Image of Immigrants in the Russian Periodical "Argumenty i Fakty"

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Abstract

The aim of this text is to present an image of immigrants that emerges from an analysis of articles in the online edition of the Russian weekly "Argumenty i Fakty". The results of research show that the image of immigrants (most of whom come from the Caucasus and from Central Asia) is created by juxtaposing two contrasting categories: US vs OTHERS. An analysis of materials demonstrates also that through "exclusive" processes, i.e. ones whereby immigrants are excluded from the local community, the identity of participants of the examined media discourse is built. To this end, strategies of constructing the image of immigrants as others are applied. This image is subject to processes of negative value attribution. Based on the analyzed materials, the author distinguishes seven dimensions that jointly create the image of immigrants in the examined weekly: legal, national, cultural, living-standard, physical, psychosocial and religious ones.

Keywords: immigrants, image, US-OTHERS, media, Russian press, negative value attribution, identity, Russia, discourse, exclusion.

Introduction

Linguistic and cultural oppositions are a universal means of perceiving and describing the world. Vyacheslav Ivanov and Vladimir Toporov stress that the world is described via a system of basic binary oppositions, determining its attributes of space, time and social relations (Ivanov & Toporov 1980). These oppositions comprise two contrasting notions, one of which usually has positive connotations (such as right, life, friend, peace), while the other has a negative value attributed to it (respectively, wrong, death,

foe, war). Oppositions seen in this way include the one which is an element of public discourse in contemporary Russia, that is, the opposition of two archetypical categories **US *vs* OTHERS**. In some discourses, immigrants are included in the category of others, "non-us", hence the US-OTHERS opposition turns into a national version of **RUSSIAN-NONRUSSIAN**. This shows a dichotomous image of the world divided into two contradictory spaces: the world that members of a given community perceive as their own, Russian, safe and lasting, and the world they perceive as foreign, non-Russian, dangerous and unstable. The emphasis on such a **dualistic image** is connected with processes of creating social, national, ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity of the contemporary Russian society. For identity is often an outcome of **self-identification** processes, consisting in attributing positive features to "us" and negative evaluation of "others", which strengthens social ties within the in-group (Tajfel & Turner 1979: 33).

Material and Method

This paper aims to present an image of immigrants on the basis of an analysis of thirty articles from the online edition of the Russian weekly "**Argumenty i Fakty**" ("AiF"), uploaded on the portal in the period from 2013 to 2016. The reason why this weekly was chosen it its socio-political profile, meaning that authors often take up topics that are important for the life of the Russian society. "AiF" weekly ranks also high among Russian periodicals in terms of the number of quotations from it, thus it can be included in the opinion-forming ones (Medialogia, October 2016). It is also available via a mobile app, which makes the content published by the weekly reach an even greater number of recipients and influence the public opinion even more.

The methodology used for analysing the empirical material comprises: **semantic analysis within anthropologically-oriented cognitive semantics** (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Boldyrev 2002; 2010; Wierzbicka 1985; Tabakowska 1995) and elements of **critical discourse analysis** (Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Fairclough 1995; Reisigl 2007). The emphasis was on the processes of mental perception of the world by social actors, the processes of value attribution, nomination acts and conceptual metaphors.

Results

According to the dictionary definition, "immigrants" mean persons who moved to another country and found themselves in a foreign ethnic environment; foreigners, who settled permanently or for a

considerable period in another state or were relocated from their previous places of residence due to adverse conditions such as natural calamities, wars, persecution (BTSRY 2014; STSRY 2005; TSRY 2006). This set of basic semantic features of the notion of "immigrants" undergoes semantic modifications in texts published in "AiF". All in all, the image of immigrants in the media is shaped as a result of **subjective worldview interpretation** made by the writer. This factor provides the image of immigrants is a specific axiological and emotional contour.

On the basis of the analysis it is possible to distinguish **seven dimensions**, which in their totality create the image of immigrants in the Russian weekly "AiF": 1) legal; 2) national; 3) cultural; 4) living-standard; 5) physical; 6) psychosocial and 7) religious one. This means that in the texts from the analyzed weekly immigrants are usually described in terms of a) legality of their stay in Russia; b) their nationality and c) culture they represent; d) their living standard, that is, places of residence or jobs they have; e) their appearance; f) mentality and g) religion. This set of categories is put in a certain order and structure by the those who attribute value depending on their **worldview**, which is defined by Michael Lind as a "more or less coherent understanding of the nature of reality, which permits its holders to interpret new information in light of their preconceptions" (Lind 2011).

By observing the media discourse using the example of "AiF" weekly, we are able to state that the image of immigrants has **negative connotations**. The fact that immigrants belong to a different nation, culture, religion or use a different (foreign) language is the object of negative axiologization. These circumstances are also seen as an unacceptable situation, posing a threat to the Russian culture and statehood. Negative value attribution is used particularly often with reference to foreigners coming to Russia from the Caucasus and from Central Asia. It should be stressed that the negative axiological charge in the examined discourse is contained first and foremost in the **nomination acts** via which immigrants are presented (Wodak 2008: 196). This is connected with the anthropocentric nature of value attribution processes (Boldyrev 2002: 32; cf. Boldyrev 2010):

'главная отличительная особенность оценки – её внутриязыковая природа и, как следствие, связь с конкретным индивидом или языковым сообществом, т.е. её антропоцентричность"

(glavnaya otlichitel'naya osobennost' otsenki – yeyë vnutriyazykovaya priroda i, kak sledstviye, svyaz' s konkretnym individom ili yazykovym soobshchestvom, t.e. yeyë antropotsentrichnost')

'The main distinguishing feature of value attribution is its intralingual character and, consequently, connection with a specific individual or linguistic community, that is, its anthropocentricity'.

In the source materials we can find the following nomination acts: 1) *понаехавшие* (*ponaekhavshie*[1]) (AiF Sep 29, 2016); 2) *инородцы* (*inorodtsy*) 'non-Russians' (AiF Oct 14, 2014); 3) *нелегалы* (*nelegaly*) 'illegals' (AiF Nov 24, 2016); 4) *гастарбайтеры* (*gastarbaytery*) 'migrant workers' (AiF Nov 24, 2016). They serve to categorize migrants in various ways: a) as interlopers; b) as people alien in terms of nationality and culture, i.e. those who do not belong to 'our' culture and nation; c) as a threat to public order and d) Russia's economic interest. This categorization is also responsible for the processes of value attribution. Not only does it play a cognitive function, but it also brings about polarization of the effects linked with social stereotypes on the plane of their contents, attitudes and behaviors (Miluska 2008: 13).

Immigrants are also described through **metaphors**. Elżbieta Tabakowska stresses that a metaphor "is a human way of understanding and expressing things that are difficult, abstract or unknown in terms of concrete and well-known things" (Tabakowska 1995: 4, quoted in Czachur 2011: 91). Waldemar Czachur states that "in any given culture metaphors are the basic and typical ways of thinking about and understanding the world" (Czachur 2011: 91). One of the conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) that was reconstructed on the basis of text analysis is: **IMMIGRATION as FLOOD**. What fosters such an image of immigration as flood is the frequent usage of nomination acts that aim to present immigrants as an inanimate collective (mass), which uncontrollably "flows into" the territory of Russia and poses a threat to local people and Russian statehood. As an example, we can quote a fragment of text from "AiF" weekly: "поток украинских трудовых мигрантов в Россию" (*potok ukrainskikh trudovykh migrantov v Rossiyu*) 'inflow of Ukrainian economic migrants to Russia' (AiF Oct 28, 2016). The lexeme *поток* (*potok*) 'inflow' aims to build an image of immigrants as inanimate mass, thus to 'collectivize' them[2]. The IMMIGRATION as FLOOD metaphor is also rooted in the visual material, which, together with the text, forms a multi-semiotic whole. This photographs shows a room overcrowded with immigrants, thus reinforcing the verbal message about the "inflow" of immigrants from Ukraine into Russia.

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[1] The lexeme *понаехавшие* (*ponayekhavshiye*) has pejorative connotations. It is used in order to stress the fact that immigrants come in large numbers and are not welcome. It was formed from *понаехать* (*ponayekhat*) verb, which means 'to overrun; come in large numbers', and in principle is synonymous with 'interlopers'.

[2] I use Martin Reisigl's term here. He understands *collectivization* as *thenomination of social actors by collectives or mass nouns*, cf. Reisigl 2007: 380.

Photograph. Visual material forming part of the article, cf. (AiF Oct 28, 2016).

"AiF" weekly is a forum of contemporary debate about economic immigration. This kind of immigration is one of the broadly discussed problems of the contemporary Russian society. In this discourse the 'inflow' of immigrants, who differ in ethnical, cultural, religious and linguistic terms, is seen as a threat. In that discourse, comparing "us" to "others" does not have the nature of 'peaceful nonidentity' (*миролюбивая нетождественность*, mirolyubivaya netozhdestvennost') (Porshnev 1973), but becomes – to paraphrase B. Porshnev – ***hostile nonidentity***. The examined texts accentuate the characteristic of immigrants as **enemies**, who come from the world of another culture, averse to the Russian culture, reluctant to accept Russian customs. At the same time, other features are given emphasis: disheveled look, presence of dangerous infections, poor command of the Russian language, being cheap labor, crime, banditry, trading in drugs, weapon trafficking, involvement in terrorist activities, illegal stay in Russia and aggression. The above set of features is not a closed one and the image of immigrants in Russian media requires further research.

Conclusion

The way immigrants' image is constructed in "Argumenty i Fakty" weekly is underpinned by the cultural and semantic opposition of **US vs OTHERS**, which is an important mechanism of perceiving and describing the world and building the **identity of the community**. The image of immigrants is built by

juxtaposing two contrasting categories, where US have positive connotations, while OTHERS are attributed negative value. In this contradictory opposition, the image of immigrants is based on associations with the category of alien people, "non-us". This helps build an image of the world as a dichotomy, divided into two polar opposites: the world perceived by members of a given community as a good, safe, lasting one, and the world of others, which is perceived as bad, dangerous and unstable.

An analysis of materials published in "Argumenty i Fakty" weekly leads to a thesis that participants of this discourse manifest their identity through **'exclusive' processes**, that is, ones that exclude representatives of certain social, religious, national groups from their socio-communicative community. To achieve this goal, strategies are applied that build the image of an enemy, an alien, the other, which is subjected to clear processes of **negative axiologization**.

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