THE DYNAMICS OF ROMANIAN PREJUDICE TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS

Andrei-Lucian Marian, Assist. Prof., PhD, "Al. Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi

Abstract: For several years we are witnessing in Romania an increase in intolerance towards immigrants, to ethnic minorities in general and to individuals from other cultures than those prevailing in a given context. In Europe and America, ethnic tensions between majority white and visible minorities remain very sharp, even if they have other, more delicate, subtle and less publicly expressed, bearing the prefix "neo" (e.g. neo-racism, implied prejudice etc.). This new attitude structured social context generates resentment from other linguistic and confessional communities (Hungarians, Roma, and Jews). Hence the importance for psychologists, not only to better understand the dynamics of prejudice and discrimination, but also to find ways to improve or change the adverse events that may occur and to promote alternative action. In this context, study aims to investigate the factors influencing the dynamics of Romanian students prejudice towards immigrants, starting from the hypothesis according to which: emphasizing positive similarities between Romanian and immigrants, presentation of several categories of immigrants and using explicit messages about the situation of immigrants in Romania, lead to improvement prejudices. Furthermore, we aim to understand how intergroup contact can reduce bias by studying the salient group membership as a moderator.

Keywords: prejudice, attitude, immigrants, intercultural, intergroup contact

Introduction

The term prejudice comes from the Latin prejudicium, which means a precedent or a "judgment based on a decision or previous experience" (Allport, 1954, p 7). Prejudices can be positive or negative, but they often are designed as negative. Consistent with this view, Allport defines negative ethnic prejudice as "an antipathy based on wrong and inflexible generalization". It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed to the group as a whole, or to the individual as a member of that group.

Prejudice, typically, is conceived as an attitude, as a learned predisposition to respond in an evaluative manner (from extremely negative to the extremely positive) towards a variety of objects or persons. Most of the times, attitudes are explored after a three-dimensional model with three components: cognitive, affective and conative. Cognitive components involves our beliefs about the attitudinal object (e.g. a group of people), beliefs which can represent simple sentences, conscious or unconscious, inferred from what the person says or does, preceded by the phrase: "I believe that ...". Examples of attitudes we can include: "African-Americans are musical", "Japanese are ambitious," etc. Affective component of attitudes involves emotional and evaluative reactions of individuals towards attitudinal object. Thus, the affective component refers to the subjective evaluations on the positive or negative aspects of attitudinal object. Conative component refers to behavioral intentions.

Also, prejudice can be regarded as an emotion, in which case we speak of a social emotion experienced by respecting an individual's social identity as a member of the in-group or as a member of the out-group as a target. Prejudice can be manifested in emotions as fear, disgust, annoyance, anger and jealousy, but most research has conceptualized it as an attitude.

Individuals tend to think prejudice in dichotomous terms, even if they express it or not this attitude. It is much more correct approach on the strength of prejudice ranging along a

continuum from strong to weak. This suggests that all individuals harms in varying degrees, as a result of socialization as members of different ethnic and cultural groups. Even those with low levels of prejudice prefer to interact with people like them because such interactions are much more comfortable and less stressful than with strangers.

Varying degrees of prejudice are associated with our personal standards for knowing how to deal with members of other cultures. Individuals with a low level of prejudices want to behave in a manner that is consistent with their standards to treat others. These standards are an important part of self-concept of those with a low degree of prejudice. These people are motivated to interact with the otherness without prejudice or sometimes respond by prejudice deemed acceptable, in which case they feel guilty and self-criticism. For individuals with a high level of prejudices standards in treating other are not so important and well defined. Therefore, they don't blame themselves when their behavior does not comply with these standards.

Prejudices can be thought out and along a second continuum, ranging from very positive to very negative. Generally, there is tendency to have positive prejudices towards cultural group affiliation and negative towards out - group, but this does not exclude the reverse situation. The valence of prejudices (positive or negative) should be considered in trying to understand the reactions of individuals when their expectations are contradicted.

Brewer and Brown (1998) argue that intergroup prejudices may not be thought simplistically as positive versus negative. The authors consider that there are two different types of prejudices: one based on negative affective states directed towards groups of foreigners and the other based on the absence of positive affective states for it. Thus, many forms of discrimination and biases can be developed in the light of the fact that positive emotions like admiration, sympathy and trust are reserved for cultural reference group and denied to foreign groups. Brewer (1998) points out that many discriminatory perceptions and behaviors are motivated by the desire to promote and maintain primary positive relationships within the cultural group membership, rather than any direct antagonism to cultural group outside.

Another aspect that should be taken into consideration is the relationship between prejudice and activating the expression of an identity in a specific situation. If an individual has a prejudice against members of an ethnic group, it is expressed when ethnic identity is enabled. If the interaction with members of another ethnic group activates personal identity or other social identities (but not ethnic identity), by contrast, individuals do not express prejudice towards their partners.

In a social context, we can talk about the existence of two categories of prejudices: one public exhibit and two latent, implicit, both with major impact on the way in which individuals relate to others, especially when cultural references are different (Pettigrew, Meertens, 1995).

In a series of experiments, Tajfel (1986) point out that the distinction in-group / out-group causes negative evaluations of the out-group members by in-group members, even in cases where the criteria used for the formation of groups are less logical, such as parts of a coin. Based on these results, we expect that the differences between immigrants in Romania and natives to explain the negative assessment of the strangers. Therefore, it is essential that programs to improve intergroup attitudes to be highlighted similarities between immigrants

and Romanian. In this process there are two options: can be highlighted positive or negative similarities. Pettigrew (1998) argues that errors of attribution provide an awareness of the consequences of both choices. These errors relate to the tendency of individuals to attribute positive behaviors out-group members and negative behaviors in-group members of situational factors (external attribution) and to attribute negative behaviors out-group members and positive behaviors in-group members of dispositional factors (internal attribution).

When negative similarities are emphasized, the negative behaviors of the out-group members are attributed to their own personal features and negative behaviors of the in-group members are attributed to situational factors. Thus, this option results in a negative evaluation of the out-group members and has no impact on the assessment of in-group members. When positive similarities are emphasized, the positive behaviors of the out-group members are attributed to situational factors and the positive behaviors of the in-group members are attributed to dispositional factors. The option in question leads to a positive assessment of the in-group members and has no impact on the assessment of out-group members.

Comparing the two options, we can say that out-group members will benefit more from the underline the similarities, because this option does not result in a negative assessment, as did not lead to a positive assessment of the stranger. Obviously the gain would be much greater in terms of attribution behaviors out-group members of the internal factors and not external ones.

Pettigrew (1998) has mentioned four reasons for which individuals ascribe positive behaviors of out-group members of the external factors: a) out-group members are considered an exception; b) out-group members are highly motivated; c) out-group members are lucky; d) out-group members have a privileged. A positive result in the assessment of out-group members may be obtained by breaking these explanations, by considering the reasons mentioned as being less justified. One way would be to appeal to the various categories of immigrants (e.g., Chinese, Turks, Arabs, French, Italian, Spanish, etc.) instead of just a single category of immigrants. Also, as mentioned above, it is preferable to emphasize the positive similarities. Moreover, one can make a distinction between explicit and implicit message. Explicit means that the purpose of the message is exactly represented as a text. The exact representation is lacking in the default message. The disadvantage of the implicit message is that it can be easily misunderstood if its purpose is left to receiver imagination. These misunderstandings occur especially when the default message about immigrants is provided in a negative social context, since activates a negative cognitive scheme leading to a negative judgment about immigrants.

According to the contact hypothesis, frequency and positive contact with members of the out-group should lead to the improvement of the whole group judgments and thus lead to the reduction of prejudice against it (Allport, 1954, Hewstone, 1986, Pettigrew, 1998). Moreover, recent research has gathered evidence through which salient group membership moderates the effect of intergroup contact, both in the sense of reducing them (decategorization) and in deepening its meaning (categorization).

The main positive effect of decategorization is the perception of categories as less useful and less frequently used, and meetings with atypical members of the out - group can increase the perceived variability of the group as a whole. Also decategorization underpins

research showed that close relationships with members of the out-group reduce intergroup bias and even have produced the "deprovincialisation" in support of increased tolerance to the out-group (Pettigrew, 1998). Beyond these approaches, there is an empirical support for limits of decategorization: first, experimental studies have focused on the study decategorization have not eliminated all categories, not measured salient categories during contact. Therefore, we cannot know if they are pure forms of interpersonal contacts or contact moderate by salient distinct categories. The second and most important limit of decategorization is that by eliminating categories individuals are depersonalized, deprived of values, trust, cooperation and desired social identity, inclusion and loyalty specific groups. Removing categories what is specific for the process of decategorization will not meet the needs of inclusion and differentiation or cognitive simplicity and reduction in uncertainty.

From another perspective it can be argued the opposite salient groups must be maintained during the contact, in order to promote generalization of target group members (Hewston, 1986, Brown, 2000). This approach has also two limits. First, by making the categories salient during contact, there is a risk to reinforce perceptions of differences between groups and intergroup anxiety, particularly where groups have very different status and may be one reason that explains the resistance of in-group members to contact out-group members. Second, although this model (based on the need for distinctness of social identities) provides a stable solution in terms of the structural cognitive situation, is rather unstable emotionally. Emphasizing intergroup boundaries is associated with mutual distrust and this undermines the potential for cooperative independence and mutual sympathy.

Based on the conceptual background, our study aims, as the first objective, to investigate the factors influencing the dynamics of students' prejudice against immigrants in Romania, highlighting the role of positive similarities between people and immigrants, the importance of the perception of many categories of immigrants and, last but not least, the utility of explicit messages about socio-economic and educational situation of immigrants in moderating the intergroup attitudes. The second objective of the research is to understand how intergroup contact can reduce bias by studying the salient group membership as a moderator.

Method

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 150 Romanian students (33% male gender and 67% feminine gender), from different faculties of the "Al. I. Cuza" Iasi University, with a mean age of 22 years. For participating in this study, students were rewarded with points on courses and seminars.

2.2. Measures

Positive similarities between Romanian and immigrants, the categories of immigrants and the type of information were systematically placed under the experimental conditions. In the first experimental condition we manipulated positive similarities between immigrants in Romania and Romanian students. In the second condition, the immigrants were portrayed in a positive perspective, but the focus has not been on the similarities with the Romanians. In the third experimental condition we manipulated the numbers of categories of immigrants, in a situation presenting six categories (Arabs, Chinese, Turkish, French, Italian and Spanish), and in another case three categories (Arabic, Chinese, Turkish). In the fourth experimental

condition we manipulated the type of information through the presence or absence of a text explaining socio-economic and educational status of immigrants in Romania.

The amount of intergroup contact was measured by four items concerned, on the one hand, about contact in generally, and on the other hand, about the contact between Romanian students and immigrants. Items were: How many Turkish, Chinese, Arabs immigrants in Romania do you personally know? (None – More than ten); How frequently do you get into contact with them? (Never - Very often); How many students Turkish, Chinese, Arabs do you personally know? (None - More than 10); How frequently do you get into contact with them? (Never - Very often). After they answered to these questions, the participants expressed their opinion on the quality of intergroup contact, answering to the following assertion: When you meet Turkish, Chinese, Arabs immigrants do you find contact with them as: pleasant, cooperative, superficial?

The salient of groups during the contact was measured by 3 items: In the interactions with the Turks, Chinese and Arabs in Romania are you aware that they belong to a different cultural group from yours? In the interactions with the Turks, Chinese and Arabs in Romania, do you perceive them as typical immigrants? In the interactions with the Turks, Chinese and Arabs in Romania are you aware that each represents their group membership? Responses were measured on a Likert scale in 6 points from not at all, never – very often, always. Alpha Cronbach for this scale was 0.72.

Attitudes towards immigrants in Romania was measured using the prejudice scale of Pettigrew (1998), adapted for the Romanian context. The scale includes 19 items and measures both types of prejudice, 9 items for the explicit prejudice (Alpha Cronbach – 0,87) and 10 item for the implicit prejudice (Alpha Cronbach - 0,73). Scoring was done by using a Likert scale from 1 to 6, where 1 mean strongly disagree and 6 strongly agree, high scores indicating a high level of prejudice.

2.3. Procedures

The study began with the testing of perceptions of Romanian students at the "Al. I. Cuza" University on the most common categories of immigrants in Romania during 2013-2014. Based on these data, we selected types of immigrants: Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, French, Italian and Spanish have been attitudinal improvements through experimental manipulation. It involved the construction of four experimental conditions and one control. The experimental conditions were supposed using the material of prototypical images for each category of immigrants, pre-tested with a group of experts and a text. The text has introduced some positive information about the categories of immigrants who live in Romania and Romanians positive similarities. After observing the photos and reading the text, participants completed scales for individual prejudice, intergroup contact and salient groups. In the control condition, subjects were asked to complete the scale without looking at the pictures and read the texts.

2.4. Results

Following the analysis of the frequency categories of immigrants perceived by Romanian students, showed that the most numerous immigrants in Romania during 2013-2014 are Arabs, Chinese and Turks. Testing does not take into account concentration, dispersion or representativeness immigration phenomenon in Romania, being only a rough

estimate a representation of the students at the "Al. I. Cuza" University of the number of immigrants existing at some point in Romania.

Experimental conditions created allowed us to formulate the following assumptions:

H1: Emphasizing the similarities between Romanian students and immigrants in Romania leading to a positive assessment of the immigrants.

H2: Presenting several categories of immigrants in Romania determines their positive evaluation; no effect is expected when only one category of immigrants is presented.

H3: Explicit information about immigrants in Romania leading to a positive assessment.

H4: Positive contact and often with immigrants in Romania reduces bias when groups of belonging are salient.

The first hypothesis was tested by comparing the experimental condition 2 with the control.

The hypothesis is confirmed, the average scores obtained at the scale of the prejudice in the control condition (M = 69, 66, SD = 6, 14) is significantly higher (t = -2, 77, p = 0,007), than that obtained in the condition underline the similarities between and the Romanian immigrants in Romania (M = 64, 86, SD = 1, 31). In other words there is an attitudinal improvement of Romanian students toward immigrants, meaning more favorable assessment in terms of the emergence of the positive similarities with the native population, than in their absence.

The second hypothesis was verified by comparing conditions one and four. The hypothesis is invalidated, obtaining an insignificant difference (t =-1.19, p = 0.23) between the presentation of the 6 types of immigrants (Arabs, Chinese, Turks, Spaniards, French and Italians), (M = 66, 26, SD = 10, 54) and the presentation of the 3 types of immigrants (Arabs, Chinese and Turks) (M = 63, 30, SD = 8.64). To increase the number of immigrants in the presentation beyond those with the highest frequency was found to not have a significant effect on attitudinal change to native people.

The third hypothesis was tested by comparing the experimental condition three and the control. The hypothesis is confirmed, the average scores obtained at the scale of the prejudice in the control condition (M = 69, 66, SD = 6, 14) is significantly higher (t =-4.8, p = 0.0001) compared with that obtained in explicit upon presentation of information about immigrants in Romania (M = 61. 07, SD = 7, 65). Message exactly represented explicitly as a prerequisite to a positive evaluation of immigrants by Romanian students.

A univariate analysis of variance ANOVA was used to test the hypothesis four. Thus, no significant main effects were obtained for the three independent variables, the amount of contact (F = 1.63, p = 0.20), quality of contact (F = 2.09, p = 0.35) and salient groups (F = 0.36, p = 0.54), as did not result in any significant effect of their interaction (F = 2.11, p = 0.12). Therefore, the hypothesis was invalidated. A possible explanation for these results is based on the large number of participants who reported a low contact with immigrants in Romania. Romanian social context in which the study was made was homogeneous in terms of ethnic, cultural or religious. Therefore, does not constitute a standard for valuing the contact and the less of its moderation by emphasizing or not groups belonging.

Discussion

Our study examined the effects that can be achieved by experimental manipulation of variables based on several theoretical perspectives, exploring the flexibility attitudinal and interactional dynamics of the Romanian population category. Results of the research have shown the presence of the positive effects of Romanian students' prejudice towards immigrant for two of the three factors involved in the analysis model. It is possible an improvement in attitudes towards immigrants through a program that focuses on positive similarities with the natives and explicit presentation of information on the socio-economic and educational foreigners in Romania.

We are aware of the fact that change attitudinal may not be long-term and that's because exposure to experimental conditions was short-lived. The long term effect would involve frequent and positive contact with immigrants in Romania, or as noted, based on our research that have disproved the hypothesis four, we deal with a small number of contacts with members of the out – group, a social context undiversified in terms of cultural, ethnic, racial, in which case both the contact value and salient group membership variables are second order in the case to reduce prejudice against immigrants in Romania, variables should moderate hypothetical contact.

A research on the phenomenon of immigration is required to be strongly rooted in specific cultural, social environment, ideology, identity and values of the participants and especially to take into account the complexity of intergroup relations and representations about the out - group at a time looking. The fact that the diversity of immigrant category there was not a variable leading to attitudinal change can be explained by its absence in Romanian social climate, the lack of perceptual variability of immigrants, Romanian students facing few times with different people in terms of its cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, etc. Either this is an effect of social homogeneity Romanian context today. But the hypothesis can be confirmed by the changes that will occur in the social structure as a result of migrations in the next few years, when immigrants' frequencies will change and, subsequently, amount of intergroup contact at students' level will increase.

Beyond the positive effects that we have reached the proposed model, the study has two limitations. We cannot rule out alternative explanations present in a situation of experimental manipulation, when there are several aspects that contribute to the achievement of results. A second limit concerns the participants in this study: students from the same cultural and geographical space (Moldavia), with a low average age, 22 years. Perhaps it would have been useful in such research to observe dynamic attitudes at subjects from another cultural group with a higher average age and with other non-university education. All these are prerequisites for a future research reply with a diverse group of subjects.

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