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Ethnic Stereotypes' Reflection by Means of Modern Cinematography

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Abstract. Cinema is one of the youngest forms of art, closely interrelated with social life. Created under the influence of certain social ideas and circumstances, and due to its accessibility and entertainment nature, it is able to have a serious impact on social groups. In modern science, the issues aimed at studying the peculiarities of ethnic stereotypes through cinematography have not been fully covered, so there is a need to study the specifics of the national character on the example of ethnic stereotypes by cinematographic means. The aim of the research work is to identify the specifics of auto and hetero stereotypes about Americans and Russians on the example of modern cinema in the USA and Russia. It is established that the specificity of ethnic stereotypes represented by modern films of the USA and Russia depends on the culture of the society, the conditions of its development, the depth of contacts between ethnic groups in the process of historical development. The national character is formed with the help of stereotypes describing ethnicity, stressing the most important characteristics distinguishing one culture from another. Despite the long-term intercultural interaction, films representing modern life in the USA and Russia reflect positive auto stereotypes and negative hetero stereotypes, which is dictated by the desire for the superiority of their own culture.

Keywords: cross cultural communication, ethnic stereotypes, auto stereotypes, hetero stereotypes, films, the USA, Russia

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Этнические стереотипы в современном кинематографе

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Аннотация. Кинематограф представляет собой один из наиболее молодых видов искусства, тесно взаимосвязанный с жизнью общества. Создаваемый под воздействием определенных социальных



идей и обстоятельств, он, в силу доступности и развлекательного характера, способен оказывать серьезное влияние на социальные группы. В современной науке вопросы, направленные на изучение особенностей этнических стереотипов посредством кинематографа, не были в полной мере освещены, поэтому возникает необходимость изучения специфики национального характера на примере этностереотипов кинематографическими средствами. Целью исследования является выявление специфики авто и гетеростереотипов об американцах и русских на примере современного кинематографа США и России. Установлено, что специфика этнических стереотипов, репрезентируемых современными фильмами США и России, зависит от культуры общества, условий его развития, глубины контактов между этническими группами в процессе исторического развития. Национальный характер формируется с помощью стереотипов, описывающих этническую принадлежность, выделяя наиболее важные характеристики, отличающие одну культуру от другой. Несмотря на продолжительное межкультурное взаимодействие, фильмы, репрезентирующие современную жизнь в США и России, отражают положительные автостереотипы и отрицательные гетеростереотипы, что продиктовано стремлением к превосходству собственной культуры.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация, этнические стереотипы, автостереотипы, гетеростереотипы, американские кинофильмы, русские кинофильмы

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Introduction

Stereotypes arise in a national group through the contact of cultures of any specific peoples. Any nation has its own characteristics that help to distinguish ethnic cultures among themselves. In this process of differentiation, there is a tendency for ethnic stereotypes to appear. Ethnic stereotypes are a kind of ethnic group image or idea undertaken by the group itself or by other ethnic group. Judgments about the original human images of some ethnic group to another is the basis for the ethnic stereotypes concept in modern linguistics.

The role of ethnic stereotype is still the subject of arguments in works by many modern linguists. Ethnic stereotypes in modern mass media have been analyzed in works by M. Appel and S. Weber [Appel, Weber, 2021] and M. Arai, M. Gartell, M. Rödin, G. Özcan [Arai et al., 2021]. Courses of ethnic stereotypes are the question to be discussed by A. Schmalor, B. Cheung, S. Heine [Schmalor et al., 2021]. Gender ethnic stereotypes are analyzed in works by D. Grigoryev, S. Fiske, A. Batkhina [Grigoryev et al., 2019]. Ethnic stereotypes in different cultures have been examined in researches by H. Kil, R. Noels, D. Lascano, O. Schweickart [Kil et al., 2019]; A. Kroon, D. Trilling, T. Raats [Kroon et al., 2021]. Ethnic media stereotypes and humor construction among friends is the subject in works by S. Sierra [Sierra, 2019].

Some linguists pay attention to the ethnic stereotypes revealed through films, this question has been analyzed by E. Cuelenaere, G. Willems and S. Joye [Cuelenaere et al., 2019]; stereotypes revealed in animated films have been studied by A. Lindgren [Lindgren, 2020]. Still in modern linguistics there are many aspects of ethnic stereotypes to be analyzed, and the question of different ethnic groups' stereotypes representation in the period of language contacts is one of them.

The scientific problem lies in the constant changing reality of language and cultural contacts, on the one hand, and in the basic cultural identity as the unchangeable component making the ground of the certain national character, on the other hand. Therefore, there's a need for linguistic and cultural analysis of traditional qualities of national character and qualities acquired in the conditions of transforming reality.

The perspective of the problem is seen in the research identifying main features of ethnic mentality in the era of adaptation to modern reality peculiarities.

Particular ethnic group representatives have their own mental and psychological qualities, certain types of communication among different peoples arise on the basis of ethnic stereotypes.

The content of ethnic stereotypes also depends on the specifics of society and culture, the conditions of their development, as well as on the depth of contacts between ethnic groups in the process of historical and cultural development. The national character is formed through stereotypes that form and describe ethnicity, stressing the most important characteristics and properties that distinguish cultures. Acting as a kind of ideal ethnic model, the national image is made through the influence of one's own behaviour pattern and the expectations of others.

The relevance of the research lies in the fact that the problem of ethnic stereotypes role in the perception of national character is becoming increasingly important in modern realities conditions. The object of the research work is ethnic stereotypes and ethnic linguistics ideas due to ethnic stereotypes. The subject of research lies in the specific functioning ideas of ethnic stereotypes due to the national character understanding.

The research work is aimed at analyzing the role of ethnic stereotypes while studying American and Russian national character depending on the language and culture perception. The purpose of the study determined the range of its tasks which are: to consider the theoretical aspects of ethnic stereotypes and ethnic linguistics; to analyze the role of ethnic stereotypes on the example of American and Russian national character; to compare American and Russian languages and cultures and reveal similarities and dissimilarities based on the example of ethnic stereotypes.

Methods

Our research highlights general scientific methods and methods of linguistic research. General scientific methods include generalization, abstraction, formalization, analysis, synthesis. In our research work generalization, analysis, synthesis are used to register and describe linguistic facts, their theoretical generalization based on methodological provisions.

Methodology of linguistic methods include descriptive method. The research procedures contained in the descriptive method help to identify the units of language and the system relations, as well as to investigate not only their qualitative, but also their quantitative properties. The comparative method of research is based on synchrony which helps to establish both the distinctive features of languages and the characteristics inherent in each language separately. The purpose of comparative language research is to consistently identify contrasts and differences between different languages. This method is a set of procedures for comparing English and Russian languages and cultures in order to identify similarities and differences.

Results and discussion

Ethnic stereotype are a socially conditioned image of one's own ethnic community, also defined as autostereotypes, or an idea of other ethnic communities, defined as heterostereotypes.

Stereotypes appear due to a person's desire for thoughts economy: the reduction of abstract concepts to concrete images, simplification, concretization, description of a large group of people as a single, united by common characteristics. These stereotypes arise due to the efforts of people's thinking economy, that is, the reduction of theoretical concepts to general images, simplification and description of a specific large group of people as a whole and held together by common features. Ethnic stereotypes come from the process of direct contacts, as well as from the process of communication informal forms such as jokes, sayings, films, music, etc., it is between peoples with the participation of prejudices rooted in historical tradition.

The results of numerous researches proved that any ethnic group can be fundamentally different from its existing stereotypes. A stereotype is a kind of indicator of the nation identity, and it should be treated more carefully. Sympathy or dislike for the people of a country based on a stereotype leads to contradictory and sometimes false stereotypes about them. An ethnic stereotype is a kind of projective test that is applied to the entire ethnic group, and the creator of the stereotype idea shows his personal psychological characteristics which can't be true.



As already mentioned, there are two types of ethnic stereotypes which are auto- and hetero stereotypes. Auto stereotype is the judgments, assessments and opinions of representatives belonging to specific ethnic communities. Most often, auto stereotypes include a lot of positive reviews. Hetero stereotypes are a set of value judgments of certain ethnic communities representatives in relation to other ethnic groups. Unlike the first type, hetero stereotypes of people can be completely different in nature. This is influenced by the historical experience of the interaction of these groups.

Factors influencing the formation of hetero stereotypes are: features of human socialization; the image of the country, political relations between countries; the level of knowledge and technological development; the image of the nation; the basic communication experience and interaction with other groups; the image of current politicians. These types of stereotypes are not autonomous units at all, but interconnected components in the structure of the individual or group consciousness development. The difference between these phenomena shows the degree of mutual understanding and psychological identity between ethnic groups. Stereotypes about one's own people are always more diverse and complicated due to the lack of information in the hetero stereotypes ideas of other people in relation to this ethnic group and detailed knowledge that strengthens auto stereotypes. Auto stereotypes are images of their ethnic group most of which are characteristics of the cultural acceptance of their subordinates. Hetero stereotypes usually represent an area of negative qualities that are unpleasant and undesirable in their culture, and therefore, in fact, denied.

Ethnic stereotypes may have positive and negative emotional effects. Hetero stereotypes are often divided into stereotypes of contempt, envy, admiration, etc. According to the criteria of evaluation of emotions there are two types of stereotypes - positive and negative. Positive stereotypes are some kind of approving statements, judgments and assessments of the whole people or its certain characteristics. The negative stereotype consists in the statement that the ethnic group has certain negative features and characteristics. The number of positive auto stereotypes usually exceeds the number of negative ones, but the latter still exist, and their number may increase during certain periods of the ethnic groups existence.

Different types of stereotypes can also be distinguished by subject or volume. There are stereotypes regarding gender (as social groups or categories), professions and any other groups. Modal ethno stereotypes are formed on the basis of the assumption that the modal personality of an ethnos exists. Stereotypes about modal (or basic) personality characteristics are called modal ethno stereotypes. They can also be called the main features of ethnic (racial) characteristics and, therefore, can also be attributed to the main ethnic stereotypes. Modal ethno stereotypes are divided into two groups: modal auto stereotypes and modal hetero stereotypes.

Characteristics of ethnic stereotypes are: they can be false and can serve as the basis for new even more incorrect stereotypes; they may not be absolutely true, but may be based on ideas close to reality; they do not reflect reality, but represent a simplified and distorted label of reality; they are extremely stable, but still changeable.

Ethno stereotypes structure has four components which are; the content – traits or characteristics related to any social or ethnic groups; the uniformity while people to some extent agree that a given group really has the characteristics attributed to it; the intensity - the degree of prejudice against ethnic groups. This characteristic of the stereotype is determined by ranking the characteristics attributed to the group; the orientation which indicates the perception of a stereotypical object: positive or negative. It is determined by the ratio of positive and negative characteristics of the stereotype. This concept shows that stereotypes should be understood as social attitudes.

The functions of ethno stereotypes include: psychological function – to simplify and systematize information, to preserve and protect personal value; socio-psychological function – the desire to minimize differences between countries and the desire to maximize differences between different ethnic groups, to correct the functions of stereotypes in order to correct our attitude towards representatives of any group; social function – identification function, broadcast function.

Ethnic stereotypes in the language and culture of the USA and Russia based on the example of cinematographic modern art

Features of ethnic stereotypes of Russia: on the example of films

Modern cinema contributes to the formation of ways to overcome ethnic stereotypes. The authors present and consider relevant problems of interethnic relations through the prism of films. Although cinema is a part of public over a hundred years it still has a high degree of importance in shaping the consciousness of viewers' worldview. Cinema makes public opinion, views on ethno stereotypes, and helps to overcome them as well, and Russian cinema was no exception. Let's analyse examples of such stereotypes based on movies and cartoons of the 20th-21st century:

Andrey Kravchuk's drama "The Italian", released in 2005, tells about a small orphanage worker who wants to adopt a childless Italian couple. This film illustrates the importance concept of mother, Motherland, Fatherland, honour and loyalty. The Italian couple appears in the film sporadically as an image of well-being, prosperity and partly oblivion of the Motherland. It should be mentioned that Italian families are leaders in the adoption of children from Russia.

Reproaches from the Italians also deserved some attention in Soviet cartoons – "Robbery by Italians" (1978), revealing the episode by the author Efim Hamburg, as well as the images of two charming, from the point of view of the Soviet viewer, bandits in the animated series by David Cherkassky "The Adventures of Captain Vrungel" (1976–1979). These works are perceived by modern Italians as their caricature where they are shown in an extremely unfavourable image: petty, fussy, prone to adventures and crime".

The film by Boris Rostov and Alexander Samokhvalov "We are from the Future 2" (2010) shows moments where Ukrainians are directly exposed as cowardly. This is a vivid, illustrative example of disrespect and hatred for people of Ukrainian nationality. Probably the brightest Russian film on ethno stereotypes is the legendary work of Alexey Balabanov "Brother-2" (2000). This film shows a huge number of stereotypes for each nationality indicated in the film. Basically, these are negative hetero stereotypes in relation to Americans, Ukrainians, and many other nationalities. Russian auto stereotypes are also shown in the film from the good side (the main character, Danila Bagrov, is a guy of Russian nationality, he is presented as a smart, brave, strong, honest, and cold-blooded person in relation to enemies). In general, the film is completely saturated with the propaganda of excessive patriotism, but it will never get worse from this. The film contributes to the destruction of old myths about Russia and contributes to the construction of a new myth in which we see a warrior capable of making serious decisions on his own. In the film, the reflective intellectuals of classical Russian literature were replaced by an active, capable of making decisions independently, a young hero from among "little people" who protects national interests not by word, but by deeds.

Also, an example can be attributed to the advertising of "Golden Barrel beer". In this advertisement, the main character is a brewer from Germany who dreams of visiting Russia. In this case, the choice of the nationality of the protagonist is due, on the one hand, to Russian hetero stereotypes about Germans. In this way, the authors decided to emphasize the quality of their product. This hero, on the other hand, in addition to his stereotypical external features, is also distinguished by some qualities that Russian people usually characterize German nationality.

Features of ethnic stereotypes of the USA: on the example of films

The culture of the USA can be confidently called a set of stereotypes. Americans are among the first who introduced television into everyday life. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, they began to shoot dozens and hundreds of films and cartoons, many of which, secretly or on the surface, have various types of stereotypes, including ethnic ones. Not much has changed since those times as even nowadays ethno stereotypes appear in their film work. Let's take as an example the mention of Russia in the US cinema.



Unlike Russian media mentioning the USA depends on the events taking place almost half of all American films mention events taking place in Russia. In Hollywood interest to Russia is actual nowadays. These stereotypes in the modern world can be called eternal. The most popular stereotypes are about the peculiarities of the Russian climate (strong frosty winter). Russian roulette, reflecting historical realities to a greater extent, remain in the associative range of Americans to this day as well, stereotypes generated by the era of confrontation between the United States and the USSR, the “Cold War”, all these aspects are still largely determined to represent Russians on the screen.

Quite often, Russians are a very religious people in the view of Americans’ ethno stereotype. This idea is also reflected in movies. In the film “The Red Sparrow” by Francis Lawrence, the main character is presented as a typical Russian – before going on stage, the heroine crosses herself and makes a three-fold bow to the ground. In this way they show their vision that the Russian people are deeply religious and superstitious, that everyone has a cross on their body, and everyone regularly goes to church.

In 1998, Walter Hill's cult film “Red Heat” with Arnold Schwarzenegger in the title role was released. He plays a Soviet policeman, KGB agent Ivan Danko. Here, the Russians, by the example of the main character, are shown as hard-headed, gloomy, obsessed with their goal people, they are ready for everything to reach their goal.

Russian people are often portrayed as villains in movies, for example, in the movie “Rocky 4” by Sylvester Stallone, the boxer Ivan Drago is such a cult villain. In this film he embodies the whole spirit of the Soviet Union, and Russia in particular. The real man is a mountain, emotionless, mysterious and deadly dangerous.

Also, do not forget about the favourite thing of Russians, according to Americans – alcoholism. Residents of the United States believe that no Russian person, regardless of profession and rank, will not live a week without a bottle of vodka. Thus, they show stereotypical thinking about our moral weakness and confusion. In cinema, such an example can be observed in the film “RED” by Robert Schwentke. In the film one of the main characters in the plot comes to the Russian Embassy to the head of counterintelligence. The charming and not at all stupid boss seats the hero at the table and, first of all, opens a two-liter bottle, after which they drink without even wincing.

Also, Russians are often shown as not even having any concepts about discipline and skill. If there is a Russian mechanic in the film, his whole job is to hit a broken thing with a wrench. As an example, you can take a Russian mechanic on the international space station from the movie “Armageddon” released in 1998. He is shown as an eternally drunk and having no basic professional skills.

On the contrary, American filmmakers almost always label their ethnicity as the ideal one. Watching an American movie, TV series or cartoon, you can often notice that their nation is the most well-coordinated system worldwide. People on the streets are always dressed fashionably, their behaviour is absolutely predictable, and they will never make any mistake.

One of the main features that distinguish Hollywood cinema from the cinema of other countries is the so-called superpower of the main character. Any American citizen, if he is the main character, has a number of traits and characteristics inherent only in superheroes. An example is the movie “Indiana Jones and the Temple of the Crystal Skull” where the main character, who is essentially an ordinary archaeologist, has the skills of all activities, ranging from martial arts and shooting, ending with hacking and magnificent eloquence. He easily captures the hearts of women and the destinies of enemies on the way to the realization of his goal. In this film, there are also Russians, in the role of special forces, again Russians are illustrated as stupid machines to carry out orders. Thus, American authors present auto stereotypes as the truth, elevating the American nation above all others.

Based on the above, we can say with full confidence that stereotypes in cinema have always been and will always be, this is an eternal problem. Without relying on any facts, directors and screenwriters use ethnic stereotypes for their own purposes, whether positive or negative.

One must stress, the analyses of USA and Russian films proved that the most productive are positive auto stereotypes and negative hetero stereotypes. This is not surprising as we live in a time when people cannot know the full truth about a foreign nation. Even after the invention of the Internet when everyone can literally find information about anything in a minute, including about other ethnic groups, still there are many false stereotypes.

The analysis showed Russians in films openly show Americans (and other ethnic groups) as a greedy people who have no concepts of altruism, selflessness and kindness. Auto stereotypes are usually of a positive nature, showing how perfect everything is in society, and how gracefully we handle life situations.

The Americans, in turn, are doing the same thing, only in the opposite direction. Everyone except the Americans themselves are fools and barbarians who have remained far beyond the development that the American ethnos has reached. First of all, this concerns the Russian nation, which is for them the apogee of evil and cynicism. Summing up, in modern realities cinema has reached the peak of its influence on the consciousness of the people. And ethnic stereotypes, even the most harmless ones, can greatly upset the bearers of these stereotypes. The authors present these stereotypes as an educational function within their country, develop extreme patriotism and hostility to other ethnic groups. After all, it does not matter how many years have the United States and Russia been on friendly terms, still the nations are extremely negative towards each other. This is a big problem, and it requires a lot of attention as the more people learn negative stereotypes and begin to believe them, the more aggression grows. This technique has been used by the authors of cinema for decades. Cinema is indeed a kind of information weapon of modern states.

In conclusion, the subject of the research work is relevant today, since ethnic stereotypes are one of the most important components of the national character. Based on the research work a number of logical conclusions can be mentioned:

–Ethnic stereotypes can be viewed from two points of view:

ethno stereotypes are a certain image or a number of characteristics typical for one ethnic group or the image of representatives of other communities in the perspective of this ethnic group.

ethno stereotypes as a cultural representation are is a kind of mental image or verbal shell. In this sense, stereotypes can be both processes and results of communication. Everything that concerns ideas about the culture of ethnic groups in this case can act as stereotypes.

–The conformity of the individual to group representations is one of the main sources of ethno stereotypes:

that is why basically a person shares existing, ready-made stereotypes in his group, and does not create them. An individual is always forced to adapt to the world around him, and therefore he accepts and assimilates a system of ethnic stereotypes. In this vein, stereotypes teach people the concept of “friend – foe” and make different opinions about other ethnic groups in future.

–The concepts of ethno stereotype and national character are, in fact, identical:

These concepts are formed under the influence of the historical and cultural environment of the ethnos. National character is a generic concept that includes an ethnic stereotype as part of one whole, and this is the only difference.

–Ethno stereotypes are almost always perceived and formed by individuals throughout life:

From an early age a person trusts people who are authoritative for him, they are parents, educators, teachers. Growing up, he begins to draw this information from the media, cinema, music, etc.

–Ethno stereotypes can be used to theoretically strengthen nationalism:

Thus, ethno stereotypes can be created intentionally in order to form new prejudices and prejudices against another nation, thereby leading to interethnic conflicts. They often make an



unfair attitude towards any ethnic group. And this, in turn, leads to such results as violence, discrimination and violation of the rights of another ethnic group.

– Ethno stereotypes are quite a frequent phenomenon in cinema:

Cinema nowadays is one of the most popular ways to get new information. A special tool for reflecting stereotypes is the language of cinema. It is understood as a system of expressive means that perform the function of semantic expression of such stereotypes. Most often, filmmakers use positive auto stereotypes and negative hetero stereotypes. Thus, the authors subconsciously install in the viewer excessive patriotism and “oblique views” towards representatives of other people.

Conclusions

Ethnic stereotypes represent a certain number of characteristic features peculiar to a particular ethnic group, or the image of other communities’ representatives about this ethnic group. Reflecting a certain kind of the mental image stereotypes affects the interlocutor attitude in cross cultural communication. The correspondence of an individual to group representations is one of the main sources of ethno stereotypes. An individual is always forced to adapt to the surrounding world, and therefore he accepts and assimilates a system of ethnic stereotypes. Stereotypes teach people the concept of “friend – foe” and make different opinions about other ethnic groups. Modern cinema reflects a person's life in the cross cultural space, representing the features of numerous “foreign” cultures, creating a certain image. Often such an image is based on a stereotypical idea of a particular ethnic group or people. Despite the fact that modern society is becoming more conscious and tolerant, stereotypes represented by means of cinema remain relevant. Stereotypes, divided into auto and hetero stereotypes, are often associated with gender, nationality, profession and other characteristics of the characters.

The research work has proved that Russian films have revealed such auto stereotypes of Russians as patriotism, love to family members, while the hetero stereotypic idea of Russians in US films includes passion to drunkenness, stupidity, insensitivity, laziness. Such ideas demonstrate stereotypical thinking about Russian moral weakness and indecision. Auto stereotypes represented by US films include the desire to be successful in life, patriotism, independence, while ambitiousness, unscrupulousness, careerism are key in the list of hetero stereotypes about Americans in Russian films. Despite the long period of historical interaction between Russian and American cultures, the stereotype representation of each other is still based on a negative stereotypical representation.

The practical results of the research work prove

Speaking about the prospects for further research, it should be noted that modern cinema has unlimited possibilities to reflect the peculiarities of modern multicultural society. We believe the idea of gender stereotypes representation by means of cinematography in modern Russian and American films is of great interest taking into consideration the different attitude towards this peculiar question.

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