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The Factors Of Face Perception And Recognition Of Distant Ethnic Groups

Maryna Chorney ^{a*}

^a *Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, 1 Mykolajchuka st., apt.11, Chernivtsi, Ukraine 58005*

Abstract

The problem of interethnic face perception and cross-ethnic effect is being analyzed in the paper. A research procedural and methodological support is proposed. The results of empirical research of own (Ukrainian) and distant ethnic groups' (Chinese, Arabian, African and Hindu people) face recognition peculiarities are presented. The factors that affect the interethnic faces perception are determined. The role of social distance and communication experience with foreigners as main factors of cross-ethnic effect manifestation are described. The influence of cross-ethnic effect on human communication and interaction is discussed.

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1. Introduction

In today's world, people socially interact with many other people from various ethnic groups. This is due to the growth of migration flows and the availability of interpersonal communication opportunities via the Internet and its additional means (Skype, Viber, social networks, etc.). Perception of faces is an important aspect of social interaction. The ability to recognize human faces of different categories (for example, different age, sex or ethnic group) may affect the way these groups of persons will be perceived. The investigation of specificity of interethnic perception of the face allows deeper analyzing the impact of this process on the further course of interethnic interaction.

* Maryna Chorney. Tel.: +38-050-290-4110
E-mail address: marynkamandarynka@gmail.com

In the modern psychological science researches that are directed on the face perception study are carried out mainly focusing on two aspects: perception of facial expressions (Calder, et. al., 2001; Ekman, 2003) and perception of individual psychological personality traits (Berry, & Finch-Wero, 1993; Diamond, & Carey, 1986).

The ethnic dimension of face perception and recognition has just recently started to be studied actively by scientists. The scholars consider the problem of face recognition through the prism of “cross-ethnic effect” or “cross-race effect” - a reduced ability to recognize faces and facial expressions to understand people who do not belong to their own ethnic / racial group (MacLin, & Malpass, 2003; Furl, et. al., 2002; Levin, 2000; Meissner, et. al., 2008). The most of studies explain the emergence of cross-ethnic effect by the presence or absence of communication experience with other ethnic groups or social categorization. The other social and psychological factors that influence the manifestation of this effect have remained without attention by researchers.

2. Methodology

The purpose of our research is to identify the main factors that affect the face perception and recognition of representatives of own (Ukrainian) and distant ethnic groups (Chinese, Arabian, African and Hindu). We are interested in research of distant ethnic groups' recognition because the most difficulties appear while Ukrainian perceive representatives of these ethnic groups (Kovalenko, & Surudzhii, 2013).

2.1. Participants

In general, 351 persons participated in first and second parts of research. 271 students from Kyiv National University named after T. Shevchenko (Kyiv) and Chernivtsi Industrial College (Chernivtsi) were the participants. 148 of the participants were female and 123 participants were male, aged from 18 to 25. Also 80 more people from 15 to 50 years old (36 male and 44 female) participated in the ascertaining experiment. Nationality – Ukrainians (by self-identification). Profiles of other nationalities were not taken into account and were not treated in this investigation.

2.2. Stimuli and Materials

The first part of the study was conducted after a questionnaire was specially created. It consisted of methodic, addressed to study individual psychological features of examinees' personalities (“the Big Five”), social perception of other ethnic groups' representatives (the Bogardus social distance scale), personal differential and specially created questionnaire aimed to determine the presence and duration of communication experience with representatives of other ethnic groups.

The second part of the empiric study was conducted along with the first part and provided the conduction of ascertaining experiment using photo materials. Experiment was held in two stages and consisted in demonstration of photo series of the Chinese, African, Arabian, Indian and Ukrainian people's faces. In general there were 20 photographs of faces in each series of materials (each included 4 photos of every ethnic group representatives: 2 male and 2 female, of different age categories). The motivating materials included images of typical representatives of the mentioned above ethnic groups that were randomly chosen beforehand among “real” people that passed by in the street and agreed to be photographed. The individuals were photographed in a frontal pose with a neutral expression at a distance of 75 cm. Twenty faces that had no facial hair or glasses were selected as face stimuli. For instance, see Fig. 1.

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