GEORGIAN STUDENTS' PERCEIVED VITALITY, COMPETENCE AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTION TO GERMAN-SPEAKING OUT-GROUP

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Abstract

Attitudes – stereotypes, their antecedents, emotions (i.e, positive – admiration, or negative - contempt) and behavioral intention of Georgian students toward the representatives of German-speaking countries are studied. According to the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske, 2015), stereotypes of warmth measure to what extent German-speaking people are percived as wishing to harm others and stereotypes of competence - how capable they are considered. According to theory, stereotypes are elicited by the corresponding socio–structural antecedents: perceived international image of German-speaking countries, measured by vitality and perceived threat posed by them, measured by fear of assimilation. Combination of stereotypes of warmth and competence, in turn, elicit corresponding emotions, which might lead to certain behavioral intentions, such as wish of cooperation or avoidance, etc. (Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske, 2018).

The data were collected from 87 native Georgian students using a modified questionnaire from Cuddy, Fiske and Glick's study (2007). The German-speaking out-groups were perceived as competent, having high international status/being vital, eliciting the wish to become similar to the people of German-speaking countries.

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis (we entered demographic variables – age and gender - in model 1, vitality and fear of assimilation in model 2 and warmth and competence in model 3) showed that perceived competence of German-speaking group positively predicted the corresponding behavioral outcome: $\beta = .48$, $t = 3.28$, $p < 0.01$, $F (9, 56) = 3.55$, $p < 0.01$, $R2$ change $= 0.14$, $p < 0.01$. However, vitality also yielded significant regression coefficient in the previous model: $\beta = .29$, $t = 2.36$, $p < 0.05$, which turned insignificant in the final model. Thus, we conducted mediation analysis, which yielded full mediation: vitality antecedes perceived competence, which, in turn, elicits behavioral intention, TE = 0.66, LLIC = 0.16, ULCI = 1.17; IE = 0.32, LLIC = 0.03, ULCI = 0.56; DE = 0.35, LLIC = -0.12, ULCI = 0.81.

The stereotype content model is usually applied to investigate attitudes to the groups in a given society, while we applied this theory to measure attitudes of Georgian students to distant out-group of German-Speaking people, who, mostly, represent the European Union countries (Germany, Austria, Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland and Liechtenstein), and found out that their image on international arena (measured by vitality), predicted wish to become similar to them via eliciting perception of these group as competent.

Keywords: Stereotype content model, attitudes of Georgian students, German-speaking countries, vitality, fear of assimilation.

1. Introduction

Attitudes of Georgians to different ethnic out-groups have been studied since the end of the twentieth century (CRRC 2019, 2020; Javakhishvili, 2005, 2018, 2021; Kemoklidze, 2012; Mestvirishvili, 2012, TDI, 2017) and have consistently shown to be hierarchical, meaning that some ethnic groups are held closer than the others (Snellman & Ekehammar, 2005). Specifically, Georgians have been the most acceptive of Europeans, such as Italians, British, Greek, Germans and North Americans, while the least acceptive of their neighbours, such as Armenians, Azerbaijanians (Javakhishvili, 2011, 2012, 2016). The current study looks into more details of these attitudes and aims to explain them on the example of German-speaking groups, such as Germany, Austria, etc. German is the second foreign language after English in Georgia, many Georgian students have received education in

Germany, Austria, Switzerland, thus, we have collected data from those Georgian students who study german as a second language at different Georgian universities.

The attitudes of Georgians toward different ethnic groups have been mostly studied by investigating either stereotypes or behavioral intentions, components of attitudes (Grigoryian et al., 2019; Javakhishvili, 2011, 2012, 2016; MDF, 2018). In the current study, we look at these simultaneously. Stereotypes are studied via pulling out the widely spread social psychological theory called stereotype content model/SCM, which posits that cognitive component of attitude, the same as a stereotype, in other words, what people think of a group, is a combination of the perceptions of these groups as competent and warm. According to the SCM, stereotypes of warmth measure how eager any group representatives are to harm others and stereotypes of competence - how capable they are. The combinations of warmth and competence result into four categories: 1. high warmth/high competence cluster, which usually contains in-group representatives, 2. low warmth/low competence – the most disliked groups, such as homeless; and two ambivalent clasters of 3. high warmth/ low competence - such as housewives, and 4. low warmth/high competence - such as rich are considered (Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske, 2015).

Moreover, according to the theory, stereotypes are elicited by the corresponding socio–structural antecedents: perceived status and competitiveness of a group. If, for example, rich people are seen as having a high status in a society, they will be perceived as competent, and, if they are seen as capable of harm, they are perceived as cold; or, housewives hold low status, but are not competitive, thus, they are perceived as less competent, but warm. Later, authors demonstrated the mediational chain from stereotypes to behavioral intentions through emotions (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske, 2018, and from antecedents to emotions through stereotypes (Javakhishvili et al., 2021). In the current study we aim to demostrate a different mediational chain starting from socio-structural antecedents to stereotypes, ended up by behavioral intentions.

Behavioral intention, as one of the components of attitude, has been widely studied since the American sociologist, Emory Bogardus started measuring them using the concept of social distance (Bogardus (1925; Makashvili et al., 2018). This concept means that people hold others at different social distances, starting from the closest, which is marriage, followed by being neighbours, friends, co-workers, etc. Modified versions of this scale have been used many times, in the current study, we used one item that measures to what extent would Georgian students wish to become similar to the representatives of the German-speaking group, indicating a very short distance.

We aim to demonstrate this mediational chain on the example of Georgian students' attitudes to the representatives of German-speaking groups. Because German-speaking groups simultaneously represent citizens of some countries such as Germany, Austria, etc., for socio-strucutural antecedents we studied perceived international image of this group, measured by vitality and perceived threat posed by it, measured by fear of assimilation. Attitudes of students are of special interest, because, they usually represent the most tolerant part of a society, at the same time being less restricted by everyday problems and fears of losing jobs, etc. (Henry, 2008). The studied group is even more specific, as contains those participants, who study German as their second language, who, unlike general population, are better informed about German-speaking out-group.

The following hypotheses were investigated:

1. German-speaking countries' representatives are perceived as vital, but less threatening; thus, warmer than competent;

2. Behavoral intention of becoming similar is predicted by perceived vitality, fear of assimilation, stereotypes of warmth and competence;

3. Mediation chain from the socio-structural antecedent of vitality through stereotype of competence to the behavioral intention of becoming similar to the representatives of German-speaking group will be detected.

2. Method

The data were collected from 87 native Georgian students using a modified questionnaire from Cuddy, Fiske and Glick's study (2007).

According to the SCM, the stereotypes of warmth are elicited by socio–structural antecedents: the perceived international image of these countries, measured by vitality (two items) and threat posed by them, measured by fear of assimilation (three items). Next, competence and warmth were studied with 8 items in all, three of them for competence and 5 for warmth.

Since we studied attitudes toward the distant out-groups, citizens of European countries, we could not use Cuddy's and colleagues' questionnaire to measure behavioral tendencies. The items would be irrelevant. Instead, we asked participants if they would like to become similar to the people of German-speaking countries.

All items had a 5-point Likert scale as an answering option, where "1" meant "not at all"; "5" meant "absolutely". Participants were delivered a printed questionnaire requiring approximately 20 minutes to fill out. All respondents were informed that they could stop participation and withdraw their questionnaire, as well as, that their participation in this study would be confidential. We also received approval to conduct this study from the research ethics committee at Ilia State University.

3. Results

Mean scores for vitality M = 4.42, SD = 0.53 were higher than those for fear of assimilation M = 2.42, SD = 1.03. Paired samples t-test was statistically significant: t (86) = 15.98, p < 0.001. Mean score for competence was M = 4.26, SD = 0.61, while for warmth was M = 3.40, SD = 0.06. The paired samples t-test was significant: t (86) = 8.93, p < 0.001. Thus, hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

As, according to the SCM, socio-structural antecedents and stereotypes are predictors of behavioral intentions, we studied vitality and fear of assimilation, stereotypes of warmth and competence as predictors of social distance of becoming similar to the representatives of German-speaking group. The hierarchical multiple regression analysis (we entered demographic variables – age and gender - in model 1, vitality and fear of assimilation in model 2 and warmth and competence in model 3) showed that perceived competence of German-speaking group positively predicted the corresponding behavioral outcome: β = .48, t = 3.28, p < 0.01, F (9, 56) = 3.55, p < 0.01, R2 change = 0.14, p < 0.01. Thus, hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

However, vitality also yielded significant regression coefficient in the previous model: β = .29, t = 2.36, p < 0.05, which turned insignificant in the final model. Thus, we conducted mediation analysis, which yielded full mediation: vitality antecedes perceived competence, which, in turn, elicits behavioral intention, TE = 0.66, LLIC = 0.16, ULCI = 1.17; IE = 0.32, LLIC = 0.03, ULCI = 0.56; DE = 0.35, LLIC = -0.12, ULCI = 0.81. Thus, hypothesis 3 was also confirmed.

4. Discussion

As predicted, studied out-group representatives are considered as vital and threatening, warm and competent. However, vitality scores are higher than those of threat scores, meaning that the corresponding countries of these group are considered as having high international status/being vital, but less threatening to assimilate Georgians. The representatives of this group are perceived more as competent than warm. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis enabled us to demonstrate that Georgian students want to become similar to the out-group members.

The stereotype content model is usually applied to investigate attitudes to the groups in a given society (Fiske et al, 2002, Fiske & North, 2015), while we applied this theory to measure attitudes of Georgian students to distant out-group of German-speaking people, who, mostly, represent the European countries (Germany, Austria, Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland and Liechtenstein), and found out that their image on the international arena (measured by vitality), predicted wish to become similar to them via eliciting perception of this group as competent. Previous studies of the social distance of Georgians to representatives of Germany showed a very positive attitude, social distance to this group was short, meaning that Georgians held German-speaking people close (Javakhishvili, 2011, 2012, 2016). The current study enabled us to demonstrate the mechanism of this attitude. Based on the international image of powerful and respected Germanic countries Georgian students think that representatives of German-speaking group are competent and thus evoke behavioral intention of becoming similar to them.

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