Role of Stereotyping in Intercultural Communication

Nikmah Suryandari[1]

[1]*(Communicatin Science, University of Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia)*

Abstract:
Intercultural communication, in the tide of globalization, is urgently needed as an interactive communication skill by the demand for promoting economic development and cultural exchange. Eilers (1992) defined intercultural communication as an instrument which helps people with different cultural backgrounds share information, knowledge, sentiments and experiences. This notion was agreed by Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern, who stressed intercultural communication plays a crucial role in "the establishment and maintenance of favorable intergroup relations" (2002, p .610). However, the involvement of multicultural groups also complicates the situation. According to Bonacich (1990), various patterns of communication have been shaped by their cultural environments, related to their own language, values, norms, etc. In this case, the participants of intercultural communication face language obstacles, unacquainted customs and different communication styles (Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern, 2002). In order to achieve effective intercultural communication, vast studies were carried out to identify ways that linguistic and cultural barriers might be overcome (e.g. Hepburn and Locksley, 1983; Chew, 2009; Peng, 2010). Stereotyping is one of the hotly debated topics. Advisedly, stereotyping was asserted to be a critical source which could motivate inimical attitudes toward cultural difference (Dovidio et al., 1996; Stangor and Lange, 1994, cited in Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern, 2002). In this case, stereotypes play an indispensable role in influencing the effectiveness of intercultural communication. It is an accepted fact that stereotypes "dramatically shape the way we perceive and interact with members of different groups" (Power, 1996, cited in Peng, 2010, p. 244). It is deemed that stereotypes are "a very partial and inadequate way of representing the world" (Lippmann, 1992, cited in Peng, 2010, p. 244). Research has been carried out to attempt to eliminate this obstructive factor in intercultural communication (e.g. Hill and Augoustinos, 2001). However, the existence of stereotypes has been justified by some scholars. As Hughes and Baldwin (2002) indicated, stereotyping is "inherently part of the communication process" (Peng, 2010, p. 244). It plays an active role in helping individuals comprehend different cultures instantaneously in an intergroup encounter. Therefore, this paper will advocate that stereotyping has a positive impact on assisting individuals to handle an encounter with different social groups despite the fact that it may also lead to misunderstandings and negative emotions in intercultural communication. In order to present the role of stereotyping in intercultural communication, this paper will start with an introduction on stereotype from different fields, followed by a discussion of the negative influence of stereotypes on the field of intercultural communication, and then focus on the available functions of stereotypes. Subsequently, some previous research will be quoted to illustrate the inevitability of stereotyping in intercultural communication. Finally, a general conclusion will be delivered with some suggestions about how to foster effective intercultural communication.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes are generalized as "the tendency to categorize individuals or groups according to an oversimplified standardized image and attribute certain characteristics to all members of the group" (Moore, 2006, cited in Peng, 2010, p. 244). The inchoate known notion of stereotype is "national character" (Chew et al., 2006). This notion was formed as early as the beginning of Western civilization (Chew et al., 2006). At that time, "national character" was employed to describe foreign people in some early ethnological depictions. In the 18th century, people from other countries were usually labeled with national characters to match the classification of certain types of governmental systems. A typical example of deepening this notion is found in Montesquieu's famous climate theory – "North-South model". Montesquieu asserted that cold climates made "Northern" men "vigorous and virtuous, honest and hard-working, rational and reflective" while warm climates made the "Southern" men "temperamental, impulsive, highly sensitive and indolent" (Chew et al., 2006, p. 181). As the research continued, this traditional notion was replaced by a more precise term "national stereotype" in the 1950s (Chew et al., 2006, p. 180). The name-change manifests the close connection between stereotypes and national character. In the light of this historical reason and the natural characteristics, the primary research fields

of stereotyping are focused on racial, ethnic and national groups (Ashmore and Del Boca, 1981, cited in Spencer-Rodgers, 2001).

Tajfel (1981) indicated that "stereotypes are certain generalizations reached by individuals" (p. 146). In general, individuals may pursue the purpose of simplifying the abundant and complex information in an intergroup encounter through the cognitive process of categorizing. This response is instinctive. According to Krieglmeyer and Sherman (2012), categorizing meets the psychological needs of humans and is generated automatically. A stereotype is formed and activated by the action of labeling an object on the basis of the individual's cognizance and knowledge. In this case, the formation and activation of a stereotype is relatively rapid and direct, even outside of conscious awareness. As Spencer-Rodgers (2001) illustrated, in terms of the significant differences of physical appearances, such as facial features and skin color, international students are usually categorized immediately and labeled arbitrarily as, for example, wealthy or underprivileged, on the basis of their nationality. Chew (2009) named this situation an "auto-image" (p. 183). In this case, stereotypes participate in the cognitive processes of international students. To put it differently, stereotyping is a reflection of life experiences and "a form of cultural knowledge" (Devine, 1989, cited in Lyons and Kashima, 2003).

Besides relating to cognition, emotional factors are also stressed by social psychologists as important when interpreting the formation of stereotypes. Chew alleged "classification categories are highly emotional" (p.183). Approved by Fein (1999), emotion plays an important role in extracting sources from cognition to form a stereotype. As a case in his research, Fein found the activation of a stereotype was reduced to a minimum when an individual received praise from a Black doctor. He concluded that individuals were motivated to inhibit the activation of negative stereotypes when they related well with their interlocutor. In addition, Fein indicated that individuals often prefer to value their in-group attributes and minimize intra-group differences in an intergroup encounter. In this case, a stereotype of out-group members might be motivated to form in perception in order to reinforce the feeling of self-worth. For example, a strong negative stereotype was created when the Nazis blamed the Jews for the defeat of Germany in World War I (Chew, 2009). In any case, the activation of stereotypes is an instinctive behavior. Stereotyping is only applied to "other" or out-groups.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This paper is a literature review on stereotypes in the study of intercultural communication.Study of concepts and theories that are used based on available literature, especially from articles whichpublished in various scientific journals. Literature review works forbuild concepts or theories that form the basis of study in research. Literature study or literature study is a mandatory activity in research, specifically academic research whose main purpose isdevelop both theoretical and practical aspects

III. RESULT

Lyons and Kashima (2003) considered that a stereotype has the property of sharedness. Kurylo (2012) agreed, saying a stereotype could be formed and spread in communication processes such as gossip. Taijfel (1981) proposed that stereotypes should be subdivided into individual and social stereotypes, and said an individual stereotype could become a general belief through the process of screening, confirmation, transformation and diffusion within a social group (Lyons and Kashima, 2003). For the controversial individual stereotypes, without going through a process of sharing at a general level for a certain period, they are hardly maintained. In this case, sharing stereotypes reapplies the deepening of stereotypes in the individuals' cognizance. After being shared as a general belief, stereotype are usually regarded as undoubted by the social group, and are confused with knowledge involuntarily. Furthermore, as a general belief, social stereotypes share a similar transmission mode with social values and traditions, which could be inherited from the older generation (Peng, 2010). In other words, sharing and educating general beliefs are key to the formation of stereotypes. In research into the development and consequences of stereotype consciousness in middle childhood, Mckown and Weinstein (2003) illustrated children are deemed to lack the capacity to filtrate and digest information. In this case, stereotypes are given to children via underlying meanings of what is taught by teachers and parents and through shared beliefs in their communities. Research shows children begin to be aware of different ethnicities and gender and start to sort themselves and their peers at the ages of 3 and 4. At about the same time, a stereotype that Whites are more intelligent than Blacks is already prevalent (Mcknown and Weinstein, 2003). This stereotype was formed not only based on observation but also involves a process of information input. Therefore, since the information is shared by all group members within the same ethnicity, broadly held stereotypes are deeply anchored in people's minds when they are young. Moreover, the stereotypes formed at this age involuntarily become a constituent part of cognizance, hardly removed and processed as children mature, and are, then passed on to the next generation.

Negative Influences of Stereotypes
3.1 Stereotype may lead to misunderstanding

As mentioned above, stereotypes occur in the process of individual's categorizing interlocutors. To be more precise, stereotypes raise a judgment according to what an individual "knows about the category to which he or she feels the other belongs" (Matusitz, 2012, p. 90). In this case, stereotypes form only on the basis of an oversimplified standardized image. It easily results in a misunderstanding of other groups or their members. For example, Hepburn and Locksley (1983) found that the Japanese were perceived as being collective-oriented and were treated as if they were the same as Chinese people by other participants in the research, on account of their physical features. As a matter of fact, differences of national character exist between Japanese and Chinese. Japanese people, especially the young, show more interest in individual contributions and flexible relationships (Matsumoto, 2002, cited in Peng, 2010). Therefore, stereotypes result in a misunderstanding. It may lead to a failure of communication.

Misunderstanding is caused by stereotypes, due to distorted views of others. Furthermore, individuals could be looked at differently when there are various stereotypes to choose from. According to Spencer-Rodgers (2001), stereotypes are based on categorizing in a single dimension, like race or nationality. Therefore, a different application of stereotypes could cause controversy. Kunda and Sinclair (1999) give an example of how an Asian American woman was stereotyped as highly skilled at maths, on account of being Asian by some, but as weak in maths because of her gender by others. They indicate that individuals might apply partial stereotypes on the basis of motivation. In any case, stereotyping is not reliable for obtaining accurate understanding.

3.2 Stereotypes may result in prejudice

Stereotypes sometimes help protect self-esteem or reinforce the concept of being part of a superior group, so an individual may be motivated to apply negative stereotypes in their perceptions and judgments to restore their own feeling of self-worth (Fein, et al., 1999). In this case, stereotyping is liable to trigger intergroup discrimination (Sachdev and Bourhis, 1987, cited in Matusitz, 2012). According to surveys in the workplace, American managers perceive their Asian colleagues to lack assertiveness and leadership, while Israelis thought Indian businessman were untrustworthy and did not provide accurate information (Iles, 1995; Zaidaman, 2000, cited in Peng 2010). Analogously, foreign students were marked usually as outsiders and considered to have "a passive and withdrawn interpersonal style" (Paige, 1990; Pedersen, 1991, cited in Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern, 2002, p.613). In this case, stereotyping motivates prejudice. Moreover, it may bring an emotional counterattack by since an individual may spontaneously activate stereotypes when they receive negative feedback (Fein, et al., 1999). For example, Hughes and Baldwin (2002) found that black students were considered to be argumentative because they spoke loudly, so they incriminated white students as ignorant when the white students spoke on trivial topics (Peng, 2010). Hence, negative stereotypes can endanger relationships among different groups and cause a failure of communication.

From another perspective, stereotypes may be "empirical" (Hepburn and Locksley, 1983), based on historical events. For example, American students attributed more negative characteristics to Germans and Japanese after World War 2 than before (Peng, 2010). These negative characteristics cannot be deemed to be universal and don't provide reliable resources for either understanding reality or delivering effective communication. Even worse, ethnic conflicts may arise and deepen in the light of stereotyping.

3.3 Stereotypes may affect individual performance

Stereotyping exerts a profound influence on recipient out-group information and intergroup relationship. However, its application not only leads to a failure in communication but also affects individual performance (Estrada and Schultz, 2012). C. M. Steele (1997) indicated that "members of negatively stereotyped groups progressively place less importance on their performance in the stereotyped domain" (cited in Estrada and Schultz, 2012, p. 635). Under the long-term threat of stereotypes, for instance, Black and Hispanic students cease to seek good scores in their study. Woodcock et al. (2012) defines the stereotyping threat as a potential threat to people's underlying thoughts and considers it to be an important influence on social values and how people behave in society.

Appel (2012) states that stereotypes also play an important role in intensifying social distance, showing how immigrants may see themselves and their group as inferior, in comparison to natives, and likely perform poorly in the process of communication under the threat of negative stereotyping. Nevertheless, stereotyping has not been weakened by these factors. In fact, animosity may occur between immigrants and local residents. In view of these phenomena, Woodcock et al. (2012) concluded that a stereotype threat plays a significant role in promoting stereotyped thoughts and ideas as a driving force in most cases. However, it has been proven that a stereotype threat can sometimes be realized and changed as people notice it. For example, the phenomenon that the women's mathematics grades are far lower than men's has started to change since women began to see that they are not inferior in this area (Woodcock et al., 2012). Therefore, the impact of stereotype threats can be

blunted. We can even suggest that negative stereotyping and prejudice can be reduced by improving cross-cultural awareness.

3.4 Stereotype can be changed on a small-scale.
      Through realizing the negative influence of stereotypes, much research has been carried out to eliminate stereotypes in past decades. Although no evidence was found to prove stereotypes can be erased, some progress has been made on changing negative stereotypes. Cardon (2010) conducted an experiment with Indians who had experience of studying in America, and American students. Firstly, he asked Indians to write down their perceptions of Americans on the basis of films watched, then provided their feedback to the American students. As a result, the American students began to raise their cultural awareness and queried the stereotypes they have applied to Indians.
      Another typical example is found in Hewstone's (1994) *Shared Learning Programme* (Hill and Augoustinos, 2001), where doctors and social workers were asked to co-operate. In consequence, intergroup attitudes were found to become more positive. This programme verified the "contact hypothesis", a well-known social psychological method which proposes that intergroup contact can effectively reduce prejudice (Brewer, 1997; Cook, 1985; Hewstone, 1996; Hewstone and Brown, 1986, cited in Hill and Augoustinos, 2001). In terms of this hypothesis and Hewstone'sprogramme, Hill and Augoustinos carried out research on changing stereotypes. Studying with *the Cross-Cultural Awareness Programme*, which "is an anti-racist education course used in staff training by the Courts Administration Authority in South Australian and by several Australian government agencies" (p. 247), they found negative stereotypes were significant decrease in a certain period after training. However, they indicated negative stereotype failed to maintain a long-term decrease. In addition, they recognized that stereotype change only occurs under perceived typicality, which means "stereotype-disconfirming information must be dispersed among otherwise typical members of the target out-group" (Hewstone et al., 1992, cited in Hill and Augoustinos, 2001, p. 249). In this case, stereotype change was achieved on a small-scale. However, stereotyping is still inevitable in the wider environment.

The Functions of Stereotypes
      In spite of stereotypes having negative impacts on how individuals perceive out-groups, it does exert positive effect on assisting intergroup perception and intercultural communication. As Hewstone and Giles (1986) suggested, "stereotypes serve important functions, such as reducing the complexity of incoming information, facilitating rapid identification of stimuli, and predicting and guiding behavior" (cited in Matusitz, 2012).

Stereotypes serve as "cognitive shortcuts"
      In an intergroup encounter, individuals usually have little information about their object except their own group (Hepburn and Locksley, 1983). Furthermore, on account of communication obstacles and cultural difference, individuals probably feel awkward and anxious (Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern, 2002). In this case, individual may desire a guideline for their discourse or behavior. In order to meet this requirement, individuals may call on a stereotype as a part of their knowledge, to help instinctively. As Hepburn and Locksley highlight, stereotypes are easily triggered when an individual is facing a low-information condition. Under the pressure of relative multiplex and unpredictable information, stereotypes can function as "cognitive shortcuts" in an intergroup encounter (Anthony and Yoshihisa, 2003, cited in Peng, 2010, p.244). This idea is also favored by Tajfel (1981). He indicates that categorization is the basic cognitive process in stereotyping. Individuals employ stereotyping in their cognitive processes to "simplify information from the social environment", then "make sense of a world that would otherwise be too complex and chaotic for effective action" (p. 148). To explain, Allport (1954) illustrates the resources which are used to form categorizations, gathered on the basis of the realistic, and assimilated to the cluster to the utmost extent (cited in Tajfel, 1981). Categorization, in this situation, composites social information of a target group and presents its typical characteristics. Therefore, stereotyping is rational to some extent. It may have the function of guiding individual daily adjustments and should be treated as valuable.
      In communication, sharing information to establish "common ground" is a key to creating coordination among involved groups (Clark, 1985, cited in Collins et al., 2009). However, individuals inevitably face a context where they meet members from other clusters in an intergroup encounter. In order to create opportunities for positive interaction, individuals may rely on culturally shared information (Collins et al., 2009). At such a time, stereotypes play a role in providing processing resources (Krieglmeyer and Sherman, 2011). For example, by activating the stereotype "British people prefer to start a conversation by talking about the weather", the non-British person may be able to fit quickly into the indigenous society. Although stereotyping cannot guide individuals to a successful communication wholly, it fulfills the desire to avoid inappropriateness.

Stereotype could be used to explain social events.

Tajfel (1981) regarded the "cognitive shortcuts" function of stereotypes tended to be related to the individual, but he thought stereotyping also has a social function, such as motivating individuals to preserve their group values and providing clues to explain certain social events.

As mentioned above, stereotyping presents typical characteristics of a certain cluster. It guides individuals establishing criteria for their target object once it becomes known. Tajfel said most categorizations in the physical environment are neutral, such as "Swedes are tall". However, this depends on the preferences for one over another: some classifications are regarded as "value-loaded" (p.154). Taijfel argues that "tall" is not consequentially value-free, even it is neither commentary nor derogatory. The trait "tall" is obvious for categorizing Swedes. In this case, the fact that an individual encounters tall Swedes who dislike their social categories may modify the general stereotype. However, Tajfel argues that, when the instances relate to a trait with a strong value, a differentiation will arise, since individuals tend to preserve their group value. In other words, the people who do not fit the feature of their group will be treated as outsiders. Furthermore, in order to avoid the threat to the values of a certain group, individuals prefer to keep out the "right person" rather than let in the "wrong person" (p. 158). The classic example to this case could be regarded as the witch-hunt. Tajfel concludes that "it represents a powerful protection of the existing system of social values, and any mistakes made are mistakes to the extent that they endanger that system" (p. 158).

Following this example, it can be seen that stereotypes bear responsibility for arousing social events, as they explain collective actions to a certain extent. Tajfel proposes that social groups may employ stereotypes to justify their behaviors against out-groups. Humanity has a psychological need to establish causality for what they perceive. In this case, a stereotype is occasionally asked to fulfill this demand. Moreover, a stereotype could act either as cause or result. For example, a stereotype is deemed as a result where it generated Americans' negative image of Turks after World War 2(Korten, 1973). However, a stereotype is employed as a cause to explain the existence of anti-Semitism (Billig, 1978, cited in Tajfel, 1981). In any case, stereotypes play an important role in justification

Stereotypes may benefit both individuals and their social group

According to the social function of stereotypes, a social group provides and maintains positive identities for members through distinguishing itself from other groups by the prominence of its valuable characteristics (Tajfel, 1981). In this case, stereotypes play a positive role in encouraging social group to preserve and create positively valued differentiations. Besides, individuals may shape their self-respect or social identity by comparing the characteristics of their own group with other social groups (Tajfel, 1981). This process is not only to fulfilling individuals' ethnocentrism, but it also guides them to locate their own group accurately. On account of stereotypes providing multidimensional references for distinguishing each social group, individuals may easily find similarities or differences between themselves and the members in a certain group. Furthermore, it may stimulate them to act positively to integrate into that group.

From another aspect, stereotypes do not always draw a negative image. Czopp (2008) says "unlike negative stereotypes, positive stereotypes are often perceived as admirable qualities" (p. 413). As mentioned above, positive stereotypes are regarded as valuable by groups, which attempted to preserve them. Positive stereotypes not only highlight the advantages of its target group but also build up an active relationship among groups. For instance, the stereotypes of African Americans innately having athletic prowess and musical ability (Czopp, 2008) may create a positive interaction among African Americans and other groups who value these capabilities. According to Tajfel (1981), groups' reciprocal images exert a vital influence on the relations between groups. In this case, the involvement of positive stereotypes may create a platform for promoting group interaction.

IV. DISCUSSION
The Inevitability of Stereotypes in Intercultural Communication

In a study of intercultural communication, Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern (2002) affirmative disclosure of negative stereotypes is censured as one of the basic causal factors which lead social perceivers to be biased against out-groups. However, abundant research proves that stereotyping is impossible to eliminate (e.g. Peng, 2010; Hill and Augoustinos, 2001). As one of the induction factors, the context of intercultural communication should be taken into account. In intercultural communication, individuals frequently face challenges, such as language barriers, low-information context, uncertainty and intergroup anxiety. In this situation, stereotyping is employed automatically to reduce information to a manageable size, "simplify and make sense of a confusing and complex barrage of perceptual information" (Hill and Augoustinos, 2011, p. 259). Krieglmeyer and Sherman (2012) indicate individuals may have the motivation to manage their stereotypes. However, they also argue stereotypes can be managed based on the practical individuating information only if this information is available. Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern admit individuals usually lack

familiarity and experience of other groups in intercultural communication. In this case, stereotyping is resistant to elimination as it provides a relatively stable structure for helping individuals handle complex situations. Furthermore, as cognitive beliefs, the activation of stereotypes is hardly conscious for the individual (Hepburn and Locksley, 1983). As Cardon (2010) suggests, it is inevitable that individuals develop their stereotypes unconsciously.

From another perspective a, stereotype is valued as involving useful social information (Hill and Augoustinos, 2001). Hill and Augoustinos stress that stereotypes include both descriptive and explanatory information, which leads individual to understand the other groups and avoid inappropriateness. For example, driven by the stereotype of Chinese as traditional and less open-minded, individuals may avoid sensitive topics, such as sex, in communication with Chinese participants (Peng, 2010). As a result, this stereotype leads to a reduction in the discomfiture felt to some extent in communication processes. Even the label of traditional for the Chinese is not precise enough. As a consequence, the existence of stereotypes is dependent on individuals to some extent. Furthermore, individuals may overlook the negative influence of stereotypes and ignore the problematics (Kurylo, 2012).

The inevitability of stereotyping is also related to its maintenance. Lyons and Kashima (2003) illustrate that individuals show a great preference for maintaining their stereotypes, even if they are challenged by evidence. In fact, stereotypes circulate via various channels in human daily life, such as the mass media. For instance, radical right political parties promote racial discrimination through propaganda, rooted in the stereotype of a minority group in their constituency, and evoke aversion to immigrants. Lyons and Kashima indicate stereotypes may also pass through chains of people by mixing information. For example, students' stereotypes are found developing through classmates, family members or the mass media (Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern, 2002). By spreading through these mediums, stereotypes circulate. Even worse, by being passed down from one person to another, information becomes more stereotypical (Lyons and Kashima, 2003). In this case, Itakura (2004) stresses "once formed, cultural stereotypes are not easily dismissed" (cited in Peng, 2010, p.246).

V. CONCLUSION

Stereotypes, which act as cognitive belief, play an important role in intercultural communication. They are relative to an individual's cultural background and their need to categorize, shared as a social belief in a certain group. The negative influences of stereotypes, which may result in misunderstanding, prejudice and psychological threat, alarms scholars, who want to weaken its effect. Some methods, such as raising cultural awareness, have enabled some to manage stereotypes to a certain extent, through multilateral efforts. In spite of the negative influence of stereotypes, the functions of stereotype should be highlighted as valuable. In intercultural communication, stereotypes play a role as cognitive shortcuts in helping individuals handle complex circumstance and mental stress. On account of the capability of stereotypes to present the typical characteristics of a certain group, they can be consulted during social events. Moreover, it may also bring benefits to both individuals and social groups in its positive meaning. The inevitability of stereotyping is proved by research. It is employed voluntarily in intercultural communication to meet the requirements to manage complexity and can be regarded as valuable to some extent. In any case, stereotypes have permeated every aspect of social life and been maintained by the social activities. This paper has presented certain features of stereotypes. However, on account of the fact that the study of stereotypes is multi-disciplinary, it is difficult to include all the information available on this topic. Further studies are needed to discover how to utilize stereotypes in practice.

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