



A Sociolinguistic Study of Anti-Negative Stereotypes in Islamic Texts

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Abstract

Concerning the studies of stereotypes, most of them are concerned with showing positive and negative stereotypes that are used in specific texts. These studies ignore an important aspect in regard to stereotypes which is the indication whether stereotypes (positive or negative) are acceptable or not in various religions or societies. The current study intends to tackle the negative stereotypes in Islamic texts (The Glorious Qur'an and Prophetic Hadiths) hypothesizing that these texts prohibit such a kind of stereotypes and that these texts are general to prevent any subsequent negative stereotypes. To achieve this, four Qur'anic Ayahs and five Prophetic Hadiths are analysed. The analysis of these texts comes up with some conclusions and the main ones are that the analysed texts are not directed overtly to prohibit negative stereotypes but they inclusively imply this accompanying the main topics that these texts tackle. Also, the analysis shows that the generality of these texts is attained via the use of some lexical units and linguistic expressions that fulfill such a purpose.

1. Introduction



Stereotypes are general ideological judgments about a group of people which might be categorized according to gender, race, religion, age and other categories. This kind of general judgment ignores any internal differences that the members of the stereotyped group may have. Usually, the characteristics of the stereotyped group are considered to exist equally in all the members of that group. Some stereotypes are positive, i.e. they generalize good or positive characteristics, and consider them as distinctive features that characterize the stereotyped group. It deals with this group as if it is one unit and as if each member has these characteristics without any exception. Most of the stereotypes are negative which generalize negative or bad features to be characteristics of a group.

This means that such stereotypes, whether they are positive or negative, are wrong assumptions and ideologies about social groups. This is because it is logically impossible to find a characteristic that exists equally in all the members of the stereotyped group without exceptions and which can differentiate this group from others. That is why many moral and religious teachings try to make people avoid such general judgments or stereotypes because these stereotypes lead to social distinctions of different kinds.

Islamic texts, represented by the Glorious Qur'an and the Prophetic Hadith selected in this study, are considered (as this research hypothesizes) as anti-negative stereotypes. One of the properties of Islamic texts is that they are not directed to a specific group of people or to a specific era. Rather, they are appropriate to humans in general and Muslims in specific in all countries and societies at all times. So, it is hypothesized in this research that Islamic anti-negative stereotypes are general ones that intend to prevent any stereotypes of that kind in any



subsequent time. This generality is utilized via using lexical items and linguistic expressions that carry such general meanings. These Islamic anti-negative stereotypes appeared either as a reaction to a stereotype uttered by the people in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or primarily to prevent a general kind of stereotype under which many subsequent stereotypes may appear.

2. Theoretical Background

Bussmann (2006:1122) indicates that stereotype is

“borrowed from sociology. This term denotes any (pre-) judgment deeply rooted in emotion and usually unconscious about a particular group. Stereotypes, as aids in judging and leveled primarily at racial, national, religious, or professional groups, may function to defuse situations of personal or public conflict.”

Crystal (2008: 452) states that stereotype is used “for a set of properties regarded by a community of speakers as characterizing typical members of a category. The term is intended to allow for inaccurate beliefs on the part of the speaker community, so that actual members of the category may not typically conform to the stereotype at all.”

Stangor (2009: 2) indicates that defining stereotyping is problematic. There are tens, if not hundreds, of definitions in the literature, although they are mostly based on the general idea of stereotypes as a knowledge structure that serves as mental pictures of a group in question. With some exceptions, it can be said that stereotypes represent the traits that are viewed as characteristic of social groups, or individual members of those groups, particularly those that differentiate groups from each other. In short, they are traits that come to mind quickly when we think about the group.



Although stereotypes can be positive, they are primarily negative. People generate many more negative than positive stereotypes when asked to do so. Also, expressing positive stereotypes is not seen positively. This is seen, for example, in how Americans might react to people who have claimed that African Americans have the positive traits of being athletic and musical. The problem, in part, is that if people express positive stereotypes, it is assumed that they hold the negative ones as well (Stangor, 2009: 2).

A stereotype is typically an element of common knowledge, shared to a high degree in a particular culture. It takes the logical form of a judgment that attributes or denies in an oversimplified and generalizing manner and with an emotionally slanted tendency particular qualities or behavioral patterns to a certain class of persons (Wodak and Reisial, 2001: 378).

What people normally think of as stereotypes involves not just any generalization about or image of a group, but widely-held and widely recognized images of socially salient groups. There are many examples of stereotypes such as understanding Jews as greedy, wealthy, scholarly; Blacks as violent, musical, lazy, athletic, irrational; Asian-American and Asians as good at math and science, hand working, a 'modal minority'; Irish as drinking too much; English as snooty; Poles as stupid; and so forth. When it is said that group X is stereotyped in a certain way, or that there is a stereotype of group X, this generally refers to the recognizable presence in a certain sociocultural context of salient images of that group- more precisely, of associations between a group label and a set of characteristics (Blum, 2004: 252).



Many theories of stereotypes started with an attempt to understand where stereotypes come from in the first place. The answers that have been proffered fall into three broad categories:

Firstly, stereotypes are assumed to be a product of the prevailing culture.

Children learn them from their parents, their friends and the media.

Secondly, stereotypes are assumed to result from deep personal needs, most notably the need to belong to one's own group, the need to feel superior to others, and the need to justify existing social order.

Finally, stereotypes are assumed to result from ordinary cognitive processes of categorization and co-variation assessment (Kunda, 1999: 314).

Stereotyping is considered simply as another word for overgeneralization. The difference between them, however, is that stereotyping carries within it an ideological position. Characteristics of the group are not only generalized to apply to each member of the group, but they are also taken to have some exaggerated negative or positive value (Scollon and Scollon, 2001: 168).

Stereotyping is a way of thinking that does not acknowledge internal difference within a group, and does not acknowledge exceptions to its general rules or principles. The problem of stereotypes is that they blind people to other, equally important aspects of a person's character or behavior. Stereotypes limit our understanding of human behavior and of intercultural discourse because they limit our view of human activity to just one or two salient dimensions and consider those to be the whole picture (ibid: 169).

3. Research Methodology



This research tackles the study four Qur'anic Ayahs and five Prophetic Hadiths in concern to the topic of stereotyping. These Ayahs and Hadiths don't include stereotypes but they imply prohibition not to make negative stereotypes about other humans in regard to their race, gender, etc. The topic of being anti-negative stereotypes is not the main topic of these texts. They are mainly related to various topics concerning human beings but one of the teachings that they want to convey is to avoid negative stereotypes.

The analysis shows how these texts intend to make Muslims avoid negative stereotypes. The first step in the analysis is presenting the interpretations of the Ayahs and Hadiths taken from the books of exegesis and Hadith explanation books to show the general meaning of the analysed texts and the topic about which they talk. This will help in understanding the topic that these texts deal with and show how they imply the prohibition of making negative stereotypes. Then, the analysis shows how these texts are related to the main hypotheses suggested by the researcher through showing the generality of the texts, and the expressions that contribute to this generality in regard to being anti-negative stereotypes.

4. Data Analysis

Text: (1)

((وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا)) (الاسراء: ٧٠)



(And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam and carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with At-Tayyibat (lawful good things), and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preferment) (Al-Hilali and Khan, 1419AH: 378).

Discussion:

This Ayah talks about the honouring and preference of humans over or above many other creatures. They are honoured by various things such as their shapes, having minds, having the ability to speak, owning the power to control the earth, etc. This also includes providing them with the devices that carry them on land and sea (Al-Beidhawi, 1418AH: 289, vol3).

This Ayah does not include overt prohibition or forbiddance of using negative stereotypes. It deals with the honouring and preference of humans above many other creatures but covertly it can be considered as anti-negative stereotypes as it clarifies the honouring and preference of all human beings regardless of their race, gender, age or any other category factor. This means that all of them have got these two characteristics whatever they are. So, no one is allowed to use negative stereotypes to generalize bad characteristics to a group of people who are honoured and preferred exactly like the source of the negative stereotype. The generality of anti-stereotyping is gained from the general meaning of the Glorious Ayah and the meaning of the verbs (كَرَّمَ) 'honour' and (فَضَّلَ) 'preferred' which equalize all human beings in their being honoured and preferred above many other creatures. This equality cancels any criterion that can be used to classify humans according to any kind of classification that may be used to insult a specific group of people and this prevents the appearance of negative stereotypes. This is because negative stereotypes



usually appear when members of a group consider themselves better than another group and this makes them use negative stereotypes to depreciate others.

Text: (2)

((يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ)) (الحجرات: ١٣)

(O mankind! We have created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa... Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware) (Al-Hilali, 1419 AH: 700)

Discussion:

The speech in this Ayah is directed to all humans. Allah tells them that He creates them from a male and a female or a father and a mother. That's why no one is allowed to be proud of his father, grandfather or even the people to whom he belongs. Also, this Ayah mentions that making people related to different nations and tribes is for the sake of knowing each other and to know the identity of each person. It means that this should not be a reason behind the distinction among people for the differences between them in the nations and tribes that they belong to. The main criterion for the distinction among people by Allah is their righteousness (Aś-Śabooni, 1997: 220, vol3).

The main reason behind the appearance of negative stereotypes is to generalize negative or bad features to characteristics of a group. This Ayah contradicts this as it determines the reason behind classifying



people into nations and tribes which is to know each other. So, honour and dishonour are not attained by belonging to a specific nation or tribe because this is not the reason behind the classification. The main criterion for classifying people is by their adherence to righteousness. The generality of this Ayah, in regard to being anti-negative stereotypes, is got from the the lexical unit (لتعارفوا) 'to know one another' which indicates the reason behind social classification of people into nations and tribes.

Text: (3)

((يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْألقَابِ))
(الحجرات: ١١)

(O you who believe! Let not a group scoff at another group, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor let (some) women scoff at another women, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor defame one another nor insult another by nicknames) (Al-Hilali and Khan, 1419AH: 699)

Discussion:

Allah prohibits and forbids scoffing and scorning other people. So, the believers should not scoff others because the scoffed person or people may be better than the scoffer or scoffers. Also, women should not scoff other women for the same reason. In addition, they should not defame or insult others using speech, action, sign, or even using nicknames that the others hate (Az-Zuhaili, 1422AH: 2477, vol3).



One of the main reasons of using negative stereotypes is to scoff other groups of people. This Ayah forbids such a kind of behaviour as it prohibits scoffing other groups whether the group is classified according to social standards or according to gender. In addition, this Ayah prohibits defaming others which is another reason behind the use of negative stereotype by people. Then, it prohibits the way of insulting people by calling them with bad nick names and this may be a way of generalizing negative stereotypes by using nicknames to call a person or a group of people when they know that the stereotyped person or group hates this nickname. The generality of this Ayah as anti-negative stereotype is gained from using the prohibition word (لا) 'Don't...' with the verbs (يسخر) 'scoff', (تلمز) 'defame' and (تتايز) 'insult'.

Text: (4a)

((وَلَا يَغْتَابَ بَعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًا أَيُّحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ))
(الحجرات: ١٢)

(And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting) (Al-Hilali and Khan, 1419: 700)

Text: (4b)

قال رسول الله (ﷺ) : (أتدرون ما الغيبة؟) قالوا: الله ورسوله اعلم، قال: (ذكر أخاك بما يكره) قيل: أفرأيت إن كان في أخي ما أقول؟ قال: (إن كان فيه ما تقولوا فقد اغتبتة، وإن لم يكن فيه فقد بهته) (مسلم، ٢٠٠٧: ٦٥٩٣)



(The Messenger of Allah said: "Do you know what backbiting is?" They said: "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said: "When you say about your brother something that he dislikes." They said: "What if what I say about my brother is true?" He said: "If it is true then you have backbitten him, and if it is not true then you have slandered him.")

Discussion:

The Glorious Ayah above (Text: 4a) above prohibits backbiting others. Backbiting can be summarized as mentioning other flaws which they don't like anyone to mention these flaws. A very distasteful image is mentioned here to exemplify the backbiting process or sin which is likened to eating the flesh of the dead brother. So, no one is allowed to do this great sin (An-Nasfi, 1998: 356, vol3). The meaning of (الغيبية) 'backbiting' is clarified in the Prophetic Hadith (Text: 4b) above. The Prophet Muhammed clarifies it because backbiting is considered as one of the worst sins that spread among people at that time and nowadays. In brief, it means saying something about Muslims which they dislike. What others dislike is something general. It might be related to body, religion, life, self, morals, money, sons, daughters, father, mother, wife, servant, clothes, movement, or any other characteristics that are related to the backbitten. Backbiting can be committed by speech, writing, signs or even imitating the backbitten. When the person mentions the disliked characteristic which is available in the backbitten, this is considered as backbiting. But when he/she lies and mentions what is not available in other person, this called (بهتان) 'slandering' which is also a very great sin (Al-Qari, 2002: 3032, vol7).

The concept of (غيبية) 'backbiting' is a forbidden behaviour and is considered as a great sin as it is shown in the previous Ayah and Hadith.



Generally, it means mentioning or saying about others what they dislike. So, backbiting could be a negative stereotype when the backbiter generalizes a negative or bad characteristic that a group of people dislike or when he/she scoff of one person by mentioning a characteristic that is usually used as a negative stereotype of the group to which the backbitten belongs. It can be said that all negative stereotypes are disliked by the stereotyped group because these stereotypes depreciate this group by generalizing bad characteristics about the group. So, prohibiting backbiting overtly includes prohibiting negative stereotypes and negative stereotype can be considered as a category of backbiting.

The Prophetic Hadith also includes forbidding another type of behaviour which is (بهتان) 'slandering'. This also includes negative stereotyping as backbiting. Backbiting means that the bad characteristic is actually available in the backbitten but disliked whereas slandering means that the slanderer lies and says what is not true about the slandered. So, if the person generalizes a feature that is not true about a group of people, this is considered as slandering them and as a negative stereotype which is forbidden and prohibited in Islamic teachings.

Text: (5)

قال رسول الله (ﷺ): (يا ايها الناس ألا ان ربكم واحد وإن اباكم واحد، ألا لا فضل لعربي على عجمي ولا لعجمي على عربي، ولا احمر على أسود ولا اسود على احمر إلا بالتقوى. أبلغت؟) (ابن حنبل، ٢٠٠١: ٢٣٤٨٩)

(O people, your Lord is one and your father Adam is one. There is no virtue of an Arab over a foreigner nor a foreigner over an Arab, and



neither white skin over black skin nor black skin over white skin, except by righteousness. Have I not delivered the message?)

Discussion:

This Hadith implies the prohibition and forbiddance of using negative stereotypes according to race distinction. It shows that there is no virtue of an Arab over a foreigner nor a foreigner over an Arab, and neither white skin over black skin nor black skin over white skin. Accordingly, any negative stereotype that is directed to a racial group is forbidden. This is because Allah is the Lord of all humans and their father Adam is one. Then, the race or skin colour cannot be considered as virtues that make one group better than another. The honour and virtue is scaled by righteousness only. This prohibition is affirmed in the following Hadith which deals with real occasion on which a negative stereotype is used to insult another person depending on race and colour distinction.

Text: (6)

قال ابو ذر: إني ساببت رجلاً فغيرته بأمه، فقال لي النبي (ﷺ): (يا ابا ذر أعيرته بأمه؟ إنك امرؤ فيك جاهلية) (البخاري، ١٩٩٧ : ٣٠)

(Abu-Dhar said: "I abused a man by calling his mother with bad names." The Prophet said to me, "O Abu Dhar! Did you abuse him by calling his mother with bad names? You still have some characteristics of ignorance)

Discussion:



This hadith talks about Abu-D \underline{h} ar when he abused a slave. It is narrated that the slave's mother is a foreigner (i.e. not an Arab) and Abu-D \underline{h} ar abused him by mentioning his mother. Others narrated that the slave's mother was a black woman and Abu-D \underline{h} ar abused the slave by saying (يا ابن السوداء) 'O son of the black woman' and this is considered as a way of scorning and abusing others in their culture. So, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) scolded Abu-D \underline{h} ar and He told Abu-D \underline{h} ar that he still has some characteristics of the pre-Islamic ignorance which is arrogance (Al-Qaš'alāni, 1323AH: 115, vol1).

This Hadith is considered as a reaction to a negative stereotype mentioned by Abu-D \underline{h} ar who insulted the slave by abusing the slave's mother. Whether the abusing is done by mentioning the foreigner or black mother, this is considered as racial negative stereotyping because in their culture having a foreigner or black woman is considered as a bad characteristic that was used to generalize negative features about the stereotyped person or group of people. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not say (لا تقل هذا) 'Don't say this!' or any expression that forbids the uttered abusing expression because this will forbids and prohibits the uttered expression or negative stereotype only. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said (انك امرؤ فيك جاهلية) 'You still have some characteristics of pre-Islamic ignorance'. So, He prohibits any expression that resembles the mentioned one in its being used to insult or abuse other people. This expression utilizes the generality of this text as anti-negative stereotype texts because under such an expression, hundreds if not thousands of negative stereotypes may be prohibited.

Text: (7)



قال رسول الله (ﷺ) : (إن الله عز وجل قد اذهب عنكم عيبة الجاهلية وتعاضمها بأبائها، انما هو مؤمن تقي وفاجر شقي. الناس كلهم بنو آدم وآدم خُلِق من تراب) (الترمذي، ١٩٩٨ : ٣٩٥٥)

(Indeed Allah removed Jahiliyyah from you, and its basting about lineage. [Indeed a person is either] a pious believer, or a miserable sinner. And people are all the Children of Adam, and Adam was [created] from dust)

Discussion:

Allah forbids Muslim from being proud of their pedigree which makes them not allowed to declare that they are better than others. The pious believer should be humble and s/he should avoid pride and arrogance. By contrast, the miserable sinner may increase his bad deeds by being proud and arrogant. Then, the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) mentions that all humans have the same father (Adam) and that Adam is created from dust. So, it is unreasonable to be proud and arrogant when the person knows this origin which resembles the origin of all other humans (Al-Badr, no date: 25, vol581).

This Hadith cancels any distinctions among people that were known before Islam which used to make some people feel that they are better than other just because they are related to specific ancestors. The real distinction should be between righteous believers and miserable sinners. This Hadith can be considered as anti-negative stereotypes some stereotypes may suggest that there are some bad characteristics that can be generalized to a group of people and these characteristics are attained from their belonging to this racial group as they are compared with the



group who make this direct this negative stereotype. Thus, this Hadith prevents such stereotype as it cancels racial classifications.

Text: (8)

قال رسول الله (ﷺ) : (اذا قال الرجل هلك الناس فهو اهلكهم) (مسلم، ٢٠٠٧ :
(٦٦٨٣

(If a man says 'the people are doomed', he is the most doomed among them)

Discussion:

This Hadith talks about those who despise and scorn others by saying that all the people are spoiled and by mentioning their flaws and sins. So, he becomes proud of himself and he feels that he is better than them. Thus, he declares that they are doomed and destroyed. This makes this person the most doomed and the worst person among them (An-Nawawi, 1329AH: 176, vol16).

Some people judge that a group of people is doomed as a way of despising or scorning them. Making such judgments or generalizations is considered as a kind of negative stereotyping. So, stereotyping is prohibited in this Hadith inclusively.



5. Conclusions

In the light of the previous theoretical background and the analysis of the data, the current research comes up with the following conclusions:

- 1- Stereotypes are general characterization of a group ignoring any internal differences within the stereotyped group.
- 2- Stereotypes may be categorized according to race, gender, age, religion, etc., and they might be positive which generalize good characteristics, or negative which generalize bad characteristics of the stereotyped group.
- 3- As far as the researcher finds, Islamic texts do not mention the term 'stereotypes' (الصورة النمطية) clearly but they try to prevent negative ones in a number of text.
- 4- The analysed texts are not overtly directed to prohibit negative stereotypes but they inclusively imply this in a way accompanying the main topics that these texts tackle.
- 5- Negative stereotypes may appear for different reasons such as pride, arrogance, insulting, despising, scorning, backbiting, slandering, depreciating, etc.
- 6- The anti-negative stereotypes Islamic texts are more general than the stereotype that they want prohibit because they intend to



prevent any subsequent negative stereotypes that resemble the tackled negative stereotypes in some features.

- 7- The generality of these texts is attained via the use of some lexical units and linguistic expressions that utilize such a purpose.
- 8- The anti-negative stereotypes Islamic texts are either initiated to prohibit some bad deeds including negative stereotypes, or they may appear as reactions to some negative stereotypes that appear on specific occasions.

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