UDC 330

How do we Draw a Picture of the World: Cultural Stereotypes

[1] Ekaterina Tskhakaya
[2] Evgeniya V. Vidishcheva

[1] Sochi State University, Russia
354000, Sochi, 26a Sovetskaya st.
student
E-mail: catherinet2008@rambler.ru
[2] Sochi State University, Russia
354000, Sochi, 26a Sovetskaya st.
PhD, associate professor
E-mail: evgenia-vv@mail.ru

Abstract. "No man is an island" said a famous poet John Donne, implying that it is impossible to live in isolation from the society. This is what makes us, people, similar. But what is that makes us all different? The first answer that may come to our mind is culture. Every culture is unique and divides the individuals that present it into hundreds of groups. In this article a closer examination will be given to the process of communication of these cultures. People all over the world interact daily with each other for personal, academic and business purposes. But is it easy to be done or does it require specific knowledge of one another? Well, certainly it does, that is why we all live in the stereotypes that our ancestors have fostered in us: we think that the British are conservative, the Germans organized and Italians are talkative. On the first case study that was provided for the purpose of the article it will be shown how stereotypes appear on the screens of our TV sets and will reveal the vision of the British people on some other cultures. On the second case study an online conference between Russian and Chinese students will depict of two behavior models and demonstrate how two groups interacted with each other in an academic environment.

Keywords: cross-culture; communication; ethnicity; culture; stereotypes.

1. Background Literature
1.1. Cross-cultural Communication – Defining the Сonceptключ

If we think of the definition of the term "cross-cultural communication", many words come to our minds: culture, people, nation, link, conversation, interaction. The list may seem endless. However we describe the process of communication between individuals representing two (or more) different cultures, we mean certain characteristics that these cultural representatives possess. One of the definition is given by the authors [1] to the term "culture" itself is "all the characteristics common to a particular group of people that are learned and not given by nature". Hence, to these characteristics we can only attribute those patterns that people are acquiring through their life, not some innate features. Having defined the concept of the culture it is possible to explain the process of cross-cultural communication. Author [2] claims that it occurs when people coming from various "cultural communities" negotiate and interact. When a communication between two different individuals (let us say they are both from two different countries) begins, their interaction is at first intercultural and after this communication becomes closer and longer it grows to interpersonal. [3]

There are two other concepts that relate to the topic and that are worth being mentioned because they can be confused by their meanings. These are social identity and ethnicity.

Social identity is a rather complex term. The author [1] asserts that upon development every individual builds his social identity that includes such components as his family position, religion, residence, political views, his occupation etc. Here is how social organizations are constructed uniting people with similar named above characteristics. An interesting point is that every individual chooses a few or one characteristic which his identity will be built on. For instance, if a person is rich and occupies a high position in a company he will be identifying himself mostly with his profession, not his nationality or political views. [1]

On the other side, ethnicity is comprised with cultural characteristics that "have a politically cohesive power". [1] When people from an ethnic group increase the importance of their nation that nationalism takes place. And depending on the grade of its emphasis it is then called chauvinism or patriotism. [1]

When ethnic belonging is strongly expressed ethnocentrism takes place which impedes people communicate across cultures and nations. Ethnocentrism is an individual`s belief that his own group prevails above the others, that he reckons the ideology and views of his group are correct and denies to regard any concepts represented by other groups to be right. [4] That is why ethnocentrism averts people from adapting to conditions of other ethnic group and complicates his communication.

Now it is possible to draw a conclusion on the term "cross-cultural communication" itself. It is a process of sharing information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds. [1]

1.2. Cultural Stereotypes – What Are They?

Through centuries people have been building stereotypes about various groups. They had a clear concept of their behaviour, language, beliefs and other attributes of cultural identity. If we ask, for instance, a Russian student (that has never met a single German in his life) what he knows about German people, he will most probably say that they are logical, disciplined and well-organized in everything we do. So if this student has never met a German what is he building his guessing on? The answer is stereotypes. They are inevitable and they lead to prejudice. [5] People attribute certain characteristics to other groups and the stereotype becomes well known among his own group. Another thing is that the stereotype does not always coincide with reality. What is more, two different groups may have very different prejudice about the third group.

We build stereotypes in order to distinct groups one from another. We do it because we cannot build our perception of the group unless we categorize them. [6] Another interesting question that may be raised is why do we use them so often? Authors [7] assert that we save energy by ignoring individual characteristics of people when we interact with them if we treat them as a part of the group about which we already have a stereotype. Although in recent publications and research work in social psychology authors have been criticizing the value of the stereotyping which is very reasonable. Indeed, if we percept according to the stereotypes that we have about his group and if they do not coincide with this individual, then we can fail negotiating with him and loose time.

Stereotypes may be regarded as such only if they are shared among a big group of people. [7] Furthermore, when people from one group interact with each other they are prone to development of their views and spreading, i.e. strengthening, them within their group. Hence their perceptions and viewpoints become more similar. Hence, the fact that the group has a formed stereotype is not a result of coincidence, but that of mutually influenced decision built on their interaction. [7]

1.3. How We Communicate.

When representatives of different groups are interacting they always exchange information. But this does not mean that it takes only verbal form. They use body language while talking, they have their own model of behaviour which also transmits information about their individuality. That is why communicating with someone from another country or of other nationality can become so complex. Especially, if you are interacting with this person for the first time.

The stereotypes that we have often lead to misunderstanding and complexes the process of communication.

A simple conversation between two people can be depicted in a two-way flow of information that is depicted on the Figure 1. [8]
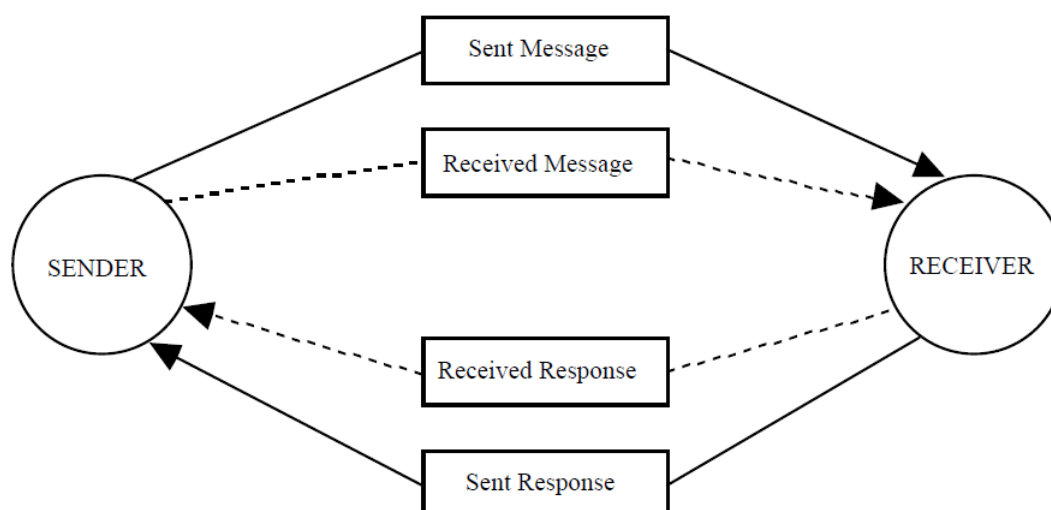
Figure 1. Communication Model

As it is clear on the graph there are two parties: the sender and the receiver. Even though the sender transmits certain information the receiver can percept it in a different way.

The author [8] sets an interesting example of this misunderstanding.

A British boss asked an American employee who was new in the company: "Would You like to have lunch earlier, at 11.00 am?" The employee was happy to hear that and agreed: "Yeah, that would be great!" The problem is that the boss regarded the word "yeah" that was supposed to be more polite "yes" as a rude form of answering and in his turn replied: "With that kind of attitude, you may as well forget about lunch!" So the new employee was astonished to hear that. The reason of such a reply of the boss was that he had some prejudice about that word "yeah" and he regarded the employee to be ill-mannered. If the boss had a better understanding of American culture perhaps he would react at the reply in a normal way. And the employee, in his turn, would not be surprised by the situation.

By regarding this example it is possible to understand the importance of correct perception of other individuals` culture which will help us avoid uncomfortable situations.

2. How we build cultural concepts. Case studies from England and Russia

2.1. Case Study 1: Mind Your Language

In 1977 British television has launched series called "Mind Your Language" directed by Stuart Allen. These series were about students from eleven countries (later on there were some more students coming but they appeared only in a few episodes) came to England to study English. They have a young teacher Mr. Brown who is absolutely not liked by the director of the school Ms. Courtney. The students arrive with a very poor knowledge of English, some of them (like an Indian lady and a Spanish gentleman) do not speak a word. As their course progresses they are learning new words and more students start communicating with each other.

Every student has his (her) own peculiar features that are shown in such a way that they represent a stereotype about the country he came from. In the Table 1 data on the students, their general characteristic is provided.

<div align="right">Table 1.</div>

Students` characteristic from TV series Mind Your Language

Country	Name of the Student	Characteristic	Real Name	Real nationality
Italy	Giovanni Capello	A chief, very loud, active and talkative. He likes to make mistakes in English on purpose so that everyone starts laughing, he often says something in Italian like "Santa Maria"	George Camiller	Italian
Germany	Anna Schmidt	She is very firm and diligent. In class she is hard-working and always does the homework. She is very disciplined. Has some mistakes in her pronunciation.	Jacki Harding	Not known
China	Chung Su-Lee	Works as a secretary in Chinese Embassy. She is carrying around her book of Mao and is often citing it. She is always defending her country if anyone wants to say something wrong about it.	Pik-Sen Lim	Chinese
Japan	Taro Nagazumi	Is working in the area of electronics. He bows all the time and is very polite. He always carrying his camera. Speaks English rather well.	Robert Lee	Japanese
India	Jamila Ranjha	Is a housewife. She is rather calm. When starting her classes she speaks only a few words in English. She is always knitting when she is at class.	Jamila Massey	Indian
Greece	Maximillian Andrea Archimedes Papandrious	Works in shipping office. He is Max`s best friend and they are somehow alike. He misunderstands metaphors in English.	Kevork Malikyan	**Turkish-Armenian**
Spain	Juan Cervantes	He is very polite and friendly. He speaks really bad English and often mixes it with	Ricardo Montez	**Gibraltarian**

		Spanish. To anything that is said to him he answers "por favor" (please).		
Punjab	Ranjeet Singh	He is often arguing with Ali. He is sometimes misusing words. When he gets angry he threatens them with his knife – kirpan. He wags his head and say "thousands apologizes" when he does something wrong.	Albert Moses	**Sri-Lanka**
France	Danielle Favre	She is flirting with many men, particularly with Mr. Brown. She is very nice and like to dress up. Sometimes she becomes jealous when other women cath men`s attention.	Françoise Pascal	French
Pakistan	Ali Nadeem	The first student to appear. He is very talkative but he often mispronounces words what is confusing the others. He often repeats: "blimey!"	Dino Shafeek	**Bangladeshi**
Sweden	Ingrid Svenson	She is flirty and tries to seduce Mr. Brown. She does not appear in many series.	Anna Bergman	Swedish

As it is clear in the table the models of behaviour of the students vary according to their nationality. In the same way, they have different level of English and their academic performance is not similar as well.

For instance, an Indian lady is not doing her homework frequently and speaks very seldom, most of the time she is knitting at the class. At the same time Anna (German student) and Chung (Chinese lady) are both very diligent and they always implement the task of the teacher, even though both them stick to their national peculiarities. For example, Chung is writing her essays in English from right to the left.

The series perfectly show the stereotype about countries. When Mr. Brown refers to an African gentleman he starts making jokes about the way he arrived, presuming he could have been travelling by elephant. He also starts explaining him what an airplane is calling it "a flying iron bird". He is assuming that African countries are poorly developed and starts joiking about this fact.

What is more, when students decided to steal test answers from Mr. Brown, German lady refuses to participate in this risky affair saying that it is not fair. There is a general consumption that German people follow the established rules depicted in this episode. At the same time Giovanni and Maximillian are the main generators of the idea to cheat on the exam, being more cunning and resourceful.

The fact that there are students whose languages are similar (come from Latin) it establishes more comprehensive relations with them. Giovanni (Italy) is translating some words from English

to Italian to Juan (Spain) who cannot speak anything rather than "por favor" (please) as a reply. Since Italian and Spanish are similar languages these two students cooperate in some situations.

Their teacher Mr. Brown, tries to adapt to their cultural peculiarities as well. For instance, once, when he approached the Japanese student he starts bowing as well, in order to show respect to his country.

Interestingly, that the majority of the students become friends very fast and even some of them who were enemies at the beginning (due to political views and ethnicity) get on better later in the series. In general, the interaction amoung students and between the students is very smooth.

For the purpose of the comedian character of the series students commit various mistakes which lead to misunderstanding between them.

Even though the actors playing the roles of the student were representing their nationalities really good, after some research it has been revealed that some of the actors had nationality different from that of the student they were playing. For example, a Greek student was played by a Turkish-Armenian origin. Nevertheless, not knowing this fact one would never notice the difference.

As a matter of fact, the TV series included British characters. For instance, Mr. Brown (the teacher), the director of the school, a cockney-speaking caretaker of the school and a lady working in the café. The creators of the show have skillfully depicted the most commonly known British features.

Through the behaviour, speech, body language, actions and even appearance of the main heroes it is possible to make a conclusion that all this attributes presented the way the British "imagine" national characteristics of some countries.

2.2. Case Study 2: Virtual Conference – China vs. Russia

Another peculiar case study relevant to the topic is an online conference held between Sochi State University (Russia) and Sheffield Hallam University (England). The technical tool for the implementation of this conference was a Skype video call. There are many details that had an impact on the outcome of the conference.

At the beginning it should be mentioned that Russian students were told they will be participating in a conference with English students. Secondly, the topics set for Russian students varied from Tourism and Hospitality areas to Volunteering and Preparation for the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014.

When the conference began the picture has changed a bit. First of all, the English university was represented mainly by Chinese students, i.e. from four groups of students three of them were 100% composed of Chinese students and the forth group was about 40% composed of Chinese students. Secondly, the topics presented by that groups were all about Hospitality Industry.

For the purpose of this article it is necessary to draw out the peculiarities of participation. In Russia there was one group that was taking part in the conference and that was interacting with Chinese students during the conference. While their counterparts from England had four groups which were changing every 30 minutes. Chinese students were doing one presentation per group while Russian students were presenting individually. There presenting styles were notably different: the Russians were using a lot of picture on their slides and the Chinese were emphasizing on texts. Hence, Russian students believe that bright images are able to catch more attention of the audience, while Chinese students reckon that carefully organized written notions can be very informative and still keep the listener involved.

Apart from the technical features which can be attributed to the difference in academic environment, at many points the participants of the online conference were demonstrating their cultural identities in their own ways.

When each of the group from England appeared on the screen to start presenting, first of all they presented each other. While Russian students just greeted them and waved their hands smiling. The point of introducing oneself was obviously not to be able to memorize all the names and start a conversation with each student by saying his name first. This was just a way of presenting oneself and opening the communication process. The ways students used to "break the ice" was different, yet it does not mean that one is better and the other is worse. These two approaches demonstrated the students` perception of the process of meeting someone for the first time.

At the end of the conference one event was the brightest example of how a culture stands out. One of the invited Russian students (who did not present) played a music composition on violin. It was said to be a present for the English counterparts. As it may be generally known, Russian people are regarded to be hospitable and friendly to their guests and people who come from other countries. Therefore, preparation of a musical gift was a way to express this national trait.

Upon the end of the conference both of the sides agreed to spur on the future partnership and make the conferences more frequent.

An evidence of the stereotypes that influence people daily it is worth presenting some data based on the answers of Russian students. They have been asked what they think about Chinese students (many of the interrogated students did not have any communication with Chinese students) and here is how some of the students replied:

"We have an Institution of Confucius in my hometown so we have many students from China. The guys are really nice, friendly and sociable. They dress up really classy as well. I like them".

"I do not know much, but I think they are students just like any others. Perhaps, as far as I know they are more interested, motivated and curious".

"I reckon they are gentle, they study well, they are purposeful".

"I think they are students like any others – mobile, resistant to stress, ready for serious tests, they are constantly increasing their qualifications, becoming more competent in their area. They are bright and cool young students! And perhaps they are full of aspirations!"

"Chinese students are sociable and friendly, they smile while greeting you. As for their academic skills, they are diligent and smart. I have a very positive image of them!"

As it may be clear from the statements above, all of the young people have a similar perception of the Chinese students. They outline that they are friendly and they go straight to their aims. The similarity of the responses indicates that Russian students have already adopted the same model of thinking about a certain group – Chinese students, because only some of the Russians questioned had previous experience with Chinese students.

Conclusion

The process of cross-cultural communication a complex one and it is hard to determine it from only several viewpoints. Even with frequent interaction with representatives of various cultures it is not so easy to build a clear picture of the nation. That is why people use stereotypes that encompass the general knowledge of the society and help (or impede) people communicate globally. Many curious situations appear in everyday situations that contribute into keeping the question of the successful cross-cultural communication open.

In the current article some of such situations have been a closer examination to. Perhaps they do not make the picture completely clear, but they still set an example of the perceptions of one group by the other.

References:

1. "Tvärkulturell kommunikation" (1985) in Allwood, J. (Ed.)Tvärkulturell kommunikation, Papers in Anthropological Linguistics 12, University of Göteborg, Dept of Linguistics, Translation to English.

2. Gudykunst W.B. (2003). Intercultural communication: Introduction. In W.B. Gudykunst (Ed.), Cross-cultural and intercultural communication, 163–166. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

3. Intercultural Communication, Communication for Governance and Accountability Program, The World Bank.

4. Triandis H.C. (1994). Culture and social behavior. New York: McGraw-Hill.

5. Devine P.G. (1989). Stereotypes and prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56, 5–18.

6. Tajfel and Wilkes, On the role of familiarity with units of Measurement in categorical accentuation, 1963.

7. Craig McGarty, Vincent Y. Yzerbyt and Russell Spears, Stereotypes as Explanations: The Formation of Meaningful Beliefs about Social Groups, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

8. Nancy J. Adler, Communicating Across Barriers, 1991, International Dimensions of Oganizational Behavior (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: PWS-KENT Publishing Company. pp. 63-91.

УДК 330

Как мы представляем картину мира: культурные стереотипы

[1] Екатерина Цхакая
[2] Евгения В. Видищева

[1] Сочинский государственный университет, Россия
354000, г. Сочи, ул. Советская, 26а
студент
E-mail: catherinet2008@rambler.ru
[2] Сочинский государственный университет, Россия
354000, г. Сочи, ул. Советская, 26а
Кандидат экономических наук, доцент
E-mail: evgenia-vv@mail.ru

Аннотация. Знаменитый поэт Джон Донн сказал, что «Ни один человек не остров». имея в виду, что невозможно жить изолированно от общества. Вот что объединяет людей. Но что делает нас разными? Первое, что приходит на ум – культура. Каждая культура уникальна и разделяет людей, представляющих ее, на сотни групп. В данной статье изучается процесс коммуникации данных культур. Люди во всем мире ежедневно взаимодействуют друг с другом по личным, образовательным или деловым причинам. Легко ли это сделать, и нужны ли для этого определенные знания? Вообще-то, да, поэтому мы все придерживаемся стереотипов, навязанных нам нашими предками: мы считаем, что британцы – консервативные, немцы – организованные, а итальянцы – разговорчивые. Исследование, проведенное для данной статьи, в первую очередь, показывает, что стереотипы появляются на экранах наших телевизоров и откроет взгляды британцев на некоторые другие культуры. Во-вторых, исследование он-лайн конференции между русскими и китайскими студентами продемонстрирует две поведенческие модели и покажет, как взаимодействуют две группы в академической среде.

Ключевые слова: кросскультура; коммуникация; этническая принадлежность; культура; стереотипы.