Ethnic Social Distance: A comparison of Georgian, German and Japanese students
Nino Javakhishvili, Johann F. Schneider, Ana Makashvili and Natia Kochlashvili

Abstract
Attitudes of Georgian, German and Japanese students towards 22 ethnic groups were studied employing the social distance scale. The results showed that ethnic distances of Georgians are larger than those of German and Japanese students. However, subjects of all three countries showed a certain kind of similarity in terms of placing the representatives of US and Western European countries at the closest distance while holding Roma and Kurds the farthest. Two-way mixed analyses of variance revealed that social distance was influenced by the interaction of students’ nationality and ethnic groups to be assessed, whereas gender and religiosity did not show significant effects on the social distance scores in neither of the three sample groups. The article discusses similarities and differences among the sample groups and relates them to theoretical positions and empirical findings in this field of research.

Summary
Introduction

For about a century social psychologists and sociologists have focused their research on the so-called »racial preferences« (Goff, Steele & Davies, 2008), that is, the desire of individuals to affiliate themselves with one race, ethnic or religious group rather than another (Bogardus, 1925, 1938; Samelson, 1978). Emory Bogardus was one of the pioneers to measure these preferences. He was introduced to the concept of social distance by the Chicago University professor Robert Park, who believed that the concept of social distance is »to reduce to something like measurable terms the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally« (Park, 1924, p. 339).

In 1924, Bogardus designed a quantitative indicator, the Social Distance Scale, defining the concept as »the degree of sympathetic understanding that exists between two persons or between a person and a group« (Bogardus, 1933, p. 268). First applied in research in 1926, the social distance scale has been translated into many languages (Wark & Galliher, 2007) and widely used in many countries to study people’s attitudes towards ethnic, racial (Bogardus, 1933; Morgan, 2006), religious groups (Bogardus, 1933), sexual minorities (Staats, 1978), occupations (Wilkinson, 1929; Bogardus, 1933; Singh, 1965), social inequality (Laumann & Senter, 1976), language study (Sakuragi, 2006) mental illness stigma (Adewuya & Makanjoula, 2005), just to name a few.

The scale was mainly administered among the population in the US, European countries, Australia, China, Japan and several African tribes. However, not much is known in this respect about the former Soviet Union and especially the Caucasus. With the present study we intend to elaborate on ethnic attitudes of Georgian students and analyze these against ethnic attitudes of Japanese and German students.

Method

Instrument

For the present study we selected the Bogardus social distance scale as it employs all three components of attitudes – cognitive, affective and behavioral, and has a value component embedded in the way how the items are formulated.

The scale consists of seven items indicating gradually increasing levels of social distance. The closest distance is shown by a person’s readiness to marry someone (score 1). Other items reflect more and more distanced attitudes. These items are: readiness to make friendship
(score 2), work together (score 3), accept as a neighbor (score 4), be a mere acquaintance (score 5), accept as a visitor to one’s country (score 6) and exclude from one’s country (score 7). A low total score indicates close social distance, while a high total score means high social distance.

Social distance was measured towards twenty three different ethnic groups/countries. The students, however, did not assess the ethnic group they belonged to. As a result, 20 ethnic groups were assessed by each of the three samples. It should be noted that the list of the groups is different from those employed in other studies as it contains some countries of the former Soviet Union and ethnic groups without a state, like the Kurds and Roma.

Samples

The study was carried out with German (N=114), Japanese (N=98) and Georgian (N=91) students. The German sample consisted of 35 (31 %) males and 79 (69 %) females; the Japanese sample consisted of 61 % female and 39 % male and the Georgian sample of 55 % females and 45 % males.

Each sample was composed of the representatives of ethnic majorities in their respective countries. Religious orientation of the three samples was quite diverse: the majority of Japanese respondents were not religious at all (82 %); among German respondents 48 % had no religion but others were mostly Catholic (25 %) or Protestant Christians (21 %). As for the Georgian sample, 96 % of the respondents were Orthodox Christians.

Results

The minimum and maximum social distance scores and the range between these scores provide an overall picture of social distance scores the three samples have (Table 1). The mean social distance scores of Georgian students towards different ethnic groups are much higher than those of German and Japanese students towards the same ethnic groups. In addition, the range between social distance scores to the closest and the farthest ethnic groups is the highest in Georgian students, while that of Japanese and German students is significantly lower. Table 1. Range, minimum and maximum social distance scores of the three samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgian</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, all three student samples are quite similar when it comes to the sequence of the ethnic groups by social distance scores (see Table 2). As the results illustrate, the respondents of all the three countries agree that they feel closest to Western Europeans and Americans (US), holding the Kurds and Roma the farthest.

Table 2. Mean Social distance scores to different ethnic groups and the rank positions for each sample (GEO = Georgian, JAP = Japanese, GER = German).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean GEO</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mean JAP</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mean GER</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israeli</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.73</td>
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<td>Japanese</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijani</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian/Persian</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgian</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurd</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma/gypsy</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the general trend, Georgian students hold larger social distance scores than Germans and Japanese, which indicates that Georgians are the most distanced among the three samples (see Table 2). Still, there are some exceptions from the general picture. There are cases when the difference in social distance scores of all the three nations is very low, almost zero. The table above shows that Georgians place Ukraine even closer than Japanese and Germans do. The distance of Georgians to Italy is also very low, almost the same as that of Japanese students. Figure 1 provides an even clearer picture of social distances of the three samples:

Figure 1. Mean Social distances towards 22 ethnic groups for the three samples (abscissa = ethnic groups, ordinate = social distance).

Japanese and German students’ social distance scores prove to be quite close, almost similar. In regard to nearly every ethnic group Japanese students have slightly larger distances than German students. However, there are a few cases where the picture changes: Japanese place China significantly further, than Germans; at the same time, Greek and Brazilian people are also placed further by the Japanese compared to German students.

In order to see which factors influence the social distance of the three samples towards different countries, we conducted a two-way mixed analysis of variance (3x20 design), with a sample (Georgian, German, Japanese) as a between subject factor and ethnic group (20 levels since, as stated above, only 20 ethnic groups were assessed by all the three sample) as a within subject (repeated measures) factor. The results revealed that the social distance
score is influenced by both, the sample and the ethnic group. On the one hand, this means that there are differences in the social distance scores of the three samples – either Georgian, or German, or Japanese (F = 32.038, df = 2, p < 0.001). On the other hand, representatives of particular ethnic groups are perceived/assessed specifically. The social distance scores of the three samples are strongly dependent on the particular ethnic group they are assessing (F = 46.397, df = 19, p < 0.001).

Moreover, the results reveal that social distance scores are influenced by the interaction of these two factors: the sample and the ethnic group (F = 7.839, df = 38, p < 0.001). This means that the respondents of the three samples react differently towards the 22 ethnic groups. Figure 1 clearly shows that the lines of the three samples do not go parallel but in some cases even intersect. Thus, social distance depends on who/which country representative yields the social distance, and whom/which ethnic group is assessed.

To examine the possible variables contributing to the variance of social distance scores among three samples, we conducted one-way analyses of variance and tested the effects of gender and religiosity on social distance mean scores of each sample. Religiosity was included in the questionnaire asking students to assess whether they feel they are a) religious, b) not religious and c) neutral. The results showed neither effects of gender (Japanese: F = 0.21, df = 1, p < 0.65; Georgian: F = 0.67, df = 1, p < 0.42; German: F = 0.49, df = 1, p < 0.49), nor of religiosity (Japanese: F = 0.84, df = 2, p < 0.44; Georgian: F = 1.00; df = 2, p < 0.38; German: F = 1.65, df = 2, p < 0.20) on ethnic social distance.

Discussion

Several issues that emerge from the given results can be considered in terms of differences and similarities of the three national sample groups. The first tangible difference is that Georgian students appeared to have significantly larger social distances while assessing the ethnic groups as compared to Japanese and German students (see Table 1). The results of a two-way mixed analysis of variance also demonstrated that the sample, that is, the country a person belongs to, influences their reported social distance. In other words, representatives of various countries should be expected to yield different social distances. At the same time, in some cases the difference will be larger, as in case of Georgia being quite distant from Germany and Japan, and in other cases the distance will be smaller, as in case of Germany and Japan.

Despite the differences, students from the three countries showed a certain kind of uniformity when it came to the preferential order among ethnic groups: they placed the Western Euro-
peans and US representatives on the closest social distance while the Kurds and Roma were kept on the farthest distance. It is interesting that in various studies which can be considered as replications of Bogardus’ research this general trend is apparent. Kleg and Yamamoto (1998), who studied the social distances of 135 middle school American teachers, found that the rankings of the ethnic groups were similar to those revealed by Bogardus in 1925; that is, after some 70 years «the most welcome groups» were still «western and northern Europeans» although the distance values were significantly smaller (grand mean=1.43) than in 1925 (grand mean=3.82). Similar results were obtained by Parillo and Donoghue (2005), with «the Western Europeans and Nordic Europeans at the top».

However, the differences between the three samples are more evident which, statistically speaking, are the function of the interaction between the nationality of the sample assessing ethnic groups and the ethnic group assessed. If we refer again to the results of a two-way mixed analysis of variance, it should be obvious why authors concerned with social distance, prejudice and attitudes in general place emphasis on two reasons that might account for such attitudes. One is related to the group member (the sample) who is assessing a certain ethnic group and the other to the ethnic group itself. For example, Traindis, Davis and Takezawa (1965) emphasized the role of the perceiver’s culture and personality as well as the traits of the perceived person in forming the social distance judgment. It was also proposed that the race of the perceived person (Rokeach, 1960; Triandis & Triandis, 1960) is an important factor for social distance. Apart from that, there are several studies claiming that factors contributing to social distance vary from country to country. For example, while race was found to be a considerable source for the social distance of American students, religion and the employment status appeared to play an important role for Greek and Japanese students’ distance respectively (Triandis, Loh and Levin, 1966). However, the factors examined in the present study, gender and religiosity, did not show significant effects on the social distance scores in all the three samples. Such results contradict those of Parillo and Donoghue (2005), who reported that women were significantly more tolerant than men when it came to their social distances towards separate ethnic groups.

Below, we will generalize some of the sources and determinants of social distance arguing that the results may be explained by a) sense of security versus insecurity, b) the reference group theory and c) lack of information and shortcuts.

It has long been theorized that insecure persons are more prejudiced rather than secure persons (e.g., Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949; Gough, 1951). Triandis And Triandis (1960) used this concept to interpret their social distance study data, which showed that the
representatives of lower class were more prejudiced as compared to those of the middle class. Similar findings were revealed by Westie and Westie in 1957. Triandis and Triandis argued that the child rearing style in working-class families (harsh living conditions, physical punishment) produces insecure persons while the sense of security is stronger in individuals raised in middle class families with more egalitarian child rearing styles. This was consistent with their findings claiming that an insecure person feels threatened, is conservative, rigid and can not tolerate ambiguity (Triandis & Triandis, 1960). Bobo’s and Hutchings’ proposition can be understood in the same light albeit it refers to racial groups: »The more the members of a particular racial group feel collectively oppressed and unfairly treated […] the more likely they are to perceive members of other groups as potential threats« (1996, p. 951).

If we apply these theoretical positions to our sample nations, it will become more evident why Georgian students report significantly larger social distance scores than Japanese and German students. From 1921 to 1991, Georgia was a republic of the Soviet Union and the »iron curtain« isolating it from all other countries but the socialist ones caused its seclusion, limited exposure to the bigger part of the world and a restricted access to any information thereon. Today, Georgia is still in the process of formation as a state nation and democracy, and the remaining problems with its sovereignty continue to threaten its identity and socio-economic stability (unemployment rate around 16 %, unresolved territorial conflicts as a constant threat to national security) as compared to the socially more stable, democratic and secure environment of Japan (unemployment rate around 5 %, no threats to international security) and Germany (unemployment rate around 7 %, no threats to international security), whose sample showed the least social distance scores.

The reference-group theory suggests that social groups will admire successful and highly advanced out-groups as they become sources for aspirations, for comparing and evaluating their own qualities, for determining their identities and attitudes. Thus, the preference for Western European countries and the US shared by all the three samples can be attributed to this theory, taking into account that the values the preferred countries adhere to – democracy, respect of human rights and peace policies as well as their economic and social stability are appreciated and sought for by the sample countries. Moreover, the huge media portrayal of these countries is of considerable importance as it fosters information availability and encourages their explicit, accustomed, almost intimate image.

Indeed, the poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in Georgia (Georgian Public Opinion) in autumn 2011 showed that 80 % of respondents either fully or partly
supported NATO integration. Furthermore, according to the sociological research of the National Democratic Institute, 68% of respondents in Georgia supported the Government's commitment to the European integration (NDI, 2012).

Close distance of Japanese students towards the US and the UK is also supported by surveys carried out on Japanese respondents. For example, the research of NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) in 2009 found out that the highest percentage (18%) of respondents hope to make friends with the representatives of the US, followed by Australia and Switzerland, with UK sharing the fourth position (5%) with France and Italy.

Lack of information might be the reason why German and Japanese students hold Armenian, Azeri and Georgian people on a large social distance. The same may be partly true about the large distances towards the Kurds and Roma, shared by all the three samples. Not much is known about the country of origin and religion of those ethnic groups; none of them constitute state nations, and in addition, the Roma are perceived as people having no permanent living space (i.e., Open Society Report, 2005). Thus, natural fear and discomfort in the face of a less known phenomenon arise, and the samples, while yielding their distance towards less known ethnic groups, base themselves upon the best available shortcuts, that is, the stereotypes (see Wagner, Van Dick & Zick, 2000).

The above-mentioned, as well as the general discussion of this study is well supported by and can be summarized in Bogardus' words that serve as an interpretation to his own findings: «A people feels nearer to another people of similar culture patterns and backgrounds than to other peoples unless serious competition of some kind occurs between them» (Bogardus, 1958, p. 134).

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