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Identifying Kyrgyz Cultural Stereotypes and Prejudices

Saltanat Mambaeva

Simultaneous Translation Department , Faculty of Humanities
KTU Manas, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
saltanat.mambaeva@manas.edu.kg:Tel: +996555870990

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Abstract

We live in a world, which is becoming a Global Village in which information and communication attract people's attention more than ever before. Our desire to communicate with strangers and our relationships with them depend on the degree to which we are effective in communicating with them. There are so many factors restricting or improving people's communication. This article gives an analysis based on one factor called stereotypes and at the same time it is a trial to identify Kyrgyz culture and Kyrgyz people too. In intercultural research, the influence of stereotypes on people's behaviors in communication is a very important issue to take into account. This paper aims to illustrate stereotypes from the aspects of their social and psychological perspectives, great influence on people's communication, the problems they may cause, and some solutions.

Key words: intercultural communication, stereotype, prejudice, identifying Kyrgyz culture, Kyrgyz stereotype, culture

1. Introduction:

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973: 89) defines culture as a "historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols … by means of which men can communicate, perpetuate and develop their own knowledge about and attitudes towards life." In other words, culture in general is concerned with beliefs and values on the basis of which people interpret experiences and behave, individually and in groups. Broadly and simply put, "culture" refers to a group or community with which you share common experiences that shape the way you understand the world. However, for the business environment, the concepts of cultural stereotypes and cultural differences rather than that of culture are much more active in approaching the most appropriate behavior and conduct business people should be able to handle. Therefore, the complexity of the situational context involved gives credit to a shocking assertion with respect to the behavioral code business people have to acquire to cope with the international dimension of their activity: "*Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy. Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster.*"1**(**Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 37)

This paper intends to point out the importance of cross-cultural communication within the constraining framework of cultural stereotypes and cultural differences, which can be, in the long run, softened or dissipated by placing them into the proper context and using them adequately. On the basis of well-known ideas about Intercultural communication here will be done an analysis of the Kyrgyz culture, which was not deeply investigated from the Intercultural point of view. Kyrghyz people is one of the ancient novadic people living in the Eurasian part of the world since the mentioned sources around the 6-7 centuries B.C? but in the other sources were given data as 15-20 c.B.C. But the nomadic cultire was always called as a barbarian culture, and it was not studied till the end of the 19th and start of the 20th centuries. In this article, the subject of research is the process of communication between different cultures, an attempt to analyze the process of communication, its main types and rules. The object of the study is the language as a national value and a constituent element of the national mentality, namely the Kyrgyz mentality as an element of the mental makeup of the nation, its manifestation in intercultural communication. The stereotypes that have developed among other nations regarding the Kyrgyz were also analyzed.

The main method of studying the Kyrgyz national mentality is a system of personal research procedures, such as observation, analysis of scientific literature, texts of fiction, collections of proverbs. This article is, as it were, a continuation of the book ***"Identifying Kyrgyz People and Culture"*** published in 2009 (Mambvaeva, 2009). In the above book, an attempt was made to focus the attention of foreign citizens studying Kyrgyzstan and its people on the identification of the Kyrgyz among other peoples; differences of national culture from other peoples living in Central Asia; the most characteristic features of the Kyrgyz stereotype in general. Special studies of foreign scientists have established that the nature, form and style of communication largely depend on the first minutes, and sometimes seconds of communication. There are many very simple techniques that allow in almost any situation to facilitate the initial stage of communication, which determines the entire further course of this process. Such techniques include a smile, addressing the interlocutor by name, complimenting him, etc. Depending on the combination of various methods. It is customary to single out three main types of intercultural communication in communication techniques and styles - verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal (Sadohin, 2005)

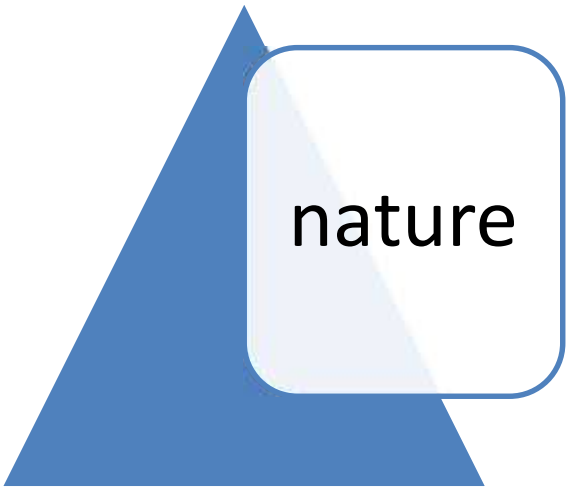
2. The methods of research

The main method of research was taken analytical and comparative methods to analyze the Kyrgyz culture and compare it with the investigated ones. The use of language as the main means of verbal communication implies that to each word or sound is given a special, unique meaning. For speakers of the Kyrgyz language, this meaning is generally accepted and helps them understand each other. Therefore, during the communication of speakers of different languages, situations of linguistic inconsistency arise, manifested in the absence of an exact equivalent for expressing a particular concept, or even in the absence of the concept itself. As a rule, the basis for such a discrepancy is objects and concepts that reflect them, which are characteristic only for a given culture and are absent in other cultures, as well as different cultural ideas about them. Compared to the verbal means of expressing thoughts among the Kyrgyz and Eastern cultures, residents of European countries and the United States speak more directly, clearly and accurately, trying to avoid silence during communication. Representatives of European cultures say what they think and think what they say, because the socio-cultural context of communication does not matter to them. These cultures are highly appreciative of those who simply and directly express their thoughts and feelings. Whereas in the culture of the Kyrgyz, speaking about everything openly and directly is a cultural peculiar and speech taboo. And by this, it is a truly national value of the Kyrgyz people, and differs from Western culture.

There are numbers of styles in verbal communication, which depends both on the individual characteristics and personality traits of a person, and on the norms of communication and attitude towards people generally accepted in a given culture. In this regard, the *communicative style* can be defined as a set of stable and habitual ways of behavior inherent in a given person, which are used by him when establishing relationships and interactions with other people. Based on the divisions of the American scientist Edward Hall - cultures by context - the Kyrgyz can be attributed to a *high-contextual culture*, as well as the Japanese and Koreans, where, according to an established tradition, it is not allowed to say openly "no", leaving a number of conventions and understatement, therefore this style refers to indirect verbal style (Hall.,1983). Another characteristic of the Kyrgyz style - is the *artsy (artsy) style*, which involves the use of a rich, expressive language in communication, for example, this style is widespread in the cultures of the Arab peoples of the Middle East, where, thanks to oaths and assurances, both the face of the speaker and his face are preserved. interlocutor. At the celebrations, the Kyrgyz try to speak skillfully - pretentiously, using sayings, proverbs and citations from classical literary works and poems, and even the Manas epic *("Manas" is the longest epic in the world, it is 20 times longer "Illiad" by Homer).* This can often be seen now when blessings or toasts are given at various celebrations. For example: at celebrations – ***toy*** -the speaker- the toastmaster begins his speech with the praise of everyone who came to this *toy*, then the host of the celebration and his children, and even each guest sometimes etc.

Do cultural stereotypes function when a business person relates to a partner of another culture? Are there cultural taboos one needs to be aware of? These are only two questions business students should be aware of when they learn to communicate cross-culturally and when they aim to develop intercultural communicative competence. Hofstede (2005) sees culture as the "*software of the mind*"; that is, while human beings all have the same "hardware", the human brain, our "software" or "programming" is rather different. It is the same experience when you interact with someone from a different culture – their words, assumptions, gestures, values, and other aspects of their culture will not make sense when transferred to your frame of reference.

This assertion is clearly illustrated in their book *Cultures and Organizations* 2005:6) by the following figure.



Roughly interpreted, all human beings are completely the same, completely different, and partly the same and partly different. This can be diagrammed as seen above. We are all the same as our "human nature" is regarded – we are all part of the same species; we all have the same "hardware". We are all completely different as our personalities are regarded. And we are "partly the same and partly different" on the territory of culture. As far as culture is concerned, a special notice should be taken into account here: the same person can belong to several different cultures depending on their birthplace, nationality, ethnicity, family status, gender, age, language, education, physical condition, sexual orientation, religion, profession, place of work and its corporate culture. However, culture is the "lens" through which you view the world. It is central to what you see, how you make sense of what you see, and how you express yourself. Cultures – both national and organizational – differ along many dimensions. Among them, four are the most important: Directness (get to the point *versus* imply the messages); Hierarchy (follow orders *versus* engage in debate); Consensus (dissent is accepted *versus* unanimity is needed); and Individualism (individual winners *versus* team effectiveness).

According to the Webster Dictionary, a stereotype is "an idea or statement about all of the members of a group or all the instances of a situation". The American Heritage Dictionary defines it as the "conventional, formulaic, and oversimplified conception, opinion, or image" or "One that is regarded as embodying or conforming to a set image or type." According to a further definition, "a stereotype is a simplified mental picture of an individual or group of people who share a certain characteristic (or *stereotypical*) qualities. The term is often used in a negative sense, and stereotypes are seen by many as undesirable beliefs which can be altered through education and/or familiarization". (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Stereotype) The concept of the 'stereotype' was borrowed from old raised printing technology, where copies of a composed type were made by using papier mache as molds for new printing plates, identical to the original. The term stereotype, as allegedly used for the first time by Walter Lippman in 1922, is used today to mean a readily available image of a given social group, usually based on rough, often negative generalizations. Stereotypes simply mean cognitive representations of another group that influence our feelings toward members of that group. Lippman (1922) refers to stereotypes as "pictures in our heads." He points out stereotypes have both a cognitive and affective component: Stereotyping is not merely a way of substituting order for the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality. It is not merely a shortcut. It is all these things and more. It is a guarantee of our self-respect; it is the projection upon the world of our own sense of value, our own position and our own rights. The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with feelings that are attached to them (Lippman (1922).,pp. 63-64)

Although stereotypes can be positive as well as negative, they are, in everyday usage, most often understood as irrationally based negative attitudes about certain social groups and their members. Stereotypes are called idiosyncratic, if only an individual uses them, or they are social, or collective if they are widely shared by a group of people. In everyday use, the concept of the stereotype is used in various contexts: usually the word stereotype is used to refer to members of some kind of collective: firemen are courageous, blondes are less intelligent, Italians are noisy, and so forth. When a person makes inferences about a new person or about some social event, they use their existing knowledge to reduce the uncertainty in the situation. The less one knows about the object, the more one uses stereotypical generalizations.

Non-verbal business communication styles are generally associated with business meetings. In some cases, it is common sense that may help us (i.e. leaning on the back of the chair is perceived as rude in Europe and America; leg crossing is perceived as threatening or accusatory in Muslim society). In other cases we rely on the assumption that messages conveyed by laughter, smiling, and crying or expressing emotions of enjoyment, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise are universal and if there is a culture where their connotation differs, it is only the smallest exception of them all. When it comes to nonverbal language, even though one can never understand and apply it fully, universal common sense has been turned into politeness by millennia of experience and goodwill. *The dress code in business* submits to some general rules commonly accepted within the international business environment but it can also be inferred from a culture's beliefs and customs. Therefore, another rule one has to take into consideration is a common sense one, asserted by Ashley Rothschild *The Rothschild Image*: "You have to honor the country and the culture." The conservative dress has generally become a business stereotype; almost all the business etiquette guides contain the well-known piece of advice: "Men should wear dark conservative attires… Business suits are most suitable… Women's dress should be conservative too…" What in fact is really important is that one should seriously take into consideration and respect the dress codes of the countries that they go to.

Intercultural business communication represents a major source of producing behavioural stereotypes that may contribute to the success or failure of a business enterprise. However, business can be considered a fundamental type of crosscultural communication; a history of international business practices can be framed in terms of the evolving structures of rules that governed how people ought to communicate to make decisions, trades, and partnerships. The major differences among business organizations follow cultural patterns that are found among all discourse communities, and some principles of cross-cultural communication can help an outsider to predict an organization's expectations. Germans, for example, highly rank directness in communication, similarly Americans are in favour of debating issues directly and openly. As with many Latin countries, communication tends to be predominantly oral rather than through the written word. Asians and Chinese are perceived as being rigid (this is only because they find it extremely difficult to say 'no'). The Arabic conversation can be very hyperbolic with much use of flowery language and flattery.

Communication barriers in cross-cultural business communication are generally considered factors such as language, modern technology, stereotyping and prejudice, anxiety, assuming similarity instead of difference, ethnocentrism; all these may lead to intercultural miscommunication by providing a narrow image of the "other" culture. Such barriers that may be perceptual, emotional, cultural or interpersonal need to be avoided, first and foremost by becoming aware of possible preconceptions (prejudice and stereotypes) to function along with the intercultural *Behavioural Stereotypes in Intercultural Communication* dialogue. Perceptions are determined by the person's life experience and the history of the culture – and they differ from culture to culture. Furthermore, the role society prescribes for persons varies greatly by culture; cultures commonly impose roles by gender or social class. Another outstanding barrier in communicating cross-culturally is ethnocentrism, already mentioned above. Judging other cultures by the standards of our own culture, and associating this with a feeling of superiority of one's own culture should be counterbalanced by not stereotyping other cultures and by increasing mutual cultural awareness. *Culture shock* represents another area of cross-cultural communication, in which behavioural patterns are worth discussing, especially for the business environment; how culture shock is experienced and how it can be faced while being included into a particular culture is another discussion closely connected to the idea of multiculturalism. At present, any modern nation is a complex society with corresponding variations in culture. It is made up of different ethnic groups, it is stratified into classes, it is differentiated into regions, and it is separated into rural and urban settlements, each having its distinctive cultural characteristics. These facts indicate that it is not a simple matter to acquaint oneself with the culture of a nation, let alone the culture of another nation.

Last, but not least a few words on *cross-cultural marketing*, which is a strategic process of marketing among consumers whose culture differs from that of the marketer's own culture; it demands marketers to be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences. Having identified such stereotypes and cultural differences, a question arises: How are these differences exploited for the benefit of the business students? First of all by making them aware that while some of our assumptions are universal, in that most people in the world have them, others are culturally specific. It is these culturally specific assumptions that can often cause miscommunication. When an interaction is not working, the following questions can help explore the underlying assumption generally induced by stereotypical judgment:

- What is the basis for this assumption/stereotype – is it personal experience or someone else's opinion?
- Does this assumption/stereotype check out against what can be objectively observed?
- If the assumption(s)/stereotypes were set aside, how would it help the interaction?

Secondly, special treatment must be addressed to the specifics of national business culture because having an insight into the cultural dynamics of a country or region can be very helpful to understand why people act the way they do, and the appropriate way you should act while in that country.

There are three areas of interest which account for the impact of business stereotypes, no matter the culture differences:

1. appearance, which highlights business etiquette do's and don'ts involving dress, clothing, body language, and gestures;
2. behaviour, which highlights business etiquette do's and don'ts involving dining, gift-giving, meetings, customs, protocol, negotiation, and general behavioural guidelines;
3. communication, which highlights business etiquette do's and don'ts involving greetings, introductions, and conversational guidelines.

These three areas address the business instances most commonly practiced within the organizational environment, i.e. business meetings, negotiations, presentations, and interviews. Starting from the above-mentioned business landmarks, stereotypes – seen not as undesirable beliefs which can be altered through education and/or familiarization but as something that *is regarded as embodying or conforming to a set image or type* – play the role of functional indicators of different cultural categories that require different patterns of treatment. Consequently, from this perspective, Geert Hofstede's dimensions analysis can assist the business person or traveler both in a better understanding of the cultural stereotypes and intercultural differences within regions and between countries, and in choosing the most appropriate code for business communication. The rules that govern this code are influenced and assisted, in my opinion, by patterns of behavior that make the difference between organizations, business people, or business environments.

If we can make accurate stereotypes, then our cultural-level predictions about strangers' behavior can also be accurate.

Stereotypes, in and of themselves, do not lead to miscommunication and /or communication breakdown. To some extent, people's assumption to others leads to stereotypes. The accuracy of our predictions depends on whether the traits that we include in our stereotype of another group are similar to the ones in that group's stereotype of its own group (i.e., are our stereotypes valid?). If the traits we apply to another group agree with the traits members of that group apply to themselves, our stereotype should lead to accurate interpretations of the behavior of members of the group who are typical. When we place someone in a category, our stereotype of people in that category helps us predict his or her behavior. In other words, we are able to reduce our uncertainty because we assume that our stereotypes tell us how typical group members communicate (Krauss & Fussell, 1991). If the other person has informed us of his or her category membership, our predictions may be accurate. For example, the distinctiveness of Chinese cultural characteristics has been recognized in these ways. Chinese are often described as: emotionally more reserved, introverted, fond of tranquility, overly considerate, socially overcautious, and habituated to self-restraint and so forth (Young, 1994).

If one says that he is a typical Chinese, then we can make some accurate predictions of his or her behavior if our stereotypes of people from China differentiate Chinese from Japanese. If our stereotype does not include this differentiation, then our predictions will probably not be accurate.

In an intercultural setting, one of the goals of the participant is getting to know the attitudes and personality of the communication partner. In this process, we apply both evidence and our existing beliefs about the members of that cultural group. These are cultural stereotypes. Stereotypes can concern one's own group or that of the other. These are

called respectively auto- and hetero-stereotypes. Nonetheless, members of a given group may also share common conceptions about the other party's stereotypical assumptions about themselves, or about the respective 'other' party. Due to the fact that the person, in this case, is projecting their own prejudices onto the group of others, this type of stereotyping could be called a projected stereotype. The different national or cultural stereotypical assumptions can be described as follows: Simple auto-stereotype: In our opinion we [my nationality] are . . . Projected auto-stereotype: We think that they [inhabitants of the foreign country] consider us to be . . . Projected hetero-stereotype: We feel that they [the inhabitant of the foreign country] think that they are . . . Simple hetero-stereotype: We think that they are . . . For instance, a Kyrgyz may feel that 'the Kyrgyzs' are hardworking\diligent and honest, but at the same time they think that 'the Kazakhs' consider 'the Kyrgyzs' to be lazy, backward and simple, and that Kazakhs consider themselves to be more educated and 'better people', whereas for 'the Kyrgyz, they are boastful and cold!

Inaccurate stereotypes often lead to misunderstanding.
In Hewstone and Giles' model, miscommunication is framed as the result of inaccurate negative stereotyping, usually the dissolution of group relationship. If our stereotypes are inaccurate, we cannot make correct attributions about strangers' behavior. As for this point, we tend to use group identities to crystallize into recognizable patterns of communicative behavior. But very often, features of other's communicative (behavior) styles are judged inappropriately. Ronen (1979) says that one's religion, mother tongue, culture, also one's education, class, sex, skin color, even one's height, age, and family situation are all potentially unifying factors. But the cues we use are not always accurate ways to categorize others (i.e., an inaccurate categorization occurs when we put someone in a category in which he or she would not place herself or himself). Individual members of a group may or may not fit a stereotype we have of that group. If we categorize strangers who so not identify strongly with their ethnic group and who do identify strongly with their culture on the basis of their ethnicity, our prediction will probably be inaccurate. That will cause inaccurate stereotypes. For example, compared with American people, English people are considered cold and not very open; Making friends with them takes a very long time; They like a certain distance when talking, etc. But things usually turn out to be much more complex (e.g. include a large number of traits in the stereotype and differentiate subgroups within the group being stereotyped).

Another source of inaccuracy in our predictions based on our stereotypes is that the boundaries between many social groups are fuzzy (Clark & Marshall, 1981). For example, what is the boundary between educated and uneducated people? Or between young and old? Even skin color may not be a good predictor of category membership. There are, for instance, light-colored African Americans who look like European Americans. These individuals may be categorized as European American solely on the basis of skin color. They may, however, identify strongly with being African American. Similarly, dark-skinned African Americans may not identify strongly with their ethnic group. When communicating with strangers, we might categorize them on the basis of one group membership (e.g., ethnicity) and assume that their social identities based on this category are influencing their behavior. The strangers, however, may be basing their behavior on a different social identity (i.e., social class, gender).

For instance, Angela was born in Kyrgyzstan but has been living in the USA for a long time. She thinks two different cultures shaped her a lot. She has two names: Angela and Saamay Kyzy "There are times when I think that I have two personalities. Depending on where I am and whom I'm with. I would wave hello to my teachers, but bow to my parents' Kyrgyz friends when they visited our home." Obviously, predictions about their behavior based on skin color, or something else are inaccurate. To sum up, even if others are typical members of the group in which we categorize them, the inferences we make about them on the basis of their group membership may not be accurate. There are two reasons for it: One is that our stereotypes may not be valid (i.e., our stereotypes of their group are different from their stereotypes of the group); the other reason is that the group membership we are using to categorize them may not be affecting their behavior in the current situation. Furthermore, if we rigidly hold our stereotypes and are not willing to question them, we can never reach the point where we know strangers as individuals (i.e., we can never make psycho cultural predictions about their behavior), and our attributions about an individual strangers' behavior will continue to be incorrect.
Often, stereotypes are understood to be detrimental to intercultural communication and the elimination of stereotypes was believed to be a prerequisite for any successful intercultural exchange. This idea could be read, in amongst other places, in the preface to the book, Stereotyping and prejudice, by Bar-Tal et al. (1989: 1), where they state;

The study of stereotyping and prejudice reflects an interest in intergroup relationship (check the quote, as, grammatically, this should read relationships). While we recognize that a discussion of intergroup relationship may

focus on behaviors describing actions such as confrontations, violence, wars, cooperation, alliance, negotiation, or coordination, we also believe that each of these intergroup behaviors is mediated by perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. (I have made this change as the quotation ran over more than two lines and, therefore, required separating from the main body of the text). However, eliminating stereotypes is not possible, or, if it were done, it would be detrimental to human cognition. Stereotypes, as such, are cognitive schemata, typical of the human cognitive system, which assigns a set of characteristics to all members of a given social group, and serves as a reference when assigning significance to observations and experiences in social interactions. They are mental structures, which simplify the complex stimuli from one's environment and facilitate their comprehension.

When we walk on the street, for instance, just to get to a certain address, we may not be able to tell how many barber shops we passed during our journey. However, if we walk on the same street to find one, our attention is tuned to see the barbershops' signs hanging above the pedestrians. Cultural stereotypes work in the same way: they focus our attention on certain features, amplify them in our observation, and offer interpretations of our observations. In this way, we see what we are taught to see, and at the same time our observations also confirm the stereotype. Expectations drive our attention as observers. Having stereotypes may even lead one to see things that are not really there. Many writers see stereotypes as rigid generalities that members of society impose on others with whom they are unfamiliar or do not understand. The less we know about the other, the more we hang on stereotypes. If the stereotype is well-grounded and justifiable it may help to orient oneself in a certain situation, but if it is unjust and loaded with negative emotions, it will harm the interaction without question. A number of phenomena make the interpretation of cultural/national stereotypes enigmatic: cultural stereotypes are at the same time enduring and changing, strong and insignificant. Some of the constituents of a stereotype may be very old and remain the same for centuries, while some of the labels given to a country or cultural group may change within a short period of time. Also, the salience of the constituents of cultural stereotype may change in time and context. Some particular features may be enacted with different intensities in different contexts, yet in another context these features may have no relevance at all. In general, stereotypes are not very useful in intercultural interaction because they do not accurately predict either party's behavior.

As such, stereotypes are not bad or good, but they can influence intercultural interactions in different ways. An observer tends to favor information that is consistent with existing expectancies, and tends to ignore, or reject information that is inconsistent with the stereotypes. According to some studies, people tend to favour hypotheses based on stereotypes even when they have a reason to suspect the validity of the stereotype (Johnston & Macrae 1994). Stereotypes are often resistant to change. Experiences at variance with the stereotype usually do not change the stereotype but are interpreted as exceptions.

3. Problems of Stereotypes and Solutions

Stereotypes may lead ineffective communication when we communicate with strangers. Our stereotypes tend to be activated automatically when we categorize strangers and when we are not communicating mindfully (see von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995). We, therefore, unconsciously try to confirm our expectations when we communicate with strangers. Our stereotypes constrain strangers' patterns of communication and engender stereotype-confirming communication. In other words, stereotypes create self-fulfilling prophecies. We tend to see behavior that confirms our expectations even when it is absent. We ignore disconfirming evidence when communicating on automatic pilot. When we communicate on automatic pilot, we do not cognitively process all the information about others that is available to us (Johnston & Macrae, 1994). Generally, the greater our cultural and linguistic knowledge, and the more our beliefs overlap with those of the strangers with whom we communicate, the less the likelihood there will be misunderstandings. To increase our accuracy in making prediction, we must try to understand which social identity is guiding strangers' behavior in a particular situation. And to be effective in communication with strangers, we must keep our minds open and be mindful.

Since stereotypes are a natural product of the communication process, they influence the way we process information.

Stereotyping is the result of our tendency to overestimate the degree of association between group membership and psychological attributes. While there may be some association between group membership and psychological characteristics of members, it is much smaller than we assume when we communicate on automatic pilot. When we communicate on automatic pilot, we interpret incoming messages on the basis of the symbolic systems we learned as children. Besides, our processing of information is biased in the direction of maintaining the preexisting belief systems. We remember more favorable information about our in-groups and more unfavorable information about outgroups

(Hewstone & Giles, 1986). So, we tend to process information that is consistent with our stereotypes and our stereotypes do not change. To have objective cognition on the information of strangers, we can process all the information available to us if we are mindful of our communication. We need for predictability, to avoid diffuse anxiety, to sustain our self-conceptions, and above all, knowledge. When we process all the information available to us, our stereotypes of *strangers* change. Our tendency to stereotypes automatically is enhanced when we are highly anxious.

Wilder (1994) points out that "when anxiety distracts persons from careful attention to the environment, they rely more on cognitive structures such as social stereotypes in making judgments of others" (pp. 87-88). Anxiety stems from feeling uneasy, tense, worried, or apprehensive about what might happen. Anxiety is an important motivating factor in intergroup encounters. If anxiety is too high, we avoid communicating with members of other groups in order to lower our anxiety. To be motivated to communicate with strangers, we have to manage our anxiety if it is too high or if it is too low. The skills necessary to communicate effectively and appropriately with strangers are those that are directly related to reducing our uncertainty and anxiety. Reducing or managing our anxiety requires at least three skills: ability to be mindful, ability to tolerate ambiguity, and ability to calm ourselves Cultural/national stereotypes are both descriptive and prescriptive in nature: they are perceivers' shared beliefs about the characteristics of the target group and at the same time they also function as social expectations. In initial interactions and in solitary intercultural contacts people's national or cultural stereotypes may be used as a source of expectation about the other party, and as a reference applied to the judgment of the other party's behavior. Stereotypical notions about the character of the members of the other party determine a person's emotional reactions to the other group: a strong, negative projected stereotype ('I believe that you conceive of us as dishonest') may result in displaced hostility. i.e. 'I behave towards you in a hostile way because I assume you to have hostile attitudes about my culture'.

The treatment of stereotypes in intercultural education is problematic. Scholars of intercultural communication have developed a great number of variables that enable the comparison of different cultures. Among these are concepts such as collectivism/individualism, high context/ low context, femininity/masculinity and so on. The generalization made by a scholar that people in one culture are more collectivistic than in another, and so on, is, naturally, a stereotypical statement too. Osland and Bird (1998) call stereotyping done by scholars 'sophisticated stereotyping'. It is 'sophisticated' because it is based on the empirical work of language and communication scholars, and because it is supposed to be based upon theoretical concepts. It has been developed in order to help in reducing the complexity of a culture, yet it is still a stereotype which may constrain an understanding of the behavior of the others as much as it may facilitate real cultural understanding. Stereotypes are the content of the categories when we are categorizing people. The stereotypes we hold have a direct influence on our communication with strangers. Our initial predictions about strangers' behavior must, out of necessity, be based on the stereotypes we have about the strangers' culture, race, or ethnic group. To the degree that our stereotypes are accurate, we can make accurate cultural-level predictions about strangers' behavior. If our stereotypes are inaccurate, we cannot make correct attributions about strangers' behavior. Further, if we rigidly hold our stereotypes and are not willing to question them, we can never reach the point where we know strangers as individuals (i.e., we can never make psycho cultural predictions about their behavior), and our attributions about an individual strangers' behavior will continue to be incorrect. To avoid inaccurate stereotypes, we should be conscious that the problem of misinterpreting others' behavior is compounded because we tend to interpret strangers' behavior on the basis of our own frame of reference. In addition, with stereotypes, people are likely to estimate the information they get from communication impertinently.

Finally, controlling our anxiety, and making it promoting is an effective way enhancing our communication with strangers. In order to increase our effectiveness in communicating with strangers, we need to increase the complexity of our stereotypes (e.g., include a large number of traits in the stereotype and differentiate subgroups within the group being stereotyped) and question our unconscious assumption that most, if not all, members of a group fit a single stereotype (Stephan & Rosenfield, 1982). Anyway, the successful intercultural understanding is based on recognizing the ways in which two cultures resemble one another as well as the ways in which they differ.

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