FROM STEREOTYPING TO BECOMING INTERCULTURALLY COMPETENT

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Abstract

This chapter illustrates a pedagogy aimed at training people of all ages and backgrounds to resist facile stereotyping of cultural diversity and, instead, seek a genuine understanding of, and entente with, that diversity. This enables such learners, after the training course, to better accommodate their language and interactional behaviour to the culturally different interlocutors they may encounter in the future, thus facilitating more successful relationships with them and promoting better cooperation between cultures. Such an ability is often called "intercultural competence" and it is much needed in today's globalized world. The pedagogy illustrated in detail in this chapter is geared toward a short, one-off workshop. It consists

of four introductory activities taken from *The Intercultural Resource Pack* published by Cambridge University Press, followed by a presentation of Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. The model may be used by learners as a tool, after the workshop, to chart their lifelong (intercultural) learning path.

Introduction

Globalization, mass migration, the internet, and world-wide mass transportation for business and tourism have brought a myriad of ordinary, monocultural individuals—whose world until recently had consisted mostly of kinsmen and compatriots—into sudden, intensive contact with *cultural others*.

Stereotyping those cultural others (i.e., applying blanket categorizing clichés to them, whether naively, jocularly, or maliciously but in any case uncritically) has largely been people's immediate reaction (Askjellerud, 2006). Stereotyping immediately reduces the anxiety caused by uncustomary behaviour that bewilders and perhaps unsettles. It offers ready-made categories that explain away the strangeness by giving it a (pseudo) explanation. Like this comment (reported in Boylan, 2017) by a Milanese woman about a new neighbour on her block, a swarthy (and, for her, "suspicious looking") Sicilian: "Just look at that new car outside his flat! And you never see him work, he's always having parties! I'll bet you anything he's in with the Mafia".

In other words, stereotypes furnish pseudo-knowledge that assuages, much like primitive peoples are said to be assuaged by attributing a fearsome thunderstorm to an imaginary battle between the gods in the heavens. At least they have an explanation!

But real comprehension of cultural others—and, in the final analysis, of oneself—requires much more than pseudo-knowledge. Thus, the major and surely most difficult task facing intercultural trainers consists of getting people to want to make the effort required to

understand cultural others genuinely, that is, from within their otherness (Boylan, 2000).

People, in fact, strongly resist understanding others in their subjective otherness. Ratford (2010), for example, notes how, in Ireland, most immigration workers justify their refusal to engage with migrants empathetically and emotionally, on the basis that it would be "unprofessional" not to "keep their distance." This attitude is not necessarily a sign of callousness; it may simply be the expression of an ill-advised defence mechanism, aimed at preserving the pre-eminence of one's native set of values and way of life, felt to be threatened.

For if we endeavour to see "from within" and thus as "normal" the strange behaviours and customs we encounter continually, not only in interacting with migrants but in all walks of life in today's *global village*, then we may risk losing sight of what we consider "normality" to be and end up in the state Durkheim (1964 [1897]) called "anomie", no longer knowing what "truly" to believe in any more. Or, at least, this implausible outcome is what many people who cling to their stereotypes like a life vest, unconsciously fear. All this explains the difficulty of teaching intercultural understanding genuinely, that is, as a "change of consciousness" (Boylan, 2009).

The present chapter proposes a pedagogy which accommodates to such fears by means of a gradual and non-impositional, two-step approach based on constructivism. It was initially devised for those participants, of all ages and backgrounds, who voluntarily attend the workshops on intercultural understanding and communication that one of the authors conducts regularly at his language school in Bergamo, Italy. It was subsequently adapted to the needs of the language teachers attending the workshops co-organized with such professional associations as CRTDrils LINGUE in Bergamo and TESOL Val D'Adige in Trento. It could conceivably be used even in schools where racial, ethnic, and religious tensions among students are rife, such as those described by Moore (2006).

The first of the two steps is a series of four preliminary exercises, rooted in constructivist learning theory, which have been taken from the *Intercultural Resource Pack* (henceforth IRP) by David Utley, published by Cambridge University Press. The second step is based

on Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (henceforth DMIS) originally devised as a description of six basic attitudes towards cultural diversity (Bennett, 1986), and here used as a didactic tool for self measurement of personal development in a perspective of lifelong (intercultural) learning.

1. A constructivist pedagogy for coming to grips with stereotyping

Constructivism (see Taber, 2011, for an ample discussion of constructivism as educational theory and classroom practice) distinguishes between genuine knowledge and rote learning. The latter is the acquisition of mere "information fragments" to be stored away and applied mechanically in given set tasks, such as demonstrating "knowledge" of the periodic tables in chemistry through a fill-in-the-blanks exercise; it is essentially tautological. Constructivist (genuine) knowledge, on the other hand, is open-ended: It is the reorganization of acquired experience—to some extent unpredictable but always meaningful—together with the continual search for new input from whatever sources are at hand, in order to acquire a better hold on reality, one that permits creative experimentation (as in a chemistry lab).

Constructivist teaching therefore begins by trying to get learners to make better sense of what they know, or rather what they think they know: for example, the words they use and the beliefs they hold in a particular thematic domain. In the case of the model workshop described here, that domain consists of the words used and the beliefs held in speaking of cultural identity and stereotyping. This preliminary activity is akin to what Aristotle typically does at the beginning of each of his enquiries: He examines the most commonly held beliefs (doxa) about the subject to be investigated and then calls those beliefs into question.

Constructivist teaching does the same: After getting learners to make an inventory of what they think they know about a given domain, it then goes on to challenge them to rework their personally-held or communally held verbal and mental constructs, in order

to gain a better grasp of what they have heretofore considered "reality". Destabilizing ploys may be used for this purpose.

As for the intercultural workshop that this paper will illustrate, constructivist methodology of the kind just described is clearly evident in the four initial workshop activities listed below in a series of four *cards*. The cards are divided into three sections:

1) Each card begins by stating the goal of the exercise to be presented and, if required, additional explanations for the teacher/facilitator.

2) Then it gives the instructions for the learners to follow in completing the IRP exercise proposed.

3) Lastly, each card (except the first one) reproduces a page from the IRP that contains an exercise that the learners are asked to complete.

The fifth and culminating activity of this workshop, on the other hand, is only in part an activity. It consists mostly of rather traditional, top-down, "input teaching". This change in procedure is justified by the fact that, at the end of the preliminary exercises, the terrain has been sufficiently ploughed for sowing to be effective; indeed, learners at this point are usually looking for a way to give coherence to their newly acquired perceptions of stereotyping and cultural identity, and even ask the teacher/facilitator for suitable input.

Contrary to popular belief, in fact, constructivist methodology does not abolish "input teaching" totally. It provides occasional moments of such teaching to enable learners to remap their newly acquired experiences by means of the explicative input (theoretical models) presented by a teacher/facilitator, input that is, in any case, rooted in the learners' newly acquired or reworked experiences. In addition, learners are invited to call into question the models or other input offered them on the basis of these experiences, as will be seen in the last activity described in this workshop. In as much, the explicative input offered to learners in constructivist teaching is fundamentally different from the presentation of theory, which seemingly descends from above and is blindly accepted as such by muted learners, so frequent in archetypical traditional teaching.

Card 1. Introductory activity: The words we use

Goal

As a warm-up, the teacher/facilitator gets learners to work in pairs or groups of three and discuss and decide on their definition of the term "stereotype". After that, s/he gets them to research the word in the five major advanced English monolingual dictionaries to decide which in their opinion is the definition that comes closest to their own views. S/he asks them to analyse the examples the dictionary gives to see in which context the word is used (national, racial, cultural, professional, gender, etc.).

This initial task establishes the learners' "commonly held beliefs" (their doxa*) and this, in turn, constitutes the point of departure for their enquiry into cultural identity and stereotyping.*

The teacher/facilitator then gets the learners to read an excerpt on stereotypes from Bennett (2013a), as a possible destabilizing input. In the excerpt, Bennett notes that, in stereotyping, we create a reality that is fictitious in that we attribute to ALL members of a given group the same characteristic—something that never happens in real life. This leads us to overlook subsequently those members who, in fact, do not exhibit that characteristic. In other words, we create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This perception may cause those learners who, in the discussion, professed some credence in cultural stereotypes to feel a bit uneasy and to rethink their beliefs.

Instructions

Five definitions of the word "stereotype", taken from major advanced dictionaries, follow. Read the definitions and examples below and choose the ones that best correspond to your way of thinking.

- *Macmillan Dictionary Online*

    stereotype: a very firm and simple idea about what a particular type of person or thing is like

stereotype of: "He doesn't fit the stereotype of the emotional Italian."

• Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary Online

stereotype: a fixed idea or image that many people have of a
   particular type of person or thing, often not true in reality
cultural/gender/racial stereotypes: "He doesn't conform to the usual
   stereotype of the businessman with a dark suit and briefcase"

• Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online

stereotype (countable): a belief or idea of what a particular type of
   person or thing is like. Stereotypes are often unfair or untrue.
      racial/sexual/cultural etc. *stereotype:* "racist stereotypes in the
   media"
      stereotype of: "women who don't fit the stereotype of the good mum"
      stereotype about: "stereotypes about the elderly"

• Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary

stereotype noun [C] /ˈsteriəʊtaɪp/: a fixed idea that people have
   about what a particular type of person is like, especially an idea
   that is wrong.
      "racial stereotypes"

• Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary

stereotype: countable noun. 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.
         "Many men feel their body shape doesn't live up to the stereotype
         of the ideal man."

Now read this:

Excerpt from Milton Bennett's

Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication** (2013a):

Stereotypes arise when we act as if all members of a culture or group share the same characteristics. Stereotypes can be attached to any assumed indicator of group membership, such as race, religion, ethnicity, age or gender, as well as national culture. The characteristics that are supposedly shared by members of the group may be respected by the observer, in which case it is a POSITIVE STEREOTYPE. In the more likely case that the characteristics are disrespected, it is a NEGATIVE STEREOTYPE. Stereotypes of both kinds are problematic in intercultural communication for several obvious reasons. One is that they may give us a false sense of understanding our communication partners. Additionally, stereotypes may become self-fulfilling prophecies, where we observe others in selective ways that confirm our prejudice. (p. 4)

Card 2. Follow-up activity: The beliefs we hold

Goal

The teacher/facilitator then distributes an IRP handout on stereotyping (IPR exercise 2.5, p. 41). It tests if learners recognize the most commonly held cultural stereotypes in the European Union, many of which they most likely use in their everyday conversations. This activity usually leads many learners to question their (or their fellow Europeans') over generalizations. As a destabilizing device, teachers can ask their learners

to find out what specific stereotypes regarding their nationality currently circulate in the EU. Learners are often shocked to discover how unjustly they and their compatriots are stereotyped by their fellow Europeans (an example is given below).

Instructions

What are the most common negative stereotypes attributed throughout Europe to the people from the countries listed below? If you think there are none and that national stereotyping is a thing of the past in Europe, try doing the following experiment at home on the internet and report in class what you find out.

The Web Forum

(a supplementary exercise to do optionally before Activity 2)

Choose an EU country and search for a web forum or chatroom for people of that country. Join it and, using English as your lingua franca, tell the forum members that, for a homework assignment, you must find out how people from your country are viewed by people in their country. Ask them to be frank, especially about negative traits. And be prepared for surprises. If you are from Italy, for example, you may be shocked to learn that older people in the UK consider cowardice, not indiscipline, as the chief negative characteristic of Italians (a stereotype dating back to World War II).

For Activity 2, match the negative stereotypes listed below with the corresponding European nationalities, basing your selection on what you have heard people say around you.

Stereotyping

Sexism, racism, ageism and religious intolerance are examples of prejudice which are only too frequently observed. Another form of prejudice is stereotyping, which occurs when someone claims that members of another culture all share the same, often inferior or offensive characteristics.

A recent report from the European Union listed some of the national perceptions which make cooperation difficult.

1 Match each of the nationalities with the stereotype you think is often attached to it:

British	hypocritical
Germans	cowardly
Italians	sex-mad
Spaniards	arrogant
Swedes	lazy

2 Which nationalities are stereotypically associated with the following characteristics?
- Obsessed with fashion
- Slow-thinking
- Insincere
- Obsessed with tradition
- Mean
- Reserved
- Obsessed with food

Figure 1: Stereotyping (IPR exercise 2.5, p. 41, republished with permission of CUP)

Card 3. Evaluating how judgemental we are

Goal

So far, we have cast light on how learners use the word "stereotype" and what cultural stereotypes still persist in the EU. The next activity enables learners to discover how judgemental or open-minded they are with respect to cultural diversity (IPR exercise 2.6, p. 43).

However, before proposing the activity, the teacher/facilitator should take her/his learners' pulse and judge whether they need an additional, preliminary exercise to lessen the stigmata that the previous activity may, in their minds, have placed on stereotyping. This will permit them to do Activity 3 more honestly, and self-report any tendencies they may have to be judgemental.

Initial Impressions

(a supplementary exercise to do optionally before Activity 3)

In this additional exercise, learners form groups of 3 to 5 and relate to each other the experiences they have had in which a first impression of someone proved a) right or b) wrong. Not everyone need give examples but at least one example of a) and of b) should be discussed per group. Learners must try to find out, regarding a), what caused the initial impression (similarities with someone else?) and, although the impression still seems right, if it ever wavered over time and why. Regarding b), learners must determine if the change in opinion was gradual or a sudden revelation, and what caused it. Then the entire class discusses two examples from the groups (the most significant ones for a) and for b)).

Hopefully, this activity will lead to conclusions that (partially) rehabilitate stereotyping, like these:

1. Initial impressions, as well as stereotypes, are based on only a few traits which usually remind us of past experiences, good or bad. But since the traits are few and de-contextualized, the impression they generate clearly cannot be considered a certainty. In spite of this, very often, upon seeing for the first time some striking individual, we feel 100% sure of our initial impression. It's only human.

2. In fact, psychology tells us that it is normal to feel convinced by first impressions... and stereotypes, too! For the human mind perceives reality in schemata or Gestalten (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984) capable of tricking us. That is why we must constantly be on guard, constantly realize how vulnerable we are to false first impressions, and constantly seek out new evidence to verify the impressions we have of people, including the stereotypes we use.

3. Stereotyping, as such, should therefore not be considered negative: It is inevitable. What is negative is clinging to one's initial impression (or socially-transmitted stereotype) and refusing to look for new experiences to confirm it, disprove it, or at least modify it.

*The Milanese woman mentioned earlier was not wrong, as such, in having an initial negative impression of her Sicilian neighbour if, in fact, he did seem to fit the Hollywood cliché of a Mafioso. But she **was** wrong in clinging to that first impression (or socially-transmitted stereotype) at all costs, refusing to chat with the fellow to learn things that might change her impression, and, instead, broadcasting her "certainty" to the entire neighbourhood, thus causing the man to be ostracised by everyone. In other words, her problem is her closed mind and petty malice, not her initial stereotyping, which is only human.*

4. Even if our initial impression of a person is good, even if s/he corresponds to a very positive stereotype, it is risky to cling to that impression at all costs, without checking it out or taking note of any

warning signs. Many incautious lovers-at-first-sight have had to learn this the hard way.

Instructions

Below are 14 statements regarding attitudes toward cultural diversity that you may or may not share. Select the attitudes that most correspond to yours. Base your choices, not on what you think ideally, but on the attitudes you actually express when you talk about "diverse" people in a conversation with friends or acquaintances.

Evaluating attitudes

How do you form your attitudes towards people from other cultures? Do you expect them to be very different from you? Do you think of them as all being the same? Are you aware of how you appear to them?

1 Read the statements below and show how much you agree or disagree by putting the appropriate number in the box:

5 = Agree strongly   4 = Agree   3 = No opinion   2 = Disagree   1 = Disagree strongly

1 Observation of different cultures allows us to form patterns. ☐

2 I don't wish to be classified. I am an individual. ☐

3 Generalisations capture similarities and hide differences. ☐

4 Regarding people of the same culture as all being the same is harmful and dangerous. ☐

5 People from other cultures often act strangely. ☐

6 Ignoring the differences between cultures is dangerous. ☐

7 We can categorise certain groups of people according to how they behave. ☐

8 We must learn to recognise the existence of different but equally valid styles. ☐

9 Different is dangerous. ☐

10 The fish is the last one to recognise the water. ☐

11 Statistical facts about cultures help us classify them. ☐

12 Other people don't try to adapt enough. ☐

13 One man's meat is another man's poison. ☐

14 Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. ☐

2 Select the statement which most appeals to you, and justify it with examples.
3 Decide which one you find least accurate.

Figure 2. Evaluating attitudes (IPR exercise 2.6, p. 43, republished with permission of CUP)

Card 4. Lies, damn lies and statistics

Goal

At this point, it is useful to help learners come to terms with the obvious fact that there is statistical evidence to back up some of the generalisations about the cultural traits of given nationalities, statistical evidence which many people invoke to justify clinging to a stereotype. These people fail to realize that statistical data can be highly misleading and always require contextualization. Statistics pinpoint traits, but do not offer a composite view of reality as a variegated whole, in which certain parts can compensate for others. Moreover, statistical inquiries tend to focus on the salient, ignoring the familiar, which may be of more importance.

The Bell-Jar Graph (IRP 2.7, p 45) exercise, described below, should make this point clear enough to learners.

If not, here is a complementary activity—and a destabilizing one to boot —that drives the point home experientially. It is called

Distribution

(a supplementary exercise to do optionally before Activity 4)

Learners gather together at the front of the classroom (it may be necessary to displace the first two rows) and are then asked to gravitate individually towards either the left or the right wall—or remain in the centre of the classroom —according to some criteria that supposedly distinguishes male from female attitudes but that is not announced as such immediately. If the teacher/facilitator has chosen, for example, TV sports programs (according to the stereotype, men supposedly love them and women supposedly dislike them), s/he will simply say: "Left wall for TV sports program fans", "Centre space for those with no strong opinion", "Right

wall for those who dislike such programs". Individual learners can indicate how strongly they feel by moving just a little, a lot, or completely toward one of the two walls. Then the teacher/facilitator explains the experiment.

Experience shows that the ensuing distribution normally discredits the stereotype invoked. In the case of the TV sports program stereotype, most males and most females usually end up somewhere in the middle of the room. Thus, the relatively fewer learners occupying the two extremes must be considered numerically atypical of their respective genders, even though the stereotype would hold that the males completely on the left (sports program fans) and the females completely on the right (against such programs) are "most typical" of their genders. They are not.

Reality will appear even more variegated to learners when they discover, as often happens, that almost as many females as males have gravitated to the left—and sometimes even more! And inversely to the right. Conclusion: Stereotypes must always be verified by testing them before believing them.
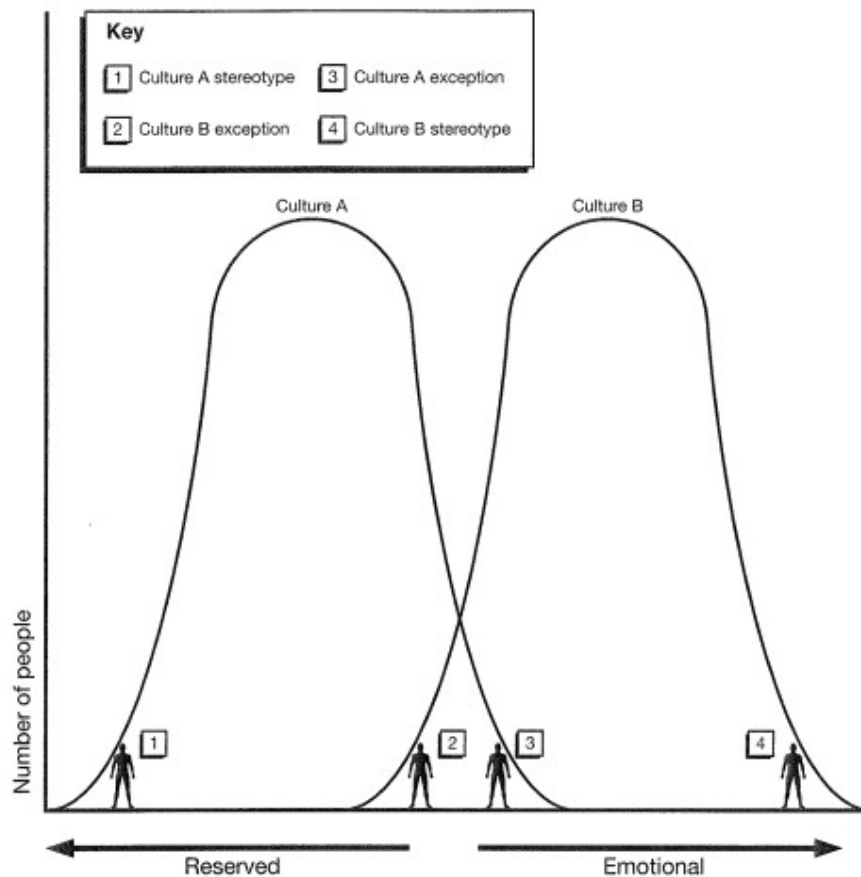
So what, in the final analysis, are the value of stereotypes, the ones we take for granted and never put to test? What do they show? Three learners, who did the above activity, wrote the following:

- "Not very much — except for the sloppy thinking of whoever uses them";

- "The tendencies of a few people; never the reality of most people";

- "A vision of things that many people in our society would like to impose on all of us, by constantly repeating the stereotypes, and that we should resist or, in any case, call into question."

Instructions

A Bell-Jar Graph (IRP 2.7, p 45) is useful for illustrating how, by fixing one's attention on what makes two given groups look different (i.e., the individuals at the extreme end of each group), one can fail to notice the vast areas of similarity between the groups (i.e., the overlapping area in the middle). The overlap sometimes occupies most of each group, although this only makes the anomalous extremes stand out even more!

The bell-jar graph

Key

1 Culture A stereotype   3 Culture A exception

2 Culture B exception   4 Culture B stereotype

Culture A   Culture B

Number of people

1   2 3   4

Reserved   Emotional

The graph shows the range of positions of two cultures, A and B, on a scale ranging from reserved to emotional.

1 Study the graph and explain how it helps break down stereotypical ideas about members of other groups.

2 Give examples of cultures which are similar to A.

3 Give examples of cultures which are similar to B.

Figure 3. The bell jar graph (IRP 2.7, p 45, republished with permission of CUP)

2. A model for describing the gradual acquisition of intercultural competence and for charting one's intercultural development in the future

At this point of the workshop, assuming that the four initial activities in the First Step have produced their intended effects, jumbled together in learners' minds are the various perceptions, newly acquired, of what it means to stereotype—or, on the contrary, to truly understand—cultural "others". Something is needed to give coherence to all these new mental constructions.

It is therefore at this stage that the teacher/facilitator can usefully switch from constructivist to more traditional teaching procedures and offer learners one possible model (even several, if time permits) for describing the process of coming to grips with cultural diversity in ways that go beyond stereotyping.

Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) is a top candidate for this task, for the DMIS describes understanding cultural "others" as a continuum that goes from rejecting and stereotyping cultural diversity to accepting and understanding it fully.

On one side is the ethnocentric pole. It groups together three different kinds of understanding of cultural diversity, all of them superficial in that they are centred on the self and on one's own set of values, instead of on the "other" and on a value system different from one's own. In a sense, one could say that the ethnocentric pole groups together three different kinds of refusal to understand "others" in their otherness.

Take the Milanese woman mentioned earlier, for example. She thinks she has really understood her southern Italian neighbour (who "never seems to work and is always having parties, yet has a new car") by imposing on him the stereotype of the Sicilian Mafioso. "I've got his number!", she gloats. In reality, by doing so she has ***denied*** her neighbour and his ethos any right to exist as such; she has ***defended*** her Milanese work

ethic as a moral absolute (anything that deviates from it must therefore be criminal); and she has *minimized* as inconsequential any positive traits that her neighbour might have (like his sociability), thus minimizing at the same time the originality of his Southern Italian culture and lifestyle, with respect to the more regimented Milanese way of life. *Denial*, *defence*, and *minimization* are, in fact, the three degrees of understanding cultural "others" superficially (or refusing to understand them genuinely) that Bennett groups around his ethnocentric pole. Stereotyping can be found at all three levels, in particular in the defensive mode of "understanding" people of another culture.

However, there is more behind ethnocentric understanding and stereotyping than just **defending** one's own set of values while **denying** and **minimizing** those of the cultural "other". There is the less-discussed but more ominous effect of such objectification, that is, the *exploitation* of that "other".

In other words, by imposing on other people our pre-determined perceptive schemata, we not only deny them any autonomous subjective existence and thereby "objectify" them (i.e., turn them into mere objects to be used), but we are led to use that objectification to **justify** manipulating them and exploiting them for our purposes (Bennett, 2013b). Here are three examples to clarify that point. They all illustrate a refusal to truly understand "others" by stereotyping them in order to manipulate them. While in only one case is the stereotype ethnocentric in the strict sense, in all cases it is self-centric and this comes close enough.

1. The Casanova (womaniser) who claims he has "understood" all the women he has pursued, has in reality understood only a stereotype: the tiny part compatible with his self-centred interests (which are ethnocentric in the sense of being male-culture centric). He even admits it, when he boasts: "All women are the same; they all want to hear such and such; so I tell it to them". Through diligence, the Casanova does get to know certain specific things about each woman he pursues: her favourite night spots, her favourite places to go afterwards, and the seduction technique she is most vulnerable to—but little else. Certainly not her deepest needs, aspirations and struggles, about which the Casanova could not care less. For that kind of understanding takes too long, too much effort and can even distract from the goal at hand, which is

overtly manipulative and exploitative.

2. Less obviously self-centred and ethnocentric (in the strict sense), but equally manipulative and exploitative, is the mode of "understanding others" that many of us put into practice on holiday trips abroad. Our declared intent is "getting to know" the country chosen and its people; but our overriding intent is having a good time. Thus, once there, like a Casanova, we tend to treat the foreign country as something to be used for our pleasure—a kind of amusement park. As for the inhabitants, we treat them like movie extras, at most co-stars, in the videos we make for our future consumption back home. Only fleeting moments are spent on learning to see things as the local inhabitants see them (our filming schedule is too intense). As for trying to understand their deepest needs, aspirations, and struggles, we never get around to that, and the reason why is simple. To continue with the cinema metaphor, paraphrasing Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*: Frankly, we don't give a damn.

3. The last example of manipulative stereotyping is making "friends" on Facebook, a web platform with a culture of its own, based on just that, manipulative stereotyping. Facebook-centric "friendships", in fact, are people who fit into our Facebook-defined preferential categories and we theirs. Thus, we end up in a self-generated, auto-referential universe which is a stereotype of ourselves. Sometimes not even ourselves: In fact, at times we pretend to be what we are not, or simply exaggerate about ourselves, to win over more "friends" who, thus, can only misunderstand what we are really like (idem for us). How can we call "friends" people who do not "like" us so much as a fictitious us? No matter: By playing the game, we get to use these "friends" to promote our interests in exchange for letting them use us to promote theirs: They are our FOCs (friendships of convenience).

Diametrically opposed to the self-centred and manipulative way of "understanding others" that Casanovas, consumer tourists, and Facebook "friends" share, is the kind of understanding that Bennett locates on the other side of his continuum, the ethnorelativist pole.

This pole groups together three different degrees of "other-oriented understanding". At all three degrees (*acceptance*, *adaptation*, and *integration*), we recognize and respect the

different "world" that the cultural "others" have within them and wish to understand it.

However, at the second of the three degrees (adaptation), we go further and, as we understand that other world better, we try to adapt our own behaviour to it. When we are with people of that other culture, we act and interact in ways that are consonant with their way of being.

At the last degree, the fullest development of intercultural sensitivity (integration), we go even further still. We displace ourselves into the world of the "other" and, instead of trying to know it (and judge it) from the outside, we become one with it. We find "right" the things that are considered right according to the system of values of that other world; we find humorous the things people in that culture find humorous and laugh spontaneously at the things that make them laugh; and we share their concerns, to the degree and in the way that they do, for their deepest needs, aspirations, and struggles.

All this does not mean that we "lose" our identity. On the contrary, we double it by acquiring a second existential worldview (*Weltanschauung*), which permits us—when we return to our home society—to see its merits and demerits contrastively and thus more clearly. This enables us to work to improve things there with a much wider vision of what is needed: We see our own culture from the inside and from the outside simultaneously.

From the standpoint of communication, the second and third degrees of ethnorelative sensitivity (adaptation and integration) permit us to communicate with people in the other culture using common frames of reference and vocabulary. Note that this does not necessarily mean that we must use their language or they ours (although it is preferable to do so). Any third language, or lingua franca, will do; for, with it, we can express ourselves in the kind of talk (parlance) and style (register) to which the people of the other country relate.

Only at the third level (integration), however, do we establish the bonds of solidarity and trust which permit us to feel in the words used by our interlocutors, exactly what they feel in using them, so that even our (and their) most idiosyncratic thoughts and feelings do not

get lost in the translation. We and they speak unashamedly and authentically, and listen without being condescending or hypocritical. All this without betraying our historical selves. Obviously we are not always in agreement with the other party; but we can see and accept why this is so—just as when we entertain contrasting sides on an issue in our own mind, before finally opting for one or the other side. This is what it means to understand genuinely. The French call it *entente*, mutual understanding deriving from a community of views and conformity of sentiments (Entente, ATILF, 1971). Augustine of Hippo describes it as having "one soul in two bodies" (Confessions, IV, 6).

The two poles and the three degrees within each pole are illustrated in the following diagram.
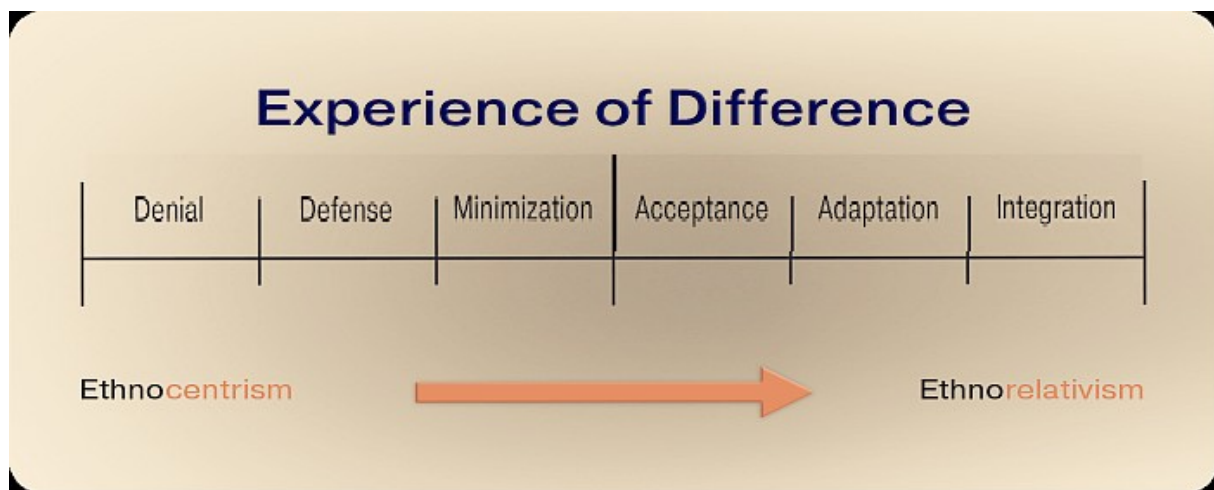

Figure 4. Development of intercultural sensitivity (source: www.idrinstitute.org/dmis/)

This, then, is the theoretical model that the teacher/facilitator can propose to learners, in the mini-lesson that s/he gives after conducting the four activities illustrated above. The focus of the mini-lesson should, in any case, be on the main theme: stereotypes.

Describing the DMIS serves only to contextualize how *stereotyping*, which we have defined as *the naive, jocular or malicious "blanket application" of unverified categorizing clichés*:

- Is a form of *ethnocentric understanding*;
- Is particularly frequent as a defence *mechanism*;
- Is fundamentally *manipulative*: The Casanovas who stereotype women ("they're all the

same") while convincing themselves that they understand them, are clearly being manipulative. But so are consumer tourists who stereotype the country they supposedly want to understand, while they manipulate its inhabitants as movie extras or co-stars in their videos. Equally stereotypical and manipulative are Facebook "friendships": By pretending to be what they are not or exaggerating about themselves in order to attract more likes, Facebook "friends" end up manipulating themselves as much as they manipulate others.

The teacher/facilitator should emphasize these three examples for their possible salutary destabilizing effects on learners. Often, in fact, these three examples manage to "shake the learners up" by pointing out to them how much they stereotype and manipulate in their ordinary life: romantic relationships, holiday trips, use of Facebook, etc. Suddenly, stereotyping becomes for them a very real question, one that goes beyond ethnic, religious, or racial categorization. This jolt can be an awakening and provide the motivation to follow the rest of the workshop more closely.

The teacher/facilitator should then move on to the classic example of manipulative stereotyping given above: That of the Milanese woman who stereotypes her new Sicilian neighbour as a Mafioso. Without seeking to get to know the man, the woman proclaims her "certainty" to the entire neighbourhood, perhaps even to the point of "imagining things" to back up her suspicion, as gossips often do, and this contributes to putting the man into a ghetto: People in the neighbourhood, whether they believe the woman completely or not, instinctively begin avoiding the Sicilian. This is clearly a manipulation of another person's life and shows the unconfessed goal of malicious negative stereotyping: It is an attempt to police the world, using language to put unwanted people into little boxes.

The mini-lesson should, of course, make it clear to learners that there are other, and far more genuine, modes of understanding cultural diversity that they can choose from. Bennett lists three under his ethnorelativist pole: acceptance, adaptation, and integration. However, there are variants, too (e.g., Boylan, 2010). And learners, in their discussions, may come up with more.

Which mode of ethnorelative understanding should one aim for in a conversation with cultural others? That depends entirely on circumstances, how one feels toward the other culture, and how much time and energy one is prepared to spend to enter into that culture. In any case, Bennett's DMIS is not prescriptive and does not claim that everyone should aim at the fullest form of understanding (integration) in every situation. Nonetheless, simply knowing that this maximum level exists and what it is like can serve as a North Star in orienting the communicative choice one finally makes in a given context.

Conclusion

The second part of this chapter has outlined the "teacher-input" session that should follow the four exercises described in the first part and thus conclude the workshop. Obviously the brief account of Bennett's DMIS given above is insufficient to prepare a mini-lesson confidently; the reader is therefore encouraged to visit Bennett's website (www.idrinstitute.org) and to consult, in particular, the page offering a selected bibliography (http://www.idrinstitute.org/page.asp?menu1=4).

The final card (in Appendix 1 below) contains the last workshop activity.

The teacher/facilitator can judge whether to have the learners do this activity as a form of preparation for her mini-lesson on the DMIS, or use this activity during the mini-lesson to focus attention on what has been said and will be said, or else propose the activity at the end, to give learners the possibility of coming up with an alternative to the model proposed by Bennett. This last option (which permits learners to judge whether the DMIS fits with their views, or needs to be amended) is most coherent with the overall constructivist pedagogy advocated in this model workshop.

What will workshop participants take home with them? They should have acquired a clearer perception of what stereotypes are: generalizations that are inevitable, given the way that the human mind works, but potentially deceptive generalizations that therefore

must be constantly tested. To do this, however, participants must have a truly open and inquisitive mind, which in turn means they must accept calling into question even their most cherished cultural certitudes. This is not easy, but it is possible if done gradually, as illustrated by the DMIS. This is the second key perception that participants should have acquired from the workshop.

Their reward for learning to relativize their stereotypes and entrenched convictions will be the capacity to see things from many different perspectives at the same time, an ability that will make them better students, better citizens, and better able to handle life's uncertainties.

Appendix 1

Card 5. Chart your path toward intercultural competence

Goal

What are the different stages of development in acquiring intercultural sensitivity and competence? The final activity (IRP 6.11, page 107) asks learners to hypothesize up to 12 different stages and, thus, to reflect on the considerable time it takes to become competent in dealing with other cultures effectively.

Instructions

Intercultural competence (IC) is not acquired over night. It takes time to learn to sideline temporarily one's own worldview in order to (gradually) embrace that of another culture.

Along the way, one tends to pass through a series of stages, going from admitting to oneself that one is interculturally incompetent, to recognising the major differences between one's native culture and a

given target culture and, finally, to accepting that culture, even to the point of identifying with it.

Therefore, below are 12 possible stages, in random order, which you are asked to re-order in the sequence that you think you will most likely follow, given your temperament and capabilities, in developing your IC.

There is no hard and fast order and no "right" answers. Like learning a foreign language, it all depends on what feels "right" to you, to what degree you want to be able to relate to people of a given culture, and how much time and effort you are prepared to spend in getting to that level.

And remember: one does not always move forward. The process may come to a temporary halt and, if you have a negative experience in trying to communicate with people of the other culture, you may even go backward or desist entirely for a while, before starting up again and moving forward.

Good trekking!

Developing intercultural competence

Awareness of culture, and competence in dealing with it effectively, takes time to achieve. Some of the different stages are listed in random order below.

Put them in what you consider to be the most logical sequence.

☐ Becoming enthusiastic about cultural variety ~ *What great potential!*

☐ Beginning to work on the study of other cultures – *There's a lot to find out.*

☐ Developing an interest in other cultures ~ *This isn't as strange as I thought.*

☐ Developing one's own style ~ *I'm sure this should work well here.*

☐ Empathising ~ *I see why they act like that.*

☐ Learning by making mistakes ~ *Oops, that was a bit of a disaster.*

☐ Monocultural approach ~ *Everybody's the same really.*

☐ Realisation that most behaviour is culturally conditioned ~ *There's probably a reason for this.*

☐ Recognition of different types of culture ~ *There are national and regional differences, and corporate and professional cultures, and ...*

☐ Recognition of possible dangers ~ *This could cause problems.*

☐ Recognition of difference ~ *There's something different about these people.*

☐ Trying different ways of doing things ~ *This might work here.*

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Figure 5. Developing intercultural competence (IRP 6.11, p. 107, republished with permission of CUP)

Note

Keep this card handy! Consider it a tool for your lifelong learning of IC. As you know, after finishing your formal schooling and after taking workshops like this one, you will be on your own in the world and responsible for directing your personal growth

in IC (and in any other discipline you may need to master).

So keep the progress chart you make on this card at hand. Consult it in the future to verify, after a trip abroad or a prolonged contact with culturally different people in your home town, if your prediction holds true about the stages you need to pass through to interact competently with people of other cultures. The chart will give you a clearer picture of where you are situated on your growth path and what kind of development you need to attain the next stage.

Alternatively, you can simply use the graph that Milton Bennett has prepared and that your teacher/facilitator will show you – it contains only six stages, but you may find that these are enough to plot your future path toward IC.

In a year or two from now, you may even decide that neither the growth path you hypothesize for yourself today, nor Bennett's graph, are adequate to describe the challenges you must face. In that case, you might want to prepare your own graph and, if you feel so inclined, write a report to the authors of these workshop materials,
– Peter Anderson (p.anderson@andersonhouse.it) and
– Patrick Boylan (boylan@uniroma3.it),
in which you use your graph to illustrate your personal intercultural development and to show them how you have overcome the new challenges you have met.

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