Language and Perceived Intelligence

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Literature Review

Introduction

In the 21st century, society relies on social media communication and the use of slang / novel words to convey complex emotions. For many people, slang is an effective form of communication, yet it has significant restrictions and limitations. Like ordinary language, slang can generate misunderstandings and confusion between certain generations, which can cause misinterpretations that some may view to be ill-mannered. Depending on the audience, the environment and the situation it is used in, plays a key role on how slang is perceived.

Given the proliferation of subcultures in modern society, each with its own sometimes contradictory slang (for example, using the same words to mean different things), meaning is lost as the language fragments. This modern evolution of language is full of both variety and versatility, and it is not limited to English, as there are also slang phrases in most other languages. Slang appears to be a sociological construct that emerges from group dynamics and the human capacity for language. Note that the speed at which words get established is considerably faster due to the advent of social media and its users. Language development on an individual scale fosters creativity and individuality, yet slang, and the attitude associated with it, are considered harmful by many people, organizations, and situations. Research shows that some slang is effective in advertising, but an abundance of slang is counterproductive (Liu et al., 2019). Further, using slang violates language expectations, causing negative perceptions and attitudes toward the user and his work. There are even questions about his cognitive abilities and work ethic (Van der Zanden et al., 2019).

People often find slang speakers to be more approachable due to the conversational-style aspect of familiarity (Schneider et al., 2015). The use of "Informal" language and the personalization of slang in conversations provide people a more approachable attribute due to the familiarity and friendly social aspects associated. Although people associated with using slang are geared towards being less intelligent, studies show that this use of conversational style helps foster better learning performance when being compared to a formal speaking style due to more engagement in deep cognitive processing (Schneider et al., 2015). Children in working-class areas use language to develop identities and relationships, establishing a link between social class and language (Spencer et al., 2013). This demonstrates how language is perceived differently by both younger people and a specific social class. For instance, sophisticated language such as "posh" hinders immediate social relationships (Spencer et al., 2013). If personalization of education materials can enhance student learning (Schneider et al., 2015), then researching how slang can be incorporated into learning effectively without having a negative connotation or being seen as unintelligent is essential.

Purpose of our study

There are negative predispositions towards people using slang in daily speech. A person who uses majority slang terms is perceived as unintelligent and unprofessional. Professional settings have strict expectations about the manner of speech used during work or interviews. Working professionals avoid the use of colloquialisms to project an idealized self to their colleagues (Shulman et al., 2020). Scientists, doctors, or professors provide reputable information because their publications avoid the use of slang to ensure that publications will not be misconstrued by general audiences (Shulman et al., 2020). These respected professionals set a precedent to what kind of traits are expected in an intelligent person.Discrimination is faced when a person uses more slang in their daily language.

Evidence shows a relationship between perceived intelligence and societal class (Spencer et al., 2013). Humans make a judgement about others strictly based on first impressions, especially on intelligence. Upon first impressions, the first qualities a person displays are their language and behaviour. People who rely on slang in early social interactions are presumed less intelligent than those who strictly use professional language (Murphy, 2007).

Theories

Two theories that are relevant to this research. The first theory is language expectancy theory, which states that people develop expectations on which language to use and when, depending on the environment (Van der Zanden et al., 2019). The second is the Social Information Processing Theory, which states that when people can't find clues as to how a person is, they turn to other clues in order to fill in the missing gaps, And this could result in a bad first impression depending on if slang is used or not (Van der Zanden et al., 2019).

Summary of literature

In previous research, adolescents were asked to describe the association between language, social class and education and when those in the dating scene were asked to rank potential partners in online dating based on language errors (which is what slang is). Both studies found a negative association between the speaker and the writer when slang is used (Van der Zanden et al., 2019), (Spencer et al., 2013). When youth slang is incorporated into learning, the overall performance of transfer testing, as in completing a drawing task after listening to the corresponding information, is increased. Using personalization in the context of language with educational material helps students improve. (Schneider, et al., 2015). Children in schools use

language to create an identity for themselves and build relationships with others. Language is linked with middle-class students and their educational success (Spencer, et al., 2013).

Based on experience and observation, it seems that an unestablished level of slang is considered appropriate, and exceeding that limit leads to the message being lost (Liu et al., 2019). Intelligence is one of the first traits a person observes when they meet someone new. There are links between body language and perception of intelligence, as specific characteristics are ideal in displaying intelligence (Murphy, 2007). Key indications that social behaviours are indicators of intelligence, so that can apply to the clarity of speech.

The presence of slang affects how one interprets certain information, which ultimately influences their perceived understanding and engagement with complex and technical topics such as Science (Shulman et al., 2020). The presence of slang, can render scientific information given to individuals with no prior concept of that information, making it less accessible and create impaired comprehension and engagement ;Importantly affecting professional relationships such as doctor-patient communication, politics and more, where literacy and engagement are crucial (Shulman et al., 2020).

Limitations/Conclusion

Previous research was limited based on the perception of slang/perception of intelligence because no cause/effect was addressed directly. A quick search on PsycINFO leads us to a topic that is very narrowly researched and concerned with specific applications. We acknowledge the scope of understanding more about slang and its implications in language and the assumptions made of the speaker. Are they too informal to be taken seriously? Or does their vibrant conversation keep the attention of the audience? For our study, we will look closer at one variable, specifically the presumed intelligence of the speaker using slang vs the presumed intelligence of the speaker who is not using slang. Our study aims to address if the presence of

slang negatively influences the perception of the presenter's intelligence as opposed to a presenter who does not use slang.

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