

How Stereotypes are Formed: The Discontents of Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations in Cultural Models

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Abstract: This paper investigates the intertwinements between stereotypes alongside syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in the sense of cultural models. Stereotypes have long been known as labels that unilaterally applied towards people including minorities. However, the stereotypes are not ex nihilo, but rational since those involve linguistic ideas between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. Through qualitative method and explorative approach, analysis of this paper includes how both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations by Ferdinand de Saussure work altogether with cultural models by James Paul Gee in shaping stereotypes. Linguistic meanings play more into matter of shifting paradigm that correlates with ideas of cultural thoughts. It is the shifting paradigm of identities that moves the unique label into such stereotypes; bringing havoc to those who are labelled inside. In conclusion, cultural models work through linguistic matters in the senses of syntagmatic and paradigmatic meanings in the sense of identities that may worsen the contexts of stereotypes beyond their literal conceptions.

Keywords: Cultural Models, Paradigmatic Relation, Stereotype, Syntagmatic Relation

Introduction

Stereotypes are deeply ingrained generalizations that simplify complex human identities into reductive labels, often exaggerating or distorting reality (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hall, 1997). They create reductive, fixed identities that deny the complexity of human diversity. Although stereotypes may appear as neutral generalizations, they have significant consequences, especially for marginalized groups, reinforcing systemic inequalities and fostering social exclusions (Andersen et al., 2022; Moscovici, 2000). Such labels play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes and behaviors, influencing how people interact with each other and understand the world around them. Stereotypes can lead to prejudiced actions, perpetuate discrimination, and affect self-identity, contributing to internalized oppression. By confining people within fixed categories,

stereotypes reinforce power imbalances and justify unequal treatment (Dyer, 1993; Lippmann, 1922; Pickering, 2001). Moreover, the persistence of stereotypes in public discourse, particularly in media and politics, amplifies their societal impact, making it harder for individuals to escape the confines of these rigid labels. This makes understanding how stereotypes are formed crucial, as their power lies not only in their content but in how they are structured and communicated linguistically.

To understand how stereotypes gain power through language, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations become essential. Syntagmatic relations refer to the linear combination of linguistic elements in sequence, such as words forming a sentence (Aisyah et al., 2024; Saussure, 1916; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). These relations construct meaningful linguistic units by organizing elements into a coherent

structure, dictating how ideas are expressed. Meanwhile, paradigmatic relations involve the substitution of elements within the same category, where choices are made from a range of possible alternatives, creating meaning through selection and exclusion (Aisyah et al., 2024; Saussure, 1916; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). The intersection of these two relational systems plays a fundamental role in how meaning is shaped within any discourse. In the context of stereotypes, syntagmatic structures dictate how certain labels are applied within specific contexts, while paradigmatic choices determine which alternative descriptors are excluded, reinforcing certain representations over others (Aisyah et al., 2024; Jakobson, 1956; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). Together, these relations demonstrate that the power of stereotypes extends beyond the surface meaning of words, it lies in how language choices organize and reinforce fixed identities, often at the expense of more nuanced or complex representations.

Stereotypes do not exist in isolation; they are embedded within broader cultural models that shape how people interpret the world. James Paul Gee's concept of cultural models refers to shared cognitive schemas that people use to navigate societal norms, values, and practices (Gee, 1999; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). These models influence how individuals understand identity and difference, providing frameworks that justify and normalize certain beliefs and behaviors. When applied to the construction of stereotypes, cultural models serve as the foundation that makes certain labels appear logical or natural within specific social contexts (Holland & Quinn, 1987; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). For instance, a cultural model that values individualism might frame some ethnic groups as "too communal," thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes about those groups. Language plays a critical role in this process, as paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations shape how these cultural models are expressed in discourse. By embedding stereotypes within cultural models, society perpetuates them not just through language, but through the larger narratives that frame social reality (Gee, 1999; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). Therefore, the study of how stereotypes are formed must consider not

only linguistic relations but also the cultural models that underlie and reinforce them, making it possible to deconstruct the mechanisms that sustain these harmful representations.

Through the above background, this article would like to investigate matters of stereotype that are actually worked through language. It is the system of language that plays the concepts of meanings to apply such stereotypes arbitrarily. By stating so, meanings that are known as diverse must nod to the statements of those concepts. It is the enactment of paradigmatic differences that play role as the sense of stereotypes.

Materials and Methods

By using qualitative methods, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through description in explorative approach, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between stereotypes alongside syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in the sense of cultural models alongside literary concepts and cultural ideas. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters. The data analysis includes attaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references lists. The research data comes from discourses of stereotypes, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations by Ferdinand de Saussure, and the senses of cultural models by James Paul Gee. Each of them is read then broken down into its every particular element. The following analyses then include matters of linguistics in the sense of stereotypes being shaped. More elaborations related to deepened analysis are also provided in addition furthermore.

Results and Discussion

Stereotype: Its Prolonging Contexts and Discontents

Stereotypes are simplified and often exaggerated generalizations about groups of people, typically

based on characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation (Andersen et al., 2022; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). These generalizations reduce individuals to a set of presumed traits, ignoring the complexity and uniqueness of each person. Stereotypes are linear to ideas of biases and labels given to other persons. Stereotypes then are not even neutral or positive. They are indicated more through harmful assumptions that contribute to social inequality. It is such a blind belief from a sole perspective that undermines otherness (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). It is also then in line with situation of being indifferent as stereotypes are never taken out of any negative consequence such as prejudice and discrimination.

Stereotypes then indeed have a deep and long-lasting impact on societies because they simplify complex human identities and create rigid social categories (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Pickering, 2001). These simplified ideas are often based on partial truths or complete misconceptions and are reproduced over time through cultural norms, media representations, and social practices. According to Lippmann (1922), stereotypes are cognitive shortcuts that allow people to categorize others quickly but often inaccurately. They serve as mental shortcuts that categorize individuals or groups based on perceived characteristics, while ignoring the full range of human diversity and experience. In Indonesia, stereotypes based on ethnicity, gender, and social class are deeply embedded in everyday discourse, they continue to influence social attitudes and behavior (Andersen et al., 2022; Platt et al., 2018). For instance, there is a stereotype that Javanese people are *halus* (having soft attitude), and this is often contrasted with the stereotype of the Batak people as *kasar* (having rough or brash attitude). These stereotypes, though seemingly harmless, create social divisions and lead to unequal power dynamics. They can impact everything from professional opportunities to interpersonal relationships. The *halus* stereotype for Javanese people reinforces the notion that they are more suitable for administrative or bureaucratic roles, while Batak people are stereotypically seen as better suited for manual labor or other more physically demanding tasks. Cultural models are shared mental frameworks that people use to make sense of the world, and

they often rely on simplifications to guide behavior and expectations (Gee, 1999; McDonald, 2020; Yuliastuti, 2018). The idea that Javanese people are refined and gentle reflects a deeply ingrained cultural model that has its roots in Javanese aristocratic traditions, where *halus* behavior was prized as a sign of social status and civility. As Pickering (2001) mentioned, such stereotypes do not reflect the complex realities of individual personalities but rather reduce the complexities of individual identity to a single attribute, thereby reinforcing a narrow view of what it means to belong to a particular ethnic group.

Gender stereotypes in Indonesia are similarly embedded in cultural models that dictate acceptable roles and behaviors for men and women. Those actions involve making assumptions about what men and women can or should do, without considering individual differences (Eagly & Koenig, 2021; McDonald, 2020). For instance, the stereotype that women are primarily homemakers and should focus on domestic duties is deeply rooted in cultural traditions. That stereotype is a reflection of the cultural model that places women in domestic roles, while men are seen as breadwinners. It is also correlated with such common gender stereotypes including Traditional Masculinity and Femininity (Eagly & Koenig, 2021; McDonald, 2020). Traditional Masculinity dictates that men are often expected to be strong, take charge, lead, and do difficult or dangerous jobs. Men who do not fit this image might be looked down upon and seen as weak. Traditional Femininity indicates that women are often expected to be gentle, quiet, and helpful. Some people in various cultural backgrounds even believe women should handle most household tasks. This model is reinforced through various social practices, including media representations, religious teachings, and familial expectations. Women who pursue careers are sometimes labeled *wanita karier* (career woman), with the implication that women pursuing a career are an exception rather than the norm, reinforcing the idea that they are neglecting their duties as wives and mothers and their primary identity should be as homemakers. Gee's cultural models theory explains that these stereotypes persist because they are tied to societal values and norms that are

deeply ingrained and widely accepted (Eagly & Koenig, 2021; Gee, 1999; McDonald, 2020). In this case, the cultural model of a "good" woman as one who prioritizes her family over her career shapes how women's roles are perceived and judged in Indonesian society. This creates a discontent for women who seek to balance both career and family, as they are often subjected to criticism for not fully conforming to either societal expectation. Such stereotypes as Hall (1997) theorized, while rooted in traditional gender norms, limit the agency of women and restrict their ability to freely navigate public and private spheres.

Class-based stereotypes in Indonesia further illustrate how cultural models shape societal attitudes. The term *rakyat kecil* (little people) is often used to refer to the lower working class, carrying with it a sense of pity or condescension. This stereotype reflects the cultural model that views the working class as powerless, helpless, and in need of protection by the elite or the government. In reality, the working class is diverse and plays a crucial role in Indonesia's economy, but the stereotype reduces their identity to that of passive recipients of charity or aid (Azmi et al., 2021; Eagly & Koenig, 2021; Keane, 2023). This cultural model not only limits the agency of the working class but also reinforces hierarchical social structures that justify inequality. Gee's cultural models help people see how these stereotypes are not merely linguistic labels but are embedded in the broader discourses of power and social order, influencing how individuals and groups are perceived and treated in everyday interactions (Azmi et al., 2021; Gee, 1999; Yuliastuti, 2018). In a similar notion, the stereotype of *orang kampung* (villager) in Indonesia reflects a hierarchical divide between urban and rural populations. People from rural areas are often seen as less educated, backward, or unsophisticated compared to their urban counterparts. This stereotype manifests in various social settings, where individuals from villages are sometimes mocked for their accent, mannerisms, or perceived lack of exposure to modernity. However, this stereotype ignores the rich cultural traditions and knowledge systems of rural communities, reducing them to a caricature of inferiority (Azmi et al., 2021; Eagly & Koenig, 2021;

Keane, 2023). The economic development disparities between rural and urban areas further entrench these stereotypes, as rural populations are often viewed through a lens of pity or condescension rather than equality. This reinforces social exclusion and limits the opportunities for rural individuals to fully participate in urbanized, modern Indonesian society (Azmi et al., 2021; Eagly & Koenig, 2021; Pickering, 2001).

A racial or ethnic stereotype is an unfair judgment about people based on their skin color or cultural background. For example, people might be judged because they are Black, white, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or from any other group. Society often creates fixed ideas about what people from different races or ethnicities are like, which can affect them for their whole lives (Fitriani et al., 2023; Wijaya et al., 2024). At certain times in history, especially in Western society, white people were wrongly seen as smarter or superior. Harmful stereotypes were created about Black people, such as the false belief that Black men are violent. These negative ideas can lead to unfair treatment, discrimination, and inequality. In Indonesia, this stereotype also works by taking out any respect and shared value. It ignores a person's character by limiting how people are seen and treated (Fitriani et al., 2023; Wijaya et al., 2024). The perpetrators of the stereotypes ignore the uniqueness of each individual and create barriers that can be difficult to overcome.

In addition, stereotypes also reduce individuals to narrow traits, ignoring their full diversity. It is also correlated with cultural models as shared frameworks that shape perceptions and behavior by simplifying reality (Azmi et al., 2021; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). Stereotypes persist because they are embedded in these models. It is also prolonging such deeds of influencing power dynamics and social interactions. In consequence, stereotypes take a big role in reinforcing societal norms and inequalities. It is especially because stereotypes play a crucial role in shaping individuals to distinguish between "in-groups" (those they identify with) and "out-groups" (those they view as different) (Azmi et al., 2021; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). By assigning stereotypical traits to these groups, individuals reinforce their

positive perception of their in-group and often develop negative views of out-groups. This tendency can foster prejudice and intergroup conflict, reinforcing divisions within society.

Interestingly, in many senses, stereotypes work through their subtle and pervasive nature. It is demonstrating that they influence behavior in ways that people may not be fully aware of (Caputo, 2022; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). Thus, even when people strive to avoid prejudiced thinking, stereotypes embedded in their subconscious minds can still shape their judgments and interactions with others. That is why these kinds of labelling may always play a significant role in social categorization, shaping group identities, and can be manipulated for persuasive purposes. Even when people are aware of the dangers of stereotyping, unconscious biases can still influence their behavior, perpetuating discrimination and social inequality (Caputo, 2022; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023).

Senses of Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations

Understanding the relationship between language and stereotypes requires a close examination of how words and phrases are constructed and interpreted within a given culture. Language is not a neutral tool; rather, it shapes and is shaped by societal structures, reinforcing existing social norms and hierarchies (Gee, 1999; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations provides a crucial linguistic framework for analyzing how language influences the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes. These two types of relations govern how words are organized and selected within sentences, subtly shaping meaning and reinforcing cultural assumptions about identity and behavior (Saussure, 1916; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). By exploring how syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations operate in everyday discourse, better understandings on how stereotypes are linguistically constructed and maintained over time could be attained by researchers. These mechanisms are not just abstract linguistic concepts but are deeply intertwined with social perceptions and cultural models, helping to

solidify the stereotypes that contribute to social inequalities (Hall, 1997; Shaikh & Memon, 2023).

Syntagmatic relations refer to how words are arranged in sequence to create meaning, while paradigmatic relations involve the choices available within a category, allowing for substitutions that change meaning. These linguistic mechanisms are central to how stereotypes are perpetuated, as they structure the way people talk about and categorize others (Aisyah et al., 2024; Saussure, 1916; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). For example, in the Indonesian context, there is a phrase of *wanita karier* (career woman). The syntagmatic combination of these two words, *wanita* (woman) and *karier* (career), implies that a woman's involvement in a career is notable or unusual, subtly reinforcing the traditional expectation that a woman's primary role is in the home as a homemaker. The phrase itself creates a sense of deviation from the norm, as opposed to simply stating *karier* (career) without reference to gender. This syntagmatic construction reflects the cultural model that sees a woman's primary identity as rooted in the domestic sphere, and her career as an optional, perhaps even deviant, choice. The repetition of such phrases in media and everyday conversation reinforces the stereotype that women who work outside the home are exceptions rather than the norm, shaping societal expectations about gender roles.

Paradigmatic relations, by contrast, involve the selection of words from a set of alternatives, highlighting the choices available in constructing meaning (Jakobson, 1956; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). In this sense, if *wanita karier* is replaced with *ibu rumah tangga* (housewife), the social expectation shifts entirely, framing the woman's identity solely in terms of her domestic role. The paradigmatic choice between these terms highlights how language offers multiple ways to describe people, each carrying its own cultural and ideological weight. In Indonesian culture, these paradigmatic choices reinforce the binary view of women's roles, either as a "housewife" or a "career woman", with little room for more nuanced or hybrid identities that reflect women's actual lived experiences (Fiske, 1993; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). Another example is the term *janda* (widow), which is often used with negative connotations, implying that a

woman without a husband is incomplete or socially suspect. The paradigmatic alternative to *janda* could be *istri* (wife), which carries a much more positive connotation, reflecting societal expectations that women should be attached to a male partner. The paradigmatic choice between *janda* and *istri* reveals the underlying cultural model that values women based on their marital status, with *istri* representing fulfillment of societal norms and *janda* symbolizing a deviation from those norms. This linguistic choice perpetuates the stereotype that widows are somehow less worthy or respectable than married women, reinforcing gender inequalities in Indonesian society (Gee, 1999; Shaikh & Memon, 2023).

Another example of how syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations shape stereotypes in Indonesia can be found in the term *pribumi* (indigenous people). Historically, the term was used to distinguish native Indonesians from foreign settlers, particularly during the colonial period (Chen, 2022; Shaikh & Memon, 2023). In modern usage, the term carries strong nationalistic and racial connotations, often used to differentiate between ethnic Indonesians and Chinese-Indonesians (*Tionghoa*). The paradigmatic choice between *pribumi* and *Tionghoa* in public discourse shapes the way individuals are categorized, perpetuating the stereotype that Chinese-Indonesians are outsiders, despite their long history and significant contributions to Indonesian society. This paradigm reflects deeply rooted cultural and historical tensions, reinforcing divisions within the nation along ethnic lines (Hall, 1997; Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018). Furthermore, this division often places Chinese-Indonesians in a position of social and economic suspicion, with stereotypes portraying them as wealthy, exploitative, or disconnected from the "true" Indonesian experience. Linguistic choices then are not merely descriptive but are tied to broader social narratives about law, order, and economic stability (Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018).

Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations also play a role in reinforcing class-based stereotypes. The term *bos* (boss) in Indonesian colloquial speech is often used sarcastically to refer to someone who is seen as overly authoritative or exploitative, while

rakyat kecil (the little people) refers to the lower working class. These syntagmatic and paradigmatic constructions reflect broader social hierarchies, where language not only describes social positions but also assigns moral judgments. The term *rakyat kecil* carries with it an implicit pity or condescension, reducing the complexity of the working class to a simplistic image of suffering or helplessness. By repeatedly using such terms in public discourse, society reinforces class distinctions and normalizes the power dynamics between the wealthy and the poor (Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018).

Ferdinand de Saussure's syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations explain how language reinforces stereotypes by structuring how words are combined and selected. Syntagmatic relations involve word sequences that create meaning, while paradigmatic relations involve choosing words from alternatives, each with its own connotations. These linguistic structures simplify complex identities, helping to perpetuate stereotypes by categorizing individuals into rigid groups. Cultural models, as described by Gee (1999), rely on these structures to shape societal expectations and reduce individuals to certain traits. Over time, such stereotypes become normalized, reinforcing social divisions and inequalities.

Cultural Models and Their Prominent Representations

Cultural models are representations of reciprocal relations between individual understandings and societal discourses. This idea conveys perspective that individuals and societies are intertwined that may affect yet be affected by one and another (Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018). Both of them could not be separated by sole purpose since any idea of becoming individual is related to being societal and in reverse. Cultural models indicate individuals' concept through societal contexts. In many aspects, the condition could be static as it relates to universal idea of society, but it could also be dynamic regarding individuals' personal particular experience.

Concepts of cultural models are not terms out of contexts, but are matters of identities. Those correlate mediations between micro (inter-

individuals) and macro (individuals and societies) level of interactions (Gee, 1999; Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018). This idea also reflects understandings of meanings that are not totally defined, but could also involve production and consumption of meanings. Individuals and societies, though the conceptual names are alike, could interpret cultural models differently. Indeed, the models are relative due to two aspects; those are bounded contextually and open to other possible meanings in further interpretations.

Identities then, as cultural models, could not be spoken out of any societal discourse (Gee, 1999; Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018). Those do not work solely in the mind of individuals, but asserted through everyday dialogues on conventions, norms, stigmas, and even myths. Those could be said as descriptions of simplified world in which abundant assumptions are taken as normal (Gee, 1999; Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018). Thinking about cultural models will firstly see that it is considered usual in certain culture. It is due to understandings that the models are widely and deeply conceptualized and practiced in people's cultural life.

However, the cultural models could be problematic since those bring in simplifications about the world (Bonnell & Hunt, 2023; Gee, 1999). As things are simplified then those must take certain definitions by leaving out all the rest. This is how representation works. Indeed, human beings could not think of everything as a whole, but representations somehow could shape further unfairness in everyday life. It is due to several understandings are forced as core values for all matters. Though cultural models are deeply embraced, those still indicate assumptions of the people, not the real truth of them. In many aspects, cultural models are defined as labels that could be applied to people inside that culture.

Cultural models are simple in its short words or concepts but complex in its meanings. Even one word could represent many things including what is really well understood in that culture. The models go beyond linguistic definition as those get involved in various discourses. By taking on discourse, the models make relations between assumptions of people and desire of society closer (Bonnell & Hunt, 2023; Gee, 1999). The terms in

cultural models are never meaningless or speaking a sole meaning, but those is rich of cultural understandings between common views of society and particular perspectives of individuals.

The models speak not as they are meant to be. Those speak of language in other meanings (Bonnell & Hunt, 2023; Gee, 1999). Those relate to experience of the people regarding that cultural discourse. If someone has not experienced that model or is not from that culture, then the models could never work since its representations fail to deliver meanings. It is since cultural models work like videotapes in minds in which abundant texts, images, and settings are unified as components of them (Gee, 1999; Giuliano & Nunn, 2021). Then, since those are recorded, the models operate like a vision of idealized, typical, and even normal values. Those stay right there. Those may change regarding cultural evolution, but many of them are always intact as base values for the society. Even if there are static cultural models, its understandings may always vary since the ideas are experienced in space and time that are limited in its realities (Gee, 1999; Giuliano & Nunn, 2021). In other words, cultural models are stated in spaces lived by situated practice of interpretative meanings in everyday life.

Meanings in cultural models then are not the ones listed in dictionaries, but always related to socio-cultural practices. Those are contextual and customized in situated meanings as listed on cultural knowledge (Gee, 1999; Giuliano & Nunn, 2021). Then, since the models are always social, those are never given but constructed. Those could be wide conceptions agreed by all members of the culture and could only be well understood by several people in the society. The concepts could be abstract but its understandings are always by contexts.

Cultural models indeed are direct reflections of discourses. Those aspects apply in dual direction; inward and outward, give meanings and meant, blaming and blamed (Gee, 1999; Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018). The ideas are used to give labels to people but people will also always think about its meanings in interpretative ways. The models are stated in humans' minds and will be operative in forward communication. Indeed, cultural models will be realized in further dialogues. Humans are

makers and are made by discourses as 'sense makers par excellence' (Gee, 1999; Hodge, 2016; Matus, 2018). People will always search for discourses as they are also made out of discursive understandings.

The frameworks of cultural models are involved in three aspects; espoused models in embraced discourses in everyday life, evaluative models used to evaluate matters of other people, and models-in-(inter)action that point active identities in having real dialogues in the world (Gee, 1999; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). Three of them are separated but actually involved in simultaneous understandings of a cultural model. In other words, a cultural model is embraced by people, used to be applied to other people, and asserted in interactions among human beings. An example of cultural model is *Punk* community in Indonesia that is different from other countries. While foreign *punk* community only embraces values of it, Indonesian *punk* totally lives homeless and earns money by doing anything. The main idea is embracing anarchy as idea of leaving out of any structure. Many people think that *punk* people is the root of many juvenile crimes. Some of the stigmas are true, but many of them only insist on living alone without any help from other people. They are labeled as trash of society, but actually, they are reflection of arrogance of people that could not enable anyone to live better. These people are normalized with violence and could not be trusted at all. They have been a model that will always be marginalized and alienated.

Second example is *Preman* that is derived from Dutch language *vrijman* and English language freeman. The idea is the same; people who work outside normal contract of work. Many *preman* works based on any request given to people; some of them join organizations while others use their power to guard a valuable place. Common people give stereotype to these people as bad men. However, society indeed needs people who could do petty or trivial things. No one has a dream to be *preman*, but even a director of a big company needs someone to direct them driving out of such supermarket. Indeed, people will think that these people are not totally needed generally in society, but they may be needed for many informal aspects.

It is similar to condition that most people refuse to be an undertaker but everyone will need them someday.

Those two examples above indicate that cultural model could always relate to label, stigma, and stereotype of people towards others in society. In many aspects, cultural model works as a static thing that could not be changed at all (Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). It is due to stigma is used to generalize people towards a certain label. It is like definition that totally limits and restricts people from other meanings. He or she will only be seen from a sole perspective and it is used to measure him or her morally. In further aspect, cultural model does not only state matter of being in dialogue culturally, but also idea of being ethical in everyday life. People in cultural model are identified as good and bad if he or she has moral values or not. In matter of being conformed to society, moral aspects in cultural model could also be similar to how someone is obedient to a structure in such discourse. If someone is out of the embedded value, he or she is considered unethical.

For example, *Bancakan* or *Slametan* is a Javanese activity to celebrate or commemorate important events, such as prayer for deceased people, birthday, and even graduation. Foods are provided for people who come or given to surroundings. Before eating, several prayers are read to remind His grace to human beings. This activity is done to remind as well as to bridge structures of *jagad gedhe* (God and the universe) and *jagad cilik* (individuals and others). In Javanese ideas, people should always live peacefully by maintaining good relations with God, universe, and other people so that they will avoid such selfish condition and remind them that they are parts of things bigger than themselves. If a family rarely holds *bancakan*, they will be considered as selfish or asocial. However, today, many people refuse to do the ritual because of religious restriction, as the event is considered as *bid'ah* or unfamiliar and prohibited. This type of perspective rejects any matter of tradition in religion.

Javanese people have embraced this cultural model for a long time. It also works as a label to maintain relations among people that refusal to do this event will considered asocial and even

immoral. However, the ethic of this event is shifted with matter of religious strictness that rejects this tradition. On one hand, those who reject to do this tradition will be considered unethical in Javanese values. Nevertheless, on the other hand, that rejection is considered necessary to promote religious teaching that is actually ethical in the other point. The duality then shows that identity is actually plural but cultural model only works to certain point with its limited definition. The model defines people but they could not be merely restricted to that definition. Human beings are full of possibilities that could make them loose out of any definition. Therefore, there is always probability for people to destroy the stigma either as reflection of their own freedom out of any closed cultural model.

Stereotypes and How Those are Linguistically Shaped

Language is a fundamental instrument in shaping social realities, as it reflects and perpetuates cultural values and norms (Bonvillain, 2019). Through language, stereotypes are not only created but also reinforced, limiting how individuals and groups are perceived within a society. These linguistic practices are deeply embedded in cultural models, which act as cognitive frameworks that guide people's understanding of social roles and identities (Gee, 1999). By encoding cultural assumptions, language helps construct stereotypes that reduce complex identities to simplistic categories, often reinforcing social inequalities. Stereotypes are frequently expressed and maintained through specific linguistic choices, reflecting the broader social and cultural expectations associated with gender, class, and ethnicity (Mooney & Evans, 2018). These linguistic patterns, whether through syntagmatic combinations or paradigmatic choices, continue to shape social perceptions. As Saussure (1916) emphasized, language organizes how people interpret reality, and by structuring terms in specific ways, it reinforces societal attitudes. This linguistic encoding of stereotypes, which is pervasive in everyday discourse, makes it difficult to challenge these fixed views.

One notable example mentioned earlier is the term *janda* (widow), which in many contexts carries

negative connotations. While the term simply denotes a woman whose husband has died, it is often used in a derogatory manner, implying that the woman is somehow less complete or socially deviant. The stereotype surrounding *janda* reflects a broader cultural model in Indonesian society that values women primarily in relation to their marital status. Widows are often viewed with suspicion or pity, as their single status is seen as a deviation from the norm of being married. This stereotype is reinforced by the syntagmatic use of *janda* in phrases like *janda muda* (young widow), which often implies that the woman is sexually available or promiscuous. The paradigmatic alternative to *janda* could be "single woman" or "independent woman," terms that carry more neutral or positive connotations. However, the entrenched cultural model that ties a woman's worth to her marital status makes it difficult for alternative linguistic choices to gain traction in everyday discourse (Gee, 1999; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023).

Another example of how language shapes stereotypes in Indonesia is the term *Preman*. As also mentioned earlier, this term has evolved from its original meaning of "free man" to one that is associated with criminality and violence. The stereotype of the *preman* as a thug is reinforced through its syntagmatic use in phrases like *preman pasar* (market thug) or *preman jalanan* (street thug), which link the term to illegal activities and anti-social behavior. The paradigmatic alternative, such as *pekerja informal* (informal worker), offers a more neutral or even positive view of individuals working outside the formal economy, but this alternative is rarely used in everyday discourse. Gee's concept of cultural models helps explain why the term *preman* carries such negative connotations: the cultural model of the "thug" reflects societal anxieties about law and order, as well as economic instability. By categorizing informal workers as *preman*, society reinforces the stereotype that these individuals are inherently dangerous or untrustworthy, even though many are simply trying to make a living in a difficult economic environment (Gee, 1999; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023).

The use of linguistic labels to shape stereotypes is also evident in the way ethnic groups are described in Indonesian society. The term *pribumi*

(native Indonesian) is often used in contrast to *non-pribumi* (non-native Indonesian), particularly in discussions about race and ethnicity. This binary linguistic distinction reinforces stereotypes about who truly belongs in Indonesia and who does not. Historically, *non-pribumi* has been used to describe Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent, who have often been marginalized and subjected to discriminatory policies. The stereotype of the *non-pribumi* as wealthy, insular, and disloyal to the Indonesian nation is deeply embedded in Indonesian society, and this stereotype is reinforced through the syntagmatic use of the term in media and political discourse. For example, phrases like *pengusaha non-pribumi* (non-native businessman) suggest that Chinese-Indonesians dominate the business sector at the expense of native Indonesians. The paradigmatic alternative to *non-pribumi* could simply be *Indonesian*, a term that reflects the legal status of all citizens regardless of their ethnic background. However, the established cultural model that links ethnicity to national identity makes it difficult for more inclusive linguistic choices to replace the binary *pribumi* vs. *non-pribumi* distinction (Gee, 1999).

Additionally, another example is the stereotype of *orang Cina* (Chinese person) in Indonesia, which has long been associated with wealth, cunning, and social exclusiveness. This stereotype has historical roots in the colonial era, where Chinese-Indonesians were often positioned as middlemen between the Dutch colonial administration and the indigenous population. The phrase *orang Cina* is often used in a derogatory manner, especially in political rhetoric, where it is employed to suggest that Chinese-Indonesians are not "true" Indonesians and are only interested in personal gain. This linguistic framing contributes to social and economic exclusion, as it positions Chinese-Indonesians as perpetual outsiders, even though they have been an integral part of Indonesian society for centuries (Caputo, 2022; Hall, 1997).

Language plays a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing stereotypes by encoding cultural assumptions and societal attitudes. Linguistic choices reflect and perpetuate cultural models that categorize people in narrow, often limiting ways, influencing how individuals are perceived and

treated. These stereotypes are reinforced through the repetition of certain terms and phrases, making it difficult for more inclusive or neutral alternatives to emerge in everyday discourse. As Gee (1999) notes, cultural models tied to language shape societal perceptions and contribute to the maintenance of social inequalities by framing individuals within rigid categories that reflect broader power structures.

Furthermore, through language, stereotypes are traits that society automatically assigns to groups of people based on things like age, weight, job, skin color, or gender. Those are how language simplifies differences by dividing different yet opposing traits. It is true that everyone holds some stereotypes because the brain naturally groups things to understand the world. These stereotypes act as mental shortcuts, helping people make quick decisions, often without thinking about it. However, various stereotypes work through subconscious levels as being involved in language, making them simple and pre-formed ideas that can negatively impact how people view and treat others (Caputo, 2022; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). They limit people by assigning them roles that may not suit them, making it harder for them to express their true selves.

Rather than flourishing deeper and wider explanations, language keeps going significantly in simplifying phenomenon. Consequently, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of language helps more to lead people towards overgeneralizations that become stereotypes (Caputo, 2022; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023). Uniqueness then is getting diminished as people are easily dragged towards various homogenizations. Indeed, language is getting more efficient. However, it slowly degenerates people's existence by ignoring individuality and exaggerating group differences. Language should always try to explain in wider senses rather than keep simplifying that may always result to prejudiced misinformation as well as discrimination in everyday life (Caputo, 2022; Storey, 2021; Suwandi, 2023).

Conclusions

In conclusion, stereotypes are deeply entrenched social constructs that simplify complex identities and reinforce societal inequalities. Language plays a pivotal role in shaping and perpetuating these stereotypes by encoding cultural assumptions and attitudes. Through syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, stereotypes are woven into everyday discourse, solidifying the cultural models that guide how individuals and groups are perceived. As James Paul Gee (1999) explains, cultural models are cognitive frameworks that simplify reality, often to the detriment of marginalized groups. Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic framework further demonstrates how the arrangement and choice of words reinforce these stereotypes, making them appear natural and unavoidable. Over time, these linguistic patterns not only reflect but also perpetuate power imbalances, creating rigid social categories that are difficult to dismantle. Understanding the mechanisms behind the formation and perpetuation of stereotypes through language is crucial to challenging and deconstructing the harmful narratives that sustain social inequalities.

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