Cultural differences in the recognition of facial expressions of emotions: No influence of stereotypes

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Facial expressions of emotions (FEE) are universally recognized; yet recognition accuracy does vary across cultures (Prado et al., 2014). According to a social-cognitive perspective, the interpretation of any individual information is biased by the stereotype that is attached to that individual. Thus, a facial expression can be understood only if one considers the relationship that links the sender and decoder and the (stereotyped) representations they hold towards each other (Hess & Philippot, 2007).

The aim of the present research is to study whether the stereotypes Algerians hold towards French people has an influence on their recognition’s accuracy of emotions displayed by French people. The stereotypes are studied according to the social value approach (Beauvois, 1995). Emotions are displayed by spontaneous and dynamic FEE.

**Method**

70 Ss from Algeria (n=35) and France, both city- and country dwellers (n-urban=20; n-rural=15):  
1. rated 11 videos (10 sec.) of French people expressing naturally induced FEE (disgust, boredom, fear, surprise, joy, and a neutral face) on a 13 items forced choice questionnaire.  
2. filled out a 51 items stereotypic questionnaire (from 0 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree) assessing their stereotypes toward French people (α = .77).

**Results** show better emotion recognition accuracy scores (Hu) for French participants as compared to Algerian participants. Among the latter, urban participants recognition scores are better than rural participants’ ones.

A multinomial logistic regression (MLR) shows no effect of stereotypes on emotion recognition scores.

This study, using facial expressions presenting a high ecological validity, shows cross-cultural differences in FEE recognition between Algerians and French people and, in particular, an in-group advantage. The degree of the in-group advantage in emotion recognition varies depending on the specific emotion tested.

Consistent with the literature, this study also shows the existence of cultural stereotypes. More specifically, Algerian and French people draw dissimilar inferences about French people. However, the interpretation of out-group member’s FEE is not biased by stereotypes. Thus, as predicted by the universality perspective, the impact of facial information is too significant for stereotypes to affect emotion attribution.

References:


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