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Stereotypes as an interdisciplinary construct: Implications for applied linguistics research

Studies on stereotypes have been done in various academic disciplines, which makes stereotypes a truly interdisciplinary construct. This article offers a review of literature on country and national stereotypes. It examines the origins of the construct of stereotypes and methodologies employed to investigate it. The article also highlights gaps – both theoretical and methodological – in research on country and national stereotypes in the field of applied linguistics. The final part of the article suggests future directions for research on stereotypes in applied linguistics, discusses theoretical and methodological considerations for future studies on country and national stereotypes in the field and highlights pedagogical implications that can be drawn from these studies.

1. Introduction

This article focuses on country and national stereotypes. It aims to, firstly, examine the construct of stereotypes and the methodology employed to investigate it in various academic disciplines. Secondly, it intends to identify gaps in the research literature on country and national stereotypes in the field of applied linguistics and propose possible research directions for future studies. Regarding the terminology, the term ‘country stereotypes’ refers to mental images about foreign countries that spontaneously come to mind (Brijs, Bloemer and Kasper 2011). The term ‘national stereotypes’ refers to popularly held beliefs about “distinctive characteristics” of other nations (McCrae and Terracciano 2006: 156).

There are four parts in this article. Following this introduction, Part 2 offers a summary of Walter Lippmann’s seminal study on stereotypes, *Public Opinion* (1922/1965), and provides an overview of research vectors that this

work inspired in the ensuing decades. Part 3 addresses important aspects pertaining to the methodology of stereotype research, such as definitions and conceptualizations of this construct, approaches toward exploring stereotype content (i.e., specific attributes that are believed to characterize an entity under study) and issues concerning stereotype assessment and measurement. Part 4 discusses theoretical and methodological considerations that might guide future empirical studies on stereotypes in the field of applied linguistics and highlights some pedagogical implications that can be drawn from such studies.

2. Review of research literature on stereotypes

2.1. Stereotypes: The origins of the construct and main research vectors

As a reference to traditions and perceptions deeply embedded in a culture, the word “stereotype” was first used by British author, James Morier (1780–1849), in the book *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (Rudmin 1989). A century later stereotypes became the topic of an extensive analysis in Walter Lippmann’s treatise *Public Opinion* (1922/1965). Lippmann’s main interest was the tendency of people to perceive social reality based on the conventions established in their own culture. As an often cited passage from his book proposes: “In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (Lippmann 1922/1965: 55).

Lippmann (1922/1965) did not give a scientific definition of “stereotypes”. Using metaphorical language, he described stereotypes as “pictures in our heads” through which we perceive “the world outside” (Lippmann 1922/1965: 3). Despite the lack of definition, the discussion of stereotypes in Lippmann’s book included important issues, such as stereotype origins, their function, stereotype maintenance and perpetuation. Lippmann’s book gave impetus to further research on this construct and determined research vectors in the ensuing scholarly investigations of stereotypes in various academic disciplines. Concerning stereotype origins, Lippmann observed that stereotypes about the surrounding world, people, countries and various phenomena are handed down as a form of cultural knowledge or cultural heritage from one generation to another.

An empirical study by Piaget and Weil (1951) found that young children have their own beliefs about other nations. When asked about the sources of these opinions, the children explained “Everyone says so”; “I’ve heard people say so and you hear it on the wireless, and at school” (Piaget and Weil 1951: 569–571). This inseparability of stereotypes from one’s cultural milieu helps to elucidate their tenacious and pervading nature. A cultural milieu is shaped by both the current socio-political reality and the past history of relations between nations. As Bar-Tal (1997: 496) pointed out, “past wars, animosity, hostility or, in contrast, help, cooperation and friendship have a cumulative

impact over time on the present nature of intergroup relations, reflected also in the content of group members' stereotypes".

Clearly, stereotypical representations of foreign countries and nations have deep historical and cultural roots. These representations are promoted in the mass media, social media and popular culture; these external sources often serve as the only source of information about a particular country or culture. Bar-Tal (1997) observed that in addition to external sources there are also internal processes that are involved in stereotype formation. He compared these internal processes to an osmosis that takes place at the individual cognitive level and involves various personality-related aspects including attitudes, values, motivations, characteristics and cognitive skills. Piaget and Weil's (1951) study among 200 children in Switzerland found that the outcome of this gradual process of internalization of beliefs, attitudes and values – of which stereotypes form a part – becomes accomplished by the age of ten. Subsequent empirical studies done in various socio-cultural contexts among children aged between 4 and 15 have confirmed this proposition. Research studies persuasively demonstrated that by the age of ten children attain full awareness of their own as well as other national groups (Enesco, Navarro, Paradela and Guerrero 2005; Heinzmann 2013; Lambert and Klineberg 1967).

Research on stereotypes recognizes that besides a cognitive aspect, which incorporates beliefs, thoughts and information about a stereotyped entity, stereotypes embed various attitudes toward this entity. Moreover, stereotypes can be "highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them" (Lippmann 1922/1965: 64). Empirical research in developmental psychology has confirmed this proposition. It was found that children as young as four years old exhibit attitudinal reactions toward people of other nationalities (Lambert and Klineberg 1967; Piaget and Weil 1951). Interestingly but not surprisingly, children tend to view their own national group in a more positive light compared to their perceptions of other nations. For example, Piaget and Weil (1951) found that the Swiss children in their study possessed predominantly negative attitudes toward and stereotypes about various foreign countries and people.

Following the publication of Lippmann's (1922/1965) book, stereotypes as a social reality and as a psychological construct have attracted considerable interest of researchers in various academic disciplines and fields. This lasting interest is to a great extent due to the interdisciplinary nature of this construct and important for practical implications that stem from a deeper understanding of stereotypes and stereotyping processes. For example, in psychology research, mechanisms involved in stereotyping were found to influence people's intentions and actions toward other social, ethnic and cultural groups (Allport 2000).

2.2. Studies on national and country stereotypes

An illuminating overview of the trajectory of research on country and national stereotypes has been offered by Clark (1990). As the author noted, precursors of extensive research on stereotypes in the social sciences and hu-

manities disciplines were studies on national character conducted by cultural anthropologists in the 1920s and 1930s. These studies focused mainly on various personality-related characteristics that were believed to be shared by representatives of a specific nation. The research on national character reached its peak during the Second World War (1939–1945). Its purpose was purely utilitarian: the insights obtained were to be used for developing effective psychological warfare strategies and for identifying workable approaches to easing tensions between the allies. In the post-war years the interest in national stereotypes began to wane among cultural anthropologists (Clark 1990).

At the same time, the topic of national character began attracting attention from researchers in other academic fields, such as political science (Klineberg 1944), international relations (Boulding 1959), developmental psychology (Piaget and Weil 1951) and the social sciences (Sorokin 1967). In recent decades, national and country stereotypes have been explored in the academic fields of marketing (Brijs et al. 2011; Clark 1990), tourism (Echtner and Ritchie 2003), literature and culture studies (Beller and Leerssen 2007) and applied linguistics (Byram and Kramsch 2008; Houghton 2010; Nikitina and Furuoka 2013; Webber 1990). The following sub-section offers a review of studies on stereotypes in applied linguistics.

2.3. Research on stereotypes in applied linguistics

Researchers and foreign language educators recognize a fact that students hold an array of mental images about various countries, their cultures and people. As Dłaska (2001: 260) noted, “stereotypes are always already there” in the language classroom. These mental images do not stem from language learners’ deep knowledge of a specific country but they derive from notions that are prevalent in the students’ cultural milieu. The fact that the external sources, such as the mass media, social media and popular culture, play a major role in developing and ingraining these stereotypes has been acknowledged by researchers in applied linguistics. As Steele and Suozzo (cited in Allen 2004: 235) succinctly put it, stereotypes held by language learners are “the products of their own enculturation and media bombardment”.

Country and national stereotypes have been the main focus of studies on stereotypes in applied linguistics, though researchers in the field do not explicitly distinguish between these two kinds of mental images. This is because applied linguists and foreign language educators tend to focus, quite appropriately, on language learners’ holistic perceptions of a target language country that include its inhabitants and cultures. This specific interest is evident in the research questions that guided such studies. In one of the earliest investigations, Taylor (1977) asked American college students learning German to name geographical areas that come to their mind when they think of Germany and to mention all other associations that Germany evokes in their minds. Schulz and Haerle (1995) used the prompts “In Germany...” and “*Die Allemand...*” to elicit language learners’ images about the target language country. Focusing on learners of Mandarin in Malaysia, Nikitina and Furuoka (2013)

asked students to write images that the words ‘China’ and ‘Chinese’ bring to their mind. The data collected by all these studies contained references to specific features and characteristics of a target country *per se* (e.g., its geography and climate), the descriptions of people who live in this country (e.g., their physical appearance and perceived character) and a variety of images referring to a target language country’s material and nonmaterial culture.

Research on country and national stereotypes held by language learners has considerable pedagogical implications. As Gardner and Lambert (1972: 139) noted, negative stereotypes held by students about speakers of a target language could be “a stumbling block” to mastering a foreign language. For this reason, studies on stereotypes in the field of applied linguistics have been mainly pedagogically motivated. Researchers aimed to use their findings for devising effective pedagogical strategies that promote the development of the students’ intercultural knowledge and competence (Abrams 2002; Allen 2004; Drewelow 2013; Houghton 2010; Nikitina 2017; Nikleva 2012; Webber 1990).

Despite extensive research on stereotypes in the field of applied linguistics, several conspicuous gaps can be identified in scholarly literature. For example, there is a paucity of studies that explored the types and sources of stereotypes that educators encounter in the language classroom. An exception is a study by Byram and Kramersch (2008) that identified three kinds of such stereotypes. The authors argued that the first kind of stereotypes concerns the “conventional ways of using language” (Byram and Kramersch 2008: 31). These stereotypes are expressed through culturally-saturated terms that reflect “a whole worldview” of a people. As Byram and Kramersch maintained, the expressions ‘challenges and opportunities’, ‘leadership’ and ‘successful strategies’ are important linguistic and cognitive models in the context of the culture of the USA. In German culture, culturally salient categories include *Bildung* (education), *Ausbildung* (training), *Mitbestimmung* (lit. “co-determination”, which refers to workers’ participation in management of the company).

The second kind of stereotypes, according to Byram and Kramersch (2008), are over-generalized notions about a nation. This is the kind of stereotypes espoused by language learners and it has been the main focus of research in applied linguistics. The third type of stereotypes identified by Byram and Kramersch are various sayings, proverbs, slogans and catchphrases embedded in the target language; this linguistic arsenal contains and reflects a common collective heritage of a target culture. There is some conceptual haziness in this framework: apparently, not only the first but also the third kind of stereotypes refer to “conventional ways of using language” (Byram and Kramersch 2008: 31). Nevertheless, this important study identified the need to recognize various types of stereotypes that are ubiquitous in the foreign language classroom and to harness these stereotypes to teach a target culture.

Studies in applied linguistics also tend to overlook the fact that stereotypes incorporate emotions and attitudes and that they can influence people’s intentions and actions toward a stereotyped entity. The relevance of this stereotype property in the field of applied linguistics is that stereotypical images about a target language country and culture can influence students’ motivation

to learn a particular language. Though this proposition was put forward by Gardner and Lambert (1972) in the 1970s, empirical research that examines links between country and national stereotypes held by language learners and the students' language learning motivation is in a nascent stage. Due to their exploratory nature, almost all studies on stereotypes in applied linguistics have employed qualitative research designs. To enhance the methodological diversity, Steele and Suozzo (cited in Storme and Derakhshani 2002) encourage applied linguists to tap into research techniques developed in stereotype research in other academic disciplines, notably psychology. The following provides an overview of literature on methodological issues in stereotype research.

3. Methodological issues

3.1. Definitions of stereotypes and stereotype content

Etymologically, the word “stereotype” is a combination of the Greek words *stereo-s* (“solid”) and *typos* (“a model”). This origin highlights permanence and rigidity as important features of stereotypes. In scholarly research, stereotypes have been defined “in myriad ways” (Spencer–Rodgers 2001: 641) and there is no standard set of features that comes up in all or even the majority of the definitions of stereotypes. A review of research literature on stereotypes has revealed that they are often defined as “a set of beliefs” (Ashmore and Del Boca 1981: 16). It should be noted that beliefs incorporate attitudes, which are psychological tendencies to view an entity with a degree of favour or negativity (Chaiken 2001). This line of argumentation concurs with Lippmann’s (1922/1965) observation regarding the evaluative nature of stereotypes or tendency to perceive various entities and phenomena as positive or negative.

Stereotype accuracy is another important aspect in the research of this construct. Some researchers proposed that stereotypes may be true or false (see Hamilton, Stroessner and Driscoll 1994 for a more detailed discussion) while others asserted that a stereotype is “a fixed impression which conforms very little to the facts” (Katz and Braly 1935: 181). This has generated intense debates among psychologists concerning the nature of stereotypes as collectively shared representations versus individually held beliefs (Hamilton et al. 1994). In a comprehensive definition of stereotypes, Jones (1997: 179) combined the main points of contention and proposed that stereotypes are “a positive or negative set of beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a group of people. It varies in its accuracy, the extent to which it captures the degree to which the stereotyped group members possess these traits, and the extent to which the set of beliefs is shared by others”.

Defining and operationalizing any psychological construct is important. This is because a researcher’s stance concerning the nature of a construct under study will influence his or her choice of methods and approaches for examining it. The following subsections focus on approaches for exploring stereotype content and measuring various aspects of stereotypes.

3.2. Exploring stereotype content: Structured and unstructured approaches

Structured and unstructured approaches have been employed to examine stereotype content. Structured approaches prevail in social psychology research where investigators use a research instrument that contains a set of personal traits or characteristics attached to a group of people (Katz and Braly 1935; Niemann et al. 1994). There are many advantages to using structured approaches: it is relatively easy to analyse the data, the findings tend to yield a well-defined structure and it is possible to make comparisons among the findings of various studies that employed the same instrument.

However, several disadvantages also exist. One drawback is that structured approaches do not allow for differentiation between the respondents' endogenous representations of a study object and the instrument items that they might have simply agreed to endorse (see Ehrlich and Rinehart 1965 for a more detailed discussion; Niemann et al. 1994). Another shortcoming is that data obtained through collecting respondents' answers to closed-ended questionnaire items inhibits the discernment of stereotypes that are most salient and important to respondents. This is because structured methods preclude spontaneous responses and reactions from participants in a study (Ehrlich and Rinehart 1965). In order to mitigate these shortcomings, researchers may want to explore stereotype content by employing unstructured approaches in data collection.

Unstructured approaches, also known as free-response techniques, are predominant in anthropological research and related disciplines, such as anthropological linguistics. In such studies, investigators aim to explore little-known cultural phenomena or semantic domains, including kinship (Nerlove and Burton 1972), emotions (Schrauf and Sanchez 2008) or colour terms (Sutrop 2001), to name just a few. To collect data, researchers ask their respondents to 'list all Xs that you know' about a research object (Sutrop 2001; Weller and Romney 1988). In a similar way, unstructured approaches are used in exploratory studies in psychology. For example, in her study, Spencer-Rodgers (2001) asked participants to indicate all the characteristics that they perceived to be typical of international students studying in the USA.

Although the main advantage of free-response techniques is that the data yield beliefs and attitudes that are endogenous to the respondents, there are some shortcomings. For example, people tend to give socially desirable answers and are not forthcoming about negative beliefs and attitudes that they may hold. Other limitations are that the lists of mental images or attitudes generated in a free-response manner tend to be short; they may contain a high proportion of idiosyncratic responses that appear only once; the responses may be too diverse and thus have low frequency. All of this poses considerable challenges when coding, analysing and interpreting data (Ehrlich and Rinehart 1965; Niemann et al. 1994; Spencer-Rodgers 2001). Researchers also recognize that regardless of the approaches to eliciting stereotypes – or any other beliefs that people hold – there will always be erroneous or inaccurate representa-

tions of a study object (Jones 1997; Katz and Braly 1935). The following section will address the issue of accuracy of country and national stereotypes.

3.3. *Stereotype accuracy*

Several decades ago, Klineberg (1944: 274) contended that national stereotypes must contain “a kernel of truth” since they do not develop in “a factual vacuum”. He also pointed out that there is a high degree of consensus about these stereotypes. Even nowadays, opinions that Japanese are deferential, Germans are meticulous and Australians tend to be informal will not raise a fierce debate, though there is an awareness that not each and every individual representative of these nations will fit into these popular perceptions.

Stereotype accuracy has been one of the central topics in psychology research. Empirical findings have led to the conclusion that stereotypes about national character not only lack in accuracy, (Robins 2005; Terracciano et al. 2005) but are in fact pure “fiction” (McCrae and Terracciano 2006: 160). Robins (2005: 63) pointed out that stereotypes about national character cannot be accurate because they are socially-constructed entities that “serve specific societal purposes”. These stereotypes tend to vary from one socio-cultural context to another and between different historical and political epochs. In addition, national stereotypes are often contradictory, even stereotypes about the same national group. As Leerssen (2003: 14) aptly put it, “Countries are always contradictory in a specific way: their most characteristic attribute always involves its own opposite. Thus Frenchmen are either formal, rational, cool, distanced (type: Giscard d’Estaing) or else excitable, sanguine, passionate (type: Louis de Funès)”.

While efforts to assess whether – and which – national stereotypes are accurate are futile, it is possible to consider accuracy of country stereotypes. This has been done in tourism research. Echtner and Ritchie (2003) developed a “common-unique” continuum to gauge the accuracy of mental representations about various countries. Images placed at the “common” end of the continuum are not specific; they refer to general features of a country, such as its climate and the perceived emotional atmosphere (e.g., “romantic”). These stereotypes tend to be hazy or erroneous. However, the representations at the “unique” extremity of the continuum refer to unique places, sites or events that exist or take place only in this particular country (e.g., “the city of Rio de Janeiro” in Brazil or “the *Bon Odori* festival” in Japan). As such, stereotypes that can be placed at the “unique” end of the continuum are accurate mental representations of a particular country.

3.4. *Stereotype measurement*

As Fishman and Galguera (2003: 13) explained, “measurement involves the assignment of numbers to phenomena in such a way that some property of the numbers also pertains to some property of the phenomena”. One of the quantitatively measurable properties of stereotypes is favourability. Assessments of stereotype favourability have been developed and widely used

in psychology research. However, stereotype salience has not been assessed in psychology research in a systematic and principled manner. Quantitative measurements of salience were introduced and extensively used in anthropology research. This section argues that a methodological cross-pollination between these two disciplines could further advance research on stereotypes in various other academic disciplines, including applied linguistics.

3.4.1 Stereotype favourability

Early empirical investigations did not employ any particular technique to assess whether stereotypes were positive, negative or neutral. In other words, researchers *a priori* assigned favourability to each mental image in their studies (e.g., Katz and Braly 1933). A plausible explanation for this methodological omission could be that investigators and respondents were assumed to have similar views and opinions concerning favourability of stereotypical images. The problems with this approach is that, firstly, while some images, descriptors or characteristics have indisputably negative connotations (e.g., “war”, “cruel”) others can be perceived in a more ambivalent manner. For example, the adjectives “conservative” and “ambitious” denote positive qualities in some cultures while in other cultures these traits are perceived as negative. Secondly, evaluations of stereotypes depend not only on cultural mores (which that can be shared among the researcher and respondents) but also on each individual’s subjective judgments. For example, one person could consider the trait “sportsmanlike” in Katz and Braly’s (1933) list as positive while another person could view this descriptor as neutral or even negative.

To solve this methodological dilemma, studies in social psychology that employ unstructured or free-response approaches to data collection ask the participants to evaluate all images or descriptors that they had provided on a measurement scale. These scales may range from -3 to $+3$ or from -2 to $+2$ (Madon et al. 2001; Maio and Haddock 2010; Spencer–Rodgers 2001). The marks that respondents assign to images in their lists are known as ‘valence ratings’ or ‘favourability ratings’. These marks indicate both the direction (i.e., positive or negative) and the strength of an attitude. The midpoint 0 in the measurement scales allows distinguishing neutral attitudes as well. In addition, researchers can establish the range within which the respondents’ attitudes are classified as positive, negative or neutral. For example, Spencer–Rodgers (2001) classified a stereotype as positive if it had an average mean valence value exceeding $+0.025$, as neutral if its mean valence was between -0.025 and $+0.025$, and as negative if the mean valence value was below -0.025 .

3.4.2 Salience measurement

Salience is an attribute related to being important, noticeable and familiar. Unlike the structured approaches to data collection, unstructured or free-listing techniques allow measuring salience of mental images in a systematic and principled manner. This is because salience of images in such studies can be measured not only by the frequency with which an image is mentioned but

also by this image's position in a free-list (Sutrop 2001; Weller and Romney 1988). As Weller and Romney (1988: 10) pointed out, the more salient the image is (i.e., the more it is "familiar", "better-known" or "important") the higher is its position in the free-list. In contrast, the least salient images tend to appear in the end of the list.

Stereotypes are considered as an essential cognitive device. Therefore, it can be argued that salience of a stereotypical image can serve as an indicator of how promptly this image is retrieved from the memory and how readily this image is available as a 'cognitive shortcut'. Measuring stereotype salience has been important for stereotype research, even though the term "salience" may not be very prominent in the relevant literature. Stereotypes are conceptualized by psychologists as "culturally shared beliefs", so it is critical to set a benchmark that would help with establishing when an image is shared extensively enough to become a stereotype. Generally, a mental image is considered as a stereotype when it is shared or endorsed by a substantial number or a sufficient percentage of people. The frequency with which certain terms or characteristics are associated with a study object undoubtedly refer to salience of these mental representations.

Coutant, Worchel, Bar-Tal and van Raalten (2011) assessed stereotype salience in their study on national stereotypes held by Israeli children aged from 4 to 17 years old. The researcher adopted an open-ended approach to collecting the children's images about other nations. To assess salience, Coutant et al. used the respondents' own evaluations of the images' prominence. Older children in their study or those aged between 8 and 17 years old marked the perceived salience of each trait that they had provided on a five-point scale ranging from 'not salient at all' to 'very salient'. While Coutant et al.'s method was appropriate for achieving the aims of their investigation, relying on the respondents' own evaluations of stereotype salience, especially when the respondents are young children, may produce misleading results. For this reason, researchers interested in assessing salience of stereotypes may want to adopt methods developed in cultural anthropology and anthropological linguistics. Among such methods are the Modified Free-List Salience (MFLS) index proposed by J. Smith et al. (1995) and the Cognitive Salience Index developed by Sutrop (2001). Both of these techniques consider an item's position in the free list and thus are particularly useful for assessing stereotype salience in studies that employ open-ended approaches to data collection.

3.5. Methodology of stereotype research in applied linguistics

In applied linguistics, research on country and national stereotypes forms a part of investigations of language learners' intercultural competence. Studies in applied linguistics have not been concerned with defining and operationalizing the construct of stereotypes. In line with the definitions proposed in social psychology, applied linguists view stereotypes as an important cognitive tool and indispensable internal mechanism for processing new information

(Drewelow 2013; Schulz and Haerle 1995; Webber 1990). Also, empirical investigations of stereotypes in applied linguistics have not attempted to offer a conceptualization of stereotypes, with the exception of a study by Byram and Kramsch (2008), discussed earlier in this article.

Concerning stereotype content, applied linguists have predominantly explored stereotypes that language learners hold about various target language countries, cultures and people. Data for these studies were collected by employing open-ended techniques (Abrams 2002; Drewelow 2013; Nikitina and Furuoka 2013; Schulz and Haerle 1995; Taylor 1977; Webber 1990). Regarding approaches to stereotype assessment, some of the studies have discussed attitudes embedded in the students' images of target language countries (e.g., Schulz and Haerle 1995; Taylor 1977). However, such assessments were made in a heuristic manner and conclusions regarding favourability of stereotypes were based on researchers' common sense and intuition rather than on evidence derived from a quantitative analysis.

In this connection, it is important to note that a dissonance may exist between an investigator's opinion and respondents' own evaluations of their attitudes. For example, many of the participants in a study by Chavez (2009: 8) described German as a "harsh" or "hacking" language but despite the apparently negative connotations of these characteristics some students considered these qualities as positive. Moreover, as these respondents explained, they had decided to learn German precisely because it did not sound like "a sissy language" (Chavez 2009: 6).

Recently, there have been some encouraging methodological developments in research on stereotypes in the field of applied linguistics. For example, in order to have an accurate assessment of language learners' attitudes embedded in their country and national stereotypes, Nikitina and Furuoka (2013) applied a measurement scale developed in social psychology research. The researchers asked their respondents, who were learners of Mandarin in a Malaysian public university, to assign a favourability rating ranging from -3 to +3 to each image about China that the students had written. The discussion of stereotypes' favourability in the article was based on the quantitative findings derived from these ratings.

Employing quantitative measurements and mixed-methods research designs offers exciting methodological possibilities. For example, numerical measurements of attitudes embedded in language learners' country and national stereotypes allow linking these stereotypes to constructs and variables that are usually quantitatively examined (e.g., language learning motivation). A recent study by Nikitina (2015) demonstrated how this can be done. The researcher used a free-response technique to collect stereotypes about target language countries held by Malaysian learners of German, French and Spanish. Then she asked the participants to give a rating to each image in their lists on a scale from -2 to +2. Quantifying the attitudes embedded in the language learners' country stereotypes allowed conducting a statistical analysis (bivari-

ate correlation) and examine the relationship between language learners' endogenous stereotypes about target language countries and their motivation to learn the target languages. Nikitina concluded that there existed positive and statistically significant relationships between these variables.

Applied linguistics research has not been concerned with assessing stereotype salience. To depart from this convention, a study by Nikitina and Furuo-ka (2013) measured salience of language learners' stereotypes about a target language country, China, using a technique developed in linguistic anthropology by Sutrop (2001). Future studies that approach stereotype measurement in a principled and systematic manner will provide valuable additional insights into the nature and cognitive structure of these mental representations. The following section suggests possible directions for future research on country and national stereotypes held by language learners and considers pedagogical implications that could be drawn from such studies.

4. Future vectors for stereotype research in applied linguistics

As the review of literature in Part 2 and Part 3 has demonstrated, country and national stereotypes are interdisciplinary constructs. As such, they are of considerable research interest for applied linguists. Part 4 focuses on important theoretical and methodological considerations for future studies on country and national stereotypes in the field of applied linguistics and highlights pedagogical implications that can be drawn from this research.

4.1. Theoretical considerations

Studies on country and national stereotypes in the field of applied linguistics lack a solid theoretical foundation. Drawing on a wider pool of academic disciplines from the humanities and social sciences could help to identify suitable theoretical frameworks and remedy this situation. Among possible vectors, theories developed by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) could offer a theoretical basis for research on language learners' country and national stereotypes. Vygotsky's theory of concept formation in young children could be fruitfully employed in future explorations of how language learners (re)construct their earlier perceptions of a target language country.

According to Vygotsky (1986), a concept – or an intellectual idea – can concern any entity that is present in the everyday life of a young child. Admittedly, a distant foreign country is usually not among such ubiquitous entities, which places emphasis on the process of concept formation about foreign countries. Vygotsky (1986) recognized two types of concepts—scientific concepts and everyday concepts. As the previous studies on country stereotypes held by young children show, the notions of various foreign countries and their inhabitants are formed by children based on hearsay (e.g., “everyone says so” as reported by Piaget and Weil 1951). In other words, initially, a young child's

conceptions of foreign countries and people stem from information that the child gathers from his or her surroundings (e.g., the parents, siblings, caretakers). Some of these notions may not be supported by scientific facts that are introduced some years later during formal schooling. However, as noted in research literature (Bar-Tal 1997), formal schooling may re-inforce stereotypes that are deeply entrenched within a given culture. In this context, studies in applied linguistics could employ Vygotsky's theory of concept formation with the aim to trace the process of (re)constructing personally held concepts about a target language country among language learners during a foreign language program.

Another possible theoretical framework for studies on language learners' stereotypes involves socio-anthropological theories of culture, where culture is conceptualized as being embedded in and expressed through language (Sapir 1994). This framework would allow approaching a culture – and outsiders' perceptions of this culture – as an array of mental representations. As House (2008) pointed out, these mental representations are individually held, culturally shared and communicated in linguistic forms. To be more specific,

Within any group there exists a multitude of individual 'mental representations', most of which are fleeting and individual. A subset of these representations, however, can be overtly expressed in language and artefacts. They then become 'public representations', which are communicated to others in the social group. This communication gives rise to similar mental representations in others, which, in turn, may be communicated as public representations to others... If a subset of public representations is communicated frequently enough within a particular social group, these representations may become firmly entrenched and turn into 'cultural representations'. (House 2008: 10)

This framework could also enable researchers to adopt conceptualizations of stereotypes proposed by Byram and Kramersch (2008). For example, a target culture could be approached as an array of mental representations that are communicated in linguistic forms through culturally-saturated terms, proverbs, sayings, slogans and catchphrases (Byram and Kramersch 2008) or 'keywords' (Williams 1985).

Valuable insights might be gained from using these theoretical frameworks in research that compare and contrast implicit and highly salient cognitive categories embedded in a target language with explicit stereotypes about this culture that exist in language learners' own cultural milieus and that are communicated through sayings, proverbs or slurs. Empirical findings that indicate the areas of convergence and divergence between the emic and etic perspectives on a target culture could prove very useful in developing the cultural component of a foreign language program.

4.2. Methodological considerations

Besides the need for a solid theoretical framework, research on country and national stereotypes in applied linguistics requires a rigorous methodology. The investigations of language learners' stereotypes about target language countries have been for the most part qualitative. Adopting mixed-methods research designs offers exciting methodological possibilities. For example, combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques in one research project would enable researchers to, firstly, collect and explore endogenous stereotypes held by language learners. Secondly, quantifying the stereotypical images – and the attitudes embedded in them – would permit linking these stereotypes to constructs that are usually quantitatively examined as research variables (e.g., language learning motivation). This method has been demonstrated in a recent study done by Nikitina (2015).

Adopting mixed-methods approaches to studying stereotypes held by language learners is not only promising but a particularly desirable vector for future research of this construct. Numerical indicators in these mixed-methods studies would allow not only examining stereotype favourability but also assessing stereotypes salience – and comparing these two parameters in a single research project. The findings of such studies would yield empirically-based conclusions regarding cognitive, attitudinal and representational structures of country and national stereotypes held by language learners. Only a small number of investigations in applied linguistics has examined stereotype salience. The available studies conducted by Nikitina (2017) and Nikitina and Furuoka (2013) used techniques developed in cultural anthropology (J. Smith et al. 1995) and anthropological linguistics (Sutrop 2001). Furthermore, adopting integrated methodologies where stereotype favourability and frequency are investigated alongside with stereotype salience would set the field of applied linguistics at the forefront in stereotype research because at the time of writing this article, no studies in psychology have adopted such an approach.

As the review of literature presented in this article has shown, positive attitudes toward and benevolent interest in a target culture are recognized as potent motivational factors in the process of language learning (Dlaska 2000; Gardner and Lambert 1972). A promising direction for future research could be in adopting statistical procedures to examine links between language learners' country and national stereotypes and their motivation to learn a particular foreign language. Thus far, only a study by Nikitina (2015) used a bivariate correlation procedure to examine such links. Future studies may want to include additional relevant socio-cultural variables. For example, variables that measure attitudes toward a target language country within language learners' cultural milieu would lead to a better understanding of a complex interplay among country stereotypes, language attitudes and various social and cultural factors involved in the process of learning a foreign language.

4.3. Pedagogical implications

For applied linguists who are also foreign language educators, knowing a representational structure of language learners' stereotypes about a target language country is important. This is because such knowledge can be employed for developing the cultural component of a foreign language program. One of the important aims of foreign language education is enriching the students' knowledge about other cultures and promoting their intercultural awareness (Byram 2014; Byram and Kramersch 2008; Kelly 1969/1976; Schulz and Haerle 1995; Stern 1983). As Kelly (1969/1976: 378) observed, over the 25 centuries of foreign language instruction "the cultural orientation of language teaching has always been one of its unstated aims". In a similar way, Schulz and Haerle (1995: 34) pointed out that despite the fact that language educators recognize the existence of stereotypes, "we would, nevertheless, be remiss in our role as educators, if we would not attempt to develop in our students a critical stance and an awareness that stereotypes impede cross-cultural understanding".

While a number of innovative pedagogical techniques have been proposed and implemented in order to address erroneous stereotypical notions about a target language country (Abrams 2002; Allen 2004; Houghton 2010; Nikitina 2017), there is only one study that holistically addresses various kinds of stereotypes that are present in the language (i.e., Byram and Kramersch 2008). Recently, empirical research has been initiated in this direction and its aim is to demonstrate how in the process of teaching culture, endogenous stereotypes that language learners bring into the classroom can be linked to stereotypes embedded in a target language and culture (Nikitina 2017).

To conclude, the construct of stereotypes offers a rich research context to scholars in various academic fields. As a discipline, applied linguistics intersects with several research areas and is well positioned to benefit from a multidisciplinary nature of stereotype research. Furthermore, applied linguistics studies on country and national stereotypes that employ innovative research methodologies have a good potential to expand and deepen our understanding of this complex psychological construct.

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Stereotip kao interdisciplinarni konstrukt: implikacije za istraživanja u primijenjenoj lingvistici

Istraživanja o stereotipima nalazimo u različitim disciplinama, što stereotipe čini pravim interdisciplinarnim konstruktom. U ovome radu daje se pregled literature o ‘stereotipima o drugim zemljama’ i ‘stereotipima o drugim nacijama’. U radu se analiziraju izvori stereotipnih konstrukata kao i metodologije kojima se koristi u istraživanju tih konstrukata. Nadalje, u radu se jasno ističu praznine, i teorijske i metodološke, koje postoje u primijenjenolingvističkim istraživanjima ‘stereotipa o drugim zemljama’ i ‘stereotipa o drugim nacijama’. U završnom dijelu rada predlažu se moguće smjernice za buduća istraživanja o stereotipima unutar primijenjene lingvistike, razmatraju se teorijski i metodološki okviri za buduća istraživanja ‘stereotipa o drugim zemljama’ i ‘stereotipa o drugim nacijama’ te se ističu pedagoške implikacije koje proizlaze iz spomenutih istraživanja.

Keywords: stereotypes, applied linguistics, interdisciplinary research

Ključne riječi: stereotipi, primijenjena lingvistika, interdisciplinarna istraživanja

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