Russians and Finns:

Stereotypes in Jokes and Anecdotes

Report for the “Mental borders” theme, group 3
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1. Introduction

The aim of this research was to study Finnish and Russian jokes and anecdotes of the neighboring country and its inhabitants. In the jokes we aimed to discover what kind of ethnic stereotypes exist in Finland of Russians and in Russia of Finns. Besides the jokes, the film “The Peculiarities of National Fishing” was analysed. The study was done in two parts; the Finnish researchers studied the Finnish jokes and the Russian researchers studied the Russian jokes. The jokes were grouped thematically, and conclusions were made first separately in Finland and Russia, and later jointly including all the jokes and the film.

2. Analysis of the Finnish jokes and anecdotes

2.1. Introduction to the study on the Finnish side

The aim of this research was to study what kind of ethnic stereotypes exist in Finland about Russians. Ethnicity means nationality. Stereotype is a certain understanding of, for example, groups of people. It is in the nature of people to classify things with the help of stereotypes. (Raittila 2004.)

Our research material consisted of jokes about Russia and Russians that we found in the internet. We had all together 44 jokes. We read all the jokes and divided them into five different groups: (1) politics, (2) alcohol, (3) cars/vehicles, (4) the Soviet Union and (5) war. These themes occurred in the jokes most often. Most of the jokes dealt with Russian politics, the use of alcohol and traffic. We chose as an example one joke from each theme. These were the jokes that the researches preferred to best suit the group. We analysed the chosen jokes with questions that we had composed beforehand. The questions were following: What kind of persons and characters there are in the joke? What kind of happenings there are in the joke? What is being laughed at? What kind of characteristics the Russians are described with?

2.2. Analysis and research results

- Politics. The jokes about politics most often made fun of the decisions and acts of Russian leaders. Russian politics was considered to be old fashioned.

Putin comes to the barber shop. The barber cuts his hair and asks all the time about Chechnya. How are people doing there? When does the war end?

Putin get nervous:
- You are moved about this Chechnya far too much, right?
- Not at all, sir. For me it is totally indifferent.
- Why do you then constantly ask about Chechnya?
- Because each time that I say Chechnya your hair rises up – and it is easier to cut...

- Alcohol. The jokes about alcohol dealt with the heavy use of alcohol by the Russians, the impacts of the use and the amount of alcohol used.
Russian Ivan died and came to the gates of heaven. Saint Peter stated:
- Unfortunately you will go to hell, but you can choose, whether you go to the capitalist or communist hell.
- I want to go to the communist hell, Ivan answered without hesitation.
- Why on earth? Saint Peter asked.
- Well, because I know the system. I know that it is good to be in inferno, when there is no coal. If there is coal, the boiler is being repaired. If the boiler is intact, the boilerman is drunk. And if the boilerman is sober, there is no coal...

- Cars/vehicles. The jokes about cars and different vehicles dealt with Lada-cars and their weaknesses. There were also jokes about how Russians are bad drivers.

*Do you know why Arabs have camels and Russians Ladas?*  
*Arabs were allowed to choose first.*

- The Soviet Union. The jokes about the Soviet Union made fun of how the time in Russia had stopped to the development level and settings of the Soviet times.

*Finnair’s flight attendant: "We are landing to Moscow. Please fasten your seat belts and turn your clocks 20 years backward.”*

- The war. The jokes about war laughed at Russian army commanders, and the actions of the army carrying out the orders of the commanders.

*Once when the Finns and Russians were at war, the Russians heard a shout behind a hill:*  
*One Finn is equivalent to two Russkis.*  
The Russian commander sent two men with a special training to deal with the shouter, but neither of them came back. Instead, soon a shout rang out behind the hill:  
*One Finn is equivalent to ten Russkis.*  
The angry commander immediately sent two commando men behind the hill, but besides a couple of gunshots nothing was heard. The men were gone, but a new shout was heard behind the hill:  
*One Finn is equivalent to fifty Russkis.*  
The furious commander sent an elite group of fifty men behind the hill and for a moment gunshots were heard. When the gunfire ceased, not one Russki came back. Instead, a shout was heard:  
*One Finn is equivalent to a hundred Russkis.*  
Not caring about anything in his fury the commander sent a hundred men behind the hill, where a huge gun-fight began. After some time one badly wounded Russki dragged himself from behind the hill and said:  
*Commander, those Finns lied. There were two of them!*

In general, the central figures in the jokes were Russians who were often compared to Americans and Swedes. The jokes included social interaction and comparison with other nationalities. Often somebody was killed. What makes one laugh in the jokes is how the Russians think of themselves as unbeatable and the best, but in the end they are the ones who fail. The jokes also make fun of the stupidity of Russians. Russians are associated with the qualities of greediness, greediness for victory and stupidity. Russia is also considered to be a retarded country.
3. Analysis of the Russian jokes and anecdotes

3.1. Introduction to the study on the Russian side

Our task was to find jokes about Finland and Finns, and to discover the main Russian stereotypes of Finns. Jokes about Finns are not very popular in Russia. We interviewed several classmates, friends and relatives. None of them remembered jokes about the Finns. We were also looking for jokes in the Internet (website Anekdot.ru). In the result we found twenty jokes. For the analysis we selected six anecdotes, the most decent and the most typical ones.

3.2. Analysis and research results

The scheme of the analysis was following: (1) to define the main theme of the joke, (2) to find the actor and event of the joke, and (3) to identify the main point of the anecdote. As a result of our analysis, we identified three basic, common themes. These were sports, fishing and hunting.

The first theme was sports.

Football match Finland - Estonia. Judge explains the rules of the game. It is already thirty minutes of the match, and the Finnish team is still discussing which goal they have to score. So ends the first half with the score 0-0.

In this joke Finns are playing football. The main point of the anecdote is that Finns are too slow and stupid. They don’t know common rules.

The second theme was fishing.

1. Two Finns are fishing on a boat. Not one of them says a word. Suddenly it begins to rain. Pekka says: “Rain.” When they go home the second fisherman tells his wife: "I will never go fishing with Pekka. He is too chatty.”

2. One Finn went fishing. Suddenly he caught a goldfish. Before he managed make a wish, the goldfish withered.

According to these jokes Finns are not talkative and they are very inhibited.

The third theme was hunting.

Two Finns returned home from hunting. The other one says: "When I get home I immediately go to the sauna". The other says: "I first take my skis off.”

We guess that this joke shows us how Finns have a sense of humor and they're smart.
To conclude, jokes about Finland and Finns are not popular among the youth, and themes of the anecdotes are limited. Repertoire of the Russian jokes connects Finns with the traditional Finnish activities: fishing, hunting, sports and sauna. The main Russian stereotypes about Finns are that Finns are too slow and think long. In the jokes the Finns are compared to Russians and Balts. Russians are smarter and have the best sense of humor. Balts are like the Finns, they are also too slow and not smart.

4. Analysis of the film "The Peculiarities of the National Fishing"

Besides studying the jokes we watched a Russian fiction film called "The Peculiarities of the National Fishing". This film was released in 1998 and it is a Russian comedy directed by Alexander Rogozhkin. In the film a group of friends go on a fishing trip and accidentally, without first realizing it, end up in Finland. The film has both Russian and Finnish actors in it (including Ville Haapasalo who is said to be the most famous Finn in Russia). Questions that we answered based on the film were: What Russian and Finnish people are like? What kind of a country Finland is? What do Russian and Finnish people have in common? What did the Finns do wrong in the film from the perspective of the Russian people, and vice versa?

In the film, the Finnish people don’t speak a lot, they are friendly and hospitable, and they drink a lot of alcohol. The Russian people talk a lot and they like fishing. Finland is depicted as a nice and clean country. What Russian and Finnish people have in common is that they both liked fishing, hunting and drinking alcohol. What Russian people did wrong from the perspective of the Finns is that they used shoes inside. The Russians, on the other hand, didn’t understand the Finnish policemen and drove in the middle of the road. In general, the way that the film pictures Finns and Russians is similar to the way that the jokes and anecdotes picture Finns and Russians.

5. Conclusions

There were not many jokes that people tell each other about Finns in Russia or Russians in Finland. But we found a lot of jokes from the internet. In Finnish there were more jokes about the Russians than in Russian jokes about the Finns.

Stereotypes of Finns in Russia and of Russians in Finland have common and distinctive characteristics. Common characteristics include alcohol, hunting and fishing. Distinctive characteristics include, among other things, traffic culture and the amount that people talk (Finnish people being silent and Russian talkative).

What is common for the jokes is that the other country is presented in a negative light and the home country is always better. Jokes are a tool for raising one’s own position. Jokes are told, because they give a chance to laugh at other countries. The jokes strengthen existing stereotypes, even if the stereotypes would not hold true in reality.
6. Literature