Short Research Article

Correlative Value of Stereotype in Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract

Although stereotype has its own defects, it is indispensable in cross-cultural communication. Based on the analysis of the necessity of stereotype in cross-cultural communication, this paper points out that the inherent defects and the logical fallacy of stereotype are the important factors that cause the failure of cross-cultural communication. And communicators should take into account the relavance between stereotype and individual cross-cultural communication behaviors in the process of cross-cultural communication. On the basis of stereotype, cross-cultural communicators should have a good understanding of foreign cultures to make cross-cultural communication effective.

Keywords

stereotype, logical fallacy, individual behaviors, correlation

1. Introduction

Stereotype is considered to be a standpoint or a perspective of a foreign culture formed before exposure to the culture. From the point of view of communication, this constant and rigid standpoint always hinders the normal progress of cross-cultural communication if cross-cultural communicators stick to it. From the perspective of psychology, stereotype is a kind of psychologically preparatory state before taking part in some activity and has a certain influence on individual behaviors in the activity. Logically speaking, the existance of stereotype is quite similar to the process of inductive reasoning, both of which can get general conclusion on the light of specific knowledge as premise, and the conclusion usually exceeds the scope of the premise, while the conclusion has only a contingent relationship with the premise. Usually speaking, stereotyp palys an obstructive part in cross-cultural communication, but with the continuous research of the phenomenon, the bias on it has been gradually replaced by dialectical views about it.

Questioning and criticizing stereotype is mainly due to the problems which cross-cultural

communicators encounter in the actual use of stereotype to predict individual behaviors in cross-cultural communication. That is, when directly approaching a certain foreign culture, cross-cultural communicators frequently use the previously-formed stereotypes to guide them, even predict and control how to communicate and behave with individuals from foreign cultures, which causes deviation, errors and final failure in the cross-cultural communication. The failure attributed to the influence of stereotype is closely realted to the traditional scientific outlook. Traditional scientific outlook always treats all knowledge in a scientific manner. It is believed that the acquisition of knowledge must be observed, experienced, theoretically stated, and then checked in practice. If checked correctly, the knowledge people acquired is acceptable; if not, it will be corrected or abandoned. Stereotype is checked wrong when it is used to guide how to communicate and treat each other without too much reasonable consideration in the actual cross-cultural communication. Therefore, stereotype is thought as prejudice that can cause mistakes in cross-cultural communication.

Can stereotypes be avoided in cross-cultural communication if cross-cultural communicators want to achieve effective cross-cultural communication? The answer is definitely no. First of all, stereotype is inevitable although some scholars have pointed out that stereotype is a simple generalization and classification in cognition because this is a way of thinking by which human beings recognize the complicated world, from the spicific to the general, from the concrete to the general and the abstract. Human beings cannot understand the world without this kind of cognition although individual differences are often ignored in the cognitive process that is too abstract and simple when generalizing. In order to simply classify numerous complex things and phenomena, this congnitive way is very beneficial for understanding the complex world. From the perspective of hermeneutics, stereotype can be considered as a kind of preconception. In cross-cultural communication, stereotype is taken as a middle link and also a necessary condition for cross-cultural communicators in communication. It is a schema before direct contact with a foreign culture. Once the cross-cultural communicators directly communicate face to face, the schema that stores in the communicators' brains will be activated and plays a role in improving or hindering communication during the cross-cultural communication process. Without the schema or stereotype, it will be quite difficult for both communicators to directly communicate.

In the next place, the necessary existence of stereotype is certainly related to the impossibility to directly contact foreign cultures. The understanding of foreign cultures is sometimes only by media such as news, movies, magazines, and radio braodcast. It is possible that cross-cultural communicators cannot have comprehensive and direct contact with and understanding of foreign cultures. In reality, it is rather difficult and impossible to have a direct face-to-face contact with and understanding of all foreign cultures.

What's more, psychologically, the existence of stereotype makes a psychological preparation for direct contact with foreign cultures, which is very necessary because cross-cultural communicators can have a general understanding and grasp of the general rules and features of foreign cultures, so that they can

168

avoid using their own culture as a criterion to guide them how to communicate and behave in practical communication, leading to discrimination and prejudice against foreign cultures. If it is found that stereotype is misleading in the actual cross-cultural communication, communication strategies should be adjusted in time, and meanwhile, cross-cultural communicators should learn more about the differences between cultures. If stereotype can successfully and effectively guide the cross-cultural communication in reality, it will become a social classification, a scientific and accurate classification.

Fourthly, complex and changeable, stereotype changes over time. Katz and Braly investigated Princeton University students' stereotypes for people in different countries in 1933, 1951, and 1967, including the Japanese. In 1933, the students believed that the Japanese were smart, diligent, progressive, smart, and cunning. In 1951, they held the opinion that the Japanese were good at imitating, cunning, and extremely narrow in nationalism and treacherous. In 1967, they believed that the Japanese were ambitious, materialistic, efficient, intelligent, and progressive. From the above changes, it can be seen that stereotype will change with different factors such as times, environment and so on.

Finally, stereotype has something to do with the characteristics of the discipline itself. In cross-cultural communication, it is essential to conduct macroscopic, general, and abstract researches. For example, it is necessary to summarize and classify the differences between different cultures because researches on cultural differences are inevitable to be generalized. In addition, it is well known that the research methods of natural science and social science are different. Social science is somehow subjective and is often mixed with constant beliefs and emotions.

In cross-cultural communication, the existence of stereotype is necessary, but it is not uncommon to fail for communicators in cross-cultural communication due to stereotype. Thus, how to properly and reasonably use stereotype to guide cross-cultural communicators to make it effective in cross-cultural communication? First of all, cross-cultural communicators cannot rely entirely on stereotype because it is thought as a general guideline rather than a specific criterion for communicative behaviors. Too much reliance on it can lead to misunderstanding and conflicts. Next, do not define a specific person by the characteristics of a group of people because one usually has complex and numerous cultural identities. For example, Americans are considered rich and generous, which can be said as a stereotype, but this does not mean that each individual American is rich and generous when dealing with others. If cross-cultural communcators communicate and behave in this way, stereotype will become a rigid rule, affecting or even destroying the normal communication between individuals, resulting in communication failure. If the failure is attributed to stereotype, and cross-cultural communcators accuse it of misleading cross-cultural communication, it will produce prejudice against stereotype. In fact, this is also a logical fallacy that confuses macroscope and microscope, abstract and concrete, and generality and individuality.

Therefore, cross-cultural communicators should avoid this kind of logical misuse and use stereotype as a knowledge background for cross-cultural communication rather than guide the actual specific

communication behaviors in the practical cross-cultural communication. In cross-cultural communication, it is possible to make some kind of correlative prediction or psychological preparation according to stereotype to carefully observe to which extent individual behaviors are correlative to stereotype. Certainly, this predication or psychological preparation may be in conflict and contradiction with individuals' specific behaviors. When conflicts and contradictions arise, they should adjust at any time to avoid the failure in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, there is a correlative relationship between stereotype and cross-cultural communication. No matter how much individual behavior is related to stereotype, it can be shown that it is very significant to study the value and meaning of stereotype. On the basis of the correlation between individual behaviors and stereotype in cross-cultural communication, we can have a deeper and more detailed understanding of foreign cultures from the microscopic point of view so as to achieve effective cross-cultural communication.

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