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Social factors of communicative misunderstanding between forced migrants and the host community

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Abstract. This paper examines social factors that cause misunderstandings between forced migrants and members of a host community. The article investigates mechanisms of social perception as a process responsible for quality of communication between these actors, as well as the relationship of these mechanisms with integration of forced migrants into the host society. The article presents the results of two studies: in the first one, 318 interviews with forced migrants from Donbass were got in 2018, and, in the second one, 200 interviews were obtained in 2019. The studies have demonstrated a high level of prejudice of the host society towards forced migrants, low level of generalized trust of migrants to surrounding people. This situation contributes to the formation of bonding social capital, but does not contribute to the formation of bridging and linking capital, which does not affect the expansion of new social connections and the acquisition of new relevant social capital.

Keywords. Forced migrants; social capital; integration; host community; social perception

1. Introduction

In modern society, migration processes intensify, resulting in social tensions, increasing anti-migration attitudes, deteriorating social status of migrants, emerging multiple institutional and intergroup conflicts in different countries. The issue that complicates the social adaptation of migrants is the problem of asymmetric communication between migrants and members of the host community, which leads to multiple communicative misunderstandings between them. Communicative misunderstandings in the workplace and in everyday life become one of the most actual problems in the sociology of migration due to competition between migrants and locals. However, in the special literature the problems of inefficient communication between migrants and the local population are paid insufficient attention, so the study of this problem becomes quite relevant.

2. Literature Review

Communicative misunderstandings are often caused by problems with social perception, which means the ability to make accurate interpretations of the content of communication and conclusions about other people from their general appearance, verbal and nonverbal patterns of communication [6]. The concept of «social perception» comes from social psychology. This concept was introduced by the American psychologist J. Bruner, according to whom the social perception has two dimensions: productive and procedural. Both of these dimensions of social perception are due to both objective-physical or sensory characteristics of a subject of

perception, and social factors such as a subject's past experience, his/her goals, intentions, the level of significance of the situation, etc. [3, p.70-71].

L. Itelson believes that social perception includes three processes: firstly, the correlation between the experience of perception of social objects and those social-perceptive standards that are stored in individual and group memory of different social actors; secondly, the process of filling information gaps under the influence of social stereotypes, which have social-group content; thirdly, filtering out insignificant features for the object that ensures the selectivity of perception [5]. Important components of social perception are social autostereotypes and social heterostereotypes – these concepts have been paid attention by G. Andreeva and D. Myers [1].

Social perception, in contrast to the simple perception of objects, is due to the emotional experience of a subject of perception, which is inevitably accompanied by bias of a subject. Many researchers worked on the topic of social perception, including G. Andreeva, V. Olshansky, and T. Stefanenko. They define that social perception, both productive and procedural, is based on the perception of a large list of different social objects and social situations; the diversity and interdependence of these objects and situations affect their evaluation.

In general, many researchers argue that signs of social perception are the following:

- emotional bias, which distinguishes social perception from non-value perception of various still objects;
- the presence of feedback towards the subject of social perception from the object, which, in turn, is also a subject, individual or group, and can actively influence the process of perception;
- the process of social perception is always based on value judgments;
- the presence of imaginary components,
- social perception depends on the motivational and semantic structure of the subject of perception.

Social perception is realized in the process of communication through the mechanisms of identification, empathy, attribution and reflection. Identification in this context is seen as identification of oneself with others, the ability to «stand up to the point of view» of another person. Empathy in this case is seen as compassion, when one person for a time emotionally becomes «as if» *other* by the definition of Carl Ransom Rogers [7]. Attribution is seen as a mechanism for explaining the reasons of another person's behavior. The understanding of these reasons is distorted by the fundamental error of attribution. According to Lee Ross and Richard E. Nisbett, «people's exaggerated belief in the importance of personal qualities and propensities, along with their inability to recognize the importance of situational factors affecting behavior, was called a 'fundamental error of attribution'» [8]. Reflection is seen as awareness of one subject of communication of how it is perceived by others.

All these mechanisms provide for the presence of representations of subjects of communication about thoughts, emotions and motivations of each other. And this, in turn, implies either the availability of personal experience in communicating with similar actors, or the presence of a life experience similar to that of a partner, or the presence of stereotypes of perception that the subjects received from the outside, for example, from mass media or from the cultural tradition of their group. Social stereotypes are the systematized images or ideas about members of a social group that are usually emotionally colored and highly stable, and may or may not correspond to reality.

Trust in a communication partner is one of the most important conditions for understanding. The essence of this principle is to consider that the statements of other subjects of communication are initially true, thus recognizing that all participants of communicative

interaction are aimed at mutual understanding and considering that interlocutors are right in essence. According to F. Fukuyama, trust arises when a community shares a set of moral values to create expectations of regular and honest behavior [4, p.153].

In addition, social perception is linked to the social capital of the actors in communication. In particular, P. Bourdier believes that symbolic capital, expressed in the form of prestigious professional or academic positions, is the legal basis of social perception [2]. In turn, social perception is responsible for the possibility of forming new social connections and accumulating new social capital.

Social perception as one of the reasons for mutual (mis)understanding between subjects of communication plays a particularly important role in case of communication between forced migrants and members of the host community. They usually lack information about each other and experience of interaction, so it is social perception that influences the level of mutual understanding between them.

Each of these mechanisms manifests differently in the situation of communication of forced migrants with representatives of host communities. This specificity is caused by different life experiences, motivations, objective needs and the presence of social stereotypes in relation to the representatives of these groups. Life experiences are significantly different for forced migrants and for representatives of host communities, so in this case there is a high probability of the fundamental attribution error. Representatives of host communities, as a rule, are not able to realize the complexity of the social situation of forced migrants, which may be the reason for the peculiarities of their behavior.

Further, stereotypes are created not only by mass media, but are also generated within the community under the influence of fears and in the absence of information and experience of communication with migrants. Finally, the quality of social perception is influenced by the difference in the motivation of migrants and non-migrants in the common communication process.

In addition, the collective traumatic event of the war results in a crisis of confidence, causing the so-called «distrust syndrome» described by Piotr Stompka [9]. Trauma rigidly engraves the life experience in the memory of the injured and therefore affects his/her worldview in general and the assessment of communication contexts in particular. This experience is not available to people who did not experience such an event, so they may not understand how traumatized people perceive the context of communication. This, in turn, directly affects the ability of migrants to create new social connections and integrate into the host society.

The purpose of the article is to consider communicative misunderstandings between forced migrants and representatives of the host society, as well as their impact on the process of social adaptation of forced migrants.

3. Methodology of the study

The article presents the results of two researches. The first study was conducted in May and June 2018 in Kharkiv (Ukraine) on «The impact of communicative misunderstandings on the process of social adaptation of forced migrants». 318 forced migrants from Donbass (Eastern Ukraine, where the armed conflict has been going on since 2014) were interviewed. The second study was conducted in April and May 2019 on «Factors of social adaptation of forced migrants». 200 forced migrants from Donbass were interviewed on the social network Facebook and in the personal accounts of the interviewers. The study was conducted within the framework of the international project MILETUS on academic mobility. The method of both studies is online poll.

4. Results and their discussion

According to our research conducted in 2018, only 41% of forced internal migrants have close personal ties with local residents and are actively interested in the life of the local community. These people identify themselves as fully integrated into the local environment. 31% of forced internal migrants have relatively close ties with local residents, but have friendly relations only with members of their group and have little interest in the life of the local community. They identify themselves as partially integrated into the local environment. The results of the study are presented in Fig.1. In our opinion, this is a very low level of integration as for the fifth year of living in local communities.

Figure 1. Self-assessment of the level of migrants' integration

Weak connections between migrants and local communities may cause misunderstandings in the work environment and in everyday life due to low social perceptions. This can lead to significant mistakes in the interpretation of the context of communication, so it does not allow to unambiguously determine the motivation of the interlocutor and understand how he/she perceives his/her communication partner.

The prejudice of the host community towards forced migrants has an impact on the strengthening of communicative misunderstandings. According to the annual nationwide population poll «Ukrainian Society» conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, representatives of host communities in 2015, 2017 and 2018 perceived migrants as strangers [10]. The lowest number of representatives of host communities want to see migrants as managers (11% and 13.2% for migrants from Donbass and Crimea, respectively); as representatives of the administration of the settlement where they live (9.4 and 9.9%, respectively); people, as heading ministries or public services of Ukraine (8.8% and 9.6% respectively); as the President of Ukraine (7.4% and 8% respectively). As for working environment, in addition to the desire or unwillingness to see migrants as managers, the attitude of locals to subordinates and equal colleagues was studied: 20.1% of locals wanted to see migrants as subordinates, and as colleagues – about 36%. This shows the prejudice of local communities towards internal migrants. Changes in the attitude of local residents to migrants during 2015-2018 are reflected in Fig. 2.

Do you agree to allow forced migrants from the Donbas in the same or different qualities? (% , 2015, 2017, 2018)

Figure 2. Changes in the attitudes of local residents to migrants during 2015-2018 in Ukraine

Thus, the most likely factors of misunderstanding between migrants and host communities might be factors that are caused by the consequences of trauma, prejudice towards migrants, weak social contacts between members of these groups, lack of mutual trust in the communication process, the presence of differences in needs and cultural differences.

According to the research «Factors of social adaptation of forced migrants» (2019), 38.3% of respondents have misunderstandings with local residents in working relationships. 6.2% of respondents constantly, and 20.4% – sometimes encounter such misunderstandings or insults about the fact that they are migrants. 72.2% of respondents do not see differences between migrants and locals at the workplace. One can conclude that this problem exists, but it is not acute at this time for the interviewed group of forced migrants from the military conflict zone in the Donbass.

Let us consider the socio-cultural indicators of the social status of migrants in Ukrainian society, which influence the misunderstandings between migrants and the host community both at the workplace and in everyday life. The answers to the question about the main type of work/income were distributed as follows: 52.5% currently have a permanent job, which they work for 6 months or more. 25.9% are entrepreneurs or self-employed persons. 7.4% have temporary jobs from time to time; 5.6% are unemployed; 2.5% are studying. At the same time, 44.4% have only one place of work and do not combine it with other types of work and do not study at the same time. 29.6% combine the main job with additional ways of earning constantly, and 25.9% – from time to time. Only 32.7% have not changed their job or kind of business in the last 3 years, 25.9% have changed only once. 29.6% have changed job 2-3 times, 4.3% – 4 or more times, 3.7% of respondents have only temporary work, and 3.7% have been unemployed all this time. This indicates a low level of integration, because a small number of respondents have a stable job, which fully satisfies them in terms of income.

It was found that the cultural capital of the respondents, accumulated before migration, did not remain stable and underwent certain transformations. Only 37% of respondents after moving work on the same specialty that they received before moving, while 3.7% did not work, but studied in the same specialty before moving, in which they are working now. 47.5% changed their profession and now are working in a new specialty. Another 3.7% had been trained in a particular profession before moving, but now they have not been able to find a job and are unemployed. Some migrants have tried to create new cultural capital in the form of new academic/professional competencies. About 30% of respondents received a new specialty with confirmation of professional competencies with a diploma of national/international standard.

35% of respondents have improved their skills through self-education, and 23.5% have changed their profession.

To the question «Who do you trust in?» respondents were allowed to give several answers at once. 38.3% of respondents trust only those from whom they have received evidence of reliability in their own experience. 67.3% of respondents have confidence in themselves. Only 8.6% of respondents have confidence in all people if they do not have information about their unreliability. Concerning personalized trust, 66% of respondents have confidence in their closest friends and relatives, 25.3% of respondents trust in acquaintances if they have not let the respondent down in the past. 16.7% of respondents have confidence in their colleagues and business partners, if there is no information about their unreliability. Regarding institutional trust, 11.7% of respondents have confidence in civil organizations, 3.1% of respondents have confidence in religious organizations, 1.2% of respondents have confidence in state institutions. Other respondents do not consider institutional trust as relevant to themselves.

We have also examined the process of forming new social capital, creating new social ties, participating in joint activities with representatives of the host community, interest in community life by forced migrants in the host society. 38.9% of respondents said that they have got new friends among local residents and actively communicate with them in everyday life. 24.7% of respondents answered that they have new acquaintances among local residents, but communicate with them mostly only when necessary. 16.7% of respondents have new acquaintances only among work colleagues and almost do not communicate with them outside of work. 8% of respondents have new acquaintances only among migrants and communicate mainly with them. 9.3% have no new friends.

43.2% of respondents take an active part in the life of their staff. 32.1% simply earn money or study, but are not interested in the life of a team at the place of work or study. 8% of respondents are organizers of collective events at the place of work or study. 6.8% are those who are not working and studying anywhere, so they do not have community activities. Others have answered that they take part in collective activities at the place of work or study episodically in various forms. 61% of respondents do not participate in public life.

About 16% of respondents actively participate in the cultural life of the local community, while 4.9% of respondents take part in organizing such events. Another 17.9% participate in cultural events at least once every 3 months. 27.2% participate in cultural events at least once every 3 months. 24.7% do not have time or money for this, and 11.7% of respondents are not interested in such events. Others take part in cultural life sporadically.

Respondents were asked to determine the degree of their integration into the host society on a 10-point scale. 27.8% of respondents rate their degree of integration as the average – 5 out of 10. 16.7% of respondents chose rating of 8. 4.9% consider themselves not to be integrated. Absolutely integrated are 7.4%. Given the approach to the Gaussian distribution of answers, it can be concluded that this group of respondents defines itself as more integrated than not.

5. Conclusions

The study revealed that the problem of misunderstandings between migrants and host communities is still relevant in Ukrainian society. A large number of respondents cannot find a stable job that would fully satisfy them in terms of income. The vast majority of forced migrants had to acquire new cultural capital in the form of academic/professional competencies because they were unable to convert previous cultural capital into economic, financial and social capital at their new place of residence. The study showed that forced migrants either do not trust the environment, or have a fairly high level of trust in the immediate environment and members of small groups. This situation contributes to the formation of bonding social capital, but does not

contribute to the formation of bridging and linking capital, which does not affect the expansion of new social connections and the acquisition of new relevant social capital.

In order to better integrate migrants into the host society, it is necessary to take measures that will contribute to establishing closer contacts between forced migrants and members of the host community, improving the quality of social perception and allow forced migrants to acquire new cultural and social capital and, in general, to promote the integration of forced migrants into the host communities.

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