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SOME DIFFERENCES OF AMERICAN AND KYRGYZ WAYS

The paper touches upon a subject of cross cultural issues when we come to a new country and communicate with the people there. More specifically, the subject is about American and Kyrgyzstani people and their cultures.

Key words: culture, value, believe, behave, manner and gestures of communication.

Статья затрагивает тему межкультурных вопросов, например, когда мы приезжаем в новую страну и общаемся с местными жителями. В частности, предметом изучения являются американцы и кыргызы и их культуры.

Ключевые слова: культура, ценности, взгляд, поведение, манера и жесты общения.

Introduction

Having visited the United States and working with Americans for some years and comparing their behavior with the behavior of our people every time, I have discovered a lot of differences between Americans and Kyrgyz people. Within all these years I have been teaching and sharing my ideas with students and staff at The International University of Kyrgyzstan. I hope this article can be helpful for any Kyrgyzstani people who speak English and would like to learn more about Americans as well as American people who visit our country and stay here for some time.

To study the people of another country or its culture one should know what people value and what they believe in there. This helps us to understand why people behave the way they do as well as the meaning of their manner and gestures of communication. It does not mean that they all share the same values to exactly the same level; it means that most of them agree with each others' ideas about what is right or wrong. Let's look at how some of those values can be described and compared to each other.

Individualism

Individualism is one the most important aspects to understand about Americans. They have been raised from the early ages to consider themselves as separate individuals who are responsible for their own life and their own destinies. They have not been raised to consider themselves as members of a tightly interdependent family, religious group, tribe, nation, or other collectivity which are very common here in The Kyrgyz Republic. Americans see themselves as separate human beings who have their own opinions and who are responsible for their own decisions.

Certain phrases one commonly hears among Americans capture their devotion to individualism: *"Do your own thing."* *"I did it my way."* *"You'll have to decide that for yourself."* *"You made your bed, now lie in it."* *"If you don't look out for yourself, no one else will."* *"Look out for number one."* In comparison with those phrases, the following Kyrgyz phrases can demonstrate how the Kyrgyz people capture their devotion to collectivism. I am giving the phrases with literal translations: *"Бөлүнгөндү бөрү жейт."* (Separated person will be eaten by a wolf) *"Эл менен чогуу бол."* (Be with people) *"Өзүмчүл болбо."* (Don't be selfish) *"Аксакалдар чечсин, алар эмне десе ошол."*

(Let eldest people make decision, we agree with whatever they say) *"Карынын кебин капка сал."* (Keep the eldest person's words in your head) *"Улууну урматта кичүүнү сыйла."* (Respect elders and treat younger with respect too)

Self-Identification versus Group-Identification

From the following examples we can see how language indicates whether a culture is more focused on self-identification or group-identification:

1. The word *"aunt"* in English can mean many different relationships: mother's sister, father's sister, mother's brother's wife, or father's brother's wife. The limited vocabulary for describing relationships is indicative of self identification in American culture.

2. In Kyrgyz language, there are different words for every different type of family relationship. Your mother's sister is your *"май эже"* and your father's sister is your *"чоң ана."* Kyrgyz language indicates a strong group-identification in Kyrgyz culture.

These examples show how language indicates whether groups in a particular culture are flexible or fixed.

1. In English, the pronoun *"you"* is used to address anyone: old/young, senior/junior. This indicates how many Americans value egalitarianism in which most people are treated in the same way.

2. Like other Turkic languages, in Kyrgyz, there are several different pronouns which mean *"you."* Depending on the relationship between two people in a conversation (age, seniority, gender, etc.), one would select the appropriate pronoun *"сен"*, *"сиз"*, or *"сиздер."* This indicates a more hierarchical culture in which groups are more fixed.

Equality

Americans are distinctive in the degree to which they believe in the ideal, as stated in their Declaration of Independence, that *"all men are created equal."* They have a deep faith that in some fundamental way all people (at least all American people) are of equal value, that no one is born superior to anyone else. *"One man, one vote,"* they say, conveying the idea that any person's opinion is as valid and worthy of attention as any other person's opinion.

People in Kyrgyzstan are accustomed to more obvious displays of respect such as averting eyes from the face of the higher status person, or using

honorific titles like *"Ak sakal"* *"Shef."* They way how some men treat women or how some parents treat their children can seem to Americans to be very unusual or even rude.

Informality

Their notions of equality lead Americans to be quite informal in their general behavior and in their relationships with other people. Store clerks and waiters, for example, may introduce themselves by their first (given) names and treat customers in a casual, friendly manner. The superficial friendliness for which Americans are so well known is related to their informal, egalitarian approach to other people. "Hi" they will say to just anyone.

People's behavior in Kyrgyzstan is more formal than it is in America. People of almost any situation in life can be seen in public, particularly at schools, universities, and in offices, wearing suits, pants, and shirt. Small village livers never wear tattoos and men earrings. When people sit at the desk, they do not put their legs on the desks. Students call the teachers at schools and universities by their first and middle names like: *"Asan Karimovich"*, *"Felix Sharshenbaevich"* for male and *"Gulmira Toybolovna"*, *"Aida Belekovna"* for female. People can be introduced the same way. In small villages calling their teachers by the students is done this way: *"Bakyt aghai"*, *"Usen aghai"* for male teachers and *"Gulmira eje"*, *"Saltanat eje"* for female teachers. The style and manner of greetings mainly depends on the status of a person and one's relationship to them for example, it is considered impolite to enter or exit a room before a person of higher status. Frequently, a group of people will pause before entering a building to insist that a senior person enter first. Unlike Americans the Kyrgyz do not use different greetings at different times of the day. In spoken greetings, in formal situations such as business meetings, official receptions, and conferences, the following greetings are used: *"Саламатсызбы?"* (singular) or *"Саламатсыздарбы?"* (plural). To respond one says *"Саламатсызбы?"* to elder people, and *"Саламатчылык!"* to younger ones.

Work

"He's a hard worker," one American might say in praise of another. Or, *"She gets the job done."* These expressions convey the typical American's admiration for a person who approaches a task conscientiously and persistently, seeing it through to a successful conclusion. Hard

workers are admired not just on the job, but in other aspects of life as well. Housewives, students, and people volunteering their services to charitable organizations can also be hard workers who make significant achievements. Americans tend to define people by the jobs they have (*"Who is he?" "He is the vice president in charge of personal loans at the bank."*) People in Kyrgyzstan could answer to such question like *"He is my closest friend and very respectful person in the community"* or *"He is my cousin."* Sometimes you can hear such expressions related to work as *"Rabota ne volk, v les neubejit"* *"Butpogon ish bar bele butot da"*.

Directness

"Let's lay our cards on the table," they say. Or, *"Let's stop playing games and get to the point."* These and many other common phrases convey the Americans' idea that people should explicitly state what they think and what they want from other people. The word *"assertive"* is the adjective Americans commonly use to describe the person who plainly and directly expresses feelings and requests. They try to speak openly and directly to others in a manner they call *"constructive,"* that is, a manner which the other person will not find offensive or unacceptable.

Although they are often open and direct, it is not unusual for them to try to avoid direct confrontations with other people when they are not confident then the confrontation can be carried out in a constructive way that will result in an acceptable compromise. Americans might feel especially reluctant to say no directly to a foreigner, for fear of making the person feel unwelcome or discriminated against.

People in Kyrgyzstan are not as direct as Americans are. There are sayings like *"Keregem saga aitam kelinim sen uk, uugum saga aitam uulum sen uk."* Staring at one's eyes while talking has negative connotation and is considered to be too much. For instance, the conversation between father in law and daughter in law can go through the third person in the family.

You could say: "In a fixed time culture like the US, time is considered to be in one's control. Time is spent, wasted, sped up, slowed down, etc. *"Time is money"* is a common saying. In such a culture, punctuality is a matter of personal responsibility and to be late is to disrespect someone else's time. In a more flexible time culture, time is NOT considered to be in one's control. Many people believe strongly in fate and

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destiny. This is also indicated in language: “*Кеч болуп кетти*” (Lateness happened) instead of “I am late.”); “*Автобус кетип калыптыр*” (The bus left me) instead of “I missed the bus.”; “*Кудай буюрса келем жыйналышка*” (God willing, I will come to the meeting) instead of “I will come to the meeting.” In such cultures, punctuality is outside of one’s control and so there is more understanding about lateness.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say that every people have their own cultural values and they are proud of representing the culture. We do not have to judge when we see strange to our understand behaviors of people that come from other countries. The important thing is we have to understand and respect whatever the people believe in or value.