mind that what is good in one culture may be seen as mysterious in the other, the highlighted characteristics of Belarusian mentality – tolerance,

collectivism, cautiousness, modesty, restraint, respect for traditions and pragmatism – form the ground for some pessimism, because they may be a reason for intercultural misunderstanding in communication with people who live in a number of bordering (Poland, Lithuania and Latvia) and English-speaking countries (the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and Ireland).

### **Intercultural communication: Grounds for optimism**

Hopefully, speaking about intercultural communication of Belarusians there is a solid ground for optimism. The above stated differences do not reach 100 per cent on all the dimensions in the countries under consideration (See Table 3). The similarities of the compared cultures constitute 82.97 per cent in the bordering, 51.9 in the English-speaking countries, and on average 67.43 per cent.

In my point of view, the evidence for successful communication lies in visitors' opinions about Belarus. For example, Roberts writes in the Bradt Travel guide: "There is so much to discover in this country, most of it to do with the people who live here: unconditional hospitality, genuine warmth of spirit and a real desire to engage positively and fraternally with foreigners" (Roberts, 2010, p. I). Hospitality is an example of positive politeness: "when we are addressing the positive face of a person – that is our desire to be accepted and liked" (cf.: O'Sullivan, 1994, p. 83). Therefore, hospitality is reflected in the behaviour aimed to please another person. Kirienko proves that it is one of the main Belarusian values (76.1 per cent) (Кириенко, 2007, p. 68). In Belarusian proverbs which reflect this character trait, often a host and a guest are opposed in favour of the latter: *"Госць у хаце – бог у хаце / A guest in the house – God in the house"*, *"Госцю трэба дараваць, а гаспадару – прамаўчаць / It's necessary to forgive the guest, and the host should be silent"*. So, hospitality is the factor that may improve intercultural communication with other people.

Another factor of successful intercultural communication is the value of multiculturalism and multilingualism in the modern world. Luckily, much is performed in cross-cultural education all over the world. Its extension promotes mutual understanding: students can learn the peculiarities of different cultures – and the more is learnt about other cultures and languages, the easier the process of intercultural communication is.

## Conclusion

Having compared cultures of people living in Belarus, the bordering countries and English-speaking countries on the dimensions of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence we conclude that the average difference is 32.57 per cent: the difference with the bordering countries constitutes 19.03 per cent and it reaches 48.1 per cent in the English-speaking countries.

The characteristics of Belarusian mentality which presumably create cultural barriers are tolerance, collectivism and cautiousness. Modesty, restraint, respect for traditions and pragmatism belong to the characteristics of Belarusian mentality which may be the reason for a cultural barrier in intercultural communication to the least extent.

The factors that facilitate intercultural communication of Belarusians with peoples under consideration are: (1) the prevailing similarities of the compared cultures (67.43 per cent on average); (b) hospitality of Belarusians; (3) cross-cultural education worldwide.

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## BALTARUSIŠKAS MENTALITETAS TARPKULTŪRINĖS KOMUNIKACIJOS KONTEKSTE: PESIMIZMO IR OPTIMIZMO PRIEŽASTYS

**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje nagrinėjami faktoriai, turintys įtakos tarpkultūrinei komunikacijai tarp baltarusių ir žmonių, kurie gyvena su Baltarusija besiribojančiose šalyse ir šalyse, kuriose kalbama angliškai. Tyrimo tikslai: palyginti minėtų šalių tautų kultūras, atskleisti baltarusių mentaliteto ypatumus, kurie, tikėtina, sukuria kultūrinių barjerų, bei nustatyti faktorius, kurie palengvina tarpkultūrinę komunikaciją tarp baltarusių ir nagrinėjamų šalių tautų. Straipsnyje analizuojamos su Baltarusija besiribojančios šalys (Rusija, Ukraina, Lenkija, Lietuva ir Latvija) ir šalys, kuriose anglų kalba yra pirmoji oficialioji kalba (Jungtinė Karalystė, JAV, Kanada, Australija ir Airija). Tyrimas pagrįstas galios distancijos, individualizmo, vyriškumo, neapibrėžtumo vengimo, ilgalaikės orientacijos bei mėgavimosi dimensijomis (G. Hofstede). Vadovaujantis šiais kriterijais, sistemingai atskleidžiami baltarusiško mentaliteto ypatumai: tolerancija, kolektyvizmas, atsargumas, kuklumas, susivaržymas, pagarba tradicijoms ir pragmatizmas. Išskirtinių baltarusiško požiūrio bruožų atspindys patarlėse ir elgsenoje iliustruoja skirtumus, kurie gali būti tarpkultūrinių nesusikalbėjimų priežastis, taip pat akcentuojami faktoriai, kurie galėtų paskatinti tarpkultūrinę komunikaciją. Tyrimo rezultatus galima pritaikyti antrosios pakopos studentų, švietimo darbuotojų arba verslininkų tarpkultūrinės kompetencijos ugdymo procese.

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** mentalitetas; tarpkultūrinė komunikacija; galios distancija; individualizmas; vyriškumas; neapibrėžtumo vengimas; ilgalaikė orientacija; mėgavimasis.