

INTERCULTURAL STEREOTYPES AND THE ROLE OF CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING IN OVERCOMING THEM

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Received 21 June 2022; accepted 3 April 2023

Abstract. Intercultural stereotypes often lead to misunderstandings or even cultural conflicts in communication, as they interfere with the rational assessment of individuals from one national culture and the products, perspectives and practices associated with them. Although there is a considerable literature on stereotypes in general and on intercultural stereotypes in particular, there is clearly insufficient scholarly works to provide concrete and conceptual insights into how to minimise or overcome stereotypical attitudes in practice. For example, the role of critical and creative thinking in the process of devisualisation of stereotypes has not been adequately assessed in the academic literature. Researchers have so far paid little attention for it in their works. This work aims to fill the aforementioned gaps in the scientific discourse. The object of this article is intercultural stereotypes in the context of the link between critical and creative thinking. The aim of the article is to analyse the theoretical aspects of intercultural stereotypes and the role of critical and creative thinking in overcoming them. The work first analyses the theoretical aspects of stereotypes in the context of intercultural communication, and then examines the nuances of the role of critical and creative thinking in overcoming intercultural stereotypes. The role of critical and creative thinking in the process of overcoming intercultural stereotypes is explored by discussing the link between critical and creative thinking, as well as the importance of the application of teaching methods for critical and creative thinking skills in the process of devisualisation of stereotypes. The following research methods are used in order to implement the aim of the article: analysis and synthesis of scientific literature.

Keywords: creative thinking, critical thinking, devisualisation of stereotypes, intercultural communication, intercultural stereotypes.

Introduction

Intercultural stereotypes often lead to misunderstandings or even cultural conflicts in communication, as they interfere with the rational assessment of individuals from one national culture and the products, perspectives and practices associated with them. Although there is a large body of literature on stereotypes in general and on intercultural stereotypes in particular (Oakes et al., 1994; Fiske et al., 2002; Chew III, 2006; Cuddy et al., 2008; Pruskus, 2010;

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Chesnokova, 2015; Korez Vide & Jurše, 2016; Hiyasova et al., 2018; Liu & Zhang, 2020; Suryandari, 2020; Gul Unlu, 2021; Urbiola et al., 2021), the number of scientific works is clearly insufficient to provide concrete and conceptual insights into how to minimise or overcome stereotypical attitudes in practice. For example, the role of critical and creative thinking in the process of devisualisation of stereotypes has not been adequately assessed in the academic literature. Researchers have so far paid little attention for it in their works. This article aims to fill these gaps in the scholarly discourse. It is true that critical and creative thinking has been addressed quite extensively in the scientific literature outside the context of overcoming stereotypes. Various theoretical aspects of critical and creative thinking, for example, have been addressed in the works of the following authors: Nosich (2011), Klooster (2001), Beresnevičius (2010), Bacanlı et al. (2011), Demir et al. (2011), Penkauskienė (2016), Bandyopadhyay and Szostek (2019), Suyundikova et al. (2021), *etc.*

Research problem. Underestimation of the role of critical and creative thinking in the process of overcoming intercultural stereotypes.

The object of this article is intercultural stereotypes in the context of the link between critical and creative thinking.

The aim of the article is to analyse the theoretical aspects of intercultural stereotypes and the role of critical and creative thinking in overcoming them.

Tasks of the article: 1) to analyse the theoretical aspects of stereotypes in the context of intercultural communication; 2) to examine the link between critical and creative thinking in the process of overcoming stereotypes; 3) to analyse the methods of development of critical and creative thinking skills, that should be applied in intercultural education sessions, teaching to overcome stereotypes.

Methods of the research: analysis and synthesis of scientific literature.

In terms of the scientific literature covered in the article, it may be stated that it is based on purely theoretical scientific articles (*e.g.* literature reviews, *etc.*) and other sources, as well as on those that present the findings of scientific empirical research. This paper incorporates valuable information from previous and recent results in its analysis of the topic.

1. Stereotypes in the context of intercultural communication: theoretical aspect

Every culture is a set of signs with defined meanings. In decoding these meanings, a representative of a foreign culture encounters a problem of identity of the meanings. The reality is that a particular culture (its concepts, attitudes, behavioural patterns), as a system of decodable meanings, forms stereotypes (Baraldsnes, 2012, p. 157).

The word *stereotype* was first used to describe the secrets of the typographic craft. It refers to the metal plate used to print repeated copies of material. Recently, the concept of stereotype has been used increasingly often to characterise processes related to culture, ideology, public policy, *etc.* (Pruskus, 2012, p. 141). The concept of stereotype was first used in the social sense by Walter Lipmann in his book *Public Opinion* (1997, originally published in 1922) to describe judgements about others based on their ethnic group membership (Jayaswal, 2009, p. 14; Pruskus, 2010, p. 30). Lipmann defined stereotypes as simplified preconceptions, occurring not from one's personal experience, but from the knowledge of an intermediate

object: we are told about the world as long as we get to know it by experiencing it (Pruskus, 2012, p. 141). Today, the term is more widely used to refer to negative or positive evaluations of individuals based on any observed or believed group affiliation (Jayaswal, 2009, p. 14). Maljichi notes:

“Stereotypes are oversimplified or distorted views of another race, another ethnic group, or even another culture. They are simply ways to categorize and generalize from the overwhelming amount of information we receive daily” (2019, p. 87).

Cultural and ethnic stereotypes are thus prejudiced attribution of certain characteristics to an individual based on their membership of a particular cultural or ethnic group (Lukošiūtė, 2012, p. 160). It is an attitude towards another nation formulated by the experience of a cultural and national community (Papaurelytė-Klovienė, 2010, p. 2). Chew III (2006, p. 180) notes that examples of stereotypical representations of people and nations can already be found in early ethnological descriptions of foreign peoples by classical authors such as Herodotus, Tacitus, or Julius Caesar.

Stereotypes are cognitive structures that serve as a knowledge base guiding individuals' behaviour in communication. Our schematic representations (*i.e.*, stereotypes) of a social group are associated with our feelings, attitudes, and behaviors toward the group. Positive feelings such as sympathy, trust and admiration, are often associated with groups that are stereotypically perceived as competent and friendly, while negative stereotypes can cause negative emotions such as anger, fear or anxiety (Liu & Zhang, 2020, p. 85). Stereotypes reduce the uncertainty in the communication process and increase our confidence in predicting the behaviour of strangers. Yet, most often, relying on stereotypes, we overestimate the common features of a certain group, do not estimate individual differences, and do so automatically without thinking (Gudonienė, 2013, p. 74). Jenifer and Raman (2015) state that stereotypes are born out of a fear of the group we are stereotyping or a lack of knowledge about that group. Seeger and Gustafsson (2021, p. 7) note that stereotypes create a wealth of problems that are difficult to solve because they exist below the level of consciousness. According to Annenkova and Domysheva (2020, p. 1032), for the latter reason, people are often unaware that they have stereotypical beliefs about other cultures.

The following components of a stereotype can be distinguished: 1) rational (cognitive) – *i.e.* evaluative statements (*e.g.* “Arabs are hot-headed”); 2) pictorial – exist in the psyche as generalising images (*e.g.* a typical Muslim, a typical Filipino woman); 3) emotional – related to emotions (positive – to sympathies; negative – to antipathies) (Jančaitytė et al., 2009, p. 47). There is a distinction between autostereotypes and heterostereotypes. Autostereotypes are how people of a particular nation perceive themselves, how they can describe their own character. Heterostereotypes are the attitudes of people of one nation towards people of another nation, and the way those people behave (Chesnokova, 2015, p. 1; Papaurelytė-Klovienė, 2010, p. 2). Autostereotypes are usually characterised by favourable evaluations, the own nation is usually described in positive terms. Heterostereotypes usually involve criticism of behaviours of people of other nations (Papaurelytė-Klovienė, 2010, p. 2). Gul Unlu (2021, p. 5) notes that the content of stereotypes varies according to the level of development of a society, its historical background, geographical location or cultural characteristics.

The formation of stereotypes goes through three stages: 1) leveling; 2) sharpening; 3) assimilation (Baraldsnes, 2012, p. 158). Initially, a complex, differentiated object is brought together into several well-known features, and then the distinguished characteristics of the object are given high importance compared to that which they had as an integral part of the whole. Next, the “levelled” and “sharpened” features of the object are selected in order to create a type that is close and meaningful to the individual. A person used to a situation reacts automatically. The intensity of reaction depends on the intensity of the emotional impact and the art of stereotype manipulation (Pruskus, 2010, p. 31).

The stereotype content model, first proposed by Fiske et al. (2002), suggests that members of a social group are evaluated along two main dimensions of social perception: warmth and competence. The dimension of warmth helps to anticipate the traits of others and encompasses properties such as sincerity and friendliness. The competence dimension provides insight into the ability of others, allows to achieve own intentions or goals, and includes qualities such as intelligence and skillfulness (Toolshero, 2018; Urbiola et al., 2021). A group perceived as warm and competent elicits uniformly positive emotions and behaviours: admiration, help and association. Those perceived as lacking warmth and competence, cause uniform negativity: contempt, neglect and attack. In turn, high warmth with low competence causes pity and patronizing help or neglect. Low warmth with high competence cause envy and strategic association or, in the case of threat, an attack (Cuddy et al., 2008, p. 137; Bye, 2020, p. 2). Urbiola et al. (2021, pp. 3–4) note that a large body of research confirms the importance of analysing morality and sociability as two distinct dimensions of warmth. Morality plays a unique role in social decisions, in building impression or in in-group and out-group evaluations and reactions. Sociability refers to willingness to help people in ways that facilitate emotional relationships with them (for example, honesty, trustworthiness and sincerity).

Although stereotypes are considered to be mainly negative judgements, they can also be positive (Jayaswal, 2009, p. 15; Maljichi, 2019, p. 87; Kei & Yazdanifard, 2015, p. 10). Positive stereotypes are often perceived as charming characteristics. Positive stereotypes not only highlight the strengths of the target group, but also create active relationships between groups. For example, stereotypes about African Americans’ innate athletic and musical abilities can create positive interactions between African Americans and other groups that value these abilities (Suryandari, 2020, p. 27). Stereotypes are harmful when they are used as rigid prejudices and are applied to all members of a group or to a person over a period of time, regardless of individual differences. Prejudice refers to irrational dislike, suspicion or hatred of a particular group, race, religion or sexual orientation. Prejudice includes unfair, biased or intolerant attitude towards another group of people (Jayaswal, 2009, p. 15). Negative stereotypes often lead to less productive interactions with others (Ching et al., 2021, p. 3; Mgogo & Osunkunle, 2020, p. 45)

Suryandari (2020, pp. 26–27), who has studied the role of stereotypes in intercultural communication, identifies the following negative effects of stereotypes: 1) the stereotype can lead to misunderstandings. For example, Japanese are perceived as team-oriented. However, if we treat them in the same way as the Chinese because of their similar physical characteristics, we may encounter a communication failure, as there are national differences between the Japanese and Chinese. The Japanese, especially the younger generation, are interested in

individual input and flexible relationships more than the Chinese; 2) stereotypes can cause prejudice. Stereotypes sometimes help to protect self-esteem or reinforce the perception of being a member of a superior group; therefore, an individual may be motivated to apply negative stereotypes to his or her perceptions and decisions in order to restore a sense of self-esteem. In this case, stereotypes can lead to intergroup discrimination; 3) stereotypes can affect a person's performance. Members of stereotyped groups may begin to pay less attention to their activities in the area of stereotypes. For example, long-term stereotyping can lead to learners from certain vulnerable groups stop pursuing good learning outcomes, *etc.* It has also been shown that stereotype threat can sometimes be perceived and changed after people have noticed it; 4) a stereotype can be changed on a small-scale. While various studies show that stereotypes cannot be eliminated completely, they can be reduced and changed within a narrow range of settings. Intergroup contact and various intercultural awareness trainings can help. But stereotypes are still inevitable in the wider context.

Meškauskaitė (2014) notes that people often fail to think about that stereotypes lead to discrimination. They are reluctant to admit that they are discriminating against those groups by responding to the “other” in an abominable way. This mindset of people is justified by the idea that “everyone does it”, why I have to be exceptional (Meškauskaitė, 2014, p. 5).

The problem with stereotypes is that regardless they are positive or negative, once stereotypes are identified, they are difficult to eliminate. Sometimes, they exist in our subconscious; they are even harder to give up because we know less about them. We tend to accept information from our environment that supports stereotypes rather than refutes them. This simply embeds them deeper. To eliminate stereotypes, we first need to identify them; next, we need to get individual information to help us do that (Maljichi, 2019, p. 87). A stereotype is useful when it is: 1) conscious. The individual must be aware that the stereotype represents a group norm and not an individual characteristic; 2) it is descriptive rather than evaluative. It must describe what the people in a particular group are, but not judge them as good or bad; 3) accurate. A stereotype must accurately describe the norm of the group to which the person belongs; 4) modified. Based on the experience of interacting with real people and new situations (Gudonienė, 2013, p. 75).

The following characteristics of stereotypes can be identified: 1) simplicity. The better a person knows someone, the more differentiated, as a rule, the image of the latter is. This is how the images of relatives and close friends are most differentiated in our consciousness. Nevertheless, the images of other people are never entirely in line with reality. Therefore, it is easy to imagine how primitive and schematic our images are about people living in completely different geographical, economic and cultural conditions; 2) evaluation. Stereotypes are often emotionally tinted with sympathies and antipathies. The same traits, depending on whether they belong to own group or to someone else's group, lead to different assessment; 3) rigidity. It should be noted that even the experience of direct contact with people from other cultures rarely leads to the correction of stereotypes. In this case, the existing stereotype continues to be the norm, and our personal experiences fall into the category of exceptions, which only confirm the rule. By taking in information from the surrounding world and processing it through the prism of own perception, people tend to give more credence to facts that confirm conventional, established views. It is a kind of self-deception, a means of

self-defence against everything that is new and incomprehensible (Chesnokova, 2015, p. 5). However, Pruskus (2012, pp. 142–143) notes that although stereotypes are characterised by permanence, they are influenced by new information, especially dramatic events. The level of education, intelligence and personal experience, as well as norms, habits, social roles and the living environment, all have an impact on supporting the stereotype.

In describing stereotypes, the following dimensions of stereotypes can also be identified: direction, intensity, specificity, consensus, and accuracy. The direction of a stereotype means that the stereotype is positive or negative. For example, “Chinese are good at mathematics” is a positive stereotype, while “Chinese cannot be strong leaders” is a negative one. Stereotype intensity refers to the extent to which a stereotype is embedded in the minds of the speaker and the receiver. Some stereotypes hold firm while others hold loosely. The specificity of a stereotype indicates whether it is vague or concrete. A more concrete stereotype is easier to refute than a vague one, because a general statement can have more than one understanding. The consensus on stereotypes relates to whether the stereotype is widespread in the community. Some stereotypes can easily come to mind even having a weak reference. Stereotype accuracy shows how accurately a stereotype describes a group (Zhu, 2020, p. 1652).

It should be noted that researchers do not agree on the nature and substance of stereotypes. In this area, according to Pruskus (2010, p. 31), we can distinguish three approaches that dominate the scientific discourse: 1) the stereotype of public consciousness is always organised specifically and functions as a particular social mark (Samovar et al., 2015; Martin & Nakayama, 2017); 2) sensory experience is important in stereotype formation (Melnik, 1996); 3) stereotypical thinking has developed spontaneously, but stereotypes are consciously maintained through the use and inculcation into everyday consciousness of a priori views that permeate all areas of life (Myers, 2008). According to Korez Vide and Jurše (2016, p. 1041), Bar-Tal (1997) states that stereotypes are formed at three levels: 1) the first level covers the history of relations between cultural groups, the socio-political and economic factors of the cultural group and the behaviour of other cultural groups; 2) the second level relates to information channels in a particular cultural group, direct contacts with members of other cultural groups and the micro-sociological environment of a member of a particular cultural group; 3) the third level relates to the individual’s personal traits.

Pruskus (2010, pp. 32–33) distinguishes the following social functions of stereotypes according to their importance in intercultural communication: 1) a function of transmitting relatively reliable information; 2) orientation function; 3) a function of determining attitudes towards a foreign culture.

Relatively reliable information transfers function. When encountering a representative of another culture, a person tries to remember what he has heard about this culture, the peculiarities of its members’ behaviour, and tries to apply this information to a specific case (Pruskus, 2010, p. 32). For example, if he has heard that Arabs are very fond of hyperbolising and using a lot of sophistication in conversations (Irimiaş, 2011, p. 170), he will look out for these elements in a conversation with an Arab. If he has heard of German punctuality, he will look for manifestations of punctuality in his partner’s actions and behaviour. Thus, the stereotype of punctuality that a person has formed (or that has been formed for him) becomes a peculiar instrument for him to assess the representative of that culture and expect

corresponding behaviour from him. However, expectations do not always work, but the stereotype, once formed, persists for a long time and affects the assessment of the partner's behaviour (Pruskus, 2010, p. 32). Probably every one of us knows deep-rooted stereotypes in our nations about English politeness, severity and reservedness, French gallantry and morousness with carelessness, Italian high temper, Finnish slowness, Russian “that's fine as it is” (Hiyasova et al., 2018, p. 25).

Orientation function. Stereotyping creates a simplified view of the world around us, based on certain stereotypes that help us to classify different social groups and individuals according to preconceived expectations and to expect them to behave accordingly. For example, many people think that a Gypsy can be expected to be deceitful and lying. Such attitudes also predispose the appropriate behaviour towards this ethnic group (Pruskus, 2010, p. 32). Stereotypes that Germans value directness in communication as well as the Americans' tendency to direct and openly discussion (Irimiaş, 2011, p. 170), guides us on how to interact with the representatives of the above-mentioned nations during business negotiations. Stereotypes thus serve to “compartmentalise” social environments, social groups and individuals, and thus simplify the acceptability of an foreign culture.

The function of determining attitudes towards a foreign culture. Stereotypes make it possible for a clear distinction between one's own and another's ethnic group. Stereotyping allows to classify the behaviour of others and to explain its causes by comparing known phenomena, values, traditions with the values and traditions of another foreign group. In this sense, stereotypes help preserve the positive identity of one's cultural group (Pruskus, 2010, pp. 32–33).

Chesnokova (2015, pp. 3–5) subdivides the functions of stereotypes, namely: 1) informing; 2) categorization; 3) orientation in the surrounding environment; 4) reduction of complexity; 5) identification with own group; 6) protecting own group's values; 7) reducing culture shock. Suryandari (2020, pp. 27–28) provides the following classification of the functions of stereotypes: 1) stereotypes serve as “cognitive shortcuts”; 2) stereotype could be used to explain social events; 3) stereotypes may benefit both individuals and their social group.

Every culture uses stereotypes. Stereotype creators and carriers are certain social groups that interact with each other to create certain social stereotypes and to judge people from other cultures through their prism. Culture is the area that most contributes to the socialisation of the individual through the acquisition and assimilation of relevant values, attitudes and concepts. This is where a lot of stereotypical thinking and behaviour exists (Baraldsnes, 2012, pp. 161–162). Most people get their information about stereotypes from movies, news, and, likely, from other people's perspectives. This information leads people to assume that a widespread belief is correct, meanwhile, the information may not be true or appropriate for everyone (Maljichi, 2019, p. 87). For example, specific social groups are often portrayed in the media in stereotypical ways that can influence our thinking, feelings and behaviour (Sutkutė, 2019, p. 37).

In order to devisualise stereotypical behaviour in practice, the individual in intercultural interaction must be able to: 1) adequately accept and interpret different cultural values; 2) make conscious efforts to overcome barriers to culture and see not only differences but also commonalities with one's own culture in an alien culture; 3) look at different cultural phenomena and representatives of other cultures with good faith in order to understand

them; 4) compare existing ethno-cultural stereotypes with personal experience and draw independent conclusions; 5) critically evaluate and change their attitude towards alien cultures, accumulate skills and experience of intercultural interaction; 6) strive for a better knowledge of foreign cultures in order to gain a deeper and more critical understanding of one's own, and to overcome the prevailing stereotypes and prejudices; 7) systematise the facts of cultural life; 8) synthesise and summarise own personal experience of intercultural dialogue (Pruskus, 2010, p. 33).

2. The role of critical and creative thinking in countering stereotypes

2.1. The link between critical and creative thinking

The role of critical and creative thinking in the process of devisualisation of intercultural stereotypes is unquestionable.

What critical thinking is? Critical thinking is the ability to analyse and assess a situation and thoughts in a multi-faceted way in order to choose a sensible and reasonable position (Variakojienė, 2010, p. 1). Klooster (2001, pp. 37–39) highlights the five main points of support on which to define critical thinking: 1) critical thinking means independent thinking; 2) information is the starting point, not the end point, of critical thinking; 3) critical thinking starts with questions, with problems that need to be solved; 4) critical thinking requires sound reasoning; 5) critical thinking is social thinking. According to Gudžinskienė (2006, p. 111), Nosich (1996) distinguishes four fundamental traits characteristic of critical thinking in his work. Critical thinking, according to him: 1) is the process of discovering inner meaning; 2) requires consideration of different approaches; 3) fosters respect for the views of the minority; 4) trials old assumptions.

What creative thinking is? Creative thinking can be described as the highest form of productive thinking. This process creates new ideas, concepts, distant associations, and unexpected links between ideas already existing, effective solutions to problems or other original and valuable things. Creative thinking is most closely associated with divergent thinking (Beresnevičius, 2010, p. 25). The following characteristics of creative thinking can be identified: 1) fluency of thinking; 2) flexibility in thinking; 3) ability to easily restructure experience, change attitudes and points of view; 4) originality of thinking; 5) detail and completeness of creative ideas (or solutions); 6) sensitivity to the creative problem (Levickaitė, 2010, p. 204).

Penkauskienė notes:

“Scholars who make a clear distinction between critical and creative thinking are based on the idea that the former is convergent and the latter divergent. However, more popular theories suggest that not only creative but also critical thinking is characterised by divergent thinking traits – flexibility, non-templatedness, versatility, the ability to look at phenomena and problems in a multifaceted way, to see more than one solution to a problem. It is the problem-solving approach that is the key link between creative and critical thinking” (2016, p. 98).

The author of this article also believes that problem-solving requires not only divergent but also opposite convergent thinking, which helps to find a single, case-specific solution. The link between critical and creative thinking is therefore undeniable.

The link between critical and creative (partly) thinking in overcoming stereotypes is, in the opinion of the author of this article, best illustrated by the technique of refuting so-called generic stereotypes presented by Lemeire (2021) – a semantic theory for generics. Generic stereotypes are broad generalisations that express a stereotype, such as: “Muslims are terrorists”, “Blacks are criminals” (Lemeire, 2021, p. 2293). According to Lemeire (2021), the meaning of generic sentences is undefined. There are two different generic relations that make a generic sentence true. A general sentence may be true on the basis of a statistical relation, a causal-explanatory relation or both. A first strategy in response to general stereotypes is to argue that neither of the two generic relations exists between the kind and the property (Lemeire, 2021, pp. 2296–2306). For example, to refute the stereotype “Muslims are terrorists”, one can simply say:

“No, it’s not true that Muslims are terrorists. It is not the case that a robust majority of Muslims are terrorists. And though some of them are, this is not by virtue of their being a Muslim. The nature of what it is to be a Muslim does not cause anyone to become a terrorist” (Lemeire, 2021, p. 2304).

The second strategy, according to Lemeire (2021, pp. 2306–2310), in response to common stereotypes, is to deny the satisfaction of an additional condition that is necessary for a generic sentence to be true. Thus, the stereotype “Muslims are terrorists” could be refuted, for example, by the following statement:

“That’s not true. The religious beliefs that define what it is to be a Muslim are perhaps part of the explanation for the fact that some Muslims turn to terrorism, but are equally part of the explanation for the fact that so many Muslims live a peaceful life. Whether these beliefs result in someone being a terrorist or a peace-loving citizen depends on personal, social and political background conditions” (Lemeire, 2021, p. 2309).

Thus, as we can see, both divergent and convergent thinking was used in this process of refuting common stereotypes.

2.2. The importance of applying critical and creative thinking skill development methods in the process of devisualisation of stereotypes

In order to overcome cultural stereotypes in intercultural communication, it is important to develop an individual’s intercultural skills, especially critical and creative thinking skills. Both formal and informal intercultural education sessions aimed, in particular, at developing non-stereotypical thinking among pupils in upper grades and higher education students should use methods that develop skills of critical and creative thinking. We will discuss some of them to better illustrate what these approaches are and how they can be applied in practice.

Annenkova and Domysheva (2020) propose a method for developing critical thinking skills in foreign language classrooms based on her teaching experience. This technique aims to reduce and prevent stereotypes or over-generalisations. The proposed technique consists of four successive stages: 1) motivational; 2) educational; 3) practical, and 4) controlling (Annenkova & Domysheva, 2020, pp. 1033–1036). Since the proposed educational method can be applied not only in foreign language classes, but also in the broader educational context when teaching in groups, we will discuss it in more detail.

The first stage, the motivational stage, engages learners and stimulates their interest in exploring their own worldviews and those of people from other cultural backgrounds. At this stage, learners need to realise that people's attitudes differ across cultures of the world, and in one particular culture; and that people tend to have stereotypical perceptions that distort the complexity of the world. It should be stressed that avoiding excessive generalisations and showing flexibility in the consideration of alternatives and opinions is essential for successful intercultural communication (Annenkova & Domysheva, 2020, p. 1033). Rimienė (2006, pp. 79–80) notes that an individual who has critical thinking skills but does not use them cannot be called a critical thinker. The motivational component of critical thinking is therefore important. To stimulate students' interest, at the motivation stage the teacher can, for example, show a video with examples of cultural stereotypes or ask learners to read a text containing examples of cultural stereotypes and then organise a discussion asking various questions about stereotypes, for instance, how they are formed, what effect they have, can they be avoided, etc.? (Annenkova & Domysheva, 2020, p. 1033). Ching et al. (2021, p. 16) mention that "intercultural behavioural skills alone are not sufficient to diminish the negative aspects of stereotypes; it is only with the addition of cognitive knowledge that intercultural affects are benefited". In the second, the educational stage, the teacher's task is to carry out activities aimed at developing learners' critical thinking skills, identifying assumptions about other national cultures and critically evaluating them. The teacher explains and gives instructions, and then guides the learners as they perform the activity. It is very important to recognise assumptions about other national cultures, as some of these assumptions may prove to be false and lead to stereotypes. Recognition of assumptions involves skills such as separating facts from opinions, assessing the reliability of sources and examining assumptions from multiple perspectives. These skills can be developed by exposing learners to information from a variety of sources and asking them to evaluate the quality of the information and the sources (Annenkova & Domysheva, 2020, pp. 1033–1035). Questions like these can help explore the underlying assumption that stereotypical thinking usually triggers: *What is the basis for this assumption/stereotype – is it personal experience or someone else's opinion?; Does this assumption/stereotype check out against what can be objectively observed?; etc.* (Irimias, 2011, p. 172). In the third, practical stage, learners are given the tasks that allow to develop their critical thinking skills to deal with cultural stereotypes. These tasks vary in content and form depending on the level of language proficiency of the learners and the programme, if the method is applied in foreign language classes. Learners may be asked to critically analyse their own attitudes towards their own or other people's national culture. A teacher chooses, for example, a particular cultural aspect or several aspects (such as family, home, customs, community, food, etc.) and makes a list of questions about people's behaviour and attitudes. If the teacher chooses the "Family" topic, the following questions can be asked: *Are there usually several generations living under one roof?; Who cares for elderly family members?; Who does the housework?; and others.* The teacher asks learners to imagine a situation where a person from an English-speaking country asks them these questions. Working in small groups, learners discuss how they would answer the questions. They then present the results of their discussions to the class. The teacher can organise the work in a variety of ways, including elements of creativity, too. In addition to discussions, learners can make presentations, write essays

and critical reviews, prepare posters, or participate in debates (Annenkova & Domysheva, 2020, pp. 1035–1036). Zhu (2020, p. 1653) assumes that a better understanding of the target culture can facilitate intercultural communication by increasing self-confidence and reducing uncertainty in intercultural communication. In the fourth, the controlling stage, the teacher monitors and checks the correctness of the tasks completed by the learners. It focuses on how well learners can recognise over-generalisations, how well they assess the quality of reasoning and consider multiple perspectives before drawing a conclusion, *etc.* (Annenkova & Domysheva, 2020, p. 1036).

While there are many teaching methods to encourage thinking with the participation of other people, *i.e.* group work, discussions, various publishing of learners' essays, Klooster (2001, pp. 39–40) distinguishes writing, which he says is the most effective tool for teaching critical thinking, from various methods:

“Writing is independent thinking, whereas the writer has to use the knowledge they have. When students write, they construct reasoned arguments for their positions. Good writing seeks to solve problems and provide answers for readers” (2001, p. 40).

Thus, in order to develop learners' non-stereotypical intercultural thinking, topics related to this problem should be addressed. By the way, writing is also characterised by an aspect of creative thinking.

There are also a variety of creativity-based educational methods that can be used in intercultural education classes, and in particular in classes that teach how to overcome intercultural stereotypes.

What creative methods are most suitable for overcoming stereotypes in education? One such method is simulation games, performances, role plays. Simulation games offer game rules and situations to learners and those evaluated, which artificially construct intercultural differences and clashes between imaginary cultures (Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė, 2011, p. 56). Wheeler notes:

“If the simulations involve group work, the student's ill-preparedness has consequences not only for him / herself but also for the entire group. This gives students an added incentive to come to class prepared to participate in the assignment” (2006, p. 332).

Role-playing and simulation games are based on experiential learning, and are mainly concerned with elements of competence such as skills, attitudes and cultural awareness. They allow learners to reveal themselves and allow observing and evaluating the encounter with unknown and unexpected subjects (Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė, 2011, p. 56). For example, the following game topics could be offered to learners in higher education or upper secondary education classes: 1) situations of communication between locals and immigrants/refugees; 2) a situation of cultural shock while staying in a foreign country; 3) situations of intercultural stereotypes disseminated by the media, *etc.*

Another method is scenarios. Scenarios are written text or video scripts. The evaluated person reads or watches the text about the intercultural encounter, the case of intercultural stereotyping, and answers questions. These can be open-ended answers or closed-ended multiple choice answers. Both paper-based and electronic tests can be used. Scenarios mainly involve elements of competence such as knowledge, skills, attitudes (Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė, 2011, p. 56).

The work of Wilkinson (2007) is worthy of attention and further discussion, as it explores the creative method – using moving pictures (films, video and television) to develop the intercultural sensitivity of late teenagers and adults, and thus their attitudes towards intercultural stereotypes. Wilkinson describes his research on the basis of the goal-driven intercultural development continuum (GIDC), which is based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) by Bennett (1993, 1998). The GIDC differs from the DMIS in purpose, and therefore definition of the stages, as well as the final goal. In contrast to the DMIS, the purpose of which is to describe the changes in a person's experience of cultural differences, the GIDC aims to provide sequenced goals upon which educators can build their curricula (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 11).

The GIDC has two main phases: monoculturalism and interculturalism. These parallel Bennett's ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 11). According to Wilkinson (2007, p. 12), people in monoculturalism, as in ethnocentrism, are characterised by a strong attachment to a single culture-bound view of reality as absolute truth. The cognitive challenges of this phase include helping people understand that their attitudes towards the world are shaped by mental patterns based on their cultural experiences, rather than being specific to the world itself. In order to bring out the best aspects of harnessing the unique power of moving pictures for intercultural education, Wilkinson (2007, pp. 12–18) identifies the following stages of monoculturalism in his work: 1) no experience; 2) confronting differences; 3) seeing commonalities. The following tiers correspond to the relevant stages in Bennett's model: 1) isolation, denial; 2) defensiveness and 3) minimization. For each stage, the author provides an example of a film that can be used to help learners move from one stage to the next, taking into account cognitive, emotional and awareness objectives. For example, in the phase of monoculturalism education, the following films are offered to learners in the three stages, respectively: *West Side Story* (1961, directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins) (in the first stage – no experience); *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961, directed by Daniel Petrie) (in the second stage – confronting differences); *Grand Canyon* (1991, directed by Lawrence Kasdan) (in the third stage – seeing commonalities). The first film, according to the author, “introduces differences gently”, the second film “establishes commonalities through human connection”, the third film “introduces deeper differences and multiple points of view” (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 15). The author notes:

“Because monoculturalism is a phase characterized by lack of cultural awareness and perhaps interest, moving pictures are particularly effective in these early stages at engaging students and carrying them imaginatively into new worlds. Students can gradually discover cultural differences and begin the process of opening to the humanity of those who are different” (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 18).

According to Wilkinson (2007, p. 18), in the phase of interculturalism, people no longer see their cultural approach as the basis of reality; they admit that there are many approaches at reality, and that none of them is central. This reflexive perception allows people to step out of their cultural context and respond more appropriately to different cultural situations. Wilkinson (2007, pp. 18–24) distinguishes the following stages of the phase of interculturalism in their work, which educators can use to develop their curricula: 1) understanding; 2) competence; 3) commitment to change. The following tiers correspond to the relevant

stages in Bennett's model: 1) acceptance; 2) adaptation; 3) integration. The following films are offered to learners for educational purposes at the above-mentioned stages, respectively in the ranking order of the stages: *The Joy Luck Club* (1993, directed by Wayne Wang), *Lone Star* (1996, directed by John Sayles), *12 Angry Men* (1957, directed by Sidney Lumet). According to the author, the first film “presents deep and complex differences played out in human interactions seen from multiple points of view”, the second film “presents deep and complex differences played out in human interactions; presents social injustice and models for addressing it”, and the third film “presents a laboratory for methods of addressing social injustice and cultural change” (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 15). Summing up the phase of interculturalism in the process of intercultural education, the author states:

“The emphasis in the intercultural phase should be on refinement of conceptual understanding, expansion of empathic capabilities, development of specific cultural knowledge, and growth of skills in applying these capabilities to intercultural situations and social action. Films and videos can be used to portray the complexities and nuances of specific cultural differences, interactions, and social situations” (Wilkinson, 2007, p. 24).

In order to develop a proper attitude towards intercultural stereotypes, the work of Wilkinson (2007) can undoubtedly also be of use to educators who, on the basis of the GIDC, can design their curricula in a way that is tailored to the aforementioned aspect, selecting films appropriate to each phase and stage of the educational cycle. Examples include the following films: *Submission* (2004, directed by Theo van Gogh) and *The Kite Runner* (2007, directed by Marc Forster):

“An image of Muslim women experiencing oppression, violence and cruelty is created in *Submission*; the obscure boundaries between the main characters contribute to the portrayal of a stereotypical image of a monolithic Muslim woman not only in the film but also in society” (Sutkutė, 2020, p. 41).

The plot of *The Kite Runner* “reveals the stereotypes of Islam and Muslims that exist in both Western and Eastern societies” (Sutkutė, 2020, p. 41). The absolute majority of orient's characters are portrayed in the film as representatives of the morals and values lower than, for example, those of the West. Episodes of the film highlight an aspect of bigotry that is linked to both terrorism and Islamism (more than half of the main Muslim characters are portrayed as inherently prone to violence) (Sutkutė, 2020, p. 41).

In the process of overcoming stereotypes in education, attention should be paid to the method of video clips (creation and analysis), which Poškienė (2011, p. 144) suggests applying in the negotiation language learning process. It is clear that this approach can also be applied in the context of the development of other similar social, communicative and intercultural competences. The selection and analysis of theme video clips is an interactive teaching method that can influence the quality of the teaching/learning process. After all, the success of any pedagogical process depends on the active participation of learners. Although the created mini videos have fiction elements, the task requires thinking through and selecting the most optimal communication elements, and evaluating the conveyed situation in the context of spreading and overcoming intercultural stereotypes. The video clips show whether the learner understands the overall acting situation, whether he/she has sufficient knowledge

of intercultural communication theory and practical skills, *etc.* The essential advantage of the method is that it reveals the learner's creativity and ingenuity. Bloch and Spataro note that video records

“can activate verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, and musical/rhythmic intelligences, allowing students to use their stronger intelligences and develop their weaker ones. Research also suggests that students appreciate visual stimulation and technology use when learning communication skills” (2016, p. 274).

The interview method is very useful for assessing the perception of intercultural stereotypes and their coping abilities, and it is advisable to use it in connection with the elements of creativity: for example, simulation games, plays, role-playing games. Not only the teacher, but also the learners can better reflect on their experience of intercultural communication, being abroad and communicating with foreigners in their own country during an interview organised in a game form. By asking open-ended questions related to intercultural stereotypes and intercultural misunderstandings, one can learn about the learners' experience, acquired competencies in the classroom and during stay abroad (Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė, 2011, p. 57). Similar to the interview is the debate method, which is very relevant for developing intercultural competence. It can be used to solve various problems and exchange views. This is a strictly regulated discussion of problems, to which a certain amount of time is allocated. Advantages of debate: helps to understand that there is no one right opinion, encourages to listen to and respect a different opinion, teaches to work in a team (Norvilienė, 2017, p. 100). However, the debate approach needs to be applied very responsibly, as some issues have multiple perspectives that cannot be presented as just right or wrong, and it is therefore recommended that such problems be better deliberated in an open discussion. However, a class discussion can always be organised after the debate (Darby, 2007, p. 2).

Learning journals, diaries, reflective texts, and essays can also be used in overcoming stereotypes in the educational process. Learners reflect on and document their intercultural experiences, cultural differences and the particularities of another culture. Usually, these texts are filled in by learners during experiential learning in another intercultural context (*e.g.* during learner exchange, living abroad) so that they can remember, reproduce and evaluate the experience (thoughts, feelings, *etc.*) once they return home. This can be organised on the basis of discussions with peers. Journals are a form of referral writing, which is not only an evaluation tool, but also an instrument for organising the study process. This method is designed to reflect on learners' experiences (Virgailaitė-Mečkauskaitė, 2011, p. 57).

Here we have only mentioned the most appropriate and applied creativity-based approaches of devisualisation of stereotypes in the process of education. But there are certainly more of these methods: brainstorming, lotus blossom, mapping process, case-based learning, unexpected involvement, discussion, report/presentation, *etc.* (Samašonok et al., 2020, p. 54, 57). If they are applied properly, the intercultural education process may gain qualitative momentum.

Conclusions

Stereotypes are oversimplified or distorted views of another race, another ethnic group or even another culture. Stereotypes reduce the uncertainty in the communication process and increase our confidence in predicting the behaviour of strangers. But most of the time, based on stereotypes, we overestimate the common features of a group, we underestimate individual differences, and we do so automatically, without thinking. For this reason, stereotypes often lead to misunderstandings or even conflicts in intercultural communication.

How to devisualise stereotypes? In order to overcome stereotypical thinking, people should increase their knowledge of other cultures, and develop flexibility and openness. Accumulating relevant cultural knowledge will promote people's cultural sensitivity and help them endeavour to respect and appreciate the new culture. One of the biggest challenges in combating stereotypes is to develop self-awareness of how such phenomena affect us personally. It is important to remember that consistent intercultural learning is inevitable for the devisualisation of stereotypes, as well as for good intercultural understanding in general. In order to achieve non-stereotypical thinking, it is also necessary to abandon ethnocentric attitudes when assessing other cultures. Each individual should be aware that by judging people according to their culture, we encourage essentialist thinking, which prevents us from getting to know the person as a personality. Empathy awareness should be fostered in intercultural interactions. It is not enough to learn relevant knowledge about the target culture in order to overcome intercultural stereotypes and establish better intercultural communication. It requires more practice in intercultural communication. During real intercultural interaction, people exchange their cultural ideas and this helps to change negative prejudices towards "others". Also tolerance is one of the ways of looking at cultural differences.

In this article, we have focused on revealing the role of critical and creative thinking in overcoming intercultural stereotypes. We have analysed the methods of developing critical and creative thinking skills that should be used in intercultural education classes, teaching to overcome stereotypes. The following methods for developing critical thinking skills can be identified: preparation of presentations, writing of essays and critical reviews, discussions, debates, *etc.* Noteworthy example includes the method of Annenkova and Domysheva (2020) of developing critical thinking skills in foreign language classes. This technique aims to reduce and prevent stereotypes or over-generalisations. Educators would greatly benefit from familiarising themselves with this technique and applying it in practice; especially since the proposed method of education can be applied not only in foreign language classes but also in a wider educational context in group teaching. There is also a wide range of creativity-based educational methods that can be used in intercultural education classes and, more specifically, in classes teaching to overcome intercultural stereotypes. The following creative methods can be identified as most suitable for use in the process of education of overcoming stereotypes: simulation games, performances, role plays, scenarios, interviews, debates, learning journals, diaries, reflective texts, essays, *etc.* The work of Wilkinson (2007), which deals with the methods of using moving pictures (films, videos and television) to develop intercultural sensitivity among late adolescents and adults, and therefore their attitudes towards intercultural stereotypes, deserves the attention of educators. This creative educational

approach is very important because it encourages active participation of learners, is interesting and not boring. Similar to this method is the method of video clips (creation and analysis). This method is particularly effective in bringing out the learners' creativity and ingenuity.

Only an individual who has mastered the skills of critical and creative thinking will be able to communicate smoothly in an intercultural environment, minimising or even completely abandoning stereotypical attitudes towards people from other cultures.

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