**Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication**

**Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are perceptions and beliefs we hold about groups or individuals based on our previously formed opinions or attitudes (Samovar& Porter, 1991). Stereotypes do not develop suddenly but are formed over a period of time by our culture. They are made up of bits and pieces of information that we store and use to make sense of what goes on around us. Stereotypes may be positive or negative. As Barna (1997) points out, they help us make sense of the world by categorizing and classifying people and situations we encounter. While stereotyping may reduce the threat of the unknown, it interferes with our perceptions and understanding of the world. When applied to individuals or groups, often stereotypes are problematic because they are oversimplified, over generalized half-truths or distortions about a group of people. There are a number of ways in which stereotypes are harmful (Jandt, 2001): first, stereotypes can cause us to assume that a widely held belief is true, when it may not be. Second, the continual use of stereotypes reinforces our beliefs and can also cause us to assume a widely held belief is true of any one of the individual in the group. If a group is stereotyped as dishonest, for example, we tend to apply that stereotype to all members of that group, regardless of individual differences. Third, when we use negative stereotypes to interpret the behaviour of individuals within a group, this further impedes intercultural communication by reinforcing those negative stereotypes. Such negative stereotyping can become a self-fulfilling prophecy for those who are stereotyped and hence place them at risk. An example of this would be the prevalent stereotype that women are not good at math and science, which in turn may cause women to internalize such beliefs and avoid studying or pursuing math or science related professions.

**Prejudice**

Prejudiceis defined as a rigid attitude based on group membership that predisposes us to think, feel, or act in a negative way toward another person or group. Thinking that Xue, a Chinese student in your class, will get the best grade in the course because, supposedly, all Chinese students excel intellectually or assuming that Alberto, who is Mexican, is working in the United States illegally would be examples of prejudice. Colin is prejudiced and believes

that all white people try to take advantage of people of color. So when his coworker John, who is white, offers to refer a client to Colin, Colin replies, “Forget it—you’re not going to pawn off a deadbeat on me.” When we interact based on stereotypes and prejudice, we risk creating messages that are inaccurate and damage our relationships. When we listen with our stereotypes and prejudices in mind, we may misperceive the intent of the person with whom we are talking.

#### [Cultural blindness](https://dictionary.apa.org/cultural-blindness)

**T**he inability to understand how particular matters might be viewed by people of a different culture because of a rigid adherence to the views, attitudes, and values of one’s own culture or because the perspective of one’s own culture is sufficiently limiting to make it difficult to see alternatives. In this, differences are completely ignored with the opinion that there is no need to worry about other’s cultures

**Cultural imposition**

Cultural imposition is defined as the tendency of an individual or a group to believe that their cultural values and beliefs should be dominant. That is why these people attempt to impose their behavioral patterns and values onto others.

**Language**

Language is one of the most obvious barriers to intercultural communication but perhaps not the most fundamental. People who do not share a language or who feel that they have imperfect command of another person’s language may have some difficulties communicating. There is also a possibility of misunderstandings occurring between people when they do not share a common language. However, sharing a common language does not always guarantee understanding. Even speakers of the same language do not have exactly the same understanding of the meanings of the words. Ways in language can be barrier to intercultural communication are problems of vocabulary equivalence, idiomatic equivalence, experiential equivalence and conceptual equivalence (Jandt, 2001). Lack of vocabulary equivalence occurs when there are not words in one language that correspond precisely with the meaning of words in another. Idiomatic equivalence can cause communication problems because although native speakers understand the meaning of an idiom, they can be very difficult for a non-native to understand and translated directly as they can be either bizarre or meaningless.