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The Use Of Stereotypes and Clichéd Phrases in Greek Journalistic Discourse

- A Teaching Proposal Related to Language Courses

Abstract

This paper deals with the study of the relation of the journalistic discourse, broadcast by the Greek media, to the cultivation of stereotypes and prejudices. In particular, we examine the stereotypes that emerge and are maintained in relation to ethnicity, sexism, and the position of women in society, the cultivated images regarding different states etc. Moreover, emphasis is given on linguistic representations of these "prefabricated" beliefs regarding classes of individuals, groups or objects, which do not arise from a contemporary assessment of each phenomenon, but, from judgment mechanical habits and expectations. In this context illustrative examples are presented, regarding the use of words and clichéd phrases, which are very common in modern Greek journalistic discourse.
Keywords: Stereotypes, linguistic diversity, journalistic discourse, critical discourse analysis, pop language

Introduction

The extensive use of stereotypes observed in modern Greek electronic media seems to be of vivid linguistic interest. The journalistic discourse, moving in the context of commitments defined by various factors, perpetuates and cultivates, both explicitly and implicitly, prejudices and stereotypical behaviors associated with social discrimination and racism, which exist, or are latent in the dominant group. As a model, media cultivate prejudices and often establish language uses, especially the use of clichéd phrases.

The journalistic discourse is not limited to extracting experiences and events from the perspective of the various social groups. At the same time, it is expanding and commenting on these data, often with exaggeration, in order to itself become once more fetching and, therefore, commercial. We cannot, however, rule out the serious possibility that the discourse of the mass media is adapted to the requirements of the owner of the information broadcasting medium. In these cases, the main purpose is to maintain the current distribution of power and wealth in society.

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Consequently, it would be very interesting to continuously study the relation of the journalistic discourse to the cultivation of stereotypes in the public and private sphere, targeting politics, women's status, national origin, but also the broader attitudes and behaviors of citizens at the level of society.

The definition of stereotype

The term "stereotype" refers to "prefabricated" beliefs regarding classes of individuals, groups or objects, which do not arise from a contemporary assessment of each phenomenon, but from mechanical habits of judgment and expectation. It is a bunch of collective beliefs, which may refer to a vast group of people, an institution, an idea, a value, an effect or even an object, but in an one-sided, schematic, generalized and simplistic manner, to the extent that the "judges" or the "judged" (ones), exhibit significant deformations and distortions, as far as their actual image and condition is concerned. Usually, a specific characteristic of a group of people is stressed with some exaggeration and intensity, thus creating false impressions which work against the actual data (Mitsis, 2000:72), and providing a rough and ready categorization of others (Wardhaugh 1994; Saville - Troike, 1995).

The language, being not socially innocent (Barthes, 1964:19), comes to serve the various considerations, to express social stratification, values, prejudices and infinite social determinations, containing and transporting numerous social and ideological information even in the simplest phrases (Fragoudaki , 1999: 24) . In general stereotypes *anticipate* our behavior (Mc Nabbm, 1986), since they lead to the provocation of specific social attitudes. In this case we talk about *bias*, which is a negative attitude toward a group or its members. This attitude, according to Kostoula - Makraki (2001:117), is characterized by stereotypical beliefs and arises from processes occurring in those who adhere to this attitude, and not from the actual verification of whether the judged, and sufferer of the current judgments and distortions, group / person / object has the traits attributed to him/ her/ it.

 The categories of bias are associated with, among other things, the origin, appearance, socio - economic objectives, socio - cultural norms and values and the personality of one or more persons.

Some general observations

The journalistic discourse is not limited to extracting experiences and events from the perspective of the various social groups. It is extended to the commentary on these data, often with exaggeration, in order to become once more fetching and, therefore, commercial, and sometimes it is adapted to the requirements of the owner of the information medium, which broadcasts it, and, thus, seeks to facilitate the maintenance of existing distribution of power and wealth in society (Tsitsanoudis - Mallidis, 2011). It also perpetuates and cultivates, explicitly and implicitly, stereotypical attitudes and biases related to social discrimination and racism, which exist, or are latent in the dominant group (Chatzisavvidis, 2000 : 103). Thus, the journalistic discourse easily brands a criminal as a "middle-aged

gypsy", an "Albanian illegal immigrant" or a "Greek- Romanian villain", as opposed to a famous scientist, who is characterized as an "American physicist", etc.

Stereotypes and relationship of social and political forces

The *elite* of the force/ power behind an information medium is able to decide what will the *lingua franca* be, that is, the language of wider consultation, and, therefore, in order to support its selection, it may present stereotypical positions for language codes of the other social groups, which differ from the official norm. The journalistic discourse is called, or is employed, in order to serve and legitimize the element of dependency and the correlation of forces. In other words, it assists and helps the transfection of language groups in such a way, that the group, which does not comply with the general trend, is placed in a minority and difficult position.

The electronic journalistic discourse, as well as a part of modern literature and also the modern Greek theater of the 19th and early 20th century, has , for example, related the use of *high linguistic diversity* to the upper or middle social classes, while the use of *low linguistic diversity* to "peasant", "comic" and "uneducated" people (Zervos, 1994). It was no coincidence that a dialectical pronunciation has never been heard in the media (Fragoudaki, 1999:105), although, in our view, this "never" should now be more moderate (Tsitsanoudis - Mallidis et al, 2011). This is because the evaluation giving superiority to the speaker of the "common" language seems outdated, as during the last 20 years in Greece, we have observed in the media the use of a "new" and "updated", at least in form, journalistic discourse, which leverages, highlights, advertises and ultimately strengthens the geographical and social varieties. Of course, this phenomenon is not observed extensively, but to a "circumspect" degree.

The ideological charge of the use of stereotypes

The categorical generalizations about people or social groups as rough and hasty conclusions are found in journalistic discourse, especially when it seeks to serve the national interest. For example, the anti-Americanism that in many cases manifests as a phenomenon at the level of Greek society can be fired up by a journalistic text that even for the sake of a joke included the phrase "*Are you mistaking us for (naïve) Americans*?" (Mitsis, 2000 : 72) . In such a case, the prejudice that all Americans are invariably materialistic, rich, but not smart, is cultivated or/ and maintained to the viewer/ listener.

The creation of stereotypes between groups or nations can be workable and lasting only during the initial or surface contact and does not always survive when followed by repeated transfection. Unfortunately this does not necessarily lead to a better understanding (Saville - Troike, 1995).

Stereotypes and ethnicity

Especially, however, as far as the Albanian element in Greece in recent years is concerned, we have the impression that the journalistic discourse, which cultivates or creates divisions between Greek citizens and Albanians or Romanians, Bulgarians or other nationals, is either retired or limited.

For example, the determination "Albanian" is less and less mentioned in the foreword or the headlines, and replaced with the "foreigner". Very often even this definition does not exist or is found in the middle or end of a story, and certainly not in the title or at the beginning of the presented topic. A typical example of this is drawn from the news media of television, which covered the football match between the Greek National Team, having won the European Championship, and the Albanian National Team, held in a climate of great tension on September 4th, 2004, in Tirana, with the Albanian National Team winning. During the delirious, and, in some cases, violent celebrations that followed, some extreme behaviors occurred, culminating in the killing of an Albanian by a Greek-American with the use of a knife, on the island of Kefalonia. In the newscast the day after (September 5th, 2004), of the television station ALPHA, with M. Kapsis as the main presenter, the Albanian – victim was presented not as an "Albanian", but as a "man who lost his life in the name of violence". The stories broadcast by both the particular television station and others, systematically avoided to enhance, with similar references, the boundaries between the nationally unitary "*we/ us*" and the heterogeneous "*other*".

Here the journalistic discourse seems to follow the requirements and considerations of a multicultural society, so it gradually avoids to stress or trigger separations initiated against such a prevailing atmosphere.

Stereotypical presentations of politicians

The electronically broadcast journalistic discourse likes to use stereotypes, in order to refer to persons of the political life of the country, eg the Greek politician George Souflias is defined by his origin, "Sarakatsanos", a definition occasionally supported with appropriate images (with a crook in hand, at a concentration of other "Sarakatsanos" on a mountain etc.).

Certainly, corresponding stereotypical preferences are displayed in many television reports of everyday life (eg., summer is automatically related to the presentation of topless women sunbathing on the beaches, the Easter fast is contrasted with the image of several people eating grilled meat, the announcement of an anti-smoking campaign with shots of "heavy smokers", etc.). We also observe that there is an obsession with the use of the so-called clichéd phrases, which, according to the Greek journalist and researcher, Tzannetakos (undated: 72), "*are like woodworms, which act within the language, undermining its performance*".

Sexist stereotypes

Sexist stereotypes are found in the televised spoken journalistic discourse, when referring to the female gender. It is a persistent sexist use of language, with stereotypical references to women, emphasizing on physical properties and marital status, eg "blondes", "beautiful", "fatal", "widows' (Tsokalidou, 1996: 31). This stereotypical attitude, which also includes famous women, namely women in the public life of Greece, is supported by the corresponding visualized presentation of specific

properties or characteristics being selected and promoted extensively. Thus, a particular emphasis is given on a particular image - possibly from a unfortunate appearance of the woman - which is retractable and repeated by each TV file. Also, various elements, selected from her para-lingual behavior (movements, gestures, facial expressions, tone/ attitude), often tend to define an arrogant or eccentric character.

Marianthi Makris - Tsilipakou (1995: 435-46) cites the title of a show by Pavlos Tsimas in MEGA Channel (March 22nd, 2009), which was the following: "*Pangalos, Vaso and Simitis*". This was, she wants to prove that women, regardless of their position, deal with, in such a stereotyped behavior, greater intimacy and less respect than men in similar positions. The linguistic sexism is not due to the inability of linguistic structure, but is an expression of "normality of male status of the social titles" (Fragoudaki, 1985).

Spender (1985) argues that the continued use of a language that obscures the feminine gender or attributes to it characteristics of secondary importance, or even negative, is the operator of perpetuating a practice of discrimination and misogyny. Tzannetakos (undated: 22) also observes on this subject: "*We risk to abolish the female gender of the shareholders for the "benefit" of the masculine one*". It is only natural that changes are required in the linguistic level, regarding the recording of the female gender (Tsokalidou, 1996: 20). Recently, though, the phenomenon of sexist representations of women seems to subside, at least in the political arena, but not in the field of show biz and the entertainment shows of Greek television.

Clichéd words and phrases in the journalistic discourse

Inextricably linked with the language employing and using stereotypes is the use of clichéd words and phrases in journalistic discourse. This correlation was attempted under relatively recent research (2005), which had as its objective the quantitative and qualitative examination of morphosyntactic forms that are identified in the journalistic discourse delivered by television media, particularly the news. What we were interested in, was to investigate the presence of stereotypes and the use of words and phrases that we call "clichéd". It is about figures of speech, which, in our view, create and cultivate a "virtual propitiousness attitude" on the part of the journalist, towards the mass of viewers watching (Tsitsanoudis - Mallidis, 2006).

This research, which was part of a doctoral dissertation conducted at the University of Thessaly (Tsitsanoudis - Mallidis, 2006) refered to the concentration of journalistic discourse samples of the so-called "main" newscasts of nation-wide television stations with the largest viewership. The investigation found examples of use of clichéd words and phrases, as follows:

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* The word **"contra"** (Italian for "conflict/ dispute") has been adopted in Greek and is particularly common in the introductions, the titles, the commentary of the newscasts, as well as the text of the stories, whether they refer to social or political issues. More specifically:

▪ In the newscast of the Greek TV station MEGA Channel, a story regarding the burning by anarchists of a patrol car of the Municipal Police of Athens, is titled "Contra between Dora and Voulgarakis" (the names of two politicians).

▪ In another story of the newscast of the Greek TV station ANT-1, about whether the women from Athens or Thessaloniki are.. the prettiest ones and look more after themselves, the title again contains the word "contra" – instead, for example, of the word "dispute" – and is the following: "Contra about beauty – Thessaloniki vs Athens".

▪ In the newscast of the Greek TV station ALPHA, a story is broadcast, titled: "Contra about the signatures", which refers to the race between two Greek political parties (New Democracy and PASOK), about which of the two would present a specific document to the Hellenic Parliament.

▪ In yet another TV newscast, a story about the conflict regarding the complaints about journalist who also occupy state positions, is titled: "Contra about the journalists".

The word "contra", which as an adverb means "opposite, against", is overly used in TV journalistic discourse, to the degree that it risks, due to its excessive use, becoming an exhausted phrasing, praising/ stressing the lack of originality, the copying practice, the mimicking and the easy solutions in general. We can also include the aforementioned word, in this category of words, which, when originally used created an impression, but afterwards, when used all the time, in order to serve multiple communication needs, risked becoming "wooden" (meaningless), as exhausted phrasing (clichés). Still, we cannot ignore the fact that the word "contra" produces/ creates a familiar sound and vision.

In the newscast of ANT-1, the journalist introduces a story about a black market circuit that issues fake taxi licenses, as follows: "There are plenty of monkey products, as you all probably know, but it's the first time we ever heard of monkey taxis". The word "monkey" is quite common in the various TV stories, having the meaning of a "bad and illegal imitation of a industrial product" (Modern Greek Vocabulary: 813) For example, Monkey car/ watch. It is used as an adjective, instead of "fake".

In another TV "window" of another newscast, the political analyst/ editor of the station, commenting on the possibility of a meeting between protesting farmers and the prime minister, says: "In the government it is thought that a meeting between the farmers and the prime minister will be in the air". The phrase "in the air" is very commonly used. Another example: "The government's (pre-) election promise for reduce of the army service time risks staying "in the air" (The phrase is mainly used instead of the word "pending").

Yet another word we encountered several times, during the study of TV newscasts, is the word "list", in phrases such as "lists on fire", "ghost lists", etc.

Related to language lessons

Recognition of stereotypes in journalistic reason can be a very good opportunity for language exercises in the classroom, especially for the students of the latest grades of primary school. The project can be as follows:

In the frame of the language lesson the teacher asks students to gather material from newspapers. He asks them to bring with them 5 first pages and a few texts from inside pages. The issue is free but it needs to be current. Next day, the teacher explains to children the concept of stereotype and repetition which is an element that characterizes stereotypes. He/she emphasizes on the essential importance of the stereotype which is the tight outlook that cannot be questioned. This very moment and time teaching could be seen as one of the starting points for teaching and building critical thinking in children. And this is because children are invited to distance themselves from a specific way of thinking and realize slowly that there is the possibility of alternative thinking and approach. And this possibility is being served by the language.

Then the teacher asks the children to pick the stereotypes words from the papers. This search could take the form of the game and called "Hunting the Stereotype!" Children get their nets and tools as they read the texts, they attempt to find stereotypical words. The child who finds the most, is the procedure's/game's winner. After that it organizes a team and with the help of a dictionary and in cooperation with the teacher tries to find the words that can replace the stereotype word. In this way, the student understands that the stereotype is binding, since it doesn't cultivate children's vocabulary. Instead the disclosure of the binding function can work in favor of linguistic creativity and stimulate the interest of the child and the class as well. Moreover, the proposal is based on the search of the authentic material especially for language courses and can help a lot, as students are engaged and self-reactive without experiencing the lesson as a forced and boring process.

Conclusions

This paper dealt with the study of the relation of the journalistic discourse, broadcast by Greek media, to the cultivation of stereotypes and prejudices. Specifically, we examined emerging and maintained stereotypes in relation to ethnicity, sexism, and the position of women in society, cultivated images about different states etc. Emphasis was given to the linguistic representations of these "prefabricated" beliefs and illustrative examples of uses of clichéd words and phrases were presented, a phenomenon very common in the modern Greek journalistic discourse.

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It appears that the mass media discourse is often the vehicle, and sometimes the bearer or the encourager of such simplistic images for groups, values, people, events and objects. Indeed, the frequent use of stereotypes in the media and their broad impact in the audience result in the journalistic discourse eventually becoming, in our view, from *original bearer,* to *validator* and necessary *legitimizing factor* of the biased position eventually formed at public opinion. The objectives each time imposing such use are judged.

Another important point concerns the linguistic prejudices that exist between the audience watching/ listening to the journalist and the very institution of journalistic discourse. According to Fasold (1991), the language biases are particularly important because of the practical problems associated with education, since research has shown that language attitudes can influence how teachers assess their students. Based on these investigations, an important part of educators form the first impression for the student based on the type of speech rather than utilizing other more relevant information sources. Mutatis mutandis the viewer may also have a bias towards the linguistic presenter - journalist, based on how "*standard*" his/her word is, how standardized the discourse is, whether he/ she possesses fluency, etc. Conversely, if the presenter of a journalistic show in a TV or radio station accedes to language varieties of the lower or middle classes (low varieties), he/ she is likely to become more familiar with these classes/ strata.

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