

**Dialogue as a means of creating a stereotyped image of Russian in jokes**

Zhanara Berikovna Abildinova and Gulfiya Seitsharifovna Mullagayanova

Pavlodar State Pedagogical Institute, Mir Street, 60, Pavlodar, 140000, Kazakhstan

E-mail: [abildinova\\_zhana@mail.ru](mailto:abildinova_zhana@mail.ru); Tel: 8-7182-54-08-76, 8777285 24 44

**Abstract.** Joke is one of those productive genres of modern folklore, which reflects national and cultural peculiarities of a certain lingual cultural environment. Jokes texts contain norms of behavior, traditional worldview and social psychological patterns as well as ethnic representation. Therefore the current research introduces a certain contribution to the problem of stereotypes description that fills consciousness of joke's reader and listener. This article is devoted to studying dialogue organization of jokes which is a means of creating a stereotyped image of Russian ethnicity. The authors have worked out a methodology of presupposition and contextual analysis, directed at studying pragmatic peculiarities of a dialogue within a joke structure. According to the authors' opinion, joke characters' dialogue speech makes them recognizable and induces certain ethnic characteristics. Identified linguistic peculiarities of dialogues in jokes demonstrate them as one of major ways to create a stereotyped image, though the features included into this image do not reflect the whole ethnic stereotype picture and serve as just a stereotypical fragment. The choice of the stereotype fragment is determined by the joke genre.

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**Introduction**

The relevance of the research is in its aspect of anthropocentric paradigm involving modern problems of language and culture interaction, intercultural communication and specific characteristics of the engaged ethnic groups. It is important to note that comparing to ethnography and culture studies, ethnic stereotypes have not been thoroughly examined in linguistics. Joke and ethnic stereotypes as culture phenomena have actively been studied nowadays and are being research objects of various scientific fields such as culture studies, linguistics, particularly social linguistics and others (V. Raskin [1], R. Graeme [2]). Interrelations between jokes and myth are viewed in the works of L. Stolovich [3], joke and fiction relations are in the focus of A. Roiphe's studies [4], based upon jokes A. Koneva [5] researches social features, woman and family images are taken into consideration by D. Ossipova [6], jokes and stereotypes are the objects of D. Kember, L. Gow [7], Y. Shmeleva, A. Shmelev [8], Zh. Abildinova's [9] works.

Stereotyped image of the Russian ethnicity has been chosen as an object of study. An overall number of jokes, serving as a factual material, reach 200 units. Based on the jokes containing ethnic component, we can state that the majority of the jokes about the Russians include the information concerning specific features of their behavior. This kind of jokes, to our mind, serves as an attempt for the Russians to self-identify and to define the mentality frame on the background of other

nationalities. Comparing auto-stereotypes with the representatives of other ethnicities can also serve the same purpose. This is considered to be logical because our self-awareness is closely correlated with understanding the vision of other ethnic groups.

The goal of this article is to study dialogues speech as a means of creating a stereotyped image of the Russian ethnicity based on the material of jokes. So that to reach the goal we put the following tasks forward:

- researching linguistic pragmatic peculiarities of dialogues in joke genre;
- analyzing dialogue speeches of jokes' characters in form of linguistic way to create a stereotyped image.

The texts of Russian jokes with stereotyped vision of the Russian ethnicity are the focus of the research. At the same time we also took the jokes related to other ethnic groups, particularly with the Frenchmen and Americans. This is due to the fact that the Russians' ethnic peculiarities are better seen contrasted with other ethnicities and the features revealed with other nationalities remain the same [9, 573]. The jokes for conducting analysis have been taken from various sources: jokes anthologies ("Eto prosto smeshno ili zerkalo krivogo korolevstva" [10], "Anekdoty" [11], "Jokes collection" [12], "Anthology of world jokes" [13]), newspapers and magazines for 2005-2010 period ("500 anekdotov" [14], "Vokrug smekha" [15]).

The methods applied in the work include general scientific methods of comparison – when

describing ethnic features of jokes characters; statistical approach for confirming validity of conclusions about the existence of a stereotyped image of the Russian ethnicity in jokes as well as pure linguistic methods (presupposition analysis used for dealing with joke characters' replies and contextual analysis for studying the contents of the dialogues).

### Research results

There are two linguistic layers in ethnic jokes – author's and character's speeches, thus jokes are mostly based upon dialogue structure [16, 155]. The dialogue in the current article is understood as a speech variety (type) provided with an exchange of interdependent utterances-replies [17, 50]. Dialogue structure of ethnic jokes allows making characters recognizable and moreover "the characters' dialogue fulfills plot creating function in the joke" [18, 4]. Predominance of dialogue structures over monologues is explained by the nature of ethnic jokes itself where there are certain situations with representatives of different ethnic groups [16, 155]. According to N. Sokolova, "dialogueness inside the joke text is a means of creating role-play reality with corresponding characters and is just an imaginary dialogue with made up characters in the monologue of a real speaker" [19, 16]. "Dialogue form fulfills the function of a linguistic way to create a participation effect of the joke listener in communicative situation and at the same time there is a distancing effect of the speaker from the text authorship" [19, 16]. This is quite easy to track, comparing a live dialogue with the one in the joke. If a real dialogue in face-to-face contact is aimed at communication process and is spontaneous, ethnic joke, in its turn can be polished by the joke teller and is oriented at causing listener's laughter.

Both personal implicit and explicit characteristics of communicants are implemented in the speech process within a definite communicative situation stipulated by the speakers' speech actions. Dialogue speech in the ethnic joke creates conditions for revealing its characters' features and that is why it can be viewed as one of the basic language means for ethnically stereotyped images. Other ways of ethnic stereotypes explication were dealt with in our previous work "Language nature of ethnic stereotypes in anecdotes" [9]. So, a stereotyped image of the Russian, represented in jokes texts, is formed upon their replies in the dialogues with other characters. Especially colorful feature revealed in the jokes dialogues is *simple-heartedness* of the Russian. For example, *a Jew and a Russian have bought a pack of cigarettes each. A simple-hearted Russian unpacks it at once and takes a cigarette, a Jew says*

*"Look, give me a cigarette; I don't want to unpack mine". The Russian gives saying "Take it!" A Jew puts it behind his ear and rubbing his hands responds: "Well now, let's smoke!"* [15, 2].

This joke reflects the idea of Russian great-heartedness, where the respond of the Russian to the Jew's request for the cigarette allows explication of the above mentioned stereotype. Great-heartedness nominates one of the soul's qualities, attributed to the Russian mentality and is also related to such features, specific to the Russians, as hospitality and generosity. A great-hearted man is the one with handsome gestures, doing things on large scale and probably even living on a grand scale. The first and most relevant feature of character in the Russian system of values is spirituality, "soul" – is a key notion, prevailing over the intellect, mind, and common sense [20, 87]. So, it is not surprisingly to see this quality reflected in jokes, however taking into account the peculiarity of the genre, this feature receives a kind of ironical coloring.

Such qualities as *smartness* and *wittiness* also appear in jokes with dialogue structure, where character' speech is full of exclamatory statements: *An American once says: "In America before slaughtering a cow we turn on symphonic music, which makes the beef softer!" The Frenchman says to this: "We use electricity for this purpose so that the cow doesn't feel its death coming, so the beef is much softer!" The Russian says: "When entering the shop, I see only some hooves, horns and tails. Who knows what they do, probably just explode them!"* [11, 14].

Smartness and wittiness of the Russians in the joke dialogue serve as a strategic means of implementing communicative pragmatics: *"When entering the shop, I see only some hooves, horns and tails. Who knows what they do, probably just explode them!"* This feature of the Russian cultural linguistic behavior, revealed in the dialogue, provides a kind of victory over the others lacking ability to use unexpected communicative maneuvers and language game or those who as the rest of the characters (Americans, Frenchmen etc.) own just real facts. Compare replies of an American *"In America before slaughtering a cow we turn on symphonic music, which makes the beef softer!"* or that of a Frenchman: *"We use electricity for this purpose so that the cow doesn't feel its death coming, so the beef is much softer!"* This way smartness and wittiness help the Russian look in the described situation better than other characters – representatives of different ethnic groups. Dialogue speech in this joke is full of personal pronouns, finite verb forms and use of exclamatory sentences that help to reveal characters' images.

*Benevolence* of the Russian is quite frequently disclosed when compared with other ethnic groups, for example, with Jews, described in jokes with such features as *being cautious, entrepreneurial, and living with the principle "everything into the family"*. In this case the contrast helps to differentiate the characters of the Russian and Jewish representatives. It is noteworthy to mention that without a Jew in the joke the Russian worldview would not have been complete. Benevolence of the Russians can be reflected in family relations, for instance towards their children. The following joke demonstrates a dialogue between a Russian and a Jew through which one can learn about Russian benevolence and Jewish cautiousness. *A Russian treating his son with indulgence gives him some money and says: "This is for you, sonny, to buy some ice-cream!" A Jew also gives money and thick ear at the same time. The Russian asks: "What for?" – "What if he loses it" – "Well, then you can give him a thick ear!" – "It will be late then!"* [14, 10].

Ethnic jokes often reflect another quality of Russian ethnicity – *honesty* that can be brought to light from characters' dialogues: *A Russian and a Jew have come to the Saint Peter. St. Peter asks the Russian: "Did you have a mother-in-law?" – The Russian honestly answers "Yes, I did". – "So, then you will go to Eden". A Jew, having thought, decided to dodge. "Did you have a mother-in-law?" – "Oh, yes, even two!" – "Well, then, you will go to Hell; after such life conditions even Hell will look like Eden for you!"* [14, 10].

Question-answer structure of this joke is fulfilled in the situation between three communicants: Saint Peter, the Russian and the Jew. The Russian honestly answers St. Peter's question about his mother-in-law, and the Jew trying to make the situation more beneficial, lies. The comic effect is created by St. Peter's response addressed to the Jew: *"Well, then, you will go to Hell; after such life conditions even Hell will look like Eden for you!"*

*Amiability* of the Russian is expressed in the process of communication with friends – representatives of other ethnic groups, more frequently it is a table talk. *After a shipwreck a Frenchman, an American and a Russian get to an uninhabited island. They have found a cave full of bottles of wine. So, they are sitting, drinking and talking. Having opened the next bottle, all of a sudden they have found a djinn. The djinn says: "For releasing me I will make two your wishes come true." – "A beautiful woman and back home, to France!" – says the Frenchman and disappears. "Million dollars and back home, to America!" – says the American and disappears. "It's a pity, we've been sitting so*

*well", – says the Russian. – "A bottle of vodka and back here my friends!"* [15, 8].

This joke is in fact a monologue of the teller. Dialogue in this joke is just retold from the names of the characters, but nonetheless, their characteristic features are clearly seen through the contrasted replies of the communicative situation participants. A stereotypical feature of the Frenchman being affectionate is manifested in his wishes: *"A beautiful woman and back home, to France!"* The American is described as money-oriented: *"Million dollars and back home, to America!"* These wishes do not hinder from coming back home; the Russian in his turn, who values friendly table talk, the most precious thing for him, asks for the following: *"A bottle of vodka and back here my friends!"*

A Russian is often represented in jokes as a *good-fellow* and *humorist*, what helps him to cope with the set tasks: *Once the king ordered to teach donkey say "Hee-haw". First comes a German and says: "Donkey, say 'hee-haw'..." It shakes its head "No". Then comes an American: "Say 'hee-haw'..." It shakes its head "No". A Russian comes and says: "Donkey, your mother has died..." – "Hee..." "I was joking..." – "Haw..."* [15, 14].

The sequence of the conversational turns: first German's, then American's and at the end Russian's is explained by the fact that the joke text consists of two semantic fields. An unexpected comic effect is created by their sudden shift, by turning from one semantic field into another. The shift is seen with the change of the characters according to the situation, thus first two addresses to the donkey are viewed as normal ones. The next character i.e. the Russian produces a comic effect which demonstrates him as a funny person.

Careless and reckless personality of the Russian is represented in the following joke: *Russian, German and English students were sent to study in an American University. Each was given personal task for a year. In a year an Englishman brings twelve thick copybooks saying: "Here they are, professor, reports for January, February..., December". The German brings three thick volumes: "This is laboratory research, this one is theoretical part and these are results". The Russian does not bring anything and says: "You know, professor, yesterday I had such a headache!"* [10, 39].

This situation reveals ethnic stereotypes through description of doing personal tasks: the Englishman brings twelve thick copybooks, the German comes with three thick volumes and the Russian brings nothing at all. Conversation turns of the first two ethnic groups representatives are complemented with their industrious deeds. As for the Russian, his behavior is even complicated by his

words addressed to the professor: “You know, professor, yesterday I had such a headache!” these are the key words that serve for disclosing a stereotyped image of the Russian as a careless person.

*Unpredictability* emerges in the jokes where the Russian is distinguished among other ethnic groups that differ much from the viewed nationality. For example, an Englishman, Frenchman and Russian were given a task for a year to teach monkey to speak. In a year the committee goes to the Englishman. He says: “I was giving it to drink, feeding, treating well but it still doesn’t speak”. The Frenchman has the same situation: “I was giving it to drink, feeding, treating well but it still doesn’t speak”. Then the committee goes to the Russian, the monkey looks very ill-nourished: “I was giving it to drink, feeding, treating well but it still doesn’t speak”. The monkey looks out and says: “Oh, how he tells lies, tells lies!” [13, 317].

Both the Englishman and Frenchman do not cope with the problem or task that was set at the beginning of the joke – to teach monkey to talk. So, the Englishman says: “I was giving it to drink, feeding, treating well but it still doesn’t speak”, the same with the Frenchman. The equal response of the Russian demonstrates his incapability to solve the problem too, but the monkey has to start speaking because the Russian did not take any care of the animal at all. The comic effect is caused by the monkey’s reply. This reaction shows the intention of the joke teller to indicate unpredictability of the Russian.

The following joke is based on a lively dialogue between the audience and international competition participants, where one can see such a feature like *stamina*. For example: *There is a competition between three countries – who will stay longer under the water surface. An American dives first. Two, three, four minutes and emerges. The audience applauds. To the questions of the press how he managed to do that, the American answers in a modest way: Yogi system. A Frenchman is the second to dive. Two, three, four... ten minutes!!! The audience is excited. “How did you manage to do that?” – “Yogi system” – modestly answers the Frenchman. The turn to dive comes to the Russian contestant. Two, three, four, five, six, seven... twenty minutes, but there is still no Russian. Then he emerges in thirty minutes. The audience is shocked: “What a stamina! How did you manage to do that?! Is it a Yogi system?” – “Not even likely! I’ve dropped my watches into the water; I had to look for it, so I was there a bit longer...”* [15, 8].

Rather often ethnic jokes characterize the Russians through relations between the state and

society: *A Russian and an American had an argument who has a bigger quantity of holidays. A flick of the finger on the rival’s forehead for each holiday. The American has started: “Independence Day, Christmas, Easter...” – about twenty flicks and puts his forehead bravely thinking: “What holidays could these pagans have?” The Russian has started: “New Year, Women’s Day, First of May, Seventh of November..., and some more: Fisherman’s Day! Seaman’s Day! Builder’s Day! Teacher’s Day!” flicks all the professions – the American falls down. The Russian continues: “Advance payment! Wages! Advance payment! Wages! Advance payment! Wages!”* [12, 98].

The jokes of the similar dialogue structure can also reflect not just a Russian but a soviet person in general (so called “sov”) and really demonstrate specific features not of a Russian person particularly, but a former soviet society in general. So, based on the analysis of the Russian’s responses, we come to the conclusion that a stereotyped image of the Russian includes the following ethnic stereotypes: being *simple-hearted*, *smart* and *witty*, *benevolent*, *amiable*, *good-fellow* and *humorist*, *careless* and *reckless*, *unpredictable* and *possessing high stamina*. Thus, determined characteristic features indicate moral ethnic qualities of the Russian. Having conducted jokes texts we found out that the above mentioned merits are the major ones and put them in percentage data below (Figure 1).

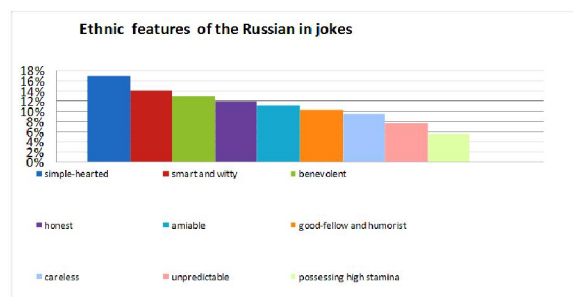


Figure 1. Ethnic features of the Russian in jokes

## Conclusion

As a result of making jokes analysis we can conclude that a stereotyped image of a Russian is revealed in the dialogue with other characters and can be reconstructed on the basis of the speech lines, characterizing him as representative of a certain ethnic group possessing definite features or qualities. Linguistic means used for creating a stereotyped image of the Russian in the dialogue are a question-answer structure, use of interrogative, exclamatory and imperative sentences, complex and simple speech lines and addressing. Thus, a dialogue in the text of an ethnic joke is not just a basic structural element,

but also an important pragmatic means. First, it allows the teller to imagine the scene happening in the joke, and the second, it makes the ethnic character type recognizable.

The analyzed jokes about the Russians do not reflect the whole stereotype but just a fragment. The choice of the fragment depends on the genre peculiarity of the joke, where the major aim is desire to have fun, cause laughter, mock some features and specific qualities of this or that ethnic group behavior. This purpose complies with the choice of linguistic means in the jokes, particularly the use of a dialogue structure. It should also be noted that specific features of one language semantics distinguishing it from all other languages do not form a coherent picture, but just separate worldview fragment [21, 217], in our case it is a stereotyped image of the Russian.

#### Corresponding Author:

Dr. Abildinova Zhanara Berikovna  
Pavlodar State Pedagogical Institute  
Mir Street, 60, Pavlodar, 140000, Kazakhstan  
E-mail: [abildinova\\_zhana@mail.ru](mailto:abildinova_zhana@mail.ru)  
Tel: 8-7182-54-08-76, 8777285 24 44

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