

## Verbalization of the stereotype “immigrant as an employee” in comedy shows

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**Abstract.** This article examines the essence of ethnic humour, defines its features and connection to ethnic stereotypes as well as analyses the stereotype of immigrants as people employed in service sector or having small business constructed by comedians in English-speaking stand-up shows. It also specifies linguistic means such as hyperbole, tautology, paraprosookian, anadiplosis, paradox and amplification that are used by comedians to get comic effect.

**Keywords:** ethnic humour, binary opposition, comic effect, stereotypes, cognitive dissonance, anadiplosis, paraprosookian.

Nowadays the topic of ethnic humour and stereotyping is researched by scientists of very different disciplines: historians (J. Boskin, J. Dorinson), linguists (I. O. Alyeksyeyeva, T. L. Katsbert), researchers in communication and social studies (F. Hirji, M. Billig), as well as psychologists (S. Fiske, C. Stangor). Investigating stereotypes as well as ethnic humour may help to understand possible aggression or establish effective communication between all the ethnic groups around the world. Thus, it is no wonder that at the Oxford meeting of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology in 1999 almost a third of all the symposia was focused on stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination [5, p. 299-300]. Professor of Psychology in Princeton University, Susan Fiske predicts that the twenty-first century may continue to emphasize mind, augmented by a focus on behaviour, cultural sensitivity, and altogether new links to the brain. Consequently, she presumed that individuals will continue to stereotype, prejudice and discriminate against each other. And last few years terrorism expansion all over the world as well as migrant crisis made people stereotype and prejudice even more proving her prediction to be accurate. Stereotypes cannot be separated from ethnic humour. This thought is confirmed by an anthropology professor Mahadev L. Apte, according to whom stereotypes are crucial to ethnic humour and its appreciation. Since they are widely accepted by members of individual cultures, they constitute a shared set of assumptions necessary for ethnic humour [2, p. 114].

Ethnic humour is defined here as a type of humour in which fun is made of the perceived behaviour, customs, personality, or any other traits of a group or its members by virtue of their specific sociocultural identity [1, p. 27].

The notion “stereotype” was introduced by W. Lippmann only in 1922, yet back in the seventeenth century Thomas Hobbes in his work “Human nature, or the fundamental elements of policy” specified that the passion of laughter arises from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others [7, p. 46]. This system of the binary opposition (eminency:: infirmity) is crucial both to ethnic humour and to stereotypes.

Joseph Baskin and Joseph Dorinson suggest that people have always laughed at others who seemed “distinct”, to reassure themselves and to blunt the threats implicit in differences. According to them, ethnic slurs in joking form have reflected the tensions of social difference. For instance, in the USA, ethnic humour against supposedly “inferior” social groups initially conveyed the thrusts of the well-entrenched members of society, the white,

mostly Protestant “haves” against the newly arriving immigrants or their imperfectly assimilated offspring, or against black slaves, freedmen, their children, and children’s children. In time, ironically, the resulting derisive stereotypes were adopted by their targets in mocking self-description, and then, triumphantly, adapted by the victims of stereotyping themselves as a means of revenge against their more powerful detractors [3, p. 81].

Accordingly, modern ethnic jokes are presented by those who were ridiculed in the past and we believe that there are two reasons for this. On the one hand, ethnic groups traditionally in powerless and subservient positions have started to assert themselves and have begun to protest their being made the butt of humour initiated by anyone but themselves [1, p. 27].

On the other hand, according to Leon Rappoport, if the humour works, it does not matter whether it is your own or someone else’s group being ridiculed. In fact, he emphasizes that it is often even cooler to relish or wink at the stereotypes applied to your own group [15, p. 126]. We suppose this can be explained by the following: no one can know more about someone’s own ethnic group than its representative.

Although some scientists believe that ethnic humour is vicious weapons [3, p. 81], offensive and degrading [4, p. 114] and demonstrates aggressive intentions but some of them suggest it possesses a salutary side as well. These can be the following:

✓ Not all ethnic, racial, and/or minority group humour is at the expense of the target group; some may literally compliment that group.

✓ “Insults” directed at ethnic group representatives may be “left-handed insults” or compliment in disguise.

✓ Perhaps even “jokes” which disparage the ethnic group are appreciated most not by the dominant, external group but by the ethnic group itself [11, p. 116].

In this research we would like to examine the ethnic humour of such comedians as Russell Peters and Maz Jobrani and especially pay attention to the episodes devoted to work that immigrants do. The material of this article is stereotypes of immigrants as employees constructed by the comedians. The duration of the analyzed shows is 3 hours and fifteen minutes.

First, we will look at the episodes devoted to immigration to the Middle East including ones related to *getting any job* or *setting up a small business*. Thus, for instance, Maz Jobrani often mentions this topic noting that a large number of immigrants in different cities and countries are employed in *service sector*. For example, he even compares the capital city of Qatar, Doha, with the United

Nations: the population of Doha overwhelmingly consists of expatriates from all over the world with Qatari nationals forming a minority. So, on his way from the airport to the hotel, Maz Jobrani was able to see an Indian, Filipina, South American, Korean, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Lebanese and Swede. All of them provided their services:

- *I love coming to Doha. It's such an international place. This is like – it feels like the United Nations just here. You land at the airport, and you're welcomed by an Indian lady who takes you to Al Maha Services, where you meet a Filipino lady who hands you off to a South African lady who then takes you to a Korean who takes you to a Pakistani guy with the luggage who takes you to the car with a Sri Lankan. You go to the hotel and you check in. There's a Lebanese. Yeah? And then a Swedish guy showed me my room* [8, 0:13-1:00].

At the lexical level we observe “stringing” of ethnonyms and tautology of relative pronoun “who” within one short piece of narration. This string and tautology boost the comic effect. It also becomes clear that these are all lower-level and low-income jobs.

Jobrani is naïve to wonder where the Qataris are. The comic effect is reached with the help of the response he gets from these immigrants regarding the absence of natives. As it turns out, it is too hot for the Qataris to work:

- *I said, “Where are the Qataris?” (Laughter) (Applause) They said, “No, no, it's too hot. They come out later. They're smart.” (Laughter) “They know.”*

In the context, the lexeme *smart* becomes a euphemism for “rich”. As per capita Qatar is the richest country and the Qataris don't have to work at all. Nevertheless, those who are employed, work in public-sector jobs and hire immigrants to work as laborers on construction sites, in trades or industrial facilities [6].

To survive, immigrants need to earn a living by all means. The following dialogue shows how one can get a job just on the way from the airport:

- *You know, like sometimes you run into people that you think know the city well, but they don't know it that well. My Indian cab driver showed up at the W, and I asked him to take me to the Sheraton, and he said, “No problem, sir.” And then we sat there for two minutes. I said, “What's wrong?” He said, “One problem, sir.” I said, “What?” He goes, “Where is it?” (Laughter) I go, “You're the driver, you should know.” He goes, “No, I just arrived, sir.” I go, “You just arrived at the W?” “No, I just arrived in Doha, sir. I was on my way home from the airport. I got a job. I'm working already.” He goes, “Sir, why don't you drive?” I go, “I don't know where we're going.” “Neither do I. It will be an adventure, sir.”* [8, 1:07-1:50]

This situation is absurd and therefore sounds comical because of the cognitive dissonance Maz experienced: a taxi driver under any circumstances is expected to know the city, yet this driver suggests the client getting at the wheel (*why don't you*). The narration becomes even funnier when the word “adventure” is used to refer to a trip by taxi. It is also amplified by the anadiplosis (*I just arrived, sir. You just arrived? No problem, sir. One problem, sir*) and hyperbole (*I was on my way home from the airport. I got a job. I'm working already*).

Here Maz Jobrani also used a technique that is called voice as prop: the driver's voice that Maz adopted for

only a short period of time makes the joke even funnier.

Russell Peters also successfully plays up with the stereotype “immigrant as a driver” saying that he was taken aback by seeing a white driver. In this episode the comedian's cognitive dissonance implies that a cab driver is usually not white. That's why a real-life situation gets absurd when it clashes with the comedian's stereotype:

- *I have seen the funniest thing today, man. I have seen a white guy driving a cab. I mean who the hell he thinks he is? You know, he comes here, he steals our jobs. Aha-ha. I love when I hear racist people say “I don't like them, immigrants. They come here and steal our jobs.”* [13, 6:38-7:11]

But the situation becomes comical owing to the parapsydokian that the comedian used in the last question addressing to all people who “suffer” from immigrants' employment:

- *Sorry, sir, did you want to open a dollar store?*

Thus, the situation is absurd, as according to the comedian, maximum that immigrants can achieve is to open one dollar shop implying natives' reluctance to do this.

As we have already remarked, the comedians talk about immigrants as people who either work in the service sector or have their own small business (self-employed taxi drivers or shop owners) and who are unlikely to become successful rich owners of effective enterprises. The stereotype of a low-social-status immigrant is so well-set, that even the comedians, who position themselves as open-minded, unbiased people, may be guilty of prejudging. Maz Jobrani, for example, was misled by the stereotype and mistook a hotel owner for a driver in Dubai. The stereotypical thinking was also encouraged with a cheap suit and a thin moustache that is often a part and parcel of the driver's stereotype. Paradoxical and that is why comical is the ending of this acquaintance as it turns out that the comedian was not the only one who prejudged. The hotel owner “categorized” Maz in the same way: *I was in Dubai. And there's a lot of Indians who work in Dubai. And they don't get paid that well. And I got it in my head that all the Indians there must be workers. And I forgot there's obviously successful Indians in Dubai as well. I was doing a show, and they said, “We're going to send a driver to pick you up.” So I went down to the lobby, and I saw this Indian guy. I go, “He's got to be my driver.” Because he was standing there in like a cheap suit, thin mustache, staring at me. So I went over, “Excuse me, sir, are you my driver?” He goes, “No, sir. I own the hotel.” (Laughter) I go, “I'm sorry. Then why were you staring at me?” He goes, “I thought you were my driver.”* (rendered verbatim) [9, 7:45-8:16] The fundamental attribution error is most visible in this example when Maz assumed the behaviour of the person standing and staring at him was related to the job of the driver and not the hotel owner. Furthermore, this incorrect assumption was also made owing to that person's poor clothes.

While the previous story took place in Dubai, the status of immigrants is similar in the USA and Canada. In another show “I come in peace” Maz Jobrani mentions that the number of Guatemalan nannies in Los Angeles is quite significant and there is a Guatemalan nanny in Maz Jobrani's own family. As a result, spending most of their time with Spanish-speaking caretakers, non-Hispanic

children learn Spanish as their first language: *"I am Iranian, my wife is Indian, our nanny is Guatemalan. Our kid is confused. He doesn't know who is who and what is what...Every night when the nanny is leaving he's got Guatemalan accent when he talks. When she is leaving he says "Adios, mama. See you later. I'm gonna hang out with these two losers again".* [10, 53:05-53:40] This episode is funny because of the paradox that the comedian used as a nanny is nominated "mama" and parents – losers.

The episode below is devoted to small business that immigrants have in Canada:

- *I went to this Chinese mall, some of you may know it, Pacific mall. That's a wrong place for an Indian guy to go. I saw this bag. I wanted to buy this bag. I go, "How much?" He goes, "35 dollars." "Um. How about 30?" And Chinese people never tell you no. They will tell you "no", the longest "no" you ever heard in your life like you just said the most ridiculous thing that they ever heard in your life. "I give you 30." "Noooooo. Nooooo. I can't do 30 dollars. If I sell you 30 dollars today, you come tomorrow I close down."* [12, 11:53-12:37]

In this show, the immigrant who has a small bag store is of Chinese origin. He doesn't want either to cut the price of the product or lose the client. The amplification (*Chinese mall, some of you may know it, Pacific mall; I saw this bag. I wanted to buy this bag; "no", the longest "no" you ever heard*), tautology (*in your life, "no", 30 dollars*) as well as voice as prop that the comedian used in this episode arise the comical situation.

In the show "Outsourced" that was held in San Francisco Russell Peters addresses to Koreans to check their presence and after getting the positive response from

them comes to a conclusion that a few dry-cleaner's are closed as their owners are present among the audience implying that this business usually belongs to Korean immigrants:

- *Any Koreans? Ok. There's two closed dry-cleaner's, nice* [14, 7:27-7:34].

However, some immigrants try themselves in movies as well. But according to Maz Jobrani, they are only offered to play in negative scenes:

- *But a lot of times in Hollywood, when casting directors find out you're of Middle Eastern descent, they go, "Oh, you're Iranian. Great. Can you say 'I will kill you in the name of Allah?'" "I could say that, but what if I were to say, 'Hello. I'm your doctor?'" They go, "Great. And then you hijack the hospital."* [9, 2:40-2:56]

In the episode above the comedian uses tautology (*great*), stereotyping (*you're of Middle Eastern descent > kill you in the name of Allah*), nonsense (*hijack the hospital*) and voice as prop to arise the comic element.

Thus, the analysis of the given material shows that the stereotype of immigrants as employees constructed by the comedians is verbalized by lexemes that denote people working in service sector (support staff, drivers, nannies) or having small business (a dollar store, bag shop, dry-cleaner's).

The given material also proves that the stereotype "immigrant" is usually someone from Asia or Africa (Indian, Filipino, South African, Korean, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Lebanese, Chinese), having skin colour other than white. The comic effect in these comedy shows is achieved via hyperbole, tautology, paraprosoodion, anadiplosis, paradox and amplification.

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#### Вербализация стереотипа «иммигрант как работник» в комедийных шоу

Т. В. Пилипчук

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматривается сущность этнического юмора, определяются его особенности и связь с этническими стереотипами, а также анализируется стереотип иммигрантов как людей, занятых в сфере услуг или имеющих малый бизнес, который высмеивается комедийными эстрадными актерами в англоязычных стенд-ап шоу. А также выделяются языковые средства, такие как гипербола, тавтология, парaprosoдия, анадиплосис, парадокс и амплификация, с помощью которых актеры достигают комического эффекта.

**Ключевые слова:** этнический юмор, бинарная оппозиция, комический эффект, стереотипы, когнитивный диссонанс, анадиплосис, парaprosoдия.