Ingroup Allocation Model

Ingroup favoritism – spontaneously expressed in choice of words

Marie Gustafsson1, Sverker Sikström2 & Torun Lindholm1

1Department of Psychology, Stockholm University, Sweden, 2 Department of Psychology, Lund University

Ingroup favoritism is often explained as a result of group belonging and a salient group identity (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Mullen, Brown & Smith, 1992). We argue, in contrast, that ingroup favoritism is a cause rather than an effect of group belonging that has evolved in selection processes (Gustafsson & Sikström, submitted). In group formation, it is important to discriminate between groups and to promote belonging to the own group. This can efficiently be done in communication by associating ingroup pronouns to positive context, such that sentences with I and We are combined with positive words, whereas sentences with She, He and They are combined with negative words (for example “I am clever”, and “They are ugly”).

In three studies, participants were instructed to generate three-word-sentences that contained 1) a personal pronoun 2) a verb and 3) an evaluative adjective. Participants chose words from boxes as presented in Figure 2. The presentation of the words was counterbalanced. The pronouns were coded either as ingroup pronouns (I & We) or outgroup pronouns (He, She & They). The adjectives were coded either as positive +1, or negative -1.

Study 1 a & b tested whether ingroup favoritism is expressed when participants generate sentences individually.

Study 2 tested whether a group condition increases the evaluation of We in relation to I.

Study 1a – English language

Participants (N = 34, Data Collection: https://www.mturk.com) generated sentences mirroring ingroup favoritism, such that sentences that started with ingroup pronouns were followed by positive adjectives, whereas outgroup pronouns were followed by negative adjectives, F(1,33) = 23.9, p < .001, r² = .42.

Study 1b – Swedish language

Also in Swedish, participants (N=34, Data Collection: Dept Psychology) expressed ingroup favoritism in a sentence generating task, F(1,33) = 7.70, p < .01, r² = .19.

Table 1 - means and standard errors for ingroup and outgroup pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ingroup</th>
<th>Outgroup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1a</td>
<td>.32 ( .08)</td>
<td>- .19 ( .06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1b</td>
<td>.07 ( .08)</td>
<td>- .23( .06)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - means and standard errors for ingroup and outgroup pronouns

Ingroup favoritism was found in all studies, in English (study 1a) and in Swedish (study 1b & 2) language. Participants chose outgroup pronouns together with negative adjectives and ingroup pronouns together with positive adjectives. Furthermore, participants generating the sentences individually combined I with more positive adjectives than We (study 1a and 1b), whereas participants in groups combined We with more positive adjectives than I (study 2).

These findings suggest that ingroup favoritism is expressed spontaneously in participants choice of words. A group context increases the favoritism of the ingroup collective level (We) as compared to the individual level (I).

Study 2 – favoring I or We

Participants (N = 77, Data Collection; Central Station Stockholm) generated sentences either individually or in groups (dyads). Also in this study, participants generated sentences mirroring ingroup favoritism, F (1,75) = 8.95, p = .04, r² = .11.

In addition, there was a significant interaction effect, F (1,75) = 3.83, p = .05, r² = .06, such that participants who generated sentences individually favored I over We, whereas participants in groups favored We over I.

Contact: Marie Gustafsson mgu@psychology.su.se, +46 707 644 144.