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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how teachers can deal with stereotypes in the classroom as they relate to foreign language learning goals, specifically the negative ethnic and cultural stereotypes held by Mexican university students about Americans and Canadians. It presents data concerning the emergence of stereotypes from various studies carried out in Mexico and Canada. Bias surrounding the learning of English by Mexican university students surfaced in the negative stereotypes held by these students of speakers of the language. Students experience a dilemma when they perceive the English language as inseparable from its speakers and their cultures, knowing at the same time that the language has international status and that it is key to their future success. Research indicates that the most productive thing for teachers to do is to not focus on trying to eliminate, challenge, or modify these stereotypes but rather become more conscious of them and be able to discuss them with students in order that their prejudices not get in the way of learning English. (Contains 34 references.) (KFT)

STEREOTYPES OF AMERICANS: FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING RESEARCH.

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Introduction

Studies with teachers and students in foreign language situations in Mexico have produced a body of data about intercultural perceptions (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998; Charaudeau, Gómez de Mas, Zaslavsky, & Chabrol, 1992; Chasan & Ryan, 1995; Chasan, Mallén & Ryan, 1997; Francis & Ryan, 1998; Gómez de Mas, 1998; Ryan, 1994). Out of this research has emerged collateral results not related to the primary purpose of the studies that included stereotypes about North Americans and their cultures.

If we are to take a position pedagogically toward the goal of interculturality in foreign language learning, questions related to stereotypes have to be raised and answered, ones such as "What position can foreign language teachers and program designers take about how to work with stereotypes given the range of attributes associated with groups of people and the intensity of feelings associated with these qualities? What does research reveal that aids in our understanding of stereotypes and forming positions about foreign language goals?

In this article we would like to refer to theories proposed in social psychology that aid in the process of interpreting research data, for example, theories of social identity (SIT) and social judgeability (SJT). Our purpose is to present data relative to the emergence of stereotypes in various studies carried out in Mexico and Canada and discuss the phenomenon of social groups, especially in the context of dominance, and notions of group membership, such as, acceptance and rejection, inclusion and exclusion. The purpose of this discussion is to present data that emerged in various studies in Mexico and Canada and to consider data in relation to theories of social psychology that may provide insight. We will reserve didactic implications for a later article.

Stereotypes

First let us define stereotypes. What is a stereotype? Oxford English Dictionary defines stereotypes in large measure as the general cognitive process of categorizing and generalizing. The main purpose is to simplify the complexity of information human beings receive from their environment (See for example, Bruner, 1957; Tajfel, 1972). The social significance of stereotypes are not taken into account in this cognitive definition.

Stallybrass (1977) defines a stereotype as:

> an oversimplified mental image of (usually) some category of person, institution or event which is shared, in essential features, by large numbers of people. The categories may be broad (Jews, gentiles, white men, black men) or narrow (women's libbers... Stereotypes are commonly, but not necessarily, accompanied by prejudice, i.e., by a favorable or unfavorable predisposition towards any member of the category in question (cf. *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (1977) in Tajfel, H., 1981: 143.)

The literature of social psychology emphasizes that stereotypes are shared beliefs about the attributes of a group of people; personality traits and behaviors of a social group. They are sometimes confused with prejudices (Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1994: 3). They are found in daily discourse among all social groups, academics and professionals alike, and fulfill a need to identify an individual as a member of a group as well as function as a component of social beliefs formed by interpersonal group action among members of the same cultural group as well as between cultural groups.[1] They range from very positive to very negative attributes and tend to exaggerate attributes (for example, a stereotype associated with Germans might be that they are industrious, one associated with the English--conventional, and one with the Irish--quick tempered).

A major concern in the past has been that stereotypes oversimplify reality and do not

respect individuality (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1994). As a result it was recommended that stereotypes should be identified, challenged, and replaced by information relevant to the individual. Thus, the person who weighs categorical information against individualizing information was called the good social perceiver. A more recent position taken in the literature (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1996; Byram, 1991; Byram, Esarte-Sarries, Taylor & Allat, 1991).

Theories about stereotypes:

Some of the first studies of stereotypes in social psychology were devoted to identification, description, measurement, and evaluation of stereotypes and their changes (Katz & Braly, 1933; Gardner, Wonnacott & Taylor, 1968; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). Two theories emerged from research on social identity. The first, social identity theory (SIT) underlines the need of the individual to maintain the positive values of the characteristics of one's own group compared to an external group with the aim of achieving a positive identity for their in-groups compared to out-groups (Tajfel, 1972; 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1975). The underlying hypothesis is that individuals define themselves in terms of social group norms and that this definition produces distinct psychological effects in social behavior (Turner, 1988). This social identity theory is based on the notion of social categorization, social comparison and social identity. It explains that stereotypes are the result of social categorization that consist of putting the greatest distance possible between the negative features that one group attributes to another and to itself, in order to defend a converse identity (Charaudeau, et al, 1994, 39). See Figure 1.

CENTRAL ASPECTS OF THE THEORIES

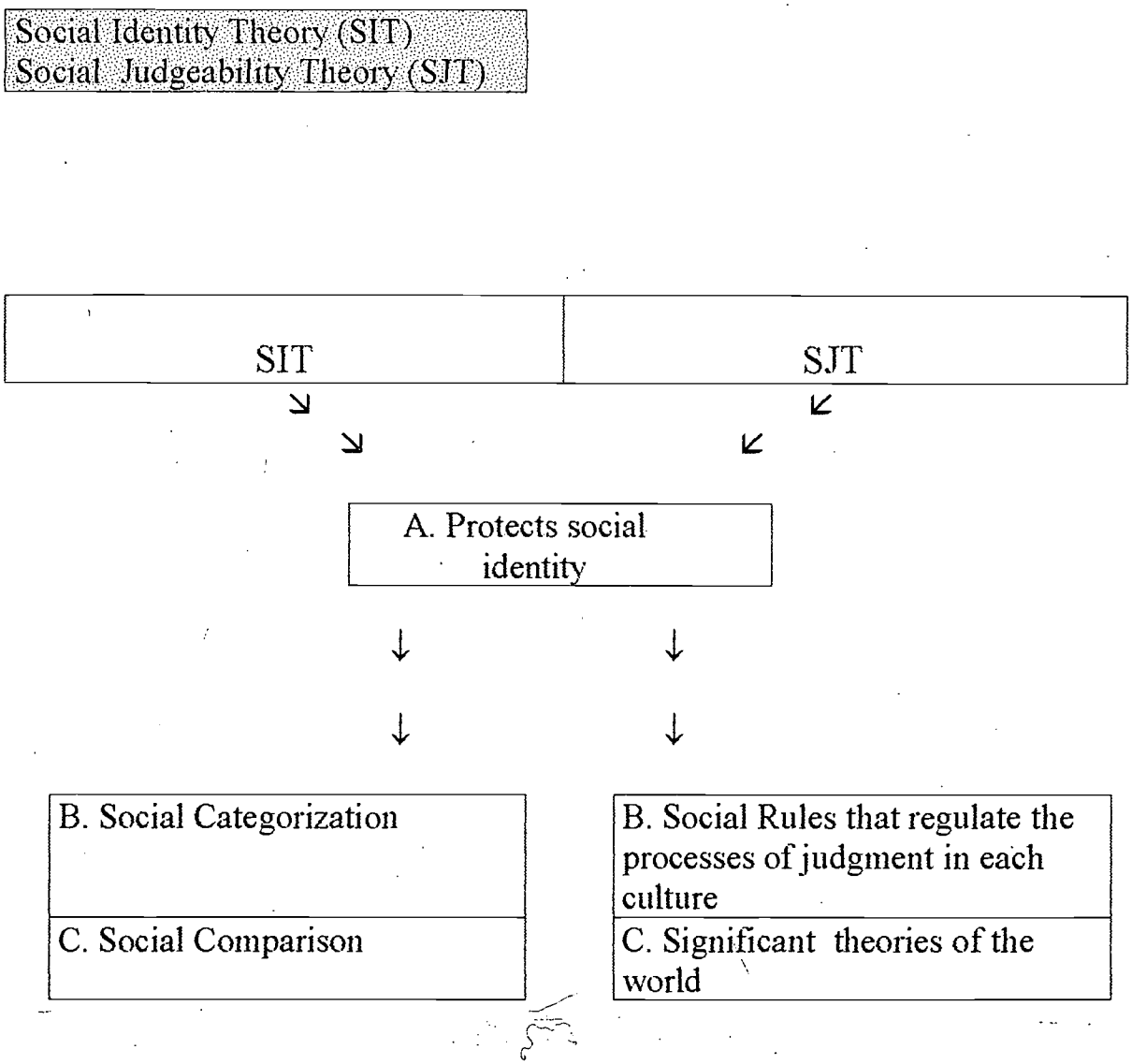

Figure 1: A comparison between central aspects of SIT and SJT.

For Turner (1982; 1985) people categorize and define themselves as members of a social category, learning the stereotype norms of that category. They assign norms to themselves thereby change their group behavior into normative behavior. The belongingness to the group implies to be a member of the group uniformity in behavior, attitudes and perceptions. People perceive of themselves as possessing the same characteristics that other members of the group have. This self characterization is a determining and useful factor for social influence and exchange.

In addition to being the result of a categorization process, stereotypes fulfill a social function (Tajfel, 1981) That is, they explain social events and justify social differentiation through: 1.) social cause (that is, one group identifies another group as responsible for a social event), 2.) social justification (that is, negative stereotypes are created by the action of the group being characterized), and 3.) social differentiation (that is, the differences between groups are accentuated to provide a favorable distinction for one's own group).

The second theory mentioned previously is the theory of social judgeability (SJT). This theory looks into the social contexts of judgements and finds that this context accounts for what is stereotyped and in what ways (Di Giacomo, 1980). Moreover, it proposes that person perception is not an intellectual task but an action taking place in a context serving a social utility. This pragmatic dimension is seen more with social validity of judgement than with epistematic validity. When a judgement is made certain conditions are involved; such as, the judgement must fit reality, that it must protect one's integrity and that of the group, and that it respects social rules defined for the culture. In addition, the judgement constitutes an enlightening gestalt that creates meaning and encourages intercultural communication. (Note Figure 2 presents a comparison of these two

theories.)

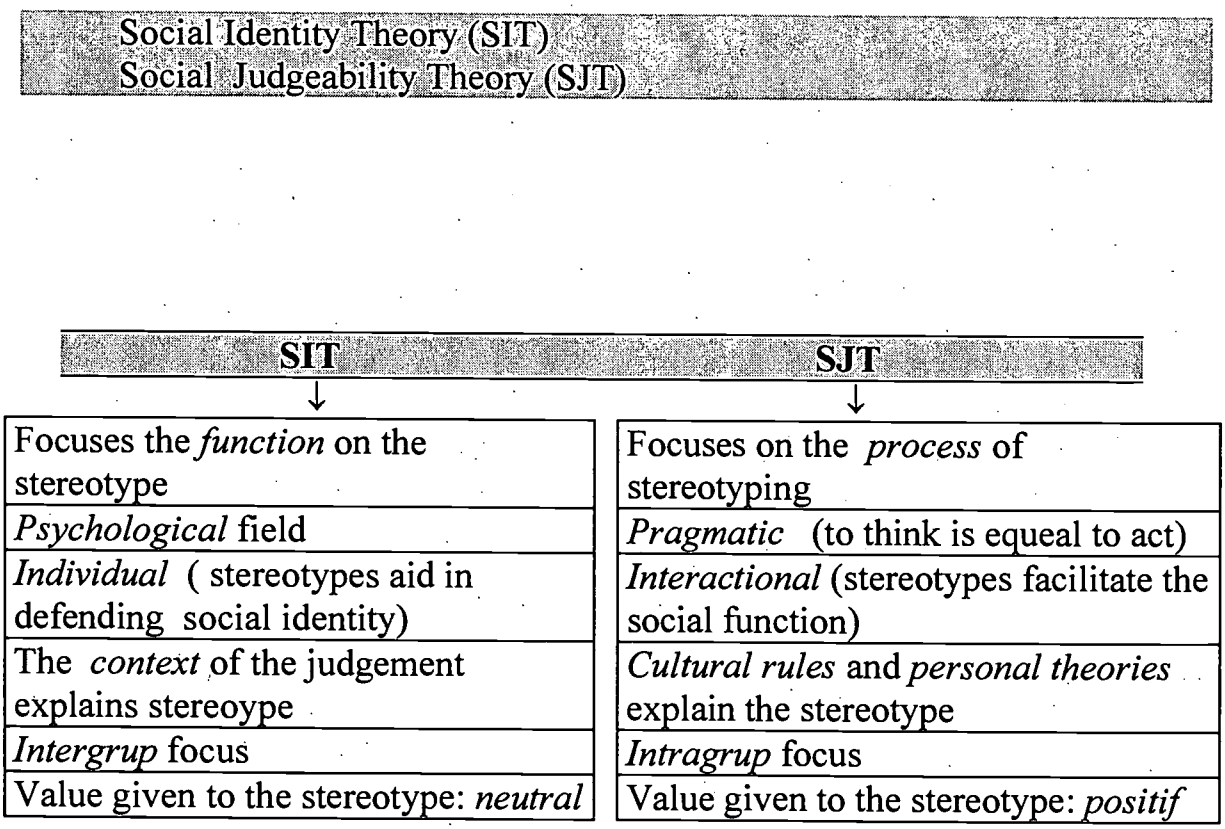

Figure 2: The main focus of SIT and SJT.

Leyens and his colleagues (1994) point out that social perception is social interaction with rules. That is, rules of the culture direct the on-going process of judgement, and define who is entitled to judge whom and when. SIT finds the value attached to the stereotypes to be neutral, while SJT finds it positive. SIT has intergroup interest and SJT, intragroup, but both theories consider stereotypes as a normal cognitive-perceptual process.

A third approach, an extension of SJT, we would like to propose for understanding stereotypes is tied closely to power and dominance among social groups. This approach focuses on relationships of dominance, real or imaginary, with which stereotypes are associated. (Charaudeau et al, 1992). Involved is a relationship between peoples that includes social, political, historical and economic aspects. Contact between groups often produces negative polarized attitudes such as is found with stereotypes of "cultural imperialism" (Phillipson, 1992). We will follow polarized attitudes in the examples of students and professors that follow.

In our discussion we would like to first consider the appearance of stereotypes in teacher/student talk found in long term studies (Chasan & Ryan, 1995; Chasan, Mallén & Ryan, 1997; Francis & Ryan, 1998; Ryan, 1994). These stereotypes appeared when teachers and students were talking about cultures related to their foreign language learning. They are for the most part negative and categorize North Americans collectively with characteristics tied to political, social and economic concerns. Let us follow these perceptions of English-speakers before discussion students of other languages such as French and German and drawing on the results of a range of studies where other negative stereotypes appeared. Theories of SIT, SJT and Dominance will aid in understanding how these stereotypes function and what they reflect about society.

"Cultural Imperialism"

Students:

Students often perceived of North Americans as "imperialists" when they were interviewed about culture in their learning experiences (Ryan, 1994). In fact, a variety of stereotypes clustered around "cultural imperialism", "cultural penetration", and "cultural intervention". As they discussed academic experiences students referred to North Americans as "evil or abusive imperialists".

Students related their attitudes to the tension they found themselves involved in as they experienced learning English. From their perspective the fact that English is the international language (or lingua franca) means that they are pressured for a variety of reasons to learn it rather than another language. They often comment that they do not relate English to the United States that they are taking this language to fulfill an academic requirement: *"No relacionamos un idioma con el país o la cultura de ese pais, porque tomamos lases de lengua para cumplir con requisitos académicos".* (We don't relate a language with the country or the culture of that country, because we take language classes in order to fulfill academic requirements.) (Byer, Mestre & Ryan, 1998). However, some also notice that when they read something in English even though they do mot want to they are thinking of the United States: *"cuando leemos algo en inglés, aunque no querramos, pensamos en los norteamericans"* (When we read something in English, even if we don't want to, we think of Americans.). Moreover, in their discussions about culture in foreign language learning they become defensive of their own culture, making statements such as: "don't touch my culture", "we want learning not loosing (culture)" and "we want to learn about, but not acquire culture." (Ryan, Byer, & Mestre, 1998).

In surveys students reacted strongly in relation to North Americans, especially in five areas: politics, intervention in other countries, intervention in the daily life of Mexicans, attitudes toward Mexicans in the United States, and attitudes toward immigrant workers in the United States (Chasan & Ryan, 1995). The great majority said that intervention and attitudes toward Mexicans in the United States infuriated them. (See Chasan, Mallen & Ryan for these areas and student responses.))

We found that when students were asked about the relationship between cultlure and langauge that they were involved in a dilemma that juxtaposed their acceptance of the need to have knowledge of cultural aspects of a particular foreign language with their caution about integrating these aspects in their foreign language classes. They also had another dilemma created over students' perceptions of English as *la llave de exito (*the key to success) and the negative perceptions they had of the United States. They were involved in linguistic and sociocultural tensions: Spanish versus English, Latin America versus United States.

A good example of the negative attitudes held toward North Americans is found in several blocks of discourse of a university student talking about her political science classes: Margarita began by talking about "abusive Americans" and later reflected on the situation at the university:

> We are used to our neighbors, the gringos, and nobody likes them. In my department (political science), it is very obvious. It's always those abusive imperialist Americans. All these things are always reflected in the class, and its is like going against the current when the teacher wants to include cultural aspects in class. I have noticed it. All this goes against the enrichment of the class, from my point of view, with cultural aspects that have nothing to do with these evil imperialists (Chasan, Mallén & Ryan, 1997).

Here we see that Margarita recognized how North Americans are viewed by Mexicans and found this attitude dominating her university classes. Further, however, she tries to be neutral,

herself, explaining her position:

> I am neither for nor against the gringos. I only think that it is another culture and one can learn from it, and from my point of view, understanding the culture helps you a lot in understanding the language. I think that this is one of the problems that has made it difficult to introduce culture, specifically American culture, here. There is a lot of this. (Chasan, Mallén, & Ryan, 1997).

Angelica, one of her classmates, admonishes students for the false images they perpetuate:

> We have to get rid of this label {evil imperialists} that has been given to them. We have a prefabricated idea of what North America is. We have to get rid of the myths by getting in contact with the people. Both Mexicans and Americans have to do so (Chasan, Mallén & Ryan, 1997).

Teachers:

Teachers were very aware of students' beliefs about North Americans and the tensions created over learning English. They expressed strongly their views about students thinking:

> Some of the students even reject studying English because of the government and imperialism. They think that if they're really going to learn English, they're going to be pro-United States culture. They think they would be puppets of the U.S. government (Ryan, 1994).

In these comments of Carmen we find that her stereotypes of cultural imperialism part of her political views related to English and the need to study it:

> I have my own opinions of why they are taking English. I tell them there's a lot of cultural imperialism. U.S. and U.K. Most come to (name of institution) because of cultural imperialism. *La llave del éxito.* (The key to success.) What keeps them here is that it's so engrained, no matter how much I tell them they will still stay here. I tell them that there is a conflict: 'I need to study English and I dislike Americans.'(Ryan, 1994)

It might be suggested that even though Carmen implies at first that she is against students' perceptions of North Americans, as she continues she expressed similar views, or prejudices herself.

The dilemmas mentioned earlier over students wanting to learn the language and not

wanting to learn the culture is constantly present throughout the data of the case studies. For instance, Enrique notices the dichotyme:

> Here at the (name of institution) they see it {English} as political penetration and I think that many of the students I've had here would like to learn English without learning the culture. I think most of the students who come with that idea are ones who drop out after one or two semesters because they have an idea they can learn English just for instrumental use. (Ryan, 1994)

Maria Teresa agrees with him and other teachers as she reports what she has heard students say:

> When asked to learn other things that can be more identified with the culture of the people, they usually react against that. I heard some student say: 'I don't want to know that. I don't want to know whether in the U.S. you have to be punctual or not. I don't care. I just want to speak English and that's all (Ryan, 1994).

These examples point to an extreme range of attitudes from acceptance to rejection perceived by the teachers and students. It was not only in research interviews that strong negative stereotypes appeared, but also during classroom observation when linguistic aspects were being focused upon. At the level of social groups the conflict surfaced as willful action involving countries in a dominant role in which the economic power of one country prevails.

Further evidence of negative feelings rooted in attitudes toward the United States surfaced during one of the classes observed in a long term case study (Ryan, 1994) while working with grammatical forms. The brief question-and-answer verbal exchanges occurred at random, relating to feelings which were usually not shown in class. In one instance, the teachers and students were talking about the linguistic use of the "article" with "nouns" found in a reading, a student asked the teacher why the article is not used with "Mexico" in the sentence, "Tacos are very popular in Mexico". Another student replied:

ST: Because in English...*porque los nombres de países no llevan articulos*

(because names of countries do not have articles.)
T: Why do you say "the" United States then?
ST: *!Porque los gringos hacen lo que quieren!* (Because los gringos do whatever they want!) Smiles and laughter.

The different examples in our discussion present a panorama of the feelings associated with the disequilibrium of power between Mexico and the United States. Ambivalence is present; dilemmas are created over having negative feelings toward the United States. At the same time, students challenge attitudes and negative stereotypes they have seeking to resolve and compensate for them.

A wide range of stereotypes, auto- and hetero-, emerged from a second bank of studies with students of Spanish, French English and German in Mexico and Canada. Surveys were carried out with Mexican students and with Quebecois students (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998 and Gómez de Mas, 1998).

We collected the types of stereotypes of the USA that Mexican students of French mentioned as they talked in 1994 about another national group, the Canadians, and found that they appeared along an axis of acceptance (+) and rejection (-), concentrating on the latter. The same questionnaire was applied later in 1996 this time not with Mexican students of French but with Mexican students of English and German. The judgements they expressed were the same with few differences, that is to say, there was not a change in the representations of the students, even though they varied with the time the questionnaires were administered and with the language being studied.

The judgements toward Americans appeared to be indirect when students gave their opinions about Canada and Quebec. In general they referred to the external politics of the United States as having "interventionists", "racists", "people without culture or of few values", and being

"unfriendly". Figure 4 represents these judgements of the dominated group (Mexican students) about the dominant groups, Canada and the USA., according to the political/socio-economic differences between countries and the pressures of power and prestige associated with them (Charaudeau, et al, 1992).

The context and situation is the key for explaining the origin of the stereotype that emerges through contact between cultures and languages. In this sense the model of dominant and dominated (Charaudeau et al, 1992:28-29) can explain phenomena of social characterization, assimilation and rejection. This model seems useful for explaining some of our data. In the case of Mexico and the United States the intercultural situation is marked by non-symmetrical and dominated relationships. That is why for the Mexican group ("the dominated") there is a tendency to protect the identity, a phenomena of social characterization. One way of protecting one's identity and that of one's group involves putting great distance between one's group and another by using very negative attributes to refer to the other group. (Note the negative features in Figure 4.)

JUDGMENTS of the "DOMINATED" (Mexicans)

Acceptance (+) → → → → → → Rejection (-)	
Canada, Quebec	**United States**
friendly cultured hard workers calm	not friendly racists lacking culture few values interventionists imperialists

Figure 4 :

Another way is to include positive features about one's own group in opposition to a negative feature presumably attributed for the other group, as SIT suggests. For example, during the 1999 World Soccer Game in Mexico City when the score was tied, Mexico and Holland, one of the Mexicans attending the game was interviewed and said: *Pues cómo no va a dar gusto, si así chaparritos y todo les empatamos a los de Holanda!* (Well, how could one not be happy when we, shorties, as we are, can tie Holland!").

In contrast, when Canada and Quebec were judged in contrast with the United States, the judgements were in the area of the area of acceptance on the positive side of the axis (acceptance) with a tendency to overvalue, for example: "The Quebecquois are a pure, sweet and simple people." (Note: Data from the dominated group (Mexico) contained a range of very weak positive evaluations to very strong negative evaluations.) To illustrate some contrasts we would like to present the following results of the same questionnaire applied to Mexican students and Quebecois students of Spanish in relation to Mexico and its inhabitants.

JUDGMENTS of the "DOMINANT" (Canadians)

Acceptance (+) → → → → → → Rejection (-)	
Mexico warm hardworkers happy nice poor	

Figure 5: Model of judgements of the "dominant".

As we observed the Quebecois students more closely, we found two tendencies: 1.) positive group qualities were mentioned about Mexicans: *les mexicains sont amicaux, accueillants, calmes...des gens avec des fortes valeurs familiales* (Mexicans are friendly, welcoming, tranquil people with strong family values. In this case one can talk of a fascination effect (Charaudeau, et al., 1992) which consists of exaggerating one trait of the other group that one's own group does not possess to create an ideal model with which one would like to be identified.

At the same time, in order to compensate for what one lacks and while at the same time decreasing the state of superiority, we found in our survey of studies that Canadian students looked also for common ground between social groups: *les mexicains aiment beaucoup les québéquois parce qu ils sont d'origine latine comme eux* (Mexicans like very much Quebecois because they are of Latin origin like themselves). They also were self critical: *Malheureusement le Mexique se résume à quelques mots pour les Québécois: 'tequila, sombrero, turists'. Vaut mieux en rire!* (Sadly, Mexico can be summed up in a few words for most Quebecois: tequila, sombrero, tourists. It makes you laugh!)

2.) The second tendency of the Canadian students was to emphasized a feature that was contrary to the traditional stereotype. For example, in relation to the concept of Mexicans being lazy, the Canadians said that they were *trabajadores* (hard workers).

Throughout the attributes Canadians gave, they only talked about Mexicans, but as we have seen in Figure 4, the Mexican students, on the contrary, compared and talked about negative attributes they held of Northamericans when they talked about Canadians. It is interesting to note that the Canadian students only referred to Mexicans in a positive relationship (+)_____Canada

(+), but Mexican students consistently produced a triangular relationship they referred to Canadians, Americans and Mexicans. Figure 6 represents the triad of positive and negative stereotypes.

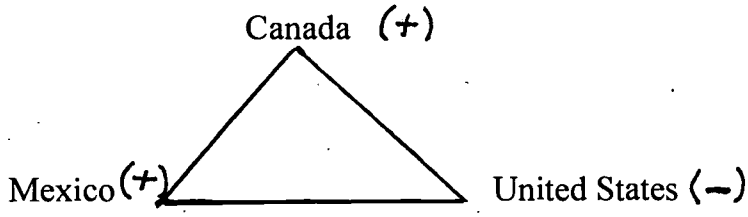

Figure 6: The triad of positive and negative stereotypes with Canada, Mexico and the United States.

This phenomena may illustrate that the superior economic group, Canadians, does not find its identity at risk in front of the other group, the Northamericans, that is equally superior. Mexicans on the other hand, to defend their identity that is in danger and to diminish their situation of being dominated, talk about Canada with positive features but to do so they need to establish a distance from the dominant group, the USA, by means of negative features. It is possible to think that this triangulation is due to the context: agreement of the NAFTA in 1994, nevertheless this circumstance was not taken into account by the Canadians, and besides, in our data of 1996, this triangulation appears again in the Mexican students' responses. So it will be better to say that Canada is considered by the Mexicans as a country economically superior to Mexico the same as the USA but with the latter there exists a relationship of economic, political and cultural domination.

How do our examples of Mexico, Canada, and the United States stereotypes function? The theories of social identity and judgement aid in interpreting their functioning through their distinctive interpretations. In relation to the role of superiority and the corresponding dependence

let us look at examples 4 and 6 in Figure 7.

MODEL OF STEREOTYPES AND THEIR FUNCTIONING

A	B	C	D	E
Categories of Judgments and examples	**Categories of discourse and expressed values**	**Social Function (explains events)**	**Operative Function (helps in social relationship)**	**Dominance relationship**
1. *Imperialists:* " There´s a lot of cultural imperialism"	Evaluative and assertive	Social cause	Theoretical position of the speaker	Inferiority (of the speaker: mexicans)
2. *Interventionists:* "They believe that America belongs to them"	Evaluative and denouncing	Social cause	Theoretical position of the speaker	*Idem*
3. *Racists:* "Xenophobists and vulgar people"	Evaluative and denouncing	Social differenciation	Corresponds to cultural rules (of racists)	*Idem*
4. *Moral Values:* " They have few values"	Descriptive and assertive	Social differenciation	Protects identity (of the speaker)	*Idem*
5. Crazy: "Frantic, mad, crazies"	Evaluative and Assertive	Social differenciation	Protects identity (of the speaker)	*Idem*

Examples of stereotypes of Canadians about Mexicans:

6. Hot- blooded: They are " rude, wild and hot blooded"	Descriptive and assertive	Social Differenciation	Corresponds to cultural rules (of hot-blooded people)	Superiority (of the speaker)

Figure 7:

The difference between these examples is that in 4 for the Mexicans a contrast is established where domination and the deteriorated historical relationships with the United States--that are often commented on in discussions--are compensated for by the indirect self attribute ("moral values"), that is a phenomenon of social categorization that protects identity and at the same time denounces a "reality" that presumably has been harrassed in other socio-political situations. It might be as they said: *"Ellos son ricos e intervencionistas y nosotros somos pobres, pero decentes."* ("They are rich and interventionists and we are poor but decent".)

In example 6, by contrast, Canadian identity is not in danger. The stereotype functions as an element that makes the subject be closer to his own group by means of a frame of shared norms. The attributes expressed by the Canadians about Mexicans such as *rudos y feroces (*rough and wild) would be rejected only because these attributes are far from their reality. The subject is not affectively involved. The stereotype functions as a group code between one Canadian and another, much like a social "wink". The objective of the wink is to create social solidarity (Geertz, 1973). At another level, not ingroup but outgroup, we can talk about the lack of comprehension due to the lack of knowledge of cultural codes of the other group and the predominant feeling that one's own code is all that exists. In relation to the second column of Figure 7, the component of the stereotype is shown in two variants, descriptive and evaluative. It must be considered, however, that they are not polar categories since a descriptive expression is not necessarily neutral. It contains a certain evaluative component, even though in general it is considered relatively free from positive or negative value, while an evaluative expression is considered polarized. In those cases of positive features like "development" attributed to Americans" or "hard workers" attributed to Mexicans, or "kind" attributed to Canadians can be

located as descriptive or evaluative categories, but not in a sense of denouncement but in an eulogizing sense.

The columns C and D refer to some aspects addressed in the theories of SIT and SJT. In Example 2 of column a, the function of the stereotype is to explain the cause of the attitudes of Americans: that is to say, they are "interventionists" because they think that the continent is theirs, in this way the Mexican students construct a theory that permits them to justify that behavior. On the other hand, Examples 3 ("racists") and 5("crazy") in column C are categorized as phenomenon of social differentiation, and in column D, under the category of cultural rules. Those features serve to mark the differentiation from the other social group (North Americans) because the cultural codes do not concide: that is to say, the cultural rules of Mexicans do not permit them to share attitudes considered "Xenofobos" or "crazy" (excessive behavior). At the same time the codes of the Canadians do not permit them to identity with people that they consider hot-blooded like Mexicans.

Let us turn now to the next graph to see the types of discourse components and values.

Although our data--within the context in which they were expressed--fall on some point of the continuum of positive-negative value, they are located in general on the negative side, as is seen in Figure 8:

Type of discourse, components and affective factors

Values (+)	(-)
Affective Closeness	Affective Distance
Acceptance	Rejection
Inclusion	Exclusion

	Assertive Discourse	Denouncing Discourse
	Descriptive Component Evaluative Component	Evaluative Component

Figure 8: The range of values associated with types of discourse: affective filters.

Along the range of polarized elements is located types of discourse that reveal the affective closeness or distance expressed by the subjects. At the same time an attitude of acceptance or rejection of the other group can be noted that also shows an attitude of inclusion or exclusion in the group.

Discussion

As was mentioned in the introduction, our discussion of stereotypes was prompted by lateral results appearing in a bank of research. Throughout our discussion we have brought together elements residing in each setting that point to interpretations related to psycho-social and political aspects of the three groups without attempting analysis related to the special contexts of Mexico,

Canada and the United States. Rather we have wanted to report on the findings that emerged and relate them to theories of social psychology (namely social identity and social judgeability) as well as dominance group theory. We have drawn on some of the basic concepts from theories in social psychology to flesh out distinctions surrounding stereotypes. Our basic goal has been lead toward an understanding of stereotypes inside the framework of discussion of the notions of acceptance, rejection or modification of stereotypes that ultimately impact pedagogical considerations in foreign language teaching.

Several assumptions were made in the first stage of our research. First, stereotypes exist as phenomen of social interaction that may guard one's identity. While they enable one to interact and understand the world, they also call for an analysis of social-historical roots and functioning. Second, they are homogeneous in the sense that several variables interact in their construction, ones such as social or economic status, political posturing of the perceiver and geographic proximity between countries. Third, they include auto- and hetero-stereotypes that reflect positioning toward cultures.

Tensions surrounding the learning of English by Mexican university students surfaced in the negative stereotypes held by these students of speakers of the language (particularly North Americans). One of the causes of the tension was an ambivalence toward speakers of English. Students experience a dilemma when they perceive of the English language as inseparable from its speakers and their cultures, knowing that at the same time English has an international status and that it is the key to their future success. An illustration is the triangle mentioned previously between Mexicans, Canadians and Americans appeared in stereotypes when Mexicans talked about Canadians. Such a triangle was not found when Canadians talked about Mexicans.

A final stage of our research takes into consideration empirical data of students and teachers–where the problem of dealing with stereotypes by the non-native speaker teacher appears in addition to problems that emerge from the relationship between self and auto–stereotypes. In addition aspects of psycho-social theories should be considered so that an effective and valid pedagogical proposal could be established. Note that some significant proposals have been made in French and German teacher training programs.

So far it seems that stereotypes in the classroom of the foreign language learner not be concerned with eliminating or modifying stereotypes, but with becoming more conscious of stereotypes as a subject of observation for analysis and discussion of their causes and functions in social contexts. Ultimately permiting teachers and students to moved between their own culture and that of foreign cultures.

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