

Peculiarities of Ethnic Stereotypes Usage in English Political Discourse

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Abstract

This paper aims to highlight ethnic stereotyping in the English-language mass media political discourse, which is an actual issue since the scope of media texts in English prevails in the global information space, which cannot but affect the viewpoint of an "average" English speaking reader. According to the cognitive linguistic approach, the stereotype is considered to be an element of the cultural and linguistic world view and an integral part of reality categorization mechanism. Ethnic stereotypes are very important in the process of intercultural communication since they can increase its effectiveness and eliminate interethnic problems or they can act vice versa. So auto- and hetero-stereotypes play a significant role in intercultural communication. This fact underlines the relevance of ethnic stereotype studies. The notions of "auto- stereotype" and "hetero-stereotype" are considered in the article, using the examples of English-language political media text headlines. Special attention is given to the headlines of English-language media texts about Russia. Basic features of the stereotype "modern Russia", formed by the English-language media, are defined by the analyzed political media text material.

Keywords: auto- stereotype, cultural and linguistic world-view, ethnic stereotype, political discourse, hetero-stereotype

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Introduction

The issue of stereotyping is closely related to the problems of language, mentality and culture interaction, which is the critical question of cognitive linguistics and linguacultural studies. There has been enough research into stereotyping in published materials (Henry, 2013; Shamsuddin, Keong, & Hamid, 2015) but they were mostly devoted to everyday awareness. This paper aims to highlight ethnic stereotyping in English language political media discourse which can be explained by the fact that the scope of media texts in English considerably outnumbers the scope of mass media texts in other languages. English-language media texts dominate the world media not only regarding quantity but also in terms of the impact on the mass reader and the world socio-political processes. A specific term "linguistic imperialism" denoting the state above of things has been coined (Al Hosni, 2015; Phillipson, 1992). In other words stereotypes formed and broadcasted by English-language media affect mass consciousness in the entire world. That is why the study of stereotyping, i.e. the process of formation, storage and functioning of stereotypes in mass consciousness, becomes one of the current topical issues since perception of the stereotyping process can be useful in overcoming problems of intercultural communication, increasing its effectiveness and eliminating interethnic issues. It should be mentioned that stereotyping is rather widespread in the media discourse since its main function is an impact one, i.e., the primary task of the media is to influence public opinion. More obviously, this function is realized in the political discourse, since a specific viewpoint beneficial to the addressee, a politician or a political group, is imposed through it. For this purpose, methods of psychological impact, as well as a variety of linguistic means, are used in the political text. The fact, that in today's political discourse stereotypes play increasingly important or the key role, speaks for the relevance of this research. The study presents an attempt to identify stereotyping in the political media discourse and analyze these phenomena using the examples of the English-language political media text headlines. Particular attention is paid to the headlines of English-language media texts devoted to the image of Russia.

Literature review

As it was mentioned above the study is based on the analysis of English language political media texts. The term "media text" appeared at the end of the 20th century in the English-language scientific literature, in the works of Bell (1998), Montgomery (1996), Fairclough (1995) & Fowler (1991). Research into stereotyping has a longer history (Kratz & Braly, 1933; Allport, 1954), but it is still a very active area of research in cognitive and ethno linguistics. It is common knowledge that any language is a way of reflecting the speakers' world perception. The values expressed with linguistic means form a single system of views, conceptualizing the reality inherent to the particular language. Therefore, due to the peculiarities of the national languages, representatives of different linguocultures are characterized by a specific worldview, which forms stereotypes of consciousness and behavior, characteristic of their mentality (Polyakova, 2013; Yuzhakova & Polyakova, 2018). The term "stereotype" was considered by Lippmann (2004), who described this concept as a model of perception, interpretation, and filtering of information in the process of the world exploration and recognition, based on the previous social experience of the involved community.

According to Krasnykh (2002), the stereotype is a fragment of a worldview that exists in the mind of an individual, i.e., "it is a certain image-representation, a mental picture, a stable,

minimally invariant, nationally and culturally specified view on the subject or situation" (p. 178). Ethnic stereotype is a rather stable idea of mental, moral, physical qualities, characteristic of various ethnic community representatives, which was formed primarily at the level of ordinary consciousness and passed from generation to generation in the form of unequivocal, stereotyped judgments like "greedy", "simple-hearted", "house-proud", etc. As a rule, ethnic stereotypes reflect biased opinion or judgment about these qualities (Prokhorov, 2005).

Belova (2006) distinguishes the following social functions of ethnic stereotypes:

- the manipulating function means that under certain conditions, for political and ideological purposes, stereotypes act as an instrument of influence on the mass consciousness;
- the function of socio-ethnic integration implies that on the one hand, stereotypes can satisfy the mental need for saving cognitive efforts, on the other hand, they can serve the public need to maintain the internal community cohesion and its opposition to other human societies;
- the cognitive function helps form the image of the external world;
- the communicative function is a means of exchanging information between representatives of "one's own" community;
- the protective function implies that stereotypes ensure the preservation of the traditional system of values about "us", the representatives of "our community" (autostereotypes) and about "them", "the aliens", the representatives of other communities (heterostereotypes).

According to Nalchadzhyan (2004), the following structural units can be identified in ethnic stereotypes:

- cognitive representation;
- thoughts about the object of cognition; object evaluation and feelings that arise as subjective indicators of this appraisal;
- a particular type of behavior towards the purpose (this component of the stereotype is not always present).

In cognitive and ethno-linguistics, it is customary to subdivide ethnic stereotypes into auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes. The auto-stereotype is a self-concept of the involved ethnic group; the hetero-stereotype is the concept that the group has about another ethnic group". It should be noted that in the political discourse, auto-stereotypes describing "us", i.e., "our country, our nation and our values", tend to have positive connotations, creating a positive self-concept. Hetero-stereotypes, on the contrary, often form a negative image of "them", "the alien"; the extreme degree of which is the "image of the enemy". The repeated use of auto- and hetero-stereotypes in the same text enhance their impact on the reader, creating a contrasting image of the real world, making the "enemy image" more negative.

Discussion

Since the purpose of our research is the identification and analysis of stereotyping in political media texts, we are to find linguistic and pragmatic means contributing to the creation of a particular referent image which hereafter could be transformed into a stereotype. So the main method of the study is the method of pragmatic analysis implicating identification the addressee's

intentions and presuppositions (Oualif, 2017). Supplementary methods are: discourse analysis method, the contextual analysis method, the cultural interpretation method, the component semantic analysis method, the stylistic analysis method. In other words, the methodological basis of our study is the complex of linguistic analytical methods. Here we cannot but refer to the works in the field of pragmalinguistics by Grice (1985), Leech (1983), Lakoff (1973), and Brown & Levinson (1987).

Based upon the scope of English-language media-texts about Russia one may say that, currently, the English-language media are forming and developing a negative hetero-stereotype "Modern Russia". The word above combination is a neutral nomination. All the same, it is turning into a stable negative stereotype of today's Russia due to being used repeatedly in a certain negative context, which is probably done purposefully to introduce a certain attitude towards Russia into the worldview of the Western reader (Yuzhakova, 2007). In most media texts, various variants of the nomination "Modern Russia", such as "Vladimir Putin's Russia", "post-Soviet Russia", "Putin's Russia", "the Russian state", "Russia" or "Moscow", are coherent to speech units with negative connotations and thus form a negative context for using the above-mentioned notion, which, in its turn, contributes to the formation of a negative hetero-stereotype of Russia.

An important role in the creation of the stereotype mentioned above is played by the media text headlines, the primary function of which is to attract the attention of a potential reader. In our opinion, headlines can also perform a "secondary" function, i.e., the purpose of forming stereotypes. It can be described in the following way: the readers of any media source, a magazine, a newspaper or a site, even those who are not interested in Russia and do not read articles about this country, look through all the headlines of all the articles (including articles about Russia) in search of an interesting material and unconsciously perceive the information contained in the headlines of the articles about Russia. As a result, a certain stereotype about this country is formed. In this case, unlike the texts of articles, headlines can affect almost every reader of the media source, since readers view *all* the headlines, but *not all* the articles.

Recently, the English media texts on events in Russia, or in some way related to Russia, are dominated by headings of the following type:

How Did Putin's Russia Descend into Lawlessness?

(<http://www.newsweek.com/vladimir-putin-russia-history-opinion-joseph-stalin-851837>). The title contains a proposition: "Russia has reached lawlessness," which can be interpreted as the absence of the rule of law in Russia; a lexeme "lawlessness" has negative connotations.

If You Talk about Russian Propaganda, Remember: Britain Has Myths Too (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/21/russia-propaganda-skipal-britain-churchill>). This heading creates the false impression that the author seeks to understand and justify Russia, comparing it with Britain. In fact it creates a contrast between hetero-stereotype "Russia" and auto-stereotype "Britain". Judging by this heading, Russia is characterized by propaganda (*Russian propaganda*). *Propaganda* is a lexeme with negative connotations denoting the spread of deliberately distorted information. In other words, in the headline, the intentional distortion of information supposedly inherent to Russia (*propaganda*) is contrasted with the sincere delusion of

Britain (*myth*); the lexeme *myth* has no negative connotations. So this headline is another contribution to the formation and development of a negative hetero-stereotype “*Russia*”.

Gangster's Paradise: How Organized Crime Took Over Russia (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/23/how-organised-crime-took-over-russia-vory-super-mafia>).

The second part of the headline *How Organized Crime Took over Russia* explains the metaphor of the first part of *Gangster's Paradise* and contains a proposition: *organized crime has swallowed Russia*. Thus, the negative context is created by using the metaphor *gangster's paradise*, and the word combination *organized crime*, which has negative connotations and falls into the proposition “*organized crime has swallowed Russia*”.

Europe Needs a Collective Defense Strategy to Counter Russia

(<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/22/europe-collective-defence-strategy-counter-russia-putin>). This heading is based on the presupposition: *Russia is dangerous*. So Europe should collectively resist this country and defend from it.

In many headlines, the personification of Russia is its president:

Aleppo, Ukraine, Cyber Attacks, Baltic Threats: What Should We Do about Putin? (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/15/what-should-we-do-about-russia-aleppo-ukraine-cyber-baltic-vladimir-putin>).

The author uses some homogeneous parts of the sentence: *Aleppo, Ukraine, Cyber Attacks, Baltic Threats*, thus listing the “crimes” of Russia and emphasizing their multiplicity. This part of the headline is a kind of allusion to all the previous articles about Russia where these “crimes” are described. Such an evaluation of the actions of Russia prevails in the Western media. Obviously, having been repeated multiple times, this attitude is introduced into the minds of the Western readers. The enumeration of Russia’s “crimes” is summed up by the rhetorical question: *What Should We Do about Putin?* Presupposition of this question can be formulated as follows: 1) the president of Russia does wrong things; 2) Western countries have the right to judge and adjust the actions of other countries, and, if necessary, “punish” them.

So, we have considered several headlines from English-language media texts devoted to Russia. All of them create a negative image of this country. On the basis of the headings discussed above, the reader can form the following view of modern Russia: a paradise for gangsters, a country that does not respect the law; a country that creates many problems in the world; a country where propaganda is widely used; a dangerous country, which the united West must resist and defend from. It should be noted that at present such headlines prevail in the English-language media. The quantity, as you know, goes into quality. So, by the ideas mentioned above, sooner or later, the negative hetero-stereotype *Modern Russia* will be formed, or it may already have been formed in the English language worldview.

Separate headings, of course, cannot form a stereotype. This process requires more information and time. However, a sufficiently vast array of media texts of the complying content and tonality can affect the reader's worldview.

As an example, consider the article *Europe Needs a Collective Defense Strategy to Counter Russia* (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/22/europe-collective-defence-strategy-counter-russia-putin>). The title of this article was analyzed above. Let's move on to the text itself. The introduction to the article is rather eloquent: *We need to stand together against Putin. If we don't, he will become emboldened in his war with our liberal democracies*. This introduction contains an appeal to the collective West (*we, our liberal democracies*) based on the presupposition: "*Putin is at war with Western liberal democracies*" (*his war* with *our* liberal democracies).

Further, as in many other English-language media texts devoted to Russia, we have a whole list of accusations against Russia, beginning with the war mentioned *with liberal democracies*:

1) *the deployment of Russian-made chemical weapons in Salisbury*: this information is introduced with ascertaining the fact modality, demonstrating the author's confidence in Russia's guilt, although the results of the investigation are still unknown.

2) *the so-called "election"*: The use of the quotes and the word combination so-called implies the idea that the election cannot be considered legal. The author also offers supposedly arguments for this point of view: *no "real choice" for voters; the main opposition leader Alexei Navalny was banned from standing*. Arguable issues are presented with ascertaining the fact modality again.

3) *... the Russian bear mauls our liberal democracies, corrupts our political systems, hacks our political parties, pollutes our online ecosystems, and seeks to drag European countries back to a violent and divided past*: claims against Russia are gathering like a snowball in this extract. To produce such an effect, the author uses a rather long series of homogeneous predicates (*mauls, corrupts, hacks, pollutes, seeks to drag European countries back to a violent and divided past*) describing negatively evaluated actions of Russia, personified by *the Russian bear*. The word combination *the Russian bear* representing Russia is a kind of allusion to the old European views on Russia. Using this technique the author seeks to arouse old European fears about that vast country. Enumerating ascribed negative actions the author demonstrates that the heart of *the Russian bear* has not changed. He uses ascertaining the fact modality to represent the listed activities as a matter of fact and in such a way to form a desired attitude of the readers.

The analyzed sentence, on the one hand, describes the reported actions of *the Russian bear*, allegedly, aimed at destroying the foundations of European society, such as *liberal democracies, political systems, political parties, online ecosystems*; on the other hand, it contains a hint of a possible solution to this problem. The salvation of Europe lies in the rallying of European countries united by common values. The enumeration of the above values is accompanied by the repeated use of possessive pronoun *our*, emphasizing the unity of these countries (*our liberal democracies, our political systems, our political parties, our online ecosystems*). This enumeration: 1) underlines the unity of the European countries based on the common values; 2) creates and develops the opposition of the negatively evaluated *Russian bear* and positively evaluated European countries; 3) points out that the only way to oppose *the Russian bear* reportedly trying to destroy European values is the unity of European countries.

In most of the analyzed articles, the list of Russia's guilt is usually followed by considering the ways to solve problems related to this country: *With this new strategy we should show to Mr Putin that his violations of international law have clear consequences, but also open up the*

perspective of cooperation and engagement, provided Russia starts delivering on its commitments under international law and beginning with the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Looking through this extract it would seem that the author is constructive, i.e., he looks for the ways out of a problematic situation in international relations. But in fact, he continues to impress the reader with the negative image of Russia and its president. For this purpose, presuppositions are used. It is common knowledge that presupposition is information which is not expressed, but implied by the statement. The presupposition is perceived in speech as "true", and is not subjected to discussion or questioning. It is often used to introduce the desired viewpoint to the reader. The passage under consideration contains the following presuppositions: "*Putin violates international law*" (*we should show to Mr Putin that his violations of international law ...*), "*Russia does not fulfill its obligations under international law and the Minsk Agreements*" (*provided Russia starts delivering on its commitments under international law and starting with the implementation of the Minsk agreements*).

The conclusion of the article does not differ either in content or in tone from the previous parts of the text under consideration: *Many don't want to accept the truth because it means hard choices have to be made, but the reality is that the Kremlin is again at war with our liberal democracies. If we don't respond with a new long-term strategy, Putin will be emboldened.* Summarizing the information stated in the article, the author makes two main conclusions:

- 1) The Kremlin again fights with liberal democracies (*the Kremlin is again at war with our liberal democracies*)
- 2) It is necessary to use a new long-term strategy to counter Putin (*If we don't respond with a new long-term strategy, Putin will be emboldened*).

So, the following image of Russia is created in the considered article: a country that uses chemical weapons; holds pseudo-elections; tears liberal democracies; corrupts European political systems, interferes with the work of European parties; pollutes online ecosystems; seeks to return European countries to the past; violates international law; does not fulfill its obligations under the Minsk Agreements; is at war with liberal democracies. The enumerated features could or are supposed to create an image of the enemy. The above list of "atrocities" of Russia in different variations is repeated time and time in various English-language media texts, which cannot but affect the reader's worldview and contribute to the development of a negative hetero-stereotype "*Modern Russia*" in mass consciousness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be said that stereotypes are widely used in mass media political discourse; their main objective is to manage public consciousness, to form a certain attitude, a viewpoint on the particular topical issue. Since stereotypes are characterized by stability and fixed emotional coloring, a single use of a stereotype in the text allows impressing the reader with the desired attitude towards the referent. However, the authors of political media texts often increase the impact effect by using auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes simultaneously, creating in such a way the impact of opposition. Currently, mass media play the leading role in the formation and development of ethnic stereotypes. The effective use of stereotyped ideas increases the pragmatic impact of the political media texts and is able to have a significant effect on the reader's worldview.

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