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## What does it mean for stereotypes to “reside in language”?

### Abstract (English)

This paper presents an ethnolinguistic understanding of stereotypes, as opposed to that prevalent in sociology. While sociologists emphasise the psycho-social functions of stereotypes, linking them with prejudice, endowing them with negative characteristics and criticising them for partiality, false generalisations and resistance to change (cf. Schaff 1981), ethnolinguists follow the reasoning laid out by Lippmann (1922) and Putnam (1975) in emphasising the cognitive functions of stereotypes. In this approach, the social, integrating function of stereotypes is considered important, but secondary to the richness and multidimensionality of the stereotypical content, represented in the form of the cognitive definition. Stereotypes are thus not only images of ethnic groups but of the totality of the human experience (people, objects, and phenomena), as well as being mythological and ideological images (e.g. of freedom, equality, solidarity, etc.). Stereotypes are taken to be indispensable, as they are an integral part of natural language. They are also subjective and ethnocentric, because that is what language itself is like in its role of categorising and simplifying the experience of the world around us.

In this paper, stereotypical judgments are divided with regard to their modality into pictures (*X* is such and such); patterns or models (*X* is and should be such and such); mythological images (*X* may be such and such); and ideological images (*X* may be and should be such and such). The common feature of all stereotypical judgments is covert universal quantification instead of existential quantification (i.e. a certain property is ascribed to all, rather than to just some exemplars of a category), plus a peculiar kind of modification, limiting the judgment to typical and/or true representatives of the category. The latter property renders the judgment arbitrary.

How does one live with stereotypes? In intercultural encounters the answer might be sought in the notion of the profiling of the base image. The profiling conception is an important element of the ethnolinguistic approach, because it facilitates dialogue across political boundaries and national divisions. An important influence on the functioning of national stereotypes is found in the political attitude of subjects functioning in public space, the desire to seek mutual understanding and international cooperation. A *modus vivendi* is thus possible through a process of their “aesthetic domestication” via language games and the notion of “meta-stereotype”. Examples can be seen in anecdotes, as well as in parodical and grotesque literature.

## Abstract (Polish): Co znaczy, że “stereotypy mieszkają w języku”?

Autor prezentuje etnolingwistyczną koncepcję stereotypu, odmienną od dominujących w koncepcji socjologicznych. O ile socjolodzy na pierwszy plan wysuwają psycho-społeczne funkcje stereotypów, łącząc z uprzedzeniami i przypisując im charakterystyki negatywne, krytykują za tendencyjność ocen, skłonność do fałszywych uogólnień oraz odporność na zmiany (vide Schaff 1981) – o tyle językoznawcy, idąc tropem wyznaczonym przez Waltera Lippmanna (1922) i Hilarego Putnama (1975), akcentują poznawcze funkcje stereotypów, funkcję społeczną stereotypów (integrowanie wspólnoty) uznają za ważną, ale wtórną, podkreślają bogactwo i wielowymiarowość ich treści i próbują zdać z nich sprawę za pomocą definicji kognitywnych. Pojęciem stereotypu językoznawcy obejmują nie tylko wyobrażenia grup etnicznych, lecz całej otaczającej człowieka rzeczywistości, ludzi, przedmiotów i zjawisk, także wyobrażenia mitologiczne i ideologiczne (wolność, równość, solidarność itp.). Zakładają, że stereotypy są nieusuwalne, bo stanowią integralną część mechanizmów języka naturalnego. Są subiektywne i etnocentryczne, dlatego że taki jest cały język, który zawsze kategoryzuje i upraszcza widzenie świata realnego. Autor różnicuje sądy stereotypowe ze względu na ich status modalny na: obrazy (X jest), wzory (X jest i powinien być), wyobrażenia mitologiczne (X może być) i wyobrażenia ideologiczne (może i powinien być). Stwierdza, że wspólną cechą wszystkich sądów stereotypowych jest niejawną kwantyfikacja ogólna zamiast szczegółowej (przypisanie cechy wszystkim okazom klasy zamiast niektórym) oraz dodatkowo swoista modyfikacja, ograniczająca ważność sądu do typowych i/lub prawdziwych przedstawicieli klasy, co nadaje tym sądom charakter “uznaniowy”.

Odpowiadając na pytanie “Jak żyć ze stereotypami?” autor wskazuje na szanse, jakie w relacjach międzykulturowych otwiera operowanie pojęciem profilowania bazowych wyobrażeń (koncepcja profilowania jest istotnym elementem podejścia etnolingwistycznego, bo umożliwia dialog poprzez granice narodowe i państwowe) i wyraża opinię, że przemożny wpływ na funkcjonowanie stereotypów narodowych ma wola polityczna podmiotów działających w przestrzeni publicznej, chęć szukania porozumienia i dążenie do transnarodowej współpracy. Modus vivendi ze stereotypami jest możliwy na drodze ich estetycznego osławiania przez różnego rodzaju gry językowe, operujące kategorią “metastereotypu”, czego przykładów dostarczają anegdoty i literatura utrzymana w konwencji parodii i groteski.

## 1. The inevitability of stereotypes

National stereotypes are inevitable; they cannot be removed from language. This is reflected in the title of the book *Stereotypy mieszkają w języku* [Stereotypes reside in language], published in Lublin in 2007, which will be referenced in my paper. Its theme is precisely that stereotypes are an integral part of natural language, because they are derived from the mechanisms of a simplifying categorisation of the world. We are doomed to live with them. The essential question is therefore: How to live with them?

I will try to answer this question at the end of my paper, but first I will critically refer to the simplified method of using national stereotypes. Subsequently, I

will turn my attention to the specificity of the semantic structure of stereotypical judgements, involving not only unauthorised generalisation, but also the use of the implicit modifiers “typical” and “true/real”; and will discuss the complexity and relativity of stereotypes raised in ethnolinguistic analyses through examining their profiling. Finally, I will formulate some practical conclusions on how to live with stereotypes and the prospects for intercultural dialogue – not so much “beyond stereotypes”, but how to use the opportunities they create.

## 2. Widespread practice: simplification of stereotypes (stereotyping)

In an increasingly united Europe, with the ongoing intensification of contact between cultures and people of different nationalities, the interest in national specificity has increased. The most popular search engine Google gives 258,000 search results for the (Polish) entry “stereotyp narodowe” [national stereotypes].<sup>1</sup> First, it shows the following definition (cf. eszkola.pl):

**National stereotypes** should be understood as a specific kind of **widely-held image of a given nation**, a simplified view of the national characteristics of another nation strongly encoded in the consciousness of groups and societies, fixed by tradition. [...] The consequences of negative stereotypes can be dangerous, because they lead to attitudes of intolerance and strongly rooted prejudices.

The key word in this definition is simplified. On the websites we find a large amount of information on national imagology – the simplified mutual perception of nations. The dominant tendency observed there is radical reductionism, reducing national characteristics to a few or even just one very distinctive characteristic, which is not always accurately selected, but is usually sharply stigmatising. If a stereotype simplifies perception, as the definition above claims, then the internet-based circulation of information brings about a further degree of simplification, i.e. the “stereotyping of stereotypes”.

Particularly popular here are anecdotes. We can illustrate this with a short tale attributed to Ignacy Paderewski,<sup>2</sup> known under the title “The elephant and the

<sup>1</sup> For the English entry “national stereotypes” this number is obviously higher – 689,000 results.

<sup>2</sup> There exist different versions of this anecdote. In 1921, the Nobel Prize winner Marie Skłodowska-Curie during a meeting of the International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations told her version of the anecdote: “In a literary contest on the elephant, the Englishman submitted the work: ‘My experience in hunting elephants in South Africa’, the Frenchman wrote an essay on ‘Sexual and erotic life of elephants’, and the title of the Pole’s story was ‘The elephant and Polish National Independence’” (Wikipedia). The anecdote was popularised by Stefan Żeromski, who used its abbreviated version in his novel *Przedwiośnie* [The Coming Spring] (1925) in the following dialogue between Cezary Baryka and Gajowiec: [C.B .:] – We are born with Polishness defect. [G.]: – I’m not talking about

Polish case". Authors representing different nations submit their works for a competition on elephants. The German submits a 3-volume treatise entitled *Versuch einer Einführung in die Psyche eines Elefanten*, the Frenchman submits a brilliant essay on the sexual life of elephants, the American submits instructions explaining how to make elephants even larger, and the Pole submits a memorial entitled *The elephant and the Polish case*.

Although the Polish stereotypes of Germans, French and Americans and the self-stereotype of Poles themselves are in fact much richer, the story reduces them to one distinctive characteristic, exaggerating it (hyperbole) and contrasting it with those of other nations in order to achieve a humorous effect.<sup>3</sup>

The proper (intention-oriented) perception of such messages requires a good knowledge of the cultural context. Only the residents of Western Europe, who share national stereotypes typical of this part of the continent, will find the following anecdote about the difference between heaven and hell amusing. According to this anecdote, in paradise an ideal lover is the Frenchman, a cook the Italian, a policeman the Englishman, and a soldier the German. In hell the roles are reversed: the Englishman is a cook, the German a lover, the Frenchman a policeman, the Italian a soldier.

And conversely, only the residents of Central and Eastern Europe – and in particular those belonging to the older generation – can adequately respond to the story about why the Warsaw Pact achieved such impressive success, namely because each nation contributed to it what it was best at: the Russians, a democratic system of governance; the Poles, sober thinking and social discipline; the Germans from the GDR, a sense of humour; the Czechs, courage; and the Hungarians, a common language.

The most radical simplification of national stereotypes can be seen in the so-called nationality maps on the internet. Witty maps by Yanko Tsvetkov from 2010 were joined this year by a map drawn in faraway Japan, on which each individual European country was given a one-word label: England, "Bad Food"; the Netherlands, "Tulips"; Belgium, "Chocolate"; France, "No Fat People"; Spain, "Good at Soccer"; Switzerland, "Watches"; Norway, "Luxurious Prisons"; Germany, "Killed Jews"; Lithuania, "Loves Japan"; Poland, "Stupid People"; Czech Republic, "Not Religious"; Austria, "Classical Music"; Belarus and Ukraine, "Beautiful Women", etc. All the labels are constructed from the perspective of a tourist; they are indeed witty, sometimes even malicious, but they serve pure fun.

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it that Poles are Poles, but about a significant defect in philosophical and sociological consideration, *deus ex machina* appears: Poland. There is an anecdote about "elephant". The Pole tasked, following other nations, to write an essay about an elephant wrote without hesitation: "The Elephant and Poland" (*Przedwiośnie*, Warsaw 1956, 270).

<sup>3</sup> A Czech acquaintance of mine informed me that in the time of real socialism, he was familiar with a version of this anecdote featuring additionally a Czech who submitted an editorial for this competition entitled "The Czech elephant as the best friend of the Soviet elephant".

### 3. Testing of liking for others – a sociological approach

It would not be worth devoting any special attention to the simplifications found on the internet, which largely serve entertainment purposes, if it were not for the fact that they derive from the more serious practices of various agencies involved in testing the liking for individual nations. In Poland, this is done regularly by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS). A recent survey conducted by CBOS in March 2016 (Communication No. 53/2016) revealed that the nations Poles like most in 2016 include the Czechs, the Italians, the Slovaks and the English, whereas the greatest aversion is observed towards Romani and Arabs. In general we learn from the survey that since 2012 the attitude of Poles towards many nations has deteriorated – especially towards Russians and Ukrainians, but also Germans and Lithuanians.

The one-sided display of liking/aversion in popular studies of national stereotypes seems to have been influenced by the analysis of experts – sociologists and psychologists – of attitudes towards other nations, and the excessive focus on the link between stereotypes and prejudice. Psychology examines the mechanisms of social perception (Wojciszke 2010) and the impact of labeling on people’s thinking and behaviour. Attention is drawn to the fact that attributing a stigmatising name to an individual or group can affect their own acceptance of certain qualities and lead to them acting in accordance with those labels.

Hilary Putnam (1975) called for an examination of the contents of stereotypes, at the same time recommending that linguists set and define them. This work was not undertaken by linguistics until the beginning of the 1970s: in Germany in the work of Uta Quasthoff (1973), and in Poland in articles by Walery Pisarek (1975) and Krystyna Pisarkowa (1976). In 1980, a trial issue of the *Dictionary of Folk Linguistic Stereotypes* (Bartmiński 1980) was published in Wrocław.

### 4. A linguistic approach to the problem of stereotypes

The linguistic approach to stereotypes differs from the approach of contemporary sociologists and psychologists, although their achievements are appreciated and respected by linguists and some of their methods (e.g. surveys based on Osgood’s semantic differential – see Appendix) are used. Sociologists and psychologists focus on the psycho-social functions of stereotypes and assign negative characteristics to them, criticising them for biased assessments and for a tendency to produce false generalisations and resistance to change; they also emphasise that stereotypes affect prejudices and create communication barriers (see Schaff 1981).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The study of stereotypes has a long tradition in Poland dating back to the 1920s and 1930s. Jan Stanisław Bystron (1924) and Józef Chałasiński (1935) created the forgotten “mythological school”, which fell into oblivion – perhaps because it was joined by the Nazi Kurt

Linguists and culture experts, following Walter Lippmann, the proponent of the theory of stereotype (1922), and his follower Hilary Putnam (1975), emphasise the cognitive functions of stereotypes and the richness and multidimensional character of their content using cognitive definitions; they do not equate stereotypes with prejudices.

Firstly, linguists use the notion of stereotype to refer not only to the images of ethnic, racial or gender groups, but also to objects and phenomena, i.e the **whole reality surrounding the human** (see *Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols* [SSiSL] 1996-2012), and mythological and ideological representations. The team of Lublin ethnolinguists working for years on the *Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols* (SSiSL) developed the folk stereotypes of heaven and earth, water and fire, meteorological phenomena and metals. This group is currently working on the stereotypes of the human body, occupations, house/home, and national stereotypes. (In 2014 Monika Łaszkiwicz defended her doctoral thesis on this subject and she will soon present an overview of the whole body of Polish research on stereotypes.) It also analyses ideological stereotypes such as FREEDOM, EQUALITY, HONOUR and WORK. The results of this work have been published (since 2015) in the *Lexicon of the Axiology of Slavs and their Neighbours*.

Secondly, as I mentioned at the outset, according to linguists, stereotypes are **indelible**, as they constitute an integral part of the mechanisms of natural language. Of course they are subjective and ethnocentric – as is language as a whole. The process of generalisation which underpins them is an elementary operation of natural language, which always categorises and simplifies the vision of the real world by transforming the image of the empirically experienced world into subjective, but socially (collectively) fixed linguistic and cultural visions of reality. There is no escape from the grammatical categories of language; there is no escape from stereotypes.

Being a colloquial theory of reality, stereotypes intentionally serve a cognitive function. Stereotypes should not be confused with prejudices, though such identification has a long tradition in the European humanities.<sup>5</sup> Axiological evaluation is not their primary function, but like all linguistic means they are embedded in the world of values and can carry both a positive and negative charge; next to the malicious stereotype of the mother-in-law there is the positive stereotype of the mother and the relatively neutral stereotypes of aunt and grandfather. The social function of stereotypes (community integration) is important, but secondary.

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Lück, the author of a thorough, albeit politically tendentious book about the Polish “myth” of a German (1938).

<sup>5</sup> The fallacy of this identification was pointed out by Andrzej Kapiszewski (1978, 32), and it was extensively substantiated in a treatise by Zdzisław Chlewiński (1992).

In treating stereotypes as natural components of a language and cultural code, linguists are joined by artists and culture experts.<sup>6</sup> The renowned film director Krzysztof Zanussi said at the conference “Nations and Stereotypes” held in 1993 in Kraków:

The feeling that stereotype in any form, including national stereotype, is a negative concept, detrimental to the mutual agreement of societies, is foreign to me. On the contrary – a stereotype is a form of reference, part of language necessary to make certain shortcuts and generalisations. [...] It is an element of synthesis, a necessary linguistic operation, particularly important for today’s dominant visual language. The only problem lies in the level of readability of a stereotype, what elements it is built from and to what stereotypes we appeal while communicating. To me a stereotype in itself seems to be neither bad nor harmful. (Zanussi 1995, 209, 218)

## 5. Varieties of stereotypes

From the point of view of the cognitive function of stereotypes, and according to the quality of the accompanying implicit “modifiers”, we can distinguish **four varieties of stereotypical judgments** (according to Bartmiński/Panasiuk 1993, 372):

	is	should be	can be
images	+		
models	+	+	
mythological representations	(+)		+
ideological representations		+	+

Examples:

Images: *Germans are thrifty, Poles are spendthrift, Russians are musical.*

Models: *A scout does not lie; a soldier defends his homeland; a Pole and a Hungarian – two good friends, they fight and drink their wine together.*

Mythological representations: *Where a German stands, the grass will not grow* (proverb in NKPP, quoted since 1894).

Ideological representations: *Freedom is measured by crosses* (a proverb-based fragment of a song by Feliks Konarski, *Czerwone maki na Monte Cassino* [Red Poppies on Monte Cassino]).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf., inter alia, Bokszański (2001).

<sup>7</sup> I will pass over for now the mythological and ideological representations; I would only like to note that in order to avoid negative connotations associated with the term “stereotype”, we refer to the latter also as “axiological concepts” and they are subject to special comparative

Separate national stereotypes usually synthesise the characteristics and combine them into bundles of descriptive judgements (images), evaluative judgements (models) and sometimes mythological judgements.

## 6. “All typical”, “all true/real” – or on the overwhelming role of modifiers

A common feature of all stereotypical judgements is implicit **general quantification** as opposed to specific – i.e. the assignment of a given characteristic to all specimens of a particular class (e.g. *Germans are hardworking*, *Poles are spend-thrift*, *Russians are musical* or “S is P” type of judgements), when in accordance with the rules of logic, only some and not all “S” are meant. This unsubstantiated generalising property of stereotypical judgements is well recognised and forms part of the definition of stereotype by a formula stressing “unauthorised generalisation”.

But that is not all, since the quantification in stereotypical judgements is subject to significant, specific **modification**<sup>8</sup> recognisable in discourse. It is notoriously abused and constitutes a source of frustration for many representatives of nations who are portrayed in this way.

When accused of unauthorised generalisations, a person using stereotypical judgments about others responds: “Not all Germans/Poles/Russians are like that, but the **typical** ones are just like that”. The quantifier ‘every/all’ is hence – in the interpretation of the carrier of the stereotype – reduced to **typical** representatives of the class. Can such a judgment be subjected to verification? Confirmed or rejected? In a way yes, because what is typical or atypical can be specified and defined relatively objectively as ‘average, normal’. It can also be verified using statistical procedures – but only to a certain extent, because “typicality” by its very nature is not a clear-cut category based on categorical criteria (*yes/no*, *is/is not*), but a gradable category with a largely subjective character.

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research undertaken by the team working on the *Lexicon of the Axiology of Slavs and their Neighbours*. (The first volume was published in 2015 and was centred on the stereotype of HOUSE/HOME; 4 further volumes dedicated to the stereotypes of EUROPE, LABOUR, FREEDOM and HONOUR are nearing completion).

<sup>8</sup> A specific role of quantifying modification using the operators “typisch” and “richtig” was noted by Uta Quasthoff in her linguistic study of stereotypes. She wrote: “Mit der Formulierung <<der typische Deutsche>> oder <<der richtige Deutsche>> im Gegensatz zu <<allen Deutschen>> ist offensichtlich eine Unterscheidung zur Klasse aller der Deutschen intendiert, deren Elemente durch die Eigenschaft <<deutsche Staatsgehörigkeit>> gekennzeichnet sind” (Quasthoff 1973, 243). However, the author equated the roles of both modifiers – “typical” and “real/true” – which in my opinion are different; this will be elaborated on in the following section.



However, another modifier is even more characteristic of stereotypical judgements – **real/true**.<sup>9</sup> It is commonly used in proverbs; for example, *True virtue is not afraid of criticism; A friend in need is a (true) friend indeed*. It often appears in online texts: *A real mother worries about her child for at least 18 years; Hans Gielen – a true German arrived in Poland! What should a true Aryan look like?* In his book *We Europeans*, which is a clear example of ethnocentric and stereotypical thinking, Richard Hill, in a comment about the Slavs, writes that he *cannot treat them as true Europeans* (Hill 2004, 270); while the notion of a *true Pole* has played a very important part in Polish public discourse in recent decades.

The modifier “true/real” is rarely revealed on the surface level of a text. When Hill states that “Poles do not like working” (Hill 2004, 275), he makes a characteristic generalisation by using the universal quantifier “each/all” instead of the logically correct existential quantifier “some”, but he also applies his opinion not to all Poles (which would be an obvious logical fallacy, of which we do not suspect Hill), but to “all *typical*” or “all *true*” Poles (in his opinion). Let us consider, based on this example, how the two modifiers work and what is the source of their “inevitability”.

The claim that someone’s behaviour is “typical” – in this case Poles, who according to Hill do not like working – can be relatively easily refuted on the basis of sociological research.<sup>10</sup> Just recently, in the light of a European survey, it has been found that the situation is opposite to what was claimed by Hill, because

<sup>9</sup> There is a culturally relevant difference between “typical” and “true/real”. It was described by Bartmiński in an article about the stereotype of a German (Bartmiński 1994) and mother (Bartmiński 1998). A typical German (according to young Poles) is hardworking and diligent, calculating, meticulous, reserved etc., a true German according to the same respondents is not only hardworking, diligent etc., but also speaks German fluently, has blue eyes and is brutal (Bartmiński 1994/2007, 250-252); a typical mother loves her children, is caring, understanding, good, also busy; a true mother also loves, cares etc., but also devotes herself to her children and is a model for them (Bartmiński 1998, 73-74). The significance of this difference was confirmed by Michael Fleischer and Marta Nowosad-Bakalarczyk on the example of woman, and by Jeremina (2016) on the example of work (manuscript in volume WORK).

<sup>10</sup> In an editorial article entitled *Poles: diligence above all*, the “Gazeta Wyborcza” of 12 April 2011 announced, referring to a CBOS survey, that “diligence was considered a prerequisite for achieving success by 92 percent of respondents. The same numbers of Poles claim that work gives meaning to our existence. 86 percent of respondents believe that the proper performance of their duties will result in reward or success, and 85 percent think that work is a moral duty to ourselves and to other people. [...]. At the same time, 52 percent of respondents agree that a man is not able to make a fortune by honest work solely.” The weekly magazine “Polityka” (No. 18 of 28 April 2015) presents the results of a European survey according to which “Poles are almost the most hardworking persons in the world. They spend 42.5 hours per week at work [...] The richest nurture their self-portrait of workaholics. 81 percent of respondents believe that they achieved everything in their life only through their hard work, 76 percent believe that work gives meaning to life” (Wilk 2015).

(I quote): “Poles are almost the most hardworking persons in the world; they spend 42.5 hours per week at work” (although in the opinion of journalists this does not bring them glory) (Wilk 2015).

In the case of the modifier “true/real” there is in fact no possibility of verification. The thing is a foregone conclusion, because a sentence with the modifier “true/real” cannot be subjected to verification. The reason behind this is the **hidden tautology** present in the expression: “All *true* Poles (who in my opinion are characterised by the fact they do not like working) do not like working”. The use of the formulas “In my opinion”, “I think so” – precludes any discussion; it closes the case.

## 7. What does it mean to be a “true European” – or on the problem of values

I will stay for a while with the opinion of the British author about a “true European”, not only because Hill refused to apply this name to the Slavs, but because of an interesting motivation for this refusal which confirms the view that values underlie stereotypes (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2013). Hill supports his concept of a “true European” on page 306 of his book *We Europeans* with a list of values, which he calls “a few things that are common to all European cultures”. Hill’s list includes 13 characteristics such as Christian faith, freedom of speech and tolerance, but also the shepherd dog, the garden gnome and Santa Claus. Regardless of the author’s humorous approach to this matter, the idea of searching for an answer to the question about the true X in the sphere of values is a serious one.

Thus, what we mean by *a true friend, a true German, a true European* etc., depends on the adopted prototype model of respectively a friend, a German and a European – the model embedded in a certain system of values. As the choice of values is always a matter of individual and/or collective preferences, the modifier “true/real” opens up a wide field of choice. The question arises whether there is a common canon of European values shared by all Europeans, which enable judgements to be passed on who is a “true European”? The list provided by Hill does not meet this condition. It is striking that it does not include the values mentioned in the preamble to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 2007:<sup>11</sup> human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity. None of these values was referenced on his list of European traits; could it be that he was an early exponent of “Brexiteer”?

It is worth recalling in this context the study results obtained by the French author Dr. Aline Viviland, a graduate of the Sorbonne in Paris, which showed a quite different perception of Europe and Europeans by young people from

<sup>11</sup> “The Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity”.

Eastern Europe, specifically Polish youth. Without going into details, in her lengthy treatise from 2014 *La compréhension des gentils Polacy, Niemcy, Francuzi et Europejczycy par la jeunesse polonaise contemporaine: une étude ethnolinguistique*, a fragment of which was published in the latest volume of “Etnolingwistyka” (“E” 28), let us note that from the point of view of young Poles, the image of a European is closer to the image (autostereotype) of a Pole than to the image of a German or a Frenchman, who in the eyes of young Poles are less European than Poles. The point is that the criteria of European-ness adopted by the Polish respondents do not reflect Hill’s criteria. One of the differences is the role of religion, considered important by Hill and almost absent from the young Poles’ stereotype of Europe.<sup>12</sup>

In detail, according to Viviani’s survey, the characteristics attributed by young Poles to the ethnonym *Europeans* are closer to the characteristics of the ethnonym *Poles* than to the characteristics of the ethnonyms *Frenchmen* and *Germans*. Aline Viviani claims that “Polish youth associates many common features of the understanding of the name *Europeans* with the name *Poles*”. These are qualities such as creativity and intelligence, attachment to tradition, education, ability to unite, mutual aid, solidarity, friendly disposition, development, and fascination with the USA. Despite the highlighted differences, the degree of identification of young Poles with Europeans is significant. What is surprising is the perceived small number of common characteristics between Europeans and Germans (according to the Polish respondents, they have only two characteristics in common: a penchant for travel and “development”). The respondents saw more common characteristics between Frenchmen and Europeans: liberalism, *savoir-vivre*, rich culture, friendly disposition, distance from religion.

## 8. Four characteristics of stereotypes

Ethnolinguistic studies show the complexity and multifaceted nature of stereotypes, their relativity, moderate variability and susceptibility to ideological profiling. I will briefly analyse these properties with reference to selected examples.

### 8.1 The complexity and richness of stereotypical characteristics

The simplified use of stereotypes on internet forums is in contrast to the rich content of characteristics assigned to nations in the popular image of the world. The richest stereotypes belong to the nations with whom Poles have a long history of contact (Germans, Russians, Jews), and the poorer ones to more remote nations.

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<sup>12</sup> The results obtained by Viviani are confirmed by the results of surveys ASA 1990, 2000 and 2010 (Bartmiński/Chlebda 2013, 85-87).

The linguistic descriptions of Polish stereotypes of Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews and Gypsies involve a number of characteristics; for the Ukrainians there were at least 24 (Bartmiński 2009, 307-308), for Germans there were 32, and for Russians there were as many as 70 (Bartmiński 2007, 249, 295-296). Of course, there are both stronger and less fixed characteristics. This can be seen (particularly in the graphs) in the course of survey research when certain characteristics are indicated by a large number of respondents, while others are indicated by only a few, or often just by individual respondents. For instance, in a survey of characteristics of a “true” Ukrainian conducted in 2000, the responses obtained from 100 people most often referred to patriotism (21), a specific language (18), love for their own culture (12), attachment to tradition (11), trade (8), specific customs and a strong sense of national identity (6), drunkenness (5), poverty (4), the mafia and Ukrainian borscht, etc.

The ranked list of characteristics (i.e. arranged according to the frequency of responses) is evenly distributed, with no clear thresholds that would permit an unequivocal decision about which characteristics are fixed and should be classified as stereotypical. Most characteristics are indicated only once. No characteristic exceeded a 50 per cent threshold of respondents’ indications.

In a similar study of Germans, a strongly established characteristic was diligence (indicated by 30 per cent or 31 out of 103 respondents); precision and order (18), cleanliness and pedantry (10), the German language and blue eyes (8 each), brutality (7), conscientiousness (6), discipline (5), firmness and chauvinism (4). Most characteristics were indicated only once.

The list of characteristics attributed to individual nationalities in the surveys is open. All proposals for cutting off the list according to the number of indications (50, 40 or 15 per cent?)<sup>13</sup> or the number of characteristics (the first 3? 10? 20?) remain a matter of convention.

## **8.2 Subjectivity and relativity of stereotypes**

The dependence of stereotypes on the subjective mindset of speakers and their system of values can be shown most simply by comparing images of the same nationality in different countries. In 2004 our teams conducted a study on the perception of Poles and Russians in different countries. Although certain characteristics are commonly attributed to Poles (e.g. religiosity), the resulting images vary considerably from language to language. For instance, Lithuanians consider Poles to be cunning and conceited (Завьялова, Англицкене 2005); Belarusians consider Poles to be haughty and fond of power (Lappo 2005); for the Russians a Pole is traditionally Catholic and rebellious, a traitor of the Panslavic idea,

<sup>13</sup> Kapiszewski (1978) was in favour of a 50 percent threshold, Sodhi and Bergius were in favour of a 40 percent threshold and Fleischer (1998) favoured 15 percent.

currently (in Kaliningrad Oblast) a dealer (Киселева 2005); for the Germans, a car thief, poor and religious (Жданова 2005); for the French, a busy Catholic alcoholic (Skibińska 2005); for the Americans, a hardworking and hospitable but stupid traditionalist (Mikos/Tieszen 2005). From earlier descriptions we know that in the eyes of the Ukrainians a Pole is conceited and despotic; for the Czechs, too pathetic, a religious nationalist; and for the English, a pretentious romantic hero with a “sarcastic sense of humour” (Hill 2004, 275-276).

There is a clear relationship between the heterostereotype of a Pole and the history of international relations and geography. The most positive stereotype of a Pole developed in remote Slovakia, separated by mountains, and far in the south, in Hungary, with whom Poland has never been at war. The least positive stereotype emerged in the nearest neighbour in the East and West (Germany), while Poles enjoy moderate liking in distant France, England and the USA.

### **8.3 Multifaceted nature of stereotypes**

Stereotypical characteristics relate to different aspects and can be combined into bundles (syndromes and facets). It is important that characteristics belonging to different aspects are evaluated differently. Neutral, purely informational characteristics relate to appearance (blue eyes, sidelocks, slightly shaved head), typical props (a mug of beer, a bandura, an accordion) and food (beer, vodka, pasta). Axiologically marked are characteristics relating to mental and social, ideological and political, and even existential aspects. In the perception of one and the same nationality, positive characteristics can collide with negative ones. Germans are clean and hardworking (existential aspect), but also conceited and hard-faced (social aspect); Jews are cunning and sly (social aspect), but also intelligent and wise (mental aspect); Russians are overwhelmingly megalomaniac and aggressive (political aspect), but also emotional, loving music and singing (psychological and cultural aspects), Ukrainians are cruel (psycho-social aspect), but also freedom lovers, striving for independence (ideological aspect). An increasingly significant role in contemporary Polish heterostereotypes is played by descriptive, neutral characteristics, while the role of evaluative characteristics is diminishing.

Owing to the internal richness and diversity of characteristics it is possible to construct basic variants of representations functioning in intercultural communication, which we call **profiles**.

### **8.4 The vulnerability of national stereotypes to ideological profiling**

I will explain what I mean by profiling using the example of the stereotype of a German (I have written about this in a separate article, Bartmiński 1994). The Germans and Poles have shared many experiences throughout the centuries,

both good and bad, but overall very rich, which has resulted in a multiplicity of stereotypical characteristics. In the Polish space of language and culture (“linguo-culture”) we can find at least five historically consecutive profiles of a German: as someone “fundamentally foreign”, half-demonic, with whom we cannot communicate because he is dumb (Pol. *niemy*) and does not speak our language (the traditional, prototypical folk profile); subsequently as an exotic and funny “pludrak” [someone who wears breeches], a hardworking and mean infidel (the noble Sarmatian profile); then as a military invader and simultaneously a person of high material and spiritual culture (for the 19<sup>th</sup> century Polish patriots and people of culture); then as a mortal enemy, driven by hatred and lust for murder (for the victims of the Nazi occupation); and finally, as a modern European (for the youngest generation of Poles).

Each profile is stored and has its own place in the social representation system, but the profiles are structured differently: as a vague memory of the past (“pludrak”), as a painful piece of living memory, and as a postulate of a European norm that is just being realised. Each profile has its preachers and followers in Poland, and this diversity is highly positive, as it allows partners to be found for intercultural dialogue and cooperation on both sides of the border.

## 9. How to live with stereotypes?

Finally, let us consider if we can overcome prejudices and stereotypes, and if so, how can it be done? Can this be achieved by knowing people better? In the opinion of many teachers, it can. Such a belief is the basis on which, among other things, exchange programmes for young people and students are built. But it is not true that closeness automatically gives rise to friendship. Rapprochement and mutual knowledge can be at most one of the factors, effective only under additional conditions. Ethnic borderlands where different nationalities live close to each other have always been sites of bloody conflict, as shown by the situation in Northern Ireland, the Balkans in the 1990s and the “ethnic cleansing” in Volyn in 1943.

We can also learn from the conclusions drawn from a recent study of the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Lithuanian borderlands. Belarussians like the local Poles more than Poles living abroad, but in Lithuania the situation is just the opposite: the local Poles, being close neighbours, are even more disliked than the Poles living in Poland (Bartmiński/Mavrič/Rzeutska 2005).

Two factors are particularly significant for **ways of dealing with stereotypes**: firstly the **historical variability** of stereotypes with reference to their cognitive content and evaluation; secondly the **political will** of actors in the public space on different sides of political borders, the desire to seek agreement and the pursuit of transnational cooperation.

Regarding **variability**, contrary to the proponents of the mythical “national character” (Hill 2004; Lewandowski 2004), stereotypes are not static, just the opposite – they are subject to historical processes of change. An example might be the recently challenged German stereotype (inherited from the Prussian era) of Polish wastefulness (*polnische Wirtschaft*) due to the success of the Polish economy since 1989. The change of negative stereotypes can be triggered by an outstanding individual having unquestionable authority. It happened in Poland, considered by some journalists as the world centre of antisemitism; the Polish Chief Rabbi Szudrich recently posted on the Internet (retrieved 8 September 2016) that “Today Poland has a really lower level of antisemitism than in the past and I am confident that all of this is attributable to the teachings of John Paul II”.

**As for the political will**, the impact of official state policy on ethnic stereotypes is overwhelming. This applies in our own region of Europe to the mutual perception of Poles and Germans, Poles and Russians, Poles and Ukrainians. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine, observed in Poland with great sympathy, has led to changes in the Polish image of a Ukrainian, changing his image from an aggressive “nationalist” who is ready to mercilessly “rezaty Lachiw” to an admired “patriot” fighting for the “samostijnist” of Ukraine (Bartmiński 2007). Parallel changes took place in the 1990s in the Ukrainian stereotype of Poles as shown by Alla Kravchuk (Kravčuk 2009). Similarly (but unfortunately only temporarily), the resignation of the Russian government from the programme of political dominance in Central Europe resulted in the emergence in Russia of a new stereotype of a Pole: no longer a rebel, “traitor of the Slavs”, but a spokesman for human dignity (in poems by Maryna Tsvetaeva) and a relentless defender of freedom in the face of violence on the part of the authoritarian rule (in poems by David Samoilov); see Levkivskaja (2002).

Positive political relations between Poland (during the term of Donald Tusk as prime minister) and Germany (with chancellor Angela Merkel) have led to the improvement of the image of Germans in Poland and Poles in Germany. “Germans positively evaluate the relations between our countries. They consider us as religious, friendly and enterprising” “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 26 June 2013). According to a survey conducted by TNS EMNID in Germany, 75 per cent, 59 per cent and 48 per cent of respondents respectively indicated these characteristics; in comparison, only 7 per cent of respondents identified Poles as car thieves.

## 10. Is life with stereotypes possible?

Is it possible and how is it possible to deal with stereotypes in social communication in such a way that they do not interrupt communication, but on the contrary, add colour and bring mutual consensus and, above all, understanding?



Literature can boast extensive experience in this field. Novels and films have long been using stereotypical images of nationalities, professions and regions as part of a convention based on the principles of artistic realism.

A method that can be used to neutralise malicious stereotypes is their aesthetic “taming” through various “linguistic games” operating on a higher level with the category of “metastereotype”. Stanisław Barańczak presented methods of disarming malicious stereotypes using the example of Harry Graham’s poems from the volume *Verse and Worse* published in 1905. *Baedeker dla Bobasa*, included in this collection is “a series of moderately funny rhyming vignettes portraying various countries and nations”. For instance, in the poem *Russia*, xenophobia is relieved by comic effects:

The Russian lets his whiskers grow,	Ludność nie goli tu podbródka,
Smokes cigarettes at meal-times, and	Pali przy stole i przełyka
Imbibes more ‘vodki’ than ‘il faut’;	Żrący płyn znany jako “wódka” –
A habit which (I understand)	Zabiłby on Europejczyka,
Enables him with ease to tell	Lecz ludność jest rumianolicą
His name, which nobody could spell.	I nadal mówi cyrylicą.

(translated by S. Barańczak)

Excellent examples of play with stereotypes are provided by aphorisms (Stanisław Jerzy Lec) and literature in the convention of parody and grotesque (Sławomir Mrożek/Umberto Eco, *The Prague Cemetery*, 2011), and also in films, cartoons and literature for children. Czesław Miłosz found such a “collection of humorous stereotypes” in colourful children’s books by the painter Hervé: an intoxicated sea wolf, an absent-minded scholar, a coloratura singer with a big bust etc. (*Tygodnik Powszechny* 1996/4).

An example of the metatextual use of a stereotype is the story about “the elephant and the Polish case” quoted at the beginning. If it is true that the author of this anecdote is a Pole, Ignacy Paderewski,<sup>14</sup> then we can add to the self-stereotype of a Pole yet another characteristic – self-mockery. The initiator of the international conference *Nations and Stereotypes* held in Kraków in 1994, Jacek Woźniakowski, noted that when it comes to the problem of stereotypes “it is easier to have a sincere, friendly and fruitful exchange of views in the climate of somewhat humorous irony (and self-mockery) than in so-called principled discussions” (Walas 1995, 6). Self-mockery and humour are excellent remedies for everything.

<sup>14</sup> Such information was provided by Kurt Lück in the book *Der Mythos vom Deutschen in der polnischen Volksüberlieferung und Literatur* (Lück 1938, 19).



## **11. Appendix: The application of Osgood’s semantic differential in contrastive studies**

A tool that allows for the comparison of national stereotypes in a systematic way is Osgood’s semantic differential.<sup>15</sup> It puts the tested object directly between two opposing values such as enterprising/passive, economical/overspending, hardworking/lazy etc. and allows the strength of belonging to one or the other pole to be measured and determined in numbers. Despite the obvious limitations of this method (as is the case with all closed surveys), it has one advantage – it produces results which can be easily applied to various comparisons.

At one time (in 1993) I conducted a survey simultaneously in Poland and Germany,<sup>16</sup> asking Polish students about the characteristics of 8 nationalities (Polish, German, Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Czech, Slovak and Jewish) and German students about the characteristics of 8 nationalities (German, French, Czech, Polish, American, Italian, Swedish and Jewish). Three results obtained from these studies are particularly noteworthy.

Firstly, I noted that the Polish students had more stereotypical images of other nationalities than the German students. This was manifested in the fact that the Polish respondents achieved values above the (conventional, but considered diagnostic) threshold of 40 per cent of the total points more frequently than the German ones.

Secondly, the degree of interest among the Poles in their Western neighbour was incomparably greater than the German interest in their Eastern neighbour; the Polish stereotype of a German was much richer than the German stereotype of a Pole. The Germans were described by the Polish students using as many as 16 distinctive characteristics: hard-working, enterprising, nationalist, thrifty, proud, clean, wealthy, patriotic, educated, intelligent, stubborn, aggressive, violent, intolerant, smart, cheerful; while the Poles were described by the German students using just 3 distinctive characteristics: religious, sociable, poor.

Thirdly, the view that autostereotypes are always positive was not confirmed. The Polish students assessed Poles more severely than the Germans themselves, giving 12 characteristics: patriotic, sociable, religious, brave, cheerful, intelligent, proud, emotional, open, educated, but also drunk, stubborn and (below the 40 per cent threshold) lazy, poor, aggressive, intolerant, and overspending. The German attributed to themselves only positive characteristics: clean, wealthy, hardworking, stubborn, educated etc. Interestingly, the German heterostereotype of a Pole is more positive (a hardworking, gentle, calm Pole), than the Polish autostereotype

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Osgood/Suci/Tennenbaum (1957); Bartmiński (1988, 1995); Akimova/Gudavičius (2003).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. data included in the book *Polskie wartości w europejskiej aksjosferze* [Polish Values in the European Axiosphere] (Bartmiński 2014, 318-332).

(a drunk, lazy, aggressive and intolerant Pole). These results correspond with the low self-esteem of Poles (attested in the literature) in the period following the political transformation in 1989.

Finally, the German stereotype of a Jew (religious, proud, educated, patriotic, intelligent, hardworking, wise etc.) turned out to be more positive, comprising only positives, than the Polish one (creative, enterprising, religious, wealthy, intelligent, smart, educated, but also – below the 40 per cent threshold – dishonest, intolerant, insincere, introverted and cowardly).

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**Bibliographical information**

This text was first published in the book:

Anna Dąbrowska/Walery Pisarek/Gerhard Stickel (eds.) (2017): Stereotypes and linguistic prejudices in Europe. Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2016 in Warsaw. Budapest: Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. [ISBN 978-963-9074-68-2. 280 pages.]

The electronic PDF version of the text is accessible through the EFNIL website at:

<http://www.efnil.org>