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Национальные стереотипы в теории и практике

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National stereotypes in theory and practice

В статье затрагиваются вопросы культурных норм поведения и общения, которые варьируются от нации к нации, выступая тем самым в качестве основы национального характера и формируя стереотипы в сознании людей. Статья дает представление об огромной роли национальных стереотипов в межкультурной коммуникации
Ключевые слова: стереотип, нация, характер, культура, межкультурная коммуникация

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The article touches upon the cultural norms of conduct and communication varying from nation to nation, thus serving as a basis of national character and forming stereotypes in people's consciousness. The article gives an idea of an enormous role national stereotypes play in cross-cultural communication

Key words: stereotype, nation, character, culture, cross-cultural communication

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It is widely believed that every nation has its basic personality structure, which is passed on from generation to generation through socialization and to some extent determines the fate of a nation. Every ethnic group is considered to have its own peculiarities featuring a nation and thus forming its "typical individual", which can be compared with that one of a different community. This fact enables us to speak of a national character as a distinctive feature of a mentality of a people. The notion "national character" is based on an idea of the real presence of personality types in a given society.

People's perception of the world is always relative, variable and dependent on a culture a person was born and raised in. To come to grips of the reasons for a representative of another culture behaving one way or another, it is essential that we should gain a deeper insight into a person's consciousness and get a grasp of his mode of thinking and world view.

The process of interpretation of the differences in the nations' ways of behavior leads inevitably to the formation of stereotypes surging into our minds and influencing

cross-cultural communication. A stereotype is a fixed general image or set of characteristics that a lot of people believe represent a particular type of person or thing. Stereotypes are fixed, generalized ideas about the lifestyle, customs and habits of the nation. They are based on repetitive, monotonous situations, which are rooted in human consciousness in the form of standard patterns and models.

What matters is the character of the stereotypes, and the gullibility with which we employ them. And these in the end depend upon those inclusive patterns which constitute our philosophy of life. Stereotypes reflect the social experience of people, common for them and recurring in their daily practice. They are formed as a result of joint activities, which bring the difference in understanding world phenomena by various communities to the surface. One should give stereotypes the credit of giving an idea of another nations' lifestyle and commonly accepted rules of behavior and therefore making an individual ready to plunge into another culture despite limited personal contacts.

Stereotypes have settled down in people's consciousness due to the fact that the lifestyle of every people had been evolving over the centuries, creating traditions and habits. Communicative behavior of any nation is based on the cultural traditions, norms of behavior, national character and mentality. Every ethnic group possesses dominant features of communication, which determine the communicative line of its representatives.

Living on the same planet, yet some nations are so different that it seems that they have come from different ones. Take, for example, Germans or French, who have always lived in close proximity to neighboring European states and thus are closely connected with them. They have developed certain cultural norms and communication strategies that are comprehensible for almost all Europeans. However, one is mistaken thinking that they share the same traditions and customs. Every nation has, nevertheless, its cultural values, national holidays, national cuisine, etc. Another thing is the islanders who due to their isolation from the rest of the world have developed their own unique culture. This is the case of China, for instance. There are a great number of amusing stories of foreigners travelling to another country and the adventures they get into there. The key-note of all of them, however, is the same, that is to reveal the cultural differences. As I myself experienced the cultural shock and had a chance to ascertain the uniqueness of Chinese culture, I know that it is the very country where a European might get to an idea that life is not always a bed of roses.

As you read books or watch TV programs about China, the idea of embarking on a venture to this country might appeal to you. You might think that it is the site of the world archeological heritage combining the impressive ancient architecture with the extensive collection of modern art specimens. Through the book you definitely get the idea of how grand and special Chinese culture is but what you might not get is what a foolish figure a European might cut of himself once plunged into this culture.

So travelling to this highly-developed technological empire the last thing you expect is for its people to be enchanted by your uncommon appearance that suddenly brings you enormous fame. Before you know, you are a local superstar giving autographs and indulgently letting Chinese taking pictures with you. But things change when a star enters a café and is offered the first course of soup only with chopsticks to

help. First comes sideways glance over the table searching for a spoon in hopes to find it behind a plate. Seeing none, in despair you grab the chopsticks and go at the soup like a prize-fighter. After ten minutes of hard work with chopsticks you can finally congratulate yourself on the first victory you've scored – that is on catching a rice piece out of the soup. Extremely proud of yourself, you look up and see the Chinese around finished with their meals and gazing at you like impressionable music enthusiasts at the solo violinist. That is where touching off your fighting spirit dinner turns into a straight struggle between you and the soup. With the put-on nonchalant air you stumble through another rice piece trying not to lose your nerve in front of the fascinated audience. While you are struggling like a cow in a bog in your attempt to win over the soup, the room seems to come to a frightening silence and stillness, like an unexploded bomb. With the tension increasing, the pulse shot in your ears and face burning hot, you finally finish the battle and as if full leave the café with an expression of superiority in your face. You walk down the stairs as if you have just finished an eight-round fight and feeling starving rush into pursuit of a salvatory hamburger.

Taking into account all said above we arrive at a conclusion that it is absolutely essential to be aware of cultural differences and appropriate ways of behavior and communication before coming into contact with representatives of another nation. Bearing in mind stereotypes about people of another culture is important but might not be enough to build up a total image of them.

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