

Structure of ethnic stereotypes of Russian students (on the example of an image of a «typical American»)

Estructura de los estereotipos étnicos de los estudiantes rusos (en el ejemplo de una imagen de un «estadounidense típico»)

MARIN, Egor B. [1](#); KALNIBOLANCHUK, Irina S. [2](#)

Received: 30/12/2019 • Approved: 05/05/2020 • Published: 21/05/2020

Contents

[1. Introduction](#)

[2. Methodology](#)

[3. Results](#)

[4. Conclusions](#)

[Bibliographic references](#)

ABSTRACT:

The article presents the results of a study of the image of a "typical American" in the minds of Russian youth, using the example of students from Vladivostok city. The image was reconstructed using psychosemantic methods, such as verbal associations and the "pictogram" technique. The reconstructed image of a "typical American" in the minds of educated young Russians is visually pleasant, smiling, active and sociable, but hypocritical and self-interested.

Keywords: "Typical American", ethnic stereotype, students, Russia.

RESUMEN:

El artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio de la imagen de un "estadounidense típico" en la presentación de la juventud rusa, utilizando el ejemplo de estudiantes de la ciudad de Vladivostok. La reconstrucción de la imagen se llevó a cabo utilizando métodos psicosemánticos, como las asociaciones verbales y la técnica del "pictograma". La imagen reconstruida de un "estadounidense típico" en la opinión de jóvenes rusos educados es exteriormente agradable, sonriente, activa y sociable, pero hipócrita y egoísta.

Palabras clave: "Típico americano", estereotipo étnico, estudiantes, Rusia.

1. Introduction

The relevance of our study is determined by the growth of social mobility in the global world. These processes are clearly visible in the transborder city of Vladivostok. Every year there is a noticeable increase in the number of foreign tourists in our city. On the example of the leading universities of the city, such as the Far Eastern Federal University and the Maritime State University named after the Admiral G.I. Nevelskoy, we see an increase in the number of foreign students coming to study at Russian universities. In order to determine the readiness of Russian students for interethnic contacts, we have studied their ideas about ethnic groups living in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the process of communication between people of different nationalities, ethnic stereotypes are formed, which are a generalized representation by an ethnic group of itself and other groups. In interethnic relations, the problem of stereotypes is very important, since stereotypes determine the attitude towards representatives of another ethnic group.

The study of ethnic stereotypes is necessary for building communication channels, correlating values and cultural characteristics in order to achieve harmonious relations in a changing world.

Directly in this article, the results of a study of ideas of Russian students about the US citizens are presented. The United States is one of the main APR countries and an important participant in the global market.

However, relations between Russia and the United States are underdeveloped, both in the business and tourism sectors and in contacts in the educational and cultural environment. In addition, recently, political relations have become worse, and this affects the atmosphere in other areas of interethnic contacts.

In the recent past, Russia used to admire the American culture and political system. This was noticeable both at the level of the Russian state's policy and at the level of youth mass culture.

However, nowadays our countries are in conflict. Has this changed the perception of the United States and Americans by the younger generation? how do the Russian youth perceive the USA and Americans today? In order to answer these questions, a study of the ideas of Russian youth about a "typical American" was undertaken. An empirical study of this nature makes it possible to identify the main content of an ethnic stereotype, to study its emotional and evaluative component and to determine the categories of evaluation of ethnic objects.

In this paper, reconstruction of ideas about typical US representatives was carried out using a psychosemantic approach. The psychosemantic approach allows us to identify the meaning system of a studied group of respondents, to explore the nuances of their mental characteristics.

2. Methodology

In a theoretical aspect, our study is based on a number of concepts by domestic and foreign authors, including the social stereotype concept by W. Lippman (Lippman, 2004), the theory of ethnocentrism by W. Sumner (Sumner, 1906), the concept of representativeness by H. Tajfel (Tajfel, 1978).

In domestic science, an analysis of ethnic stereotypes is presented in the papers of such scientists as G.U. Soldatova (Soldatova, 1998), T.G. Stefanenko (Stefanenko, 2010, 2013), A.N. Tatarko and N.M. Lebedeva (Tatarko, Lebedeva, 2011), etc.

The concept of a social stereotype was first used by W. Lippman in 1922. In modern science, a stereotype is considered differently depending on direction, for example, Z.V. Sikevich defines a stereotype as an idea of a social object that expresses a usual way of perceiving and acting (Sikevich, 1999).

A comparative analysis of ethnic identity, autostereotypes and heterostereotypes was given by G.U. Soldatova (Soldatova, 1997, 1998). Autostereotypes are understood as the sum of narratives of characteristic features and peculiarities of the own ethnic group. As a rule, they contain culturally approved attributes. Heterostereotypes refer to the totality of ideas of this group about other ethnic groups.

An interdisciplinary approach to the study of social stereotype is also promising (Ageev, 1985, 1986), (Sikevich, 2005). Various aspects of intercultural relations and communication are studied in the papers of L.G. Pochebut (Pochebut, 2013), S.D. Gurieva (Gurieva, 2017), A.I. Dontsov (Dontsov et al, 2014).

In one of the studies conducted in Russia in 2005, the authors revealed the attitude of students to representatives of other nations. As a result, it turned out that the preferred ethnic groups for Russian students were the Germans, Americans and French. However, the reaction of rejection was also revealed in relation to the Americans; young Russians at the same time prefer and reject them. Russian young men and women were unanimous that the United States was "a rich country with great prospects" (Zalevskiy et al, 2005).

In recent years, ethnic stereotypes have been studied in the Far East of Russia, interethnic relations are studied in the papers of such researchers as V.V. Kalita and M.A. Melnikova (Kalita and Melnikova, 2007), (Kalita 2013), E. B. Marin (Kalita and Marin, 2013). They have revealed meaningful features of ethnic stereotypes of Russians and Chinese, described the stages of formation of ethnic stereotypes among Russians and Chinese residents in the border region (Kalita and Melnikova, 2007).

In line with these concepts, we undertook a study of the image of a "typical American" as pictured by the FEFU students. The analysis of ideas about current communication partners is an effective tool for measuring interethnic relations.

Reconstruction of the image of a "typical American" was carried out using a psychosemantic approach. Psychosemantic methods include such methods of studying psychic phenomena that make it possible to identify individual and group systems of cultural and personal meanings and establish connections between them.

A meaning in science is understood as a generalized perfect model of an object in a subject's mind, in which the essential features of the object, identified in the aggregate social activity, are fixed (Petrenko, 2005). Meanings exist in an individual consciousness in various forms: images, symbols,

communicative and ritual actions, as well as verbal concepts. The task of experimental psychosemantics is reconstruction of subjective semantic spaces, which are a form of representation of a subject's experience. The space of meanings in a subject's consciousness describing a particular significant area is called a mental map.

Psychosemantics allows us to explore and reconstruct the structures of subjective experience (system of cultural and personal meanings), based on which the image of a human world can be built. The task of psychosemantics includes reconstruction of an individual system of meanings, through the prism of which a subject perceives the world, the others, him/herself (Serkin, 2008).

One of the psychosemantic methods convenient to use is an associative experiment. The method of multiple free verbal associations is a flexible tool that allows you to identify the system of narratives of respondents, understand their mental characteristics and study the emotional and evaluative components of ethnic stereotypes. This method allows us to identify semantic categories used by the studied group.

In addition, in order to identify the figurative and emotional components of ethnic stereotypes, we used the "pictogram" technique. Pictorial information is an integral part of our memory. A pictogram is a picture writing, it refers to projective tests that reflect hidden motives, personal problems, fears and emotional states of a test subject. The method of pictograms allows you to penetrate into the depths of an associative flow of interviewed individuals, thus revealing their underlying attitudes towards the called objects. Application of this technique is possible for the study of subjective figurative semantics. The semantics of graphic images was studied by E.Yu. Artemieva (Artemieva, 1999). The method is quite simple to use: a test subject is given a blank sheet of paper and a pencil and asked to draw any character that he/she associates with the stimulus word. The drawings can be accompanied by a descriptive note to clarify its meaning.

The algorithm for the application of psychosemantics methods is described in the works of V.P. Serkin (Serkin, 2008), A.G. Shmelev (Shmelev et al. 1988), V.F. Petrenko (Petrenko, 2005, Petrenko et al. 2016).

An empirical study was conducted by us on the premises of the Far Eastern Federal University in the spring of 2018. To achieve the goal, 4 groups of students of different years studying in various human studies specialties (psychology, conflictology, philosophy, theology) were studied at the FEFU School of Arts and Humanities. The total sample contained 53 students. The age of test subjects varies from 17 to 21.

3. Results

3.1. The study reconstructed the image of a "typical American" using the associative method.

We have analyzed and expanded the classification of objects developed by M.A. Melnikova for analysis of ethnic stereotypes (Kalita and Melnikova, 2007) by excluding categories which are irrelevant for this material and adding new categories: "personal qualities", "attitude to people", "negative symbolism".

The "typical American" stimulus received 194 associations. Associations for the "typical American" stimulus are presented in nine categories (see Table 1).

In the category "food, soft drinks", the heterostereotype has 14 associations (see Table 1).

The analysis of the semantic content of the heterostereotype allowed us to draw a number of conclusions regarding the students' narrative of a typical American (see Table 1).

In the category of "attitude towards work and law", a positive assessment of business qualities of an American is noticeable (hardworking, business-minded, knows his rights).

The analysis of the semantic content of the category "personal qualities" shows that, when characterizing a "typical American," positive and negative qualities are approximately equally represented in the heterostereotype (36 and 36 associations, respectively). Negative characteristics are associated with human qualities, such as hypocrisy, lies, greed, secrecy. The first place was occupied by such a characteristic as hypocrisy. It can be concluded that young Russians mistrust a "typical American".

The positive qualities of an "American" are associated with the qualities of activity and charisma: mobility, confidence, charm, optimism, cheerfulness.

Table 1
Respondent associations: a "typical American"*

Categories	A typical American (194 associations)
------------	--

1. State and commercial symbols -	Trump-4
2. Personal qualities:	Positive: Cheerful - 4, optimist - 4, simple - 3, active - 3, on the go - 3, confident - 3, open - 2, charming - 2, calm - 2. Negative: hypocrite - 5, liar - 3, cunning - 3, greedy - 2, smug - 2, boring - 2, selfishness - 2, private - 2.
3. Attitude towards people:	Tact - 6, tolerance - 5, benevolent - 4, kind - 3, sociable - 3.
4. Attitude towards labor and law:	Hardworking - 2, knows his rights - 2, business-minded - 2, accuracy - 2.
5. Negative symbols -	Hard life - 1, bridge-and-tunnel crowd - 1, empty talk - 1 children with guns in schools - 1.
6. Food, soft drinks -	Burger - 7, fast food - 3, likes fast food - 2, Coca-Cola - 2.
7. An individual. Separate elements of appearance -	Smile - 7, heavysset - 3, handsome - 2, blacks - 2, cool hairstyle - 2, suit - 2.
8. Cultural objects and attributes -	Hollywood - 5, good movies - 3, LGBT - 2, gay - 2, money - 2, Statue of Liberty - 2.
9. Equipment and buildings -	Weapon - 1, iPhone - 1, clean house - 1, pickup truck - 1.

* Table 1 shows group associative universals, single associations are not shown in the table, with the exception of categories with a small number of associations.

A "typical American" is mainly associated with American cinema, the US tourist attractions, money. These results correspond to the data obtained using the "pictogram" methodology.

The analysis of the semantic content of the heterostereotype in the category "Individual. Separate elements of appearance", shows that an "American" is associated with positive looks: cheerfulness, beauty, a good hairstyle, suit. Single associations contained laughter, good clothes, etc. The features of the image of a "typical American" can be combined with such a characteristic as "charm".

In the category of "attitude towards people", positive associations prevail in the heterostereotype. A "typical American" is characterized by students as tactful, tolerant, friendly, kind, sociable.

So, in the image of an American, positive communicative qualities appeared in the first place. In the category of "personal qualities", when characterizing a "typical American", positive and negative qualities are equally represented in the stereotype.

3.2. Reconstruction of the image of a "typical American" using the pictogram technique

The total number of pictograms received from the FEFU students for the "typical American" stimulus is 64. We have classified and analyzed the obtained drawings.

The first distinguished category of pictograms includes state and commercial symbols. The students' drawings of the "typical American" stimulus depict the official symbols of the United States and American companies: the US flag (5), an eagle (5), McDonalds (logo) - (6), the reverse side of the US Great Seal (1). Such symbolism indicates that the idea of a "typical American" is associated with the image of the United States as a state.

Students also associate the image of a "typical American" with such elements of the American culture and lifestyle as food and drinks. Students portrayed fast food (8), burger (7), Coca-Cola (2). Abundance of such associations (with food and drinks) shows that the depicted national dishes and drinks have a clearly pronounced connection with the image of a typical representative of the United States in the minds of young Russians. Young Russians have a certain idea of various aspects of American culture (food culture, cinema, sports).

The presented images of a representative of the United States have a connection with such a characteristic of an American as a "business man" (a man in a business suit). Students also believe that the characteristic of a "typical American" is smiling.

The drawings also reflected the cultural attributes of a "typical American" - these are objects related to American sports (baseball bat, ball for American football), and cinematographic images (Hollywood, cowboy hat, Mickey Mouse). The LGBT flag is also used, which may mean the idea of the United States as a country from which non-traditional relations are spread. Thus, students associate a "typical American" with American cinema and sports.

The next type of pictograms reflects the image of a "typical American" existing in the students' view through such elements of a modern lifestyle as equipment and buildings. The students depicted a spaceship (1), private houses (6). It can be interpreted as an idea of the typical lifestyle of an American family having a private house or a cottage.

An analysis of the drawings showed that young Russians have a certain idea of various aspects of the American culture (food culture, cinema, sports). They represent a "typical American" as a business man, often smiling and mostly living in a private cottage.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the results of the free verbal association method and the "pictogram" method made it possible to identify the structure and content of stereotypical representations of Russian students about a "typical American". An analysis of the ethnostereotype indicates that a certain impression of a "typical American" has developed in the students' view. This impression has both positive and negative features, its orientation is dual. This is in contrast to the unambiguously positive assessment of US representatives during the period of cooperation between Russia and the United States after the Cold War. A transformation of ethnic stereotypes is taking place.

The students showed awareness of various aspects of life and personal qualities of a "typical American", characteristics of the American culture. The image of a "typical American", as we believe, was formed under the influence of various sources of information, primarily the media. It can be assumed that critical media coverage of information about the United States has an impact on youth's narratives of the Americans.

The orientation of the heterostereotype is twofold (both positive and negative). On one hand, students see positive characteristics in relation of a "typical American" to work and to people - hard work, tact and tolerance in communication. His positive personality characteristics include activity, charisma, and communicative qualities.

However, among the personal qualities of an "American" in the students' view, negative traits are clearly expressed, first of all, hypocrisy and lies, cunning and greed.

The generalized image of a "typical American" in the view of young Russians is visually pleasant, active and sociable, but internally hypocritical, deceitful and greedy.

An analysis of the drawings showed that young Russians have a certain idea of various aspects of the American culture (food culture, cinema, sports). This can be interpreted as a good acquaintance with the basic elements of the American culture and the presence of a certain interest in it. This creates the basis for communication and tolerance towards representatives of the United States.

As we believe, a certain distrust of the youth towards a "typical American" was reflected in the content of the heterostereotype. The revealed negative characteristics of the heterostereotype can affect the reduction of our youth's tolerance towards the United States and its representatives.

However, the image of a "typical American", as our study has shown, is not completely negative at the moment, which means that it remains possible to normalize relations between the two countries.

Thus, the application of the psychosemantic approach made it possible to reveal the ideas of young Russians about a "typical American" and show specificity of their ethnic stereotypes.

The data obtained show that narratives of US representatives among Russian youth have become more controversial. The political situation influences ethnic stereotypes. However, positive views remained. This means that possibility of interpersonal contacts and communication between representatives of the two countries remains. Young Russians retain a certain interest in and tolerance for representatives of the United States.

The results of the study may be useful to representatives of public authorities, educational institutions. The obtained data can be used in formation of a multicultural educational environment in Russian universities.

Bibliographic references

Ageev, V. S. (1985). The influence of cultural factors on perception and assessment of man by man. *Psychology Issues*, 3, 135-140.

Ageev, V. S. (1986). A psychological study of social stereotypes. *Psychology Issues*, 1, 95-97.

- Artemieva, E. Yu. (1999). Fundamentals of psychology of subjective semantics. Moscow: Nauka; Smysl. P. 264.
- Dontsov, A. I., Perelygina, E.B., Karavaev, L.P. (2014). Intercultural interactions and social distance. National Psychological Journal, 2 (14), 5-12.
- Gurieva, S.D. (2017). Intercultural communication. Social psychology of communication: monograph / under the total. ed. of A.L. Svetsitskiy. Moscow: INFRA-M, P. 107-123.
- Gurieva, S.D. (2017). Socio-psychological phenomena in interethnic relations. Social Psychology of Communication. monograph / under the general. ed. of A.L. Svetsitskiy. Moscow: INFRA-M, P. 81-107.
- Kalita, V.V. Melnikova, M.A. (2007). Ethnic stereotypes of residents of the Far Eastern border region (for example, Russians and Chinese). Vladivostok: Publishing House of Dalnauka; Maritime State Univ.
- Kalita, V. V., Marin, E. B. (2013). The image of a "typical Chinese" and a "typical Russian" in the view of Chinese students studying in Russia. National Psychological Journal, 3 (11), 28-41. **DOI:** 10.11621/npj.2013.0304
- Lippman, W. (2004). Public opinion. Moscow: Institute of the "Public Opinion" Fund.
- Petrenko, V. F. (2005). Fundamentals of psychosemantics. 2nd ed., St. Petersburg: Publishing House Piter.
- Petrenko, V. F., Gladkikh, N. Yu., Mitina, O. V. (2016). Psychosemantic study of perception of political figures by citizens of South Korea. Historical Psychology and Sociology of History, 9 (2), 85-104.
- Pochebut, L. G. (2013). Intercultural communicative competence as an expression of human relations. Psychological Journal, 34 (4), 5-15.
- Psychological aspects of intercultural adaptation: coll. scientific monograph (2015). / under total. ed. of V. V. Kalita - Vladivostok: Dalnauka, p. 110-133.
- Serkin, V. P. (2008). Methods of psychology of subjective semantics and psychosemantics: study guide for universities. M.: Publishing house PCHELA.
- Shmelev, A. G., Pokhilko, V. I., Kozlovskaya-Telnova, A. Yu (1988). Workshop on experimental psychosemantics. Thesaurus of personality traits. Moscow.
- Sikevich, Z. V. (1999). Sociology and psychology of national relations. St. Petersburg: Publishing House of Mikhailov V.A.
- Soldatova, G. U (1997). The content of ethnic identity: stereotypes and values. Psychological Review, 2 (5), 22-26.
- Soldatova, G. U (1998). Psychology of interethnic tension. Moscow: Smysl.
- Stefanenko, T. G. (2013). Ethnopsychology: Practicum. Moscow: Aspect Press.
- Stefanenko, T. G., Kupavskaya A. S. (2010). Ethnic and cultural competence as a component of communicative competence. Psychology in Russia: current state, 3, 550 - 554.
- Sumner, W. (1906). Folkways: A study of the sociological importance of usages, manners, customs, mores, and morals. Boston: Ginn and Co.
- Tajfel, H., Fraser, C. (1978). Introducing social psychology. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Tatarko, A. N., Lebedeva N. M. (2011). Methods of ethnic and cross-cultural psychology: study guide. Moscow: Publishing House of the Higher School of Economics.
- Zalevskiy, G. V., Kuzmina, Yu. V., Razgonyaev, E. V. (2005). Gender characteristics of ethnic stereotypes of students. Siberian Journal of Psychology, 21, 65-70.

-
1. Ph.D, assistant professor, Maritime State University named after Admiral G.I. Nevelskoy, Vladivostok, Russia. mailto egor-marin@yandex.ru. Ph.D, assistant professor, Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok, Russia
 2. Ph.D, assistant professor, Director of the Department of psychology and education, Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok, Russia
-



This work is under a Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial 4.0 International License