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Focus on Brazil: Country images held by Malaysian learners of Brazilian Portuguese

Foco no Brasil: imagens do país por estudantes malaios de Português do Brasil

ABSTRACT - This study explores images about Brazil held by learners of Brazilian Portuguese in a big public university in Malaysia. It employs a mixed methods approach for this purpose. In the qualitative component of the study, the students' images about Brazil were explored by analyzing their responses to an open-ended question and grouping the resultant images into categories. In the quantitative strand, favourability of the images about Brazil was accessed using the ratings that each respondent had assigned to his or her images about Brazil. The findings revealed that references to football and sporting events made up the largest share in the kaleidoscope of images about Brazil. For the most part, the students' images about the target language country, culture and people were highly positive. At the same time, the findings indicated that the students' mental pictures about Brazil were limited to popularly held country stereotypes. The article concludes with a discussion on pedagogical implications of the findings.

Keywords: country image, foreign language education, Brazilian Portuguese, foreign language learners, mixed methods, applied linguistics.

RESUMO - Este estudo focaliza as imagens que aprendizes de Português do Brasil têm sobre esse país. Os participantes do estudo estudam em uma grande universidade pública da Malásia. O estudo emprega a abordagem de métodos mistos. No componente qualitativo da pesquisa, as imagens dos alunos sobre o Brasil foram exploradas através da análise de suas respostas a uma pergunta aberta e através do agrupamento das imagens em categorias. No componente quantitativo, o caráter favorável das imagens sobre o Brasil foi medido usando-se o valor que cada participante atribuiu as suas imagens sobre o Brasil. Os resultados revelaram que as referências ao futebol e a eventos esportivos constituíram a maior parte do calidoscópio de imagens sobre o país. Em sua maioria, as imagens sobre o povo, a cultura e o país de sua língua alvo foram altamente positivas. Ao mesmo tempo, os resultados indicaram que as imagens mentais dos estudantes estavam limitadas a estereótipos populares sobre o Brasil. O artigo é encerrado com uma discussão sobre as implicações pedagógicas dos resultados.

Palavras-chave: imagem do país, ensino de língua estrangeira, Português do Brasil, aprendizes de línguas estrangeiras, métodos mistos, linguística aplicada.

Introduction

Language learners' perceptions and images about the target language (TL) country, culture and native speakers have generated considerable interest among researchers in the academic fields of applied linguistics and foreign language education. Scholars and educators recognize the fact that students bring to the language classroom a variety of images about the TL country, culture and the speaking communities. The problem is that these images are often stereotypical and are limited to cultural clichés. As Steele and Suozzo (1994, *in* Allen, 2004, p. 235) have noted, "Unless students are encountering an absolutely exotic culture, they already reach the classroom with an array of stereotypes…" These stereotypes are acquired by people since early childhood via various channels including the mass media, family, school, peers and friends.

Generally speaking, studies on language learners' stereotypes about the TL country and culture have been done in the contexts of teaching German (Abrams, 2002; Schulz and Haerle, 1995; Taylor, 1977; Webber, 1990), Spanish (Vande Berg, 1990), French (Allen, 2004; Steele and Suozzo, 1994) and English (Kim, 2010; Peng, 2010). More recently, research interest has extended to the learners of Mandarin (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2013). However, no available research studies on country image have been

conducted in the context of the Portuguese language class-room. The present study addresses this gap and explores perceptions about Brazil held by the learners of Brazilian Portuguese in Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to explore the images that Malaysian learners of Brazilian Portuguese have about the TL country and to assess the favourability of these images. The questions it raises are:

(i) What stereotypical images about Brazil do the learners of Brazilian Portuguese hold?
(ii) Are these images positive or negative?

To answer these research questions the present study adopts a mixed methods approach which involves collecting, analyzing and integrating both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2003; Dörnyei, 2011). This study is also interdisciplinary in nature. As Kramsch (2000, p. 317) has noted, research in applied linguistics is positioned "at the confluence of several disciplines and at the intersection of theory and practice" (Kramsch, 2000, p. 317). The implications of this view are that, firstly, a study in applied linguistics will be interdisciplinary by nature and, secondly, it will attempt to establish a bridge between theory and practice of language teach-ing and learning. Regarding the current study, it draws on the academic field of social psychology, which is renowned for its rigorous methodology and techniques for exploring stereotypes and for quantitatively assessing stereotype favourability.

Scholars and educators have long advocated that language and culture be taught in tandem in the language classroom because they are inseparable (Weiss, 1979). This study offers some insights on how the knowledge of the students' stereotypes about the TL country, culture and speaking community can inform empirically-driven decisions about teaching culture in the foreign language classroom.

Language learners' country stereotypes: Theoretical, methodological and pedagogical implications

Exploring language learners' perceptions and stereotypical views about the target language (TL) coun-try and culture is bound to have important theoretical, methodological and practical implications for the fields of applied linguistics and foreign language education. From the theoretical perspective, studying stereotypes involves studying attitudes. A close linkage between stereotypes and attitudes has been noted by Walter Lippmann who has introduced the concept of stereotypes into the Social Sciences. Lippmann (1965 [1922], p. 64) proposed that stereotypes are "highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them". Social psychologists recognize feel-ings as "the most essential part of attitude" and define

attitudes as "a person's general feeling of favorableness or unfavorableness toward some stimulus object" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 216).

In the field of applied linguistics, the importance of language learners' attitudes toward the TL culture and speaking community has gained a wide recognition since Gardner and Lambert (1959) empirically proved that such attitudes have an impact on language learning motivation. In Gardner's (2001, p. 1) own words, the important question is whether "someone could really learn a second language if they did not like the group who spoke the language". In the contexts where direct contact between the language learners and the TL speakers is lacking or non-existent, the learners' cultural knowledge in the form of stereotypes often serves as a motivating factor for learning the foreign language (Dlaska, 2000) and shapes the students' attitudes. Motivation has been recognized as a key element in the language learning pro-cess. Language learners are assumed to be influenced by various motivational factors, among them instrumental factors, which include getting good grades, fulfilling uni-versity requirements or enhancing one's job prospects, and integrative factors that denote positive attitudes toward and genuine interest in the target culture. It has been argued that the presence of integrative motivation leads to better learning outcomes, both linguistic, such as language proficiency, and non-linguistic, such as a deeper understanding of the TL culture (Gardner, 1985). Based on these theoretical underpinnings, exploring language learners' stereotypes about the TL country may provide useful insights into the students' attitudes and their motivational inclinations.

From the methodological perspective, language learners' attitudes toward the TL culture and speakers have been traditionally incorporated into the integrative motivation and measured on Likert-type scales by a set of questions that were either directly borrowed or modified from the instrument "The Attitude/Motivation Test Bat-tery" developed by Gardner and his colleagues (Gardner, 1985). However, a set of questions pre-determined by the researcher and a quantitative approach may not be adequate for assessing cultural beliefs and attitudes of the language learners. For example, Kormos and Csizér (2007) observed that standard questionnaires on language learning motivation may not be applicable for measur-ing attitudes in situations where direct contact between the foreign language learners and the target culture are lacking or non-existent. As they have argued, attitude scales used in the previous studies are not universally applicable because "it is impossible to foretell what at-titudes L2 learners might show in these limited personal contact situations" (Kormos and Csizér, 2007, p. 242). To solve this dilemma, researchers in social psychology recommend using a free-response approach to elicit the data on cognitive representations of other cultures in

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the contexts where direct contact between social or cultural groups of people is lacking (Ehrlich and Rinehart, 1965; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). This would allow the respondents to express their own cultural beliefs and attitudes instead of endorsing a set of items prepared by the researcher and which they themselves may not share. Also, the free-response approaches permit reporting and capturing the characteristics, features and traits that are the most salient and most strongly associated with the object under study.

Several studies in the field of applied linguistics and language education have used a free- response approach to examine country images and stereotypes held by language learners (e.g., Schulz and Haerle, 1995; Vande Berg, 1990). These studies have provided useful insights into the language learners' knowledge and conceptions about the TL countries, cultures and native speakers. However, some limitations can be found in their methodological approaches: the researchers relied entirely on qualitative methods which did not allow an empirical assessment of the language learners' country attitudes. A rare exception has been a recent mixed methods study by Nikitina and Furuoka (2013) on cultural stereotypes about China held by learners of Mandarin; the current study will adopt a similar methodological approach.

From the pedagogical perspective, knowledge of language learners' stereotypical views and attitudes about the TL country, culture and speaking community is important because it can help the language instructors to make informed decisions about the content of the cultural component of the language program. Researchers and language educators recognize that enhancing students' cultural awareness and intercultural competence is one of the important outcomes of any foreign language program (Byram and Kramsch, 2008; Dlaska, 2000; Schulz and Haerle, 1995; Webber, 1990). Byram and Kramsch (2008) and Dlaska (2000) have argued that language educators will inevitably encounter various kinds of learner stereotypes about the TL country, culture and native speakers and they will need to address these stereotypes in the classroom.

Literature review

Country image and stereotypes

Mental imagery plays a key role in the processes of human cognition, memory as well as information retention and management. Stereotypes occupy a special place among the mental images. The etymology of the word 'stereotype', which combines the Greek words *stereo-s* ("solid") and *typos* ("a model"), conveys the meaning of "something continued or constantly repeated without change" (Oxford English Dictionary 1991, p. 651).

Lippmann (1965 [1922], p. 3) described stereotypes as "pictures in our heads" and argued that stereotypes are culturally bound:

> 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, 1965 [1922], p. 55).

Lippmann's treatise on stereotypes and the ensuing empirical studies have demonstrated that stereotypes can be false or true, positive or negative and they can be held individually or shared by a group of people. Country images and stereotypes have been extensively investigated in various academic fields and disciplines including the social sciences (Bar-Tal, 1997), tourism and marketing (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993), literature and culture studies (Beller and Leerssen, 2007), applied linguistics and foreign language education (Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Byram and Kramsch, 2008; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2013; Schulz and Haerle, 1995). The focus of these studies varies according to the aims of the researchers and the academic discipline. For example, several researchers in the academic fields of tourism and business are interested in identifying the dimensions along which the country images are formed (e.g., Brijs *et al.*, 2011; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). In their seminal study, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) identified a "common-unique" dimension in the individual's perceptions of a foreign country. Country images at the "common" end of the continuum pertain to general features and descriptors that are commonly used in relation to some country, such as "nice scenery", "cold climate", "located in Asia". In contrast, "unique" images make reference to specific sites, events, phenomena that exist only in a particular country. Some examples of such unique images could be "St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow", "the city of Prague" or "the carnival in Rio de Janeiro". In the field of applied linguistics, Nikitina and Furuoka (2013) have argued that the presence of unique country images among the language learners' stereotypes about the TL country may indicate the depth and width of their knowledge about the TL country and culture.

Language learners' stereotypes about the target language country, culture and native speakers

Language researchers and educators have long recognized that students bring a variety of stereotypes about the TL culture into the language classroom. As Dlaska (2000, p. 260) aptly put it, "Stereotypes are always already there". This should not be viewed in a negative light because the stereotypes can be valid, positive and even reflect the emic perspective of the TL culture. Besides, as noted by Dlaska, language learners' stereotypes

about the TL culture can serve as a motivating factor in the process of language learning. Researchers agree that the problem with stereotypes is not their existence but their reductionist nature because they limit the language learners' views to simplistic, trivial and popular notions of the TL culture (Dlaska, 2000; Schulz and Haerle, 1995; Webber, 1990).

For the most part, previous studies on language learners' stereotypes have focused on stereotypical content. In other words, they explored stereotypical images that language learners hold about the TL country, culture and native speakers. Research in the context of German language classroom is especially abundant. A study by Schulz and Haerle (1995) elicited stereotypes about German people and Germany held by American college students. The authors distinguished eight main categories among the students' stereotypes, namely: (i) the Germans' love of beer, (ii) the personal characteristics of the German people, (iii) cars, (iv) the country or language, (v) schooling or culture, (vi) physical attributes, (vii) history or historical events, and (viii) food and eating. Studies by Taylor (1977), Webber (1990) and Abrams (2002) on learners of German in American colleges reported similar findings; the students frequently made statements about the German people's love of beer and also made references to their food, culture (e.g., folklore, classical music), national traits and school system. Various studies have concluded that language learners' images about Germany and the Germans are highly stereotypical.

In a similar vein, studies among learners of French and Spanish have likewise indicated that students' perceptions of the target cultures are highly stereotypical. For example, the language learners in Allen's (2004) study cited popularly held stereotypes about the French typically concerning their *joie de vivre,* independence, and their pride in all things French. Vande Berg's (1990) investigation of TL country stereotypes revealed that the perceptions of American students about the Spanish people were limited to notions about the personal traits and the perceived typical behaviour (e.g., the males are macho, the women wear conservative black) as well as the references to food. A search of literature on language learners' impressions of Brazil has revealed a lack of such reports especially in the scholarly academic journals. Several web sites are devoted to popular stereotypes about various countries, including Brazil. According to these sites, the prevalent stereotypical images about Brazil relate to "carnival", "samba" and "football" (National Stereotype, 2013).

Regarding language learners' attitudes toward the TL country, culture and people as reflected in their stereotypes, Schulz and Haerle (1995) found that for the most part, the students' images about Germany and the Germans were positive. However, this conclusion was based on a heuristic approach and did not rely on a quantitative assessment of the images provided by the students. This may have caused some ambivalence in the interpretation of the results. For example, the authors classified the descriptors "*stolz"* ("proud") or "*mit viel Gefühl*" ("with much feelings", "emotional") as positive images. However, the respondents who provided these images could have evaluated them as neutral or even negative. To avoid this ambiguity, Nikitina and Furuoka (2013) in their study of Mandarin learners' stereotypes about China asked the respondents to rate each image on a scale ranging from −3 (for the most negative images) to +3 (for the most positive images).

An important study on stereotypes in the context of the foreign language classroom was conducted by Byram and Kramsch (2008). The authors identified three kinds of stereotypes. Firstly, there are stereotypes that represent important cognitive models within the TL culture. These stereotypes are rooted in linguistic categories and they shape conventional ways of using the target language. For example, 'self reliance', 'success', 'competition' are important linguistic and cultural categories that permeate various types of discourse in a national culture that places a high premium on individualism and hard work. These stereotypes are not easily recognizable by the people unfamiliar with the TL culture but they are important to know as they provide valuable cultural insights. The second kind of stereotype is a monolithic characterization of the whole people (e.g., 'the Americans are industrious', 'the Brits are reserved' or 'the Russians drink a lot'). These stereotypes often include the cultural clichés about the TL speakers that the students bring into the language classroom. The third kind of stereotype encapsulates "collective national memory" and collective consciousness shared by the members of the TL culture (Byram and Kramsch, 2008, p. 32). These stereotypes are embedded in proverbs, sayings, political slogans and popular catchphrases and they represent important cultural signposts. Byram and Kramsch (2008) suggested that language educators address these stereotypes in the language classroom.

Background to the study

Malaysia is a multiethnic and multicultural country in South-East Asia with a population of almost 30 million people (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013). The main ethnic groups include Malay (50.4%), Chinese (23.7%), Indian (7.1%) and there are various indigenous people. The official language of the country is *Bahasa Malaysia* (the Malay language). Other widely spoken languages are English, various Chinese dialects (e.g., Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien) and Tamil.

Despite there being a considerable geographical and cultural distance between Brazil and Malaysia, both countries share a common point in history, which occurred when the Portuguese colonizers and settlers arrived at

the shores of Malacca in the 16th century. In the course of 500 years the Luso-Portuguese heritage has faded in Malaysia. Some traces of it remain in the presence of a small ethnic group called Kristang[1] and the lexical borrowings from Portuguese. Among these borrowings are such widely-used words as *kereta* (car), *meja* (table), *almari* (cupboard), *bendera* (flag), *mentega* (butter), *garpu* (fork) and *veranda* (veranda) (Muzzi, 2002).

Among the 20 principal public universities in Malaysia, Brazilian Portuguese is taught in only one, namely the University of Malaya (UM) – the location for this study. The university offers both European Portuguese and Brazilian Portuguese classes. The language is offered at elementary levels 1, 2 and 3. Each level is taught during one semester and lasts 14 weeks with 4 contact hours per week. In the semester when this study was conducted, Brazilian Portuguese was offered at Level 1 only.

Method

Participants

Twenty-three students learning Brazilian Portuguese in the University of Malaya participated in this study. There were 17 (73.9%) women and 6 (26.1%) men among the respondents, which is higher than the 63:35 female to male gender ratio in Malaysian public universities. By ethnic background, 18 students (78.3%) were Chinese and 5 students (21.7%) were Malays.

The age of the participants was between 22 and 23 years old. The majority of the respondents (n=22 or 95.6%) were third year students and one student (4.3%) was in her second year. Twenty students (87%) were studying the sciences, specifically, medicine, pharmacy and engineering, while three respondents (13%) were majoring in accountancy and business.

The students were informed that the purpose of the study was to explore country images about Brazil held by language learners.

Data collection and research instrument

Data was collected during a Brazilian Portuguese class in the academic year 2012/2013. In this concurrent mixed methods study, integration of the qualitative and quantitative types of data occurred at the data collection, data analysis and data interpretation stages. Each student was given a form that contained the open-ended question "What images or mental pictures come to your mind when you hear the words 'Brazil' and 'Brazilian'?" The

students were encouraged to write as many words or short phrases as they felt they needed to describe the country. After the students had described their images they were asked to assign a favourability rating to each image on a scale ranging from –2 ("a very negative image") to +2 ("a very positive image"). Finally, the respondents were asked to provide some personal details about themselves, such as age, gender and university major.

Data organization and analysis

In the qualitative component of the data analysis, an inductive approach involving open-coding procedures was used to classify the images into categories (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). In the quantitative part of the analysis the favourability ratings assigned to the images by the students were used to assess the mean value of the main categories of images about Brazil and to calculate the mean value of the images in each individual list.

Data processing techniques in the qualitative part of the analysis included word lists and word counts which are appropriate for analyzing verbatim data consisting of short words and phrases. The word list technique allowed a 'fine-grained' analysis aimed at identifying as many themes or categories in the data as possible (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Firstly, all the answers provided by the students were typed *ad verbatim* together with the ratings that the students assigned to them. Then the images were classified into primary, intermediate and main categories. To do this, the images that were mentioned more than once were grouped together forming the smallest units of the analysis or primary categories. Each of these primary categories was given a label based on the words, phrases or descriptors it contained, such as "Football", "The Olympic Games", "Rio de Janeiro", "Samba", "Beautiful Beaches", and "Beaches". Next, the primary categories that contained semantically close images were joined into intermediate categories and assigned their own labels. For example, the primary categories "Beautiful Beaches" and "Beaches" were grouped together and labeled "Beaches". Following the same logic, the primary categories "Football" and "FIFA World Cup" were joined and formed the intermediate category "Football". This step of the analysis allowed some "condensation" of the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, p. 97). At the same time, it reduced the number of the primary units of the analysis without an excessive reduction of the data, which suited the exploratory nature of this study.

In the next step of the analysis, we joined conceptually close intermediate categories into larger main

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[1] The Kristang, or Malacca Creole Portuguese, are the descendants of the Portuguese colonizers and settlers who occupied the strategic port of Malacca in 1511. These *gente Kristang*, or 'Christian people', married with local women or slaves and by the year 1613, there were 300 married Portuguese male settlers in Malacca (Byrne, 2011, p. 133). Nowadays, some researchers (e.g., Grimes *in* Baxter, 2005, p. 16) estimate that there are 5,000 speakers of the Kristang language in Malaysia though Baxter (1996, p. 309) considers this figure excessive.

categories of images and assigned each category its own label. As Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 94) have observed, the analysis of the qualitative data involves personal judgment as well as "hunches and intuitions" on the part of the researcher when identifying the themes. Also, it requires establishing a logic to be followed in the process of analysis in order to ensure coherence and consistency of the decision making process. We followed the same guiding principles at this stage of the analysis as before: firstly, the groups of images forming a main category must be conceptually close; secondly, we avoided an excessive reduction of the data. For example, the intermediate categories "Football" and "The Olympic Games" were joined into one main category labeled "Football and Sport Events". This label aptly describes the set of images integrated into the main category, particularly since the intermediate category "Football" contained the image "FIFA World Cup" which refers to a sporting event. At the same time, "Culture and Arts" and "Festivals and Dance" were retained as two distinct categories. This is because the category "Culture and Arts" contains general references to "culture", "architecture" and "art and literature" which could be aligned with the concept of 'high culture'. In contrast, the images in the category "Festivals and Dance" allude to popular culture as they include references to "samba dance", "carnival" and "various festivals".

In the quantitative component of the analysis we calculated the mean value (MV) of the images in each main category. To do this, we divided the sum total of the ratings given to all the images in a main category by the number of images in this category. Also, we assessed the mean value of individual images about Brazil held by each participant. For this purpose we calculated the sum total of the ratings given by each student to the images in his or her list and then divided this figure by the number of images in the list.

Findings

Categories of images about Brazil and their favourability

The students provided a total of 144 images (N=144) about Brazil. Of these, 133 (n=133) images could be grouped into primary categories containing at least two images. Eleven (n=11) images could not be grouped with the other images to form a primary category; these images were "amazing country (+2)", "Christian catholic country (0)", "relaxing (+2)", "Malacca (+2)", "fashion (0)", "the 'wave' road (+2)", "the history is related to Malaysian history (–1)", "fire incident in a night club where many people died (–2)", "chaotic streets (–2)", "colourful things (+1)" and "hot country (+1)". These images were assigned the label "Others".

The content analysis yielded 14 main and 35 intermediate categories of images about Brazil. Table 1 shows these categories; it also reports the main categories' mean values that were obtained in the quantitative component of the data analysis. As can be seen in the table, the largest main category was "Football and Sport Events" and it contained 30 images (n=30) while the smallest category "Economy" contained only two (n=2).

Based on the range from –2 to +2 of the favourability rating scale adopted in the present study the lowest possible mean value is –2 while the highest possible one is +2. Among the 14 main categories of the images about Brazil, 10 categories had high positive mean values between 1 and 2 points; two categories (i.e., "Country Size and Location" and "Language") had positive mean values above 0 points and only two categories (i.e., "Economy" and "Crime") had negative mean values. The main category with the highest mean value was "Beach and Ocean"; it included the images "beautiful beaches", "ocean", "surfing" and "sun tanning". Almost all of the images in the category had been given the highest rating +2, which contributed to the category's high mean value (MV=1.82). Brazil as a "Travel Destination" category had the second highest mean value of 1.8 (MV=1.8). It contained such images as "a holiday destination", "a nice place to travel", "(has) many unique places to visit". Next, the students had very positive attitudes toward the images in the "Culture and Arts" category as reflected in a high mean value of this category (MV=1.76). This category, which was the second largest main category of images (n=17), contained such images as "colourful culture", "unique culture", "culture influenced by African and non-Portuguese European cultures", and "amazing art". Some of the respondents made references to architecture (e.g., "colourful buildings", "historical buildings") and the arts (e.g., "arts and literature", "music").

In the "Cities and Sites" category, the prevailing image was "Rio de Janeiro", while considerably fewer references were made to the "Amazon" and "*Cristo Redentor*"; only one respondent wrote "São Paulo city". All the images in this category were assigned positive ratings by the students and its mean value was high at 1.67 (MV=1.67). Although the category "National Flag" had an equally high mean value (MV=1.67), it contained considerably fewer images (n=4). Besides the laconic answer "flag", the students gave such vivid descriptions as "the flag with green and yellow colours" and "Brazilian national flag (strong and beautiful colours)". All the images in this category were positively rated, and only one student failed to provide a favourability rating.

Besides having a high mean value (MV=1.6), "Football and Sport Events" was the largest main category of images (n=30). The most frequent images in this category were "football", "samba football", "street football", and "FIFA World Cup"; less frequently men-

Table 1. Categories of images about Brazil and their mean values.

Main categories	Intermediate categories	Mean value (*MV*)
Beach and Ocean (*n*=11)	Beaches Ocean Surfing	1.82
Travel destination (*n*=5)	Holiday destination Unique sites to visit	1.8
Culture and Arts (*n*=17)	Unique / colourful culture Architecture Art and Literature Music	1.76
Cities and Sites (*n*=12)	Rio de Janeiro Amazon Cristo Redentor	1.67
National Flag (*n*=4)	Flag with strong and beautiful colours	1.67
Football and Sport Events (*n*=30)	Football The Olympic Games	1.6
Nature and Scenery (*n*=5)	Stunning nature Beautiful scenery	1.6
Food (*n*=12)	Various foods Barbeque Hot and spicy meat	1.58
Festivals and Dance (*n*=11)	Carnival Various festivals Samba dance	1.45
People (*n*=10)	Attractive people Friendly people Passionate people	1.3
Language (*n*=5)	Difficult language Brazil shares language with Portugal Language different from Portuguese	0.8
Country Size and Geographical Location (*n*=5)	Big country South America Far from Malaysia	0.6
Economy (*n*=2)	Poorer country	–0.5
Crime (*n*=4)	Crime Drug smuggling	–1.5

tioned were "Olympics 2016" and "various sport events". The overwhelming majority of the images had positive ratings, +1 or +2. There was only one image with the neutral rating "0" and one image with a negative rating –1. Also, it should be noted that the only Brazilian person mentioned by name among the 144 images provided by the students was found in this category: the image referred to "Ronaldo, the world cup footballer (retired)". The next main category, "Nature and Scenery" had the same mean value (*MV*=1.6) as "Football and Sports Events". All the images included in this category had positive ratings and referred to the "stunning nature", "conservation areas" and "beautiful scenery" of Brazil. The main category "Food" had the mean value 1.58 (*MV*=1.58). The stu-

dents made references to the "barbeque food" and "hot and spicy meat". One student provided the name of a Brazilian dish ("*feijoada*") and it was the only image with the neutral rating "0" among otherwise positively rated images. Interestingly, one student wrote that "(Brazilian) food is similar to Malaysian". The "Festivals and Dance" main category had the mean value of 1.45 (MV=1.45) and with 11 images it was one of the larger categories. It contained such responses as "various festivals", "a place full of festivals", "lots of colourful festivals", "singing and dancing", "samba dance", "traditional dancing". Only one item had the neutral rating "0"; the rest were positively rated. The main category "People" had the mean value 1.22 (MV=1.22). The typical answers in this category were "attractive people", "warm and friendly people" and "passionate people".

An interesting finding was that the main category "Language" had a rather low mean value of 0.8 (MV=0.8). This is despite a fact that none of its five images had been assigned a negative rating. The lowest in this category rating ("0") was given to the images "difficult language" and "(Brazil) share(s) language with Portugal"; the highest rating of +2 was received by the image "language". The following main category, "Country Size and Geographical Location", had 5 images and a mean value of 0.6 (MV=0.6). It should be noted, however, that this rather low mean value was due to a low rating of –1 assigned to the image "too far from Malaysia". Despite the negative rating, the fact that a considerable geographical distance between Malaysia and Brazil was perceived by the respondent as a negative factor has in itself a very positive connotation. Other images in the category with positive ratings were "big country" (mentioned twice), "South America" and "somewhere near the United States".

There were only two categories of images about Brazil that had negative mean values: "Crime" and "Economy". The "Economy" category contained the images "poorer country" and "rather poor country", which were given the ratings –1 and "0", respectively. The mean value of the images in this category was negative (MV= –0.5). The main category "Crime", which had the lowest mean value (MV= –1.5) among the main categories, included such images as "crime" and "gun fights". Finally, the mean value of the remaining 11 idiosyncratic images in the category "Others" were calculated and found to be positive (MV=0.58).

Overall individual favourability of the images about Brazil

In the next step of the analysis we calculated the mean value of the images in each individual list submitted by the participants. This enabled us to deduce that the images about Brazil held on the individual level by the majority of the students were positive. For example, the

mean value scores for the lists provided by 16 respondents ranged between 1 and 2 points while the scores for another five lists ranged between "0" and 1 points. Only in the case of two individual lists were the mean value scores negative at –0.4 (the scores were same for the both lists). However, it should be noted that these lists contained both positively and negatively rated images.

Overall, the findings of the present study indicate that the students held predominantly positive images about the TL country. Also, the findings reveal that the images provided by the students align with widely held stereotypes about Brazil which reduce it to a country of "samba, soccer, beaches and Amazonia" (National Stereotype, 2013). The participants seem to have either very limited or non-existent knowledge about some important aspects related to the TL country, especially those concerning Brazil's history, political life, science, geography and economy. For example, the respondents did not seem aware that Brazil being the largest economy in Latin America is one of the most dynamic economies in the world.

The analysis of the data indicates that very few of the images provided by the students are 'unique' images that refer to sites, events or phenomena specific to a particular country (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). It has been argued that a greater number of unique country images indicate that the language learners have a more extensive knowledge of the TL country and culture (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2013). Among the unique images provided by the participants in the present study are the names of cities (i.e., "Rio de Janeiro" and "São Paulo"), the iconic statue *Cristo Redentor*, the samba dance, the dish *feijoada* and the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Overall, the findings of this study agree with the results reported in previous scholarly investigations into language learners' stereotypes about the TL country, culture and native speakers (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2013; Schulz and Haerle, 1995; Vande Berg, 1990). The main similarity with previous results is that the students' images, albeit positive, tend to be limited to the "preconceived, simplistic and stereotypical notions" (Schulz and Haerle, 1995, p. 29).

Pedagogical implications

Researchers and language educators agree that enhancing students' critical and theoretical thinking is one of the most important elements in the teaching of the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines (Abrams, 2002; Byram and Kramsch, 2008; Ferreira, 2003). As Schulz and Haerle (1995, p. 29) have pointed out, one of the most important objectives of foreign language education "is the lessening of preconceived stereotypical images regarding the target culture". This can be achieved through developing culture-rich foreign language curricula. In the context of teaching Brazilian Portuguese in Malaysia, a country separated

from Brazil by a considerable cultural and geographical distance, acquiring a deeper understanding and knowledge of Brazil's multifaceted and rich cultural heritage in the language classroom will lessen the students' reductionist and stereotypical perceptions about the country. Based on the findings of the present study, a short quiz about Brazil could be conducted in the beginning of semester. The quiz could include some of the most tenacious stereotypes about the country (e.g., "Brazil is a tropical country"), contain humor (e.g., "Football player Ronaldo is the most famous Brazilian in the world") and have questions concerning the students' factual knowledge about Brazil (e.g., "The motto on the national flag of Brazil is ...."). This ludic activity has a good potential to raise the students' awareness of their own misconceptions about the TL country and the lacunae in their knowledge about Brazil.

The language educators can opt to use the knowledge of the students' stereotypes about the TL country as a platform for further explorations about Brazil. For example, the students could be encouraged to work in small groups to prepare short presentations in English or Malay about various aspects of life in Brazil, the country's past history and its present reality. For the students involved in this study, topics relating to football, carnival and samba could offer some common grounds from where to begin further and deeper explorations of Brazilian culture. This is not only because these images were identified among the most ubiquitous stereotypes about Brazil held by the students, but also because they represent important cultural symbols of modern Brazil (see Chasteen, 1996; Levine, 1980; Oliven, 1984). For example, through exploring the origins, development and symbolic significance of these cultural phenomena the students would acquire much deeper and wider perspectives on Brazil's history, economy, society, culture and perhaps get some meaningful insights into 'the heart and soul' of the country. Classroom presentations could then be organized to give the students an opportunity to share their findings with the classmates. The instructors' role in this kind of activity should be that of a mediator and facilitator rather than an omnipresent authority. For their group research and presentation the students should be able to choose a topic appealing to them. The language instructor could then suggest some reading materials such as books or even scholarly articles on the TL culture. This would encourage the students to seek knowledge beyond the available internet resources which are often lacking in depth.

It is also important that, besides factual knowledge, the language educators introduce to the students the emic perspective on the target culture. At the initial stage of the language program this can be done through highlighting how lexical and cultural elements amalgamate in the target language by explicitly linking linguistic features taught in the classroom to cognitive and cultural categories that are important in the target culture (see Byram and Kramsch, 2008; Webber, 1990). Byram and Kramsch (2008,

p. 32) have identified sayings, proverbs, slogans and even catchphrases as "essentialized representations" of national consciousness and suggested that these can be effectively used to illustrate grammatical rules and at the same time provide insights into the collective consciousness of the people in the target culture. In view of the fact that the images "flag", "football" and "FIFA World Cup" were often mentioned by the participants in this study, the motto "*Ordem e Progresso*" ("Order and Progress") written on the national flag and the slogan for the 2014 FIFA World Cup "*Juntos num só ritmo*" ("All in one rhythm") could be used to integrate linguistic and cultural aspects into the language teaching and learning curriculum. Furthermore, the participants had very positive but somewhat shallow perceptions about Brazilians as reflected in the images "attractive people", "friendly people" and "passionate people". Based on these findings introducing the slogans and catchphrases "*Brasil: um país de todos*" ("Brazil: A country for everyone"), "*Eu sou brasileiro e não desisto nunca*" ("I am Brazilian and never give up") and "*O melhor do Brasil é o brasileiro*" ("The best thing about Brazil is the Brazilian people") would enrich the students' perspective on Brazilian society and give them valuable insights into the social values and the emic perspective of the TL culture.

A body of literature is available on imparting cultural knowledge in the language classroom (Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Byram and Kramsch, 2008; Webber, 1990). There is also a growing realization that even at the elementary level and in short language programs, (as was the case in the present study), learners must be introduced to the present-day realities and culture of the TL country. There is no recipe for teaching culture that would work with equal success in each and every language classroom. This is because the language educators need to take into consideration specific features of the educational context, the curriculum requirements as well as the immediate demands of the language classroom when deciding on the cultural component of the language program. The present study has demonstrated how language learners' stereotypes about the TL country, culture and speaking community can be explored and assessed in a more comprehensive manner and how the knowledge thus gained could be used for making empirically-driven pedagogical decisions about introducing cultural components in the language classroom.

Acknowledgments

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