

England and the USA Through Stereotypes

Bálint SZELE

Kodolányi János University

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Abstract. The paper investigates stereotypes concerning the two most important English-speaking cultures — England and the USA — and to what extent these stereotypes are known and felt to be real among Hungarian students of English. The essay includes a short introduction about the definition of stereotypes and clichés, their significance in intercultural communication, and then draws up a list of the commonest stereotypes about the two countries and nations, a list of 29 stereotypes altogether. This list was sent in a questionnaire to a large number of Hungarian students, whose replies indicate clearly which are the most and least known stereotypes in Hungary about the two most important English-speaking cultures. The conclusion offers an analysis of the results and an interesting summary of the respondents' comments on the different stereotypes mentioned in the questionnaire.

Key Words. England, the USA, culture, stereotypes, survey

Introduction

Whatever discourse we happen to be part of, it is easy to discover two things. The first is that stereotypes are very popular and are frequently used, the second is that the notion itself is quite impossible to define well. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines a *stereotype* as “a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong”. It also offers a more general definition: “an idea that is used to describe a particular type of person or thing, or a person or thing thought to represent such an idea” (Cambridge Dictionary). The common ideas seem to be “types” (these can be ethnicities, geographical regions, occupations) and “thought to” or “wrong”. Both definitions imply — but do not state — that stereotypes are

not based on actual experience, but any kind of knowledge from any source, and they refer to groups, not individuals. If the problem is considered in this light, there are no truths in the world, only stereotypes, as it is impossible to get first-hand information about groups without generalisations. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *stereotype* both as a verb and a noun. As a verb, it means “to make a stereotype from”; “to repeat without variation: make hackneyed”; and “to develop a mental stereotype about”. As a noun, the definitions are the following: “a plate cast from a printing surface”; or “something conforming to a fixed or general pattern *especially*: a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary: Stereotype). This definition is more detailed and explicitly speaks about simplification, prejudice, or judgment (the idea of group is not mentioned here, either). A synonymous word is *cliché*, defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary in this way: “*Cliché* is today overwhelmingly encountered in reference to something hackneyed, such as an overly familiar or commonplace phrase, theme, or expression. *Stereotype* is most frequently now employed to refer to an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary: Cliché).

In general discourse, in everyday life, people do not always think that stereotypes are wrong, or, going further, upsetting or offensive. Stereotypes have their role in everyday communication and — as the title of this paper suggests — intercultural exchange. Stereotypes help us express ourselves when we do not know much about the topic of the discourse (e.g., in our case, a given country), they give us at least something to rely on, and it is better to know stereotypes about a country and nation than nothing. If the general maxims of politeness are observed and the speaker is careful to speak descriptively, not evaluatively, no stereotype will lead to real conflicts. The same idea is endorsed by Michael Gates, who writes:

to talk or write about culture one has to generalise about the cultural characteristics of the nationalities discussed. It is not possible to do otherwise, as we are discussing the behaviour and values of *groups* of people, not individuals — passed on at a collective level from generation to generation. The study of cultures is a social science, and — as Aristotle points out three times in the introduction to his *Ethics* — in the social sciences, accuracy is not the same as in the physical sciences. One has to use phrases such as ‘in general...’, or ‘this tends to be the case...’ (Gates 2017).

Accuracy is important, but we must be prepared to modify our approach quickly if our counterpart does not correspond individually to the generalisation. Pushed too far, any generalisation becomes absurd, but it can still be a good starting-point. People sometimes avoid generalising because they believe it may upset others. Others object to generalisations because they question the wisdom of applying general characteristics to a particular individual. People have to possess an open mind, but, as Gates puts it, everybody has to be “prepared to suspend disbelief in order to benefit from the usefulness of non-judgemental cultural generalisations” (Gates 2017).

As it has been said above, stereotypes are important and necessary — we simply cannot know all the truths in the whole world, so it is convenient to say e.g. “Scottish people respect their traditions” — as most of them do — instead of not uttering anything about Scotland or digging into data (if they are available at all) to say 96.28% of Scottish people respect their traditions. The case might be more difficult, of course, when something more negative is stated. If we say “Hungarians like eating”, the statement is, in general, true of about 98% of the population of Hungary (lacking statistics, this is only a rough personal estimate), but there would always be food conscious people who would say “most of them do, but I don’t,” or “most of them do, and I do too, but without their excesses”, and this leads us further to modify the stereotype and say “most Hungarians like eating too much”, or, even, being more objective, “most Hungarians tend to eat too much” (or simply, as it is often said, “in Hungary, food is religion”). This is how stereotypes get refined and more exact. Using stereotypes needs a lot of flexibility and openness. In a world of extreme sensitivity, when anybody can uphold the right to feel upset, annoyed, or offended about any statement he or she finds untrue, stereotypes and clichés help us by providing efficient bits of safe communication, and flexibility and politeness help us clarify questions and maintain communication.

Stereotypes can also be a rich hunting ground for journalists / bloggers to explain new findings or truths about them and attract readers. Many publications and even videos give readers invaluable information by debunking myths and throwing light on the truth behind common stereotypes. In connection with Scotland, the stereotype about frugality/stinginess has been analysed in detail (Szele 2021). In this paper, two lesser-known stereotypes will be discussed, simply because they are not so well-known — they are listed as common stereotypes, but only few Hungarian respondents have heard about them, as it will be shown later. One stereotype is that “the English are anti-social when abroad”; the other is that “Americans are generous”.

The fact that English tourists display anti-social behaviour abroad has been analysed in

a *Guardian* article (Khaleeli 2017), which says Spain, Greece, Latvia and Malaysia have all taken measures against unruly Britons. A Greek mayor is reported to have said: “They scream, they sing, they fall down, they take their clothes off, they cross-dress, they vomit,” And, in case there was any question, he added: “It is only the British people – not the Germans or the French.” Other articles discuss in academic terms why there is so much anti-social behaviour in the UK (“UK Tops EU”). In Quora, readers make attempts to find the sources of the problem. Three contributions are presented here (emphases added):

The UK (England) is a *deeply unhappy* country. The English can’t come to terms with their diminished status in the world. [...] Of course the reality is grim. There is so much poverty and austerity in England. [...] Yet the English feel they have rights bestowed upon them by the universe, simply by the virtue of being English, and are entitled to better than their miserable lot. (Harrison)

Britain lost an enormous empire [...] English/Britishers who display organised antisocial behaviour are too mindless to know why, or that it relates to history that took place before they were born; [...] they do not want to examine the source of their imaginary sense of loss — *loss of an empire and a status* that they never enjoyed. (Jacobs)

Despite being British myself, I actually think the British are among the most *arrogant* people on earth. And because of something most of us aren’t even aware of. The Brits have this deep-seated, unconscious belief, that British is the basic state of human nature. (Lane)

Many elements of these arguments (unhappy country, imagined status, arrogance) will reappear in the questionnaire results. One Hungarian respondent in the survey, however, explained that “anti-social behaviour is only characteristic of drunken English youngsters”, which may be perfectly right, and may serve as the basis for the stereotype.

Concerning the fact that Americans are a generous nation, no real evidence was found. A CNN article declares that “We are still the most generous people in the world today” (Bennett 2011), and then goes on to describe how other nations praise help received from the USA and in what ways Americans (both companies and individuals) are charitable people. So it might be concluded that Americans in general are generous, which might be called a stereotype. But most

people who are asked “are Americans generous?” think of individual Americans only, thus responses to this question might vary (this will be discussed later in the results section). The Wikipedia site (see Appendix) that lists stereotypes about the USA puts generosity at the top of the list, so it seems selling off American generosity as an important feat is a tool of American PR.

Technical background and procedure

The idea to study a significant number of stereotypes came from previous research conducted by the author of this paper on intercultural knowledge, communication, and civilisation (Szele 2019 & 2020 & 2021). This research had shown the importance of cultural information in speaking a foreign language and investigated the extent to which English and American cultural items are known in Hungary.

The survey behind the present paper included two main parts: in the first part, respondents were asked to write down all the stereotypes that came to their minds about eight English-speaking countries, namely England, Scotland, Ireland, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Jamaica. This was done so that their input was not influenced by any *a priori* information. The instructions were written in Hungarian so that no language barriers would hinder the respondents, but answers in English were also welcome. This part was designed to elicit all the active stereotypes the respondent had in mind. The instructions were the following:

Please write down briefly what stereotypes come to your mind concerning the countries mentioned. Stereotypes are true or not-so-true beliefs, general ideas about a nation or country, e.g. “Hungarians like to eat” or “Hungary is a pessimistic country”. You might answer in Hungarian or English.

In the second part of the questionnaire, a list of 85 stereotypes, previously gathered from many different sources, was provided, grouped by country, where respondents had to choose between “heard about it” or “never heard about it”. This part was aimed at providing a list to respondents to see which stereotypes they were familiar with. Space to add any individual comments was provided. The instructions were the following:

In this part, common stereotypes are listed. Please have a look and indicate whether you have heard about them. If you have your own experience, opinion, or remark, please write it down. You may answer in Hungarian or English.

The survey was conducted online in early 2021 using Google Forms. The form was sent to 440 students of English and Translation Studies, but the recipients were free to forward the questionnaire to anyone, so the exact number is somewhat over 440. The number of responses returned was around 95 (not all questions were answered by all respondents).

England: Free answers

Stereotypes concerning England circle around a number of main topics. During the research stage, 14 stereotypes were found from various sources (see Appendix). But as it has been said earlier, the first part of the survey asked respondents to provide their own answers. The original question was “Milyen sztereotípiákat ismer az angolokkal / Angliával kapcsolatban?” [What stereotypes do you know concerning English people / England?]. A quick analysis of the responses suggests drawing up the following categories:

- a) inner characteristic features
- b) bodily appearance
- c) weather
- d) cuisine
- e) tea
- f) heritage (tea, football, royal family, pubs, language, etc.)
- g) British humour
- h) alcohol

Table 1 shows how many times elements of each category were mentioned by respondents. Below the table, a detailed analysis of the responses follows, together with explanations.

Table 1. Summary of free answers (England)

Category	Number of mentions	Percentage
a) inner characteristic features	100	105
b) bodily appearance	19	20
c) weather	39	41
d) cuisine	39	41
e) tea	22	23
f) heritage (tea, football, royal family, pubs, language, etc.)	32	33
g) British humour	11	11
h) alcohol	15	15

Inner characteristic features is by far the biggest set if the number of responses is considered. Within this category, the answers can be broken down as follows: the English are “reserved, keep distance” (26 instances); “polite” (21), “cold, unemotional” (20), “snobbish” (6), and even “conceited, arrogant” (6). The English “have respect for traditions” (5), they are “open, sociable” (3), “sad” (2), “superficial” (2), “diplomatic, tactful” (2), “strange, eccentric” (2), and “punctual” (1). Other responses mention further ideas, such as the English “queue patiently” (2), “use understatement” (2), and “do not drop litter” (1).

Stereotypes about the appearance of the English are equally mixed. According to these, the English “have bad teeth” (6), they are “fat” (4), they “wear bad clothes” (3), and are “ugly” (2), also “some have red hair” (2). On the positive side, the English are “good-looking, elegant” (2).

Within the category of weather, all the 39 mentions are rather consistent: 15 responses simply mention “weather”, whereas 24 speak about “rain” or “bad weather”.

Within the category of cuisine, a number of ideas are present in the answers, the most prominent being “bad food” (18). There are six mentions of “beer”, and five of “fish and chips”. Three other things are mentioned, each once: “gin”, “mincemeat”, and “Indian food”. Tea was mentioned 22 times: “tea” (16) and “tea with milk” (6).

Within the category of heritage, five cultural items came up in several forms. The most frequently mentioned cultural item is “football” (7), then the “Royal Family” (4), “language, pronunciation” (3), “pub culture” (3), “driving on the left” (2). There was one mention of “bearskin”, “Hyde Park Corner”, “sheep and cattle”, “lawn”, “being an island”, “British

Scientists”, “trainspotting and birdspotting”, “hunting”, “English breakfast”, the “importance of social classes”, a “non-standard system of measurements”, and “being a gentleman”.

Within the category of British humour, the word “humour” appears in several forms: it is usually called “English humour” or “strange humour”, but two other adjectives are also used to describe it: “absurd” (2), and “dark” (2).

Within the category of alcohol, respondents either just mentioned “English people like beer” or “English people like drinking”, but six respondents said “the English are drunkards”.

From these data, the following conclusions can be made on the basis of respondents’ ideas about England. *English people are reserved, unemotional, but very polite, and some are quite friendly. Many have bad teeth and are fat. They frequently speak about the weather and consume bad food, but they really like tea. Football and the Royal Family are the most prominent parts of their heritage, and they have a special kind of humour. Many like drinking alcohol. In general, they respect traditions and care about adequate social behavior.*

It is hard to see why Hungarian respondents are so much concerned about the inner characteristics and appearance of the English, while their cultural heritage basically remains in the background — even the weather and English cuisine are mentioned more frequently.

To get a glimpse of what an actual response looked like, some instances have been singled out and, if necessary, translated into English. Some are lists of general ideas, e.g. “rossz fogak, rossz ételek, elhízott emberek, abszurd humor, teaivás, rossz idő” [bad teeth, bad food, fat people, absurd humour, tea drinking, bad weather], “tea, foci, rossz fogak, íztelen ételek, részeg turisták, angol hidegvér, eső, udvariasság, understatement, abszurd humor” [tea, football, bad teeth, tasteless food, drunken tourists, English cold blood, rain, politeness, understatement, absurd humour], or “rainy weather, tea/beer drinking, British humour, bad teeth, saying ‘bloody hell’”. Other comments are more detailed and reflect a deeper knowledge of the English: “fish and chips ország, Gin ladies and beer monkies országa” [fish&chips country, the country of gin ladies and beer monkies]. “Arrogánsak, felszínes témákról beszélgetnek, kevésbé őszinték. Ugyanakkor udvariasak, tabu témákat nem feszegetnek, úgy mint bevándorlás, fizetés, bórszín, nemi identitás. Pol korrektek / Vagy: Angliában mindenki normálisan tud sorban állni, nem szemetelnek, udvariasak. / Nem jó a konyhájuk, ami szakadt, arra azt mondják patinás” [They are arrogant, speak about superficial topics, they aren’t honest. At the same time, they are polite, do not speak about taboo topics such as immigration, salary, skin colour, sexual identity — they are politically correct. Or: in England, everybody queues up neatly, they do not drop litter, they are polite. Their kitchen is not good, what is worn is described as ‘antique’.] “Rossz konyha, pub kultúra — munka után rögtön, karót nyelt nemzet,

állandó esős időjárás, időjárásról beszélnek, zárkóztak, keep calm hozzáállás, franciákkal ellentét, külön szigetként viselkednek, Brexit óta különállás fokozott, elegancia, nők nem a legszebbek, jellegzetes brit angol nyelv” [bad cuisine, pub culture — immediately after work, an uptight nation, continual rainy weather, they speak about the weather, they are aloof, keep calm attitude, conflict with the French, they behave like an isolated island, since Brexit, even more, elegance, the women are not the most beautiful, characteristic British English language]. “Nagy teafogyasztók, időjárástól függetlenül öltözködnek (télen papucs és rövidnadrág), túl udvariasak (sorry, thanks, how are you), túl diplomatikus, rabszolgatartó társ. (babysitter, takarítónő, kertész etc.)” [they drink a lot of tea, they dress irrespective of the weather (slippers and shorts in winter), they are very polite (sorry, thanks, how are you), they are overly diplomatic, and a slave owner society (babysitter, charwoman, gardener, etc.)]. The last example highlights England as an island: “fish & chipset esznek, vacsorára indiait. Sokra tartják magukat. Szigetország, ezért azt hiszik, hogy mindent máshogy csinálhatnak, mint a kontinentális Európa, pl. másik oldalon vezetnek, politikai ügyek” [They eat fish&chips, Indian food for dinner. They are very proud. Being an island, they think they can do everything differently from continental Europe, e.g. drive on the left, political affairs].

England: Standard stereotypes

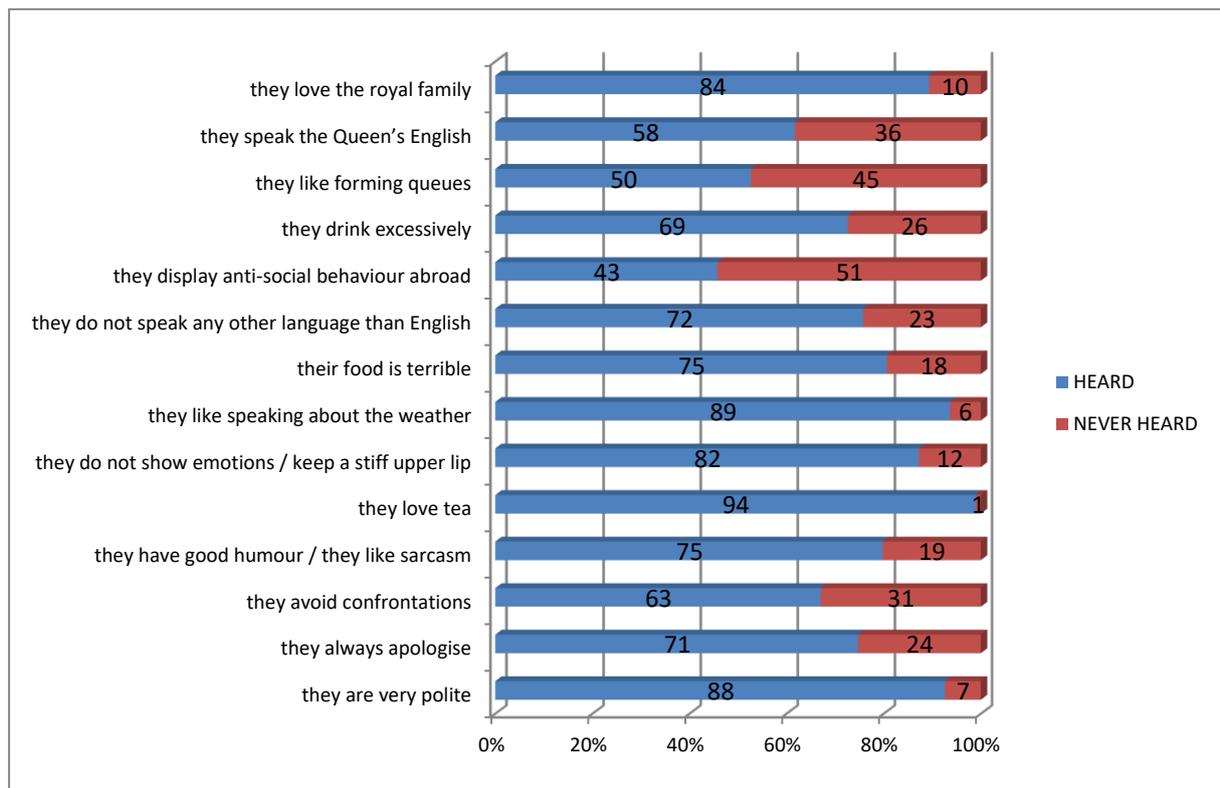
During the research period before the administration of the survey, a number of sources (see Appendix) were analysed, and, from the stereotypes available, a pool was set up. This pool consisted of the most frequently mentioned 14 stereotypes. These were the following, all related to English people or to England:

1. they love the royal family
2. they speak the Queen’s English
3. they like forming queues
4. they drink excessively
5. they display anti-social behaviour abroad
6. they do not speak any other language than English
7. their food is terrible
8. they like speaking about the weather
9. they do not show emotions / keep a stiff upper lip
10. they love tea

11. they have good humour / they like sarcasm
12. they avoid confrontations
13. they always apologise
14. they are very polite

Graph 1 shows the results of the dual choice survey.

Graph 1. Results of dual choice survey on England



In the dual choice part of the survey, respondents had to indicate whether they had heard about the stereotypes mentioned, or not. It is interesting to see the correspondences with the free-answer survey. The commonest stereotypes are the same: love of tea, speaking about the weather, and being polite. The stereotype about love for the royal family is more prominent here, in the dual choice survey. The emotional aloofness, bad food and good humour, as well as their drinking habits and apologetic nature also appear here. However, the free answers very rarely mentioned features like “the English avoid confrontations”, “apologise a lot”, or that they “speak the Queen’s English” or “do not speak other languages than English”. Liking queues and displaying anti-social behavior abroad are the least known stereotypes.

Some respondents commented on the list, adding valuable insights for the researcher. One of these concerns avoiding confrontations. “Elkerülik a konfrontációt? Sokszor azt mondják, hogy túl direkttek és húsba vágóak, máskor, meg nem merik a lényegét kimondani. Mindkettő. Sokáig nekem is furcsa volt” [Avoiding confrontation? Some say they are direct and tactless, some that they don’t dare to speak their minds. Both are true. I found it strange for a long time]. Another one addresses cuisine and queuing. “Az ételeik nem minden esetben ehetőek, van köztük kifejezetten finom és ötletes is. Sorban állni ők sem szeretnek, csak megtanulták a rendet. Az italozás igaz, de csak hétvégén vallják be” [Not all their dishes are uneatable, there are tasty and ingenious ones as well. They don’t like queuing, it’s just they’ve learnt how to behave. Drinking is true, but they only admit it at weekends]. Another respondent added that “szerintem az angol konyha igenis finom” [I think English dishes are indeed tasty]. One respondent simply wrote “they have superiority complex”, which corresponds to the statements of internet users at the end of the introduction.

Three respondents commented on the stereotypes in general. The first stated that most of the stereotypes listed are true: “a fentiek jó részét saját tapasztalatom alapján is meg tudom erősíteni” [I have experienced most of these stereotypes to be true]. The second agrees: “a fenti sztereotípiák illenek az angolokra, 13 év után látom így” [these stereotypes match the English, I see it so after 13 years]. The third is of a different opinion: “a felsorolt állítások többségét hallottam már más magyaroktól, ugyanakkor angolokkal is találkoztam már, akik mindezt egyáltalán nem támasztották alá” [I heard many of these statements from other Hungarians, however, I have met English people who do not fit the description at all]. The problem of generalisation discussed in the introduction returns here.

The USA: Free answers

Stereotypes concerning the USA and American people centre around a surprisingly narrow list of topics. During the research stage, 15 stereotypes were extracted from various sources (see Appendix). The first part of the survey asked respondents to provide their own answers. The original question was “Milyen sztereotípiákat ismer az amerikaiakkal / Amerikával kapcsolatosan?” [What stereotypes do you know concerning American people / the USA?]. A quick analysis of the responses suggests drawing up the following four categories:

- a) inner characteristic features
- b) bodily appearance

c) heritage (size, culture, guns, Hollywood etc.)

d) cuisine

Table 2 shows how many times elements of each category were mentioned by respondents.

Table 2. Summary of free answers (USA)

Category	Number of mentions	Percentage
a) inner characteristic features	156	164
b) bodily appearance	45	47
c) heritage (size, culture, guns, Hollywood etc.)	40	42
d) cuisine	26	27

It is surprising to see how much Hungarian respondents were concerned with the inner characteristic features and bodily appearance of Americans. The category of inner characteristic features was divided into seven subcategories, namely education, positive and negative attitudes to human interaction, relationship to their country and others, functioning in a political community, attitude to work and other resources.

Concerning education, a very high number of respondents (half of the respondents) agreed that Americans are “uneducated” (48) and “superficial” (12).

Concerning negative features in human interactions, Americans were said to be “conceited, boastful” (13), “impolite” (7), and “loud” (6). The positive side looks better: “kind, friendly” (10), “cheerful, smiling” (9), “positive” (6), “easy-going” and “self-confident” (4 each), and “emotional” (2).

Stereotypes about Americans’ relationship to their own country and others appear to be mixed. According to respondents, Americans are “patriotic” (10), they “love freedom” (1), but they are “racist” (3) and “violent” (2).

As a political community, Americans are seen to be “individualistic” (2), they “follow their leaders” (1), at the same time they are “easy to manipulate” (3).

Concerning work, Americans are described as “workaholic” (6) and — surprisingly enough — “lazy” (2).

Concerning the use of their resources, Americans are seen as “generous” (2), “materialistic” (2), and “wasteful” (1).

Within the category of bodily appearance, three basic ideas were distinguishable. The first was that Americans are “obese” (39). The second was “they lead an unhealthy life” (3). And the third was the opposite, showing that “appearance is important” for Americans: “plastic surgery”, “nice teeth”, and “hair implants” were mentioned (each once).

Heritage, which is such an important factor in the case of Scotland and Ireland (cf. Szele 2021), is not so prominent in the case of England or the USA. Although fifteen cultural items were mentioned in the free answers here, these represent just a very small section of American culture and civilisation, and no one mentioned the natural beauties of the country. The numbers of instances are the following: “big cars” (7), “guns” (5), the “American Dream” (5), “Hollywood” (5), “obsession with size” (5), “baseball / American football” (3), and “consumerism” (2). The following eight items were only mentioned once: “McDonalds”, “sneakers”, “pronunciation”, “slang”, “multiculturalism”, “sports”, “Nascar”, “country music”.

Another important aspect of a country is its cuisine, which, in the case of America, is really varied. Despite this, there were only nine distinguishable responses. The answers contained the following: “burgers” (8), “bad / fast food” (7), “hot dog” (3), “coke” (2), “convenience food” (2), “maple syrup”, “BBQ”, “roast turkey”, “pancakes” (1 each).

From this data, the following conclusions can be made on the basis of respondents’ ideas about America. *Americans are uneducated, conceited and superficial, but at the same time friendly, cheerful, and positive. Many tend to be impolite and loud. Many are patriotic (sometimes even racist), and many live for their work. Americans are overweight, and eat burgers and other bad food, but a minority is obsessed with their good looks. They are interested in big cars, guns, and some typical American games.* If there is a feeling that this description is inaccurate, it can be stated that stereotypes about Americans seem to be abundant in Hungary, but lack of personal contacts and the false presentation of the country in the state-run media distorts the overall picture.

To get a glimpse of what an actual response looked like, some instances have been singled out and, if necessary, translated into English. It is worth quoting many of them as they shed light on how Hungarian respondents see the country and its people. The first four comments summarise common stereotypes very concisely. “A világ többi részéről nem tudnak szinte semmit. Egészségtelen az életmódjuk” [They know almost nothing about other parts of the world. Their lifestyle is unhealthy]. “Coke — Burger — Hot dog — Hollywood”. “Hamburger, hot dog, készételek. Tájékozatlanság (pl. földrajzi), elhízás, közvetlenség, segítőkészség. Iskolai és élsport szeretete és fontossága. Amerikai filmek. Sok munka,

karrierépítés, női egyenjogúság, kisebbségi problémák” [hamburger, hot dog, convenience food. Ignorance (e.g. geography), obesity, openness, helpfulness. Love and importance of school and professional sport. American movies. Lots of work, career, equal rights for women, minority problems]. “Laza, nagyképű, felületes, tájékozatlan, a rossz produktumot is megpróbálja nagy körítéssel eladni, magabiztos” [easy-going, conceited, ignorant, tries to sell off even bad products with a lot of talk, self-confident].

The following comments are more detailed, and sometimes ironic. “Kövérék és imádják a fegyvereket, számukra az USA a világ egyetlen országa, non-stop dolgoznak, magabiztosak” [they are fat and they love guns, for them the only country is the USA, they work non-stop, they are self-confident]. “Kövérék, udvariatlanok, mindig mindent jobban tudnak, Amerika a világ közepe számukra, minden otthon előtt zászló leng, minden szobában legalább egy pisztoly van, tudatlanok” [they are fat, impolite, they know everything better, America is the centre of the world for them, homes have flags outside, each room has at least one gun, they are ignorant].

“Showmanek; folyton mosolyognak, de nem jelenti azt, hogy barátságosak; legtöbben nem gondolják komolyan közülük, amikor Istenre hivatkoznak; patrióták; nyáron grilleznek, télen pulykát sütnek; fura pizsamákat hordanak (állatjelmez-jellegűeket); előszeretettel exportálják bármely ideológiájukat baloldaltól jobboldalig a világ többi országába; munkamámorosok (nem mániások, hanem egyenesen szerelmesek a munkaéletükbe, pl. a “cég az egy nagy család” mottó); műveletlenek, és nem kíváncsiak a máshol élők perspektívájára” [they are showmen; they smile constantly, but this is not friendliness; they do not mean it when they refer to God; they are patriotic; in summer they do barbecue, in winter turkey; they have strange pyjamas (likenesses of animals); they export their ideologies, no matter if these are rightist or leftist, to other countries; they are obsessed with work (not a mania but a love affair, see ‘the company is a big family’ motto); they are uneducated and do not care about other parts of the world].

“Az amerikaiak hangosak, kövérek, műveletlenek, tájékozatlanok, optimisták, magabiztosak, könnyen barátkoznak, de felületesek, az USA-ban minden nagy (pl. az autók, a távolságok, a hamburgerek)” [Americans are loud, fat, uneducated, ignorant, optimistic, self-confident, they make friends easily, but they are superficial, in the USA, everything is big (e.g. cars, distances, hamburgers)].

There are some rare examples of objectivity, for example, in this comment: “Az érzelmeiken keresztül nagyon befolyásolhatóak (Hollywood, reklámok stb.), magas az igazságérzetük, nem mindig a logikus gondolkodás jellemzi őket egy megoldás keresése közben, (de az ország nagyon nagy, így a különbség is nagyon nagy pl. déli és északi államok

között”)” [they are easy to manipulate through their feelings (Hollywood, adverts, etc.), their sense of justice is high, they do not always think logically when looking for solutions (but the country is very big, there are very big differences between the south and the north, for example)].

There are many comments which display negative feelings about Americans, some of these are quoted here. “Mindenre valami más kifejezést használnak, nem tudnak rendesen angolul, szar kajákat esznek, elhízottak és óriási benzinfalókkal közlekednek. Rengeteg egyszer használatos vackot dobálnak el. Minden ház könnyűszerkezetes, amit megesz a természet. Rommá vannak hitelezve” [they use a lot of strange expressions, they don't speak proper English, their food is junk, they're fat, and use huge gas-guzzlers. They throw away a lot of single-use items. Their houses are light structure houses, eaten by termites. They have an awful lot of loans]. “Legtöbbjük elhízott a sok gyorsételtől, vakon követik a választott vezetőiket, tárgyalás helyett fegyverrel oldják meg a problémáikat” [many of them are obese from the junk food, they follow their leaders blindly, they solve their problems with guns instead of talks]. A comment in English: “1. They are dumb as hell 2. They are fat 3. OIL 4. They think they invented everything 5. Hates China 6. Guns & war 7. Butting into everybody's business 8. Presidents 9. Roaring 20s is the only memorable period 10. INCREDIBLY sensitive and self-entitled.” And, finally, a comment that is the quintessence of malice: “Korlátlanul manipulálható túlsúlyos embertömeg, ami az emberi civilizáció csúcsának gondolja magát” [a mass of obese people that can be manipulated without constraints, who think they are the top of civilisation].

The USA: Standard stereotypes

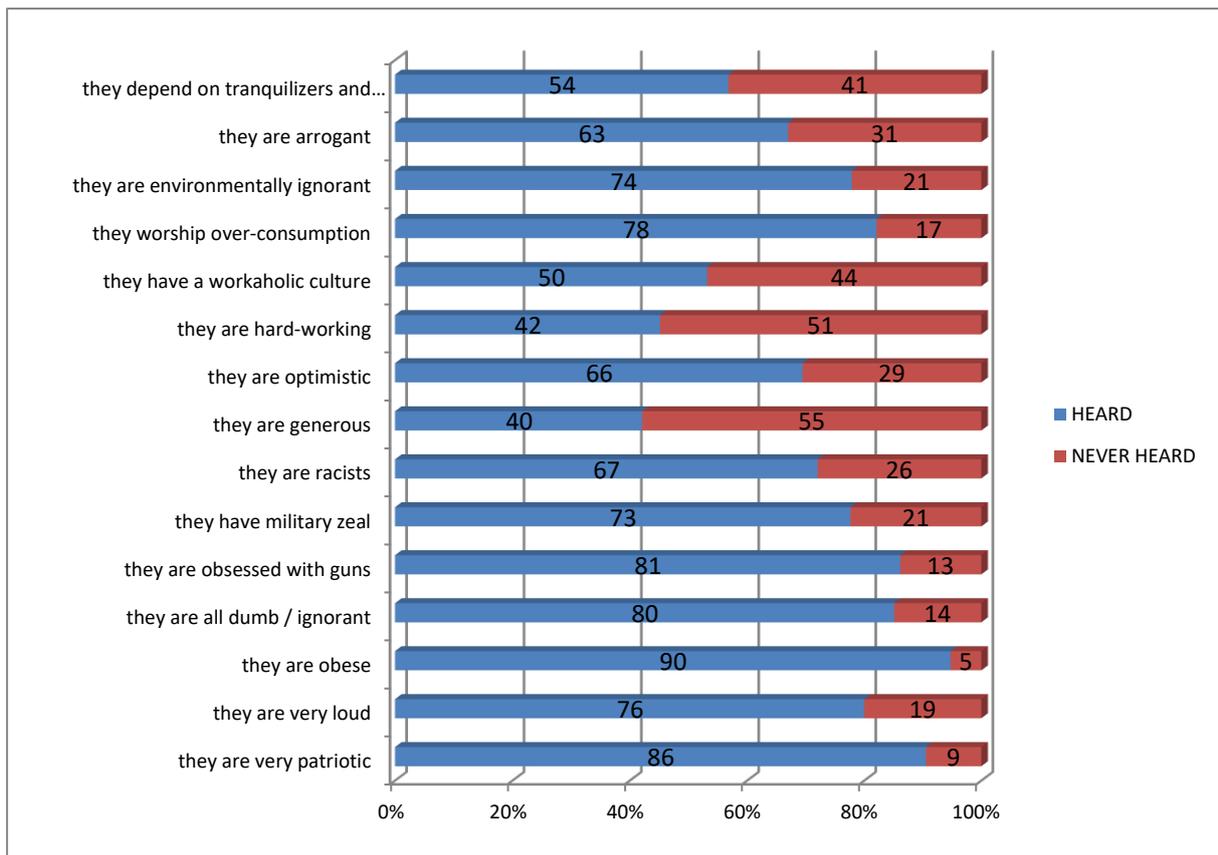
During the research period before the administration of the survey, relevant sources (see Appendix) were analysed, and, from the stereotypes available, a pool was set up. This pool consisted of the most frequently mentioned 15 stereotypes. These were the following, all related to American people or to the USA:

1. they depend on tranquilizers and other psychoactive drugs
2. they are arrogant
3. they are environmentally ignorant
4. they worship over-consumption
5. they have a workaholic culture
6. they are hard-working

7. they are optimistic
8. they are generous
9. they are racists
10. they have military zeal
11. they are obsessed with guns
12. they are all dumb / ignorant
13. they are obese
14. they are very loud
15. they are very patriotic

Graph 2 shows the results of the dual choice survey.

Graph 2. Results of dual choice survey on the USA



In the dual choice part of the survey, respondents had to indicate whether they had heard about the stereotypes mentioned, or not. It is interesting to see the correspondences with the free-answer survey. Obesity and patriotism are the most well-known stereotypes here. Guns, ignorance, over-consumption, and being loud also had about 80% “heard” answers. 60% of the

respondents said they have heard the stereotypes about American optimism, racism, and arrogance. The least-known stereotypes are about workaholic culture, a hard-working attitude, and generosity, which has been discussed in the introduction. Three common stereotypes had not been mentioned in the free answer part at all, namely: environmental ignorance, dependence on drugs, and military zeal.

Some respondents commented on the list, adding valuable insight for the researcher. One comment mentions satirical cartoons: “a szatirikus animációs filmek onnan tök jók, pl. South Park, Family Guy” [American satirical animations are very good, e.g. South Park, Family Guy]. Another respondent commented on work culture: “többet dolgoznak munkaórában, de sokat lötyögnek, kávézgatnak is közben” [they work a lot in terms of working hours, but in fact they just hang about and drink coffee]. One comment in English addresses generosity, too: “they are generous — are they? Or do they just like to think they are? They are optimistic — annoyingly optimistic, I have the feeling often that it is almost toxic optimism, which is not necessarily good for the country’s reputation”. Another respondent adds: “they often behave impolitely abroad”. Two comments address Americans’ openness: “felszíneseznek vannak titulálva, de barátságosak” [they are labelled as superficial, but they are friendly], and “I was sooo positively surprised when I experienced true interest in Hungarian culture”.

There are three longer comments as well, which are worth quoting in full as they display objectivity and knowledge about the country. “Saját tapasztalat, hogy az utca népének valóban nem magas a műveltségi szintje, és a munkamániá a viselkedéskultúrájuk részévé vált. Külföldön valóban hangosak és arrogánsak tudnak lenni, ha elégedettek egy szolgáltatással, nagyvonalú borraivalót osztogatnak. Rokonszenves vonásuk, hogy a gazdagoknak illik! jótékonykodni — ez nálunk még nagyon gyerekcipőben jár... Praktikus és problémamegoldó a gondolkodásmódjuk. Mint minden társadalomban, ott is vannak lecsúszott emberek (vagy csúcsra járatott főnökök vagy egyszerűen a magukkal kezdeni képtelenek), akik vevők a drogfogyasztásra, a szomszédos kontinensen pedig a nagy szállító — csoda, ha egymásra találtak?” [My experience is that the man on the street is uneducated indeed, and work mania is a part of their culture. They can be loud and arrogant when abroad, if they are satisfied, they leave generous tips. It is positive that rich people are expected! to donate money — this is almost unknown here... Their way of thinking is practical and problem-centred. Like in every society, there are deadbeat people (or hyperactive bosses or listless individuals) who care about drugs, and the supply is just next door — is it a wonder they find each other?]

“A felsoroltak annyira nem sztereotípiák, tényleg ez van náluk. Annyit tennék csak hozzá, hogy a hard-working és a workaholic nem ugyanaz. Az, hogy valaki bent van a

munkahelyén akár késő estig is, vagy otthon is a telóján levelez a főnökkel, még nem jelent kemény munkát is egyben, produktivitásról meg aztán ne is beszéljünk. Volt olyan amcsi kollegám, aki felkelt minden reggel hajnal 5-kor és bejött a melóhelyre, de esküszöm, csak bámulta a monitort egész idő alatt (egy emailen voltunk, egyet nem nyitott meg ezen idő alatt). A rasszizmus és a military zeal sem feltétlenül jellemző mindenkire, de az már igaz, hogy tisztelik a katonákat és a veteránokat. Igen, hangosak, igen, tudatlanok, de tesznek fel kérdéseket, és nagy elánnal mindig problémamegoldani akarnak, ott is, ahol nincs is probléma. De ez csak felszín, az igazi konfliktusokat ők is ugyanúgy kihordják, mint bárki más.” [The things listed here are not so much stereotypes, this is what goes on there. I have to add that hard-working and workaholic is not the same thing. Staying in your workplace late or messaging your boss from home does not mean hard work, not to mention productivity. I had a colleague who came in at 5 in the morning, but he just stared at the screen (we used the same e-mail and I swear he didn’t open a single e-mail). Racism and military zeal are not characteristic of everyone, but they do respect soldiers and veterans. They are loud and ignorant indeed, but they do ask questions, and want to solve problems with great enthusiasm, even if there is no problem. But this is just the surface, they process their real conflicts just like everybody else].

“Nehéz válaszolni. Majdnem mindet, és az ellenkezőjét is hallottam már. Manapság ‘köztudott’, hogy minden fehér amerikai rasszista, korábban az volt a közvélekedés, hogy a legkevésbé rasszista ország. A megosztott társadalmon belül az egymással kapcsolatos sztereotípiák egyre inkább előtérbe kerülnek. Jellemző a militarista handabandázás kultusza is, de csak az amerikai társadalom bizonyos csoportjaira. Másokra épp az ellenkezője” [It is hard to answer. I heard about almost all these stereotypes and the opposites, too. Today it is well “known” that all white Americans are racists, but in the earlier decades America was seen as the least racist country. In a divided society, stereotypes about each other are more and more prominent. There is a cult of military bravado, but only in certain groups of Americans. Others are just the opposite].

Conclusion

No matter what group we belong to — teachers, drummers, police officers, husbands, wives or shopkeepers — we are always surrounded by stereotypes. They are even more frequently present when intercultural exchanges happen, and it is always true that encountering another culture and respecting rather than denying its differences from our own culture can be an

enriching learning experience. Stereotypes are good points to start from, but it is not all the same whether they mislead us or help us.

The two cultures under scrutiny in this paper, English and American as seen by Hungarian language learners, have a lot in common, and this is easy to discover in the stereotypes that came into play during the research. The population surveyed, mainly students of English and people speaking English (BA or MA students, or students of Translation Studies), knew a lot about both cultures, but — contrary to the case of Scotland and Ireland, where the characteristic features of both cultures were quite adequately summarised (Szele 2021) — collecting common stereotypes showed a distorted view of England and America. In the case of England, the most prominent thing that Hungarians mentioned was the behaviour and inner characteristic features of English people, these accounted for almost half the responses in the free answer section of the survey. In the case of America, the findings are somewhat similar: there are certain negative feelings about America in Hungary, which is shown by the fact that three fourths of the answers dealt with inner characteristic features and bodily appearance (many of these in an unfavourable light), heritage and cuisine were dwarfed compared to the findings concerning Ireland and Scotland. The conclusion that Hungarians' view of Americans sticks to the present day and does not take the past into consideration is handy.

It is hard to see why Hungarian respondents are so concerned about the inner characteristics and appearance of the English and Americans, while their cultural heritage basically remains in the background. There is a sort of imbalance in how small countries see great ones, as if there were some kind of inferiority complex behind the answers and comments, and world politics also seems to have a role in this.

Learning about other cultures is always a mind-broadening experience. Doing research on the topic is very illustrative, and the results can be used in everyday language teaching and also university level education. Bringing cultures closer together is what all educators should do. It would be interesting to extend the survey to a large population of Hungarians, not just university students, and see what average people know about English-speaking countries.

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Appendix

Sources of stereotypes about England:

- <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/articles/14-british-stereotypes-that-we-wont-even-try-to-deny/>
- <https://www.tandem.net/british-stereotypes-fact-fiction>
- <https://www.movehub.com/blog/cultural-british-stereotypes/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypes_of_the_British

Sources of stereotypes about the USA:

- <https://www.insider.com/biggest-misconceptions-stereotypes-americans-tourists-2019-4>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypes_of_Americans

Bálint Szele holds a position of Associate Professor at Kodolányi János University, and is the author of three books and a number of publications on a diversity of topics: Jean Monnet, the father of the European Union, literary translation, English literature, Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Plays, and intercultural studies. He has published a number of literary reviews and translations, twelve interviews with Hungarian Shakespeare-translators, and a monograph on translations of Shakespeare’s plays into Hungarian. His interests include drumming, astronomy, and backpack hiking. bszele@kodolanyi.hu

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