SPREADING ETHNOCENTRIC INFORMATION IN THE MEDIA DISCOURSE

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Abstract. The present article attempts to explore the effect of spreading ethnocentric information and shaping a new ethnic identity mostly focusing on the Internet media in multicultural countries, namely in Great Britain and the United States of America. The research is conducted in the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. In this research media discourse is considered as a means of verbalization for social interaction between representatives of different cultures. Protagonists of the stories as well as their social background, education, age and marital status were taken into account. The offered hypothesis was supported by the results of the present study. They proved the spreading of ethnocentric information, which leads to shaping of a new ethnic identity.

Keywords: spreading of information, ethnocentric information, media, ethnic identity, multicultural.

Introduction

Recently, with the debate over globalization, there has been an increase of interest in media and intercultural studies. The most prominent researches were made by L.A. Samovar and R.E. Porter (1991), F.E. Jandt (2001), N. Fairclough (2000), A. O’Keeffe (2006), M. Talbot (2007), R. Wodak (2009). Most of these researches focus on structural (Fairclough, Talbot,) or political (Wodak) dimensions of media. However, little is yet known about the impact of media discourse on spreading ethnocentric information and pushing forward prejudice against other nations in ethnically heterogeneous countries.

Media discourse is a broad term which can refer to a totality of how reality is represented in broadcast and printed media from television to newspaper (O’Keeffe, 2006). Media discourse gains its importance in the globalized world where information is rapidly spread through different channels. It is a leading means of describing different events in the life of multicultural societies. We can assume that media discourse spreads ethnocentrism and shapes a new ethnic identity as it uses different techniques to cover main events of multiracial societies.

The problem of ethnocentrism often deals with the study of intercultural communication, i.e. the study of communication within a particular cultural or social group.

Numerous researches have investigated the notion of ethnocentrism in the field of intercultural communication. Berry and Kalin (1995) pointed out that the ethnocentrism concept tends to be viewed as «the synonym for general antipathy towards all out-groups».

Ethnocentrism has been described as an individual psychological disposition which has both positive and negative results (Neuliep and McCroskey, 1997). Ethnocentrism serves as a means of «patriotism and willingness to sacrifice for one’s central group» (Neuliep and McCroskey, 1997). On the other hand, ethnocentrism leads to misunderstandings between representatives of different cultures (Neuliep and McCroskey, 1997).

Stephen and Stephen (Gudykunst, 2003) indicates that ethnocentrism is lower in countries with strong belief in tolerance of others, harmony with others than in countries with a sense of cultural superiority, respect for tradition. It is pointed out that the concept of ethnocentrism has two components: an exaggeration of in-group position, cultural superiority and a criticism of all out-group cultures.

As an extension to ethnocentrism, ethnic stereotypes are the barrier to intercultural communication. Samovar and Porter (1991) define stereotypes as «the perceptions or beliefs we hold about groups or individuals based on our previously formed opinions or attitudes». As the definition points out, stereotypes do not develop suddenly. They are formed over a certain period of time by our own culture. Barna (1997) states...
that stereotypes can be either positive or negative and they help us to understand the world by categorizing and classifying people we encounter.

Jandt (2001) described a number of ways in which stereotypes are harmful and impede communication. Firstly, stereotypes are essential for assuming that a widely held belief is true, when it may not be. Secondly, the usage of stereotypes can reinforce our beliefs and can cause assuming the fact that a widely held belief is true of any one individual in the group. Thirdly, using negative stereotypes to interpret the behavior of individuals within a certain ethnic group, further impedes intercultural communication.

Thus, taking that views into account, we can assume that ethnocentrism as well as ethnic stereotypes can be harmful for the participants of communication as they create barriers in understanding representatives of different cultures.

We can further assume that above mentioned factors can lead to shaping a new ethnic identity. Hall (1996) states that identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not «who we are» or «where we came from» rather than what we become, how we have been represented and how that influences the way we represent ourselves. Alba (1990) argues that ethnic identity is no longer connected with ethnic social structures. However, he presents ethnicity as a symbolic entity concerned with the symbols of ethnic cultures rather than with the cultures themselves.

The present paper attempts to prove the hypothesis that media discourse spreads ethnocentrism and shapes a new ethnic identity which can lead to changes in the language used by representatives of different cultures.

Method

The present research is carried out in the framework of the critical discourse analysis, or CDA. The term CDA is used nowadays to refer to the critical linguistic approach of scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication (Wodak, 2001). In general, it is a study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships (Van Dijk, 1993).

CDA treats language as a social practice and considers the context of language use. Thus, we considered media discourse as a means for verbalization of social interaction between representatives of different cultures, i.e. people who represent a certain culture and at the same time representatives of a different one. Their nationalities, religions, age groups, education levels were of a crucial role for analysis.

Results

The findings of this research show that media spread ethnocentrism as a feeling of superiority of a particular culture over another one. It should be mentioned that the rate of ethnocentrism is higher in countries with respect to traditions and feeling of cultural superiority, i.e. in Great Britain. Besides, it is lower in countries with equality in rights and opportunities, i.e. in the United States of America. Ethnocentrism is mainly represented in media discourse by two components: exaggeration of cultural superiority and criticism of all out-groups (see Appendices A-D). However, ethnocentrism in media discourse should not be referred to as general antipathy towards all out-groups. It rather helps to create the opposition OTHER vs. NON-OTHER in media discourse. The above mentioned is reached by using ethnonyms. They may be expressed directly by using geographic names, e.g. Americans, Britons, Mexicans, Chinese, Romanians, Bulgarians, Pakistani, Syrians, Spaniards, and implicitly by using colorful ethnonyms, e.g. black, white. Moreover, they can be expressed by names for places of living, e.g. Chicago, Illinois, Israel. The other possible way for their expression is the protagonists’ religion, e.g. Christians, Muslim.

The findings also show that usage of ethnonyms reproduce different types of situational interaction between representatives of different cultures. They represent factual information, i.e. facts from lives of different ethnic communities (see Appendix E). Furthermore, ethnonyms used in texts indicate conflict situations, confrontational situations and situations of cooperation between different ethnic groups (see Appendix F).

It should be also mentioned that ethnocentrism creates basis for ethnic stereotypes. The latter are formed on the ground of out-group’s behavior and lifestyles within in-group (see Appendix G). The research showed that they can be either positive or negative. Moreover, there can be well-known opinions or attitudes towards all representatives of out-groups. They can also be formed artificially by media discourse techniques.
The further results show that by means of spreading ethnocentrism, a new ethnic identity is shaped. The latter does not depend on historical background. However, cultural as well as religious background is of great importance. Person with a new ethnic identity gains new features, either positive or negative ones.

Discussion

The study triggers the impact of media discourse on spreading ethnocentric information and shaping a new ethnic identity in ethnically heterogeneous societies. The research was conducted considering earlier attempts to define main concepts of intercultural communication and their impact on effective communication between representatives of different cultures. The analyzed material showed that by using certain ethnonyms in the media texts opposition OTHER vs. NON-OTHER is advanced. It becomes possible because of exaggeration of superiority of a certain culture over another one and criticism of other cultures representatives. Such usage creates certain types of interethnic interaction. They are verbalized in the form of intercultural interaction situations.

Results indicated that above mentioned opposition leads towards pushing forward prejudice, thus creating ethnic stereotypes. The latter can be dangerous as they are possible reasons for interethnic conflicts. Such stereotypes show either positive or negative features of out-groups representatives.

Overall, the results of this study show that usage of certain methods and techniques can spread ethnocentrism, thus shaping a new ethnic identity. The latter adds new features to a person as a representative of a certain culture.

The present study is helpful for the further investigations within the framework of theory of intercultural communication as well as linguistics. The research shows the peculiarities of intercultural interaction verbalization. It embraces the analysis of means that spread ethnocentric information and create basis for ethnic stereotypes, thus shaping a new ethnic identity in media discourse. However, results of this study do not cover investigation of correlation between authors of the texts and their potential readers. Moreover, the target audience of the stories was not taken into account.

It should be also mentioned that results are applied only to media discourse and they will not be the same in cases with other corpora, e.g. fiction. In that case intercultural interaction situations will be made up for purpose.

References

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Appendices

Appendix A (an example of exaggeration of cultural superiority): Tories hope that axeing foreign-language versions of documents explaining how to claim benefits would make it harder for immigrants such as newly arrived Romanians and Bulgarians to cash in on the UK’s benefits system, encourage others already here to learn English – and save money spent on translators (The Daily Mail, 19 January 2014).

Appendix B (an example of ethnocentric criticism of out-groups): One in four Americans ‘don’t know the Earth orbits the Sun’ and only half believe in evolution (The Independent, 17 February 2014).

Appendix C (an example of superiority exaggeration): The global order is being transformed as wealth and power spread into the new emerging economies. Incrementally but remorselessly, “The Asian Century” is taking shape. The implications for our prosperity, security and influence will be immense. The question for Britain is whether we have the imagination, boldness and urgency needed to succeed. The stakes could not be higher: our private wealth, our public services and our international standing are all at risk. We either respond by embracing innovative change or live with the consequences of our inertia (The Independent, 12 April 2014).

Appendix D (an example of ethnocentric criticism of out-groups): In a recording first obtained by TMZ, Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling chastised his then-girlfriend, V. Stiviano, who is herself of both African-American and Mexican descent, for bringing African-American guests to games, and posting photos of herself with people of color, including Magic Johnson, to her Instagram account. “It bothers me a lot that you want to broadcast that you’re associating with black people. Do you have to?” Sterling complains (The Washington Post, 28 April 2014).

Appendix E (an example of factual information coverage): The sound of battles echoes from the outskirts of the capital as Christians in Damascus celebrated the Easter weekend, briefly ignoring the conflict for the yearly ritual. Christians, many belonging to ancient denominations found only in Syria, form about 10 percent of the country's population. Most fear the rising power of Islamist groups within the rebel movement fighting to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad, although many are also wary of the authorities (The Chicago Tribune, 19 April 2014).

Appendix F (an example of interethnic cooperation): Officers from City of London Police joined Spanish counterparts from the Policia Nacional in a series of raids in Barcelona, Madrid, Marbella and London in one of the biggest anti-fraud operations ever staged. There were further arrests in the US and Serbia. Details are being reported for the first time after a ban on publication was lifted by a Spanish judge (The Guardian, 28 February 2014).

Appendix G (an example of ethnic stereotypes creation): Defying enduring stereotypes about black fatherhood, a federal survey of American parents shows that by most measures, black fathers who live with their children are just as involved as other dads who live with their kids — or more so.

Worry about black fathers has been tied to a persistent fact: Black dads are especially likely to live apart from one or more of their children — and fathers of all races tend to be less involved in the day-to-day lives of their kids when they live elsewhere (The Los Angeles Times, 20 December 2014).