Not Knowing Their Language Can Make You Feel More Ostracized: Linguistic Ostracism and Openness

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Background

In a globalized society, a situation where people speak in a language others do not comprehend is more likely to happen in the workplace.

Social ostracism, defined as being ignored and excluded (Williams, 2011), negatively impacts individuals' feelings and experiences. Being ostracized by those who can speak English but purposely don't may aggravate such negative effects. We call this an intentional case of linguistic ostracism (cf. Dotan-Eliaz et al., 2009).

This research seeks to understand the negative effects of linguistic ostracism and to explore whether Openness moderates (alleviates) such negative effects of ostracism.

Hypotheses

Main effects of linguistic ostracism

Hypothesis 1: Individuals in the linguistic ostracism condition will have lower levels of a) belonging, b) self esteem, c) meaningful existence, and d) control than those in the regular ostracism condition.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals in the linguistic ostracism condition will have lower levels of a) evaluation of teamwork, b) team member satisfaction, and c) evaluation of outcome.

Main effects of Openness

Hypothesis 3: Openness will positively predict a) evaluation of teamwork, b) team member satisfaction, and c) evaluation of outcome.

Moderating effects of Openness

Hypothesis 4: Compared to those who are low in Openness, individuals low in Openness in the linguistic ostracism condition will have lower levels of a) belonging, b) self esteem, c) meaningful existence, and d) control than those in the regular ostracism condition.

Hypothesis 5: Compared to those who are high in Openness, individuals low in Openness in the linguistic ostracism condition will have lower levels of a) evaluation of teamwork, b) team member satisfaction, and c) evaluation of outcome.

Method

Participants: 71 American students enrolled at Purdue University in the U.S. (69% female, 100% white, mean age 19.2).

Procedures: Two Confederates were trained to ostracize participants in either the regular ostracism condition (i.e., English) or the linguistic ostracism condition (i.e., Korean) during a 5 minute "social conversation" while the experimenter is 'setting up the computers' at the start of the experiment. In the linguistic ostracism condition, the confederates began by casually talking with each other in English and then immediately switched to Korean for the rest of their interactions, which automatically excluded the participant. Then each participant engaged in an online "problem solving" discussion task in separate rooms with the 2 confederates for 10 minutes.

Measures: Openness was measured with a 10-item scale (α = 0.78; John & Srivastava, 1999); Tolerance, a facet of Openness, was measured with a 9-item scale (α = 0.74; Woo et al., 2013); reflexive and reflective responses to ostracism were measured with a 20-item scale each (α = 0.95, 0.94, respectively; Williams, 1997); and evaluation of teamwork, team member satisfaction, and evaluation of outcome were measured with a 3-item scale each (α = 0.79, 0.90, 0.63).

Results

Hypothesis 1 Supported

Individuals in the linguistic ostracism condition reported lower reflexive responses in the levels of a) belonging (t = 2.76, p < .05), b) self esteem (t = 2.12, p < .05), and c) meaningful existence (t = 3.08, p < .05). The two conditions did not differ in their levels of control (t = .55, ns). The reflective response showed very similar patterns of results, although the effect sizes were slightly smaller.

Hypothesis 2 Not Supported

Individuals in the two ostracism conditions did not significantly differ in the levels of a) evaluation of teamwork, team member satisfaction, and evaluation of outcome.

Hypothesis 3 Partially Supported

Tolerance, an Openness facet, was significantly related to evaluation of teamwork (β = .41, p < .05), team member satisfaction (β = .32, p < .05), and evaluation of outcome (β = .22, p = .06). Openness as a broad dimension did not predict these outcomes.

Hypotheses 4 & 5 Not supported

There were no significant findings on the moderating effects of Openness and Tolerance as hypothesized.