Intercultural communication on the move: National stereotypes and discursive representations of tourists in a tour guide literacy program in Nepal

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With increasing mobilities of people across national and cultural borders in the context of tourism, there are linguistic encounters in unexpected places with unexpected people in unexpected ways (Heller 2007; Pennycook 2012). This has created conditions for the tourist service providers in the host contexts to learn culturally and linguistically appropriate ways of communicating and behaving with tourists from diverse nationalities.

This paper presents an analysis of interactional and ethnographic data from intercultural communication and tourism literacy training classes for tour guides in Nepal. One frequently occurring topic as part of this literacy development program was the construction and representation of tourists as bearers of their national stereotypes. For example, the analysis of training classes shows that Germans were represented as scholarly and hardworking; British as formal and disciplined but shrewd; American as open-minded and easy-to-work-with; and French as proud of their language and as lovers of arts and music. These kinds of representations arguably reinforce a certain kind of image of the tourists and need for a certain kind of communication strategies on the part of the service providers. By constructing such representations of international tourists, these tour guides learn very explicit self-representation strategies in order to meet the expectation of international tourists.

Recent intercultural communication research findings in medical, business and retail service show that intercultural communication encounters and cultural identities are characterized with hybridity and fluidity. However, in the context of international tourism, national stereotypes continue to have a significant impact on literacy development and intercultural communication skills training. This presentation also contributes to the existing gap in the study of discursive representations in the context of tourism where a lot of previous literature has focused on how tourists construct and represent the other, but little attention to how the locals represent tourists.

Keywords: discourse analysis, intercultural communication, representations.