

Verbalization of national and cultural stereotypes in Russian and British anecdotes

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Author: Petrina Galina Sergeevna [13.06.2013]

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Abstract: This qualification paper studies linguistic, cultural and structural properties of ethnic anecdotes.

Anecdotes are short narratives or riddles with a long introduction and a brief comic ending which impute a particular ludicrous trait or pattern of behavior to the butts of the jokes. The main ways of achieving humorous effect in an anecdote are pun, paradox, parody, hyperbole and an underlying false logic.

Due to their brief content jokes are often based on means of linguistic economy, therefore many of them rely on stereotypes - simplified and settled concepts, held by one social group about another. Stereotypes are emotion-based and are often used in a negative or prejudicial sense.

An ethnic stereotype is a generalized representation of an ethnic group, composed of what is thought to be typical characteristics of members of the group. We can distinguish autostereotypes and heterostereotypes. Autostereotypes reflect what the representatives of a particular ethnicity think of themselves and tend to be positive because they aim at highlighting the importance and uniqueness of the ethnicity. Heterostereotypes are often represented by negative caricature or inversion of positive characteristics possessed by members of a foreign group, exaggerated to the point where they become repulsive or ridiculous.

The subject matter of our research is British and Russian anecdotes analyzed from the point of view of ethnic stereotypes they rely on.

Ethnic anecdotes with the representatives of two hostile nations rely upon direct confrontation of positive autostereotypes and negative heterostereotypes.

The majority of analyzed ethnic anecdotes focus upon certain paired qualities, notably stupidity and canniness but also recklessness and restraint, practicality and generosity, snobbishness and vulgarity, boastfulness and understatement. Thus, the English tend to criticize such stereotyped characteristics of the Russians as recklessness, endurance, stubbornness, spree, integrity and simplicity. The Russians are regarded in English anecdotes as stiff, arrogant, materialistic and very practical people. Upon comparative analysis of British and Russian ethnic anecdotes we concluded that these funny narrations rely for humorous effect on real or imaginary peculiarities of another ethnicity that frequently derive from political and socio-economic relationships between the two countries concerned.