

## **Assessment of the Socio-perceptive Component of Intercultural Competence: A Pilot Study of Russian Students' View of Americans**

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### **Abstract**

This article describes a pilot study of changes in Russian students' stereotyped views of Americans resulting from their involvement in intercultural interaction. Exactness of perception of an intercultural communication partner is considered to be an index of the socio-perceptive component of intercultural competence (Kupavskaya, 2008; Sadokhin, 2009). This index indicates the effectiveness of students' participation in the Global Understanding course (Chia, Poe, & Yang, 2011). Seven students of Ural State Pedagogical University aged 18-20 years old participated in the study. The Global Understanding course, which lasted for four weeks, consisted of intercultural communication between Russian and American students. The students discussed culturally-relevant topics such as college life, cultural traditions, and family, the meaning of life, and stereotypes and prejudices. Each class session included live discussion in small video groups, one-to-one keyboard chat and e-mailing. To assess the shifts in Russian students' views of Americans, the authors employed a projective technique of constructing "Collages" (Minyurova, 2002). This technique enables the researcher to reconstruct a person's subjective attitude to objects and events of the surrounding world in a symbolic form. Russian students made two collages during local classes, one prior to videoconferencing with American students and one a week after. Collages made before the links reflected the following image of American students: attention to physical shape; significance of studies, work, and rest; individualism; comfortable life conditions. The authors used two major characteristics to assess the changes in perception: completeness and personification of images. The paper discusses reasons why the hypothesized changes were not statistically significant.

### **Introduction**

The Global Understanding course provides opportunities for global intercultural interaction among students with the help of virtual teaching environment (Chia et al., 2011). According to the World Conference on Higher Education (1998), intercultural communication is a key requirement for the quality of higher education in the XXI century. Since the Global Understanding course is a regular course that is taught in a number of disciplines, there is a practical goal to assess the effectiveness of the course with respect to its relevance to the higher education objectives. Recently the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation recommended a competence-based approach to evaluate the quality of educational programs at universities (Khutorskoi, 2002). Russian researchers of the competence-based

approach state that the idea of competence-based education appeared in 1970s in the USA (Zimnyaya, 2006). The forerunner was Chomsky (1965), who introduced the term “competence” within language theory. Further Hymes (1972) introduced the term “communicative competence” having included the component of social conditions in linguistic competence. Later on the term “competence” was used to describe social skills and habits that are vital for existence in modern society (Hutmacher, 1996; Raven, 1984). Researchers singled out various types of competence for various types of activities: professional-pedagogical competence (Kuzmina, 1990), professional competence (Markova, 1996), and pedagogical competence (Mitina, 1998).

Currently Russian researchers define competence as an integral characteristic which reflects a person’s readiness and ability to effectively carry out activity in a certain subject area. Each academic discipline leads to achievement of a certain level of competence which is considered as an index of the quality of education. The basic type of students’ activity in the Global Understanding course is intercultural interaction. That is why the authors suggest measuring the level of intercultural competence as a means of assessing the effectiveness of the course. The authors’ approach to interpretation of intercultural competence accounts for the choice of measuring procedure. Currently there are many definitions of intercultural competence, and intercultural communication is a multidisciplinary phenomenon which is investigated in philosophy, sociology, psychology, philology, and culturology. There are a number of terms which are close in meaning to the term “intercultural competence” in Russian studies, namely: “ethno-social competence” (Krysko, 2002), “ethno-cultural competence” (Kupavskaya, 2008), “foreign language communicative competence” (Krasilnikova, 2009), “polycultural competence” (Khazova & Khupsarokova, 2009), and “intercultural communicative competence” (Sheina, 2010). Despite the variety in terminology these terms are not independent as they include informatively close components. □ Since intercultural competence is revealed in the process of intercultural interaction, the authors consider as most relevant those models of intercultural competence that take into consideration psychological regularities of communication processes. The concept of communication by Andreeva (2003) may serve as theoretical basis of such a model. Andreeva singles out three aspects within communication structure: informative, interactive, and perceptive. The informative aspect, or communication as such, consists of information exchange between interlocutors. The interactive aspect amounts to exchanging knowledge and ideas as well as actions. The perceptive aspect implies perception and mutual understanding between partners (Andreeva, 2003). In American and European social psychology, the corresponding term for social perception is “social cognition” (Andreeva, 1999; Bruner, 1974).

Similar to Andreeva’s (1999, 2003) approach to the structure of communication, the authors single out three aspects in intercultural competence, namely, informative, interactive, and socio-perceptive. Informative competence is defined as the skills to use verbal and non-verbal means for rendering information, and includes knowledge of vocabulary and grammar (which corresponds to Chomsky’s (1965) “linguistic competence”); knowledge of culturally-conditioned meaning of non-verbal means; and use of verbal and non-verbal means to formulate utterances corresponding to the communicative goal. Socio-perceptive competence includes skills of adequate assessment of the interlocutor’s psychological characteristics, awareness of

influence of ethnic stereotypes on the assessment of the interlocutor; interpretation and anticipation of the reasons for their behavior; and awareness of how the interlocutor assesses you as a partner. Interactive competence is connected with coordination of actions in the process of communication, namely social norms existing in this culture, skills to manage communicative interaction (to initiate conversation, stress respect for the interlocutor) (Sheina, 2010); and skills to regulate one's emotional state for overcoming the language barrier.

Elements of informative and interactive aspects of intercultural competence are constituent parts of intercultural competence models offered by linguists (Hymes, 1972). However, exact perception, assessment and understanding of a partner are crucial for successful communication as well (Kupavskaya, 2008; Sadokhin, 2009). That is why it is essential to include the socio-perceptive aspect in communicative competence structure. Sadokhin (2009) singles out socio-cultural, communicative and linguistic aspects of intercultural competence. One of the components of the socio-cultural aspect is knowledge and understanding of peculiarities of a partners' lifestyle, their national-psychological characteristics. Kupavskaya (2008) includes components dealing with social perception and social cognition in cognitive aspect of ethno-cultural competence. They are the ability to adequately categorize and interpret peculiarities of both one's own culture and a partner's culture.

At the first stages of intercultural communication participants base their perception and assessment of their partners on ethnic stereotypes, which are simplified schematic images of ethnic groups. Ethnic stereotypes include general typical characteristics of representatives of an ethnic group which make them different from another group. Such stereotypes form expectations regarding interaction with representatives of the ethnic group. Since particular representatives of an ethnic group demonstrate various degrees of stereotype characteristics, the expectations may collapse. This may result in misunderstanding or even disappointment (Stephanenko, 1999). Presumably, misunderstanding is more probable if stereotypes have been formed not as a result of immediate intercultural interaction but based on information received from secondary sources. The authors suggest that immediate intercultural interaction should lead to specification of ethnic stereotypes: some characteristics may be excluded and new characteristics may be included in a stereotype. Enhancing exactness of ethnic stereotypes promotes better understanding of a partner's behavior and consequently contributes to intercultural competence development. Besides, the authors suppose that immediate intercultural interaction may change the direction of a stereotype, making it more favorable. Direction of an ethnic stereotype is mainly defined by immediate contact with particular representatives of a given ethnic group rather than by relationships between the two ethnic groups.

Thus, the authors suggest that exactness of assessing a partner in intercultural communication is an important component of the socio-perceptive aspect of intercultural competence. Since exactness of assessing a partner depends on content and direction of an ethnic stereotype, it is logical to use methods of investigation of ethnic stereotypes to study the socio-perceptive aspect of intercultural competence. Traditionally, to investigate stereotypes (ethnic, professional, sex, and age groups) two types of methods are used: 1) control list of adjectives, where participants of the research are offered a list of personal

characteristics among which they should choose five most typical of the target group (Katz & Braly, 1933); and 2) psycho-semantic methods (participants of the research are offered a set of scales (from – 3 to + 3); the poles of the scales represent opposite characteristics, e.g. sociable-reserved. According to the scale participants evaluate most typical characteristics of the group (Petrenko, 1988). However, these methods have a number of limitations in their use. Firstly, they are aimed at assessing only personal characteristics. An image of a group may include other objects which are associated with the culture. Secondly, the procedure of direct assessment leads to distortions since it requires immediate expression of attitudes toward another group. Thirdly, verbal techniques enable the researcher to assess only consciously realized aspects of experience with respect to another culture. To overcome these limitations qualitative methods are employed in social-psychological research.

Qualitative methods are aimed at a more complete investigation of phenomenological images of the phenomenon under study. As distinct from quantitative methods, they are characterized as non-standardized ones (Melnikova, 1994). The main aim of qualitative methods is to access values and attitudes that the respondent may not be aware of, and to investigate a broad spectrum of ideas, emotional reactions, and personal meanings regarding the object under study (Bogomolova, Nelnikova, & Folomeeva, 1994). The “Collage” technique belongs to qualitative methods. It was based on a technique taken from the arts. This technique consists of choosing materials and arranging them together into a new form. In psychology, the “Collage” technique is traditionally used as an art-therapy method to work with subjective ideas and experience. It is based on a psychodynamic approach (Kopytin, 1999). “Collage” has also been used to investigate a person’s image of the world (Minyurova, 2002). The methodological base for using “Collage” to investigate a person’s image of the world is interpretation of an image as a “perceptive utterance about the world” (Petrenko, 1975).

The “Collage” technique amounts to the following procedure. Respondents are asked to make an individual collage on the topic “I in the World”, using photos and pictures from magazines and newspapers. Such collages reflect subjective perception of the world in symbolic form. Visual images chosen for the collage reveal the actual subjective attitudes of respondents to the world and themselves (Minyurova, 2002). After making collages, respondents are asked to write a commentary answering the question “What does it mean for me?” Commentaries make it possible to clarify the meaning of subjective attitudes. In social psychology research, the “Collage” technique has certain advantages over psychological drawing techniques. While making a collage, respondents use ready-made material from mass media which reflects group ideas and allows respondents to investigate common tendencies with respect to the object under study (Minyurova, 2002). At the same time, the “Collage” technique has limitations which are typical for all projective techniques. Projective techniques are considered poor psychometric tools because of low reliability and inconsistency in data interpretation. Enhancing validity and reliability of projective techniques may be possible with the use of an empirical scheme for interpretation and qualitative-quantitative methods of data processing (for example, content-analysis).

Stereotypes about other ethnic groups may be viewed as part of a subjective image of the world. That is why the “Collage” technique may be used to investigate stereotypes, but with modified instructions. The “Collage” technique gives an opportunity to investigate changes in stereotypes before and after interaction with particular representatives of another ethnic group (with the use of Internet-based technologies). The authors hypothesized that the content of stereotypes should become more exact. The authors expected the two changes: 1) increased complexity of the content of stereotypes on account of including new characteristics, 2) greater “personification” of stereotypes on account of increase of human images and decrease of symbolic objects associated with the culture under study. More exact view of another ethnic group is considered by the authors as an index of development of socio-perceptive aspect of intercultural competence. A more exact image of another ethnic group forms more realistic expectations regarding the behavior of representatives of this group, thus, providing more favorable conditions for attaining understanding in intercultural communication.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A pilot study of Russian students' views of American students involved 7 students who took the Global Understanding course. The students were 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in the Foreign Languages Department and Psychology Department at Ural State Pedagogical University. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years old. The students did not have prior experience in such intercultural projects. American students were from East Carolina University. The interaction lasted for four weeks (March-April 2012). Each class session included live discussion in small video groups, one-to-one keyboard chat and e-mailing within given topics.

### **Procedure**

The authors suggested that communication with particular representatives of another culture would lead to changes in the stereotypes about that culture. Since the USA was a partner-country, the study was aimed at investigation of Russian students' views on Americans. To study the characteristics of a partner's image, the technique “Collage” was used (Minyurova, 2002). The students were given the following instructions: “Now each of you will have a chance to do an interesting, creative activity. In front of you there is a sheet of Whatman paper, magazines, pencils, scissors, glue. You have 40-60 minutes to make a collage on the following topic ‘An American Student: How do I View Them’. Relate to your life experience, knowledge, feelings. Each of you is allowed to work at your own pace, putting on the sheet of paper everything you find necessary and anywhere you like. While working, try not to discuss what you are going to do”.

The first collage was made prior to intercultural interaction. The second collage was made a week after the last link day. After the collage was finished, students were instructed to number every element of their collages. Further, they evaluated the elements of their collages which introduced human images using five scales. Scale names corresponded to the five basic human factors, the so-called “Big Five” personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992): 1) neuroticism, N, 2) extraversion, E, 3)

openness to experience, O, 4) agreeableness, A, and 5) conscientiousness, C. Instead of “neuroticism” the authors used the polar term “emotional stability”, which seems to be more comprehensible for students not majoring in psychology. The students used a five-point scale (from 1 - characteristic is not expressed to 5 – characteristic is clearly expressed). A scaling procedure was used to investigate the subjective meaning of separate elements of the collages.

## Assessment

To evaluate the results, the authors used a content analysis procedure. Content analysis is a method designed to transfer qualitative information into the language of figures. The aim of this pilot study was to investigate changes in perception of partners during intercultural communication. Categories for the content analysis were identified by the authors from the visual images displayed on the collages. The authors realize that this approach decreases the degree of generalization of the results. The authors calculated frequency of occurrence for each category, counting all instances across the collages.

Having studied the contents of collages made before and after intercultural interaction, the authors identified three types of object classes (A—people, B—objects, C—words, phrases) and their subclasses. A list of subclasses is provided in Table 1 in the results section. Then the authors calculated frequency of occurrence for each class and subclass in the collages made before and after intercultural interaction. The authors used two additional criteria: general number of images in a collage and proportion of people in the images. The first criterion reflects completeness of respondents’ perception of the group under study. Interpretation of the second criterion is debatable. In the authors’ opinion, increase in the proportion of people in comparison with the proportion of inanimate objects confirms changes in the perception of another group. Symbolic objects are an abstract characteristic of other cultures in general. Human images reflect more concrete images of people constituting a cultural group. That is why the authors think that an increase in the proportion of people in the images may be considered as transfer from a more abstract to a more concrete perception of another culture group. Such a result is viewed as a logical consequence of immediate personal interaction with representatives of a certain culture group.

## Results

Table 1 lists the frequency of occurrence for all the coded categories in the collages. The general number of objects and images ranged from 3 to 22 ( $M = 11.3$ ,  $SD = 6.3$ ) before intercultural interaction and from 5 to 17 ( $M = 9.4$ ,  $SD = 3.8$ ) after intercultural interaction. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for two related groups showed that the average number of objects and images before and after the course were not significantly different ( $p = 0.2$ ). The authors suggested that the number of objects in collages might be interpreted as completeness of perception (in the present study – perception of American students). The authors expected an increase in this index as a result of the enriching experience of immediate personal intercultural communication. Perhaps this indicator requires another approach to its interpretation. If collages are considered as utterances in a symbolic language, then the general number of images in the collages may be interpreted as an indicator of

individual “speech” productivity, which is probably a stable personality characteristic independent from situational influences.

Proportion of people in the images in the collages ranged from 0.4 to 1 ( $M = 0.53$ ,  $SD = 0.22$ ) before intercultural interaction and from 0.22 to 0.88 ( $M = 0.64$ ,  $SD = 0.23$ ) after intercultural interaction. This difference was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.4$ ).

Table 1  
*Frequency of Representation of Categories and Subclasses in the Collages Before and After Intercultural Interaction in the Global Understanding Course*

Category	Frequency of Occurrence	
	Before the course	After the course
<b>A — people</b>	<b>49 (47.1%)</b>	<b>60 (62.5%)</b>
A1 — spheres of activity	17 (34.7%)	22 (36.7%)
A11 — intellectual activity (studies, work)	4 (23.5%)	6 (27.3%)
A12 — sport, fitness	6 (35.3%)	3 (13.6%)
A13 — party, gathering	4 (23.5%)	8 (36.4%)
A14 — walk	1 (5.9%)	3 (13.6%)
A15 — food	2 (11.8%)	2 (9.1%)
A2 — character of interaction	32 (65.3%)	38 (63.3%)
A21 — group	7 (21.9%)	13 (34.2%)
A22 — pair	4 (12.5%)	2 (5.3%)
A23 — single	21 (65.6%)	23 (60.5%)
<b>B — objects</b>	<b>40 (38.5%)</b>	<b>22 (22.9%)</b>
B1 — computer (and accessories)	3 (7.5%)	1 (4.55%)
B2 — audio- and video equipment	4 (10%)	2 (9.1%)
B3 — luxuries	3 (7.5%)	1 (4.55%)
B4 — sport equipment	0	2 (9.1%)
B5 — books	0	1 (4.55%)
B6 — toys	1 (2.5%)	1 (4.55%)
B7 — food	7 (17.5%)	0
B8 — interior objects	13 (32.5%)	1 (4.55%)
B9 — cosmetics, perfumery	2 (5%)	3 (13.6%)
B10 — animals	2 (5%)	0
B11 — architectural buildings	2 (5%)	2 (9.1%)

B12 — symbolic objects	33 (7.5%)	8 (36.4%)
C — words, phrases	<b>15 (14.4%)</b>	<b>14 (14.6%)</b>
C1 — in the Russian language	15 (14.4%)	5 (35.7%)
C11 — personality's characteristics	8 (53.3%)	4 (80%)
C12 — spheres of activity	5 (33.3%)	1 (20%)
C13 — preferences	2 (13.3%)	0
C2 — in the English language	0	9 (64.3%)
C21 — personality's characteristics	0	2 (22.2%)
C22 — spheres of activity	0	5 (55.6%)
C23 — preferences	0	2 (22.2%)

When the work on collages was over, students were asked to number elements of their collages in category A (people) and to scale them according to the “Big Five” factors. The students used a five-point scale (from 1 - characteristic is not expressed to 5 – characteristic is clearly expressed). Table 2 contains average values for each factor before and after intercultural interaction. Emotional stability and openness to experience were rated highest and agreeableness was rated lowest before intercultural communication. After the intercultural interactions, the agreeableness ratings increased substantially.

Table 2  
*Average values of evaluation of class A – people elements of collages*

Scale	Average Ratings for “Big 5”	
	Before the course	After the course
Emotional stability	4.3	4.7
Extraversion	3.9	4.4
Openness to experience	4.3	4.2
Agreeableness	2.8	3.7
Conscientiousness	3.9	3.4

## Discussion

The goal of the authors' pilot study was investigation of changes in Russian students' stereotyped views of Americans resulting from their involvement in intercultural interaction. The authors viewed this objective as part of a more general perspective which was to evaluate changes in intercultural competence. Level of competence is considered an integral index of student learning in a course or program (Khutorskoi, 2002; Zimnyaya, 2006). Since the Global Understanding course is based on intercultural interaction, the criterion of effective participation in the course is level of intercultural competence. In the authors' opinion, there are two reasons to expect an



increase in intercultural competence for students taking the Global Understanding course (Chia et al., 2011). Firstly, it is enrichment of personal experience through immediate interaction with representatives of other cultural groups. Secondly, the discussion focused on questions common and significant for every culture (college life, cultural traditions, family, the meaning of life, and stereotypes and prejudices).

Since intercultural competence reflects a person's ability to effectively realize intercultural communication, the authors employed Andreeva's (2003) model of communication as a basis for distinguishing aspects of intercultural competence. They are informative, socio-perceptive and interactive aspects (Andreeva, 2003). The authors emphasized the socio-perceptive component because exact perception, evaluation and understanding of a partner is a necessary condition for successful communication (Kupavskaya, 2008; Sadokhin, 2009). In the beginning of intercultural interaction, perception and evaluation of a partner is based on stereotypes. Stereotypes are simplified and generalized ideas about other ethnic groups. The authors singled out two points of scientific interest: 1) investigation of Russian students' views of American students; 2) changes in these views as a result of intercultural interaction. To answer the two questions, the authors used a "Collage" technique (Minyurova, 2002). A collage reflects a person's subjective attitudes toward various objects and events in a symbolic form. Russian students made collages on the topic "An American Student: How do I View Them". Use of the "Collage" technique enabled the authors to analyze visual images which reflect Russian students' views of American students. To assess changes in perception, the students produced collages twice, before intercultural interaction with American partners and a week after the last link. The information retrieved from the collages was analyzed with the help of content-analysis.

In order to investigate Russian students' view of American students, the authors analyzed the frequency of occurrence of different classes and subclasses found within the images (Table 1). In collages produced before intercultural interaction, the frequency of occurrence of objects in class "A-people" and class "B-objects" did not differ (47.1% and 38.5% respectively). In collages produced after intercultural interaction, the frequency of occurrence of objects in class "A-people" was greater than for class "B-objects" (62.5% and 22.9% respectively). The authors consider these images of people and objects as an index which reflects perception of other cultural groups. Inanimate objects reflect abstract ideas about another culture in general, whereas images of people reflect more particular ideas about people constituting the cultural group. In the present research, changes before and after intercultural interaction were not statistically significant. Perhaps it might be due to the limited sampling. However, the authors consider that there are some positive changes in perception of another cultural group regarding specificity and personification.

Frequency of occurrence of class "C-words, phrases" remained the same. The fact that the number of words and phrases in English in collages after intercultural communication increased does not immediately relate to characteristics of a partner. However, that may confirm the development of language skills as a result of intercultural interaction.

In collages before intercultural communication, the most frequently occurring objects were the following: A12—sport, fitness (35.3%), A11—intellectual activity (studies, work) (23.5%), A13—party, gathering (23.5%), A23—single (images of separate people) (65.6%), B8—interior objects (32.5%), C11—personality's characteristics (53.3%). These results demonstrate that stereotyped views Russian students have of Americans includes such characteristics as importance of keeping fit, significance of studies, work and rest; individualism; and comfortable living conditions. Verbal means of expressing characteristics of personality were noted only in two collages. That is why the authors consider them as an indicator of individual peculiarities of respondents.

In collages after intercultural communication, the most frequently occurring objects were the following: A13—party, gathering (36.4%), A11—intellectual activity (studies, work) (27.3%), A23—single (images of separate people) (60.5%), B12—symbolic objects (36.4%), C11—personality's characteristics (80%), C22—spheres of activity (55.6%). The most significant changes were increases for subclasses B12 and C22. Symbolic objects (B12), including ones connected with MacDonal's brand, reflect stereotyped images of American preferences regarding fast food. Presence of objects of subclass C22 in the collages confirms activity in various spheres of life.

Thus, could the authors conclude that Russian students' views of Americans became less stereotyped as a result of their experience of intercultural communication? In order to answer this question it is necessary to carry out additional research to investigate stereotyped views of a greater number of participants. As a reference standard the authors used description of stereotyped views of Americans provided in psychological research (Krysko, 2002). Stereotypes of Americans include such ideas as enterprise and initiative, energetic assertion, self-reliance, value of life success, honesty, kind-heartedness, directness in showing positive emotions, being law-abiding, and love for sport (Krysko, 2002). Among the enumerated characteristics, the "Collage" technique allowed the researchers to single out only love for sport (subclass A12—sport, fitness) in collages before intercultural communication. Perhaps one of the reasons is that the majority of characteristics within a stereotype are abstract. It might have been difficult for respondents to find corresponding visual images. That is why the authors cannot provide a definitive conclusion regarding the degree of stereotyped views that Russian students have of American students, nor for the changes resulting from intercultural interaction.

In order to investigate subjective meaning, the students were asked to evaluate elements of their collages which introduced human images using the "Big Five" personality scales (Costa & McCrae, 1992). As Table 2 indicates, before intercultural communication the most significant were "emotional stability" (4.3) and "openness to experience" (4.3), and the least significant was "agreeableness" (2.8). After intercultural communication, the most significant were "emotional stability" (4.7) and "extraversion" (4.4), and the least significant was "conscientiousness" (3.4). The most noticeable increase was for "agreeableness" (from 2.8 to 3.7). It is possible to suppose that emotional stability (calmness, self-confidence, insensitivity) is a stable characteristic of American students as viewed by Russian students. The increase for "agreeableness" is a result of a particular intercultural communicative situation.

In the course of the research the authors faced a number of limitations regarding the use of the “Collage” technique as an instrument of assessment of a socio-perceptive component of intercultural competence. The first limitation is alternative interpretations of the results. The second limitation is less completeness of the results in comparison with verbal methods. Most of the characteristics are abstract ones and difficult for visualization. A technical limitation is processing of superfluous visual information

The authors are planning to design a more compact procedure for evaluating level of the socio-perceptive component of intercultural competence as an indicator of effective participation in the Global Understanding project. The authors consider ability to exactly evaluate a partner taking into consideration not generalized stereotyped ideas but individual manifestations of the partner as a main aspect of the socio-perceptive component. The authors single out a number of reasons why Russian students' views of Americans did not change. The first reason is connected with the limitations regarding the use of the “Collage” technique mentioned above. The second reason is a limited number of participants. The third reason is stability and rigidity of ethnic stereotypes to new information (Stephanenko, 1999), that is why it is hardly possible to anticipate drastic changes within a relatively short period of time. On this basis the authors are planning to move from evaluating changes in characteristics of a particular group to evaluating a more universal indicator connected with ability to exactly assess a partner from other culture. For example, one of the possible indicators is a decrease in ethnocentric attitudes. In that case it might be advisable to prolong the interval between initial and final measurement and carry them out in the beginning and in the very end of the course.

### **Conclusion**

Before intercultural communication Russian students' views of Americans included such characteristics as importance of keeping fit; significance of studies, work and rest; individualism; and comfortable living conditions. A stable characteristic which was evaluated as an overt one before and after intercultural interaction was emotional stability which means calmness, self-confidence, insensitivity. No changes regarding decreases in stereotyped views that Russian students have of Americans was discovered. The supposition about increase in completeness of ideas resulting from experience of intercultural interaction was not supported. The tendency regarding increases in personification and exactness of Russian students' view of Americans was revealed.

To summarize, the “Collage” technique does not allow the researcher to receive complete and exact data regarding respondents' ability to exactly assess a partner in intercultural communication. The authors are planning to investigate a more generalized index connected with ability to exactly assess a partner regardless their cultural identity. Moreover, a more compact method of evaluating such an indicator should be designed. However, the authors believe that assessment of the socio-perceptive component as well as students' intercultural competence in general may be included in evaluation of activities in the Global Understanding class.

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