



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Language Sciences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/langsci

Explicit and implicit speaker evaluations and their differential attitudinal determinants

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 January 2018

Received in revised form 19 June 2018

Accepted 19 June 2018

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Speaker evaluations

Explicit-implicit distinction

Evaluative priming task

Language attitudes

Nationality attitudes

Differential predictive validity

ABSTRACT

Previous speaker evaluation studies have traditionally assessed the influence of attitudes toward languages with explicit self-report measures. Social-cognitive theories positing a differential influence of explicit and implicit attitudes on controlled versus automatic evaluative responses have not been addressed in this domain thus far. In addition to separating attitudes toward languages from attitudes toward nationality, the aim of this study was to test whether explicit and implicit speaker evaluations refer to distinct concepts. We expected that explicit attitudes would be stronger predictors of deliberate speaker evaluations than implicit attitudes would. By contrast, we expected that automatic evaluations examined with an evaluative priming task would primarily reflect implicit attitudes. Results showed that explicit speaker evaluations were influenced by explicit attitudes toward nationality, whereas implicit evaluations were mainly predicted by implicit attitudes toward nationality. The crucial role of speaker's nationality in speaker evaluation processes is further discussed within the framework of implicit group processes.

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1. Introduction

The language a person speaks provides potent communicative cues that listeners use to form social impressions of speakers in social interactions (Giles and Marlow, 2011). The evaluation of a speaker is thus influenced by the assessment of the linguistic features (i.e., language or dialect) presented in a given encounter (Giles and Marlow, 2011). Previous speaker evaluation models have proposed that language attitudes are the most salient influential factors underlying listeners' evaluative reactions (for a review, see Giles and Rakić, 2014). To gain knowledge about people's language attitudes, evaluations of speakers have been applied because language attitudes are considered latent constructs and thus difficult to capture (e.g., Bresnahan et al., 2002).

Previous studies on speaker evaluations have primarily employed explicit self-reports, which have the advantage of being easily generated. However, they come with the risk of socially desirable responding when participants wish to avoid providing socially unacceptable responses (Hofmann et al., 2005). This issue may be particularly relevant when studies involve socially sensitive topics, such as the evaluation of groups or individuals (Cargile, 2002).

Furthermore, in daily social encounters during which people often lack sufficient motivational or cognitive resources, there is a need for swift impression formation (Bargh, 2006; Fazio and Towles-Schwen, 1999). Various theoretical frameworks

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have consistently offered a distinction between two different cognitive processes that can be divided into more explicit (controlled) reasoning, on the one hand, and implicit (automatic) processing, on the other (for a review, see [Gawronski and Creighton, 2013](#)). Specifically, researchers have argued that deliberate responses are primarily influenced by explicit attitudes, whereas spontaneous and automatic evaluations primarily reflect implicit attitudes (e.g., [Fazio and Towles-Schwen, 1999](#)). This differential predictive impact of explicit and implicit attitudes has not yet been tested in the domain of speaker evaluations.

Furthermore, most speaker evaluation research has been conducted in monolingual contexts with one dominant language. These contexts are characterized by the fact that language and nationality are closely related concepts because, for instance, a person speaking German in France can reliably be categorized as a German national. Multilingual societies require a complex consideration of the concepts of language, nationality, and speaker, thus highlighting the lack of adequate models. For instance, in the linguistically highly diverse context of Luxembourg, language does not qualify as a reliable indicator of a speaker's nationality because various national groups live together and use multiple languages ([Horner and Weber, 2008](#)). As indicated in [Fig. 1](#), language and nationality attitudes should be treated as distinct concepts on both an explicit and an implicit level ([Lehnert et al., 2016, 2018](#)). It is interesting that differences have been identified between explicit and implicit attitudes such that multilinguals' preferences for their own language and group were apparent only on an implicit level ([Lehnert et al., 2016, 2018](#)). To gain comprehensive insights into the determinants of multilinguals' explicit and implicit speaker evaluations in Luxembourg, in the present study, we extended the model by positing that explicit and implicit speaker evaluations should be distinct and that explicit and implicit attitudes should differentially predict such speaker evaluations.

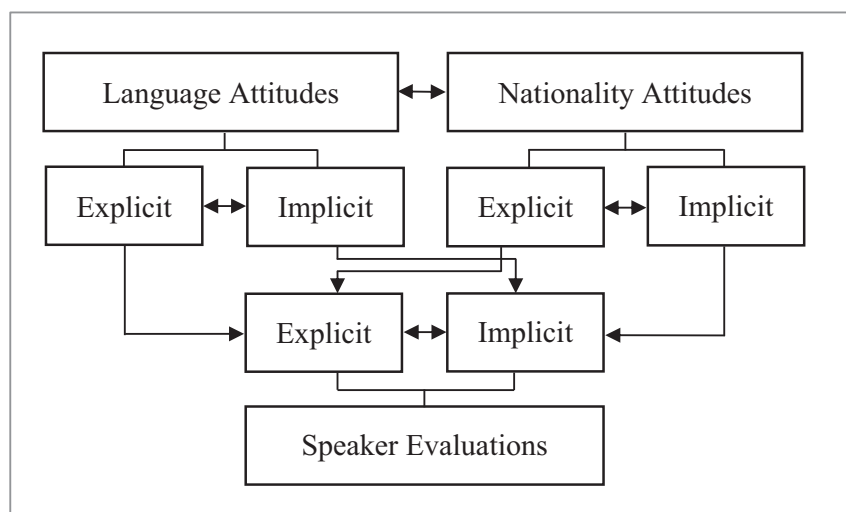


Fig. 1. The extended speaker evaluation model suggesting the differential predictive validity of explicit and implicit attitude types.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Explicit versus implicit social cognition

In social cognition research, several so-called dual process models have made an essential contribution to the understanding of attitudes and their influences on evaluative outcomes in recent decades (for a review, see [Gawronski and Creighton, 2013](#)). In simplified terms, attitudes can be defined as mental associations between a social object and a favorable or unfavorable valence ([Eagly and Chaiken, 1993](#); [Greenwald et al., 2002](#)). A common feature of dual process models is that they distinguish between two qualitatively different types of cognitive processes, which describe the distinction between explicit, controlled, and effortful processing on the one hand, and implicit, automatic, and effortless reactions on the other ([Gawronski and Creighton, 2013](#)). Accordingly, people hold two types of attitudes toward the same social object: an explicit attitude and an implicit attitude ([Wilson et al., 2000](#)). These two modes of social environment processing are expected to work in parallel and to influence each other (e.g., [Deutsch and Strack, 2006](#); [Perugini, 2005](#); [Whitfield and Jordan, 2009](#)). Moreover, there is conclusive evidence that both explicit and implicit attitudes can affect people's evaluative reactions ([Bargh, 2002](#); [Greenwald et al., 2009](#)). Certain preconditions are central for the predominance of explicit or implicit processes and the interaction of these two processes on the path to the formation of evaluations ([Gawronski and Creighton, 2013](#)). If sufficient motivational and cognitive resources are available, explicit attitudes can override implicit attitudes and predominantly affect evaluative outcomes. By contrast, if these resources are missing, implicit attitudes tend to play a larger role in determining individuals' evaluations, leading to different predictions for the impacts of the two attitude types (MODE; [Fazio and Towles-](#)

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