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Stereotypes of continents in contemporary Polish

Summary of the doctoral dissertation

The aim of the doctoral dissertation is to reconstruct the stereotypes (linguistic and cultural images) of continents in contemporary Polish. The thesis corresponds with linguistic research trend that treats language as a source of knowledge about man, his mentality, the way of perceiving the world and the system of values professed by the community. In the analyses, I use the conceptual instruments developed by Lublin ethnolinguistics and the methodology of reconstructing the lingual image of the world proposed by Jerzy Bartmiński and utilised during works on the *Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols* (1996–2022) as well as *Axiological Lexicon of the Slavs and Their Neighbours* (2015–2019).

The subject of the description is the conceptual correlate between the name and reality, i.e., the image of the continent (and its inhabitant). I show how continents are understood by users of contemporary Polish: categorized, characterized, and valued. The result of the analyses are extensive explications of five continents: Africa, America, Antarctica, Australia, and Asia. I deliberately omit Europe, which has been the subject of many similar linguistic studies.

The base of the work are three types of data, referred to by the abbreviation S-A-T: a) systemic (S) – taken from lexicographic sources (including general dictionaries of the Polish language, phraseological dictionaries, dictionaries of synonyms and antonyms, specialist dictionaries); b) “induced” – obtained by means of surveys (A) conducted in a group of 100 students (7,000 responses); c) text (T) – contexts excerpted from press articles from daily newspapers “Gazeta Wyborcza”, “Rzeczpospolita” and the National Corpus of Polish Language (29,300 contexts in total).

I reconstruct the base image of each of the five continents on the basis of system and survey data. Next, I reveal the modifications of these images in the discourse and show precise profiles of continents functioning in press texts.

The dissertation comprises of seven chapters preceded by an introduction. The thesis is closed by conclusion and bibliography.

Chapter 1 provides a synthetic review of stereotype theory in various scientific disciplines (linguistics, sociology, psychology). I present the model of cognitive definition as a tool for describing linguistic and cultural stereotypes, as well as other concepts used to recreate the cognitive content hidden behind lexemes: the lingual image of the world (JOS), profiling and profile, point of view and interpretive perspective, subject and values.

Chapter 2 focuses on the issues of discourse by presenting the most important studies on the mentioned subject in contemporary Polish linguistics. I present various definitions and typologies of discourse, devoting particular attention to the classification covering: politics and political discourse, and public discourse – the latter was the starting point for the textual research. Then, I characterize the subtypes of public discourse important for the analyses: media discourse and press discourse.

Chapters from 3 to 7 are symmetrical in nature – they include reconstructions of stereotypes of the studied continents, in the following sequence: Africa, America, Antarctica, Australia, and Asia. Each chapter has a three-part structure, corresponding to three types of analysed data: system, survey, and text. In accordance with the cognitive definition, I extract the definitional features of individual concepts (I compile them – as in the *Axiological Lexicon of the Slavs and their Neighbours* – in a synthetic form). In the following part, I characterize the profiles of the continents present in the collected press texts, answering the questions: who and from what point of view shapes these profiles and what features of the continents are exposed.

The reconstructed stereotypes (basic images and profiles) of the continents outline the Polish “mental map.” **Africa** on the one hand is seen as the Black Continent and the Third World – a wild, dangerous, and unpredictable place, facing many difficulties (such as poverty, hunger, diseases, wars, corruption), but on the other hand – as the cradle of the human species and a fascinating continent for its exoticism. **America**, identified mainly with one country, the United States of America, takes the shape of a dream land in the eyes of Polish speakers, who associate it with prosperity, wealth, development, novelty, happiness, and a chance to achieve success or make dreams come true. Other views focus on democracy, equality, and freedom. It is also seen as a melting pot of nations/cultures and a global leader, who in the 21st century is beginning to lose its dominant position in the world. **Antarctica** is seen through the prism of a frosty and unfriendly climate – as a continent of eternal winter. It is often confused with the Arctic located at the North Pole. The harsh climate of Antarctica together with its other features, such as inaccessibility for the average person, special political and legal status and the interest aroused in the world of science, make this place appear in the eyes of Poles as

“another world.” **Australia**, perceived mainly as the antipodes of humanity, is associated with beautiful, but often dangerous nature: wild animals (especially kangaroos) and a hot and dry climate, which results in frequent fires. It is also considered as an oasis of prosperity, famous for its high standard of living and areas rich in gold deposits, which translates into a constant influx of people there – from the time of British colonization until today. In the eyes of Poles, **Asia** is mainly perceived as a “factory” of the world. The continent is primarily associated with China (and, to a lesser extent, Japan) and its large-scale production of counterfeit and cheap products, as well as a labour system that does not respect human rights. Nevertheless, thanks to the dynamically developing markets of Asia, it is seen as a growing power and the economic centre of the world (and thus shifting it from the West to the East). The prosperity of Asia is even labelled as “Golden Age of Asia.” Moreover, the continent is considered a socio-cultural conglomerate – the largest population centre and a place where various cultures meet. This diversity translates, among others, into various culinary inspirations of Asian cuisine, and as a result – into perceiving Asia as a melting pot of flavours.

In the last part of this dissertation, I show which continents are the central points on the “mental map” of contemporary Polish users (i.e., they are closest to Poland-Europe), and which are peripheral. The analysis reveals that for Poles (Europeans) the most important are the developed continents and those with the strongest position in the world: America and Asia. Therefore, they look favourably at Australia, even though it is less firmly fixed in their consciousness. The most negative image is associated with Africa because it is perceived as wild and civilizationally backward continent. Antarctica, on the other hand, is barely noticed by contemporary Polish users – for them it is not so much the periphery of the world as a completely “other world.”

The thesis ends with a bibliography and a list of sources and abbreviations.

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