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Effects of country size and language similarity on international attitudes: A six-nation study

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Linguistically similar neighbouring nations that differ in size are often asymmetrical in their attitudinal relations towards each other: Citizens of smaller nations tend to see larger nations as less likeable and less similar than vice versa. We hypothesized that the smaller nations' reaction is the consequence of a threatened identity due to its relative size combined with too much similarity on a vital part of its identity, namely language. To test this hypothesis, 832 high-school students from six different ethnic/national entities (France, Germany, Austria, the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland, the French- and Dutch-speaking parts of Belgium, and The Netherlands) completed a questionnaire on liking and similarity ratings. The results—to a large extent—showed that differences in size, in combination with linguistic similarity with another nation, pose a threat to the identity of the smaller nation or ethnic group. Differences in size, in combination with linguistic similarity, were associated with asymmetries in mutual liking on one hand and asymmetrical perceptions of similarity to the other country on the other hand. The conclusions of this study are consistent with findings of earlier research and stress the importance of language for a nation's identity. Moreover, the findings support social identity theory as a useful theory for understanding intergroup and international relations.

Les nations voisines linguistiquement similaires qui diffèrent en taille sont souvent asymétriques dans leurs relations attitudinales l'une envers l'autre: les citoyens des nations plus petites tendent à voir les nations plus grandes comme moins sympathiques et moins semblables et vice-versa. Notre hypothèse était que la réaction des nations plus petites est la conséquence d'un sentiment de menace à l'identité dû à leur taille réduite combinée avec trop de similitudes concernant une partie vitale de leur identité: c'est-à-dire le langage. Pour tester cette hypothèse, 832 étudiants collégiaux issus de six ethnies/nationalités différentes (la France, l'Allemagne, l'Autriche, la Suisse romande et allemande, la Belgique française et néerlandaise, les Pays-Bas) ont complété un questionnaire sur les taux de sympathie et de similitude. Les résultats ont indiqué que les différences en taille en combinaison avec la similitude linguistique avec une autre nation représentent une menace pour l'identité de la nation ou du groupe ethnique plus petit. Les différences en taille en combinaison avec la similitude linguistique étaient associées, d'une part, avec des asymétries dans la sympathie mutuelle et, d'autre part, avec des perceptions asymétriques de similitude avec l'autre nation. Les conclusions de cette étude sont en accord avec les résultats des études antérieures et soutiennent l'importance du langage pour l'identité d'une nation. De plus, les résultats appuient l'utilité de la théorie de l'identité sociale pour comprendre les relations intergroupes et internationales.

Naciones vecinas con similitudes lingüísticas pero que difieren en tamaño son frecuentemente asimétricas respecto de sus relaciones actitudinales una respecto de la otra. Los ciudadanos de naciones pequeñas tienden a ver a naciones más grandes como menos simpáticas y parecidas que viceversa. Nosotros hipotetizamos que la reacción de las naciones más pequeñas es la consecuencia de una identidad amenazada debido a su menor tamaño combinada con una similitud muy grande relacionada con una parte vital de su identidad: es decir el lenguaje. Para probar esta hipótesis 832 alumnos de la escuela secundaria de seis diferentes grupos étnicos/

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nacionales (Francia, Alemania, Austria, regiones en Suiza en las que se habla francés y alemán, regiones en Bélgica en las que se habla francés y holandés así como los Países Bajos) completaron un cuestionario sobre gustos y similitudes. Los resultados mostraron – en alto grado – que las diferencias en el tamaño en combinación con las similitudes lingüísticas con otras naciones, se asocian con la amenaza de la identidad de las naciones o grupos étnicos más pequeños. Las diferencias en tamaño en combinación con las similitudes lingüísticas estuvieron asociadas con asimetrías respecto del aprecio mutuo por un lado, así como por otro lado, con percepciones asimétricas de similitud con el otro país. Las conclusiones de este estudio son consistentes con los descubrimientos de estudios previos y recalcan la importancia del lenguaje en la identidad de una nación. Adicionalmente estos resultados soportan la Teoría de la Identidad Social como una teoría útil en la comprensión de las relaciones entre grupos así como a nivel de las relaciones internacionales.

Keywords: Asymmetrical international attitudes; Linguistic similarity; Social identity theory.

In general, one would expect attitudes between nations to have a fair level of reciprocity. Sometimes, however, we find *asymmetrical* international attitudes, especially between small and large nations. For example, research suggests that Poles, Czechs, Bulgarians, and Byelorussians rate Russians lower on morality than Russians rate these other groups (Phalet & Poppe, 1997), and Belgian and Dutch individuals reported liking the Germans and the French less than vice versa (van Oudenhoven, Askevis-Leherpeux, Hannover, Jaarsma, & Dardenne, 2002). In the present study, we postulated that asymmetrical attitudes between small and large nations would be particularly pronounced when they have the same or a closely related *language*. We apply social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to explain the effect of language similarity on the occurrence of such asymmetric attitudes. First, however, we address the concept of national identity.

NATIONAL IDENTITY

A common way of defining national identity is to focus on the *features of a nation*. In various reviews of national identity (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1996; Licata, 2003; Schildkraut, 2007; Schlesinger, 1987; Smith, 1971), two factors repeatedly mentioned are “language” and “degree of industrialization”. Language, in particular, is mentioned as a factor that characterizes a country’s identity. ‘One language—one identity’ is a very European notion, which became very popular in the nineteenth century when new states were formed. Of course, a country with one official language has large administrative advantages, but the language also has an identity-building function, sometimes even to the extent that a split of a nation goes hand in hand with a linguistic division. The division of Czechoslovakia is an example of this. Despite the obvious relevance of language for national identity, there are many examples of multi-linguistic nations

that still express national unity (e.g. Switzerland has four official languages). The second feature, degree of industrialization, is a forceful stabilizing factor for a nation’s identity because large internal economic differences between groups often lead to conflicts within a country.

An alternative way of looking at national identity stresses that a national identity will change when the conditions construing it change. For instance, Germany’s importance in Europe certainly has grown as a consequence of German reunification, which in turn might have changed national identity. An aspect of national culture, such as language, also may vary in importance over time. An example is the increasing use of English as the lingua franca of the European Union. English is being used especially in businesses and universities, sometimes at the expense of the official languages.

National identity, therefore, is a continuously reconstructed category (Schlesinger, 1987). This dynamic view of national identities is in line with self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), which states that the salience of social categories is contextually determined. When social self-categorization (i.e., the self as a group member) becomes salient, its normative properties work in a way that orients people towards those characteristics that bind them together and what distinguishes them from other groups. In the present study, language and economic power were chosen as the describing aspects of national identity.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), an individual’s identity originates partly in the context of the groups to which s/he belongs. We define social identity as *a feeling of belonging to a group or social category which affects our social perceptions and behaviour*. People strive to achieve

or maintain a positive social identity, which means that they want their own group membership to be positively distinguishable from other groups. As a consequence, group members tend to favour their own group in comparisons with other groups in intergroup evaluations and allocations (e.g. Brewer, 1991; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1987).

Relating social identity theory to the context of international relations is not new. Tajfel began his theoretical work around issues of national and ethnic identities (Fiske, 2000). By applying social identity theory to the domain of international attitudes, we attempt to explain asymmetrical attitudes between neighbouring countries of unequal size. In most cases, the larger country has more inhabitants, and consequently more power, than the smaller country. The more powerful group has more influence, its decisions have more impact, it utilizes a larger group of media to express its opinions, and its political leaders are generally better known internationally. As a consequence, inhabitants of small nations may have more trouble in maintaining a positive social identity as compared to inhabitants of larger nations. As the power relations themselves are relatively stable, and as giving up one's own nationality is not a feasible option for many, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) predicts that people will apply cognitive strategies to maintain or enhance their social identity. One example of this is "social creativity" strategies (Blanz, Mummendey, Mielke, & Klink, 1998). Especially in situations of socio-structural constraint, where changes in group membership are not possible, people tend to employ creativity strategies (Ellemers, 1993). An example of this would be to select another comparison dimension on which the ingroup scores better in comparison to the outgroup, or to shift one's self-categorization to another level of social identity, e.g. from an Austrian to a European identity.

In international relations the smaller nations' social reality does not easily allow for establishing positive distinctiveness, because many important comparison dimensions are directly related to power (such as international influence and military force). However, there may be other dimensions that are more open for favourable comparisons. By choosing likeability as a comparison dimension, a smaller group manages to distinguish itself positively from larger groups. This would be a typical example of a creativity strategy (Blanz et al., 1998).

When two groups are very much alike, however, it may be difficult for them to distinguish themselves positively one from the other. The more

common features two groups have, the more salient one group's superiority will be to the other group (Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). Therefore, we assume that if in addition to the power difference there is linguistic similarity between the smaller and the larger nation (for instance, Germany and Austria), the social identity of the smaller group, in particular, is threatened. The linguistic similarity makes the larger nation an inevitable social comparison partner, but being a smaller, and consequently a less powerful, nation makes it difficult to obtain positive distinctiveness. For instance, the language that is shared refers explicitly to the larger nation: The official language of Austria is German. Hence, the larger country, having more inhabitants, sets the standard for the language. This means that the larger country influences the smaller nation not only economically and politically, but also linguistically. Correspondingly, citizens of the linguistically similar but smaller nation should perceive a strong threat to its positive distinctiveness and, therefore, provide evidence for asymmetrical attitudes towards the larger neighbour. We therefore expect that members of a smaller nation will rate a larger, linguistically similar, nation as less likeable than they themselves will be rated by individuals from the larger linguistically similar nation (*Hypothesis 1*).

But how can we conclude that asymmetrical ratings are due to the combination of linguistic similarity and differences in size and not just to the differences in size? One way to do so is to compare linguistically similar and dissimilar small nations on their ratings of large countries. This is the primary approach adopted in a study by Van Oudenhoven et al. (2002). One might compare, for instance, evaluations of Germans by Danes and Austrians. Even in this case, however, there is a methodological problem, because discrepancies in attitudes towards the Germans might be attributed to numerous other factors such as different cultural, political, and historical experiences, geographic location, etc. It is not possible to find two countries that are totally alike.

There is, however, in the linguistically complex European context a case that enables us to make a purer comparison. Switzerland has two important linguistic groups that share their language with a neighbouring country. For the Swiss, Germany and France are large nations, but the identity threat would apply in particular to the French-speaking Swiss in relation to the French, and to the German-speaking Swiss in relation to the Germans. This leads us to the following hypothesis: Of two neighbouring countries the inhabitants of the linguistically corresponding part of the

smaller country will like the inhabitants of the larger country less than the inhabitants of the linguistically non-corresponding part of the country (*Hypothesis 2*).

According to social identity theory, the smaller country will try to cope with the identity-threatening situation as a means of re-establishing a positive social identity. Differences in likeability would indicate such a coping attempt. Additionally, however, there is another 'social creativity' strategy that could be employed (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), namely *increasing the perceived distance towards the comparison partner*. Perceived distance (or denying similarity) between two groups is an interesting psychological phenomenon. Objectively, the distance from nation A to nation B is equal to the distance from nation B to nation A. However, psychologically, perceptions of the two estimates may differ considerably. For the smaller country, the distance can help to buffer the social identity threat due to inferiority in size and linguistic similarity; the larger country, however, does not face an identity threat and should not be motivated to exaggerate dissimilarity. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis: In the case of two countries sharing the same language but differing in size, the inhabitants of the smaller country perceive a larger difference between themselves and the inhabitants of the larger similar country than vice versa (*Hypothesis 3a*).

Finally, the need to create a distance can also be observed in the smaller nation's tendency to notice differences between their and the larger nation's version of the shared language. The smaller group speaks more or less the language of the larger group with small variations, but often these variations are stressed. Accordingly, Austrians might emphasize that they speak "Austrian" (Österreichisch), and German-speaking Swiss will say that they speak "Swiss German" (Schwitzerdütsch). Although the actual linguistic difference—the hardware, so to speak—is relatively small (Wodak et al., 1998), psychologically it can be experienced as quite pronounced. This follows from our previous argument: Stressing variation in the language shared with the larger nation can help the smaller nation to (re-)establish its (positive) distinctiveness. Therefore, we predict that if two countries share the same language, the inhabitants of the smaller country will perceive a larger difference between their version and the larger nation's form of the common language than the inhabitants of the larger country (*Hypothesis 3b*).

To summarize, the goal of this study is to discuss international relations using social identity

theory. To test our predictions with respect to asymmetrical attitudes we had to choose linguistically similar neighbouring nations differing in size. Countries fulfilling the conditions of similarity and geographical closeness are: France in comparison to the French-speaking parts of Belgium and Switzerland, and Germany in comparison to Austria and to the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The comparison pairs share a language and are comparable in standard of living but differ in size and number of inhabitants. Moreover, differences in numerical size go along with differences in gross domestic product¹ and, consequently, differences of power.

There are other examples of linguistic similarity between neighbouring European nations, such as the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking area of Belgium. However, because Belgium and the Netherlands are both small countries and because they have almost equal political influence in the European Union, they do not fit the 'small-large nation paradigm'. Therefore, they were not compared with respect to the first two hypotheses. However, linguistically the Dutch surpass the Dutch-speaking Belgians in population in a ratio of 16.5 : 6. Therefore, we included the Dutch and Flemish when testing the hypotheses with respect to perceived (linguistic) similarity.

METHOD

Participants

Respondents were 832 high school students (average age 17.04 years, $SD = 1.47$) from six different countries and 30 different cities: France ($n = 101$), Germany ($n = 87$), The Netherlands ($n = 128$), Austria ($n = 89$), Belgium (123 French-speaking Belgians and 87 Dutch-speaking Belgians), and Switzerland (127 French-speaking Swiss and 90 German-speaking Swiss). The schools were located throughout several regions of the six countries. The researchers contacted the schools and sent information about the project. One week later the schools were contacted again and asked whether they were interested in participating. In total 30 schools took part in the project; 56.9% of the respondents were female. In each country only data from native-born students were included in the analysis.

¹The OECD uses gross domestic product as an indicator for economic competence.

Questionnaire

To measure *likeability* respondents estimated the percentages (1–100) of people from a certain country having the following traits: “tolerant”, “pleasant”, “easygoing”, “friendly”, “having a sense of humour”, and “arrogant” (responses for this last trait were reverse-coded). Each respondent judged each of the six countries in the sample, including their own nation (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands and Switzerland). Cronbach alphas for the likeability scale varied between .80 and .85 across target nations.

Perceived similarity was measured as in the study by van Oudenhoven et al. (2002): “To what degree do you think that the inhabitants of the country concerned resemble the people of your own country?” (1 = absolutely not; 5 = very much). Each respondent was asked to indicate the similarity with each of the participating nations, excluding their own.

To measure *perceived similarity of the languages* the respondents were asked: “To what degree do you think that the language spoken in the country concerned resembles the language of the people of your own country?” Respondents assigned points (1 = no resemblance at all, 100 = identical). In this question, participants were asked their opinion regarding the language of the linguistically similar nation only.

Finally, biographical data, such as age, sex, and nationality, were collected from the respondents.

Procedure

The questionnaire was translated from English into German, Dutch, and French by native speakers of these languages and subsequently back-translated. The schools taking part in the research were randomly selected and contacted by phone. To maximize comparability of the data across the six countries, only high school students were included in the sample. Every respondent was asked to give his or her opinion on every country participating in the study including his/her own country. This was done to verify whether a country’s relationship with its linguistically similar comparison-partner differed from the relation it had with other countries. Respondents took approximately 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Two months later each of the schools received a summary of the results of the study.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: Likeability of linguistically similar smaller nations versus larger nations

We expected that members of smaller nations would express ingroup favouritism by rating the larger linguistically similar nation as less likeable than their own, smaller, nation would be rated by members of the larger nation. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that citizens of smaller countries ($n = 424$) and larger nations ($n = 180$) indeed differed in how well they liked the linguistically corresponding country that differed in size, $F(1, 602) = 64.50, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. *Post-hoc* tests indicated that all four comparison pairs showed significant differences as expected (see Table 1). These results clearly support Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2: Likeability of linguistic similar vs. dissimilar groups within a multi-linguistic nation

Hypothesis 2 stated that in the case of a multi-linguistic country, the liking of the larger nation will be influenced by linguistic similarity. The inhabitants of the linguistically corresponding part of the smaller country will like the inhabitants of the larger country less than the inhabitants of the linguistically non-corresponding part of the country will like that larger country. This implies that inhabitants of the French-speaking part of Switzerland will like the French less than their German-speaking counterparts will like the French. Similarly, we anticipated that inhabitants of the German-speaking part of Switzerland will like the Germans less than their French-speaking fellow Swiss will like the Germans. To test this hypothesis a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with “language group” (German-versus French-speaking Swiss) as the between-group factor and “likeability-rating of the larger nation” (French and German) as the within-group factor. The pattern of answers was in line with the hypothesis. There was a significant effect of the within-subject factor likeability, $F(1, 212) = 39.07, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$. At the overall level, Swiss participants liked the Germans less than the French, $M = 45.50, SD = 16.24$ vs. $M = 52.72, SD = 16.36$. The effect of the between-subject factor “language group” was not significant. Most importantly, there was an interaction effect of language group and liking of the French and Germans, $F(1, 212) = 18.08, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$. A closer

TABLE 1
Likeability ratings between linguistically similar nations differing in size

<i>Pair comparisons</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
French-Belgian (<i>n</i> = 120)	55.07	17.50	215	5.48**	0.76
French (<i>n</i> = 97)	66.65	12.53			
German-Swiss (<i>n</i> = 89)	44.07	13.01	171	5.83**	0.89
Germans (<i>n</i> = 84)	56.63	15.26			
French-Swiss (<i>n</i> = 125)	49.13	17.30	217	3.51**	0.48
French (<i>n</i> = 96)	56.68	13.41			
Austrians (<i>n</i> = 89)	44.95	15.72	171	5.94**	0.90
Germans (<i>n</i> = 84)	58.38	13.92			

** $p < .01$.

look at the likeability ratings of the French revealed that, in line with the hypothesis, the French-speaking Swiss liked the French less ($M = 49.13$, $SD = 17.30$) than the German-speaking Swiss liked the French, $M = 57.76$, $SD = 13.48$, $F(1, 212) = 15.44$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$. However, the German-speaking Swiss liked the Germans ($M = 44.07$; $SD = 13.01$) not significantly less than the French-speaking Swiss liked the Germans, $M = 46.48$; $SD = 18.16$, $F(1, 214) = 1.14$, *ns*. Hypothesis 2 can therefore be regarded as partly supported.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived (dis)similarity

Hypothesis 3 predicted that smaller countries would overestimate the distance towards linguistically similar, larger neighbouring nations. This would be manifested on perceived general similarity (Hypothesis 3a) as well as on perceived similarity of the two versions of the language (Hypothesis 3b). For this analysis also the Dutch-speaking Belgians and the Dutch were compared. A multivariate ANOVA was conducted with language group and group size as between group factors and perceived general and perceived linguistic similarity with the linguistically similar nation that differed in size as dependent variables. The multivariate test showed significant effects for the factors size $F(2, 808) = 7.17$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, language group $F(4, 1618) = 14.62$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, as well as their interaction, $F(4, 1618) = 9.86$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$.

In line with Hypothesis 3a we found that, across all language groups, citizens of larger nations ($n = 299$) judged their nation as more similar to linguistically similar smaller nations ($n = 516$) than vice versa, $F(1, 809) = 9.81$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. A *post-hoc* ANOVA confirmed this effect, $M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.82$ versus $M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.02$, $F(1, 830) = 6.19$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. In addition there was an interaction effect between

language group and nation size, $F(2, 809) = 3.81$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, which indicated that this difference between larger and smaller nations regarding their perceived similarity was dependent on the language group. It was applicable to the German-speaking and Dutch-speaking groups, but not to the French-speaking groups (see Table 2). Together the results offer partial support for Hypothesis 3a.

Hypothesis 3b proposed that such an indication of social distance would be reflected in the ratings of the similarity of each other's version of the common language. Although an ANOVA revealed no significant differences between the smaller nations' ratings and the larger nations' ratings of linguistic similarity, $M = 66.94$, $SD = 18.68$ versus $M = 66.29$, $SD = 24.50$, $F(1, 814) = 0.16$, *ns*, we found a significant interaction effect of country size and language, $F(2, 809) = 19.10$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, which indicates that the smaller-larger group difference in perceived similarity of languages depends on the language group. *Post-hoc* tests showed that whereas the Austrians, the German-speaking Swiss and Dutch-speaking Belgians perceived less similarity to the language of their linguistically corresponding larger nations, in the French-speaking groups a reverse pattern was found (see Table 2). The results provide partial support for Hypothesis 3b.

DISCUSSION

Asymmetrical attitudes between neighbouring nations that share a language but differ in size are general social psychological phenomena that occur across different historical backgrounds. Overall social identity theory can explain the results to a large extent. The theory would predict that the identity threat to the smaller nations would lead to identity-protecting strategies. We

TABLE 2
Perceived general similarity and perceived linguistic similarity between linguistically similar groups, differing in size

Language	Sample size	General similarity					Linguistic similarity				
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	η^2	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	η^2
Dutch	s (<i>n</i> = 87)	3.17	0.94	6.89**	203	.03	55.05	23.36	6.26*	203	.03
	l (<i>n</i> = 118)	3.52	0.96				62.27	17.94			
French	s (<i>n</i> = 249)	3.49	1.05	0.14	343	.00	76.75	19.47	13.19**	343	.04
	l (<i>n</i> = 96)	3.44	0.67				68.60	16.34			
German	s (<i>n</i> = 180)	3.39	1.02	8.84**	263	.03	57.26	25.37	20.42**	263	.07
	l (<i>n</i> = 85)	3.75	0.75				71.53	20.78			

l, large; s, small; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

found, as predicted, ingroup favouritism with respect to likeability among Austrians and German-speaking Swiss towards the Germans, and among French-speaking Belgians and Swiss towards the French. This intergroup phenomenon has also been observed by other social scientists, e.g. White and Langer (1999), who have called it "horizontal hostility". It is a pattern of asymmetrical intergroup attitudes in which members of a distinctive minority (e.g. German-speaking Swiss or French-speaking Swiss) look down on members of a larger, more mainstream dominant majority (e.g. Germans or French respectively).

Another way to avoid the identity threat for a smaller nation is to overestimate the psychological distance between one's own nation and the larger nation. Such a distortion was indeed found, both on a general measure of distance between the groups and on perceived language similarity. However, this pattern of distorted similarity perceptions seemed only to occur among the Dutch-speaking and the German-speaking respondents.

The results of this study also underline the importance of considering identity threat in multilingual countries. If a linguistic group is a minority in its own country, as in the case of the French-speaking groups in Belgium and Switzerland, then the largest identity threat might not come from the linguistically similar larger nation but from the linguistically dominant group *within* the country. At present the French-speaking Belgians make up about 40% of the Belgian population compared to 60% Dutch-speaking Belgians. In addition there is a higher unemployment rate in the Walloon region of Belgium. This might be the reason why French-speaking Belgians did not perceive such a strong threat to their identity from the French and did not overestimate their distance from the French. We may speculate that, given that the relevant threatening majority is within the country, the French may even be seen as part of a common, broader ingroup. For that reason, French-speaking Belgians may have perceived the French just as

similar to them as the French did vice versa. The same phenomenon, with even more reason, applies to the situation of the French-speaking Swiss. They too have been losing more and more influence within their country. Currently they represent only 18% of the population of Switzerland, whereas the German-speaking Swiss comprise 65% of the total population. It seems that if a group is a minority in its own country, as is the case with the French-speaking groups in Belgium and Switzerland, then this group stresses its similarity with the larger similar group in order to maintain a stable positive identity. In this case, the similarity with the French may help the linguistic minority group to make its own identity more forceful towards the dominant language group in their own country.

Another important finding from the present study is that it underlines the significance of language for a nation's identity. Language is crucial to national identity and is often defended in case of an identity threat (e.g. Hobsbawm, 1996). For instance, in the USA Spanish is seen as a threat to the American national identity because of the large—and still growing—number of Spanish-speaking immigrants. Our findings indicate that linguistic similarity may be a determining factor for asymmetric attitudes. This is in line with findings from other studies (e.g., Ammon, 1995). The close relation between language and attitudes seems especially clear in the case of the multilingual Switzerland. The two Swiss groups vary in their reactions depending on whether they are linguistically similar to the comparison group or not. Identity threat in multilingual countries may come from the larger country with the shared language, the other linguistic group in the nation, or both. More work is therefore needed to examine identity threat in multilingual nations. An important conclusion is that similarity ratings by inhabitants of smaller countries who at the same time form a minority in their own country highlight the interplay between intergroup and

intragroup processes when one is investigating national identities.

By including samples from Austria and Switzerland that had not been investigated before, findings of a previous study on asymmetric international attitudes (van Oudenhoven et al., 2002) could be cross-validated. However, a limitation of the present study is that it dealt with Western European countries only. In order to validate our conclusions it will be necessary to include comparison cases from other continents, such as Uruguay versus Argentina, New Zealand versus Australia, Taiwan versus China, and Canada versus the United States.

Another interesting and related area of research would refer to the influence across boundaries of indigenous languages—next to the international languages Spanish and English—on ethnic and national identities in Africa and South America. The most important examples are Quechua, which is primarily spoken by indigenous populations in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and Swahili, which is widely spoken in Tanzania, Kenya, and Eastern Congo.

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