

# The Hidden Impact of Cultural Conflicts (British Gypsies and Non-gypsy British people) on the Discourse of the Dominant Ethnic Group

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## ARSTKACT

*This paper has the aim of analysing (1) the interethnic conflict that exists between the British-gypsy ethnic minority and the dominant non-gypsy British group, and (2) the unofficial xenophobic attitudes that can be observed in the discourse of the British dominant group. The research field of discourse analysis examines the interdependence of cultural aspects and communication from different disciplinary perspectives (Byram 1991; Brogger 1992; Fantini 1995; Scheu 1998). In particular, studies which have been carried out from the ethnography of communication (Tannen 1987; Saville-Troike 1989; Schiffrin 1994) emphasises the importance of cultural background on the discourse between members of different races/cultures and, how, at the same time, discourse becomes the reflection of cultural interaction. Thus, according to our objectives, we applied the methodology offered by the ethnography of communication to our research project. The data for the study was obtained by carrying out a questionnaire and interviews with a group of non-gypsy British informants within the context of the University of Murcia. The findings resulting from a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the informants' perception of an ethnic conflict were discussed in the light of the consequences that xenophobic attitudes have on the discourse of the dominant group. (KEYWORDS: Cultural interaction; intercultural conflict; xenophobic attitudes; Ethnography of Communication; Discourse Analysis).*

## RESUMEN

*Este estudio pretende analizar (i) el conflicto interétnico que existe entre la minoría étnica de los gitanos británicos y el grupo dominante británico (no gitano), y (ii) las actitudes xenófobas*

que pueden observarse en el discurso del grupo dominante británico. Dentro del área de estudio del Análisis del Discurso se examina la interdependencia entre los aspectos culturales y la comunicación desde muy diversas perspectivas disciplinarias (Byram 1991; Brogger 1992; Fantini 1995; Scheu 1998). Concretamente, los estudios que se han desarrollado desde la disciplina de la Etnografía de la Comunicación (Tannen 1987; Saville-Troike 1989; Schiffrin 1994) enfatizan la importancia de la influencia de los antecedentes culturales sobre el discurso entre miembros de diferentes razas y culturas, y cómo el discurso, a su vez, refleja la interacción cultural. Así, de acuerdo con nuestros objetivos, decidimos utilizar para el presente estudio la metodología propuesta por la disciplina de la Etnografía de la Comunicación. Los datos para el análisis se obtuvieron a partir de un cuestionario y una serie de entrevistas basadas en el mismo, con un grupo de informantes británicos no gitanos en el contexto de la Universidad de Murcia. Los resultados obtenidos del análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo de la percepción del conflicto interétnico de nuestros informantes fueron discutidos con relación a la existencia de actitudes xenófobas y sus efectos sobre la producción discursiva del grupo dominante. (PALABRAS CLAVE: Interacción cultural; conflicto intercultural; actitudes xenófobas; Etnografía de la Comunicación; Análisis del Discurso).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Origins and Historical Background

The gypsy ethnic group or Romà has its origins in India. From the moment they abandoned their homeland, this race was constituted by members of different ethnic groups who were assimilated as they moved away from India towards western European regions. The Romà were forced to migrate from India in two different waves (D. Kenrick 1993). The first migration took place between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries after the Islamic Invasion. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the arrival of the Mongolian troops caused the second and definitive emigrational movement of the gypsy race. The Romani history since the second migration has been that of continuous exodus throughout all Western Europe. This ethnic group had to adopt a nomadic life style, which has been characterised by a mixture of linguistic and ethnic aspects belonging to other ethnic communities. The members of the gypsy group acquired these aspects as a result of the contact with such races as they moved westwards. At the same time, the Romà were creating their own ethnic identity and language (Thomas A. and Kenrick D. 1984.)

At the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, many Mediterranean areas saw the appearance of shantytowns that gradually spread out in all Europe, where gypsy communities tried to inhabit. The Romà have suffered persecution of the local authorities every time they arrived in a European country, and attempted to settle down. (Hancock 1987.) The Romà have also been victims of slavery, racism and even, genocide (this last was the case on the part of German national socialist group). In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, acts against the Romà started to be issued in the

countries where this group arrived. This fact created an atmosphere characterised by the feeling of distrust and prejudice towards the Romà. An atmosphere that has given rise to the interethnic conflict as we nowadays know it.

Governments have tried to put an end to the present conflict existing in all Europe (as for example with the creation of acts that assimilate gypsies into the British social and political system.). But, unfortunately, after applying several policies European governments have not found a solution that satisfies the concerned ethnic groups.

## **1.2. Theon**

In our world, where citizenship are sectioned into categories (first, second and third) that not only stand for a gradual difference in living-standards but for profound gaps between luxurious and inhuman conditions, racism is more than ever a major threat. Attitudes of superiority, the overshadowing fear of otherness and feelings of anxiety pervade societies everywhere. In spite of our fierce attempt to maintain the distance of our first world from any threatening contact with the third world, nightmares of possible guilt and the fear that sometimes we shall pay for the abuse committed, make us wary. Capitalism as well as materialism enhances xenophobic attitudes, which tinge social relationships. Xenophobic attitudes are part of some people's worldview, and as Fantini (1995) argues our worldview is mediated by language and culture.

U. Robinson (1972) demonstrated that individuals are actively implicated in the construction of the social reality and they use language creatively to define situations and impressions. Ideology, beliefs and cultural values are reflected in our language use. World-view is at its most 'visible' when we are able to identify the discourse norms that manifest the cultural values that mediate between worldview and language (Corson 1995). Cultural values provide structures or mechanisms that affect the behaviour and interaction of the members of each group, and the way people behave and interact. Within the same line of argument, the work of Fisher (1962) posits that a greater awareness of our role in interacting with others, of our cultural filters and worldviews might reduce the number of conflicts and/or miscommunications. However, this awareness of our worldview and its influence on our interaction implies an analysis of the assumptions embedded in our discourse. At this point, the relationship between discourse and social group becomes the window through which we can observe the influence of the cultural conflict in discourse. Van Dijk (1997) goes further arguing that, from the analysis of the relationships between discourse and social power on the part of the dominant group, we can explain how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimised by the text and talk of the dominant groups or institutions. Power abuse not only involves the abuse of force, but also, and more crucially, may affect the minds of people. That is, through special access to, and control over the means of public discourse and communication, the dominant group and the institutions may influence the structure of text and talk in such a way that, as a result, the knowledge, norms, values, and ideologies can be affected in the interest of the dominant group. Precisely, the

analysis of racist attitudes in the discourse of the dominant ethnic group is going to be the major objective of the present paper.

The field of intercultural research, and, in particular research on intercultural communication, has been concerned with the study of the nature and function of communicative behaviour in the context of culture. Different theoretical-methodological approaches have dealt with the problems arising from the inherent influence our cultural background has on intercultural interaction. After Boas' Volumes of the *Handbook of American Indian Languages* the relation of languages to culture began to be undertaken with increasing attention. After World War II the study of the relation between language and culture (or society) was fully recognised as important enough to be considered in the sub-fields of anthropology. Byram (1993), among others, has stated that language is inseparable from social, cultural, political, economic and educational phenomena, it expresses and embodies the values, beliefs and meanings shared by the members of a given society. Many authors from different approaches (Brogger 1992; Schiffrin 1994; Fantini 1995) have proved by now the intimate relationship between language and culture. Within this framework Alvino Fantini (1995) proposes the term *linguaculture* for the notion of the inseparability of language and culture.

Language, at the same time, integrates psychological and social factors of races. Through language, individuals acquire social structures that make them aware of the social premises and demands of the group s/he identifies with. Language, as Fantini has well defined, affects and reflects culture, as culture affects and reflects what is encoded in language. Language, in this sense, may become a double-edged weapon, because through language, we communicate, but also, we can exclude those who do not share the system of such language. The social differences we can find among members of a society are reflected in their linguistic behaviour, which, on the other hand, functions as a mark of common interethnic identity. There is variety in the contact among races, as well as in the situations where such contact takes place (H. Giles 1979). Thus, ethnic groups differ in accordance to historic contexts of the interethnic relations, power position in society and the importance that is assigned to language and its degree of linguistic integration in this context. Giles sees in language an important social and ethnic mark.

As M.G. Gumperz (1983) points out, the linguistic behaviour of an individual identifies him/her as a member of an ethnic group. U.D. Scheu Lottgen (1993), in *La Función Cultural de la Empatía en el Dominio Oral del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera*, highlighted the fact that there is a direct relation between language and thoughts of human races. Our social environment influences our language, which is deep-rooted in the cultural reality and surrounded by different social, political and economical conditions in each culture. The starting point of our research coincides with the basic idea of Gumperz that when individuals from different cultural origins try to communicate, unforeseen difficulties arise at linguistic, psychological and cultural levels. Difficulties which, in some cases (and influenced by specific factors such as negative stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination...), may increase the cultural and interethnic conflict. W. G. Stephan and C.W. Stephan (1996) distinguish three types of Interethnic Threat. The first is

formed by those that represent a *real threat* for the other groups. They affect the existence of the individual in a political, economical, material, and/or physical way. The second type is the *symbolic threat*, which affects the members of a race in their morality, beliefs, values and attitudes, including customs and traditions. The third type of threat comprises *anxiety* that exists in an ethnic group towards another race. This type of threat may have as a consequence hostility towards the other race and tends to arise during the social interaction. W. G. Stephan and C. W. Stephan (1985) state that people usually feel threatened during the contact with members of other races because they have, in advance, the assumption that the experience is going to be a negative one; they are convinced that their first contact will have negative results, such as rejection, discrimination and humiliation. In this context, stereotypes condition the interethnic contact. Furthermore, racial stereotypes, together with the aforementioned threats, are the main factors that create intergroup prejudices. Of course, the quality and quantity of contact have also a crucial role. In low contact situations, stereotypes and interethnic anxiety have a direct influence on the quality of the contact, affecting negatively the attitudes towards the other group; reinforcing, in this case, the negative assumptions about the contact with that race. On the other hand, in situations of high contact the result of the interaction depends much on its quality. Situations of this type are real interethnic contacts, in which members of different ethnic groups create an image of the considered "threatening" group from the contact with a member of such group.

A method for describing a situation within a culture from the point of view of the cultural actor is offered by the ethnography of communication. Its origin dates back to Hymes' article "The Ethnography of Speaking", published in 1962, and since then, it has served as a descriptive technique useful in obtaining the cultural information we need for our analysis. Therefore, our study will lean on the approach of the ethnography of communication, which entails a process with a variety of techniques, including interviews and participant observations. Through this observational techniques we elicit observer participation and interpretation of the cultural situation, taking place in a non-laboratory setting.

Here, we are dealing with conflicts between races of unrelated or asymmetrical socio-cultural backgrounds that take place in contexts of intercultural communication, and their impact on the discourse of the dominant social group. For this purpose we consider the methodological perspective Brogger (1992) proposed for analyses of discourse in cultural studies<sup>1</sup>. According to him, the anthropological concept of culture provides the most systematic and productive foundation for the study of British life. It offers a scientific framework for the general interpretation of many different aspects of experience – at regional, social, ethnic, political, economic, and/or religious level. A cultural approach to British studies may be directly related

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<sup>1</sup> A cultural approach means to Brogger *the study of mutually confirmative and conflicting pattern of dominant assumptions and values signified explicitly or implicitly, by the behaviour of members of a social group and their organisation of their institutions* (1992:27).

to the study of language, since, in Brogger's words, culture and language are inextricably interrelated and interdependent (1992:27). This author has tried to evidence the interdependence of language and cultural context, to analyse some of the ways in which specific language uses are produced by, and reflect, particular dominant assumptions and values- particular ideological strategies- in a society.

Brogger's approach is that of the analysis of dominant patterns of beliefs and values connected with the study of people's everyday lives and their actual socio-economic situation at a given time. In his book *Culture, Language, Text: Culture studies within the study of English as a foreign language* (1992) he proposes a methodology for cultural studies that starts with the analysis of the discourse of members of the dominant social group and re-examines its implicit and explicit socio-cultural dimension. Brogger's Three-step Methodology is a procedure that analyses the three main constituents of any cultural approach: CULTURE (i.e.: dominant assumptions and values), SOCIETY (i.e.: social, economic, political and ethnic characteristics) and TEXT. The first step of this analytical procedure is the analysis of a text in order to see how cultural assumptions are embedded in the use of language itself. Step 2 is then that of cultural analysis, the study of how some aspects of life – its economic system, its class structure or whatever – involves particular patterns of dominant assumptions and values. And finally, Step 3 would consist in a social analysis, that views the belief systems reflected in Step 1 and shaped by economic, social and political circumstances.

## II. STUDY

### II.1. General Objective

In the present study, we are going to follow the Three-step Methodology proposed by Brogger (1995), in order to analyse the unofficial racial attitudes of the dominant non-gypsy British group towards the British gypsy minority, elicited in the discourse of the dominant group.

### II.2. Specific Objectives

From this perspective, our specific objectives are first the analysis of these racial attitudes in the interethnic conflict. We have obtained our information of racial attitudes from data that are not yet contained in the official literature dealing with cultural conflicts. These data have been elicited from our informants' perceptions of the ethnic conflict. Then, we will attempt to examine how these attitudes affect the discourse of the dominant group. Finally, considering discourse as a mirror of the non-official assumptions, values and attitudes of the dominant group at a social, economic, political and ethnic level, we will relate our findings to the interethnic situation that nowadays exists in Great Britain.

**11.3. Informants, Methodology and Data Collection**

We have selected our informants from a group of thirty informants: twenty-two non-gypsy British students whose modal age was 20.3; and eight non-gypsy British teachers whose modal age was 34.7, all of them from the University of Murcia (Spain). In order to obtain the data for our analysis, fifteen informants filled in a questionnaire; on the other hand, the other fifteen were subjects of an oral interview based on the written questionnaire; their answers were recorded on a tape recorder, and then transcribed. Thus, Both the questionnaire and the interview consisted of ten items that focused on the gypsy stereotype: cultural assimilation, integration and tolerance; the intercultural conflict; the political background of the conflict and interracial problems in educational backgrounds. We have transcribed the data that we have obtained from these two methods in a chart (see sample chart, figure 1), which summarises the relevant information according to our specific objectives.

*Figure 1*

QUESTIONS	INFORMANT 1	INFORMANT 2	INFORMANT 3	INFORMANT 4
<b>1- Gypsy image/lifestyle</b>	Communal life, lack of hygiene.	Traveller tradition, Problematic people.	Problematic. Spoil the area they occupy.	Strong ethnic sense.
<b>2- Integration</b>	Gypsies reject the system. Don't fit in it.	No. Rejection on social grounds.	No. Nomad in nature.	No. Try to keep their culture.
<b>3- Tolerance</b>	Low tolerance, cultural assimilation.	No tolerance.	Assimilation through integration.	Tolerance, but not integration.
<b>4- Prejudices</b>	Stereotypes cause prejudices.	Yes, due to incidents.	Travellers give a bad image to traditional gypsies.	A lot of prejudices.
<b>5- Conflict</b>	Geographical, Social, and Cultural.	Yes. For occupation of open areas.	Due to leaving rubbish and robbery.	Violent incidents.
<b>6- Contact; experience</b>	Negative attitudes before any contact.	Lack of contact. No personal experience.	Positive personal contact.	Contact as a threat.
<b>7- Policy</b>	Not specific nor effective policies.	Taxes are not a solution.	Legal means to through them out.	Unsuccessful initiatives.
<b>8- School situation</b>	Low attendance.	Not prepared to a multicultural situation.	Low attendance.	Curriculum not considers gypsy culture.
<b>9- Rejection; separation</b>	Institutional racism.	Not contribute positively to society.	Yes, due to their bad reputation.	Romantic gypsy image respected.
<b>10- Solutions</b>	Integration policies.	Gypsy political representation.	Professional opportunities.	Good quality housing.

## II.4. Analysis

By means of both the questionnaire and the interviews, we obtained both our informants' attitudes towards the ethnic gypsy group as well as the effects of the attitudes on their discourse. The informants' answers were guided by the ten questions that we included in both the questionnaire and interviews, and correspond to different aspects of the socio-cultural and political background of the interethnic situation. These questions revealed the informants' image of gypsy-traveller, as well as their value judgement of their lifestyle. They were asked about the problematic of *integration* of gypsies into British society respecting gypsy cultural, social and ideological backgrounds, and *cultural assimilation*, i.e., gypsies are absorbed into the British socio-political system, which implies the loss of their identity as ethnic group. Informants also explained whether they see themselves and British society as tolerant people with ethnic minorities, in particular with gypsies. In the same line, they talked about prejudices against gypsies by non-gypsy British people, and how they may affect interracial behaviour and rejection. There were questions that centered on their perceptions of the possible conflict, in order to see whether they would define the situation as a conflict, why and, what kind. We also asked about any kind of personal contact with members of the gypsy group and what kind of the experience it turned out to be. On political grounds they commented on the British government's posture regarding the problem, and whether they noticed any specific policy concerning the situation and both groups' interests. Since the problem also exists at an educational level, the questions also focused on the gypsy children's situation in British schools. Our informants concluded the questionnaire and interviews offering possible solutions that might solve the problem between British gypsy and non-gypsy British people.

The ten questions were selected and organised taking into account the Three-steps Methodology proposed by Brogger, which we used in accordance to our specific objectives. In this approach, we choose those questions that covered the information on which such methodology focuses. This methodology divides the study into three-steps: first, the analysis of attitudes of the dominant group towards the British gypsy group and the possible conflict. Second, the study of their reflection of the dominant group's discourse and finally, a sociological analysis.

## II.5. Results

### II.5.1. First step: attitudes

#### II.5.1.a. Gypsy image and lifestyle

Our informants make a distinction between the Romà and what they call travellers. The Romà are the traditional gypsies, normally accepted by the non-gypsy population due to the fact that non-gypsy British people have a romantic image of the traditional gypsy, i.e., people who arrive in their towns in caravans and try to make their living honestly, with occupations such as telling



fortunes, tinkers, travelling, etc. On the other hand, they state that non-gypsy British people do have negative attitudes towards the traveller, i.e., people who are not born gypsy in most cases, but have adopted the gypsy lifestyle as a way of living out of the system, mainly for legal reasons. The informants see travellers as a kind of "hippie" who chooses this lifestyle as a way of escaping from the norm. They are seen as parasites that do not contribute to anything in British society. Generally, this second group are thought to be responsible for minor incidents (stealing, leaving rubbish...) and are the ones who give the traditional gypsies a bad name.

When our informants talked about the image of the gypsy they all agreed that it is a problematic group. Most of them stated this happens because of their nature, that is, as a consequence of their nomadic lifestyle. However, within the dominant group there is a 10% who argued that this aspect of the gypsy ethnic group is not motivated by their nomadic lifestyle, but by the situation they have had to face wherever they have tried to inhabit for a permanent or short period. Despite the fact that both groups of informants (those with anti-gypsy attitudes and the tolerant minority) stated that they respect the fact that gypsies want to get a plot of land, keeping their communal culture and traditions, they also see that gypsy lifestyle "clashes" with the British system mainly because their communal lifestyle is incompatible with the British one. Our informants agreed that gypsy should be allowed to set up their community in common land or land not being used, but when they do so near their houses, the conflict arises.

#### *II.5.1.b. Interethnic contact*

As far as the quality and quantity of contact between the two groups is concerned, we found that this contact is very low. Only 2% of our informants has xenophobic attitudes towards gypsies as a result of negative interethnic experiences with a member of the gypsy group. Such attitudes are rather motivated by inherited stereotypes and the bad image around the figure of the gypsy, created from stories everyone has heard about incidents with members of this group.

#### *II.5.1.c. Integration*

When we asked the informants whether integration may take place or not, they all coincided in the fact that - although they all have heard about gypsy families who are integrated (have a job, bring their children to school) in the British social system and continue living permanently in a caravan - their integration into the British system is unlikely due to two main reasons: on the one hand, they explained that gypsy culture clashes the British one. And on the other, they have the assumption that integration may represent for gypsies following British norms, something impossible because of their strong ethnic sense, that makes them want to keep apart from English society. We also found highlighting the fact that our informants do not actually know what gypsies think of integration. Despite this, only 5% of the informants claimed to have information about them.

### *II.5.1.d. Political background*

Regarding our informants' perceptions about the political dimension of the conflict, they explain that they do not personally notice any kind of policy in favour of the integration of this ethnic group. They have not heard about the existence of specific policies concerning gypsies, that it seems as if the government is not interested in the matter. Our informants think the Government offers integration to gypsies but they actually intend to assimilate them into the system. In turn, gypsies are offered all the advantages of the British system, advantages they do not accept because it will imply they have to forget about their tradition and culture. 23% of the informants are the minority of non-gypsy British people who do not accept assimilation as a way of dealing with the problem. They criticise the fact that gypsies are first offered integration as a way of solving the conflict, but what is really happening is that they are trying to assimilate them without considering the gypsy tradition, culture and communal laws. On the other hand, the rest of our informants think that assimilation may be a good solution to the conflict, arguing that if they want to get advantages from the system, they have to accept local norms, and cannot follow gypsy norms within the British system.

### *II.5.1.e. Tolerance*

This 23% is constituted by informants with a more tolerant point of view, they have the impression that the Government seems to act in a responsible way and deal with the problem seriously, in those cases in which we think that it can be obtained any kind of economic advantage from imposition of taxes to gypsies for the occupation of open areas, that in many cases no British citizen wants to use. They continued arguing that it is true that the system offers them advantages, such as a fixed place to live, occupation, etc. However, they are not asked what they really want: the Government imposes on them what it considers the best solution for the problem. Gypsies are not asked if they definitively want to settle down. This tolerant minority sees that laws and policies are not very favourable with the rights of gypsies. These people see government as incompetent dealing with the conflict. They gave us the example of the imposition of taxes to gypsies for land occupation. Taxes that government knows that gypsies cannot pay. On the other hand, we found 70% of our informants that gave evidence of having "anti-gypsy" attitudes. They did agree with the fact that the government must "protect" local people interests, and that taxes for land occupation, together with assimilation, are ways of doing so.

### *II.5.1.f. Possible interethnic conflict*

After having answered that intercultural clash may be the main reason for the present conflict, our informants went on arguing that the situation is difficult to solve because gypsy culture.

tradition and communal laws are not written in any document, so it is not likely to happen that any government, British or any other, takes into account their needs or wants on social and political grounds. They observed that the situation is getting worse, due to the fact that it seems they have racial unity nor a political organisation or leader who represent their interests.

### *II.5.1.g. Educational background*

Xenophobic attitudes towards the gypsy ethnic group are also reflected on the British educational background. 80% stated that since gypsies do not accept the British system, it cannot be expected that gypsies will bring their children to school according to law (obligatory school attendance). This is the reasoning they gave to the fact that Romani culture is not considered in the agenda for school curriculum. They see that gypsy children's attendance to school is very low and that when a gypsy family decide to take their children to school, teachers face a lot of problems. They also referred to the fact that, as most gypsy families are uneducated, gypsy children hardly catch up with their peers, something that negatively affects the learning process in the classroom. Cultural differences also make integration difficult in the classroom at both, the educational and the interpersonal level. Our informant put as example rare occasions in which the child begins to integrate, but then the family moves out of the town, and consequently the child has to leave school. Accordingly, they all agree that it is not logical that schools may organise an official curriculum that integrates gypsy culture and tradition.

### **II.5.2. Second step: attitudes and discourse**

On the discourse of the dominant group we found phrases or expressions such as "those wild, dirty, and dangerous travellers", referring to any member of the gypsy ethnic group. In relation to the bad image of gypsies, the dominant group uses the term gypsy or "gypo" as an insult. This is a clear example of the bad connotations that the word *gypsy* has for some members of English society.

Evidence of the low physical contact between the two races can be elicited in the discourse of non-gypsy British group, where we have phrases such as "I've heard that..." "I was told..." "Personally, I don't know any gypsy, but..." that imply the low interethnic contact we referred to. For the members of the dominant group, the idea of a possible contact with a gypsy represents a cultural threat, and even a physical one. Our informants "have heard about" cases of open violence, which make them prefer keep distance from gypsies. Stories they "have been told", but very few of them have experienced any case, positive or negative, as a direct witness. One of the main aspects we had special interest to uncover in the present analysis was whether the dominant group sees itself as a tolerant group towards the gypsy community. There were some informants who acknowledged that there is a "wider, more hidden discrimination against minorities in Great Britain". Our informants share the general assumption that since gypsies are

in Great Britain, they have to adopt the dominant system and follow the norms of the culture that surrounds them. An example of this can be seen in the discourse of the dominant group, where our informants referred to gypsies as "that strange group" that "do not fit in British social system". We may talk about fear to what is different, that is, to what is different to the dominant culture. And what is different to the norm, seems to be subversive to the dominant culture: i.e., a threat.

As we have already mentioned, only those informants of the dominant group who have xenophobic attitudes towards the gypsy ethnic group, defined the situation with the word "conflictive". Moreover, the negative image of gypsies existing in the British society, is a direct consequence of those cases in which gypsy travellers are thought to be responsible for minor interracial incidents. Evidence in the discourse of the dominant group that show the negative image of gypsies were found in expressions such as "This is a problematic group...", "... people who spoil wherever they go..." Thus, it is not surprising that the negative connotations of all things referring to gypsies give rise to the use of insulting expressions containing the word gypsy, or the term "gypo" above mentioned.

Our informants have the assumption that the gypsy group is a problematic group. The majority thinks that traveller tradition and life conception are incompatible with the British one. So, they see that the solution is to allow them to settle down in not used open areas but of course, away from their houses. Here it lies what we have called *eyesore phenomenon*. The following expressions are examples of this: "...as long as they are away from us...", "I don't care where they settle down, but not here...", "If they are away from us that's good for both parts".

Interethnic differences are not generally understood by the dominant group. They can not understand how these people have adopted this lifestyle, or lifestyle that is unthinkable in our modern societies. This is implied in phrases such as "...those strange people": "I wonder how they can live in that condition..."

The discourse of the dominant group revealed that both, the group with less tolerant attitudes and the tolerant minority within the dominant group, think that integration can not take place due to the cultural clash and the unwillingness on the part of gypsies to be integrated. Our more tolerant informants consider assimilation not to be the solution for the conflict, because the solution should respect gypsy beliefs and traditions. On the other hand, the vast majority of our informants sees assimilation of those gypsies who really want to become part of the system, as the best way of solving the conflict. This attitude is linked to the assumption that "...since they are in Great Britain, they have to adapt themselves to the ruling system and follow the local norms".

Focusing on the political background again, we must state that our informants do not have the certain knowledge that the British Government has established specific policies to solve the conflict. However, they think gypsies are offered all the advantages of the system, in turn, gypsies simply have to follow the rules that govern the country. However gypsies do not only want all these advantages, but they also want to establish their own communities and rule

themselves in Great Britain but without being ruled by British laws. Expressions that imply the desire of 'protecting local people' interests were repeated through the discourse in sentences like "they can't expect to become members of our community if they follow their own laws; that lifestyle doesn't fit in England...". "we must protect our tradition, safety and welfare".

### **II.5.3. Third step: Sociological analysis**

British people do not know what have been the reasons that have forced gypsies to adopt this lifestyle. Among the tolerant 23%, 5% states that if non-gypsy British people knew gypsy history and origins, the events that have been responsible for their nomad lifestyle, many aspects of their lifestyle would be better understood, and it would favour tolerance, and might put the Government on the right way to find a solution to the conflict.

We are dealing with a situation of low interethnic contact, where stereotypes and prejudices are the main factor affecting the xenophobic attitudes of the dominant group. In this social context, interracial anxiety does not appear as a result of negative real contact with a gypsy, but because of stories they have been told, the negative stereotype of a gypsy, reports in media of cases of open violence, robbery... Similarly, xenophobic attitudes that in very few occasions are justified by personal negative experiences with any member of the gypsy group. Informants who are acquainted with interethnic conflicts, are the ones conforming the minority who acknowledge that there is lack of information about this race and claim it as a way of making non-gypsy British people more tolerant with gypsy culture and tradition. This minority sees that, in general terms, British society is not tolerant. Moreover, they also observe negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities on the part of official circles, figures of authority and institutions, which reject them in a legally covered way. They observed that prejudices and negative attitudes seem to be more marked in old and uneducated British people. They even admit that this negative stereotype affects them so negatively that they even feel anxiety when they think of the possibility of a physical contact. In 2% of the cases, interracial anxiety does not exist. These are the few cases in which our informants have experienced a positive contact with a member of the gypsy group.

Regarding to the perception of the conflict, informants with more tolerant attitudes towards this ethnic minority think that lack of tolerance as well as xenophobic attitudes are the main factors that give rise to the present conflict. Together with the fact that some British institutions favour these negative attitudes (they talk about cases of ejection or taxes imposition), they also see Media as the other main factor favouring the negative image of gypsies. Sensationalist reports about incidents where gypsies are involved perpetuate the negative stereotype of the gypsy. Media seem to focus more on the large-scale problems of racism defined as a colour question, when dealing with intercultural and interracial problems. Gypsy British people are often difficult to identify by the colour of the skin, so they are not included in the public debate as an ethnic group that suffer from racism.

### III. ANALYSIS

When our informants were asked about their view and value judgement of the gypsy lifestyle, just a minority answered that gypsies are forced to live this way, that it is not their nature as ethnic group which causes the so-called problematic situation. Rather, they think that intolerant attitudes, prejudices and rejection, encountered by gypsies wherever they go, have forced them to acquire a nomadic lifestyle. In fact, gypsies have a communal culture, which is totally different from British lifestyle, and this fact makes both groups clash.

As far as the informants' attitudes towards the attempt of setting up on the part of gypsies in not used open areas is concerned, our informants explained that their need and right to a place to live is respected, but always at a distance. Because, in the opposite case, the interethnic problems or conflict begin to appear. We are here dealing with what we called the eyesore phenomenon, which makes British people 'tolerate' gypsies as long as gypsy population do not directly 'affect' them: in other words, as long as they occupy, dirt and spoil open areas far from their towns. Moreover, we can talk about a kind of vicious circle: non-gypsy people admit that gypsies need to settle down in any place, but this place is always someone else's land.

In relation to the fact that, as our informants recognised, there is low tolerance towards ethnic minorities in Great Britain, the members of the British dominant group share a general feeling of cultural superiority. Romani culture has nothing in common with the British one since Romani culture has its origins in Eastern Europe. Therefore, what we face here is a complex relation between asymmetrical cultures, that give rise to the fact that most British people do not understand the 'gap' existing between both cultures. As a result of such difference, it seems that non-gypsy British people consider everything concerning gypsies (look, lifestyle, customs...) strange, unacceptable and of course inferior to their own culture. They actually ignore the fact that this may be exactly the same impression the Romani have of British culture. This feeling of cultural superiority may lead the majority (70%) to put the blame for the aforementioned intergroup incidents on gypsies. Whereas a minority of our informants wonders whether this group has any reason that justifies the way they act.

In cases of low interethnic contact - and this is a clear example - stereotypes and prejudices clearly play a crucial role as far as negative attitudes are concerned, because they constrain such attitudes in a decisive way. Xenophobic attitudes may become so extreme that, as we have said before, gypsies may represent an eyesore for local people. As this tolerant minority recognised, the problem at this point is that stereotypes and prejudices against gypsies are part of their social environment, and that they even constrain the interethnic behaviour of more tolerant people, because as members of that society they are also influenced by the gypsy stereotype and xenophobic attitudes. However, where the contact with a gypsy has been a positive experience, stereotypes and prejudices stop having a determinant influence on the dominant group's attitudes.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the discursive analysis of keywords and expressions related with the theme of the study allows us to elicit xenophobic attitudes, and help us discovering and understand the xenophobic attitudes. From our data analysis, we have elicited various and contrasting types of attitudes of our British informants towards both the British gypsy ethnic group, and the interethnic conflict that exist at a social and political background. Among them, we have specifically paid attention to the xenophobic attitudes shared by a low number of our informants. In sum, we can conclude stating that non-gypsy British people perceive the situation between them and gypsy British people as *conflictive*, when the problems arising from such interethnic situation directly affects them. In contrast, non-gypsy British people who have not had any kind of contact with the gypsy group, use the term *problematic situation* when talking about the matter. Considering specific attitudes towards the gypsy group, the study has revealed that our informants have two opposite attitudes towards the gypsy ethnic group: on the one hand, a tolerant minority respects the gypsy community, culture and traditions, on the other hand, a majority of our informants shows clear xenophobic attitudes towards gypsy-travellers.

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