

Affective Priming as a new method for measuring language attitudes

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Since Fazio et al. (1986) developed this experimental measuring technique, the affective priming paradigm has become an important and successful tool in psychological research on the implicit measurement of attitudes. In a typical affective priming paradigm (Hermans, De Houwer & Eelen 1994), participants are presented with positive and negative prime stimuli followed by a positive or negative target, after which they have to evaluate the valence of the target stimuli. The standard observation in this priming procedure, which is based on the automatic evaluation hypothesis, is that speeded responses are facilitated when prime and target are affectively congruent (both positively or negatively valenced), rather than when prime and target are affectively unrelated (positive–negative or negative–positive).

Moreover, recent studies have demonstrated that the affective priming effect is a rather general phenomenon that can be generalised to different types of stimuli, as diverse as written words (Bargh et al. 1992), real life colour pictures (Hermans, De Houwer & Eelen 1994), odours (Hermans, Baeyens & Eelen 1998), or musical chords (eg. Sollberger, Reber & Eckstein 2003). However, no such studies exist that use auditive primes recorded in different varieties and additionally, no priming experiments have been carried out with a view to measure language attitudes.

To test whether the affective priming technique can be considered a new instrument to measure language attitudes, we developed an experiment consisting of three subsequent phases: an assessment of the targets' main effect, the main auditive priming procedure, and a postexperimental rating task to check the primes' connotative neutrality. In the main task, we presented our test subjects positive and negative prime stimuli followed by a positive or negative target. As in a typical affective priming paradigm (Hermans, De Houwer & Eelen 1994), we selected the visual target stimuli, standardized positive or negative pictures, from the IAPS-database (Lang, Bradley & Cuthberth 1999). The selection of the primes, however, is innovative in the field. We developed an auditive affective priming experiment, which implies that the primes we selected were connotatively neutral existing and non-existing cognates, recorded in various varieties of the same language. Per variety, the average prime length is identical. In an evaluative categorisation task, test subjects then had to evaluate as quickly as possible whether the target of each associatively unrelated prime–target pair was emotionally positive or negative.

In line with the results that were revealed by previous affective priming tests, we expect to find significantly shorter response latencies when the valence of both prime and target is affectively congruent (positive-positive or negative-negative) as compared to incongruent prime-target pairs (positive-negative or negative-positive). Accordingly, we hypothesize that words with a regional accent carry, apart from their semantic value, an affective connotation and that this indirect measuring technique can, besides its current applications, be used in research on language attitudes.

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