

КУЛЬТУРНАЯ АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ



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FROM DECEPTION TO GIFT (Application of interpersonal communication theories to anthropological analysis)

The current exploratory and explanatory research argues that theories, which were developed in the field of interpersonal communication, could be applied for the analysis in anthropology. It is supposed that interpersonal and intergroup communication itself could be the subject of anthropological research. The author argues that recent development of the both disciplines – interpersonal communication and anthropology – gives scholars opportunity to analyze complicated cases of human communication both cross-culturally and inside individual ethnic groups. In the current research this possibility is demonstrated by the example of modifications of such a communication phenomenon as “gift”. The history of the development of this communicative tool is considered, starting with the pre-gift phase of exchange and the stage of origin of the phenomenon of gift exchange, then shows the form of degradation of the mechanism of donation to the phenomenon of bribery, and finally, the form of revival of the practice of giving in some modern small ethnic communities in the post-Soviet period.

Keywords: human communication, cultural anthropology, modes of exchange, cultural change, the Kula exchange tradition, gift, bribery, Taiwan, Mongolia, Russian Far East

Introduction

In my current exploratory and explanatory research I intend to clarify whether theories, which were developed in the field of interpersonal communication, could be applied for the analysis in anthropology. So far as through communication people meet their basic needs I suppose that interpersonal and intergroup communication itself could be the subject of anthropological research, especially in the field of cultural anthropology. In this paper I argue that recent development of the both disciplines – interpersonal communication and anthropology – gives scholars opportunity to analyze complicated cases of human communication both cross-culturally and inside individual ethnic groups.

In this paper I show this in terms of interpersonal communication theories applied for analysis of four cases in domain of cultural anthropology. Two cases are examples of cross-cultural communication and another two illustrate the communication inside two individual ethnic groups. In the exploratory part of this study I observe the phenomenon of cultural change [25] on example of modes of exchange transformations, again both cross-culturally and inside individual ethnic groups. I focus on the switching between such opposite types of modes of exchange as balanced and unbalanced exchange [18, p. 339] on example of gifting phenomenon.

The concept of ‘gift’ is common both for anthropology, where it is a subject of many studies, and for interpersonal communication, where it is distinguished as a form of nonverbal communication. Such interdisciplinary quality of the ‘gift’ concept gives opportunity to verify possibility to apply interpersonal communication theories in the domain of anthropology.

For the anthropological analysis I use several theories from the field of interpersonal communication: Expectancy Violations Theory, Interaction Adaptation Theory, Face Theory, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, and Constructivism Theory. To show the phases of ‘gift’ phenomenon development as communication instrument, I designed my paper to begin with non-gifting phase in Lamay case (Taiwan) to the phase of mature practice of gift exchanging in Kula tradition; and then demonstrate the phase of gift degradation into bribe phenomenon in modern Mongolia, and finally the phase of gifting practice as a tool in purifying and revival of an indigenous culture in Kamchatka.

I. First Pair of Cases (Cross-Cultural Context: A1 & A2)

Case A1 (Non-Gifting Phase)

In early Chinese [26], Dutch [9], and Spaniards [24] documents about their visiting and staying in Taiwan we found several records describing dangers of Taiwan shore, especially for shipwreck crews [22]. Many historical records about

killing of shipwrecked crew on Taiwan shores could be found in American sources of the 19-th century [1].

The most famous among recorded shipwreck event took place in 1867. It is said in the historical record that after hours of rowing in the lifeboats and safety reaching ashore the shipwrecked crew of the American bark the *Rover* was murdered by members of an aboriginal village named Koalut (龜仔角) [8, p. 3]. After that event the American officials started negotiations with Qing authorities and an aboriginal leader. The purpose was to make the southern Taiwan area safer for mariners. One among means to solve the problem was an idea to build a lighthouse or a fort there.

The earliest Chinese record (1349) from the Yuan Dynasty period (1271–1368), called “Brief Accounts of the Island Barbarians”, mentions two places Liu Chiu (琉球) and Pi-she-ye (毗舍耶). Thompson [26, p. 166] informs that at the time of this record the name Taiwan was not yet used, and both Liu Chiu, and Pi-she-ye have commonly been thought to refer to parts of Formosa. In the “Brief Accounts of the Island Barbarians” the ancient Chinese author Wang Tanyuan describing Liu Chiu inhabitants [26, p. 169] says: “Should a person from another country offend them, they [kill him and] cutting off the raw flesh, eat it [or, cut the flesh off while he is still alive and eat it], and they take his head and hang it on a wooden pole”. At the same time the Chinese author mentions the trading which was in use with that place. Chinese used to sell pearls, agates, gold, beads, coarse dishware, and pottery from the present Zhejiang province; they used to buy gold nuggets, yellow beans, millet, sulfur, beeswax, and the hides of deer.

Among the records of Dutch colonists in Taiwan there is one, which describes a conflict which took place in 1636 on the island with the name Lamay or Hsiao Liu Chiu (琉球嶼), not far away from nowadays Kaohsiung (高雄). The document informs that a crew of a Dutch ship was killed there [9, p. 14]. Besides, in the same Dutch record we can find the description of the following special episode, which could be interpreted as a subject of the both disciplines – anthropology and human communication:

There is a certain island about 3 miles from Formosa, called Tugin in the native language [i. e. Lamey or Lambay]. We called it the Golden Lion Island; because it was there that the captain of the ship *Golden Lion* was murdered with all his crew, when attempting to take in some provisions. The inhabitants of Tugin are constantly at war with the people of our island [Taiwan], and do not permit men of any other nation to land. Now and then the Chinese visit the place for the purpose of trading. Those visitors do not land, however, but remain in their junks and the inhabitants row out and hand them the things they wish to sell with the right hand and receive the price of them with the left. Indeed, they are exceedingly careful about the exchanges on both sides, neither party trusting the other.

Lately, some 60 inhabitants of Soulang village, belonging to us, sailed with some Chinese to the Golden Lion Island. They were dressed like Chinese, and pretended to have gone for the purpose of bartering. On one of the natives ap-

proaching the junk and handing up what he wished to sell, he was suddenly seized by the arm, dragged into the ship, and cut into many pieces. Thereupon, they returned home, and fancied they had obtained a great victory. Such is their manner of carrying on war [9, p. 14].

Lamay Incident: Interaction-Centered Theories Application

To understand the background of Lamay incident I address to the theories, which were developed to explain and predict social interaction behavior: Expectancy Violations and Interaction Adaptation Theories. Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), which was developed by Judee Burgoon, a communication scholar at the University of Arizona [12, p. 85], pays attention to the interpretation of behavior in interaction. According to EVT, which is focused on the study of nonverbal communication, some behaviors have clear social meanings, but others display different messages depending on the context. EVT theorists [4] argue that “because expectancies are central to interaction in all cultures, EVT is applicable to cross-cultural interactions” [27, p. 201]. The goal of Interaction Adaptation Theory (IAT), which “was crafted as an extension and expansion of EVT” [12, p. 93], is to predict how communicators will respond to one another in interaction [27, p. 195]. Both “EVT and IAT may help researchers understand a wide variety of contexts ranging from situations where uncertainty is high and expectations are based on stereotypical knowledge, to circumstances where interaction is strongly patterned and based on intimate knowledge of the other” [27, p. 201].

In further development of the both theories they have been applied to such specific communication context as “the influence of expectations or adaptation on the detection of deception” [27, p. 196]. It was found that unusual behavior was more likely to be seen as deceptive. Moreover, the IAT researchers argue that deceivers show more concern for self-presentation than truth-tellers [27, pp. 199–200]. To explain how people deceive and how people are deceived the special theories were designed: Information Manipulation Theory (IMT) [19] and Interpersonal Deception Theory (IDT) [3]. Unfortunately, both theories still now are in the stage of “fledgling theory-in-progress” [20, p. 224] rather than fully developed theories. The limitations of EVT are related to its ability to predict patterns of interaction; the biggest limitation of IAT is in fact that there is very limited empirical evidence supporting the predictions of this theory about adaptation in interaction [27, pp. 200–201].

I interpret the Lamay incident in terms of deception concept, which was developed in EVT and IAT. The nonverbal behavior of the 60 Soulang village inhabitants is a bright example of expectancy violation, which was used consciously, and so could be interpreted as nonverbal deception. The incident took place in the context of cross-cultural interaction and was based on stereotypical knowledge about high level probability of violence from both sides of the communication participants. In such circumstances deceivers designed an effective

method, which helped them to avoid detection. Thus, despite of the interaction-centered theories high limitations they are able to brighten up the nature of cross-cultural interactions on Taiwan shores, which took place in the remote past.

In conclusion I can reconstruct the reason for emergence of the famous Taiwan tradition to rob and kill shipwrecked crews. It seems the purpose was just to avoid uncertainty of cross-cultural interaction: fewer interactions meant less uncertainty. Probably it corresponds to the similar reasons, which on the shores of Trobriand Islands (archipelago of coral atolls off the eastern coast of New Guinea) led to development of the opposite (in terms of ethical concerns) communication phenomenon of the ceremonial exchange system [18]. The Trobrianders' ceremonial exchange system is based on specific shipwreck mythology, which was developed from the long time experience of the similar episodes of danger and high level uncertainty during the cross-cultural communication on the foreign shores.

Case A2 (Gifting Phase)

In the beginning of 20-th century in Trobriand Islands the famous anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski studied Kula tradition, which is also known as the Kula exchange or Kula ring [15]. It is a ceremonial exchange system which involves thousands of individuals. Participants travel in long distance in order to exchange Kula valuables which consist of red shell-disc necklaces and white shell armbands. According to Malinowski [15] and many other anthropologists after him, Kula valuables are non-use items traded purely for purposes of enhancing social status. Kula valuables never remain for long in the hands of the recipients; they must be passed on to other partners, thus constantly circling around the ring. Important chiefs can have hundreds of partners while less significant participants may have just several of them.

Kula tradition is connected with dangerous traveling on waters [22]. Following their specific Kula social institution Trobrianders visited far away islands and could trade with people of different cultures who spoke different languages, some among whom practiced headhunting or cannibalism. It is not a surprise that very important part of their shipwreck mythology is devoted to ashore dangers: "We do not go ashore. We are afraid of the *mulukwasi*¹. They follow us ashore [15, p. 257]". Malinowski explains the myth origin as reflection of environment reality. Giving example of real shipwreck events among the Trobrianders he writes:

In the South of the Island, several cases are on record where canoes were wrecked and saved in the d'Entrecasteaux Islands or in the Amphletts. Once the whole crew were eaten by cannibals, getting ashore in a hostile district of Fergusson Island, and one man only escaped, and ran along the shore, south-eastwards towards Dobu. Thus there is a certain amount of historical evidence for

¹ *Mulukwasi* are 'flying witches', the hostile characters of the Trobriand mythology.

the saving power of the magic, and the mixture of fanciful and real elements makes our story a good example of what could be called standardized or universalized myth – that is, a myth referring not to one historical event but to a type of occurrence, happening universally [15, p. 261].

Kula Tradition: Face Theory Application

To understand the background of Kula tradition development first of all I address to the Face Theory, which was created to investigate some mechanisms of social interaction. Face Theory was developed by the Canadian born sociologist Erving Goffman (1922–1982). In his description of human interaction Goffman [10] supposes that all people have a public image, a “face”, which they display during communication [17, p. 203]. The purpose of this theory is to understand two main aspects of interaction: why and how people construct their social self. The main expectations for Face Theory application are connected with Goffman’s notion of “social skill”, which can help in everyday practice of communication. Among various useful skills the support of so called satisfactory order seems to be especially important. Ordering in communication is based on rules in “expressive ritual.” Goffman suggests that communication consists of ordered sequences of messages between people and should be a coordinated, rule-abiding pattern of exchange for effective performance [11].

Goffman suggests that in the process of social interaction people manifest the features similar to those found among actors who perform on the theatre stage [11]. The purpose of such performance is to design an idealized image of ourselves that fits appropriately into the requirements of the context. The central concept of Goffman’s theory is ‘face’ [11]. He defined this concept as a type of performance, in which people present the positive social value of themselves. People create this positive image through their appearance, messages, and actions that should demonstrate that they are competent and worthy social interactants. Goffman pays attention to the fact that people are emotionally attached to their face and underlines that during interactions people usually try to support each other’s face presentation basically because they expect that in exchange other people will do the same to them [10; 18].

Goffman’s Face Theory helps in further interpretation of Kula tradition phenomenon. Kula social institution was extensively discussed by the sociologist Marcel Mauss in his essay *The Gift*, and was vital to the development of an anthropological theory of reciprocity. In his essay Mauss argued that the exchange of objects between participants builds relationships between them [16]. He claimed that giving an object creates an obligation on the receiver to reciprocate the gift [16; 18]. The series of exchanges between groups thus provided one of the earliest forms of social solidarity. Mauss examined also Indian history and demonstrated that traces of gift exchange could be found in more ‘developed’ societies as well. In the conclusion he suggested that industrialized societies could benefit from recognizing this dynamic of gift giving.

Studying Gofman's Face Theory I realized that during the life of several generations Kula ring participants designed and developed perfectly ordered sequences of messages between themselves which became a coordinated, rule-abiding pattern of exchange for effective "face" performance. I suppose that they used this system mainly to avoid danger of cross-cultural communication during their trading expeditions. In the same time I don't agree with Malinowski's assumption that Kula valuables were non-use items traded purely for purposes of enhancing social status. From my point of view, the Kula participants' social status, which was strongly depended from the number of special artifacts in their personal temporary possession, helped to perform the corresponding level of their "face" value and served to satisfy the main purpose of successful trade transactions.

II. Second Pair of Cases (Inside-Cultural Context: B1 & B2)

Case B1 (Phase of Gift Degradation into Bribe)

David Sneath [23] informs that personal networks historically used to be very important for Mongolian society. The author noticed that gifting practices like basic hospitality "can be seen as a product of the obligation and expectations attached to the status of being a good relative, parent, householder, friend or potential friend" [23, p. 94]. The author compares the Mongolian phenomenon with the Russian traditional system of '*blat*', which means the use of personal influence to obtain goods and services. From the other hand Sneath [23] noticed an opposite side of gift phenomenon development – the notions of legitimate and illegitimate gifting and other material transmissions in context of post-Soviet Mongolia. As he says "It is a commonplace now to think of bribery as an everyday part of Mongolian life – particularly among the relatively small new elite of wealthy businesspeople and politicians" [23, p. 89].

Personal Networks: Uncertainty Reduction Theory Application

To understand the reason for the wide dispersal of the gift system in the vast area of Eurasian continent from Russia to Mongolia we need address the Uncertainty Reduction Theory. Uncertainty Reduction Theory developed by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese seeks to explain communication under conditions of uncertainty [14]. The theory highlights uncertainty as a casual force shaping communication behavior and argues that people seek to reduce uncertainty about their social environment, predict and explain their surroundings [2]. Uncertainty arises when people lack information about others and themselves. Huge distances of the northern part of Eurasia with wide steps and deep forests always were the source of uncertainty and lack of information.

I suppose that gifting system and personal networks were used there as an effective instrument of uncertainty reduction and this can explain the historical popularity of the gift system among many different peoples in Eurasia.

Sneath noticed that his Mongolian respondents described such their practices as “appreciative gift-giving and fulfilling obligations to help family and friends on one hand and the illegitimate acts of corruption on the other” [23, p. 90]. Corruption was associated with city life, while rural life was associated with networks of help and obligation. Sneath argues [23, p. 92] that this reflects importance of close personal networks in rural life. He noticed also that small amounts of cash are understood as perfectly legitimate gift, while large sums of money – thousands of dollars – are seen in very negative way. Sneath explains this phenomenon in terms of transition to the market system, when in society emerged a strong association between corruption and large amounts of cash [23, p. 101].

Personal networks and *blat* system was common for the societies of the Soviet Block in the era of Soviet planned economy. *Blat* was commonplace in Soviet times and not seen as corruption, but “as helping related person in continuous relationships of trust, whereas the bribe was conceived of as an illegal transaction between parties without trust or long-standing relations” [23, p. 105]. From the other hand in the context of social system transformation into the conditions of market economy *blat* in former soviet societies became mixed and then associated with bribery because of growing importance of money.

Case B2 (Phase of Gifting Practice Purifying and Revival)

Petra Rethmann [21] has analyzed an example of positive functional aspect of gift exchange in modern Koriak indigenous culture in the northern Kamchatka peninsula in the Russian Far East. Rethmann observed the emergence of the new indigenous tradition in the situation of cultural change [25] in the period of social and economic transition in the post-Soviet period. The author discusses the significance of fur production and exchange for nowadays Koriak identity formation. She examined two love stories involving reindeer herding Koriak women and men, and explored “the meaning of the gift as an embodied metaphor that arouses desire and creates seductive subjectivities” [21]. Within a wider discussion on aesthetics and gift exchange Rethmann explores the poetic dimensions of the gift. In her elegant observation Koriak women offer gifts of hand worked reindeer fur and leather traditional cloth items to entice men to become their sweethearts.

Koriak Women’s Aesthetic Gifts:

Uncertainty Reduction & Constructivism Theories Application

To understand the nature of the new Koriak tradition of communication in an initial phase of romantic relationships I address both Uncertainty Reduction and Constructivism Theories. Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) has provided

a foundation for understanding communication in romantic relationships. As I mentioned already, when discussed the Mongolian case, uncertainty arises when people lack information about others and themselves. According to URT, seeking information is one of the three strategies to reduce uncertainty. URT distinguishes three categories of information-seeking behavior: passive, active, and interactive [14, p. 136]. In passive strategy people observe a target person from a distance. Passive strategy minimizes face threats, but may not produce the information the observer needs. In active strategy people could ask others about the target person or even to manipulate the situation to get information.

Active strategy has such advantage as more control over the process of getting information; from the other hand, this strategy requires more effort and involves more risk: the third party may notify the target person; lack of desired information; and distort of information. Interactive strategy is the most direct method of reducing uncertainty, which uses direct communicating with the target person. Among the disadvantages of interactive strategies are such as high risk of anxiety from both sides of communicators, embarrassment, and discomfort.

In the Rethmann's case study analyzing the seductive romance behavior of two Koriak women, both of them used an interactive strategy of getting desired information about their target persons [21]. At the same time they found the way to minimize risk of anxiety, embarrassment, and discomfort from both sides of communicators using such form of nonverbal communication as gift. "Gifts, and the people who give and receive them, are often understood as being entangled in delicate webs of power and reciprocity that are constantly subjected to contest and negotiation" [21, p. 52].

At the same time the case of Koriak women's aesthetic gifts demonstrates their high level communication competence. This could be understood with the help of the Constructivism Theory, which was created by Jesse Delia from the department of speech communication at the University of Illinois [13]. In his theory of constructivism Jesse Delia offers a cognitive explanation of competent communication [7]. Delia's colleague Brant Burleson [5; 6] maintains that people with high levels of cognitive complexity are able to better understanding the people and events of social world [13, p. 98]. Cognitive complexity is a psychological variable that indicates how complex or simple is the frame and perceptual skill of a person. Delia and Burleson distinguish two types of people – those who are able to see others only in terms of good and bad; and those who are able to see many-sided social world [7; 5]. Constructivists assume that first type of people is cognitively immature. From the other hand the other type of person has developed into a sophisticated observer, capable to distinguish more delicate differences among people [13, pp. 98–99].

Person-centered message is another central concept in constructivist theory. Person-centered message is a communication technique which allowed the speaker to adjust his or her communication accordingly to their anticipation how different individuals might respond to a message. In their research

constructivists link person-centered messages to cognitive complexity. Constructivists note that cognitively complex students are two years ahead of their classmates in the ability to encode *person-centered messages*. They claim also that cognitively complex people in their perceptions of others have a communication advantage over those with less developed set of interpersonal constructs. According to constructivists, the creation of person-centered messages is a sophisticated communication skill [13, pp. 100–101]. Cognitively complex people demonstrate their complexity using person-centered messages. It is noticed also that highly developed communication skills are an advantage in friendship only when both partners have equal sophistication to appreciate them. In the case of Koriak women both of them provided a person-centered message, which meant the following: they are women with whom traditional Koriak men could live in the tundra [21]. At the same time they proved this message choosing the right gift items – with their own hands made clothing elements (mittens, boots, hats), which were useful for everyday life in special environment of reindeer herding and represented examples of traditional art of high aesthetic value.

Conclusion

The set of earlier analyzed four cases from anthropological domain demonstrates the gift phenomenon as a nonverbal communication instrument. I tried to analyze and discuss the usage of this instrument in terms of both its effectiveness and ethical concerns. To show the phases of ‘gift’ phenomenon development as communication instrument I designed my paper to begin with non-gifting phase in Taiwan-Lamay case, then to the phase of gift exchanging in Kula tradition and to the phase of gift degradation into bribe phenomenon in the post-Soviet period of Mongolian society, and finally to the phase of gifting practice revival in present Koriak indigenous culture in the northern Kamchatka peninsula in the Russian Far East. In the exploratory part of this research using interpersonal communication theories I observed the process of exchange modes transformations which has started in prehistory and continues until present. The last two cases of Mongolian and Koriak societies demonstrate examples of a common nonverbal form of communication transformations in ethnographic present.

Theories of interpersonal communication could be applied also for the reconstruction of the processes, which took place in early history and even prehistory. In this paper I tried to make such reconstruction by comparison of two cases, both of which were observed in historical times, but which traces go back into far away prehistory. One case is the Kula exchange tradition in Trobriand Islands, archipelago off the eastern coast of New Guinea; and the other case is a conflict which took place in 1636 on the island Lamay near Taiwan.

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CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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ОТ ОБМАНА К ПОДАРКУ (Использование теорий межличностного общения в антропологическом анализе)

В данной поисково-объясняющей научной работе утверждается, что теории, разработанные в области изучения межличностного общения, могут быть использованы в антропологических исследованиях. Предполагается, что межличностное и межгрупповое общение само по себе может являться предметом антропологических исследований. Автор полагает, что современный уровень развития обеих дисциплин – теории человеческого общения и антропологии – предоставляет исследователям возможность анализировать сложные примеры человеческого общения, как в межкультурной его области, так и внутри определённых локальных групп. В данной статье эта возможность демонстрируется на примере видоизменений такого коммуникационного явления как «подарок». История развития данного коммуникативного инструмента рассматривается, начиная с доподарочной фазы обмена и этапа зарождения феномена обмена подарками, затем показана форма деградации механизма дарения до феномена взяточничества, и наконец, форма возрождения практики дарения в некоторых современных малых этнических сообществах в постсоветский период.

Ключевые слова: человеческое общение, социально-культурная антропология, формы обмена, культурные изменения, церемониальный обмен круга Кула, подарок, взятка, Тайвань, Монголия, Дальний Восток России