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Dynamism vs Stability of Sociocultural Stereotypes

The Case Study of the Hipster Stereotype

Abstract

Focusing on the dynamic nature of sociocultural stereotypes, we examine changes in linguistic representation of the hipster stereotype, which is considered a verbalized cognitive structure that embodies a simplified and conventional image of a social group. The study is based on the premise that dynamism of a sociocultural stereotype can be detected and described mainly by linguistic methods and techniques that include semantic, motivational, distributional, contextual analysis. Notable alterations of verbalized sociocultural stereotypes are observed in media discourse, which is highly responsive to social processes that influence stereotyping. The data for the study is collected from American web-based digital sources and language corpora. The results of the research confirm linguistic representation of sociocultural stereotypes is a dynamic process of their formation, functioning and changing that comprise qualitative and quotative transformations. Qualitative changes are transformations of the stereotype characteristics, represented by lexical items and syntactic units. Quantitative changes concern the increase or reduction in frequency of the sociocultural stereotype in media discourse with subsequent disappearance of it. Under certain conditions, the disappeared sociocultural stereotype renews in media discourse. The results of our research can be of use in a wide range of linguistic studies aimed at detecting changes in verbalized cognitive units.

Keywords: sociocultural stereotype, subcultural group, hipster, media stereotyping, dynamism

Introduction

Contrasted concepts of change and permanency has been discussed throughout the whole history of philosophy and science. Ancient philosophers claimed all things do change: *Omnium rerum vicissitudo est* (Riley 1891: 314). Change seems the only constant feature of our life. As Virginia Wolf has put it, "change perhaps would never cease. High battlements of thought, habits that had seemed as durable as stone, went down like shadows at the touch of another mind" (Wolf 2007: 485). There is an appropriate balance between change as a characteristic of the world and permanency as a phase in the progressive development of the conceptual system (Davies 1900: 515). Concentrating knowledge about social groups (Hamilton *et al.* 1992: 135), sociocultural stereotypes function as elements of the conceptual system of a particular society. Social and political processes influence greatly transformations of sociocultural stereotypes, which we consider potentially changeable. Originated from the Greek δυναμικός "capacity, capability to develop" (Liddell & Scott 1853), the term "dynamism" refers to transformations of sociocultural stereotypes in media discourse.

Ever since Walter Lippmann introduced the term "stereotype", an abundance of scholarly research has emerged, focusing on diverse aspects of stereotypes. One of the main properties, attributed to stereotypes is their resistance to change. However, experimental data suggest (Vinacke 1957, Kranz *et al.* 2021) that stereotypes can change (Yzerbyt & Corneille 2005: 181). The degree of their changeability depends on different factors, such as the context of their emergence and functioning, their significance for the national culture, their pragmatic meaning, *etc*.

Scientists acknowledge simplicity, conventionality and axiological character of stereotypes (Ashmore & Del Boca 2017, Shneider 2004). To a certain degree, all stereotypes are represented in the language (Bartmiński 2017, Beukeboom & Burgers 2019). They manifest on a lexical-semantic level and on the level of syntax (Bartmiński 2005). Changes in a verbal form of a stereotype reflect the alteration of cognitive and pragmatic properties of it.

Within the frame of our work, a sociocultural stereotype is defined a verbalized cognitive structure that embodies a simplified and conventional image of a social group or an individual (Lyubymova 2022b: 60). A sociocultural stereotype embraces descriptive and evaluative features, commonly associated with members of a specific group (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2013). Sociocultural stereotypes are propagated by mass communication, particularly within media discourse, which is characterized by its agile response to social processes that influence stereotyping (Dijk 1996, Chilton 2004, Ross 2019). Media stereotyping is representation of sociocultural stereotypes by linguistic and non-linguistic means in media discourse (Lyubymova 2022b). It is a dynamic process, brought about by social, cultural and media factors. They are ethical, aesthetic and behavioural standards, cultural dominants, activity of journalists and social networks' leaders that draw public attention to trends and events of a social life. The research has been conducted on the US media sources due to the significant impact of American media products on a global public opinion through the spread of films, songs, memes, *etc*.

The objective of this paper is to outline the dynamism of sociocultural stereotypes on the example of media portrayal of a subcultural group of hipsters that "practice a wide array of social dissent through shared behavioral, musical, and costume orientations" (Clark 2018: 313). Subcultural groups, such as hipsters, are conventional social types, perceived as "deviations from the norm" (Cohen 2011: 6), that

is why their media stereotyping conveys their inconsistency with the traditional values of the dominant culture. Changes in media representation of subcultural stereotypes reflect generational worldview shift.

Theoretical Premises of the Work

Sociocultural stereotypes are the results of social cognition, *i.e.* a mental action, concerning various psychological processes (perception, attention, memory, *etc.*) that enable people to learn about the world (Frith 2008). Categorizing social setting, people distinguish salient features of a social group and evaluate them (Pickering 2015) in accordance with national ideals, cultural values and ethical, aesthetic, and behavioural standards (Lyubymova 2020). Evaluation is ascertainment of compliance or non-compliance of a social group with culturally prioritized value criteria. The criteria are embodied in discrete ideas, "fixed" images (MacLaury 2007: 140). Cultural archetypes and established sociocultural stereotypes and function as mental points of reference in the process of stereotyping. Cultural archetypes are symbolic images that can vary without changing their basic cognitive schemes (Jung 1981). They preserve the ancestral experience of the nation and serve as value orientations of the society (Shutova 2014: 519).

Indispensable to human mental activity, sociocultural stereotypes are the integral part of natural language. Representing the image of a group in its verbal form, a sociocultural stereotype functions as the centre of semantic and cognitive associations (Coulmas 1981). Linguistic manifestation of stereotypes are found in lexical items (Bartmiński 2017, Beukeboom & Burgers 2019), connotations and pragmatic presuppositions (Lawton 2016), derivational paradigms (Bartmiński 2017), propositional structures (Coulmas 1981, Quasthoff 1978, Ross 2019), rhetorical and stylistic devices (Dijk 1996), phraseological units and proverbs (Bartmiński 2005, Shutova 2015), communicative styles (Furkó 2013, Deutschmann & Steinval 2020), speech etiquette (Shutova 2013) and media genres (Lyubymova 2021). In our paper, we dwell on lexical items and syntactic units that represent a hipster subculture in American media discourse. The lexeme *hipster* is defined as a nomen of a sociocultural stereotype (Lyubymova 2022a: 120). A syntactic unit that represents a sociocultural stereotype expresses societal attitude to a social group. Judgements about a stereotyped group are regularly reproduced in the language usage (Shutova 2014), for example, *Everybody hates hipsters*. Subcultural groups, such as hipsters, are conventional social types, perceived as "deviations from the norm" (Cohen 2011: 6), that is why their media stereotyping conveys their inconsistency with the traditional values of the dominant culture. Changes in media representation of the stereotypes of subcultural groups reflect generational worldview shift.

Methodology

The research methodology rests on the premise that sociocultural stereotypes interpret reality within the scope of cognitive models, represented by linguistic signs (Bartmiński 2017, Lawton 2016, Ross 2019, Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2013). The research methods are based on the anthropocentric approach to linguistic studies and the principles of holism that claims the interdependence of processes and phenomena of the social world and functionalism, according to which language structures are analysed in communicative situations.

Although sociocultural stereotypes are not purely linguistic concepts, they can be detected and described mostly by linguistic methods and techniques (Shutova 2022). The first step of the research design is media monitoring that involves observation and fixation of language material for further linguistic processing (Graffigna & Riva 2015). The research data are restricted to syntactical units that verbalize the hipster sociocultural stereotype in American web-based digital media that comprise «quality» periodicals, popular entertaining magazines and blogs within the period of the 1940s till 2022. A verbalized sociocultural stereotype is indicated in the chosen texts by semantic and grammatic markers of typicality. They are the plural form of nouns, e.g. *hipsters*; an indefinite article, e.g. *a hipster*; characterising adjectives, e.g. *a typical hipster*; quantifiers, e.g. *most hipsters*; evaluative predicates, e.g. *a self-conscious hipster*.

Hermeneutic procedure of a media text interpretation involves knowledge of the communicative background, *i.e.* the historical, cultural and ideological context, as well as the information transmission channel (Lyubymova 2020). Interpretive reconstruction of the stereotype's meaning is based on the hermeneutic canon that the language is the medium for understanding (Gadamer [1975] 2004). Regardless of the author's will (Schleiermacher 1998), "the meaning is determined and affected by the context" (Gadamer [1975] 2004: 233). Mediated by the language meaning is formed by the most important characteristics of the interpreted object: "we must understand the whole in terms of the detail" (Gadamer [1975] 2004: 291) and vice versa, "understanding of the particular follows the provisional understanding of the whole" (Schleiermacher 1998: 45). Hermeneutic procedure lies in comprehending the meaning of the sociocultural stereotype, interpreting it in the cultural and historic context and explaining the means of its media representation.

The fundamental step in our study is cognitive analysis (Croft & Cruse 2004, Góralczyk & Paszenda 2020), which is a procedure largely based on introspection (Talmy 2007). Considering our own ideas and thoughts about the verbalized sociocultural stereotype, we focus on contextually construed meaning (Croft & Cruse 2004: 97) and motivation, concealed behind the linguistic structure. Semantic and motivational analysis contributes to detecting all possible meanings (Shutova 2022). The research technique involves knowledge of cultural concepts that influence representation of the sociocultural stereotype.

Corpus analysis is applied to verify introspective findings of the research. It includes qualitative as well as quantitative methods. Analysing corpora, such as Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) (Davies 2019), Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies 2020), we can observe patterns, which are not always accessible to intuition (Hallan 2001: 91). Language Corpora are useful tools to track changes in the linguistic representation of the sociocultural stereotype over time. Diachronic perspective of the research refers to interpretation of changes in media representation of the sociocultural stereotype from the time of its appearance till the present day. Diachronic description confirms the hypothesis that sociocultural stereotypes of media discourse are inherently changeable.

Dynamism of Media Stereotyping

Dynamism of media stereotyping comprises different stages of the stereotype's development: formation, functioning and changing (Lyubymova 2022b: 61–62).

1. Formation of a Hipster Stereotype

The hipster sociocultural stereotype emerged in times of high economic growth and general prosperity. It was the period of rigid conformity, when people, especially older generations, strictly observed norms of behavior and aligned their attitudes and beliefs with traditional values. The generation of hipsters "reared during a period when most middle-class U.S. families were obsessed with regaining financial and social security" (Wentworth & Flexner 1967: 258). Hipsters differentiated themselves from conservativism of their parents and determined their own values and appearances.

The subculture began to garner attention of media in 1948. "The San Francisco Chronicle" characterized a hipster as "a chap who's hep to what's happening" (Dalzell 1996: 99). In his "A Portrait of the Hipster" published in "Partisan Review", Anatole P. Broyard depicted a hipster as opposed to conformist American society. Broyard revealed the noticeable features of a hipster: jive music and marijuana, a fashion style (padded shoulders and dark glasses), "rich in aggressiveness" language (Broyard 1948/2018). Interest of journalists in the subculture promoted its stereotyping. Collocations *generic hipster*, *quintessential hipster, typical hipster* confirm stereotypic character of the hipster subculture.

Stereotyping of groups and individuals begins with their perception that physically stimulate human senses (Ageles 1992: 222). Sensual experience of verbal and non-verbal communication with the group is conceived and structured: the prominent features of the group are compared with ones of the exemplar. In American society, the exemplar is a white middle class protestant (Zárate & Smith 1990) that embodies ethical, esthetical and behavioural standards. Contrary to a conventional middle-class, the hipster stereotype is formed in view of its negatively evaluated properties.
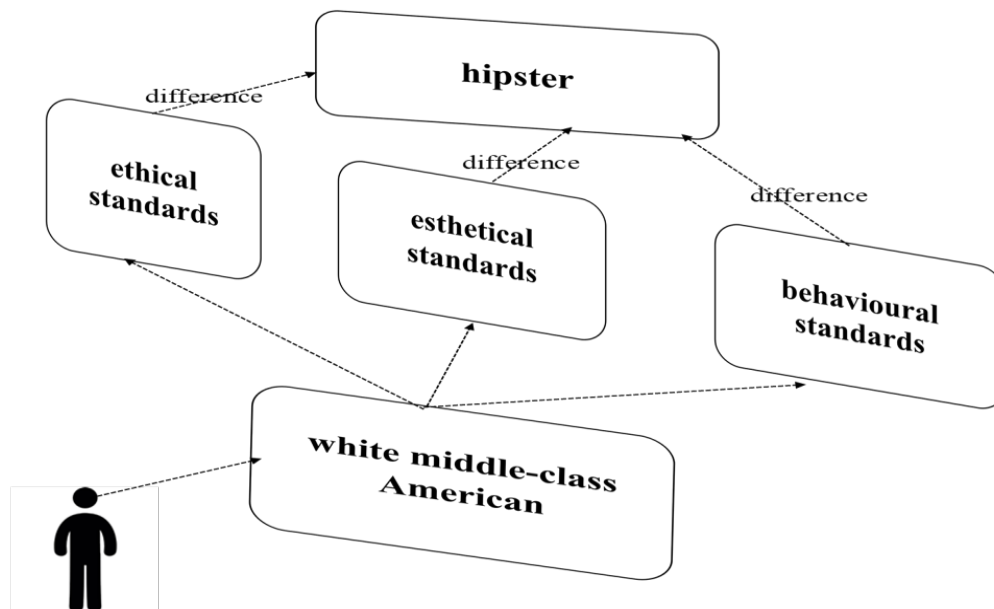

Figure1. Formation of a sociocultural stereotype

Formation of a sociocultural stereotype is accompanied by its designation. A nomen of a sociocultural stereotype correlates with a conventional opinion about a social group, which is very often created and/or fortified in media discourse (Lyubymova 2022a: 121). Formed by means of suffixation, the nomen *hipster* derives from *hip* or its doublet (etymological twin) *hep* (Wentworth & Flexner 1967: 258, Dalzell 1996: 57). Early in the 20th century, *hip* and *hep* were used interchangeably to mean "world-wise, sophisticated, and up-to-date with trends in music, fashion and speech" (Dalzell 1996: 57). Adjective *hip* was fixed in 1915 in the meaning "cool, gone, far-out" (Wentworth & Flexner 1967: 258), while *hep* appeared later in the meaning "aware of, with comprehension and appreciation for a field of endeavour, modern mode, fashion, the way of life; modern" (Wentworth & Flexner 1967: 253). The word stem suggests that referents of the subcultural group have been categorized as having qualities expressed by *hip/hep*. Derogatory meaning of suffix *-ster* (Hoad 2000: 461) indicates that these qualities were negatively perceived in American society. In the 1940s – 1950s, two versions (*hipster/ hepster* and *hippie*) were in use to denote a devotee of jazz music and the jazz lifestyle, who strives to be hip (Dalzell & Victor 2013: 1148). In the 1960s, *hippie* became firmly associated with "flower children" subculture (Dalzell & Victor 2013: 1149). The distinction between hippie and hipster subcultures is highlighted by contemporary media: *First thing's first: hipsters aren't hippies* (Baklarz 2021).

In media discourse of the1960s, a hipster was portrayed as a disillusioned person, interested only in his own likes and fads: *the real hipster loved fast cars and motorcycles. He was cool only with the arts because he trusted nothing else* (Stem 1967). Much attention was paid to hipster's appearance that was criticized and ridiculed, e.g. *A local policeman, patrolling his beat last week, looked disdainfully at a cool hipster loafing at a street corner… the "cool number" wore a box-back jacket, stove-pipe slacks, flat-toed shoes, a beige sport shirt with peagreen Continental necktie* ("This Cat Was Cool, Man!" 1961). Represented in details the hipster style arouses contempt, which is explicitly expressed by predicate modifier *disdainfully*. Slang adjective *cool* "fashionable" (Dalzell & Victor 2013: 537) and noun *number* "an attractive person" (Dalzell & Victor 2013: 1603) convey irony with which the hipster style is treated by media. The hipster way of life is described as *non-intellectual, non-imotional, non-social* (Stem 1967) and characterized by *extreme behavior* (Masters 1958). Evaluative predicates *underground rebels* (Masters 1958), *punks* (Stem 1967) convey assessment of the hipster group.

2. Functioning in Media Discourse

Propagated and reinforced by mass media, sociocultural stereotypes are unambiguously perceived by the audience as well-established information. In media discourse, sociocultural stereotypes function as means to present persuasive arguments. An utterance act manifests an underlying communicative intention (Recanati 1986: 214). Using the stereotype nomen, the author supposes the audience shares his knowledge of a sociocultural stereotype. Appealing to a stereotype, the author realizes his persuading intention, e.g. *He is not the race man protesting through Hip – not the hipster… He is informed, polite, hard-rock, no-nonsense* ("The Shine Boy" 1963). The author employs the nomen *hipster* to underline decisiveness of the African American to fight for their rights, not just protest for the sake of manifesting their disagreement with existing societal rules.

Circulating in media discourse, the sociocultural stereotype acquires prototypicality, *i.e.* associated with the stereotype characteristics become standard criteria for making inferences and forming value judgments about social setting. This manifests in the hipster + noun collocation, in which the descriptor *hipster* endows a noun with a characteristic feature of the stereotype.

Table 1. *Hipster* + noun collocations in American English Corpora (COCA, COHA)

	Hipster + Noun	
hipster	style, icon, fashions, design, sports jacket, plaid pants, shoes, dress, jeans, glasses, chignon and wisp, body getup	fashion standards
	district, neighborhood, apartment, hotel, lounge	
	restaurant, bar, coffee shop, downtown club, food	behavioral standards
	lifestyle, hobby, behaviour	
	literati, writer, bloggerati	
	language, jargon, slang	
	farce, irony, joke, humor	
	underworld, twist	
	vibe, party	

As shown in Table 1, the hipster stereotype sets up fashion and behavioral standards that are used to identify specific features of objects in American social setting.

3. Changes in Media Representation of the Hipster Stereotype

Under the influence of social, cultural and media factors, sociocultural stereotypes undergo changes. This process comprises content modification, evaluative variation, activation, inactivation, and iteration (Lyubymova 2022b).

Content modification of a sociocultural stereotype is a change of its descriptive features. In the 1950s, phrases *narcotics violation* and *sexual misbehavior* (Masters 1958) described asocial behavior of hipsters. At the beginning of the 21st century, the socially acceptable hipster life style is outlined by the phrase *purchasing environmentally-friendly products and celebrating visual arts* (Greif 2010a). Ecologic awareness within the subcultural community has caused its designation *green hipsters.*

The hipster appearances correspond not only to fashion trends, but also the social status of members of the subcultural group. Before the turn of the century, hipsters used to be described *a class of people who moved to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, wearing white tank tops* (Rogers 2016). Their unassuming clothes and residence area point to their modest position. In the 21st century, hipsters are portrayed as *white, young, and affluent* (Greif 2010b). They prefer trendy clothes, e.g. *skinny-jeans-loving, tattoo-sporting, ironic-glasses-wearing* (King 2017). Regardless of cost considerations, the hipster style is characterized by *individuality and self-expression* (Adam n.d.).

Evaluative variation refers to the alteration of evaluative features of sociocultural stereotypes. These changes manifest in connotative meanings of nomina or evaluative predicates, *e.g.* if in the 20th century, hipsters are characterized as *young slum hoodlums* (Masters 1958) and *parasitic characters* (Wayatt

1980), in the 21ˢᵗ century, the subculture does not arouse such negative attitude. A hipster is described as *adopting an artsy persona* (Baklarz 2021) and *rebel consumer* (Greif 2010 a), provoking ironic attitude because of his *knowing, and deciding, what's cool in advance of the rest of the world* (Greif 2010b). The adjectives *wacky* and *quirky* (Anderson 2015) express mockery of the hipster style and hobbies.

The lack of incoming information about referents of sociocultural stereotypes leads to their **inactivation** that manifests in reducing their occurrence in media discourse and consequently their **disappearance**. Social breakdown of the 1960s-1980s declined in the early 1990s. The period of "a moral revival" discredited the idea that it is every adolescent's social duty to be a rebel (Brooks 2005). Under these circumstances, the hipster stereotype practically disappeared from media discourse in the early 1990s.

Table 2. Frequency of lexeme *hipster* in COCA

1990–1994	1995–1999	2000–2004	2005–2009	2010–2014	2015–2019
22	42	60	110	166	200
Total 600					

As shown in the Table 2, the frequency of nomen *hipster* in Corpus of Contemporary American English has been increasing at the turn of the century. The data indicate **iteration,** *i.e.* the return of the disappeared stereotype in its original nomen to media discourse.

The extraordinary popularity of the hipster subculture in the United States in the 21ˢᵗ century is shown in the sentence *Hipster culture is omnipresent, it dominates fashion, music and lifestyle* (Weeks 2010). The considerable interest of media in the subculture brings about **activation** of its sociocultural stereotype. Activation manifests in increased occurrence of the sociocultural stereotype in media discourse. The diagram below shows that frequency of lexeme *hipster* in Corpus of Historical American English (Davies 2019) is increased by 70 per cent from the time of the stereotype formation in the1940s.

Hipster			
1940–1950	1960–1970	1980–1990	2000–2010
6	13	19	111
Total 149			

Figure 2. Frequency of occurrence in COHA

Activation induces morphological derivation or appearance of new nomina. Activation of the hipster stereotype manifests in word-formation paradigm.
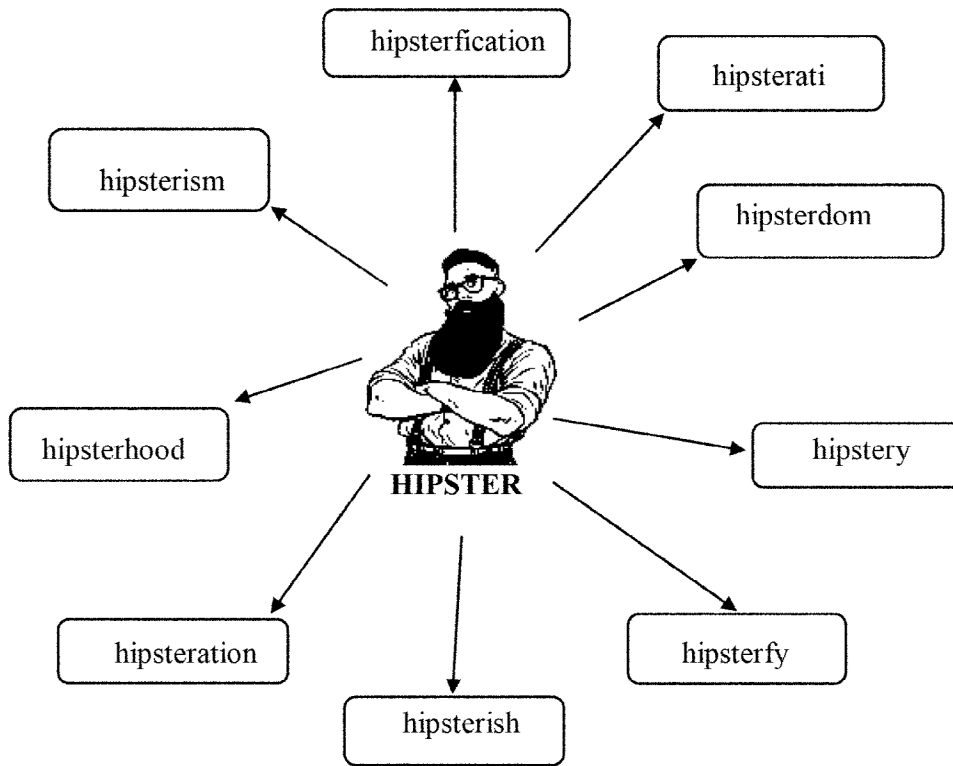
Figure 3. Word-formation paradigm of nomen *hipster*

The meanings of all derivatives are semantically related to derivational base *hipster* that undergoes semantic and lexical transformations through suffixation. Derivation is motivated by organizing new information about the sociocultural stereotype. This mental process is characterized by generalization and specification of information about the subcultural group.

(1) Generalization is formulation of general ideas by abstracting common properties of hipsters, e.g. *Hipsterfication of Denver, college hipsterism*. The derivatives *hipsterfy, hipsteration, hipsterfication* denote the action or process connected with acquiring the hipster qualities. Noun *hipsterism* denotes the style of life of a hipster. Collective nouns *hipsterdom* and *hipsterhood* refer to the aggregate of hipsters in the United States.

(2) Specification is identification of unique qualities of the subculture, e.g., *hipsterish vibe*. Synonymous adjectives *hipstery* and *hipsterish* indicate a specific characteristic of a hipster, which becomes evident in a particular context, *e.g.,* adjective *hipsterish* means "beautiful, tidy, popular" in the phrase *hipsterish Los Angeles neighborhood* and "bold, persistent, ready to break the rules" in the phrase *local designers (many young and hipsterish) and factory owners (many older and not hipsterish at all)*. Noun *hipsterati* is the blending of derivational base *hipster* with the non-morphemic part of the word *literati*, which was separated to form a new word in the

meaning "elite" (Bauer *et al.* 2013: 526). *Hipsterati* conveys ironic attitude towards hipsters' arrogance and superiority, based on their knowledge of fashion and technology micro trends. On the results of the analysis, it can be stated that media stereotyping of the hipster subculture is characterized by three periods. The first period covers the 1950s and 1960s, when the hipster subculture is represented by analogy to the hippie subculture, which was criticised for a negative assessment of their asocial behavior. The second period, comprising the 1980s – 1990s, distinguishes the hipster stereotype as the social group, having knowledge of modern urban life. The third period begins in the 21ˢᵗ century with propagation of the image-conscious and eco-friendly hipster persona, described ironically.

Conclusion

Our study offers the insight into linguistic and cognitive process of stereotyping. We consider a sociocultural stereotype a verbalized cognitive structure that embodies a simplified and conventional image of a social group. A sociocultural stereotype can be subject to modification as new information and perspectives on a social group emerge. The transformations of sociocultural stereotypes can be observed through their linguistic manifestations, which vary over time. The most noticeable alterations in the portrayal of sociocultural stereotypes are discernible in media discourse.

Media stereotyping include stages of formation, functioning and changing of sociocultural stereotypes. Formation is evaluative categorization, *i.e.,* distinguishing and assessing salient features of groups and individuals in accordance with cultural values and social standards. In media discourse, sociocultural stereotypes function as means of presenting persuasive arguments to explain the point of view of a group or an individual. Changes of stereotypes can be qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative changes are content modification and evaluative variation that reflect changes in verbalized descriptive and evaluative features. The quantitative changes comprise activation that manifests in increased occurrence of a stereotype in media discourse and inactivation, which is frequency reduction of a sociocultural stereotype that leads to its disappearance from media discourse. Iteration is a renewal of the disappeared stereotype in media discourse under the influence of social, cultural and media factors.

Not every sociocultural stereotype undergoes these transformations. There are persistent stereotypes, whose stability depend on their significance for the society. The most variable stereotypes are those of subcultural groups that reflect generational worldview shift. The driving forces behind the dynamism of sociocultural stereotypes are social and cultural processes that shape media interest in sociocultural stereotypes.

The results of our study have important implications for future research of linguistically represented stereotypes. The proposed methodology can be applied in studies of media stereotyping groups, participating in social movements, *e.g.,* stereotyping pro-lifers in the context of the anti-abortion movement, gender stereotypes with regard to heteronormative ideology, or stereotyping ethnicity in the perspective of the Black Lives Matter movement. The results of our research can be of use in a wide range of linguistic studies aimed at detecting changes in verbalized cognitive units.

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