

# Constructing and Deconstructing Stereotypes

VALERIA REGGI

Centre for Translation Studies (CenTras)

University College London

After reflecting on how human beings experience environments, WeTell Summer School explored awareness of and responsibility towards people. The day focused on the notion of stereotyping: in the morning students explored how it is constructed in discourse (Valeria Reggi) whereas in the afternoon they experienced how it can be de-constructed through drama techniques (Brigitte Jirku; see *Appendix*). The morning seminar provided students with a basic overview of the tenets of communication as a social phenomenon and of the dynamics of stereotyping in relation to nationalism. After a brief introduction to Jeremy Munday's method for evaluation in translation (2012), students were presented with the outcomes of a pilot study on how the method can be applied to foreground (self)stereotyping in second-language institutional discourse and were invited to practise the technique on a variety news reports.

## 1. Stereotyping

Though the term 'stereotype' now belongs to everyday language, many of its salient features are unknown or neglected in the common usage. In 1922 Walter Lippman applied the term to the current use in his seminal work *Public Opinion*. Before then, research had focused on classifying processes, which were defined non-rational, social constructs that fulfil a cognitive function (Durkheim and Mauss, 1903/1965). Lippman, however, highlighted the illogical nature of stereotypes and their being subject to manipulation by the media and the institutions (Lippman, 1998: 90, 95, 120, 125). Subsequent research defined their contradictory es-

sence: they are grounded on emotions, but develop around a ‘kernel of truth’; they have an evaluative function, but also work as a rationalising process of oversimplification (Allport, 1954: 21–22, 191, 204). Above all, (self)stereotypes exist as language constructs within a social dimension (Allport, 1954: 178–187; Bhabha, 1997; Moscovici, 2000: 23–24; 74): their function is to determine group membership insofar as they define a positive ingroup identity against a negative Other, the outgroup (Allport, 1954: 66–67; Hogg and Abrams, 1988: 20–23; Tajfel, 1981: 63–70, 156–158). Interestingly, stereotypes may also act as self-fulfilling prophecies. This is because targets may end up by embodying, whether deliberately or not, the traits that they are being stigmatised for (Allport 1954, 159–160, Eiser 1990, 252–254; Hogg and Abrams 1988, 88; Pickering 2001, 25).

Due to its nature as a simplifying, emotional, social process, stereotyping holds a pre-eminent role in nationalism. Indeed nationalism is grounded on narratives that emerge from hegemonic struggle and, as such, are produced by dominant elites. These ideological representations act on collective memory, since they naturalise symbols and traditions and turn them into unproblematic aspects of a shared culture (Balibar, 1990: 31, 48–54; Bell, 2003; Billig, 1995: 24–36; Gellner, 2006: 55–56; 1998: 94–95; Hobsbawm, 1972: 388–389; Moscovici, 2000: 27, 33, 49, 55; Smith, 1991: 72–79; 2008: 19, 21, 185). Time, space and group identity play a pivotal role in this process: the past is reinvented as a myth, a specific portion of territory is portrayed as an idealised land to be defended, and a stereotyped national character provides simplified ingroup membership (Bell, 2003; Billig, 1995: 38, 74–78; De Cillia et al., 1999: 150–155; Kerdourie, 1993: 70–82; Smith, 1991: 14, 69, 117, 140, 161). In short, stereotyping as a cognitive process acts on the level of the individual, but bears significant consequences in the social sphere of group identity, on which nationalism is grounded.

## 2. Discourse and power relations

Language and discourse play a pivotal role in generating and consolidating stereotyping in two ways. Not only are stereotyping and

nationalism constructed and reproduced in discourse, but discourse itself is instrumental to the dynamics of ideology and, consequently, of power relations. The reasons are multifarious. First, since language expresses the system of values and beliefs of the speaker, all utterances are evaluative (Bakhtin, 1981; Volosinov, 1973). Second, it is in discourse that the subject is constructed ideologically (Bourdieu, 1991; Fairclough, 2015). Third, the processes of encoding and decoding are both determined by ideology. In his influential essay of 1973 Stuart Hall defines mass-media communication in terms of a process of encoding and decoding that takes place on the grounds of two frameworks of knowledge (1973/2001). Meaning, therefore, is the outcome of cultural and ideological negotiation between the systems of values and beliefs of the producer and the receiver. Indeed, discourse provides schemata for the interpretation of reality and, by doing so, reproduces ideologies (Hodge and Kress, 1979: 5–6).

Though linguistic structures ‘are not *inherently* deceptive or manipulative’ (Fairclough, 1989/2013: 101–127, italics in the original), they can be aimed at influencing the hearer (Habermas, 1976/1979: 35). Manipulation consists in violating the norms that define the criteria that should be fulfilled in order for communication to be effective. What is more interesting is that these cooperative norms, or principles, can be deliberately disregarded with the purpose of suggesting implied meanings, which appeal to the social and cognitive dimension of communication (Chilton, 2004: 35; Grice, 1989/1991: 24–40). Language alone, therefore, does not account for the complex interplay of social and cognitive factors: all is text and all forms of semiosis are part of social processes (Baldry and Thibault, 2006: 4; Fairclough, 2001/2006: 122; 2001/2003: 234).

In order to understand the dynamics behind stereotyping and ideology, therefore, linguistic analysis is of paramount importance. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is particularly relevant as a framework for research thanks to its approach to analysis of discourse as a form of social practice (Wodak, 2002: 149) and an enactment of power relations (Fairclough, 1989/2013: 26; Machin and Mayr, 2012: 8–9; Wodak, 2001: 2). Far from being a prescriptive methodology, it is a heterogeneous school that gathers analysts and scholars whose ultimate purpose is to bring to the fore – and challenge – naturalised ideologies that underlie everyday

utterances (Wodak, 2001: xxiii–xiv; Wodak et al., 2009: 8; Wodak and Meyer, 2001/2009: 5).

### 3. Methodology

Munday's model for evaluation in translation provides a comprehensive method for foregrounding the attitude of the speaker. By combining James R. Martin's and Peter White's Appraisal Theory (2005) with Paul Chilton's Deictic Space Theory (2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2010, 2013), the model aims to highlight the strategies of evaluation and self-positioning of the speaker. Martin and White's model is based on the analysis of three main resources: *engagement*, *attitude* and *graduation*. Engagement and attitude represent, respectively, the stance of the speaker towards external voices, and the speaker's feelings; graduation applies to attitude and expresses the degree of intensity. Each of these resources is further fine-tuned in a multi-level system of sub-categories.

Attitude can be expressed towards feelings and emotions (*affect*), or ethics, behaviour and capacity (*judgement*), or things and phenomena (*appreciation*). The speaker may recognise or dismiss different viewpoints by showing a variable degree of tolerance (*heteroglossia*), or avoiding to acknowledge any alternative voice by providing information as 'given' (*monoglossia*). Finally, graduation can feature as a scalable category (*force*), or a non-scalable one (*focus*), or it can be embedded (infused) in the lexical resource, as up-scaling or down-scaling intensification. This model also acknowledges that attitude may be realised implicitly through specific lexical choices. These strategies vary in degree and together constitute a cline whose extremes represent complete explicitness (*inscribed* attitude), and complete implicitness (*invoked* attitude); between the extremes, attitude can be modulated more or less overtly.


The purpose of Chilton's model is to foreground the position of the speaker with reference to time, space and modality, which expresses the system of values and beliefs of the speaker. Deictic positioning is

graphically represented as the intersection of three axes along which the main semantic resources employed are placed according to their distance from the centre/speaker (deictic centre). The far end of the modality axis is the location of the 'Other'.

The students were introduced to the outcomes of research on stereotyping in the rhetoric in English of the Italian ex-Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. The research is a pilot study to test whether the method can be applied to second-language production instead of inter-language translations and can also take into account specific cognitive resources that contribute to the creation of background knowledge. The study also integrates the analysis of semiotic hand gestures: besides being indexical of the Italian stereotype, nonverbal language is a significant visual component of communication.

#### 4. Example of analysis



Transcript: *So... we... we know the past in Italy is beautiful. Buzzfeed gave 39 reason last week not to visit Italy: Dolomiti, Val D'Orcia, wine, Sardinia sea, and we can continue. We have an unique art heritage and more than half the Unesco global heritage are in our country. Italy is a land of science, of experiments, of innovation. Of course you might think they used to have Leonardo da Vinci now there is Matteo Renzi, this is a really problem for the decline... symbol of decline of Italy. But, this is for me very important, the real challenge for my country is stop to look only in the past and try to turn in a different way. Italy for the moment, in the last 20 years, in particularly in the last 20 years Italy seems a sleeping beauty. Politics, government, what you call in Washington DC 'beltway' got stuck. The world changed around us and for a long time Italy were unable to reform. Now it's the time in which we can use this expression: Italy is back.*

	Transcript	Appraisal analysis	Value
1	So... we... <b>we know</b> the past in Italy <b>is beautiful</b>	we know: heteroglossic engagement (proclaim: concur); is beautiful: monoglossic engagement and appreciation (+valuation)	so: reinforces background knowledge by summarising the previous concept; the past is beautiful: stereotype; inclusive 'we'/past: deictic positioning
2	<b>Buzzfeed gave</b> 39 reason last week not to visit Italy: Dolomiti, Val D'Orcia, wine, Sardinia sea, and we can continue.	Buzzfed gave: heteroglossic engagement (attribute: acknowledge)	Buzzfeed: invoked appeal to a young audience; not to visit: irony; we can continue: Italian calque; hand gesture: Italian emblem meaning 'repetition'
3			
	<i>[Renzi rotates his right arm forward holding his palm open while pronouncing the word 'continue']</i>		
4	<b>We have</b> an <i>UNIQUE art heritage</i> and more than half the <i>Unesco GLOBAL heritage</i> are in our country	we have: monoglossic engagement; unique art heritage: appreciation (+valuation) and graduation (force: +intensification); Unesco global heritage: invoked appreciation (+valuation) and graduation (focus: +sharpen)	unique art heritage: stereotype; inclusive 'our': deictic positioning
5	<b>Italy is</b> a land of <i>science, of experiments, of innovation.</i>	Italy is: monoglossic engagement; science/experiments/innovation: invoked judgement (social esteem: +capacity)	invoked opposition with 'heritage' (repeated twice)

(Continued)


	Transcript	Appraisal analysis	Value
6	Of course you might think they used to have Leonardo da Vinci now there is Matteo Renzi, this is a <i>REALLY</i> problem for the <i>decline</i> . . . symbol of <i>decline</i> of Italy.	you might think: heteroglossic engagement (entertain); problem/decline: invoked judgement (-capacity) and graduation (force: +intensification by repetition and hand gesture); really: graduation (focus: sharpen)	joke reinforced by a hand gesture (illustrator); of course: conceding structure
7	 <p><i>[Renzi mimics a sloping surface while pronouncing the word 'decline']</i></p>		
8	<b>But, this is for me</b> <i>VERY</i> important, the <i>REAL</i> challenge for my country <b>is</b> stop to look <i>only in the past</i>	but the real challenge (...) is: heteroglossic engagement (disclaim: counter) and judgement (social esteem: +capacity); this is for me: heteroglossic engagement (entertain); very important: appreciation (+valuation) and graduation (force: +intensification); real challenge: invoked judgement (+capacity) and graduation (focus: sharpen); only in the past: invoked appreciation (-valuation)	for me: deictic positioning; hand gestures (Italian emblem) meaning 'past' but also 'to refuse'; stop to look only in the past: stereotype
9	 <p><i>[Renzi moves both hands and slightly turns towards the left while pronouncing the word 'past']</i>.</p>		

(Continued)

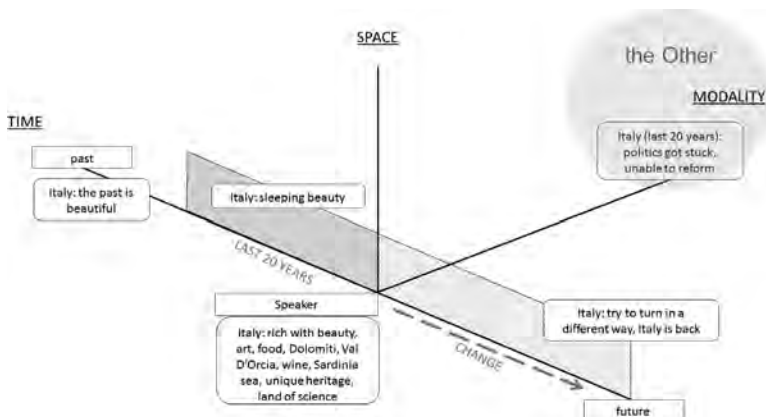
	Transcript	Appraisal analysis	Value
10	and <i>try to turn</i> in a <i>different</i> way.	try to turn: invoked judgement (social esteem: +capacity); different: invoked appreciation (+valuation)	hand gesture (illustrator) reinforcing the concept of 'turning'; hand gesture: possibly a variation of the Italian emblem indicating the explanation/comment to a core concept
11			
	<i>[Renzi slightly cups his right hand and briefly rotates it while pronouncing the word 'turn']</i> .		
12			
	<i>[Renzi slightly cups his right hand far from his body while pronouncing the word 'different']</i> .		
13	Italy for the moment, in the last 20 years, in particularly in the last 20 years <b>Italy seems</b> a <i>sleeping beauty</i> . Politics, government, <b>what you call</b> in Washington DC 'beltway' <b>got stuck</b> .	Italy seems: heteroglossic engagement (entertain); beauty: invoked appreciation (+valuation) mitigated by 'sleeping': judgement (social esteem: -capacity); what you call: heteroglossic engagement (attribute: acknowledge); got stuck: monoglossic engagement; stuck: judgement (social esteem: -capacity)	for the moment/in the last 20 years: deictic positioning reinforced by repetition; sleeping beauty: irony and stereotypes

(Continued)



Transcript	Appraisal analysis	Value
<p>14 <b>The world changed AROUND US</b> and for a long time <b>Italy were unable to reform.</b></p>	<p>the world changed/ Italy were: monoglossic engagement; changed around us: invoked judgement (social esteem: -capacity) and graduation (force: +intensification by hand gesture); unable: judgement (social esteem: -capacity); reform: invoked judgement (social esteem: +capacity)</p>	<p>inclusive ‘us’/‘we’/for a long time: deictic positioning; hand gesture: Italian emblem meaning ‘a naive person/a fool’; unable to reform: stereotype of passatism</p>
<p>15 </p> <p><i>[Renzi cups his right hand upwards and briefly rotates it to form a circle while pronouncing the words ‘around us’].</i></p>		
<p>16 <u>Now it’s the time</u> in which <b>we can</b> use this expression: <b>Italy is back.</b></p>	<p>we can: heteroglossic engagement (entertain); it’s: monoglossic engagement; is back: monoglossic engagement and invoked judgement (social esteem: +tenacity)</p>	<p>now/inclusive ‘we’: deictic positioning; now it’s the time: repetition (see below)</p>

Deictic positioning chart



#### 4. Interactive experience

The students were invited to familiarise with the basics of Munday's method in advance. To do so they had been given access to the brief description above, complete with reference charts and examples, as preliminary work. During classroom activity, they were asked to form groups of three or four, choose an article among a selection of news reports and provide a preliminary draft of analysis, whether as Martin and White's appraisal table or deictic space positioning chart or both, with the ultimate purpose of foregrounding the attitude of the speaker. They were given 45 minutes to work on their material before discussing it in class. All students seemed to manage the basics of Munday's framework quite easily and were able to provide further contribution to debate by integrating textual analysis with visual resources.

Interestingly, the debate concerned not only the new reports themselves, but also the actual need to carry out this type of analysis. In particular, one student of a school of journalism claimed that the position of the speaker was usually quite overt and explicit and, consequently, evaluation analysis may be redundant. In fact, the discussion that followed brought to the fore a variety of implied meanings that can be hidden in written and oral communication by means of visual resources (layout, images, clothes, kinesics and so on), allusions to or creation of background knowledge, humour, tone and volume of voice, register, and the like. This discussion, albeit circumscribed within a limited group of students in a short period of time, suggested that the concept of manipulation in communication may run the risk of being overlooked also by professional journalists of younger generations.

Whereas language structures are not intrinsically deceptive, communication expresses ideology and can be manipulative. Discursive representations, however, are context-dependent: it is the participants' mental models – which are both subjective and socially-constructed – that determine how the communicative event is defined. If, following Hall (1973/2001), the gap between encoding and decoding is actively filled by the reader with his or her own personal knowledge, communication is a negotiation of meaning. This implies that all humans have the capacity to check the consistency of an utterance, which can be hindered when other factors such as a high level of trust, persuasive strategies and so on come into play.

Due to the interplay of a multiplicity of factors, therefore, manipulation in language is not easily predictable, especially in the era of mass communication, which is central to political purposes.

The human brain, however, has the capacity to reflect on its own cognition process and resist manipulation, especially if it is trained to do so. If we assume that democratic societies are grounded on the critical awareness of language, educating readers against disinformation and manipulation. A relevant contribution to this objective may come from discourse analysis, which provides useful tools to raise readers' awareness of underlying messages and ideology across the media. While research has long provided interesting tools to detect manipulation, it seems that these methods are not widely known or used outside academia. In this globalised society in which information plays a pivotal role, therefore, good practices of discourse analysis and media literacy among the younger generations deserve more attention and further investigation as they may prove crucial to develop critical thinking.

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- Website of Matteo Renzi's speech at Georgetown University <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEEP1j8ceqk>