


To “slang” or not to “slang”: That is the persuasive question



Research “under construction”

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Research questions



Primary research question

- **What effect has slang on persuasion?**

Secondary research question

- **Which slang (loveLife slang or subjects' own slang) is more effective in producing attitude change?**

The concept “slang”



Slang will be seen as gradient concept, at the one end of the continuum will be “proper” slang words which are group specific, at the other end of the continuum will be more general informal words which are not group specific (cf. Stenstrom et al 1996)

Study population



Urban teenagers (grade 11-learners) attending high schools in the Tshwane metropolitan area with Afrikaans, English and Northern-Sotho (Sepedi) as first languages.

Experimental design



Design consists of two phases:

Phase 1: The persuasive impact of loveLife slang

Phase 2: Subjects' own slang forms and its persuasive impact

Experimental study consists of:

- **only post-testing**
- **independent and dependent variables**
- **experimental and control groups**

Experimental design (cont.)

- **2X3 between-subjects design (for each phase)**
- **independent variables:**
 - ⇒ **language variety (loveLife slang; own slang and standard variety)**
 - ⇒ **language groups (Afrikaans, English and Northern-Sotho/ Sepedi)**
- **Dependent variable:**
 - ⇒ **attitude change**
- **Two texts versions to be designed that are identical in content, advocated position, sentence structure and length. The only difference will be the lexical items: In the one text slang items will be prevalent, in the other text these slang items will be replaced by standard lexical items.**

Phase 1

- **loveLife slang and its impact on persuasion**
- **loveLife text an authentic text, appeared in *thethaNathi* (Issue 13/ June 03-07; 2002)**
- **More than 20% of the lexical items/ expressions in text are slang items**

Slang items:

getting around, guy, gal, playa, lurv to score, hot babe, being he village bicycle, uncool, sussed, catching (HIV), skyrocket, heaps (better), crowd, pit (of problems)

Phase 2

- **Subjects' own slang forms and its effect on attitude change**
- **The procedure to elicit "own" slang forms:**
 - ⇒ **Classroom discussions with the subjects around the standard language version (of the loveLife text) written in subjects' first language.**
 - ⇒ **Lexical items that were translated (from the loveLife text) into standard lexical items will be highlighted.**
 - ⇒ **Subjects will be divided into groups, and expected to translate the standard version into their own slang, with particular reference to the highlighted items.**
- **Data processing:**
 - ⇒ **content analysis on conceptual level, particularly the word level**
 - ⇒ **coding for frequency will be employed**

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)



- **To explain and predict the effect of slang on persuasion CAT is employed**
- **CAT explains the dynamics of language shifts in social interactions and the consequences thereof**
- **CAT distinguish between speech convergence and divergence.**
- **Speech convergence is a strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other's communicational style by means of a wide range of linguistic-prosodic-non-verbal features.**
- **Language convergence is regarded as a move towards evoking the recipient's social approval or towards social integration or identification with the recipient. Other factors: to produce greater social attraction, to be perceived favourably, to become assimilated into outgroup.**

CAT (cont.)

- **In health care environments CAT can be an important component of many supportive encounters. Giles et al (1991:45) argue:**

“Feeling supported may be a function of the degree of attuning (accommodation) one receives, and so to those who are known or perceived to possess attuning skills may be preferentially sought out as supporters” (My insertion)

- **CAT is rooted in similarity-attraction research:**

As similarity increases, social attraction increases

(Giles & Powesland 1975; Giles & Smith 1979; Simard et al 1986; Street & Hopper 1982; Giles et al 1973, 1987, 1991)

Experimental studies on language variation

- **Standard variety rated higher in terms of competence/ socio-intellectual status dimensions (by both standard-accented and non-standard-accented listeners)**
- **Non-standard variety rated higher in terms of personal integrity and/ or social attractiveness/ solidarity dimensions (by non-standard-accented listeners)**
- Cheyne 1970; Giles 1971; Bourhis, Giles & Lambert 1975; Ryan & Carranza 1975; Giles, Baker & Fielding 1975 (quoted in Giles & Powesland 1975:101-105); Ryan & Sebastian 1980; Giles, Wilson & Conway 1981; Ryan & Bulik 1982; Giles & Sassoon 1983; Brown, Giles & Thakerar 1985; Giles, Henwood, Coupland & Coupland 1992
- Cheyne 1970; Giles 1971; Bourhis, Giles & Lambert 1975; Flores & Hopper 1975 (quoted in Street Jr & Hopper 1985:179); Giles, Wilson & Conway 1981

Lang. variation studies (cont.)

- **Standard variety perceived more favourably in terms of social attractiveness/ solidarity dimensions (by standard-accented listeners)**
- **Interaction between social class and language variety**
- **No interactive effects between social class and language variety**
- **Dialectical similarity (on topic irrelevant to regional norms) rated higher in terms of competence and trustworthiness**
- Ryan & Sebastian 1980; Ryan & Bulik 1982; Rubin 1997
- Ryan & Sebastian 1980
- Ryan & Bulik 1982; Giles & Sassoon 1983; Stewart, Ryan & Giles 1985
- Houck & Bowers 1967; Delia 1972

Lang. variation studies (cont.)

- **Non-standard variety produces significant attitude shift (among regional-accented listeners)**
- **Standard variety shows tendency to produce attitude shift (among standard-accented listeners) -- non-significant trend**
- Giles 1973 (quoted in Giles & Powesland 1975:93-94)
- Powesland & Giles 1975 (quoted in Giles & Powesland 1975:95-96)

Lang. variation studies: Trends/Generalities

- **The standard variety is rated by both standard-accented (ingroup members) and non-standard-accented listeners (outgroup members) higher in terms of competence/ status dimensions.**
- **Non-standard-accented speech is perceived more favourably in terms of social attractiveness and/ or personal integrity (in some studies referred to as the solidarity dimensions).**
- **Standard-accented speech is also perceived more favourably in terms of social attractiveness/ solidarity dimensions.**

Applying CAT to lang. variation studies

- **Listeners' identification with the language variety (standard or non-standard) seems to be the most important factor. Subjects who perceive the speaker as "one of us" (as an ingroup member) tend to perceive the situation as solidarity-stressing; i.e. these listeners are more socially attracted to the speaker, and the speaker tends to reflect greater integrity** (cf. Edwards 1982:25; Street Jr & Hopper 1982; Giles & Street Jr 1985; Giles & Powesland 1975).
- **Contrary to previous claims (cf. Giles & Powesland 1975; Giles & Street Jr. 1985) the standard variety can be evaluated favourably in terms of both competence and social attractiveness. The condition for social attractiveness is: The listener must identify with the standard-accented speaker, i.e. regard the speaker as an ingroup member.**
- **The non-standard variety is perceived favourably only in terms of social attractiveness and/ or personal integrity. The condition: The speaker must be viewed as an ingroup member.**

Mediating factors in language attitude formation

Cognitive processes

- **Prior knowledge of speaker can affect listeners' evaluations of speaker**
- **High-familiar context: receiver has prior knowledge of speaker**
- **Low-familiar context: receiver has no (or little) knowledge of speaker**
- **High-familiar context: other “individuated information” about the speaker (such as speaker’s competence/ abilities) can override language cues as basis of speaker evaluation**
- **High-familiar context: receivers able to activate “efficiently organised knowledge” stored in schematas and can process “schema-inconsistent information and generate alternative interpretations”** (Cargile et al 1994:220)

Cognitive processes (cont.)

- **High-familiar context:** When information processing is via the peripheral route, language attitudes that are made salient tend to be those “which are incorporated in or supportive of an existing scheme” (Cargile et al 1994:220)
- **Low-familiar context:** Receiver not able to form language attitudes by selecting from an existing schemata, but the available language behaviours automatically elicit attitudes in the hearer.
- **Stereotypic schemes influence processing of information about a speaker.** In low-familiar contexts the language variety can evoke a stereotypical response (such as: non-standard-accented speakers have low levels of education) (Street Jr. & Hopper 1982:177)

Cognitive processes (cont.)



- **Relevance for this study:**
 - **The study operates in a low-familiar context: Writer will be unknown to the subjects. Subjects will have little (or no) knowledge about the writer.**
 - **To determine the (salient) stereotypes that the language variety elicits:**

How would you describe the writer of the text?

Social context



- **How is the social interaction perceived?**
 - **Interpersonal vs. Intergroup**
- **Interpersonal interaction: the description and evaluation of the self and others are in terms of personal/ individual characteristics (such as competence/ expertise)**
- **Intergroup interaction: the description of the self and others are in terms of the salient attributes of the ingroup (eg. language/ belief/ ethnic/ racial similarities)**
(Giles & Ryan 1982; Brown & Turner 1984; Van Knippenberg 2000)

Social context (cont.)

- **Which factors elicit interindividual or intergroup behaviour?**
 - **Confrontation/ conflict with outgroup**
 - **language**
 - **other similarities (belief, ethnic, etc.)**
(Brown & Turner 1984)
- **Language variety can be seen as marker of ingroup identity; to reflect the distinctiveness of the group** (Fishman 1977; Bourhis & Giles 1977; Giles 1979; Brown & Levinson 1979; Giles & Johnson 1984)
- **Distinction between marked linguistic forms and unmarked forms: Non-standard varieties marked; standard/ normative varieties unmarked.**
- **Non-standard varieties more likely to evoke social categories/ salient ingroup norms, values, stereotypes, attributes**

Social context (cont.)



- **Standard variety more likely to be perceived in interpersonal terms (and viewed as status-stressing)**
(Giles & Ryan 1982:218-9)
- **Non-standard varieties more likely to be perceived in intergroup terms (and seen as solidarity-stressing)**
- **How do we measure listeners' perception of the interaction as interpersonal or intergroup?**
- **Important to determine whether the subjects identify with the social category ascribed to them and, also to determine the shared attributes of the group.**

Interpersonal vs Intergroup interactions: Constructing a measurement scale

- **Pilot study: To determine shared attributes of teenagers**
 - *Teenagers: What makes us different as a group?*
- **13 categories identified**
 - Wearing of “name” clothes (74%)
 - Experimenting with alcohol and/ or drugs and/ or cigarettes (71%)
 - Listening to hard music (hip-hop, R&B, house music) (64%)
 - No respect for authority (63%)
 - Going to clubs/ parties (“housas”) (44%)
 - Be in relationships (“to jol”) (44%)
 - Own language variety (27%)
- **First four categories to be included in Likert-type rating scale**

Rating scale (cont.)



- **Second measurement scale:**
 - *How would you describe the writer of the text?*
- **Analysis: Modify the Cognitive Response Measure used by Sparks, Areni & Cox (1998)**
 - **Three categories:**
 - person-oriented thoughts
 - group-oriented thoughts
 - other thoughts

Other factors influencing language attitude process

- **Language similarity; source attraction and credibility**
- **Accommodation factors (external pressure, linguistic ability and effort)**
- **Attention and comprehension**
- **Affective state of receiver**
- **Route of information processing (peripheral vs central route)**
- **Formal--Informal; Standard--Non-standard**

Measurement scale: Language similarity

- **Constructing a measure for language variety similarity:**
 - **Pilot study:** Subjects responded to the question: *Why do I identify/ not identify with writer*
 - **Content analysis revealed the following:**
 - *It is the way young people speak today*
 - *The language use is similar to that of the subjects*
 - *The words in the texts are similar to those that the subjects use*
 - **Second pilot study:** Employ 4-item 5-point Likert scale to measure language similarity. With exception of one item the remaining three items yielded an alpha reliability of .80.
 - **3-item scale used by Aune & Kikuchi (1993) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$)** included in measure for language similarity.
 - **Final rating scale:** 5-item Likert scale, which is context-specific: an informal context is portrayed; i.e. “ talking to my friends”

