Ostracism is lost in translation: When being ignored and excluded does not matter

Han Kang  Research-Focused Honors Program supervised by Kipling D. Williams

Introduction

Ostracism refers to being ignored and excluded which threatens four basic needs—belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence (Williams, 2009).

Linguistic ostracism is defined as a situation in which two or more people converse in a language that others around them cannot understand. Linguistically ostracized targets have been found perceiving less team potency and coworker attraction than included (Dotan-Eliaz, Sommer, & Rubin, 2009).

Current Hypotheses:
- Ostracism by people speaking a foreign language results in greater psychological distress than ostracism by people speaking in one’s own language.
- Inclusion by people speaking a foreign language results in higher levels of desired aggression and paranoia, than ostracism by people speaking in a foreign language.

Method

122 undergraduates were randomly assigned to a 2 (inclusion/ostracism) × 3 (English/English-Chinese/Chinese) between-S design.

In each experimental session, one participant who did not speak Chinese was in a room with two Chinese confederates.

Ostracism condition was manipulated by confederates conversing either with each other or with the participant. Language condition was manipulated by confederates’ speaking language.

Participants’ basic needs, moods, prosocial and antisocial thoughts, paranoid attributions, and memory of word lists were measured afterward.

Results

Basic Human Needs
- ANOVA: No significant main effects or interaction
- A PRIORI: Participants experienced less need satisfaction when being ostracized than included by English only, but greater when by English switched to Chinese, \(F(1,79)=5.72, p<.02\).

Moods
Participants’ positive vs. negative moods were not affected by either the ostracism condition, or the language condition.

Prosocial Thoughts
- Main Effect: Participants reported fewer prosocial thoughts when Chinese was the only language spoken than English, \(F(2,116)=4.13, p<.02\).

Antisocial Thoughts
- Main Effect: Participants were more tempted to behave antisocially toward the others when being included than ostracized, \(F(1,116)=4.25, p<.05\).

Paranoid Attributions
- Main Effect: More paranoid attributions were made by participants who were included than ostracized, \(F(1,116)=11.39, p<.01\).
- Main Effect: More paranoid attributions were made under the conditions of English to Chinese and Chinese only than English only, \(F(2,116)=11.74, p<.01\).

Memory
Ostracism by a foreign language had no effects on participants’ memory of social vs. nonsocial words.

Discussion

Ostracism is not the end of the world:
- as long as it is in a foreign language
- as inclusion by a foreign language is even worse

References
