

Asymmetric Mutual Social Perception of Austrians and Germans: A Social Identity Approach Assessing Implicit and Explicit Attitudes

Walter Renner, Ph.D.¹, Bartosz Gula², Maximilian Wertz, BSc.³, Stefan Fritzsche⁴

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ABSTRACT

Whereas Austrians tend to perceive Germans as "competent but cold", Germans tend to see Austrians as "incompetent but nice" in the sense of Fiske's Stereotype Content Model. With respect to the unequal distribution of power between Austria and Germany, which outnumbers Austria by approximately the tenfold population, Social Identity Theory (SIT) predicts that Austrians will tend to devalue Germans, attempting to preserve their self-esteem and cultural identity. Germans, on the other hand, will perceive Austrians more positively. We tested this expectation with N = 31 Austrian and N = 49 German students at an Austrian university. Our hypotheses of asymmetrical mutual attitudes and massive devaluation of Germans by Austrians were confirmed by the Implicit Association Test; whereas on adjective lists as an explicit measure, Austrians described Germans more favourably so as not to appear prejudiced. The results support SIT and have important implications for the development of Austrian academic education.

Introduction

Cultural Tension Actualized by Increasing Numbers of German Students at Austrian Universities

In spite of their similar language, Austrian and German cultures differ in important respects. For example, Hofstede (1984) found marked differences between the two countries on the dimension of Power Distance (Germany 35 vs. Austria 11 points), suggesting that Germans would lay more emphasis than Austrians on competence and authority, and on the dimension of Masculinity (Germany 59 vs. Austria 75 points) indicating a more traditional view of gender roles among Austrian respondents. Austrians (55 points) scored lower than Germans (67 points) on Individualism, pointing to Austrians' tendency to preserve harmony, and to Germans' willingness to fight for their rights. In the more recent large scale GLOBE study of organizational practices and values, Austria scored higher than Germany with respect to practices (but not values) related to Collectivism (Gelfand, Bhawuk, Nishii & Bechtold, 2004) and Power Distance (Carl, Gupta & Javidan, 2004), and also scored considerably higher than Germany on practices and values related to "Humane Orientation" indicating a strong concern for others (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004).

The latter finding agrees with Muhr's (2008) linguistic comparison: Germans tend to argue, whereas Austrians rather avoid conflict; Germans prefer a pragmatic way of approaching problems, whereas Austrians take interpersonal considerations and status into account asking politely rather than demanding things. For Germans, rules are there to be abided by, whereas Austrians tend to adapt rules to situational necessities. These differences tend to be exaggerated in Austrians' prejudiced perception of Germans as know-it-all type, snotty and arrogant people.

The Vienna University of Economics and Business investigated the respective images the citizens of various nations had of each other: From 380 interviews with Austrians, Höglinger and Kleedorfer (2008) and Moravitz (2007) by a questionnaire study found that Germans described Austrians as far more likeable than vice versa. Germans perceived Austrians as nice people, known for their charm, hospitality, cuisine and mentioning the beautiful countryside. However, at the same time, they described Austrians as neither very

¹ Professor, Pan European University, Faculty of Psychology, Tematinska 10, 85 105 Bratislava, Slovak Republic. E-Mail: walter.renner@aau.at, Phone: ++43 / 2700 1608

² Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Austria, E-mail: bartosz.gula@aau.at

³ Research Assistant, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Universitaetsstrasse 65-67, 9020 Klagenfurt, Austria, Phone: (00)43 463 2700 1605, Email: mwertz@edu.uni-klu.ac.at

⁴ Research Assistant, Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Universitaetsstrasse 65-67, 9020 Klagenfurt, Austria, Phone: (00)43 463 2700 1605, Email: mwertz@edu.uni-klu.ac.at

dependable nor industrious or educated. The Austrian sample, on the other hand, perceived Germans as cold and bossy, but also as competent, industrious and well-informed.

These near representative findings converge with previous results by Fischer (1992) on the ethnic stereotypes, N = 100 German students reported to have of other nations. They perceived Austrians in a predominantly positive way as gregarious and cultivated, generous and loving children, helpful, hospitable, jovial, and enterprising and Austria was perceived as having low criminality, no slums, and neither much social conflict nor bureaucracy. On the other hand, only low degrees of technological progress or social advancement, thoroughness, or financial interest were ascribed to Austrians.

Amashauffer (2012), on the basis of an online survey (N = 198) reported Austrians to perceive Germany as a highly urban (73% of responses) and economically successful (82%) nation though, at the same time, being plagued by joblessness (90%), youth riots (75%), criminality (58%), and environment pollution (52%). Austrians characterized Germans as self confident (73%), ambitious (67%), sporty (58%), and modern (49%), though boastful (88%), intrusive (71%) and narrow-minded (54%).

Based on McClelland's theory of motivation, Michal (2007) analyzed New Year speeches of high rank Austrian, German, and Italian politicians between 1970 and 2003 in order to examine a possible "kernel of truth" in the respective country images. Michal's conclusion was that Germans in fact had "by far the highest degree of achievement motivation" among the three nations, and "the stereotypes of industry, efficiency, zeal etc. do in fact characterize Germans best", whereas "Austria reaches average scores among the three countries, thereby confirming the popular stereotype of being the more moderate sister nation of Germany" (p. 252, translated from German). Similarly, Austria scored only moderately on the power motive.

At Austrian universities the tension between the two nations currently is being actualized with the increasing numbers of German students, especially with a major in psychology. In 2005, the European Court decided that foreign students from the EU must be admitted at the same conditions as nationals. Traditionally, any person having completed secondary education was entitled to study whatever major in Austria. Germany, on the contrary, especially for popular subjects like psychology has very strict admission criteria. Therefore, there have been lately an increasing number of Germans studying in Austria, a country of about one tenth of Germany's population. For example, in the Winter Term 2012/13, at Innsbruck University, 171 out of 227 first year students of psychology or 75.3% were Germans (Salzburg: 145 out of 187 or 77.5%; Vienna: 259 out of 519 or 49.9%; Klagenfurt 44 out of 119 or 37.0%). Consequently, Austria had to abandon its policy of free university access, and Austrian applicants have to compete with their German colleagues for limited numbers of university places.

Renner, Salem, and Menschik-Bendele (2012) found that German students had difficulties in understanding Austrian mentality and to communicate with Austrians. In a pilot study in the course of a seminar at Innsbruck University, German students reported being faced with subtle forms of discrimination in academic life (e.g., being excluded from communication by Austrian fellows), but also with open discrimination in everyday life outside university. For example, students complained that their colleagues had been refused renting a room because of being Germans, or were shouted at when the other person had become aware of their German accent. A German flag had been burnt in public by hooligans in the course of a sports event, causing some of the German respondents to avoid attending further such events out of fear. Some Germans reported having been threatened by their neighbours that they would cut the tires of their cars, or when driving in Austria were bullied by Austrian drivers once they were aware of their German license plates.

Asymmetrical Cultural Attitudes: Social Identity Theory and the Stereotype Content Model

As summarized above, Germans' images of Austria tend to be more positive than vice versa. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978) suggests that similarity of culture can be perceived as threatening a country's identity: Typically, the population of the less powerful or smaller country will denigrate the more powerful one in an attempt to preserve self-esteem and group identity. Following this approach, Austrians' tendency of accusing Germans of being cold, bossy, and arrogant may be understood as a way of preserving "face" as a reaction to endangered identity. At the same time Germans' more favorable, though patronizing view of Austria, can be explained by this model.

Testing these assumptions from SIT, van Oudenhoven, Askevis-Leherpeux, Hannover, Jaarsma & Dardenne (2002) found asymmetrical international attitudes between geographically close and linguistically similar countries that differed in size. Van Oudenhoven, Selenko, and Otten (2010) also confirmed their predictions of asymmetrical attitudes reporting that Austrian respondents perceived Germans as less likeable than vice versa. Additional results of this study pointed to the role of language similarity: Attitudes towards Germany were more negative between German speaking than they were among French speaking Swiss respondents.

This asymmetric theoretical view of attitudes among Austrians and Germans is further supported by historical considerations. Uhl (2012) pointed out quite correctly that, whereas many Austrians in 1938, hoping for economic recovery enthusiastically welcomed the invasion of the country by the Nazis. However, post-war Austria tended to refuse taking responsibility for the atrocities committed during the time of the annexation to Germany (the so-called *Opferthese*, according to which Austria was Hitler's first victim [= Opfer]), and in 1952 refused the requests by the *Jewish Claims Conference* arguing "that all the suffering that had been caused to Jews during that time had been done by Germans, not by Austrians" (p. 150, translated from German). After post-war time, the *Opferthese* ceased to be officially argued and was gradually abandoned. The re-establishment of Austrian national identity was complicated and delayed, not only by reluctance to take responsibility for the past, but also the fact that 500,000 Austrians had been members of the NSDAP continuing to exert political and administrative influence (Uhl, 2012).

Asymmetric respective stereotypes of Austrians and Germans also correspond to Fiske's (2000) worldwide typology of prejudice (cf., Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, and Glick, 1999), according to which "(a) paternalistic prejudice toward the incompetent but nice, subordinate outgroup; (b) envious prejudice toward the competent but cold higher-status outgroup" (p. 313) can be distinguished. As Fiske et al. (1999) pointed out, the "competent" vs. "warm" antagonism of stereotypes, corresponds to Rosenberg, Nelson and Vivekanathan's (1968) finding obtained by multidimensional scaling suggesting that interpersonal perception tends to distinguish between traits associated with *intellectual* desirability (i.e., competence), on the one hand, and those pertaining to *social* desirability (i.e., warmth) on the other (cf. also, Phalet and Poppe, 1997). Finally, in the light of seemingly scarce resources at universities, "realistic conflict" in the sense of Sherif and Sherif (1969) must be expected to act as the trigger for prejudice, social exclusion, or open racism.

Implicit Attitudes: The MODE Model

Assessing inter-group attitudes in students of psychology, who may wish to be perceived as unprejudiced poses the problem of impression management bias. In contrast, so-called "implicit" attitudes (e.g., the Implicit Association Test, IAT, Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) are free from such influences. The IAT assesses the time needed for categorizing positive vs. negative attributes that had been paired visually with the concepts of interest (e.g., Black vs. White faces). Mean differences of reaction times indicate an automatic tendency to prefer one concept to the other.

The acronym MODE stands for "Motivation and Opportunity as Determinants of the Attitude-Behavior Relation" (Olson & Fazio, 2009, p. 19). When assessing "explicit" attitudes by questionnaires, respondents might be motivated not to appear prejudiced and also have the opportunity to control their reactions. On the IAT, on the other hand, even a motivated individual would not have this opportunity. Therefore, for racial or cultural prejudice, implicit and explicit attitudes usually diverge. In their meta-analysis of 122 papers (total N=14,900), Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, and Banaji (2009) indicated that the predictive validity of the IAT was superior to explicit measures of inter-racial attitudes. As a result of impression management, especially in White Liberals, preferences of Whites over Blacks differed when implicit (Cohen's $d = 0.55$) as opposed to explicit attitudes ($d = 0.15$) were assessed, which reflects "the propensity to consciously deny feelings and thoughts either because of social (external) pressures or personal (internal) standards" (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002, p. 111).

Rationale of the Present Study

From Social Identity Theory we expected asymmetrical attitudes between Austrians and Germans. Whereas both national groups were expected to view their respective in-group more favourable than the out-group, we expected that German stimuli would be perceived by Austrians in a significantly more negative way than vice versa.

In accordance with the MODE model we expected these effects to be clearly reflected by implicit attitude measures. When using explicit measures, however, we expected that these effects would be concealed by the respondents' desire, "not to appear prejudiced".

Methodology

Participants

Eighty psychology students at Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt participated. Thirty-one of them (24 female) were Austrians and 49 (36 female) were Germans. Their mean age was 23.5 years ($s = 5.2$).

The required sample size was estimated in advance according to considerations of statistical power. Expecting large effects (Cohen's $d > 0.80$), a sample size of approximately $N = 30$ in each of the sub-samples seemed appropriate, using the online tool G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Participants were offered course credits in order to secure their motivation.

Measures

Implicit Measure

On the IAT task, "Austria" vs. "Germany" were used as the concepts, and "good" vs. "bad" as the attributes. The block design as recommended by Gawronski, Deutsch, and Banse (2011) was employed. The stimuli for "Austria" were the names of the cities Vienna (Wien), Graz, and Salzburg, and for "Germany" Berlin, Frankfurt, and Stuttgart as well as pictures of a car's license plate and the national flag for each country. Attribute stimuli were taken from the Berlin Affective Word List (Vo, Jacobs, & Konrad, 2006) and approximately matched for word length and lexical word frequency. Stimuli with positive valence were for example love/Liebe, freedom/Freiheit, or paradise/Paradies. Stimuli with negative valence were for example force/zwingen, to hit/schlagen, or torture/Folter. The order of combined blocks was constant, with the categories Austria and good (vs. Germany and bad) associated with the same response key being presented first. The D measure (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003) was used to assess the implicit preference for Germany over Austria. We computed this measure for each participant as the difference between the mean response times in the compatible and incompatible blocks divided by the (inclusive) standard deviation across all trials of the corresponding blocks.

Explicit Measure

In a pilot study we had asked German and Austrian students to characterize the respective out-group by adjectives. Austrians had characterized Germans most frequently by adjectives like ambitious/zielstrebig, precise/genau, or committed/fleißig, but also as arrogant/arrogant and loud/laut (cf., Fiske's (2000) "competent, but cold" type of prejudice). Conversely, Germans characterized Austrians by adjectives like slow/langsam, conservative/konservativ, tradition-minded/traditions bewusst, and patriotic/patriotisch, but also as friendly/freundlich, humorous/humorvoll, unhurried/gemütlich, and helpful/hilfsbereit, to name only a few examples. For young students of psychology the first group of adjectives clearly has a touch of being "underdeveloped" and thus Austrians' perception by Germans corresponds to Fiske's (2000) "incompetent, but nice" type of prejudice. In the present study, the most frequently named 16 of these adjectives characterizing the respective outgroup were rated on a scale reaching from no agreement (0) to full agreement (6).

Results

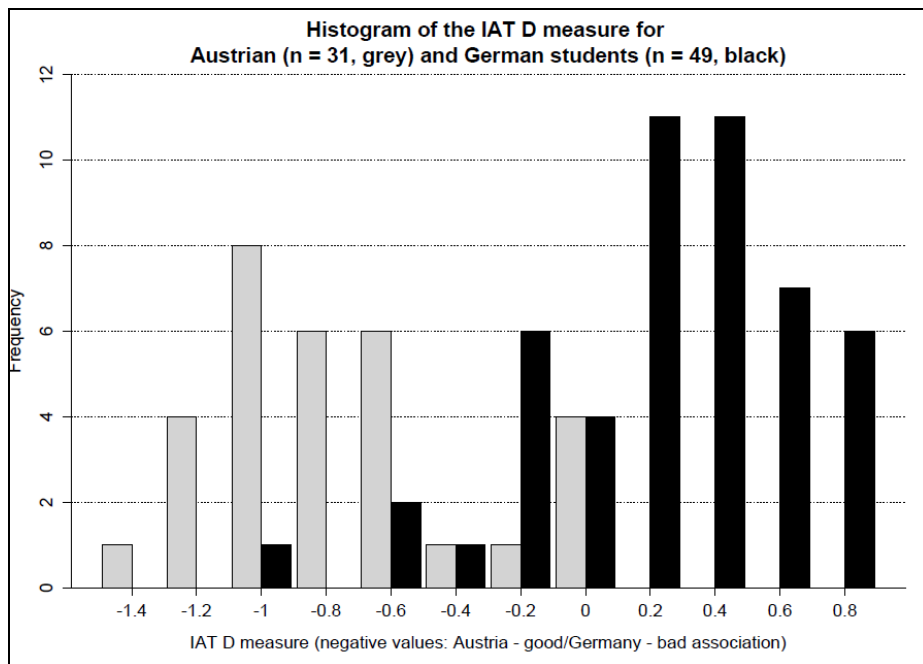
Implicit Measure

Table 1 shows the mean reaction times, the relative correctness, and mean IAT D-scores for each block for German and Austrian participants. Austrian and German students' IAT scores differed significantly from each other ($t[66] = 10.88, p < .001$). In both groups, D-scores differed significantly from zero: $t_{AUT}(30) = 9.04, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.62$ and $T_{GER}(48) = 6.02, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .86$. A group difference of Cohen's $d = 2.48$ was computed. IAT D-scores are also visualized in Figure 1. Positive D-values indicate positive bias towards Germany and negative bias towards Austria and vice versa.

Table 1: Mean reaction times in milliseconds (RT), standard deviations (in parentheses), relative correctness and IAT D-scores obtained from Austrians and Germans

	Blocks 3 and 4: Austria – good vs. Germany – bad		Blocks 6 and 7: Germany – good vs. Austria - bad		IAT D Score: Blocks 3, 4 – Blocks 6, 7
	Mean RT	Relative Correctness	Mean RT	Relative Correctness	
Austrian students	779 (195)	.98 (.02)	993 (185)	.92 (.06)	-.63 (.39)
German students	930 (180)	.93 (.06)	805 (138)	.96 (.04)	.35 (.41)

Figure 1: Histogram of IAT D-scores for Austrian (grey bars) vs. German (black bars) respondents.



Explicit Measure

Adjective ratings were factor analyzed by principal components analysis with varimax rotation. For the perception of Germans by Austrians, on the basis of the Scree criterion, three factors were extracted, which explained a total of 73.6% of the variance and were named *Zealousness* (e.g., exact/genau, orderly/ordentlich), *Arrogance* (e.g., bumptious/wichtiguerisch, know-it-all/besserwisserisch), and *Communicativeness* (e.g., communicative/kommunikativ, reserved/distanziert [Reversed]). Scale means were 4.37 (s=1.08) for Zealousness, 2.32 (s = 1.27) for Arrogance, and 4.13 (s = 1.12) for Communicativeness. Thus, Austrians reported to perceive Germans as moderately "zealous" and "communicative" and as only slightly "arrogant" (with the mean rating about half a standard deviation below the neutral scale mean).

For the perception of Austrians by Germans, by the Scree criterion, two factors were extracted, which together explained 60.6% of the variance. Factor I, was termed *Friendliness* (e.g., relaxed/entspannt, funny/lustig; scale mean 3.94, s = 0.97)) and Factor II, was named *Traditionalism* (e.g., patriotic/patriotisch, loving one's-home-country/heimatverbunden; scale mean 4.23, s = 1.08). Both means are about 1 standard deviation above the neutral centre of the scale. Thus, Germans reported to perceived Germans as moderately "friendly" and "conservative".

For none of the adjective scales, significant correlations with the IAT were found.

Discussion

In line with our expectations, on the IAT, both Austrians and Germans perceived their ingroup more favourably than their outgroup. In accordance with Social Identity Theory, by the IAT a marked devaluation of Germany by Austrians was found, whereas devaluation of Austria by Germans was small. We also found as expected, that Austrians, obviously out of the desire "not to appear prejudiced," reported only a slight degree of devaluation of their German colleagues on the adjective scales as a measure of explicit attitudes. The non-significant correlations between the explicit and the implicit measures point to the same direction.

The group difference of Cohen's $d = 2.48$, found on the IAT considerably exceeds the differences observed for example by Rudman and Ashmore (2007), between Jews and Christians ($d = 1.64$) or between White and African Americans ($d = 1.09$). German students' mean D score for the difference between Blocks 3, 4 and Blocks 6, 7 (cf., Table 1) resembles the scores found by the same authors, namely $D = .39$ for White vs. African Americans, $D = .42$ for White vs. Asian Americans, and $D = .37$ for Christian vs. Jews. The D values found for Germans' perception by Austrians found in the present study are considerably higher.

Important limitations in interpreting this result pertain to Gawrowski et al.'s (2011) finding that larger IAT effects are to be expected if stereotype congruent blocks are presented prior to the stereotype-incongruent blocks. For example, when Greenwald et al. (1998) compared implicit attitudes towards flowers vs. insects or musical instruments vs. weapons, they found a $d = 0.78$ for the "incongruent first" and a $d = 2.30$ for the "congruent first" condition. In the present study, blocks with "Austria" and "good" on the same side were presented first. This "stereotype congruent" arrangement might lead to an over-estimation of the IAT effect for Austrians, whereas the "stereotype-incongruent" arrangement might lead to an under-estimation for Germans.

Considering Greenwald et al.'s (1998) above mentioned findings, however, the $d = 2.48$ (in the case of the "congruent blocks first" condition) still corresponds to a "large" effect ($d = 0.8$) in the case of an opposite order of presentation. Moreover, following recommendations by Nosek, Greenwald, and Banaji (2005), in order to reduce block-order effects, the training block between the two combined conditions of the IAT consisted of the double number of trials. In summary, although the extremely high degree of the group difference observed may be due in part to technical effects, it still may be safely concluded that Austrian bias against Germany by far exceeds German bias against Austria.

Our findings support SIT and confirm the MODE model, which suggests that questionnaire measures of attitudes are prone to impression management. The results also are of practical importance with respect to the living conditions of German guest students in Austria. Anecdotal evidence with respect to their severe discrimination in public life and to more subtle forms of social exclusion at university should be taken seriously, and further research towards developing countermeasures is strongly recommended.

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