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COGNITIVE MECHANISMS UNDERLYING THE FORMATION OF LINGUISTIC STEREOTYPES

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Abstract. This article examines cognitive mechanisms that contribute to the formation of linguistic stereotypes, particularly categorization, prototype formation, cognitive economy, and heuristic generalization. Russian speech formulas illustrate how descriptions of social roles can develop into categorical expectations. Attention is also given to evaluative vocabulary, metaphorical imagery, and the cultural meanings of proverbs in Russian and Uzbek. The study uses conceptual and contextual analysis of constructed examples rather than experimental data. It proposes a framework for distinguishing neutral categorization, social norms, and stereotypical judgments, with implications for language teaching and intercultural communication.

Keywords: linguistic stereotype, categorization, prototype, cognitive economy, speech formula, evaluation, intercultural communication.

INTRODUCTION

Everyday expressions such as «Он же преподаватель» (After all, he is a teacher) and «Молодёжь сейчас совсем другая» (Young people are completely different nowadays) may convey more than an observation. They activate familiar expectations about a social group. Such shortcuts can make communication easier, but they may also obscure individual differences.

Categorization is indispensable to human thought; a stereotype arises when a typical or expected feature is treated as a characteristic of nearly every group member. This article considers how that transition is expressed linguistically and why context matters in distinguishing a generalization from an evaluative stereotype.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Eleanor Rosch's research on prototypes [10] and George Lakoff's work on categorization [7] provide a basis for describing why some group members are viewed as more typical than others. Studies of cognitive semantics by N. N. Boldyrev and V. A. Maslova [3; 8], as well as Lakoff and Johnson's account of conceptual metaphor [6], clarify the role of conventional images. Cultural interpretation draws on Jerzy Bartmiński [2], while works by N. F. Alefirenko, V. V. Krasnykh, Yu. E. Prokhorov, and Yu. N. Karaulov address shared representations and speech practices [1; 4; 5; 9].

The material consists of author-constructed examples based on recognizable Russian-language patterns and two proverbial expressions. Conceptual analysis and contextual comparison are used to identify the named category, the attributed quality, the evaluation, and markers of generalization. The examples are illustrative, not a corpus sample; no surveys, experiments, or frequency measurements were conducted. The claims therefore concern possible mechanisms of interpretation, not the actual prevalence of stereotypes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A category identifies someone as a teacher, doctor, or student; a prototype supplies a familiar image of a representative member. Teachers, for example, may be associated with patience and responsibility. Yet these desirable qualities cannot automatically be attributed to each teacher. The phrase «настоящий учитель» (a true teacher) often evaluates conformity to an ideal rather than confirming professional status. In «Настоящий учитель никогда не сердится» (A true teacher never gets angry), an admired quality becomes an unconditional requirement.

The contrast between «Она преподаёт русский язык» (She teaches Russian) and «Она же преподаватель русского языка, должна говорить без единой ошибки» (She is a Russian-language teacher, after all; she should speak without a single mistake) is instructive. The first sentence identifies an occupation; the second imposes a norm. The particle «же» presents the expectation as obvious, while «должна» introduces an obligation. Stereotyping is produced by this interpretation of a social role, not by the occupational noun itself.

Ready-made cognitive schemas reduce interpretative effort, but a few observations may be mistaken for evidence about an entire group. After seeing several students use phones in class, a speaker may say, «Все студенты постоянно сидят в телефонах» (All students are constantly on their phones). The quantifier «все» and adverb «постоянно» make the assertion universal and habitual. «Некоторые студенты пользовались телефоном во время занятия» (Some students used their phones during class) describes the observed event without unwarranted generalization.

The availability heuristic may reinforce this error: memorable or frequently repeated incidents seem representative even without sufficient evidence. Repetition of a speech formula, however, does not demonstrate that the behavior it describes is common. Linguistic frequency and social frequency are separate questions.

Speech formulas can praise, criticize, or impose expectations. «Человек старой закалки» (a person of the old school) may suggest perseverance or resistance to change, depending on context. Likewise, «Хороший руководитель всегда всё контролирует» (A good manager always controls everything) turns one model of management into a universal standard. Even positively valued group traits can narrow the evaluation of individuals.

For analytical purposes, three levels should be kept distinct. Neutral categorization identifies a person as belonging to a class. A social norm expresses a community's preference for certain conduct without necessarily describing every person. A stereotypical judgment, by contrast, extends a presumed group trait to particular individuals regardless of their differences. In actual conversation the boundaries are not always explicit; grammatical markers and the speaker's intention help identify which interpretation is most plausible.

Metaphors such as «железная воля» (an iron will), «тяжёлый характер» (a difficult character), and «тёплый приём» (a warm welcome) render abstract qualities concrete [6]. Nevertheless, figurative expression is not automatically stereotypical. A stereotype is more likely when the image is repeatedly attached to a specific group and used to judge its members. Its interpretation requires attention to speaker, audience, and situation.

Russian «Гость в дом, Бог в дом» (When a guest enters the home, God enters the home) and Uzbek «Mehmon otangdan ulug'» (A guest is more honored than your father) both express respect for guests. Their shared value does not prove that hospitality practices are identical across communities. Proverbs provide evidence of cultural ideals, not a direct account of how all speakers behave. Broader usage data would be needed to compare regional or generational differences.

A working model of stereotype formation involves five stages: noticing a salient feature; linking it to a social category; generalizing it and assigning value; expressing the judgment in a

conventional construction; and repeating the construction until it seems self-evident. This is a heuristic framework, not an experimentally established developmental sequence. Analysis should ask which group is named, what quality is assigned, whether exceptions are admitted, and whether an individual impression has been substituted for evidence.

In Russian-language teaching, students can compare «Этот студент опоздал» (This student was late), «Некоторые студенты опаздывают» (Some students are late), and «Студенты всегда опаздывают» (Students are always late). The progression demonstrates how quantification changes an utterance's scope. Comparing culturally related speech formulas in Russian and Uzbek also helps learners separate lexical meaning, social evaluation, and communicative context.

CONCLUSION

Linguistic stereotypes develop through the interaction of categorization, prototype effects, cognitive economy, and evaluative generalization. Quantifiers, modal expressions, and conventional images can make expectations about a group appear unquestionable. Yet neither a prototype nor a proverb is necessarily a stereotype. The crucial issue is whether a characteristic is assigned categorically to individuals on the basis of group membership. Future corpus and association studies could test the proposed distinctions in Russian and Uzbek speech.

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