

LANGUAGE, GENDER SALIENCE, AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

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Reductionist explanations for gender differences in language use continue to occupy much research attention. However, such approaches cannot explain when or why people might change their gender-marked language use. This article reviews and critiques several of these approaches and tests an alternative from the perspective of self-categorization theory. Male-female dyads (N = 42) discussed a gender-neutral controversial issue under conditions of low or high gender salience. When a shared student identity was salient, males and females used tentative language with equal frequency; but when gender was salient, women used more tentative language than men and held the floor longer. Furthermore, women who used more tentative language were more influential with men, but only when student identity was salient. The article suggests that women's tentative language use is influential with men when it serves to unconsciously confirm men's wider, social-structural advantages over women.

Keywords: *social identity; gender; social influence; intergroup*

Best-sellers, stereotypes, casual observation, and often empirical research tell us that men and women use language differently. Theoretically, however, there is much to be explained. Although reviews show that there are indeed gender differences (for reviews, see Aries, 1996; Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001; Pearson, West, & Turner, 1995), there is relatively little evidence of cross-situational stability in any particular linguistic form. For example, Carli (1990) found that women used more qualifiers (e.g., "I'm no expert"), hedges (e.g., kind of), and

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tag questions (e.g., capital punishment is wrong, *isn't it?*); on the other hand, Bradac, Mulac, and Thompson (1995) found that women used more intensifiers (e.g., so; really), and men used more hedges. Given the apparent ephemerality of these differences, the first and major aim of this article is to begin to explain what language forms men and women will use, when, and why.

Furthermore, gender differences in language use have evaluative consequences. For example, there is evidence to suggest that females use tentative language¹ (hedges, disclaimers, and tag questions) to gain influence with men (Carli, 1989, 1990; Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995; see also Henley & Kramarae, 1991; Lakoff, 1975, 1990). It is thought that tentative language is influential because it prevents women from being perceived as dominant and hence threatening the male social position. However, it might be countered that the perception of threat does not adequately explain this phenomenon. Although threat to male dominance might explain why males are resistant to female influence, it does not explain why males would be receptive to female tentativeness. Thus, the second aim of this article is to explore the effect of tentative language on the social influence of its users as well as the social evaluations such speakers might receive.

In this article we will first consider the most commonly cited theory and research that address gender differences in language use and then go on to introduce self-categorization theory as a framework to reconcile both empirical and theoretical difficulties associated with these approaches.

EXPLANATIONS FOR GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE USE

Research and theory that address gender differences in language use have burgeoned since the publication of Lakoff's (1973, 1975) *Language and Woman's Place*. Lakoff proposed that there is a "women's language" and that it is characterized by the more frequent use of nine forms: words related to feminine interests, "empty" adjectives (charming, sweet), tag questions, hedges, intensifiers, hyper-correct grammar, superpolite forms, avoidance of humor, and talking in italics. Lakoff argued that a number of these forms, particularly hedges (which include disclaimers, in Lakoff's scheme) and tag questions, indicate uncertainty or tentativeness. Women use these forms because of childhood socialization and because they are expected and sanctioned. This effectively places women in a double bind. On one hand, women can choose to use tentative language forms, but then they risk being perceived as unintelligent or incompetent (and for men this justifies maintaining women in a subordinate position). Or, on the other hand, women can choose more direct, male language, but then they risk being demeaned and ostracized for being unfeminine.

Lakoff's (1973, 1975) scheme has stimulated a good deal of research that addresses whether men and women do indeed use these forms with different frequencies; but, as noted, research remains equivocal as to what forms are used differently, when, and why (Aries, 1996). A recent tabulation by Mulac et al. (2001) showed that disclaimers (three studies) and hedges (two studies) are used more often by women but that tag questions are sometimes used more often by women (four studies) and sometimes by men (two studies). Indeed, why might women use tentative forms more frequently when the cost to one's group as a whole is presumably greater than the personal cost of appearing unfeminine? When and why would these language forms be expected and sanctioned? More importantly, Lakoff's reasoning leaves little room for us to understand how women might influence men, let alone the fostering of wider social change. Of course, women do influence men, and recent years have been marked by a great deal of social change. Clearly, it is worthwhile to consider how tentative language might (or might not) promote influence and social change (see below for discussion).

Theory and research inspired by Lakoff's (1973, 1975) work have focused largely on the question of why women might use more tentative language than men. Explanations have been of two general forms: power/dominance theories and cultural difference/social-learning theories.

An early and simple power theory was put forward by Zimmerman and West (1975). These researchers observed that in intergender conversations, men produced the overwhelming number of interruptions. Zimmerman and West interpreted these interruptions as instances of conversational dominance and suggested that male conversational dominance of women is a recapitulation of wider, social-structural dominance. This position is simply countered by evidence that interruptions can be used to promote solidarity (Makri-Tsilipakou, 1994) and by evidence that women interrupt men more frequently than vice versa when discussing a feminine topic (Dovidio, Brown, Heltman, Ellyson, & Keating, 1988).

A more sophisticated power theory was offered by O'Barr (1982). O'Barr proposed that tentative language use reflects a speaker's socioeconomic status (cf. Fishman, 1978, 1980; Johnson, Funk, & Clay-Warner, 1998). Although there is some evidence that women use more tentative language than men, this is because men generally have more socioeconomic status than women. Indeed, research seems to confirm this position. A study of courtroom discourse showed that tentative language use was less common as the occupational status of the witness increased for both men and women (Lind & O'Barr, 1979). Further research (Erickson, Lind, Johnson, & O'Barr, 1978) using courtroom simulations showed that witnesses who used relatively frequent tentative language were perceived as less attractive, less credible, and their

testimony was considered less acceptable, regardless of the sex of the witness or participant.

Although an advance on Zimmerman and West (1975), O'Barr's (1982) approach remains problematic (Reid & Ng, 1999). First, this approach abstracts language use from the group memberships of its users; tentative language use is attributed to socioeconomic categories, yet there is some evidence that tentative language is used more frequently by women and quite possibly also by ethnic minorities and the working class. When this is considered, another interpretation of the data of Erickson et al. (1978) presents itself: It might be that middle-class, undergraduate respondents perceive tentative language as stereotypic of either minorities or the working class and for this reason consider it to be unattractive, low on credibility, and less acceptable. Indeed, research by Giles (1973) provides support for this interpretation. Giles presented a persuasive message by either a received-pronunciation (RP) speaker or speakers with regional accents. Although the message from the RP speaker was rated as being of higher quality, the regionally accented speakers produced more attitude change. This brings us to a second criticism: Namely, O'Barr's approach implies that there is something inherently powerful in nontentative language, yet research such as that of Giles (as well as research by Carli, 1990, and Dovidio et al., 1988) suggests that the social influence of such language is context sensitive and depends on what hearers are willing to concede. O'Barr's (1982) approach has no theoretical mechanism to explain how women (or anyone else who uses tentative language) might gain social influence. In fact, O'Barr's approach implies that the only way women can be influential is to adopt nontentative language. This inheres an implicit endorsement of a social-mobility ideology: For women, the only way to become influential is to abandon their language forms and to conform to male standards.

Another power approach discussed by Henley and Kramarae (1991; see also Kramarae, 1990) is not so much a model of intergender communication as a critical approach to existing theory. These theorists lament the need for research attention to address gender hierarchy and male exploitation of women. Like O'Barr (1982), gender difference in language use is not attributed to something about gender but instead to power inequality. However, rather than viewing power as a function of socioeconomic status, Henley and Kramarae consider the wider power inequality between men and women qua men and women. Whereas Zimmerman and West (1975) made a direct link between power and language, Henley and Kramarae linked power to language use through social identity. This reorientation makes it possible to circumvent problems associated with both Zimmerman and West's and O'Barr's models. Namely, it suggests that people might evaluate women who use tentative language as unintelligent or incompetent

because it is perceived to be a low-status identity in relation to male language (see Carli, 1990, for such findings). Furthermore, this approach makes it possible to begin to theorize social change. By actively recognizing that power inequality underpins male-female differences in language use, women can organize collectively to maintain female forms of language while arguing for an end to inequalities. Indeed, this appears to be part of the reason that feminists have adopted new vocabularies (Coates, 1986). Although we view Henley's and Kramarae's critique as a welcome redress to many of the inherent assumptions of common approaches to gender and language, it remains that they have yet to produce a coherent and testable theory.

The second common approach to gender and language is the intercultural/sociodevelopmental approach. This form of argument has been exemplified in the popular press by John Gray's (1992) book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. The assumption is that there are essential differences between men and women, and from these differences, language use flows. Because of inherent differences (be they biological, cultural, or sociodevelopmental), men and women see the world differently, use language differently, and as a result, miscommunicate. This same argument is apparent in a number of scholarly theories that address gender differences in terms of subcultural and/or social developmental theories. For example, Maltz and Borker (1982; cf. Gilligan, 1982) suggest that men and women speak differently because they are socialized into and occupy positions in separate subcultures. Girls are socialized in ways that emphasize interdependence, communality, and cooperation, and consequently, girls use language that supports conversation and relationships. Boys are socialized in ways that emphasize independence, separation, and competition, and consequently, boys use language that is task oriented and controlling. For example, according to Maltz and Borker, girls and women ask more questions and do so to facilitate the flow of conversation; whereas boys and men use more interruptions and do so to control conversation. This analysis would imply, then, that women are more likely than men to use tentative forms of language because they have been socialized to do so.

However, this approach can be criticized for failing to explain why men and women might use these forms on some occasions and not on others or why men and women might use the linguistic forms of the other gender. Maltz and Borker (1982) might counter that there is much overlap between the genders and that situational variations account for such effects. We would argue that this simply sidesteps the need to address the process that governs such changes. Why would some situations and not others promote some uses of language and not others? Indeed, there seems to be little utility in offering an endless list of situations in which people do and do not use gendered forms of language—there are potentially infinite social situations that vary with

time, place, actors, roles, and so on. What is needed is a parsimonious, theoretical mechanism that accounts for the dynamics of language use.

SELF-CATEGORIZATION THEORY AND TENTATIVE LANGUAGE USE

Self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985, 1987) can be used to reconcile a number of the inconsistencies found in the literature on the incidence of tentative language use and, in so doing, avoid the criticisms we have raised in relation to the power/dominance and subcultural/developmental theories. In brief, by considering the historical and contextually relevant basis for social comparisons between males and females (broadly speaking, whether relations are cooperative or competitive in nature), we can make predictions about the contextual salience of gender, its normative character, and, hence, specific predictions about whether males and females will use more or less of the linguistic features identified by Lakoff (1973, 1975).

Self-categorization theory is a social-cognitive approach to understanding the genesis of collective behavior. According to the theory, the mechanism that underpins all collective behavior is a subjective shift in self-definition from self as an individual to self as a group member. The process that governs this shift has been labeled the *depersonalization process*. This is not to say a loss of self but rather a qualitative shift in self-conception from idiosyncratic differences (as realized in intragroup social contexts) to shared identity as a group member (as realized in intergroup social contexts). The mechanism that governs this shift is described by the *fit process*. Fit follows from an interaction of individual (perceiver readiness), cognitive (comparative fit), and social (normative fit) components.

Perceiver readiness (also labeled *category accessibility*) captures the fact that there are individual differences in the propensity to self-categorize. These include but are not limited to social values, experiences, needs, task demands, and motivations. In short, people tend to categorize in ways that make sense of their personal experiences and current psychological needs. *Comparative fit* refers to the process of cognitively amplifying between category differences and within category similarities. So, for example (other things being equal), in a social context in which there is an attitude difference between men and women, the comparative-fit principle tells us that people will perceive the most psychologically diagnostic or meaningful position as that which is simultaneously most different between gender groups and most similar within gender groups (this can be expressed mathematically by the metacontrast ratio [Turner, 1987]). However, this is an entirely cold and cognitive process; it is no different than the process we go through when bringing to mind representative instances of tables and chairs. It is *normative fit* that lends the theory social relevance. People are most likely to perceive (and internalize)

comparative information that is consistent with norms. For example, a collection of men and women might be categorized along gender lines when they consistently differ in opinion, but this is particularly likely to happen if that difference is one that people stereotypically associate with men and women.

The information that is used for self-categorization and social comparison is represented as a prototype—a typical, representative instance of a category. Prototypes are context-dependent ‘fuzzy sets’ of attributes that fall along a dimension of social comparison. Social comparisons might be based on attitudes, forms of dress, skin color, gender, accent, phrases, and—relevant to our current purposes—word choice. The particular attributes that are perceived to be the most prototypical are those that maximize intergroup differences and intragroup similarities. Under the right conditions, tentative language could be a prototypical feature for females. However, this is not to say that women will use tentative language whenever they perceive themselves in terms of gender.

We need to know something of the circumstances of the social categorization to make a specific prediction. On one hand, if men and women find themselves in a competitive “battle of the sexes” social context, say, in a heated intergroup exchange among several men and women, we can predict that both men and women will tend to use direct/nontentative language features—features that we normally associate with men. However, this would only be the case if the women concerned perceived the male style of argument as a legitimate and stable higher-status form (see social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this context, the prototypical feature of women would not be tentative language: It would be their sharp difference of opinion with men.²

In fact, Hogg (1985) tested this prediction. Male and female subjects discussed a controversial social issue in either same-sex dyads or a competitive, intergroup context in which two males and two females agreed within groups but disagreed across groups. Naive subjects then listened to and rated abstracted contributions of the speakers. Both men and women were perceived as less feminine/more masculine in the mixed-sex group discussion than in the same-sex dyadic discussion. Although Hogg did not code the language of the speakers, we might speculate that few of the features of tentative language would have been displayed in the intergroup discussion, whereas relatively many would have been displayed in the dyadic encounters. However, the groups analyzed here differed in size, and so it is possible that women used more masculine language in the group context because they had the support of a fellow female and hence felt confident arguing with the men. To resolve this issue, further research should keep group size constant and code actual, conversational behavior.

On the other hand, it is possible to conceive of an intergroup social context in which tentative language use is prototypical for females and nontentative language is prototypical for males. Such a context would be one in which traditional sex-role stereotypes fit. If males conceive of themselves as competitive, task oriented, and independent, whereas females conceive of themselves as cooperative, relationship oriented, and dependent, it would follow that men will use relatively direct language and women relatively tentative language. This would be most likely to occur in a social context in which male/female differences are apparent (i.e., in which there is comparative fit) but where interaction is relatively cooperative (as opposed to competitive and antagonistic). This leads us to predict

Hypothesis 1: In a cooperative, intergroup social context, women will use more tentative language—tag questions, hedges, and disclaimers—than men.

It is also possible to make predictions about a context in which both males and females would use similar and moderate levels of tentative language. In a context in which a male and female discuss a topic on the basis of a shared identity, we would predict similar levels of tentative language. In this case, there would be no comparative basis for a distinction between men and women, and so language would not be used to differentiate. This leads to the null hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: In an intragroup social context, men and women will use tentative language with an equal frequency.

More interestingly, we can contrast the frequency of tentative language use that we would expect men and women to use under conditions in which gender is salient and compare it with a context in which a shared identity is salient.

Hypothesis 3: Women will use more tentative language in a cooperative, intergroup social context than in an intragroup social context.

Hypothesis 4: Men will use less tentative language in a cooperative intergroup social context than in an intragroup social context.

SELF-CATEGORIZATION, TENTATIVE LANGUAGE, AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Carli (1990) found that women used more tentative language when speaking with men than with women. Furthermore, the more tentative the language women used, the more influential they were with men but the less influential with women. A second study replicated this finding on social influence and showed further that the tentative

women were perceived to be more likable and trustworthy by men but less so by women. Interestingly, the tentative women were also perceived to be, among other things, less intelligent and competent than the assertive women.

Carli's (1990) experiments seem to suggest that tentative language can be functional for women who try to influence men. However, it is possible that this is not due to language tentativeness per se, but rather it might be the psychological context in which those forms of language are used. Indeed, the fact that men are influenced by women they like and trust yet consider to be incompetent and unintelligent suggests another interpretation. It might be that "men are willing to withstand short-term concessions in social influence if this serves a broader function of maintaining power inequalities in the longer run" (Reid & Ng, 1999, p. 123). Tentative language use by women might confirm and restate advantages for men. If this is true, self-categorization theory can be used to suggest that such an effect will only occur when an intergroup relationship between men and women is salient. If men and women conceive of themselves in terms of some other shared identity (say, as members of the same university) that is irrelevant to self-definition along the lines of gender, we might predict that there will be no possibility for the confirmation of the broader power inequality and hence no advantage for women in using tentative language with men. Thus:

Hypothesis 5: Men will be more influenced by women who use tentative language when gender is salient than when an alternative identity is salient.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND DESIGN

Twenty-one male and 21 female undergraduate students participated. Participants were recruited from the first-year psychology participant pool and from various lunch halls at the University of Queensland. Participants received \$10 (AUD).

A pretest questionnaire measured attitude positions on potential discussion topics. The study was an experimental-correlational design. The variables included gender salience (*low* versus *high*), participant gender, and language tentativeness (tag questions, hedges, and disclaimers), which was coded from participants' 10-minute dyadic conversations and used as both an independent and dependent variable. A postdiscussion questionnaire included a measure of attitudes on the topic of discussion and social evaluations of discussion partners.

PRETEST QUESTIONNAIRE

A pretest questionnaire was administered to 147 potential participants and was used to identify potential participants for the study, suitable topics for discussion, and to gauge pre-experiment attitudes. The questionnaire measured positions on 14 issues. Participants stated their positions on Likert scales anchored by *completely for* (1) and *completely against* (10). Each issue question was accompanied by a measure of the participant's interest (1 = *no interest*, 10 = *very high interest*) and issue knowledge (1 = *no knowledge*, 10 = *very much knowledge*). Participants who indicated attitude positions that were extreme (i.e., 1 or 10) or neutral (i.e., 5 or 6) were not considered for the experiment. Furthermore, participants who indicated the highest levels of interest and knowledge were given preference.

Another purpose of the pretest questionnaire was to identify topics that were gender-neutral (as per previous research, e.g., Carli, 1989, 1990) and hence to eliminate any advantages that might accrue from gender-preferential topics. To test for gender-neutrality, a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with participant gender as the independent variable was run on the 14 attitude items. The omnibus test revealed a significant effect for gender, $F(14, 134) = 2.85$, $p = .001$. Analysis of the univariate effects revealed no reliable gender differences for the following topics (which were, therefore, used for the conversations): "Capital punishment should be instituted in Australia (i.e. the state should have the power to execute)," "Membership in the UQ Student Union should be voluntary," "The government should sign a treaty with Aboriginal Australians recognising their right to self-government," "Heroin-shooting galleries should be made available for addicts in Brisbane," and "Mandatory sentencing (the sentencing of juveniles who have been convicted of an offence three times) should be introduced in Queensland." Discussion topics were evenly distributed across the salience manipulation.

PROCEDURE

Participants were recruited by telephone approximately 2 to 4 weeks following completion of the pretest. Upon arriving at the laboratory, participants were seated in separate cubicles and asked to read a cover sheet that outlined the procedure of the study. Next, participants were asked to write three arguments for their position on the discussion topic. This exercise was designed to encourage participants to think about the issue to facilitate discussion. Participants were then reseated in front of a video camera and were read information designed to heighten the salience of either gender or student identity. In the high gender-salience condition, participants were read the following:

We are comparing males and females in the way that they co-ordinate their discussions of different issues. In our previous research we have found that males and females differ quite sharply in the way that they approach issues such as (the topic of discussion). We can't give you any details, because we will be testing an explanation for these differences in today's study. What we can tell you, is that there is a very stable and consistent difference between males and females that has been found in several other studies. We will point these out to you after the discussion. We have separate databases for males and females, and at the end of today's study, we will enter your data into these databases for later comparison. Please note that your interaction will remain completely anonymous. So, what we would like you to do today is use your initial thoughts on this controversial issue and work with your partner to get a discussion underway.

The manipulation was designed to provide information only about a difference between males and females and to avoid information that might imply greater status for any one gender. In the student identity-salience condition, the same information was read, but the terms *males* and *females* were replaced with the terms *university* and *high school* students.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

After 10 minutes of discussion, participants returned to their cubicle and completed a postdiscussion questionnaire.

Attitude change was assessed using the topic-relevant item used in the pre-discussion questionnaire. Perceived-influence ranking in the conversation was measured by asking participants to respond to the item "Who was the most influential in the discussion?" Participants ticked either "I was" or "other speaker was."

Participants were asked to rate their conversational partner on a series of evaluative items on 10-point Likert-type scales (1 = *not at all*, 10 = *very much*). Adjectives included likeable, trustworthy, competent, rational, intelligent, assertive, and submissive (reverse coded).

A check on the gender-salience manipulation asked participants "How conscious were you of being male/female during the discussion?" and "How often was your attention drawn to your partner's gender during the discussion?" These items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .85$), and so the mean score was used as a composite measure. We also measured the perceived gender prototypicality of conversational partners using two items: "How typically 'feminine/masculine' was your conversational partner?" and "How representative of women/men as a whole was your conversational partner?" The items failed to produce a reliable scale ($\alpha = .56$) and so are treated separately.

CODING

The coding scheme was adapted from that used by Carli (1990), and the summary was supplied by Mulac et al. (2001). Alterations to these coding schemes were made following close inspection of one conversation. It was found that hedges, which are normally used in the middle of statements, were being used with the same intent at the beginning of statements. Furthermore, disclaimers that are normally used immediately preceding a statement were being used by participants at the end of statements in the same manner.

The videotaped conversations were first coded with respect to tentative language: Hedges (e.g., I don't know, probably, pretty much, y'know, kinda, I think, I guess, etc.), tag questions (e.g., isn't it?, doesn't it?, you know?, right?, don't you think?), and disclaimers (e.g., I think, seems to be, I may be wrong, I'm not sure, I mean, I suppose, etc.). Those instances of hedges, tag questions, and disclaimers that were being used nontentatively were not counted as tentative language.

We coded for a series of other conversational forms not related to our specific hypotheses. These forms included hesitations (e.g., uh, um, ah, oh, well, let's see, now, so, you see), repetition or stuttering (e.g., I, I, I, think that . . .), intensifiers (e.g., quite, so, definitely, absolutely, "I fully, fully agree with that"), verbal reinforcers (e.g., uh huh, yeah), questions that were either personal or topic relevant, fillers (forms with no apparent semantic intent, e.g., like, you know), and laughter. Finally, we coded for interruptions. A successful interruption was coded when both (a) the original speaker was stopped from completing an utterance and (b) the interrupter completed an utterance. An unsuccessful interruption was coded if either or both of these criteria were not met. Two randomly selected conversations were coded by an independent judge blind to the experimental condition; this yielded a high level of reliability ($\kappa = .88$).

RESULTS

MANIPULATION CHECKS

To check for variation due to dyads, a one-way MANOVA using dyad as the predictor variable on our focal variables (tentative language, time speaking, and hesitations) was nonsignificant, $F(60, 63) = .66, ns$. Consequently, we report the raw frequencies of these language forms.

A one-way MANOVA with discussion issue as the predictor variable was conducted on the same set of focal variables. This analysis was

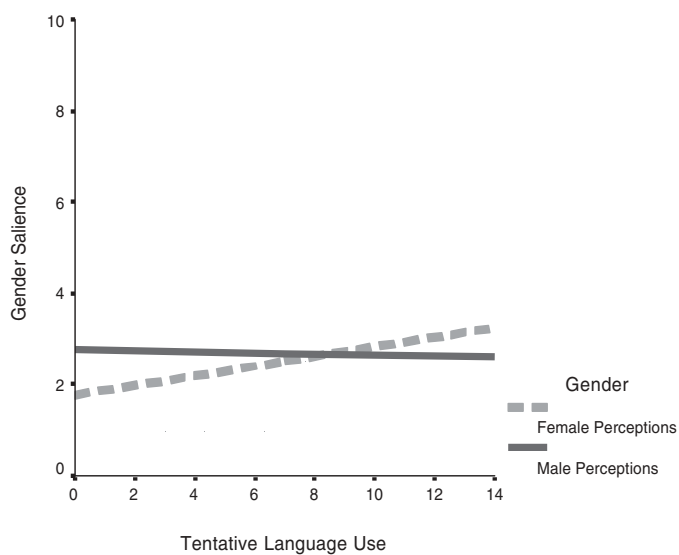
nonsignificant, $F(12, 105) = .60, ns$, and so issue of discussion is considered no further.

A two-way, between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) using participant gender and gender salience as independent variables was used to check gender salience. This analysis revealed no significant effects. A further possibility is that participants only found gender to be salient in the high gender-salience condition if conversational partners actually used stereotypical levels of tentative language (i.e., males used less and females used more tentative language). A hierarchical, moderated-regression analysis was used to test this possibility by modeling the interactive effects of participant gender, gender salience, and the frequency of tentative language use on perceptions of gender salience. First, the tentative language variable was centered (i.e., the mean scale was subtracted from the scale) to minimize potential multicollinearity and to aid in the interpretation of any interactive effects (Aiken & West, 1991). First-order effects were entered in the first block, two-way interactions in the second block, and three-way interactions in the third block. The tentative language variable was transposed within dyads so that perceptions of gender salience were contingent upon conversational partners' use of tentative language. This analysis revealed a marginal three-way interaction, $\beta = -.34, t(32) = -1.97, p = .058$. Under low gender salience (Figure 1, top), gender salience was generally low ($M = 2.58$), and both of the simple slopes were nonsignificant, $r = -.02, ns$, and $r = .17, ns$. People in the student-identity condition did not consider gender to be salient. On the other hand, in the high gender-salience condition (see Figure 1, bottom), males reported gender to be more salient the more their conversational partner used tentative language ($r = .71, p = .01$), whereas females reported gender to be more salient the less their male partners used less tentative language, $r = -.49, p = .078$. These data suggest that the high gender-salience manipulation worked when males and females used tentative language stereotypically.

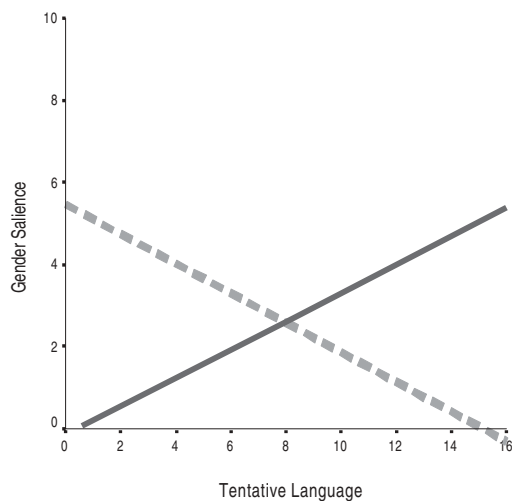
Finally, we correlated partners' tentative language use with the measures of gender prototypicality separately for males and females on the two measures of gender prototypicality. The only significant correlation was for males who perceived females as more typically female the more they used tentative language, $r = .41, p = .038$ (one-tailed).

TENTATIVE LANGUAGE USE

A participant, gender-by-gender salience ANOVA on the frequency of tentative language (mean frequency of tag questions, disclaimers, and hedges) revealed the predicted interaction, $F(1, 38) = 4.72, p = .036$ (see Figure 2). Simple effects analysis confirmed Hypotheses 1 through 3. In the high gender-salience condition, women used more tentative language than men, $M_{diff} = 3.94, F(1, 40) = 7.83, p = .008$ (confirming



Low Gender Salience



High Gender Salience

Figure 1. Perception of the Salience of Gender as a Function of Partners' Tentative Language Use for Males and Females Under Conditions of Low and High Gender Salience.

Hypothesis 1). There was no evidence that men and women used language with a different frequency in the low gender-salience condition, $M_{diff} = .53$, $F(1, 40) = .11$, *ns* (confirming Hypothesis 2); and females used more tentative language under high ($M = 9.24$) than low ($M =$

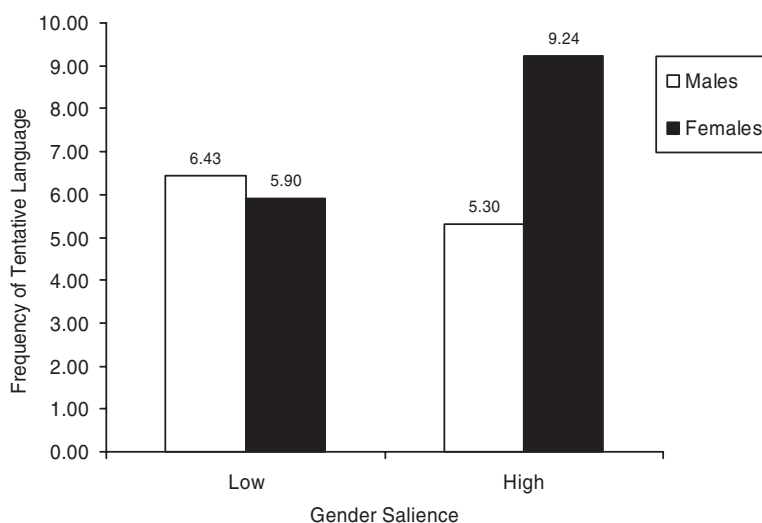


Figure 2. Frequency of Tentative Language Use by Males and Females Under Conditions of Low and High Gender Salience.

5.90) salience, $F(1, 40) = 5.35, p = .026$ (confirming Hypothesis 3). However, there was no evidence for Hypothesis 4 (although the means were in the predicted direction), that men would use less tentative language under high salience ($M = 5.30$) than low salience ($M = 6.43$), $F(1, 40) = .60, ns$.

ATTITUDE CHANGE

To test for attitude change, partial correlation analyses were conducted in which conversational partners' tentative language use was correlated with postdiscussion attitude position while controlling for the pre-discussion attitude position. The partial correlations were conducted separately for male participants under the low and high gender-salience conditions. Contrary to Hypothesis 5, males were more influenced by women who used more tentative language under low ($r = .59, p = .048$, one-tailed) than high gender salience, $r = .09, ns$.

SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES

Nontentative Language Forms

A significant participant gender-by-gender salience interaction was found on the frequency of hesitations, $F(1, 38) = 7.08, p = .01$. Under low salience, men used more hesitations ($M = 15.30$) than females ($M =$

8.20), whereas under high salience, females ($M = 15.91$) used more hesitations than males ($M = 10.27$). Scheffé post-hoc analysis of the pairwise differences showed that the only reliable difference was for females across the low and high salience conditions, $F(1, 38) = 2.28$, $p < .05$.

A significant gender-by-salience interaction was found on time speaking, $F(1, 38) = 8.19$, $p = .007$. Under low gender salience, men ($M = 291.50$) spoke longer than females ($M = 237.30$), whereas under high salience, females ($M = 335.64$) spoke longer than males ($M = 237.23$). Scheffé post-hoc analyses revealed that the difference in time speaking for females across the low and high salience conditions was significant, $F(1, 38) = 2.62$, $p < .05$, as was the difference between males and females speaking under the high salience condition, $F(1, 38) = 2.67$, $p < .05$.

No significant effects were found on the frequencies of verbal reinforcers, successful interruptions, unsuccessful interruptions, personal questions, topic-relevant questions, or laughter.

Perceived Social Influence

Participants were also asked to nominate whom they perceived to be the most influential in the conversation, themselves or their conversational partner. It was expected, following previous research (Bales, 1956; Ng, Bell, & Brooke, 1993; Reid & Ng, 2000), that speaking time would be positively correlated with perceived influence. Indeed, this proved to be the case, $r(37) = .48$, $p = .001$ (one-tailed, Spearman's rho). However, it was found that participants often disagreed on who was the most influential within the discussion. When those dyads that were unable to reach agreement ($n = 14$) were discarded, it was found that this correlation was accentuated, $r(26) = .59$, $p = .002$ (one-tailed).

To test whether males and females were equally likely to nominate themselves for the top-ranked position, a cross-tabulation of gender and influence ranking was computed (note that some participants failed to answer this question). This revealed that males rated themselves first ($n = 12$) more often than second ($n = 8$), whereas women rated themselves second ($n = 12$) more often than first ($n = 5$). A log-linear analysis revealed that this interaction was marginally significant, $\chi^2(1) = 3.46$, $p = .063$.

It is also informative to consider the rankings of self and other on social influence by gender and salience. Under low salience, males ranked themselves first ($n = 5$) and second ($n = 5$) at an equal rate, whereas females ranked themselves second ($n = 7$) more often than first ($n = 1$). Under high salience, however, males were more likely to rank themselves first ($n = 7$) than second ($n = 3$), whereas females ranked themselves first ($n = 4$) and second ($n = 5$) at about the same rate. The frequencies under high salience demonstrate that, although

males spoke considerably less than females, they were still more likely to rate themselves as more influential than their female partners. Females, on the other hand, although they dominated the floor under high salience, were still not inclined to nominate themselves as influential.

SOCIAL EVALUATIONS

Participants evaluated their conversational partners on a series of items: likeable, trustworthy, competent, rational, intelligent, assertive, and submissive. We used a multivariate, general linear model to test a set of moderated-regression analyses simultaneously. As with the analysis of the manipulation check on salience, the moderated-regression factors included participants' gender, gender salience, frequency of partners' tentative language use, and the four interaction terms. The multivariate analysis fitted all of these regressions simultaneously to our evaluation measures. This analysis revealed a significant multivariate effect for the three-way gender by gender salience by tentative language use interaction, $F(6, 27) = 2.57, p = .042$. Analysis of the univariate effects revealed that this three-way interaction was significant on competence, $F(1, 32) = 5.19, p = .029$, and trust, $F(1, 32) = 7.27, p = .011$, and marginal on rationality, $F(1, 32) = 3.62, p = .066$. The pattern of all three interactions was identical, so we will describe only that for trust.

Under conditions of low gender salience (shown in top of Figure 3), both men and women perceived each other as highly trustworthy ($M = 7.75$), and the simple slopes of partners' tentative language use on perceptions of trustworthiness were nonsignificant for both male ($r = .26, ns$) and female ($r = <.24, ns$) perceivers. Under conditions of high gender salience (shown in bottom of Figure 3), however, the more tentative language that women used, the less men trusted them ($r = <.70, p = .025$), whereas the more tentative language the men used, the more women trusted them, although the latter effect was only marginally significant, $r = .53, p = .11$.

DISCUSSION

The current study confirmed our self-categorization analysis of gender salience and language use. Namely, we found that women used more tentative language than men under conditions of high gender salience, whereas under conditions of low gender salience (where a shared student identity was salient), we found that men and women used moderate levels of tentative language at about the same frequency. Furthermore, we found that women altered their language the most by using considerably more tentative language when gender was

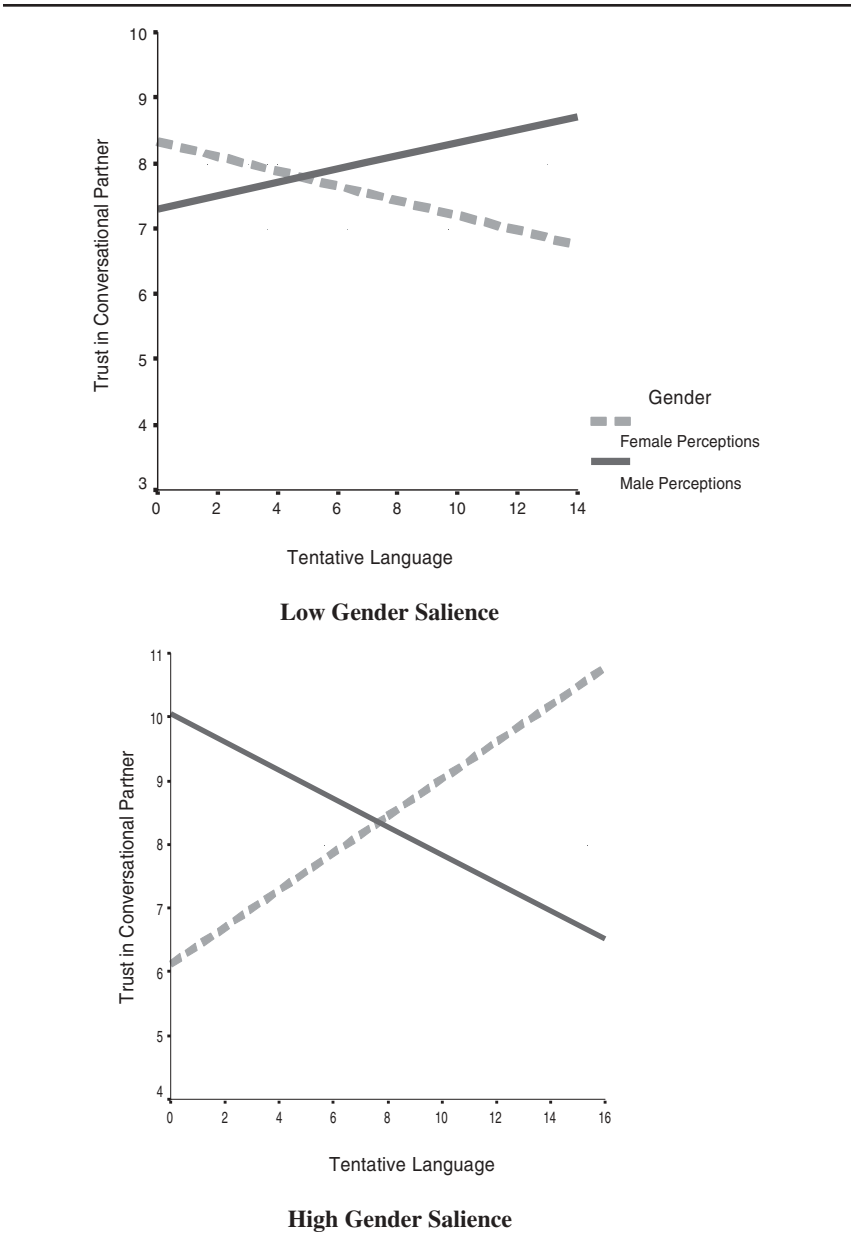


Figure 3. Trust in Conversational Partner as a Function of Conversational Partners' Tentative Language Use, Gender Salience, and Gender of Perceiver.

salient compared with when gender was not salient. Our argument is that tentative language can be a basis for delineating male-female social identities in relatively cooperative, intergroup social contexts. Further supporting this view, we found that the more tentative

language that women use, the more prototypically female they appear to males. Under conditions of low gender salience, alternative bases for social comparison become relevant, gender differentiation in language is no longer relevant to self-definition, and so men and women use similar quantities of tentative language. It is worth noting that these findings are difficult to reconcile with previous theory (Lakoff, 1973, 1975; Maltz &orker, 1982; Zimmerman & West, 1975) and research (Carli, 1990; Mulac et al., 2001) that would have predicted a main effect for gender on language use.

Furthermore, the gender difference in language use under high salience was primarily attributable to women's greater use of tentative language (men did use slightly less tentative language under high salience, but the comparison with the low salience conditions was nonsignificant). Furthermore, it would be expected that men who use less tentative language would be perceived as more prototypically male by their female interlocutors; however, we found no evidence for this. These findings are consistent with previous research that shows that women are more likely to adjust their language use to men than vice versa (Hogg, 1985) and with theory and research that demonstrate that members of subordinate groups are more likely to adjust their language to the dominant group (see Giles & Coupland, 1991). Another possibility is that tentative language use is prototypical for women, whereas other forms are prototypical for males (e.g., pitch). Further research might consider more multidimensional prototypes for defining both men and women in conversation.

We found that the more tentative language that women used, the more influential they were with men; but contrary to predictions, this was the case in the low gender-salience condition, not in the high gender-salience condition. Furthermore, it was the case that gender was not salient in the low gender-salience condition, and men and women used similar, moderate levels of tentative language in that condition. In light of these findings, it seems particularly curious that men should still be influenced by females who use language that differentiates them from men. One possible explanation is that men are influenced by the female use of tentative language when they are unconscious of gender. In fact, research suggests that this is possible. For example, in a number of studies, Mulac and colleagues have demonstrated a gender-linked language effect (see Mulac et al., 2001): People evaluate prose written by women as higher in sociointellectual status and aesthetic quality and prose written by men as more dynamic, even when they are unable to identify the gender of the writer. Other research shows that gender can bias social evaluations, even when the perceiver is unaware that gender has been primed (Banaji & Greenwald, 1995; Banaji & Hardin, 1996). Because gender is a chronically accessible social category, people might simply be unaware of its influence. Indeed, this very property might explain how tentative language is influential with

men. By using tentative language in a gender-*ir*relevant context, women might prime and confirm for men, quite unconsciously, their wider social dominance and power. This might lead to attraction to and trust of such women, and hence, social influence. Indeed, our data show that women who use more tentative language under low gender-salience conditions tend (the correlation was nonsignificant) to be trusted relatively more by men.

On the other hand, if being unconscious of gender is a requirement for women to create influence with men, we might then expect that men would be resistant to female persuasion attempts when gender is salient. In fact, our findings on the influence ranking and social evaluation measures indicate this. Men perceived women to be less competent and trustworthy under high gender salience the more tentative language that women used—consistent with stereotypes of women as lower in status and power in relation to men. That it was indeed this stereotype that produced this effect is suggested further by the findings that men felt more aware of their partners' gender under the high salience condition the more their partner used tentative language.

Interestingly, women spoke more when gender was salient than when gender was not; furthermore, they spoke more than men in the high salience condition. This finding is even more interesting in light of other findings. First, as in much previous research (Bales, Strodtbeck, Mills, & Roseborough, 1951; Ng, Brooke, & Dunne, 1995; Reid & Ng, 2000), time speaking was strongly and positively correlated with perceived influence ranking. Given that women spoke more under high gender salience, we might assume that women would be perceived as more influential. However, this was not the case; under high gender salience, men ranked themselves as more influential than their female partners, who dominated the floor. It was only in the low gender-salience condition that men acknowledged that their female partners were as influential as themselves. Further consistent with our reasoning so far, it might be that women dominated the floor in the high gender-salience condition because they too were aware that men would be resistant to their influence attempts when gender was salient. By speaking more, women might have been attempting to counter for this resistance.

Finally, it is worth considering some weaknesses in our study. First, our manipulation of gender salience did not yield the expected main effect on the check. It seems that our manipulation of low gender salience was successful ($M = 2.58$ on a 10-point scale) but that manipulation of high gender salience was not ($M = 3.20$). We found, however, that gender salience increased the more that participants' conversational partners used stereotypic levels of tentative language. It could be said, then, that the tests of our predictions were somewhat conservative because not all participants reported seeing gender as particularly salient, and yet we found the pattern of language use that was

predicted (as well as a host of other effects). It might simply be that the check was a reliable but not perfectly valid measure of gender salience.

Second, it might be argued that the pattern of language use we found resulted from demand characteristics. Women might have been particularly inclined to cooperate with the experimenters and produce language forms they believed we were looking for. However, such an account would have to explain why women in our study chose to use tentative language and not less tentative forms, as found by other researchers (Coates, 1986; Hogg, 1985). Furthermore, after telling our participants that there was a difference in the way males and females approach interaction (although we told them nothing of content), why did women only alter those forms of language that are most indicative of tentativeness and uncertainty? Furthermore, there are a host of variables for which we found no difference, and this would need to be explained. Finally, even if a demand-characteristics explanation has some merit, it remains that it cannot provide any explanation for our findings on attitude change, perceived social influence, and social evaluations.

In theoretical work underway, we provide a more in-depth analysis of gendered forms of language use under various types of gender salience (Palomares, Reid, & Bradac, in press). Depending on the background circumstances of gender salience, different linguistic forms will likely arise. For example, we would predict that women would be more likely to use forms such as intensifiers and empty adjectives when conversing with other women under conditions of elevated gender salience. Such language might confirm female solidarity by distinguishing women from men but do so without using tentative forms indicative of lower status and power relative to men. In these conditions, we would predict that women who use more tentative language forms with other women would be less influential with other women, whereas women who used nontentative but still female forms would be more influential. Further research will investigate these possibilities, and we hope to get closer still to answering the question of what language forms men and women use, when, and why.

NOTES

1. There are various labels for female language forms. These include *feminine register*, *woman's language*, *tentative language*, and *powerless language*. We will use the latter two labels interchangeably in recognition of the fact that it is not only women who use these forms. Furthermore, it is worth noting that although such forms generally are tentative (we could hardly call them so if they were not), they can in some instances be used to indicate power. For example, if I were to say to a student, "This paper was due yesterday, *wasn't it?*" I would be questioning the student, not my own knowledge (we are thankful to an anonymous reviewer for this example). Of importance, in coding our partici-

pants' language use, we counted only those tentative forms that were indicative of tentativeness.

2. It is theoretically possible to think of a context in which women in a competitive discussion with men would use tentative language features. This would be a case in which the women perceived themselves to have legitimate and stable status over men and in which using the tentative form of address is normative for women.

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