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DOI: 10.1515/jolace-2016-0016

A cross-cultural study of the smile in the Russian- and English-speaking world

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Abstract

Although the smile is a universal facial expression, the use of smiles in communication varies across cultures. This may lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication. Both Americans and Europeans experience the same frustration and communication failure when they do not find smiling faces in Russia. At the same time, it is common for Russian people to perceive the smiles of Westerners as artificial and insincere. What is the reason for such a difference in perception? Why don't Russians smile in some situations?

The study of the use of the smile as a non-verbal sign in a few chosen communicative contexts across Russian, European and American cultures showed the difference in its meaning and distribution according to the cultural tradition. The reason could stem from the difference of Russia's history when compared to that of Western Europe, as well as in the specific restrictions in Russian Orthodox Christianity and the traditions of laughter in Russia. All the meanings and specific cases of distribution are clearly retained and expressed in the languages. If we compare the Russian *улыбка* and *улыбаться* with the English *smile*, we can see both common and distinctive semantic elements and different connotations.

Key words: intercultural communication, smile, non-verbal sign, language, semantics, connotation

Introduction

A smile is a non-verbal sign that plays an important role in social interaction, where it is used to express a myriad of meanings. Although most of them are universal, people use and interpret smiles according to their national, culture specific system of non-verbal communication. Therefore, problems in communication between cultures arise when national traditions and cross-cultural varieties are neglected.

Numerous studies have been recently conducted on specific facial morphology of smiles, and their meanings and interpretations across cultures (Barrett, 2002; Caldara, 2010; Niedenthal, 2010; Patterson, 2011; Trumble,

2004). Szarota carried out an analysis of cross-cultural differences in preference for smiling self-images among the users of an instant messaging site, and claimed that "smiling is a complex social phenomenon which can be explained from different angles, in relation to political systems, economic conditions, well-being, self-presentation strategies, and, last but not least, as non-verbal behaviour guided by specific cultural scripts" (Szarota, 2010).

If we compare Western (namely British and American) and Russian behavioural patterns where one uses formal smiles directed to a stranger, some differences are evident. I argue that this discrepancy in non-verbal behaviour is due to the difference in the most common meanings and interpretations of smiles, as a result of the specific cultural traditions and the history of cultural development.

In the present work I compare the use of formal smiles and the messages they convey in British, American and Russian non-verbal traditions. The next step is to explore how the differences in meanings and attitudes toward smiles are reflected and expressed in both Russian and the two main variants of the English language, as far as language keeps and treasures cultural clues and national mindset. Taking into account the dictionary analysis and after reviewing the works that attempt to explain the attitudes toward smiles and smiling in the cultures under investigation, I am to speculate on the historical events and cultural elements that might shape specific Russian appreciation of smiles and typical Russian facial expressions.

Comparing patterns of behaviour

This study mainly deals with formal smiles to a stranger, as these smiles highlight the main differences between the cultures under investigation and cause a communicative failure. Most Russian authors investigating smiles (Sternin, 2000; Ter-Minasiva, 2004; Volkova, 2000; Kreidlin 2002) often state that the smile in Russia is personal, not social. Russians are quite friendly and often use the smile as a form of informal communication with friends and acquaintances. They openly show different shades of positive emotion, however, in the formal environment of a public place, smiles are rare. In Western Europe and the USA, formal or courteous smiles in public are prescribed by the rules of behaviour in order to create a comfortable environment for successful communication. The well-known 'American smile' is a semi-conscious, socially-expected mutual facial expression. Both Americans and Europeans experience the same frustration and indicate communication failure when they do not encounter smiles on people's faces in public places like streets, public transport and shops in Russia. It should be acknowledged, however, that smiles are

becoming more popular in Russian social communication. Despite this, foreigners continue perceiving Russians as sullen and gloomy people. On the other hand, Russians who travel to Europe or the United States wonder why strangers smile at them in situations where there is 'nothing to smile at' or no apparent reason for a close friendly interaction.

As a result of my studies conducted in 2006 and 2013, which include surveys among young European, American and Russian participants and a short analysis of examples from fiction and the press, I have identified four basic communicative contexts where the difference between the national behavioural patterns concerning the use of smiles is obvious. These are namely: a short interaction between strangers in public places (e.g. in the street, on public transport, etc.); greetings and communication between a citizen and a public officer in public places (e.g. at customs, personnel departments, visa offices, civil registry offices, etc.); public presentation when a person applies for or has a high position in business or politics; and greetings and offer of services in trade (commerce).

What I mean by 'communicative context' is a particular behaviour setting, which, according to Patterson, is a specific physical environment with associated social norms that constrain individuals in a relatively predictable programme of events (Patterson, 2014).

In the first context of a brief interaction between strangers in the street, both in Britain and the USA, it is common for people to smile while making short eye contact. The Russian behavioural pattern in this case also consists of eye contact, which could be a bit longer than the average American one. The smile is optional and still a fairly rare sign, despite the new emerging trend in Russia to appreciate smiles between strangers especially among the young generation.

The meaning of this pattern is positive social intentions, the lack of aggressiveness and the sense of belonging to the same community. Niedenthal calls it 'affiliative' (Niedenthal, 2010). While its basic meaning is the same among British, American and Russian cultures, the forms of expression differ, i.e. smiles in one cultures and eye contacts in the other.

For centuries, in Western Europe and North America, a smile to a stranger in a situation of minimal contact in public places has been used as social identification and meant: 'I'm like you, I'm not dangerous, I belong here'. Literature gives good examples of this function of smiles, as for example in Galsworthy's 'The Country House': "...a friendly smile became fixed upon her face, and of those who saw it - shop-girls, women of fashion, coachmen, clubmen, policemen - most felt a little warmth about their hearts" (Galsworthy, 1995). Ter-Minasova calls the smile an integral feature of British non-verbal communication, which is a sign of the lack

of aggressiveness towards other people (Ter-Minasova, 2004). Larina mentions unfailing cheerful smiles as one of the conventional means (linguistic and paralinguistic) that help to realise special British strategies of positive politeness: “pay special attention to the interlocutor, exaggerate your interest and liking, be optimistic” (Larina, 2003). Jobses and Guerrero (Jobses, Guerrero 2001) regard occasional smiles or nods and expressions of interest as elements of polite behavioural patterns, typically reflecting moderate levels of non-verbal immediacy and verbal person centeredness in situations where people have little or no information about each other. As for the American smile, Lapeyrouse calls it a social mask which helps to hide feelings and therefore isolate and separate people in America (Lapeyrouse, 1997). According to Ter-Minasova (Ter-Minasova, 2004), another meaning of smiles in American culture is an ideological one: “It inspires people of the USA to believe in the great good fortune and luck to be citizens of this country”. Lapeyrouse also tends to explain “standard daily social American smiles” through the American creed of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” that makes American people often believe and assume in their daily life that they should be ‘happy’ and enjoy life, even if in reality they are not and don’t know why (Lapeyrouse, 1997). Nowadays, such a smile has the same meaning in Britain and America, but it is not necessarily used in socialising between strangers and depends largely on the gender and age of the participants of this communication. The following example from an Internet site demonstrates this clearly:

“It’s a risk game - I could smile at someone and they’ll smile back, and we’ll have a nice little moment of human contact (30%). Or, I’ll get no response (50%). Or a random sexual come on, hey baby, you wanna come out with me? (15%) Or he’ll come after me into a damn Blockbuster and I will have to spend fifteen minutes doing safety calculations and trying to figure out if there’s a rock or something I can grab, and glancing behind me as I walk home in the dark (5%). But you know what? That 5% does a whole lot to negate the 30% tiny happy feelings, and the 15% of random crap isn’t much fun either” (Ampersand, 2004).

Communicative failure occurs when the members of one culture do not find the element of their behavioural pattern in the other culture and misread the situation. Thus, Americans and Europeans suspect Russians of moodiness and even hostility when the latter do not smile in public places. Moreover, the long-lasting Russian eye contact seems alarming to them. Russians in turn do not understand why a stranger would smile at them, and look for a meaningful explanation to that smile, such as ‘the person is in good spirits’, ‘they like me and want to get acquainted’, ‘they confused me with someone else who they know’ or ‘they know me but I don’t remember them’. Russians mostly use smiles in

personal communication. A smile to a stranger could be considered as a sign of special favour to the addressee or willingness to switch to a more personal relationship. Pavlovskaya advises foreigners in Russia to be more attentive and cautious when smiling to strangers in public places, especially if the stranger is of the other gender (Pavlovskaya, 2003). The other possible meaning behind smiling to strangers in Russian communicative tradition could be a sort of mild criticism, because laughter and smiles in Russia have often had ironic or even satirical value. A smiling or laughing person in Russia could be interpreted as making fun of something or someone, and people often sense mockery rather than greetings in smiles. Sternin supports the claim denoting unclear, fuzzy distinction between smiles and laughter to be characteristic of Russians (Sternin, 2000). He gives the examples of rhetoric often addressed to smiling people, like, for instance, 'What's so funny?' or 'Have I said anything funny?' Nonetheless, Russians, especially after travelling to Europe and/or the US, appreciate smiles in this setting rather positively, as a sign of friendliness and usually smile back. We can speak about the obvious changes in the attitude toward smiles in a short contact with a stranger among the younger generation of Russians.

Greeting and communication between a citizen and a public officer in public places is the other situation where Russians do not expect smiles, while Americans and Europeans feel that smiling could give them a sense of confidence and security. In European and American cultures, public officers being representative of the state or an institution feel socially equal to all the citizens. Their behavioural pattern means that they are ready to help, to carry out their duty. Smiles help to create a general atmosphere of peace and stability particularly needed in such public places where citizens meet the state, which the public officers represent. It means that nerves are tense and people need special communicative strategies to cope with the situation. Smiles of British and American policemen, and customs and security officers give the impression of safety and order, create the congruent atmosphere and are appreciated as conventional signs of politeness and willingness to carry out duties. We can see this clearly in the following examples:

"'There you will see the sign, a big board... that's where...' - he smiled his big smile again as he tore off the piece of paper and handed it over to me. I started getting confused halfway through, but I was determined not to ask anyone else. I didn't want another negative response to spoil the childlike happiness that the policeman's courtesy had brought to my otherwise unrewarding day. I finally managed to get to where the directions led me". (Reflections of a Statesman: The Selected Writings and Speeches of J. Enoch Powel, selected by Rex Collings).

This fact is also evident in this excerpt of American fiction:

"This time as I walked towards the customs gate, the officer smiled and just waved me through, barely glancing at my passport and wishing me a nice trip. I felt the 'power' with me" (Tammy Tillotson "My Twenty-Third Psalm").

In Russia, public officers acting on behalf of the state or representing an institution feel that their social status is higher than that of a private citizen. Consequently, the meaning of their behavioural pattern is an emphasis of seriousness and importance of their work and position. It reflects the power of the state over an individual, characteristic of Russian mentality. This behavioural pattern is due to high Power Distance Index of Russian culture. At the same time an individual under this pressure of the state may use an ingratiating smile to interact with representatives of power, which is supported by Russian literature illustrating the context. Such ingratiating smiles reflect the usual awe of a superior, a wish to make contact and to please. As it was described by Russian writer Vladimdir Sologub in one of his short story, "laughing means familiarity, smiling apropos is quite another thing. Such a smile means I understand, I rejoice, I can feel, I agree, I feel grateful, but do not dare put myself on a par with you" (Vladimir Sologub "An Old Lady", 1850).

For the purpose of creating a successful public image, people in Great Britain and North America deliberately use smiles. Business executives as well as politicians and celebrities usually smile while giving interviews and speaking in public. They mostly use a broad smile, showing teeth, the so-called dominance smile (Niedentahl, 2010). In Russia until recently there has been a trend to keep a serious facial expression in the situation of public self-presentation, especially when the person occupies a high position. The situation has changed a little from the time of Perestroika. A smile appeared on the faces of Russian leaders, starting with Mikhail Gorbachev, whose smile won over Europe in 1984 (Ottawa Citizen, 1984; Ter-Minasova, 2004).

When describing the dominance smile, many authors denote the meaning of social prosperity and success. It shows that the person is self-confident and has achieved a lot in life. Such dominance smiles reflect social status and control, and display a sense of leadership and dominance in human societies (Tracy & Robins, 2004, 2008; Senior et al., 1999). Tony Blair and Bill Clinton have been known to be "skilled proponents of the dominant smile" (Senior et al., 1999). To be a powerful attribute, such a smile should demonstrate beautiful, smooth, well-kept teeth — "big white teeth like luxury hotels on the Florida coastline" (Aldersly, 1996). Nowadays, the British public mostly considers smiles of politicians to be a false courtly mask. Interesting studies showing changes in the attitude towards public smiling were done in the UK in 2005. Some results were presented in "The

Scotsman' (Alastair, 2005) and claimed that receiving a smile generates much higher levels of stimulation to the brain and the heart than being given money or having a cigarette, however, the amount of pleasure depends on who is smiling. Thus, a child's smile or that of a celebrity have a much stronger effect than that of a politician or a member of the Royal family. "Political smiles were voted the worst, particularly for trust, followed by royalty. In contrast to loved ones, the fake smiles of royalty and politicians are detected and have the opposite effect, giving the person an untrustworthy and hypocritical image" — said Dr David Lewis, the psychologist who analysed the tests (Alastair, 2005).

A serious facial expression in the Russian tradition of self-presentation of politicians or business leaders implies their serious intentions, validity and reliability, since smiles in Russian non-verbal communication most notably display a cheerful mood. So everything connected with a state affair, business and any important social events justly does not involve a smile. People in important positions should demonstrate that they understand the importance of their tasks and the seriousness of the problems to be solved. Smiles in this case would indicate that the person is careless and irresponsible, and therefore not credible. When smiles are used in Russian self-presentation, there should be some specific reason for it. This is illustrated by the episodes 'War and Peace' by Leo Tolstoy, where Emperor Alexander I uses the smile to maintain the fighting spirit of the troops as well as to create an atmosphere of confidence and well-being.

Commercial smiles have been used in Great Britain and in the United States for centuries. They mean that the seller is interested in the customers' loyalty, in communication and collaboration with the customer, and is ready to provide the service. It is directly related to respect and complaisance.

In Russia, the seller should make eye contact and offer help - smiles are optional. This pattern means that the seller noticed the client and is ready to provide the service. This Russian pattern could be explained as a soviet-era holdover, when the fixed wage of service workers and shop assistants did not depend on the sale of goods or the number of clients served. Sellers or shop assistants who possessed a deficit felt their power over a buyer eager to the deficit, so they didn't need to smile in order to win their customer's loyalty. It was the customer who could smile ingratiatingly in this situation. Since Perestroika, a new commercial behaviour style and new behavioural patterns in the service sector have emerged in Russia. Nowadays, Russian staff working in the service industry is taught to smile at every client.

It should be stated though that some new trends concerning the more frequent use of smiles in Russian behavioural patterns have arisen recently. Some Russian politicians and public leaders have begun to use the smile. There

are new public service ads (PSAs) calling everyone to smile: "Smile and the world will smile at you in return!" or "A smile is an affordable way to look better". Service personnel who are trained by Western partners and are interested in customers use smiles more often. The Internet culture has established a particular style of communication. Thus, Smileys (emoticons) have become largely widespread.

Studying languages

As a constituent part of every culture, a language displays the mentality and the world outlook of the nation. By studying a language, one can find reliable information regarding the concept of a smile, its appreciation and the attitude toward this phenomenon in the national mindset. The corpus-based approach, with reference to The Corpus of Global Web-Based English and the Russian National Corpus, would help to reach this goal. But even the investigation of dictionaries can provide some interesting material, at least initially. So in this article I shall confine myself to the analysis of the dictionary definitions of the key words *smile* (n/v) and *улыбка/улыбаться* [smile/to smile], then compare the synonyms and analyse phraseological units of this semantic field. (Refer to the list of the dictionaries used for the purpose of this study in the appendix).

The simple comparison of dictionary entries defining the concept of a smile gives some insight into the subject matter. The keywords representing the concept of a smile coincide in their meaning in Russian and the two variants of the English language. Examples of these include expressing amusement, pleasure, approval, and sometimes bitter feelings, emotions and attitudes, ranging from pleasure to derision. However, there are still some specific definitions and examples in the entries that reveal thought-provoking facts. For example, Russian dictionaries (Dictionary of Russian language by Dal, 1882; Dictionary of Russian language by Ozhegov, 1988), among the other more common definitions of a smile start by pointing out the willingness to laugh: 'smile means to laugh silently' (Dictionary of Russian language by Dal, 1882). This is in contrast to British and American dictionaries which do not mention laughter. One could regard this fact as the manifestation of a closer connection between the laugh and the smile in the minds of Russian people.

It was also found out that the English verb *to smile* has wider syntactical and lexical compatibility when compared to the Russian *улыбаться* [to smile]. Some combinations like phrasal verbs reveal semantic elements of affective emotional impact. For instance, when combined with the preposition *away*, smile acquires a specific meaning: *smile away* means to drive away a person's vexation, like fears, tears, and grief, bringing the person into or out of a mood by smiling (Cambridge

International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs, 1997). *Smile away* – drive away or get rid of something bad by smiling or a smile, for example, ‘as the child smiled away his tears’ (Webster’s New World Dictionary of American Language, 1957). Both in the Russian and in the two variants of the English language there is an expression *smile through one’s tears* (улыбаться сквозь слезы). However, there might be a difference in context when this expression is used in speech in the Russian and the English-speaking world. The metaphorical meaning of the phrasal verb *smile on* is also specific in English. It refers to accepting behaviour that is slightly bad because you do not consider it important and because you like the person who is responsible for it, as in the example ‘Americans tended to smile on misdemeanours of their presidents’ (Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs, 1997).

In transitive and metaphorical meanings both Russian and English verbs *улыбаться* and *to smile* have semantic elements of benevolence and bright aspects, like in the example ‘судьба улыбалась ему’ [Fate smiled on him]. Meanwhile this Russian verb can express rather specific metaphorical meaning of fraud and failed expectations. The following phrase is a good illustration of the last: ‘Чувствую улыбнется мне мой отпуск в это лето’ [I feel like my vacation will smile at me this summer] meaning that I will not have any vacations this summer (Dictionary of Russian language in 4 volumes, 1999).

By studying the synonyms that express different types of smiles and smiling, one can find that the Russian words denoting broad smile teeth bared [оскал, ослабиться, скалиться] mostly have negative connotation, while the English word *grin* is neutral. It might be due to the fact that Russian words maintain an association with their origin - the aggressive expression of animals’ grin. At the same time, both in Russian and in the two variants of the English language, one can find the words which convey the meaning of an arrogant smile of supremacy or unpleasant smile of rudeness with evident negative connotations: *leer, smirer, sneer, скалиться, щериться, ослабиться*. It shows that the feeling and manifestation of disdain and self-satisfaction is judged negatively in all three cultures.

An inquiry into phraseological units is of special interest in this case. It reveals unique elements of the national mind and creativity. According to Ter-Minasova, idioms, proverbs and sayings illustrate the way of life, geographical position, history and traditions of a nation (Ter-Minasova, 2004). Using these creative linguistic means, people express their moral regard for various phenomena. Such nationally specific forms of expression are also of great interest.

In the Russian language, one can find much less phraseological units with the words representing the concept of smile, than in both variants of the English

language. Russians seem to use the word *смех* [laughter] in idiomatic expressions and phraseology more willingly than *улыбка* [smile]. There are still several examples of Russian proverbs and idiomatic expression that could be analysed and compared with the English phraseology. The two Russian idioms '*улыбка до ушей*' [a smile from ear to ear] and '*рот до ушей*' [a mouth from ear to ear] (informal.) have no negative connotation connected with the aggressive demonstration of teeth, but on the contrary, a shade of positive benevolent playfulness (Dictionary of Russian idioms and phrases by Fedorov, 2008). These expressions are very similar to the English phrase '*be all smiles*', having the same meaning of a sincere, cheerful, happy look with the additional meaning of unexpectedness: 'She spent the whole yesterday shouting at people and yet this morning she's all smiles' (Cambridge International dictionary of Idioms, 1998).

The negative view of a permanent, perpetual smile is expressed in English and Russian phraseology. An old British proverb '*a smiling boy is a bad servant*' (The Wordsworth Dictionary of Proverbs, 1993) is close to the Russian idiom '*набьёт и улыбка оскмину*' [even a smile may become boring/annoying] (Dictionary of Russian language by V. Dal, 1882) in its suspicious attitude toward such smiles. There is a hint of criticism to inappropriate smiles in the English expression '*to take / wipe ... etc. the smile off someone's face*', which can be illustrated by the following example: 'Wipe that grin off your face, this is a serious matter!' (Longman dictionary of English Language and Culture, 1992).

The American slang expression '*smiling faces*' (Cassell's Dictionary of Slang, 2000) meaning false friends and deceivers, together with the British proverb '*The smiler with a knife under his cloak*', condemn the use of smile as a mask that hides dislike and even aggression. The ability to use smiles in this function is often presented in British and American dictionaries.

However, in some American and British phraseological units, a flattering smile worn as a mask has no negative connotation or criticism. Thus, the idiomatic expression '*to grin and bear*', which is well-illustrated in the following example 'I hate having my wife's parents to stay, but I suppose I'll just have to grin and bear it' (Longman dictionary of English Language and Culture, 1992) shows that the mask of a smiling face might be very useful and in some cases even expected, reflecting a social necessity of a polite behaviour. The same necessity is presented in the American idiom '*smile and smirk*' with the meaning 'to work' (Cassell's Dictionary of Slang, 2000).

There are many expressions in both British and American English that render the use of smiles as an active and positive tool to moderate and encourage the communicants and communication itself, like '*keep smiling*' (br./am.); '*come up smiling*' (br./am.); '*smile through one's tears*' (br.); '*smile when you say that*', e.g.

'That's pretty rude. You'd better smile when you say that' (Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms, 1998). It reveals the long tradition of English-speaking cultures to use courteous smiles for public social purposes.

Speculating on the historical and cultural impact

Some possible reasons behind the difference in appreciation and attitude towards smiling in Russia and the English-speaking world could be found in the historical context that had a noticeable impact on the development of culture-specific rules of communication.

Among the authors studying smiles and smiling traditions in different cultures from a historical perspective, there are those who have the following mutual ideas concerning the topic.

First of all, in different studies the authors point out the influence of Christian attitude toward smiles and laughter over the appreciation of these phenomena. In his book 'The philosophy of the laugh', Karasev reflects on the mournful and stern image of Christ and the question regarding the smile of the Savior (Karasev, 1996). In the Christian antithesis of the laugh and tears, the former is associated with the world of evil presented in the image of the laughing devil, while the latter is considered positive, by bringing a man closer to the world of goodness, putting him off the mortal life and showing him the heavenly world. By experiencing grief and sympathy a man can come closer to heaven. The question about the smiling Christ stirs up disputes. It is the core question of Umberto Eco's detective novel 'The name of the Rose' that tells a story of a medieval monastery where the two contrasting opinions on laughter clash in a battle between an old Benedictine monk and a Franciscan. In fact, the positive attitude toward the smile and laughter has also existed in Christian discourse. In investigating the role of humour and laughter in religion, Geybels writes: "Humour is an integral dish on the table of God's creation and so it should be on the Christian menu" (Geybels, 2011). He backs this idea with examples from the scriptures.

Most of the studies claim the important distinction between smiles and laughter in Christianity (both in the Western Catholic and the Russian Orthodox churches), where the laugh is considered to be the sin of intemperance and impropriety, while the smile is appreciated as the expression of harmony and quiet joy. In Russian churches one can still find the preaching of texts that condemn merrymaking and laughter. The authors of some Russian studies about the topic in question claim that there is less distinction between smiles and laughter in Russian mentality compared to the Western one (Sternin, 2000; Ter-Minasova, 2004; Tokareva 2005). Moreover, laughing is considered to be more popular than smiling in Russia. Volokova has an interesting explanation for this

phenomenon, speaking about Russian extremity and a very little sense of balance: “being the balanced expression of kindness and golden measure, a smile can’t be a characteristic Russian trait” (Volkova, 2000). The study of the emotional concepts of ‘Smile’ and ‘Laugh’ in British and American English (corpus analysis) made by Gabrielyan leads to the conclusion, that as opposed to the laugh, the smile is more characteristic of the British mentality, as an attribute of good manners and higher status (Gabrielyan, 2015).

Some Russian authors (Gachev, 1997; Volkova, 2000) compare the images of Russia and North America. They highlight the symbolical meaning assigned to smiles and teeth in American culture, representing the idea of festivity, openness, self-assurance and materialism. The main feature of the Russian face is said to be the eyes. Since Russian Orthodox Christianity and Russian culture in general consider suffering to be the way to heaven (to the absolution from sins), the Russian archetypical image is sad and not smiling.

Traditions of laughter could also have some impact on the attitude toward the image of smiling faces and the use of the smile in social interaction. Comparing the laughing traditions in Western Europe and in Russia, one can see some major differences. Mikhail Bakhtin, who created one of the best Laughter theories, wrote about the central role that different carnivals and vulgar festivals played in medieval Europe creating a kind of the second world, the other side of the official life (Bakhtin, 1965). There were lots of Feasts of Fools, street performances, rural feasts and carnivals throughout the year in European countries. One of the distinctive features of that ‘vulgar laughter’ was its democratic, public and general character. Carnivals helped to maintain contact between people who had almost nothing in common in the hierarchically divided society of medieval feudal Europe. So the unceremonious, free and easy contact between all the people at the feasts was a crucial part of the carnival, especially since the socially created distance between people disappeared for that time. Meanwhile, in Russian rural entertainment and feasts, one cannot find such democratic, nationwide atmosphere of unity and free contact between different social strata. Furthermore, many authors point out that such a specific phenomenon in Russian history as persecution against *skomorokhs* (travelling minstrels, fools) existed in the 17th century. The church persecuted minstrels, actors, fools who entertained people and somehow were associated with anything merry or cheerful.

It should also be mentioned that the process of rehabilitation of laughter and entertainment started in Russia shortly after the reforms of Peter the Great, who regularly organised festivals and various entertaining and merrymaking events full of jokes, tricks and carnivalesque jolly atmosphere. Since that time, the

Western tradition of courtly smiling had influenced the Russian etiquette of high society. Samples from Russian literature of the 19th century show that a courteous smile at a stranger was accepted in Russian high society before the socialist revolution. A special content analysis of 'Anna Karenina' by Leo Tolstoy carried out by Stefanenko revealed the wide spread popularity of the smile as an element of non-verbal communication among aristocrats as well as the other classes (Stefanenko, 2014). Among the smiles registered in the novel there were a number of formal, courteous smiles, used for social purposes. The examples of ingratiating smiles, addressed to a person of higher social status have also been found in Russian classical literature. Taking into account Russian fiction and non-fiction texts, we can suppose that formal smiles were adopted in Romanov's Russia by the educated society, as well as by servants and salesmen, who used them for commercial purposes. It is difficult to figure out whether Russian farmers and peasants practised formal, affiliative smiles for social purposes, but they definitely used them in personal settings.

One can argue that today, the symbolical image of Russia does not include a smile. Most Russian authors agree that there cannot be a smile on the Russian face after the harsh experience of the 20th century which included two devastating wars, the Communist regime and the hard times of the recent reforms and experiments. Stefanenko claims that some negative attitude towards social and formal smiles is not the distinctive feature of Russian culture, but rather of soviet and post-soviet culture, when "social smiles just disappeared during the times of communist regime and people grew out of the habit to smile in public" (Stefanenko, 2014).

Conclusion

National manners and customs, and culturally conditioned social demeanour including non-verbal signs matter in inter-cultural communication as much as spoken languages. A universal human facial gesture 'the smile' is used and appreciated according to national culturally embedded non-verbal traditions. Thus, in Russia people widely apply smiles in personal interaction in order to convey a wide variety of meanings, but do not usually use them in several socially important contexts of formal communication. This should be taken into account in case of contacts between Russians and the representatives from other nations, where formal, courteous smiles play an important role in social interaction, being an element of the corresponding behavioural pattern. The fact is that very often the meaning of such social smiles is denoted in Russia by other non-verbal elements. At the same time there are situations where smiles are considered to be redundant in Russian tradition, whereas they would be quite appropriate in

the English-speaking world. It can happen because of the divergence between the most common meanings of the non-verbal sign in the cultures, as well as because of some cultural characteristics. Different norms of etiquette and social system also matter a lot.

Incongruity of the behavioural patterns might in some cases reveal the variety in the national attitude and appreciation of some phenomenon. Language is a wonderful treasurer of the national history and mentality, where one can find a lot of facts testifying to the national system of values. Thus, lexical compatibility with the English verb 'to smile' as well as British and American phraseology reveal the semantic elements, which are absent in Russian. First of all, the smile has the meaning of an effective measure that influences people's behaviour, and encourages both parties in communication. The other important thing found in the English phraseology is the appreciation of the smile as a social mask useful and necessary in polite communication. The Russian verb *улыбаться* [to smile] in turn has the implication of fraud in its meaning. There are also several synonyms of Russian and English 'улыбка' and 'smile' having negative connotations.

Essentially, the historical development of a nation shapes and influences customs and traditions including specific communicative patterns and rules. As was mentioned by Steven Laperouse, "a history of the facial expression and their 'language' of various nations would surely be an interesting work to read – though probably difficult to research, determine and write" (Laperouse, 1997). However, it is a good guess that the Russian Orthodox Church with its appreciation of suffering and tears, and historical periods of persecutions against laughter (skomorokhs, fools...) as well as wide spread traditions of various carnival laughter in Western Europe had an impact on the general attitude toward smiles in Russian and English-speaking cultures, respectively.

In conclusion, one can argue that like verbal language, non-verbal signs are deeply embedded within a complex cultural system. Hence, even a simple gesture such as a smile could have various implications and interpretations across different cultures.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Professor Svetlana Ter-Minasova for scientific supervision and for the very productive comments on the earlier draft of the paper. I am grateful to Chiara Fabrizio for her detailed feedback.

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Appendix

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