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# Contents

<b>Original Articles</b>	Ethnolinguistic Identity and Television Use in a Minority Language Setting <i>Jake Harwood and Laszlo Vincze</i>	135
	Outcomes Are in the Eye of the Beholder: The Influence of Affective Dispositions on Disconfirmation Emotions, Outcome Satisfaction, and Enjoyment <i>Colleen Bee and Robert Madrigal</i>	143
	Killing Is Positive! Intra-Game Responses Meet the Necessary (But Not Sufficient) Theoretical Conditions for Influencing Aggressive Behavior <i>Annie Lang, Samuel D. Bradley, Edward F. Schneider, Sojung C. Kim, and Sharon Mayell</i>	154
	Covering Your Face on Facebook: Suppression as Identity Management <i>Michele M. Strano and Jill Wattai Queen</i>	166
<b>Meeting Calendar</b>		181
<b>Volume Information</b>	Table of Contents	182
	Author Index	183
	Keyword Index	183
	Reviewers 2012	184

# Journal of Media Psychology

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# Ethnolinguistic Identity and Television Use in a Minority Language Setting

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**Abstract.** Based on the model of Reid, Giles and Abrams (2004, *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie*, 16, 17–25), this paper describes and analyzes the relation between television use and ethnolinguistic-coping strategies among German speakers in South Tyrol, Italy. The data were collected among secondary school students ( $N = 415$ ) in 2011. The results indicated that the television use of the students was dominated by the German language. A mediation analysis revealed that TV viewing contributed to the perception of ethnolinguistic vitality, the permeability of intergroup boundaries, and status stability, which in turn affected ethnolinguistic-coping strategies of mobility (moving toward the outgroup), creativity (maintaining identity without confrontation), and competition (fighting for ingroup rights and respect). Findings and theoretical implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** television, ethnolinguistic identity, ethnolinguistic-coping strategies, minority language use, social identity theory

## Introduction

The purpose of the present paper is to analyze the relationship between language, media use, and identity in a minority language setting. More particularly, we address how the language patterns of TV watching are related to ethnolinguistic-coping strategies among German-speaking youth in South Tyrol, Italy, and how these effects are mediated by perceptions of group vitality, intergroup permeability, and the stability of intergroup relations. These predictions are derived from the model of Reid, Giles, and Abrams (2004) but have not previously been tested empirically in the form of a single mediated model.

According to ethnolinguistic identity theory (ELIT; Giles & Johnson, 1981, 1987; Reid et al., 2004), strategies to maintain a positive ethnolinguistic identity depend on three factors:

- (a) The perception of the ethnolinguistic *vitality* of their language group – that is, the strength of the group in status, demography, and institutional support (Bourhis, Giles, & Rosenthal, 1981; Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). Groups with high vitality have high status in a given context, are demographically strong, and dominate major social institutions (e.g., government, schools, and religious institutions);
- (b) The *permeability* of ethnolinguistic boundaries – that is, how easy it is to cross from one group to another. When boundaries are perceived to be permeable, members of low-status groups are more tempted by

(and perhaps manipulated by) the perceived plausibility of gaining access to the benefits of high-status-group membership;

- (c) The perception of cognitive alternatives – the extent to which people believe that their group's position in the intergroup hierarchy can be changed – a perception influenced by factors such as the *stability* of the intergroup status quo (Turner & Brown, 1978). When the intergroup hierarchy is perceived as unstable, a disadvantaged group is more likely to challenge the status quo and fight for collective rights and self-determination.

ELIT (and its precursor, social identity theory: Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that these factors influence the strategies which minority groups will use to maintain a positive self-concept. Some groups will engage at the group level and fight for their collective destiny, while others will use more individualistic strategies, with specific people trying to get the best deal they can for themselves and their families (Hogg & Abrams 1988; Reid et al., 2004). Three such strategies exist:

- (a) People can adopt *mobility* and make efforts to pass into the *outgroup*. In the context of linguistic minority groups, this typically occurs via avoiding the use of the minority language, associating with majority language group friends, striving for fluency in the majority language, and encouraging children to learn the majority language.

- (b) People who adopt *ethnolinguistic creativity* attempt to maintain their identity while avoiding confrontation with the outgroup. This can be accomplished by shifting the bases of comparison (“They’re richer, but we’re cooler”), seeking alternative comparisons (“At least we’re better off than X,” where X is a yet-more-disadvantaged group), or more generally by adjusting the categorical bases of comparisons (e.g., seeking a superordinate unequivocally positive identity: “We’re all Americans/Swedes/Europeans, etc.”).
- (c) People who adopt *ethnolinguistic competition* seek to strengthen the position of their ethnolinguistic ingroup typically via direct confrontation with the outgroup and challenging the status quo. Traditional battles for civil rights, campaigns for language use, collective shunning of ingroup members who do not use the ingroup language, and even terrorist activities by minority language groups all fall under this umbrella.

According to ELIT, ethnolinguistic mobility is associated with perceptions of low ethnolinguistic vitality, permeable intergroup boundaries, and stable intergroup relations. Similarly, high vitality, less permeable boundaries, and a stable intergroup status quo can lead to ethnolinguistic creativity. Ethnolinguistic competition arises when the ethnolinguistic group has somewhat high vitality, the intergroup boundaries are relatively impermeable, and status relations are perceived as unstable (Reid et al., 2004). The current paper integrates the model of media use and vitality of Reid et al. (2004) and applies it to a multilingual ethnic context; while their model develops connections between vitality and media use, they do not apply the model to language groups in any systematic manner. We suspect that language is a particularly powerful context both because it infuses the entire content of media in ways other variables do not, and for additional reasons elaborated in the next section.

## Media Use

The media constitute an important dimension of social identity and ethnolinguistic communication. In bilingual settings, the linguistic aspects of media presentation and consumption are significant in understanding the intergroup context (Moring, 2007). Media offer a vital arena where speakers may encounter their own and *other* ethnolinguistic groups and/or languages – all the more true for people spending significant portions of their leisure time with the media (Harwood & Vincze, 2011). Ethnolinguistic media use can be responsive to identity needs (Harwood, 1999) and can contribute to ethnolinguistic identity. Ethnolinguistic media effects can also occur incidentally, such as when watching an important sporting event which happens to be broadcast in an outgroup language, resulting in more knowledge of, or identification with, the linguistic outgroup.

The linguistic facets of media use in supporting an ingroup identity may be particularly important in environments where speakers have relatively little everyday contact with their own group and/or language (e.g., for minority language group members living in a majority language-dominated setting). However, even in areas where the minority group is more concentrated, minority language media serve as reminders of institutional support for the group, deliver information about the society and the intergroup setting, offer opportunities to encounter the standard form of the language on a daily basis, and provide unique ingroup windows on the outgroup. Media are consumed both in public and private, and their influence extends beyond the moment of consumption, into later conversations about the media content (Walther et al., 2011). They also transcend space: In our context, for instance, German and Austrian television cross the national boundary and are available for German-speaking audiences in Italy. In multilingual contexts, media are also interesting in that they may be uniquely accessible or inaccessible to specific groups – with rare exceptions, monolingual English speakers have very little access to or use for Spanish language television in the United States.

Most globally, we suspect that media are more powerful supporters of identity for minority than majority group members. Majority group members take the availability of multiple media for granted. Given the broader levels of institutional support and status for their group, ingroup media for majority group members are an expected but unremarkable part of the vitality landscape. On the other hand, for minority group members, ingroup media represent what may be a rare macro-level symptom of support and a community-wide source of shared knowledge and cultural resources.

In a minority *language* context, media effects should be strong, given that language infuses the entire media portrayal. In *non-bilingual* intergroup media contexts, minority group individuals might find ingroup members embedded in programming, even when that programming does not explicitly target the ingroup (e.g., in the United States, Black characters embedded in predominantly White programming). However, for minority language speakers, majority language media are unlikely to feature “incidental” characters who speak the minority language. Hence, minority media are central to finding minority support for one’s group.

This study examines the hypotheses summarized in Figure 1A; these are largely derived from the theoretical examination of social identity theory and media use by Reid et al. (2004), extending their analysis specifically to a minority language situation. Reid et al. did not discuss the implications of their model for linguistic groups in any detail, however, we think the linguistic context is particularly interesting, given the pervasiveness of language within media content.

First, we expect that TV use will be associated with beliefs and perceptions about the ethnolinguistic social context. Specifically, we anticipate that minority language TV use will be positively related to ethnolinguistic vitality, given that media portrayals are explicitly named as a key

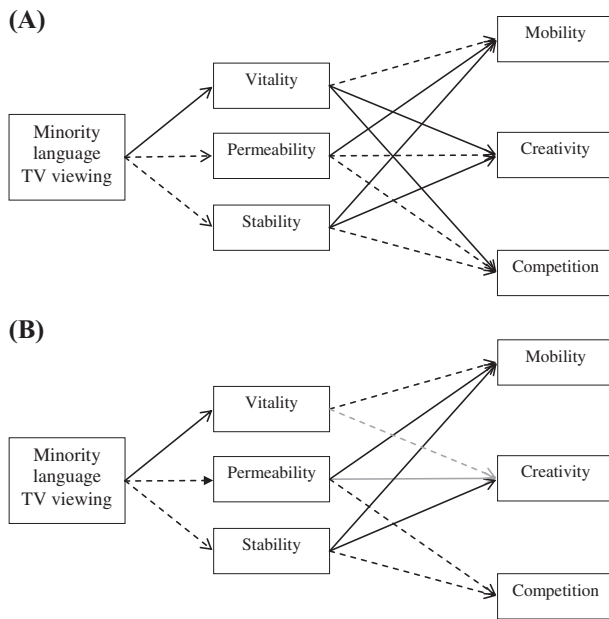


Figure 1. Schematic representation of proposed model (A). Solid arrows = positive relationships; dashed arrows = negative relationships. (Adapted from “A social identity model of media usage and effects,” by S. A. Reid, H. Giles, & J. S. Abrams, 2004, *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie*, 16, pp. 17–25. © 2004 by Hogrefe; and *Achieving Positive Social Identity: Women’s Coping Strategies in Response to Status Inequality in Television Portrayals*, by P. Raman, 2008, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ. © 2008 by P. Raman.) Schematic representation of the results (B). Solid arrows = positive relationships ( $p < .05$ ); dashed arrows = negative relationships ( $p < .05$ ). Gray lines indicate significant relationships in the opposite direction to those predicted; black lines indicate significant effects in the predicted direction. The path from vitality to competition was nonsignificant; all mediated pathways are significant except the effect through vitality to competition. Complete statistics are reported in Table 2.

element contributing to ethnolinguistic vitality throughout the development of the vitality perspective (Giles et al., 1977). However, we predict that minority language TV use will be negatively related to the perceived permeability of boundaries and stability of the intergroup situation. Viewing largely ingroup media portrayals suggests a degree of ingroup involvement and perhaps even isolation (hard boundaries). Viewing *outgroup* media portrayals suggests a willingness to engage with the outgroup, at least in terms of cultural objects like television shows, presumably reflecting perceptions of more open boundaries between groups (Abrams, Eveland, & Giles, 2003; Reid et al., 2004). Minority language media will feature few outgroup members and little evidence of intergroup contact, hence consumption of such media should cultivate perceptions of closed boundaries between the groups. Simultaneously,

viewing ingroup media reflects a broader goal of group independence or self-determination; in many cultural contexts, minority language media support such ideologies, actively advocating for minority language rights and representation in government and commerce (e.g., Cormack, 2004, 2007). Even fictional worlds on TV portray social settings dominated by minority group members. Consumption of such messages should lead to perceptions that the current status of the minority group is not set in stone and that there is a possible world in which the minority group is dominant: in ELIT terms, perceptions of instability (Abrams et al., 2003).

Second, we hypothesize that the language of TV use will be associated with specific ethnolinguistic-coping strategies described within ELIT, and that these relationships are mediated by vitality, permeability, and stability. Using TV in the minority language should influence vitality, permeability, and stability (as already outlined), and those factors influence the strategies minority group members endorse for maintaining positive identities.

Minority language media consumption would clearly support a world in which minority language rights were supported and reinforced, and hence should precipitate ethnolinguistic *competition* inclinations (Reid et al., 2004); as described above, we suggest this happens by enhancing perceptions of minority group vitality, hardening perceptions of impermeability between groups, and reducing perceptions of intergroup stability.

However, as *outgroup* media consumption suppresses vitality, identification with an outgroup that provides clear tangible benefits becomes more attractive and less inconsistent with self-concept, and thus *mobility* into the outgroup becomes a tenable strategy for TV viewers consuming primarily majority group programming. Permeability and stability should be positively related to mobility: As the intergroup situation is seen as more stable and boundaries between groups more permeable, group members will be more inclined to attempt to “join” the outgroup than fight for ingroup rights.

We predict that ethnolinguistic *creativity* will be predicted by a combination of relatively high perceived vitality, low permeability, and high stability. High stability blocks competition orientation (“no point fighting if you can’t change anything”), and low permeability blocks mobility (“can’t join them, so need to make the best of who we are”). High vitality maintains a sense of group identity and belongingness, and hence emphasizing positive aspects of the ingroup where available offers the clearest strategy to maintaining a degree of positive group feelings (Abrams et al., 2003; Raman, 2008).

### The Intergroup Setting: South Tyrol

The southern part of Tyrol was moved from Austria as a result of peace treaties following the First World War, and today South Tyrol is one of five autonomous provinces in Italy. From the point of view of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles et al., 1977), the overall strength of German in South Tyrol can be assessed as very strong regarding all three

dimensions: status, institutional support, and demography. Today, about 70% of the population of South Tyrol speak German as their mother tongue; thus the German language group constitutes the majority in the region, although their local majority/minority status varies. The German-speaking community is one of the few national minority communities that is continuously growing in number (growing from 224,000 in 1910 to 296,000 in 2001). Italian and German have official status and almost the same rights, as ensured by two special regulations: (a) the principle of ethnic proportions (jobs in the public sphere, public housing, and subsidies for culture and sport are divided in accordance with the proportion of ethnolinguistic groups); and (b) knowledge of both languages is obligatory to occupy public service positions (Bonell & Winkler, 2006). German is also supported by strong formal and informal institutions including a provincial parliament, educational institutions, political parties, and a Catholic diocese (Bonell & Winkler, 2006; Oberrauch, 2006).

The use of German in the mass media was legally authorized under the Autonomy Statute (1972, Article 8.4, Ch. 3) and its enacting laws, and is given official encouragement by the provision of financial aid (Bonell & Winkler, 2006). As a consequence, the German-speaking media supply in South Tyrol today is abundant thanks to both locally produced and foreign media products. The German TV landscape has two components. The Italian Public Broadcaster's regional studio (Radio Audizioni Italiane) broadcasts 550 hr of programs in German a year (Bonell & Winkler, 2006). Also, South Tyrol's own public broadcaster (Rundfunkanstalt Südtirol) relays German-language broadcasts from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. In this paper, we do not distinguish between watching German-language South Tyrolean TV programs and watching transfrontier German channels. The regional public radio channel is RAI Sender Bozen, and there are several private, commercial radio channels as well. In terms of print, there are two German dailies, some weeklies and monthlies; moreover, several Austrian, German, and Swiss papers are available.

Although the ethnolinguistic situation has improved considerably since autonomy in 1972, social distance still exists between German speakers and Italian speakers in South Tyrol (e.g., Eichinger, 2002; Schweigkofler, 2000), which can partly be traced back to the historical conflicts between the language groups (Paladino, Rauzi, Vaes, Cadinu, & Forer, 2009; Steininger, 2003).

South Tyrol is an interesting and unusual setting to examine, given the multiple levels of majority/minority status for the German-speaking group. They are a majority within the province of South Tyrol, but a minority within the broader region (Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol), as well as of course being a national minority within Italy. Locally their majority/minority status varies (including in our two data collection sites), from some cities and towns where they are a large majority, to localities where they are a minority. Psychologically and sociologically, evidence suggests that Germans consider themselves a minority group; they have equal status on most (but not all – e.g., military and police) fronts, but those rights were only granted in

1972 after a 50-year-long fight. When German and Italian speakers converse, it is mostly in Italian, again suggesting a psychological minority role for German speakers. Italian speakers in the region typically have poor German language skills (e.g., Paladino et al., 2009) again suggesting that they adopt the psychological majority role. That said, minority language media access in South Tyrol is unusually good, given the transnational media available from Germany and Austria. Hence, we were interested in examining minority language media use and effects under circumstances of higher than typical access to high-quality programming. To build again on the model of Reid et al. (2004), social identity based on selectivity in media use is only plausible when the resources for such selectivity are available, and South Tyrol provides a context in which this is clearly the case. Also, while German language TV programs are available, they are not primarily minority produced, hence they lack the activist content that might feature in locally produced German language media.

## Method

Self-report questionnaire data were collected from German speakers in Bozen/Bolzano and Bruneck/Brunico in November 2011. The research was conducted in secondary schools where the language of instruction was German ( $N = 415$ ). Respondents were between 15 and 17 years old, and all spoke German as their primary home language.

## Measures

### Independent Variable

We assessed the frequency of Italian language TV use with a 5-point scale (“almost every day,” “more times a week,” “once a week,” “more seldom,” and “never”). Relative TV language was measured by a 5-point scale from “only Italian” to “only German.” These two items were combined with good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .79$ ); high scores indicated relatively more viewing of German than Italian language television.

### Mediator Variables

Perceived vitality was measured by twelve 5-point items from the subjective vitality questionnaire (Bourhis et al., 1981) separately for the ingroup and the outgroup. Four items gauged each of three dimensions of vitality: perceived status, demography, and institutional support within South Tyrol. Internal consistency of the ingroup ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and outgroup ( $\alpha = .82$ ) scales was good. Subtracting the outgroup from the ingroup vitality scale yielded a single measure of relative perceived ingroup (i.e., German) vitality. There is debate in the literature over whether to treat ethnolinguistic vitality as a unidimensional or

multidimensional construct (Abrams, Barker, & Giles, 2009). For the purposes of our study, the unidimensional treatment yielded excellent reliability, and parsimony suggested that retaining the three dimensions would complicate our model and not add substantially to the broad theoretical point; therefore we treated vitality as a single dimension.

Perceived permeability was measured with two 5-point items adapted from Mummendey, Klink, Mielke, Wenzel and Blanz (1999); e.g., "For a German-speaker it is nearly impossible to be regarded as an Italian-speaker"); the internal consistency of the two items was acceptable ( $\alpha = .67$ ). Stability was assessed with a 5-point single measure ("I think the relationship between German speakers and Italian speakers will remain stable for the next years").

### Dependent Variables

All items were assessed with 5-point Likert scales. Ethnolinguistic mobility was measured with three items adapted from Mummendey et al. (1999; e.g., "I make some effort to be considered an Italian speaker";  $\alpha = .84$ ). Ethnolinguistic creativity was measured with a single item developed for this study ("After all, both German speakers and Italian speakers are South Tyrolean"). We developed a measure to assess ethnolinguistic competition, which included two items (e.g., "German speakers should do much more for their rights";  $\alpha = .69$ ).

### Control Variables

We controlled for sex (57% of the respondents were girls), the linguistic composition of the family (90% of them had two German-speaking parents, while 10% had one German-speaking and one Italian-speaking parent), and local vitality. *Local vitality* (Henning-Lindblom & Liebkind, 2007) refers here to the linguistic composition of the municipalities: 55% of the participants were from Bruneck/Brunico and 45% were from Bozen/Bolzano, where respectively 84% and 27% of the population are German speakers. Control variables were dummy coded.

### Analysis

Three multiple mediation analyses were conducted, with mobility, creativity, and competition as dependent

variables, respectively. Minority language TV use was the predictor variable, and vitality, permeability, and stability were mediators (all included together). Sex, linguistic composition of the family, and local vitality were included in the model as covariates. The analysis was performed with the SPSS macro created by Preacher and Hayes (2008) using 5,000 bootstrap samples to estimate the path coefficients. We present bootstrap estimates of the total and specific indirect effects, together with bias-corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals (95% CI); as Preacher and Hayes recommend, indirect effects were significant when the confidence interval did not include zero.

## Results

Descriptive statistics are given in Table 1. TV use was dominated by the German language. The participants perceived the vitality of the German language in South Tyrol as higher than that of Italian. Table 1 reports the difference score; the difference between perceived vitality of German ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) and Italian ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) was significant, paired  $t(369) = 18.73$ ,  $p < .01$ . Boundaries were perceived as moderately permeable, and the stability of the status quo relatively high. The most characteristic coping strategy was creativity; support for ethnolinguistic competition was weaker, and there was low support for mobility. All variables were significantly correlated.

We report the multiple mediation analysis results in Table 2; they are schematically represented in Figure 1B. These show support for our model regarding mobility and competition, but not for creativity. The model explained 25% of the variance in mobility,  $F(7, 349) = 17.85$ ,  $p < .01$ . The effect of TV language on mobility decreased significantly with the addition of the mediators to the model, indicating partial mediation (multiple mediation: 95% CI  $[-.14, -.05]$ ). All specific indirect effects through the mediators were significant (see Table 2), and all effects were in the predicted direction. Control variables were not associated with mobility.

The model explained 41% of the variance in creativity,  $F(7, 349) = 35.84$ ,  $p < .01$ . The effect of TV language became nonsignificant after including the mediators in the model, indicating full mediation (multiple mediation: 95% CI  $[-.27, -.10]$ ). The indirect effects were significant, but did not reflect our predictions. Specifically, the path

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and intercorrelations among the variables

	Vitality	Permeability	Stability	Mobility	Creativity	Competition	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )
TV language	.22**	-.15**	-.17**	-.34**	-.23**	.35**	4.29 (0.92)
Vitality		-.16**	-.23**	-.27**	-.38**	.14**	0.70 (0.72)
Permeability			.20**	.26**	.27**	-.29**	3.18 (1.14)
Stability				.23**	.52**	-.22**	3.83 (1.07)
Mobility					.31**	-.27**	2.24 (1.01)
Creativity						-.29**	4.27 (1.18)
Competition							3.43 (0.98)

Notes. Variables were measured on a scale of 1–5, except vitality which was measured from –4 to 4. \*\* $p < .01$ .



Table 2. Multiple mediation analyses for ethnolinguistic strategies ( $N = 357-359$ )

Dependent variable	Overall model		TV on mediators			Mediators on dependent variable			Individual Effects of Mediators (95% CI)		
	Total effect	Direct effect	Vitality	Permeability	Stability	Vitality	Permeability	Stability	Vitality	Permeability	Stability
Mobility	-.37**	-.28**	.11*	-.24**	-.23**	-.20**	.20**	.10*	-.02*	(-.09, -.02)	-.02* (-.05, -.00)
Creativity	-.24**	.06	.10*	-.25**	-.24**	-.27**	.13**	.49**	-.03*	(-.07, -.01)	-.12* (-.20, -.05)
Competition	.30**	.24**	.11*	-.24**	-.23**	.04	-.15**	-.12**	-.00	(-.02, .01)	.03* (.01, .06)

Note. Coefficients are unstandardized parameter estimates (B). \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

from vitality to creativity was predicted to be positive, but it was significant and negative; the opposite was true for the path from permeability to creativity (predicted negative, but was significant and positive). The stability effect was significant and positive as predicted. Local vitality was the only significant control variable ( $B = -.35, p < .01$ ); creativity is more common in Bozen/Bolzano (where German speakers are a local minority).

The model explained 21% of the variance in competition,  $F(7, 351) = 14.55, p < .01$ . The effect of TV language decreased significantly after including the mediators, indicating partial mediation (multiple mediation: 95% CI [.02, .10]). The indirect effects through permeability and stability were significant and negative as predicted; vitality was not a significant mediator. Sex ( $B = .28, p < .01$ ) and the linguistic composition of the family ( $B = -.40, p < .05$ ) were significant controls. Ethnolinguistic competition was less typical among girls and those with an Italian-speaking parent. All specific tests of mediation via confidence intervals (see columns on the right in Table 2) reflected the results described above for all variables.

## Discussion

Our findings illustrate that TV viewing plays an important role in shaping ethnolinguistic-coping strategies, supporting the contentions of Reid et al. (2004). Minority language TV viewing was associated negatively with ethnolinguistic mobility and creativity, but positively with ethnolinguistic competition. With respect to creativity, this finding seems to be somewhat surprising; and we will explore this further below. Consistent with our predictions, minority language TV use was positively related to ethnolinguistic vitality, but negatively related to the permeability of boundaries and perceived stability. TV use is clearly associated with beliefs and perceptions of the ethnolinguistic context.

Furthermore, our results indicate that permeability and stability were significant mediators between TV viewing and all three coping strategies, while vitality was significant for mobility and creativity. The lack of a mediating impact of vitality on competition may reflect the idea that the German language in South Tyrol has high vitality. Our results indicate German speakers perceive German as having even higher vitality than Italian, although the latter is the national language of Italy. Obviously, if a “minority” language is perceived to have higher vitality than the majority language, vitality will be less of a motivating factor when it comes to competition. More specifically, it may be the case that the effect of vitality on competition is non-linear. We would imagine that there is a low-end threshold for vitality below which competition may seem futile. Above this point, however, increasing vitality would not increase motivation for challenging the status quo: Once competition is at least plausible, engaging in it is more strongly determined by feelings of injustice and potential for change (e.g., instability).

We found support for our hypotheses with respect to the direction of mediating effects in the case of mobility and

competition. However, vitality and permeability worked in the opposite direction to our predictions in their relationship to creativity: Creativity was associated with *lower* vitality and *higher* permeability. These results, together with the negative relationship between creativity and minority language TV use, can be explained by reference to our measurement of creativity.

Creativity has several dimensions, including making comparison with other low-status groups, redefining the value associated with a low-status criterion, and making *intragroup* comparisons. Our research focused on recategorizing into the superordinate category of "South Tyrolese," a choice that we believe influenced our results. This recategorization involves grouping Italian and German speakers into a single category. Such a categorization might remind German speakers of a cultural history in South Tyrol in which they were forcibly assimilated by the Italian government. In retrospect, we see this joining together with the local Italian speakers into a single South Tyrolese group as closer to social mobility than a truly creative solution that would retain the German-speaking identity; notably, in our findings, the associations of social creativity with vitality, permeability, and stability were quite similar to those of mobility. The macropolitics of being part of Italy would place merging with the local Italian population as a surrender of cultural identity – an unlikely choice given that the group currently enjoys substantial rights and vitality.

Other local contexts, of course, might yield superordinate identities that carried less cultural baggage and could reasonably be seen as a route to maintenance of valued portions of the minority identity. In some contexts, certain superordinate identities might even serve to threaten the outgroup's distinctiveness (and hence move the group closer to taking up a social competition strategy). For instance, a South Tyrolese identity that emphasizes Germanic roots and shared culture might lead the region's population to move closer to a shared identity with the populations of Austria, Switzerland, and Germany, and more directly threaten the local Italian-speaking population. In this context, we would reemphasize a critical point from the synthesis of social identity processes and media consumption by Reid et al. (2004): They note that certain social creativity strategies serve to maintain the status quo, and indeed may be rather close to social mobility. Other creativity strategies are just a short step from direct intergroup competition (or at least may serve to motivate and focus such competition). Our data suggest that our specific choice of creativity strategy was closer to a mobility-style approach. For a group with majority demographic status and substantial self-rated vitality, social mobility is not a reasonable option (Reid et al., 2004).

A few practical conclusions can be drawn from our data. First, some of the findings suggest that imported (transnational) media serve different functions for groups than internally produced media. As such, imported media may simultaneously support identities and perceived vitality (e.g., the evaluation of the international status of languages), but could also suppress activism among minority groups. Hence, community activists might consider main-

taining and sustaining ingroup media, even when substantial imported media sources are available. Second, the context we examined draws stark attention to the multiple levels on which groups can perceive themselves as majorities/minorities. Both in terms of specific dimensions (e.g., demographic versus status) and specific levels of regional analysis (e.g., city versus nation), the specific perspective can dramatically change how group status is perceived. Third, while we did not examine it in this study, Reid et al. (2004) discuss the role of significant events and leaders in influencing media content and intergroup dynamics. The role of the media in establishing ingroup norms, leadership figures, and group goals is an essential one that requires additional examination, particularly in contexts like South Tyrol where the relevant "ingroup" leaders shown in the media may be from outside the country (e.g., Austrian politicians).

Our interpretations are limited by the use of a cross-sectional design. The design provides the opportunity to demonstrate covariance structures that are compatible with the model we propose; however, more conclusive evidence would emerge from longitudinal designs that we hope to engage in the future. Such designs would permit examination of cross-lag correlations, permitting more definitive causal direction conclusions. Multiple time points also permit examination of time structure between predictors (T1), mediators (T2), and criterion variables (T3). All of these would provide more stringent tests of the model that we present. As with most areas where data are sparse, cross-sectional survey designs provide the most efficient and sensible first step in examining potential directions for research. For now, we must acknowledge that the paths in our model could work in alternate directions. Indeed, in some cases we are fairly sure that the relationships proposed are bidirectional. Just to provide one example: Social mobility strategies should drive increased consumption of outgroup media, as minority group members attempt to become more familiar with outgroup norms, practice outgroup language, and assimilate into outgroup culture. Hence, while we present what we believe is a sensible and theoretically grounded model, we do not want to reduce the complexity of the picture in which many of these variables are mutually influential.

While constrained by having only cross-sectional data, we have nonetheless demonstrated support for the role of minority and majority media consumption in shaping identity-coping strategies among German-speaking youth in South Tyrol, and tested a model that can be further examined in other minority language groups. In particular, we recommend examination of the model in contexts where the minority is a true minority even in the local context, and we encourage more exploration of the varying forms of social creativity.

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