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ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Nowadays, social media has become a standard part of people's lives: we use them for entertainment, education, and, most often, to communicate with each other. As a result of migration, communities are becoming increasingly multicultural, and the ability to interact with people from multiple cultures is becoming increasingly important in all aspects of life. Social networks have created a unique space where people from across the globe, who speak different languages and have varying cultural traditions, can easily interact with one another, overcoming distances and cross-cultural boundaries. Nevertheless, we must consider that digital platforms are establishing a brand-new culture of communication that contrasts with the traditional, in-person approach, where various languages, styles, and cultural codes are combined.

The main difference between communication on social networks and real-life interaction is the absence of nonverbal signals, which are key to conveying information between people. According to psychological studies, up to 80% of communication during face-to-face interactions occurs through non-verbal channels. Australian body language researcher A. Pease found that words convey only 7% of information. In comparison, intonation and tone of voice account for 38% and facial expressions, gestures, and posture account for as much as 55% [1]. Whenever we interact online, primarily through text messages, all these crucial nonverbal aspects are lost, and people have to substitute them with emojis, stickers, or punctuation marks. As a result, misunderstandings often arise in online communication because we cannot see a person's genuine emotions, hear their intonation, or even tell if they are joking.

Communication on social media is transforming how we use language. Although our spoken words are only heard by people standing nearby, a statement posted on social media can be seen by thousands of people within a minute, and each of them can respond immediately. This fact creates a new communicative

situation in which, instead of dialogue, a complex network emerges in which anyone can participate in the conversation, express their views, or object to another person's opinion. What is most remarkable is that the conversation does not disappear immediately after one person has stated their opinion; instead, it remains accessible for review and further discussion for a day, a week, or a year. Moreover, people have time to consider their response and edit it before sending it, whereas in a face-to-face conversation words are spoken instantly [2].

With social media, we have a unique opportunity to interact with people from other countries. Communication with native speakers provides access to authentic vocabulary, slang, and expressions that are not typically presented in textbooks, allowing for language practice in real-life situations. Furthermore, by engaging in this way, people learn about the traditions, customs, and day-to-day life of other nations, enabling them to understand other cultures better. However, it is essential to remember that the exact words or symbols can signify different things in different cultures, so it is necessary to familiarise oneself with cultural characteristics before beginning communication. Considering all of the above, we can conclude that social networks are no longer just platforms for entertainment, but also tools for language learning and cultural exchange [3].

The English language serves as a lingua franca in the modern world, facilitating communication among people from different cultures and countries. In other words, even if two people do not speak each other's languages, they can still communicate in English. It is especially noticeable on social media: English has become the language used by millions of people worldwide to interact with one another [4]. Therefore, knowledge of English is practically essential for effective intercultural communication on social media, as it enables communication with users worldwide and the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and cultural experiences.

Another noteworthy aspect is that globalization has contributed not only to the spread of English but also to its adaptation to different cultures. Under the influence of local languages, several variants of English have emerged: European, Asian, etc., reflecting the cultural characteristics of their speakers [5]. It is particularly noticeable on social media: people combine English words with their native language, creating unique hybrid forms of communication. For example, a Ukrainian user may write a post in Ukrainian but use English terms to express emotions or modern concepts, or vice versa, write in English and add Ukrainian words to convey specific cultural concepts. It shows that English in intercultural communication is not just a translation tool but a living language that constantly changes and adapts to users' needs.

Consequently, social media is a significant component of current intercultural communication, facilitating active interaction between individuals from different countries and cultures. Indeed, this type of communication has unique characteristics; however, these are mitigated by digital platforms or by attempts to overcome them through alternative forms of linguistic and visual expression. The English language plays a vital role in multicultural communication, helping overcome language barriers and fostering the emergence of new hybrid language forms. Therefore, knowledge of English and understanding of the peculiarities of online communication are necessary conditions for effective interaction in a multicultural digital environment, without which this process becomes significantly more difficult or even impossible.

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