Bezrukova D.U., Egorova U.A.**The peculiarities of professional communication of customs officials***Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration
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Abstract

This article is devoted to the peculiarities of communication of customs officers within state bodies as well as with other participants of foreign economic activity. The article raises the question of the possibility of using speech patterns as a criterion for assessing the professionalism and competence of customs agents. The author examines the role of nonverbal communication as a means of identifying and suppressing possible offenses of the customs legislation. The author provides the requirements for the behavior of customs officers during the performance of their official duties, illustrating findings with examples from actual practice.

Keywords: customs authorities, communicative competence, the hallmarks of good speech, motives, body language.

Аннотация

Статья посвящена особенностям коммуникации сотрудников таможенной службы как внутри структурных подразделений государственных органов, так и с другими участниками внешнеэкономической деятельности. В статье поднимается вопрос о возможности использования речевых паттернов в качестве критерия для оценки профессионализма и компетентности служащих таможенных органов. Автор подробно рассматривает роль невербальной коммуникации как средства выявления и пресечения возможных правонарушений таможенного законодательства. Автор исследования приводит требования к поведению таможенных служащих при осуществлении должностных обязанностей, иллюстрируя свои выводы примерами из реальной практики.

Ключевые слова: таможенные органы, коммуникативная компетентность, признаки хорошей речи, мотивы, язык тела.

Communication plays a significant role in the profession of a customs worker. It is one of the main components of this job since Customs deals with international trade and the connections with English-speaking foreigners become a regular thing for the state servants. Communication includes a speech interaction of a specialist with other experts, participants of foreign economic activity, individuals and media representatives during their professional activities.

Communicative competence of a well-qualified public servant implies the ability to establish a psychological contact with people, to engage themselves in a dialogue with them on particular topics, the ability to predict the behavior of interlocutors, to understand the motives behind their actions. It also includes the ability to interpret correctly the behavior of an interlocutor, verbal and non-verbal, and to make a proper impact on the recipient [1, p. 119-120].

The conversation is conducted in accordance with the traditions of communication of the nation the customs authorities represent. For example, the expected quality of the Russian public servant is modesty, which excludes complacency and arrogance. For a state employee, excessive self-confidence, intolerance towards peers, subordinates and visitors are completely unacceptable. As for the greeting, a public servant needs to bow slightly or nod in respect. Shaking hands becomes an important requirement of etiquette with another civil servant. The

first to give a hand will be the superior person. If government workers are of the same status, then the oldest person extends a hand to the younger one.

The hallmarks of good speech are correctness, logic, accuracy, clarity, effectiveness, purity, expressiveness and politeness [1, p. 119].

The correctness of speech is the observance of all rules of the literary language and standardization of the terms. The correctness of speech prevents misunderstanding. Professional clichés are another feature of a written text or an oral interaction. The typical examples of clichés used in customs affairs are collocations formed by nouns or/and verbs and prepositions or adjectives such as «levy of duties», «to dispose goods of home consumption», «countervailing duty», «freight insurance». Clichés make a speech short and laconic, accelerate information exchange and as a consequence, enhance the effectiveness of interaction between a customs officer and his communicator [3, p. 100-101].

The logic of speech determines the correspondence of speech to ideas the author wants to express. The speech of customs officers should contain as few stamps as possible. A stamp is a phrase that is generally applicable in almost any context but actually is not informative. The examples of stamps are the following: «the relevant measures were taken», «much attention was paid to this issue» and etc. Stamps make a speech too complicated and disorient the listeners. Customs officers are advised not to violate lexical norms in their speech. One of the most typical mistakes they can make is the use of excess words in a phrase, which is called speech redundancy. It manifests as tautology and pleonasm. Tautology is the unjustified use of the single-root word or the same word in the sentence such as «to bring into the country imports». Pleonasm is the use of more words in the phrase than it is needed to express the idea, for instance, «to emigrate abroad», «illegal smuggling» [3, p. 98-99].

The accuracy of speech means the compliance of words and phrases with the meaning that the author wants to put into them. Accuracy is associated with the right choice of a single-root word or synonym [3, p. 97]. In this way, the customs officer should use “contraband” as a synonym to «smuggling».

The clarity of speech depends on the correct use of terms and foreign words. It is advisable not to use foreign words as well as terms if they are unclear to the audience. Russian customs clerks use both words: foreign word «invoice» (ИНВОЙС) and its translation into Russian language – «счет-фактура». In addition, a customs officer must be ready to explain the meaning of a term even in English that does not make any sense to a person who works outside the sphere of customs, international trade or jurisprudence

The speech of a customs officer should be effective, that is with the focus on the proper response and achieving an expected result.

The purity of speech means that there are no elements in it that do not correspond to the literary language. It disappears in the case of using harsh words and expressions, including expletives as well as parasitic words like «shortly speaking» (короче говоря), «simply speaking», (проще говоря), «something like» (как бы), «such as» (типа) [3, p. 100].

The manner of communication of government officials is a basic condition for the good customs service image formation. They should treat participants of foreign trade, other public authorities, foreigners and citizens politely and carefully ask them delicate questions. For example, customs officers should welcome passengers politely before asking them for a personal body check in the required for the overall security way: “Good morning! Come this way, please,” (Доброе утро! Прошу, проследуйте за мной). Besides, they need to use special titles when approaching people: Mrs., Madam, Mr., Sir, etc. to show their respect.

A customs officer should be restrained, honest, law-abiding and incorruptible. Among the professionally significant features of the people in the ranks of public servants are a high level of legal awareness, the dominance of socially significant motives (the desire to help people, seek justice, resist crime, protect the law) and a sense of responsibility [1, p. 118].

While on duty customs clerks are not allowed to refer to their personal problems communicating with participants of foreign economic activity and other citizens as it can be

perceived as a hint or extortion of a bribe. In addition, customs officers need to be very careful with gestures as some of them can be perceived as an agreement or an invitation to a bribe in order to conceal the committed offence. That is why during the performance of his/her official duties a public servant should not use such gestures that can be interpreted ambiguously: winking, rubbing with fingers, scratching his/her palms.

As it is well known, body language can be an effective method of identifying potential threats. For example, customs officers analyze the behavior of people during checking-in for a flight, passport control, security check, customs control and passport control at the airport. They gauge the passengers behaviour and potential lie and concealment by the movement of the pupils of the eyes, hands and fingers, by the position of the body, which can characterize the state of relaxation or excitation, and the time of reactions to questions. A felon always tries to cover his real emotions in order to prevent the excessive attention of law-enforcement agencies. One of the signs of a fake emotion is the lack of muscle contractions always caused by real ones. For example, the feigned sadness does not involve raising the inner corners of the eyebrows [2, p. 268-269]. The offender committing a crime feels fear because he is afraid of being disclosed. When the tense lower eyelids are supplemented with the raised upper eyelids and the rest of the face elements neutral, the customs official should consider such expression as a sign of fear [2, p. 205]. If a customs worker notices something suspicious, he/she may ask a potential offender to answer a few questions or go through, for instance, personal customs inspection.

The best illustration of the importance of body language as a means to detect a suspicious behaviour at border crossing is the British reality TV series «Nothing to Declare UK». It presents a coverage of some interesting cases the employees of Gatwick Airport and Bristol Airport Customs have dealt with. This series gives a good insight into psychological part of customs officers' work. In some of the episodes of season 3 the scene is set at Gatwick Airport. It highlights the skills of customs officers to see potential offenders among passengers by their body language. The main characters are customs officers Fitz and Tony. In one of the episodes Fitz notices the passenger who seems to be extremely nervous and unconfident while passing through customs control zone. He is looking over his shoulder and around too frequent. In the customs channel Fitz is taking him aside for further questioning. Their interaction is hindered by the language barrier but due to high professionalism the customs clerk manages to find out the home country of the traveler and the purpose of his coming to the UK. The officer is searching his suitcase, as a result Fitz notices that some of the things cannot belong to the traveler, among them a passport of an unknown woman. The passport is sent to the immigration to be checked. Some tests are conducted in order to detect signs of drugs in the organism of the passenger. The high reading for cocaine makes officers suspect that it can be a swallower. In the end the passenger is arrested on suspicion of being involved in the controlled drug transportation [4, season 3 episode 11].

Customs officers must remain objective when conducting various checks. This is the reason for customs inspections, personal inspections and other forms of control being carried out in the presence of more than one public servant. Thus, other people get the idea of an integrated system of state regulation in the sphere of customs with exact prescriptions and rules.

Rules of public speaking and the provision of official information by customs officers are included in the mandatory norms of behavior of public servants. A customs officer has to give a speech for different purposes within his functions: while presenting statistic reports or other records concerning results of the Customs service's or distinct Customs agency's activity to colleagues, higher authorities, while participating in proceedings on customs offences or during negotiations on international meetings. Mastering oratory, art of getting the message across and convincing the audience in rightness of the presented ideas, is the only way to gain respect and support of colleagues and other public servants and civilians. In order to influence the public in an expected way a customs officer should comply with all

requirements of communication at work as well as to make the right choice of arguments to evoke definite emotions in listeners. A customs officer should comply with rhetorical ethos – ethical aspect of speaker's image which is formed as a relation of a speech to the norms of morality. It consists in correspondence of a speaker's intent to emphasize a certain idea with the value system of the audience [3, p. 184]. During their speech customs officers must show respect to the people, considering the cultural and linguistic features of various ethnic and social groups.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight that the culture of speech is a crucial requirement to the competence of customs officers. The quality of work of customs authorities mainly depends on the level of communicative skills of their servants. Customs agents are representatives of his state. They must present their speech in the right key while interacting with other state servants, foreign trade participants, ordinary foreigners and citizens. They must comply with the norms of the literary language, use special terms in relation to certain objects, actions or processes. Moreover, customs officers must show verbally respect to the person they refer to, use words and phrases that correspond to the purpose of conversation and the specific situation of interaction. The culture of speech, thus, helps customs officials to perform their duties to achieve expected results.

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