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Prejudices towards the Catalans: An experience in primary education

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Abstract

In recent years, the society of our country has maintained a tense political situation between the Spanish state and the autonomous community of Catalonia. The children have been exposed to this situation and the comments heard may have been able to cause the appearance of prejudices or the creation of a stereotype about the inhabitants of this region. The beliefs of children from two different contexts, a rural setting and an urban one, the capital of Spain, have been taken into account. From a sample of students from two different contexts, we have obtained results that indicate that girls from Primary Education show more positive prejudices towards Catalans than boys. In addition, if we consider gender, children who live in an urban environment do not show differences when it comes to showing negative prejudices.

Keywords: Prejudices, Catalans, primary education, urban, rural.

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1. Introduction

The appearance of prejudices is a fact present in society and manifested in all areas of the human being. Allport (1955) already affirmed that people use categories to think, and this process of categorisation is essential for the survival of humanity. In this sense, prejudices are defence mechanisms that lead to decision-making based on indicators of uncontested situations, which generates unfair situations for prejudiced individuals (Suarez, Perez, Soto, Muniz & Garcia, 2011). In this respect, the already mentioned Allport (1955) widely developed the implication that beliefs or ways of thinking have in the issuing of generalised judgments, whether real or not. Therefore, it is noteworthy that most of the psychosocial models related to prejudice, on the one hand, put the emphasis on the emotional and evaluative nature of the same towards the members of other social groups and on the other, on the negative attitude that entail towards those same social groups or their members (Rojas, Navas, Perez, Cuadrado & Lozano, 2012).

In this way, if we take into account that, as Rojas et al. (2012) state, echoing authors like Devine (1995), prejudices come to be constituted as phenomena with a clear multifaceted character and with some components not only affective, but also cognitive and behavioural, it seems evident that the education plays a very important role in the birth of prejudices. Prejudices in which, in addition to the perception of potential dangers and the perception of intergroup competition (Ungaretti, Etchezahar & Brussino, 2015), many related factors, such as the personality appear later when talking about the extinction or permanence of these preconceived opinions. Thus, the ideas, on which prejudices are served, are named as 'stereotyped'. One can distinguish between stereotypes (beliefs) and prejudice, the feelings towards individuals belonging to the group that has an associated stereotype. These conceptions tend to be very consolidated and, usually, individuals who present prejudices do not try to contrast or verify individual nuances. Very rigid formulations are established (Heintz, 1968).

Anyway, this new concept, stereotype, roughly implies a series of representations or 'esquemas culturales preexistentes, a traves de los cuales cada uno filtra la realidad del entorno' (Amossy & Herschberg, 2010, p. 32). In this sense and more specifically, Lippmann used the concept of stereotype for the first time. For this author, in the stereotypes, a great variety of contents, historical characters and social collectives are applied. In short, it is the image of the world that a specific group transfers to all its members (Lippmann, 1922).

The elimination of stereotypes and prejudices is presented as a very complicated task to achieve. In fact, the extinction of these preconceptions is more complicated than their maintenance, since, among other things, a whole social structure is based on stereotypes and prejudices which in turn serves as the base from which the identity of the people is configured (Colas & Villaciervos, 2007). Furthermore, taking into account that most authors associate the stereotype to the functioning of the human mind it will be very difficult to change (Echebarria, Garaigordobil & Villareal, 1995). In this sense, Allport also insisted on the rigidity of this concept, since as Einstein said, 'it is easier to break the atom than to destroy a prejudice'. In this respect, it is also remarkable the complete analysis made by Duckitt about the different historical moments to explain the prejudice. After the First World War, the superiority that one race could show over another was questioned and the concept of prejudice appeared. Since then, it has been affected by the different theoretical currents that have been present at each moment such as behaviourism, cognitivism, etc.

It is evident that prejudices and stereotypes are transmitted socially from generation to generation, but also, paradoxically, at the educational level through what we know as hidden curriculum, present for example in textbooks. Textbooks that, in the different curricular areas, show clear imbalances in terms of race and gender issues (Moya, Ros, Bastida & Menescardi, 2013). From this perspective and within the Spanish social and educational context, studies have been conducted in recent years with Spanish children between 3- and 11-year old. In a general way, we can say that the development of stereotyped attitudes has a sequence very similar to other studies. Children of 3 and 4 years do not seem to have stable categories; they pay little attention to differentiating elements, such as skin

colour. At this age, social categories, such as gender or age, are used. The little vision of differentiating elements of the smallest children fades at the age of 4 or 5. There are usually positive attitudes about the group they belong to and negative attitudes towards other groups. These positions increase between 6 and 7 years, when preference over members of their own group and rejection of others is radicalised. Later, there is a downward trend of prejudice (Enesco & Navarro, 2002).

To this respect, in Spain, at present, the nationalisms of certain geographical areas have received a renewed boost through one of the most prosperous regions of the country, Catalonia. In this sense, it is remarkable that the origin of Catalan nationalism has historical roots. In fact, the separatist ideals in this region began to develop at the end of the 19th century under the umbrella of Unio Catalanista, an organisation founded in 1891 in the city of Barcelona and which, in the first years of the 20th century, radicalised its ideological position (Esculies, 2018).

Thus, this entire historical basis, in some way, has been conditioned by the different political events that have occurred in the last decade, mainly between 2010 and 2014. It is the so-called 'Sovereignty Process', 'Right to decide' or more colloquially called 'El Proces' (Clua i Faine, 2014). A process that, in short, has been fuelled by the recent global economic crisis that has obviously affected countries, such as Spain (Serrano, 2018) and in extension, to Catalonia.

From this perspective described, the question of Catalonia has been—and is present—in the politics of Spain and in public opinion for many reasons, both the interest of dynastic parties to maintain the political, social and economic context without alterations, as well as ideological prejudices (Duran Franco, 1995). Based on these prejudices, one can find different opinions on the conception that Spaniards have about Catalans. Herrero Garcia refers the mentality of Spaniards from different locations considering their opinion about the inhabitants of Catalonia (Herrero Garcia, 1966). In this sense, it is remarkable the fact that already in the 16th and 17th centuries the perception that there was about the Catalans was to be warlike, brave and proud people, as well as open and welcoming, aspects the latter that began to change from the War of the Reapers of the year 1640 (Schumacher, 2003).

Also, some authors conducted their research on regional stereotypes from the middle of the last century. They are the oldest researches on this subject of authors, such as Pinillos and Rodriguez Sanabra, in the 60's or Sangrador two decades later (Bourhis & Leyens, 1996). Javaloy, Cornejo and Bechini (1990) carried out the most complete study on regional stereotypes. It focuses on six groups of the autonomous distribution of Spain (Andalusians, Aragonese, Catalans, Galicians, Valencians and Basques). It was intended to know which was the region that was considered the most favourable (Andalusia) and the least favourable (Galicia). The characteristic adjectives of the inhabitants of the Andalusian community are opposed to those of Catalonia and the Basque Country. Similarities are established between the Basques and Catalans. Although with differences, they are also related to Galicians, they are attributed a certain radical character (Javaloy et al., 1990). There is some coincidence between the studies of Javaloy, Rodriguez Sanabra and Sangrador. Greater difference with respect to the Basque stereotype and to a lesser extent to the Valencian and Aragonese. There are coincidences between the stereotypes of Andalusians, Catalans and Basques.

Rodriguez, Sabucedo and Arce (1991) also conducted another study on regional stereotypes in Galicia. They asked about stereotypes towards Andalusians, Castilians, Catalans, Spaniards, Europeans, Galicians and Basques. Gallegos and Basques were considered traditional and supportive, while Catalans and Europeans were perceived as modern and unsupportive. Castilian and Spanish are separated on the one hand, Catalans and Europeans on the other, as well as Galicians and Basques in a third group. In some cases, pairs with opposite personal characteristics were established, such as Catalans and Europeans versus Andalusians, and to a lesser degree against Castilians and Spaniards. Finally, Galicians and Basques were considered to have characteristics that were closer to Catalans and Europeans than the other regional stereotypes analysed (Rodriguez et al., 1991).

But all these prejudices and stereotypes can be found in much older texts. As an example, the work of a classic writer like Francisco de Quevedo is cited. This author shows many prejudices towards the Catalans. Especially, we can highlight the work 'The rebellion of Barcelona' and a letter addressed to Don Francisco de Oviedo. According to this author, some of the most widespread ideas that have circulated around them were considered positive: 'The love to their freedoms' or 'the firmness of friendship'. However, others are very negative such as 'violence meaning revenge' (Balcells, 1974).

The methodology of this investigation is presented below. The characteristics of the sample used are specified, as well as the instruments used for the collection and analysis of data. Subsequently, the objectives and hypotheses of the research are delimited, before presenting the results. Finally, the main conclusions are presented.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample that has been used in the present investigation consisted of 138 students (92 from Tomelloso and 46 from Madrid); 73 are boys and 65 are girls. These were students of the fifth and sixth year of Primary Education with ages ranging from 10 to 12 years.

2.2. Instruments and procedure

For the collection of data, a questionnaire prepared specifically for this research was prepared. It was administered to the students in their corresponding classroom. This questionnaire is based on the activity called 'Paintings in our heads' taken from the guide that was published on racism by the INTER research group of the National Distance Education University (INTER Group, 2007).

Before carrying out the experimental phase, brief instructions were prepared for the teachers who had to apply the questionnaire. It was intended to control the weird variables that could influence its realisation. A protocol was established so that the same guidelines were followed in all the groups that carried out the experience, providing the same explanations of the entire process by the teachers who intervened.

The questionnaire was anonymous, but they had to indicate their date of birth to use it as an identifier, and their gender to take it into account as a variable. Later, they had to fill in several sentences that were incomplete. The first answers had no value for data collection, but they were useful for children to become familiar with the dynamics of the activity. The question that was valid for our investigation was written in the following way: 'The Catalans are...'

Once all the data were collected, the answers that corresponded to different prejudices on the part of the students were counted. On the one hand, the positive prejudices that boys and girls had related to Catalans were contrasted. The answers where there was a clear impartiality about their beliefs or opinions about the inhabitants of Catalonia were also taken into account. Finally, the manifestation of negative prejudices towards the Catalans was analysed, which in some cases was insults with a great harmful character.

We have compared the frequency distributions for the different answers offered by the students with the Chi-square test. The p -value has been used to assess whether significant differences are observed. A p value less than 0.05 allows us to accept that differences are found with 95% confidence. However, values higher than this figure indicate that the two samples are statistically similar.

Finally, it is said that the test was applied in December 2017. During the last months of that year, just like adults, children have been continuously exposed to news about the so-called 'proces'. The predisposition to the appearance of prejudices on the Catalans could have been influenced by this fact.

2.3. Aims and hypotheses

The aim of the present investigation is to analyse the appearance of prejudices towards Catalans in primary school children from two populations located in different environments, one rural and the other urban. The presence of prejudices of different types (positive, neutral and negative) is analysed. Variables are taken into account, such as the gender of the survey respondents and the place of residence.

The research hypotheses that are intended to be contrasted would be stated in the following way:

H_1 : There is a difference in the appearance of prejudices towards Catalans that show boys and girls from ¹different environments according to gender.

H_2 : There is a difference in the appearance of prejudices towards Catalans that show boys and girls of different environments according to the place of residence.

3. Results

Below, we present the different results of the research, taking into account all the participants at first and differentiating according to the population of residence later. As the number of students of each population and the gender is not balanced, the analysis was made from the percentages.

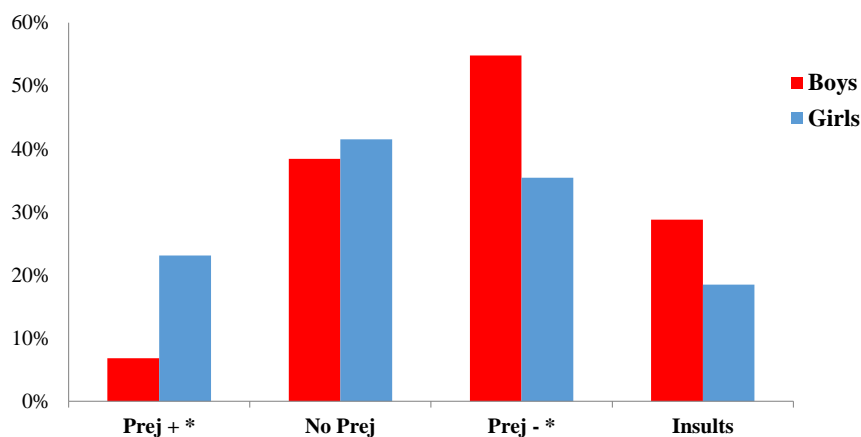


Figure 1. Total results according to gender. * $p < 0.05$

Figure 1 shows the total results of the presence of prejudices according to gender. In red, the percentage of boys who show some prejudice towards the Catalans is appreciated. In the case of the girls, the colour blue was used. Some differences are observed in the most cases.

The female students have a greater predisposition to emit positive prejudices than the male ones. The Chi-square test provides a value of 7.307 ($p = 0.007$). A p -value of less than 0.05 is obtained and indicates that the difference between the two is significant. The same tendency can be observed in the absence of prejudices, but there is much more equality. This is confirmed by not finding statistically significant differences in this case. Therefore, taking global values, girls show more positive prejudices towards Catalans than boys.

Regarding the judge of offensive prejudices towards Catalans, there is a greater predominance on the part of the boys, more than half. In this case, an important difference can be seen in the data collected, with a Chi-square value of 5.221 (0.022). The value of p is less than 0.05, and therefore, significant differences appear. It is not the same in the case of insults. The same tendency is observed,

higher in the case of male students but not showing statistically significant differences. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the boys present more negative prejudices towards the inhabitants of Catalonia.

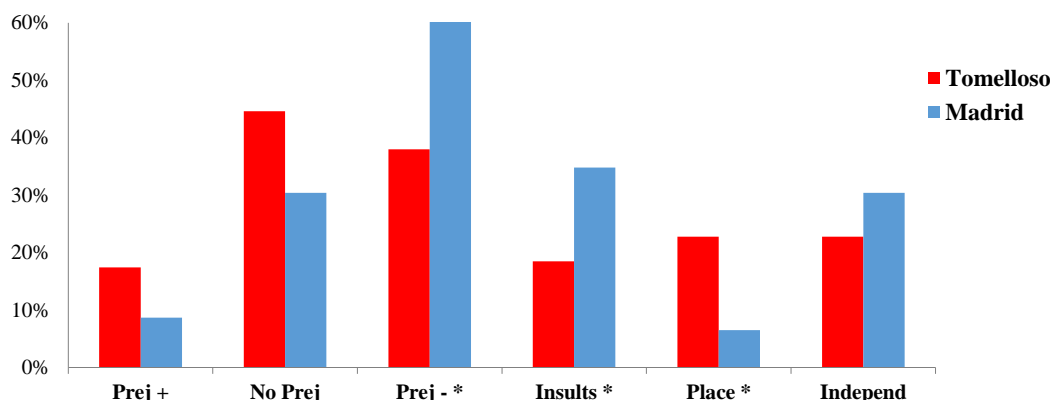


Figure 2. Total results according to the place of origin. * $p < 0.05$

In Figure 2, the results can be observed taking into account the location where the questionnaire was carried out. In red colour, we can see the percentage of the children of Tomelloso who present some prejudice. In the case of the Madrid participants, the colour blue was used. Different values are observed in the most cases although not always with statistically significant differences.

It can be seen that the students of Tomelloso have a greater predisposition to emit positive prejudices than students living in Madrid. Likewise, the same tendency can be observed in the absence of prejudices. However, neither of the two cases shows significant differences, since the Chi-square value is higher than the confidence level (0.05).

Regarding the judging of offensive prejudices towards the Catalans, there is a greater predominance in the case of the boys and girls from Madrid. There is a difference of more than 20% in the judging of negative prejudices. The same tendency is observed in the predisposition to emit insults towards the Catalans. In this case, it is also greater on the part of the students of Madrid. In addition, significant differences can be seen in the two situations, with Chi-square values of 6.440 ($p = 0.011$) and 4.481 ($p = 0.034$), respectively. Both values of p are lower than 0.05 and, therefore, it can be affirmed that the students of Madrid have a greater predisposition to the appearance of negative prejudices, and even in the form of insults towards the inhabitants of Catalonia.

Other responses that may have relevance to the geographical area to which it refers are also taken into account in this graph. More than 20% of Tomelloso students relate their answers to a specific geographical area. These participants provide answers such as: 'from Catalonia', 'people from Barcelona', 'those who live in the northwest of Spain', etc. There are statistically significant differences, with a Chi-square value of 5.674 ($p = 0.017$). There are also values between 20% and 30% of children who relate their response to independence or independence although without showing significant differences. Therefore, it can be said that the students who reside in a rural area tend to relate more to Catalans with a specific geographical area.

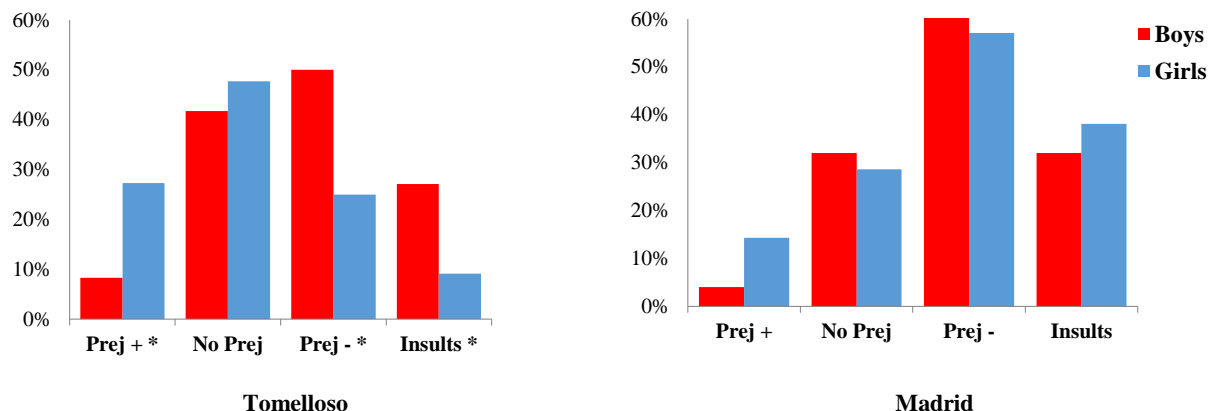


Figure 3. Total results according to the place of origin and gender. * $p < 0.05$

In Figure 3, one can see results similar to the first one (Figure 1) but differentiated according to the population of origin of the students and also taking into account the gender of the participants. As it was previously done, the percentages of boys who show some prejudice are in red and girls in blue. Some differences can be observed taking into account the gender of the participants although in many other cases, there is a balance between both sexes.

First, the girls show a greater predisposition in the judging of positive prejudices opposed to boys. The same trend is observed in both cases, but only significant differences are found in the students of Tomelloso, who reach almost up to 30%. In this case, the Chi-square value is 5.732 ($p = 0.017$). Therefore, it can only be affirmed that the girls of Tomelloso show positive prejudices towards the inhabitants of Catalonia compared to the boys.

On the other hand, there is quite a balance in the answers that do not show any prejudice. In addition, this equality is confirmed by the absence of statistically significant differences.

Regarding the judging of offensive prejudices against Catalans, a clear difference can be seen between the participants according to their place of origin. An important difference can be observed according to the gender in the judging of negative prejudices in the students of Tomelloso. The boys reach approximately 50%, while only a quarter of the girls respond in this way. It also happens in the manifestation of insults, much greater on the part of males. In both cases, Chi-square values of 6.087 ($p = 0.014$) and 4.933 ($p = 0.026$) were obtained. In both cases, we can see the results below the level of significance that we had marked, 0.05. On the other hand, this emission of negative, and even offensive, prejudices by the students of Madrid is more balanced between both sexes. Very similar percentages are appreciated, confirmed when performing the statistical analysis and not finding significant differences.

Therefore, there is no differentiation in the presence of negative prejudices according to gender in the students of Madrid. However, children from a rural environment show more negative prejudices, and even with a marked offensive character.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Taking into account, that the research presented here was carried out in December 2017, that is, 2 months after the vote or referendum on the independence of Catalonia from the rest of Spain and, therefore, it was a hot topic in the different means of communication at the local, regional or national level, to approach and analyse the presence of prejudices towards the Catalan population by the children of two populations located almost 200 km away and in two different environments, rural and

urban, it has been a great challenge. A challenge that was configured in the main objective of the study presented here and that led to raise two hypotheses.

The first one referred to the existence of significant differences in the appearance of prejudices towards Catalans that show boys and girls of different environments depending on gender.

Analysed the data above, we can conclude that girls show more positive prejudices towards Catalans than boys, discovering, in this case, significant differences. On the other hand, male students are the ones who present a greater amount of negative prejudices towards the Catalan population than their female counterparts, and significant differences are also found in this case. Likewise, in the same line, the greatest manifestation of insults against Catalans by boys with respect to girls is also noteworthy. However, these differences are not significant. On the other hand, the second hypothesis referred to the existence of differences in the appearance of prejudices towards Catalans that show boys and girls of different environments depending on the place of residence.

In this way, in general terms, the results obtained lead to the conclusion that Tomelloso students show a greater predisposition to judge positive prejudices or to give neutral opinions than the students contextualised in Madrid. However, the differences obtained are not significant. On the other hand, it is clear that the trend is totally different when it comes to manifesting negative prejudices or insults towards the Catalan population. In this sense, the students from Madrid show higher levels of negative prejudices or insults towards the Catalans than Tomelloso students, being these differences of a significant nature.

Likewise, it is worth mentioning the fact that the pupils of the rural area of Tomelloso relate the inhabitants of Catalonia to a specific geographic area to a greater extent than Madrid students, being these differences really significant. On the other hand, schoolchildren in Madrid relate more than the Tomelloso students to Catalonia and the Catalans with independence although these differences are not significant. Possibly, around a quarter of the participating students establish this relationship between Catalonia and independence for the political events that occurred in the last months of 2017 and for its media and social impact.

In any case, in a more specific way, it is remarkable in the research that the female students of both populations, Tomelloso and Madrid, show an evident tendency to emit more positive prejudices towards the inhabitants of Catalonia, than the students of gender male. In this case, only in the case of Tomelloso male and female students can say that there are significant differences regarding the judging of positive prejudices.

This described tendency varies totally if we refer to the judging of negative prejudices. In this case, higher values are obtained in the case of male students. In this regard, it is noteworthy that among the Madrid students there are hardly any differences between the genders in the judging of negative prejudices, but there are in the case of the students of Tomelloso, obtaining significant differences between the boys and girls in the judging of negative prejudices towards the Catalans, scoring in this case far above the males respect to the female students.

Finally, it should be noted that when students' opinions are presented in an offensive or insulting manner, the results are similar to the aforementioned. In fact, in Madrid, the results obtained among male and female students are very similar, with a slight difference being observed in that girls emit a greater number of offensive opinions regarding children in relation to the population of Catalonia, differences that do not become significant. On the contrary, it is in Tomelloso where male students show a greater tendency than girls to issue offensive comments towards Catalans, these differences being clearly significant.

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