

## *Funny or aggressive? Pragmatic analysis of national stereotypes in an advertisement – a case study*

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(Opole)

There is a thin line between what people consider funny and what is seen as offensive. Texts based on national stereotypes tend to be perceived as insulting, especially when they are produced by the out-group members, even if they were created as humorous. Playful aggression is not a serious *bona-fide* aggression but it happens that what was supposed to be funny causes real verbal aggression and anger. So there is a power in the provocative humor making the reaction not humorous at all. The issue of consideration of what could be published openly and what should be banned so as not to offend others regularly reappears in public discussions. Political correctness was supposed to solve this problem but although it is present in contemporary discourse, it is not strong enough to ban “hatred speech” from the public sphere. The everlasting clash between freedom and censorship is still there with the question if we can say whatever we like and then add – “I was just joking”.

The aim of this paper is to present the pragmatic analysis of an advertising spot that included references to Poles. The national stereotypes used, their source and the social situation evoked by this event are very interesting from a linguistic and cultural point of view as they reflect different problems and provoke numerous questions about the nature of human communication in intercultural relations.

The fifty second long spot was produced for the Media Markt chain of shops and was shown among others on ARD German national TV in March 2006 and taken off very shortly afterwards. Here is the verbal content of the spot:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| - A! berühmte drei Herren Media Markt.  | - Ah! The famous three men Media Markt.   |
| - Grüßen und Danken. Wofür? Produkte einmalig in Welt.                                | - Greet and thank. What for? Products only the world.                               |
| - Preise tief wie polnische Seele. Ihr tolles Team, Drücken Daumen Weltmeisterschaft. | - Prices deep as Polish souls. Your superteam – crossing fingers for the World Cup. |
| - Der Pole, so ein anständiger Mensch. Hier, siehe meine Uhr.                         | - The Pole – what a decent man. Here, look at my watch!                             |

[The Poles go away and the security guards realize they are left without their trousers on].  
The Poles say: - Media Markt. Ich bin doch nicht blöd. 'I am not that stupid'.

In the spot there were three people pushing a trolley full of different goods. They were not only named (*der Pole*), but their strong Polish accent and incorrect German grammar forms indicated their nationality as well. Actually, only two of them were speaking; the third one seemed to understand more or less what was going on, but except for the simple word *danken* said in chorus with the others, he kept silent. Polishness was also marked in the appearance as one of the Poles had a red T-shirt with the word *Polska* in white. One of them wore a Wałęsa-like moustache, the other one had a moustache<sup>1</sup> and a beard, the third one was well-shaved just like all the Media Markt staff members. That and the business-like suit uniforms made the contrast between the neatly-dressed security guards and the shabby-looking Poles even greater. Moreover, the missing teeth of one of the Polish customers were also exposed.

The Poles did not look good but they seemed to behave in a very nice way - they were friendly, had the ability to give compliments and took care of finding a com-

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1 In the eyes of the Germans, a moustache is an indispensable element of an image of a Pole e.g. on the medals produced for the Football World Cup, representing icons for the participating countries, there is a sheep shepherd with such a moustache from the Polish Tatra mountains watching two geese (Michał Kokot, Dariusz Kopeć *Wizerunek Polski: dwie gęsi i ich pastuch*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 25-05-2006). Such a choice of the symbols for Poland made by the Germans aroused general indignation among the Poles who do not want to be perceived as a backward nation. The malicious commentary of the medal creators made the situation even worse: „Bei allem Respekt für traditionelle Werte hat Polen das Ziel, sich bei der FIFA WM erfolgreich zu präsentieren, klar vor Augen. Wenn es schief geht: Die Gänse rütteln sie wach”. ([www. POLEN - Faszination Fußball Die offiziellen Sammelmedaillen der FIFA WM 2006 Die 32 Teilnehmer!htm](http://www.POLEN - Faszination Fußball Die offiziellen Sammelmedaillen der FIFA WM 2006 Die 32 Teilnehmer!htm)). [By all the respect for traditional values, Poland has achieved its aim of presenting itself successfully at the World Cup clearly before the eyes. When it goes down, the geese will wake them up.]

mon subject of conversation. Obviously, it was football – as in the 2006 World Cup in Germany, the Polish and German teams were going to play in the same qualifying group. The Polish openness and emotionality were demonstrated by warm hugs given to the stiff surprised Germans as well as by mentioning the Polish souls<sup>2</sup>. The use of this was to underline the character of Poles who are believed to be proud of their Slavic and national roots. The Poles smiled nicely and seemed to be happy.

The script<sup>3</sup> THEFT is present twice: presupposed on a conversational level (*Hier, siehe meine Uhr*) and on a visual one. The latter forms the punch line of the spot – the Media Markt workers were left without their trousers on. The positive behavior clashes with the results of it. The scripts NICE, OPEN, FRIENDLY and HONEST are contrasted with CHEATING, TRICKY, CANNY and DECEITFUL. The spot ends with the Poles saying “Ich bin doch nicht blöd”. It may imply that the Poles could not resist the opportunity to steal, but it is the security who are stupid as they were supposed to watch the products in the shop, but were unable to take proper care of their own garments. The spot could be interpreted as a funny trick. The Poles were fully dressed so they did not need the trousers. They just wanted to make fun of the Germans and show them how quick they could be and make the Germans realize how vulnerable and easy to fool they are. Such a perception of the spot may be confirmed by the fact that there were also other films of this kind during the same promotional campaign. Media Markt employees are mocked, for example, in the spot about the English where a salesman speaks poor English.

- Hallo!
- Hallo!
- My name is Peter and this is Mary.
- My name is Olivier.
- We'd like to buy a camera.
- Oh, take this one. This is very *billig* [cheap].
- Thank you very much.
- Please.

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2 However, in Polish the expression has conspicuous connotations with the ‘the Russian soul’ (*rosyjska dusza*).

3 A *script* is ‘a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it’. A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions are satisfied: the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts; the two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite (Raskin 1985: 81).

- Good bye.
- Yes, it is! (<http://press.pl/pogodzinach/04.2006>)

Focusing on the Germans as the targets of the spot, one can see that the Media Markt employees were shown as incompetent, slow, imperceptive, naive and finally funny and ashamed as they were not only not clever enough to prevent the robbery, but they became the victims and even did not notice it at first. The theft was unreal and just because of this hyperbolisation and impossibility, the spot was funny. Mentioning a watch was related to the popular jokes in Germany about Poles who steal watches.

Ein Pole, ein Österreicher und ein Franzose fliegen mit dem Flugzeug. Sie wollen wissen wo sie gerade sind. Also greift der Franzose aus dem Fenster. Ein ertastet den Eiffelturm und weiß sofort: „Wir sind in Frankreich“. Eine halbe Stunde später greift der Österreicher aus dem Fenster, ertastet den Stefansdom und weiß: „Wir sind in Österreich“.

Eine weitere halbe Stunde später greift der Pole mit seiner 1000 Rolex Uhr hinaus. Er gibt die Hand wieder hinein und die Uhr ist weg. Also weiß der Pole: „Wir sind in Polen“.

([http://info-ad.de/popup.php?n=sads&w\\_sads=2326](http://info-ad.de/popup.php?n=sads&w_sads=2326)).

A Pole, a German and a Frenchman are flying a plane. They want to know where they are. Thus, the Frenchman looks through the window. There is the Eiffel Tower and he knows immediately: "We are in France". Half an hour later the Austrian looks out of the window and he can see St. Stephen's Cathedral and he knows immediately: "We are in Austria".

Half an hour later, the Pole with his 1000€ Rolex on his wrist puts his hand out of the window. Then, he brings his hand in and they all can see that the watch has disappeared. Therefore, the Pole knows: "We are in Poland".

The Poles themselves tell the joke showing that not only do they steal, but that they also do it in a perfect way, they do it imperceptibly quickly and they are proud of it.

Jechali pociągiem Polak, Niemiec i Rusek.

Założyli się o to, kto jest szybszym złodziejem.

Niemiec mówi:

- Dajcie mi dwadzieścia sekund i zgaście światło.

Po dwudziestu sekundach zapalają światło, niby nic się nie zmieniło, a tu nagle Niemiec oddaje im zegarki. Rusek mówi: - Dajcie mi dziesięć sekund i zgaście światło. Po dziesięciu sekundach zapalają, niby nic się nie zmieniło, a tu nagle Rusek oddaje im zegarki.

Polak mówi:

Dajcie mi pięć sekund i zgaście światło.

A Pole, a German and a Russian are travelling on a train.

They make a bet who is the quickest thief.

The German says:

- Give me just twenty seconds and turn off the lights.

After twenty seconds they turn on the lights, but it seems that nothing has changed. Suddenly, the German returns their watches to them.

The Russian says:

- Give me just ten seconds and turn off the lights.

After ten seconds they turn on the lights, but it seems that nothing has changed.

Po pięciu sekund zapalają, niby nic się nie zmieniło, a tu nagle wchodzi konduktor i mówi:

- Panowie koniec jazdy, ktoś nam podpiżdził lokomotywę.  
(<http://www.ugt.jgc.pl/lofiversion/index.php/t7913.html>).

Suddenly, the Russian returns their watches to them.

The Pole says:

- Give me just five seconds and turn off the lights.

After five seconds they turn on the lights, but it seems that nothing has changed. Suddenly, a train ticket inspector comes in and says: "Gentlemen, the ride is over, somebody has stolen our engine".

From the point of view of strangers, this skill causes that Poles are even more dangerous because one cannot trust them, they are treacherous and deceitful, they know how to make themselves popular with people and use it for their wicked purposes.

The other banned commercial used in this Media Markt advertising campaign also showed Poles as thieves and was strictly based on a popular joke from the Polenwitzen cycle, which was quite popular in the 90s in Germany (cf. Brzozowska 2004). The reference to the stereotypes that appear in joke scripts is confirmed by a direct quotation from one of the jokes. In the radio commercial a Pole telephones Media-Markt and when asked about his surname he replies: "- I Klaus. – What are you stealing? – the speaker responds. – I don't steal anything – he replies. – I realize that with such low prices at Media Markt it doesn't pay to steal" (<http://www.taz.de/pt/2006/03/29/a0082.1/text>). The controversial commercial is based on the word play of the first name Klaus and of the word *klauen* ('steal') included in the popular joke.

- Was ist der beliebteste Vorname in Polen?

- Klaus

(<http://forum.webmart.de/wmmsg.cfm>)

- What is the favorite first name in Poland?

- Klaus.

The joke ignores the fact that *Klaus* is actually a name that is not popular at all in Poland – showing the perception of Poles as strangers reveals the lack of information about their culture or customs. As in most jokes of the cycle, a Pole could be substituted with a different nationality member as there are no specific features that would characterize the butt of the joke but calling him *a thief*.

There were two types of Polish responses to the spot – an official one and a private one. The official response was the statement of the Polish Embassy in Germany.

Kierownictwo sieci sklepów Media-Markt za-  
blokowało, po interwencji Ambasady RP w Ber-  
linie, reklamę powielającą antypolski stereotyp  
Polaka-złodzieja. [...] List protestacyjny w tej  
sprawie wysłał w poniedziałek do zarządu firmy  
ambasador Andrzej Byrt.  
[http://press.pl/pogodzinach/pokaz\\_presscd.php?idw=123&idi=7](http://press.pl/pogodzinach/pokaz_presscd.php?idw=123&idi=7)).

- Nie chcieliśmy nikogo zranić ani przedstawić  
Polaków jako złodziei. Chciałbym przeprosić  
tych, którzy poczuli się urażeni - wyjaśnił Ger-  
hard Taubenberger, rzecznik prasowy sieci  
(Bartosz T. Wieliński, Berlin 27-03-2006, ostat-  
nia aktualizacja 27-03-2006 23:12).

The Media Markt management blocked, after  
the Republic of Poland Embassy's intervention,  
the use of the commercial including the anti-Po-  
lish stereotype of a Pole as a thief. [...]. The pro-  
test letter related to the issue was sent on Mon-  
day to the company's management by ambassa-  
dor Andrzej Byrt.

- We neither intended to offend anybody nor to  
present Poles as thieves. I would like to say sorry  
to those who felt hurt – explained Gerhard Tau-  
benberger, the press spokesperson of the chain.

It is noteworthy that not only Poles, but also Germans protested against the spot so the official response resulted from the numerous letters, e-mails and telephone calls received from individuals of both nationalities. The official reaction also appeared in newspapers. The Polish ones showed the negative attitude towards the creators of the spot. The mass media coverage of the spot was not always objective and exact:

Spora widownia zdążyła obejrzeć prostaków  
z zepsutymi zębami, kradnących spodnie  
ochroniarzom sklepu. Poszkodowani, którzy  
zostali w majtkach, skomentowali: „Polak to  
przyzwoity czło- wiek, bo mógł ukraść zegar-  
rek”  
(„Newsweek” 9.04.2006).

A considerable audience were able to watch louts  
with bad teeth, stealing the trousers from the shop's  
security guards. The victims left in their underwear  
made the following comment: “The Pole is a de-  
cent man because he could have stolen the watch”.

The quotation used by “Newsweek” was neither the actual final punch-line of the spot nor the true comment the Germans made in the spot; it was only a pre-supposition.

Contrary to the mass media coverage of the incident, Internet responses of individuals were more complex. The majority of the Internet users who expressed their opinions on the spot, condemned it. Some claimed that they liked it and they found it quite funny. The category of truth was also discussed. Some people did not seem to have seen the spot but reacted angrily on the basis of what was said about it.

Internet users acted very spontaneously and the number of discussion participants was relatively high<sup>4</sup>. The majority perceived the spot as aggressive.

1. Different targets became the subject of verbal aggression.

•The majority of responses were directed against the Germans.

“Nie, dla hitlerowcow”

czyli nowy slogan MM: spieprzaj dziadu (czarna\_rozpacz 28.03.06, 20:52)

“Re: Pieprzyć Niemców i Media Markt!!!!”

Jestem jak najbardziej ZA!!! Popieram!!! Nie nawidzę tych wrednych szwabów!!! (Gość: Polak 29.03.06, 00:31).

he he, ci co udają polaków, wyglądają jak statystyczni nie skażeni procesem myślenia niemcy. typowe bezmyślne gęby (by semek).

“No, to Hitlerites”

i.e. MM’s new slogan: get lost, old creep<sup>5</sup>.

“Re: Screw the Germans and Media Markt!!!!”

I’m very much for it!!! I support the idea!!! I hate those nasty Krauts!!!

Ha, ha, those who act the Poles look like statistical Germans, not infected with the process of thinking; typical mindless mugs.

•The other type of response transferred the aggression on the German language and products.

Hehe, tak się składa, że nie jeżdżę żadnym szwabskim autem, nie pracuję też w szwablandzie, ani żadnym innym kraju, gdzie aby legalnie pracować, trzeba mieć te ohydne szwabskie pochodzenie. [...] A szwaby? Jak słyszę gdzieś ten ich ohydny język to mi się niedobrze robi... Tfu!!!

(Gość: Polak 31.03.06, 19:49).

Ha, ha, it happens that I don’t drive any Kraut car, and I don’t work in Krautland either, or any other country where, to work legally, you need to be of that atrocious Kraut origin [...] And the Krauts? When I hear that atrocious language of theirs I feel like puking... Ugh!!!

•Various suggestions for revenge were made e.g.

- a proposal to demolish the other markets from a chain of German shops popular in Poland:

4 There were 538 comments made on the subject only on 27.03.2006 on [www.g/forumregionalne/opole.pl](http://www.g/forumregionalne/opole.pl). The Polish spelling of the quoted comments is unchanged.

5 This is a reference to the words said during the election campaign in 2002 by Lech Kaczyński, the president of Poland, who was then running for the President of Warsaw, to a nasty comment made by somebody from the crowd while Kaczyński was leaving the room after an election meeting. Caught by TV crews and broadcasted, the phrase became a winged word. It is used e.g. as a name of a website criticizing President Kaczyński and his political supporters: <http://www.spieprzajdziadu.com>.

- an idea to produce aggressive commercials:

w odpowiedzi proponuję zrobić reklamę jakiegoś piwa i pokazać oszczanych Niemców na święcie piwa w Bawarii (by gospogrz) Responding, I propose a commercial of some beer showing the Germans with wetted pants during a Bierfest in Bavaria.

•An attempt of stopping the aggression was made by indicating the Poles' economic dependence on Germany.

hehe znalazł się :) A niemieckim autem pewnie jeździsz, wpie..sz niemiecką żywność !Twoje dzieci zapewne przepadają ze Kinder czekoladą lub Nutellą. Zastanów się chłopie co wygadujesz !Twoja stara pierze w proszku wyprodukowanym przez Henkla w Raciborzu itd. itd. (Gość: aldi 29.03.06, 12:25). Ha, ha, you don't say :) And you probably drive a German car, eat German food! Your children must love Kinder chocolate or Nutella. Just think what you're talking about! Your old lady does her washing in powder produced by Henkel in Racibórz etc. etc.

•Some discussion participants trying to block the offensive comments responded to them by using a verbal aggression towards the particular interlocutors:

Najlepszy jasiu, to jasiu bez kompa (29.03.06, 00:16). The best Jasiu is one without a computer.

To masz gościu problem !I to poważny ! Radzę udać się czym prędzej do dobrego specjalisty psychiatry (najlepiej amerykańskiego :)) (Gość: ..tesz Polak 31.03.06, 23:46). So you have a problem, man! And a serious one! I advise you to consult a specialist psychiatrist soon (an American one would be best:)))

•There was also a transfer of aggression to Poles and Polish politicians and a reference to the socio-economical realities:

Jeżdżę niemieckim używanym autem, bo Polacy nie potrafią zrobić dobrego własnego (wszystkie zakłady wyprzedane za bezcen). Piore w proszku z Niemiec bo w Polsce niemieckie-koncerny dosypują wypełniaczy żeby wcisnąć kit bidocie... I drive a used German car because the Poles can't make one themselves (all plants were sold for peanuts). I wash in powder from Germany because in Poland, the German companies add fillers to the washing powder and sell it to the poor...

I nie wiem dlaczego tak nas Niemcy nie nanawidza, że przedstawiają Polaków w reklamie w takim świetle. Nie dość że robimy u nich najczarniejszą robotę, zabieramy szrot spod domów, skupujemy tanie zarcie i ciuchy używane, to robia z nas złodziei. [...] Jesteśmy narodem biednym ale godnym. And I don't know why the Germans hate us so much that they present the Poles in that commercial in such a way.

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Przykro mi że zmuszona jestem zyc na łasce niemiec (Gość: podopolanka 29.03.06, 13:36).

Podziękuj za ten stan rzeczy swoim Politykom-rodakom [...].  
fabryki zostały wyprzedane ze bezcen ? To nie wina fabryk tylko narodu ! Tępy i leniwy naród zostanie taki już na  
zawsze ,gdyż o tym decydują geny a nie obiekty które można wybudować lub nie (Gość: Aldik 29.03.06, 21:02).

You should thank your politicians-compatriots for this state of affairs [...].  
factories were sold for peanuts? This is not the factories' fault but the nation's! The dull and lazy nation will remain so for ever because it is genes that decide about it, and not buildings which can be erected or not.

2. The second kind of reaction was to consider the truthfulness of the presuppositions about Poles as thieves that were included in the spot.

- Some of the responses showed that the recipients took it very personally and tried to convince the others that the advert is false as "I am a Pole and I am not a thief".

Trzeba być kretynem żeby gadać, że Polacy to naród złodziei. Owszem może i zdarzają się Polacy, którzy kradną. Jednak ja nie kradnę i nikt z moich bliskich znajomych też nie. Dlatego na pieprzenie, że "Polacy to złodzieje", stać jedynie kompletnych bałwanów. Albo samych złodziei... (by Rychu07).

You have to be a moron to say that the Poles are a nation of thieves. Well, there may be some Poles who steal. But I don't and neither do any of my friends. Therefore only complete blockheads can say this crap that "Poles are thieves". Or complete thieves...

- The others accepted the negative stereotype as an accurate opinion – either as a statement or the case that could be proved with numerous examples.

a mi się podoba i to bardzo :D:D:D:D taka jest prawda i nie ma się co oburzać bo taka jest prawda (by Papatatan).

And I like it, and very much :D:D:D:D This is the truth and there is no reason to be indignant because this is the truth.

a to dlaczego trzeba być kretynem, żeby gadać, że polacy to złodzieje? a masz legalnego windowsa? i wszystkie gry? nie kupiłbyś lewego spirytusu za 10 pln? trzymasz samochód na parkingu strzeżonym? zakładasz do niego alarm?

Why do you have to be a moron to say that the Poles are thieves? And have you got a legal Windows? And all games? You wouldn't buy illegal spirits for 10 zlotys? Do you keep your car in a manned car park? Do you have an alarm in it?

a po co? ściągasz filmy z internetu? płacisz za nie? ech... (by dudi)\_

What for? Do you download films from the Internet? Do you pay for them? Ah...

hehe.. ale wygarneli nam co o nas myśli świat :)))

Ha, ha, so they told us openly what the world thinks about us :))) Unfortunately, it is true that a Pole is a thief. [...]:)

Niestety to prawda że Polak to złodziej. [...]:)(by ali01)

3. The third type of reaction to verbal aggression was the use of humor.

•Some people responded jokingly.

Ja akurat złodziejem się nie czuję.... co nie znaczy, że nie czuję się okradany... :) (by melex).

RE: „Najlepszy Niemiec to ten 2 m pod ziemią” (Gość: jasio bis 28.03.06, 21:44).

Czyli w U-Bahnie (Gość: behemot 29.03.06, 00:00).

Well, I don't feel like I am a thief... which doesn't mean I don't feel I'm being robbed...)

RE: "The best German is the one 2 m under the ground".

That is in the U-Bahn.

•Others perceive the spot as humorous.

[...] niech się tu choć jeden oburzony przyzna, że nie uśmiechnął się oglądając tę reklamę nad sprytem wykazany przez wesółych złodziejasków. [...] Tylko sztywniak nie widzi humoru sytuacyjnego w tej reklamie. Ale macie trochę racji... Arabowie wyszliby na ulice i paliliby niemieckie flagi. My tu sobie pomarudzimy, ale rząd polski i inni oficjale złożyły protest i po sprawie (Gość: Rozalia Richtig 31.03.06, 23:45).

[...] I'd like at least one of those indignant to admit that watching it, they did not like the cunning shown by the merry pilferer [...] Only stuffed shirts cannot see situational humor in this spot. But you are right to some extent... The Arabs would turn to the streets and burn German flags. We are complaining here to each other but the Polish Government and other officials have made their protests and the matter is closed.

•There are also some efforts to explain why the spot was actually funny:

A dla mnie, to ta reklama jest bardzo śmieszna, pokazuje Niemców jakimi są głupkami, po spotkaniu z Polakami zostali bez spodni, tacy durni, dali się tak obrobić, sami tego nawet nie zauważając. I tak to trzeba odbierać! (Gość: Mack 11.04.06, 23:25).  
reklama byłaby nieśmieszna gdyby ci trzech ukradli im zegarki albo coś w tym stylu, a oni zostali bez portek i to było w tym śmieszne... (by kamiczki | 2006-03-28 23:50:21).

And for me this spot is very funny, it shows the Germans as fools, after meeting the Poles they are left without trousers, they're so stupid, they let others rob them without noticing this. And that's the way it should be perceived!  
The spot wouldn't have been funny if the three had stolen watches or something like that from the Germans, and they were left without pants and that was funny...

•Several people support the right to produce funny spots even if they are offensive.

[...] Niedługo political correctness zabije resztkę jajec w tym chorym biznesie... (specu 2006-04-05, 11:14).

[...] Soon political correctness will kill the remnants of the sense of humor in this sick business...

4. The fourth and less common attitude was that there was nothing to make fuss about.

Tyle krzyku o nic ! (Gość: dominik 30.03.06, Much ado about nothing!  
23:32)

Sporadically, there appeared such opinions but it resulted also from the character of the forum – those who were not moved by the topic did not participate in the debate.

The commercials with the Poles are a part of Media Markt's campaign conducted under the catch phrase of *Bester Fan Ausrüster* 'the best fan provider'. Other spots refer to the stereotypes of the Austrians, the French and the Dutch etc. They use the motif of the football championship which is a good opportunity for the representatives of different nationalities to compete on the football pitch and for the fans to manifest their patriotism.

Media Markt had other campaigns in Poland that raised controversy. One of them showed the Polish capital city – Warsaw as a dirty place full of garbage and rats.

„Brudna Warszawa na reklamach Media Markt” “Dirty Warsaw on Media Markt's billboards”

[...] Ponury obraz miasta pełnego śmieci i szczurów wyłania się z 400 billboardów, które zawisły w całym mieście. [...] a gloomy picture of a city full of garbage and rats appears on 400 billboards hung all over the city.

[...] Jak się jednak mają grasujące po ulicach szczury i przepełnione śmietniki do promocji nowych telewizorów? - Chodziło o to, by przekaz był mocny. Wtedy dociera do większej liczby osób. [...] Do redakcji dzwoniли oburzeni czytelnicy (Anna Krężlewicz 2005-10-25, ostatnia aktualizacja 2005-10-26 09:51 ). [...] What do rats and overfilled garbage bins have to do with the promotion of new TV sets? The point was to make the message strong. Then, it reaches a greater number of people. [...] Indignant readers called their newspapers' editorial offices.

Media Markt is known for such strong messages. Their controversial catch phrase *Nie dla idiotów* 'Not for idiots' was even the subject of an investigation conducted in Poland by the Bureau for the Protection of Competition and Customers whose employees were investigating if the phrase did not violate morals.

“An aggressive discourse constitutes that part of linguistic interaction which is based on a conflict oriented towards a negative effect, i.e. mostly hurting somebody” (Gajda 2002: 62). According to this criterion, the discussed spot can be considered aggressive because it offends the dignity and good name of the ridiculed nation, which are legally protected<sup>6</sup>, as well as uses and maintains the negative image of Poles. However, it should be stressed that it was a secondary objective. The primary one had a commercial nature – it was to intrigue and shock in order to draw the viewers' attention to the shop and encourage them to do shopping there. With

respect to the motif of aggression, it is possible to distinguish violent aggression, which is an emotional reaction to specific stimuli and instrumental aggression, whose objective is to defeat an opponent or acquire something in his possession. "The more directly the object of aggression is identified, the stronger it is struck" (Gajda 2002: 64). Because of the deliberate actions oriented towards the acquisition of new customers, the aggression included in the spot can be classified as instrumental and direct – its object was clearly identified. Obviously, there can be no randomness in an advertising campaign – the spot had been well prepared and its provocative and aggressive character had been intended, which can be confirmed by other commercials prepared by Media Markt. Another criterion allowing to classify this text as aggressive is the fact that it was perceived as offensive (Peisert 2004: 32), and the fulfillment of this condition can be confirmed by the protests and comments which caused its withdrawal from the media.

One could wonder how it is possible that a spot that was supposed to be humorous was perceived as aggressive but the relation between those two is quite common. Among the scholars supporting the theory of aggression, we can distinguish the followers of S. Freud, who considered some forms of humor as aggressive. Therefore, he proposed a division of jokes into tendentious and innocent. The innocent jokes do not serve any particular purpose apart from causing laughter, while the tendentious ones appear when the teller has a specific objective in mind. Some scholars go even further in their search for connections between humor and jokes and regard all humor as an expression of aggression. This group includes the supporters of L. Feinberg, who claims that "an element of aggression is present in all contexts where humor appears" and "the mystery of humor is hidden in playful aggression" (Feinberg 1978: 87, 110). On this basis, it could be concluded that the more playful aggression a spot contains, the more funny it becomes.

Germans are a nation that is attributed a complete lack of a *sense of humor*, which can be defined as 'the trait of appreciating (and being able to express) the humorous', while *humor* is understood as 'a message whose ingenuity or verbal skill or incongruity has the power to evoke laughter'. People talk about a lack of a sense of humor when somebody does not have enough distance to reality. Stereotypically, the Germans are attributed order and regularity, practicality and realism, which make it difficult to develop a distance necessary to appreciate humor. Therefore, these qualities are logically related to the German seriousness, which is the opposite of humor. On the other hand, it is not a coincidence that the Jewish nation, to whom the greatest sense of humor is attributed, is also described as self-ironic because the ability to distance oneself from one's own ego is the proof of having

achieved the highest degree of detachment from reality. Contrary to the stereotypical perception of the Germans, the creators of the advertising campaign analyzed in this paper, have shown the ability to laugh at themselves by making a self-mocking commercial spot presenting fat Germans constantly thinking about food.

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|--|---|
| - E hör mal du Frettchen!  | - Hey, buddy!   |
| - Ja bitte.  | - Yes, can I help you?  |
| - Meine Kumpels und ich, wir wollen zu Hause mal so richtig schön WM gucken. | - My friends and I, we want to watch the World Cup jolly well.          |
| - Na da sucht ihr bestimmt etwas flaches.                                    | - So you must be looking for something flat.                            |
| - Hier alles Flachbildschirme. Deutschlands größte Auswahl.                  | - Here they are all sets with flat screens. The best choice in Germany. |
| - Das freut mich für euch aber wir suchen Kühlschrank.                       | - That's good for you, but we're looking for a fridge.                  |

Analyzing the purpose of the campaign we could ask if the spots are successful. The provocation surely focused the public attention on the Media Markt chain of shops. Its name appeared many times a day on the radio and in newspapers as well as on TV news and on the Internet where the original spots were also available. All the above mentioned factors made the commercials even more popular. The spots evoked emotions that are considered the main source of successful advertising ("Newsweek" 9.04.2006). As for the nation specific sense of humor, a violent reaction to the commercial spots about Poles can be perceived as a confirmation of the Germans' opinion that the Poles have a strong sense of national pride and that they are sensitive about their own image (cf. Kurcz 1994) as well as that they do not like jokes about themselves. With such attitudes, it is not far from the accusations of the lack of the sense of humor and suspicions that the Poles can laugh only at others, never at themselves.

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*Funny or aggressive? Pragmatic analysis of national stereotypes in a commercial spot - a case study*

The paper deals with the sense of humor represented in stereotypes and in jokes about various nations. The thesis that “real is what has real consequences” is examined on the basis of advertisements. The focus of the paper is on Media Markt (consumer electronics retailer operating in Western and Central Europe). One of their campaigns using the slogan “Ich bin doch nicht blöd” (“I am not that stupid”) was accompanied with a series of short dialogues between shop assistants and customers from different countries and ethnic groups. As a result of the protests of the Poles and of the Germans of Polish origin, the company decided to stop presenting the spot mocking Poles in Germany and even removed it immediately from its website. The analysis of the scripts present in a spot is carried out and the discussion of the pragmatic context of the issue is conducted. The characteristic features of the xenophobic language and the means of contempt are presented. A thin border between what is funny and what is aggressive is observed in the context of national sense of humor or its lack.

**Key words:** *humor, aggression, national stereotypes, advertisement, Poles, Germans.*