Language Use and Persuasion: Multiple Roles for Linguistic Styles

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Abstract

Language is the most common medium for persuasion. Stylistic variations in how individuals communicate can influence a number of processes and outcomes in a persuasion setting. This article reviews previous research on a number of commonly studied language styles and their influence on persuasion and provides suggestions for future research. First, we provide a review of some of the commonly studied stylistic features and their relation to persuasion. We then use a common multi-process model of persuasion (i.e., the elaboration likelihood model; Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 1986, New York: Academic Press) to provide an overview of how linguistic styles can influence persuasion. In the final section, we discuss directions for future research on linguistic styles and persuasion.

He who wants to persuade should put his trust not in the right argument, but in the right word.

–Joseph Conrad

When exposed to a persuasive claim, individuals can use several facets of the information to help form their opinion. Information can be organized into several general categories addressing the question ‘Who says what to whom, when, and how?’ (Lasswell, 1948). For example, individuals can attend to the expertise, gender or race of the communicator, the content and length of the information, or to the linguistic cues provided by the communicator. In other words, people are judged by not only what they communicate to others, but also how they communicate it (Ng & Bradac, 1993). Because language use is an important part of impression management and person perception (Goffman, 1959), it is not surprising that individuals (consciously or otherwise) manipulate/vary their speech to achieve a particular outcome (Higgins & Rholes, 1978). One’s linguistic style (i.e., the ‘how’) can be so important that it not only is considered a defining feature of that person (Holtgraves, 2001), but also affects the persuasiveness of an appeal.

Scholars in philosophy, literature, sociology, communication, linguistics, and psychology have been fascinated by how various linguistic styles influence the attitudes and impressions of others. Many styles have been examined in relation to Aristotle’s three modes of persuasion or rhetoric (Aristotle, 1926), as they can influence a message source’s credibility (ethos), logical aspects (logos), and the emotional element of the message (pathos). After even the most cursory perusal of the literature across any of the aforementioned disciplines, one thing is clear: how something is said can at times be as important as what is said (Brennan & Williams, 1995).

In this article, we review the literature on some of the commonly studied linguistic variables and their influence on persuasion. An abundance of research on linguistic variables and evaluations of communicators and communications exists (Bradac, Cargile,
We will attempt to organize previous research as it relates to the commonly used dual- and multi-process models of attitude change and persuasion (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). In particular, we will use the multiple roles postulate of the elaboration likelihood model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1998) to address unresolved issues and seemingly conflicting findings from the literature, and to provide a framework for new research questions and directions.

As explained in detail later, we demonstrate that much like other variables in a persuasion context (e.g., mood), linguistic styles can serve ‘multiple roles’ (e.g., sometimes serving as a cue to influence judgments directly and sometimes serving to bias effortful thinking about the attitude object; Petty & Wegener, 1998). Thus, the multiple roles approach incorporates both relatively thoughtful and non-thoughtful processes to account for the effects of linguistic styles on persuasion. These different processes and the different circumstances in which they occur are important because attitude change produced by relatively thoughtful processes is more consequential (e.g., guiding behavior) than change produced by relatively non-thoughtful processes.

**Linguistic Style**

Linguistic style is defined as a set of pragmatic features that can modify the intended assertion in a message (Holtgraves, 2001). Linguistic styles may not necessarily change the content of information, but can influence perceptions of the communicator and message. For example, a sentence containing the phrase ‘you know’ at the end does not change the content of what is said, but it can influence impressions of the communicator and the message. Generally, linguistic style is not considered to include differences due to variations in geographical region or dialect (i.e., accent). Rather, linguistic style is tied to social variations such as power (Erickson, Lind, Johnson, & O’Barr, 1978) and expertise (Blankenship & Craig, 2007a). In the next section, we provide a brief overview of the commonly studied features of linguistic styles and persuasion.

**Commonly studied linguistic styles**

**Powerless language.** Once conceptualized as women’s language (Lakoff, 1975), powerless language refers to a number of markers used by communicators that are associated with low social power. These markers include (but are not limited to) tag questions (‘don’t you think?’), hesitations (‘…um…’), and hedges (‘sort of’; Ng & Bradac, 1993). Most research has focused on the negative aspects of these markers on source characteristics, such as intelligence, competence, sociability, and credibility (Blankenship & Craig, 2007b; Bradac & Mullac, 1984; Gibbons, Busch, & Bradac, 1991; Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999; Hosman, 1989, 1997). Given the multiple instantiations of the powerless language construct, we will discuss research focused on the most commonly used markers: tag questions, hesitations, and hedges (Ng & Bradac, 1993), but will also make note of research where one particular low power marker (i.e., tag questions) has been studied in isolation from other powerless markers.

**Linguistic intensity.** Any language markers that influence the extent to which a message differs from a neutral position are labeled as intensifiers (e.g., very, extremely; Bowers, 1963). Linguistic intensity has been considered an important and complex characteristic in the persuasion setting because it is associated with increases (Hamilton, 1998) and
decreases (Bradac & Mulac, 1984) in credibility, increases in perceptions of the source’s familiarity with the topic (McMullen & Pasloski, 1992), competence (Hosman & Siltanen, 2006), message discrepancy (Hamilton & Stewart, 1993), persuasion (Hamilton, 1998), and resistance to persuasion (Burgoon & Miller, 1971). As such, elements of linguistic intensity (e.g., extremity) may also be associated with influencing valence of the information (Bowers, 1963) and perceived message position (Craig & Blankenship, 2010).

For example, when trying to convince a friend to consider voting for a political candidate, we may say that the candidate has views that are either consistent or inconsistent with our own. However, in some instances when we feel strongly about our opinion of the candidate, we may use certain words to convey the extremity of our opinion of the candidate (i.e., the candidate’s views are really consistent or really inconsistent with our own). Simply adding the word ‘really’ in our description indicates to others the extremity of our opinion. Thus, message recipients may be likely to use linguistic extremity to determine the degree of the appeal’s valence.2

Linguistic Styles and Persuasion Processes

Although there is little debate regarding the persuasive effects of linguistic styles on persuasion, research is mixed regarding which underlying processes may be responsible for such effects. Consistent with the Laswellian perspective, we see such styles like linguistic power influencing persuasion through the ‘who’ (e.g., communicator credibility, intelligence), and the ‘what’ (perception of the message; Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999) channels. In other cases, linguistic power may influence persuasion without a marked influence on perceptions of the source or message (Hosman, Huebner, & Siltanen, 2002). Understanding whether the persuasion results from source or message perceptions may result in some intriguing effects. For example, when linguistic style influences source perceptions, these perceptions may likely influence reactions to a different persuasive message presented by the same source. Conversely, linguistic influences on message perceptions might be more limited to reactions to that message and not influence source perceptions.

One reason for these mixed findings may be that the style markers are embedded into the actual content of persuasive message, making them inseparable from the message itself. Providing credibility-related information before or after the persuasive appeal can create effects that are relatively distinct from those that occur when linguistic variables are processed within the message itself (Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2007). Fusion of the style and the message may increase the difficulty of distinguishing between the effects of style and substance (Sparks & Areni, 2002). Therefore, perceptions of these markers and the information they convey are processed and evaluated simultaneously, increasing the likelihood that markers may influence persuasion through direct impacts on perceptions of the source and message, but also by influencing message processing (e.g., distraction, ease of counterargument, motivation, etc.). How these markers influence persuasion also depends on the types of persuasion processes that are occurring in the persuasion context. For example, there are situations in which powerless language can be used in simplified forms of processing (e.g., using perceived lack of source expertise as a cue to reject the message) or in more effortful forms of processing (e.g., when a linguistic style instigates message processing by increasing motivation to process an appeal; Petty, Cacioppo, & Heesacker, 1981b).

It is important to understand the processes by which linguistic styles can influence persuasion, especially because these processes indicate how effective and lasting the persuasion will be. The process(es) by which any linguistic variable influences persuasion
may be determined by the amount of effortful thought recipients invest in the message. Persuasion occurring through more effortful processes may be more likely to persist, resist, and guide future thinking and behavior more than equal amounts of persuasion occurring via less effortful processing (Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995). The persuasion resulting from a particular linguistic style varies as a function of how motivated and able people are to process the content of the message (i.e., thoughtfulness). For the remainder of this paper we outline a conceptual framework for how linguistic style may influence persuasion. This framework relies on current dual- and multi-process models of attitude change commonly used in social psychology and communication. Specifically, we use previous work to support the idea that linguistic styles can serve multiple roles in a persuasion setting.3

The elaboration continuum

The notion of a continuum of information processing or elaboration was first outlined by the ELM (Petty, 1977; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and heuristic-systematic model (HSM; Chaiken, 1978; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). Both models posit that high amounts of elaboration or thoughtfulness are the result of individuals being willing and able to carefully consider all of the available information about an issue or object. Under conditions of high motivation and ability, persuasion occurs via the recipient’s assessments of the central merits of the message. High elaboration conditions may cause information from a persuasive appeal to integrate into issue-relevant attitude information or schemas (Petty et al., 1995). Under conditions of low motivation and ability, less thoughtful forms of persuasion can occur as a result of the use of simple cues or heuristics in the persuasion context (Chaiken & Eagly, 1983).4

Because amount of thought can vary from one context and one individual to the next, linguistic styles may influence persuasion in more than one way by serving different ‘roles’ in a persuasion setting (Petty & Wegener, 1998). The likelihood of these roles affecting persuasion differs along the elaboration continuum. When elaboration (i.e., motivation and ability) is low, linguistic style can serve as a simple cue in the persuasion setting. When elaboration is moderate, linguistic style can influence the extent of elaboration by either increasing or decreasing amount of thinking. Finally, when elaboration is high, linguistic style can act as a persuasive argument, bias attitude-relevant processing, and can influence the perceived validity of thoughts produced by the individual.

Assessment of elaboration

Two common approaches in assessing relative differences in elaboration in a persuasion setting include a manipulation of argument quality (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the assessment of cognitive responses (Greenwald, 1968). Based on the assumption that strong, cogent arguments are more persuasive than weak, specious arguments when processed thoroughly, an argument quality manipulation assesses under what conditions individuals attend to a message-relevant aspect of a communication (i.e., engage in effortful processing). Under conditions of high elaboration likelihood, individuals will scrutinize the message and therefore be more persuaded by messages containing relatively strong versus weak arguments. Thus, an index of information processing is the difference between recipients’ self-reported attitudes across the argument quality conditions.5
In the cognitive response assessment approach, the thoughts or cognitive responses recipients have during or after attending to a communication are assessed along with measures of their attitude. Attitudes established in a thoughtful manner (i.e., high elaboration) should be more related to message recipients’ cognitive responses than an attitude established in a nonthoughtful manner (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981a). In addition, cognitive responses also serve as a potential mediator of a linguistic effect on attitudes under conditions of high motivation and ability.

Organizing Past Research

In the following sections, we attempt to organize previous research on a number of linguistic styles and persuasion by applying the multiple roles reasoning of the ELM that helps identify when and how linguistic styles can influence persuasion. Given that previous research has not focused on this multiple role perspective, some theoretical predictions will also be presented.

Linguistic style in low elaboration likelihood conditions

When individuals lack the motivation and ability to effortfully process a persuasive appeal, stylistic features in an appeal may act as peripheral cues to determine whether the individual should accept the appeal. For example, when distracted from considering the merits of an appeal, the particular linguistic style used in the appeal may influence persuasion. Linguistic styles may activate a particular category (e.g., social power) or stereotype (e.g., credible sources), that may influence perceptions of the communicator and amount of persuasion (Cargile, Giles, Ryan, & Bradac, 1994).

Powerless language. Using powerless language more generally can also negatively influence persuasion in low elaboration likelihood contexts. When the message recipient is not motivated or able to process the message, powerless language use leads to a general perception of low source credibility (Areñi, 2003). In these situations, powerless language may serve as an easily processed cue, which in turn provides the basis for forming an attitude about the message itself. For example, Gibbons et al. (1991) found that powerless language negatively affected participants’ perceptions of the speaker when motivation to process the message was low. Other research consistent with this notion has found similar effects when participants are not able to process the message at their own pace (e.g., an audio tape or under time constraint; Sparks, Areñi, & Cox, 1998). Under these low elaboration conditions, we may also see perceptions of the source influencing persuasion/resistance of subsequent information from the source.

Given the predominately negative effect of a low power marker such as tag questions on perceptions of the communicator (Ng & Bradac, 1993), it is relatively easy to imagine how tag questions could serve as a cue, particularly when people are not motivated to process the message. For example, when reading a message that has no bearing on the message recipient, tag questions negatively affect persuasion (Blankenship & Holtgraves, 2005), in part because tag question use is associated with low speaker power (Bradac & Mulac, 1984). In these cases, perceptions of the speaker, rather than cognitive responses, may mediate the effect of tag questions on persuasion. Decreased persuasion due to the use of tag questions has occurred when the appeal is presented aurally, whereby recipients cannot process the information at their own pace (Blankenship & Holtgraves, 2005).
Linguistic intensity. Although little research has directly examined linguistic intensity as a cue, one can imagine conditions under which this would happen. When motivation and ability are low, linguistic intensity may indicate a more extreme message position than the content suggests and therefore may influence persuasion. If the message is initially viewed as proattitudinal, use of phrases such as ‘extremely good’ or ‘wonderful’ may increase persuasion by making the message seem more favorable toward the message recipients’ current attitude without influencing information processing. However, if the message is counterattitudinal, then phrases associated with intensity such as ‘wonderful’ may decrease persuasion. Intensity may also increase perceptions of the communicator’s familiarity with the topic, thus leading the communicator to be more persuasive (McMullen & Pasloski, 1992).

Linguistic style in moderate elaboration likelihood conditions

In some situations, the persuasion context may not dictate whether information processing will be near the ends of the continuum (i.e., very high or low in motivation or ability). When motivation and ability are not constrained to be high or low, linguistic style may influence the extent to which individuals are motivated or able to process the message. In these situations, linguistic style may influence a person’s motivation (e.g., influencing message position; Craig & Blankenship, 2010), and ability (e.g., increasing distraction; Petty et al., 1981a,b) to thoughtfully consider a message.

Powerless language. In situations where the message is self-paced (i.e., presented in written versus audio format; Sparks et al., 1998), powerless language has negatively affected persuasion (Hosman et al., 2002). Sparks and Areni (2008) demonstrated that an advertisement containing tag questions, hedges, and hesitations (versus a control message) disrupted processing by distracting message recipients from the message. These speaker-relevant thoughts in the powerless language conditions are more predictive of attitudes relative to a message without the markers (Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999).

Areni and Sparks (2005) argued that powerless language redirects message recipients’ thoughts toward the speaker, perhaps in order to explain the speaker’s apparent lack of confidence or certainty. Similarly, previous research has demonstrated that message recipients generate fewer argument-related thoughts and more speaker-related thoughts when speakers use powerless language (Gibbons et al., 1991; Sparks & Areni, 2002). Such a focus on speaker-related rather than message-related thoughts may influence the amount of message-relevant processing, thus distracting recipients from the message content, especially under conditions where motivation and ability to process the message is not constrained to be high or low.

Tag questions can also influence the amount of processing differently according to the form of presentation (e.g., audio vs. written). Recipients exposed to a written message can process the message at their own pace thus increasing their ability to process the content of the message, whereas participants exposed to an audio-based message do not have that luxury (Smith & Shaffer, 1995). Along these lines, Blankenship and Holtgraves (2005) found decreased elaboration and persuasion of an audio message (a format that inhibits self-pacing of information) when the message topic was relevant to participants and contained tag questions, relative to a message containing no tag questions. That is, tag questions decreased the effect of argument quality on attitudes found in the control message, suggesting that tag questions were distracting (Sparks & Areni, 2008). Under these conditions, tag questions used by a credible source also increased processing of a
written message, relative to a control message, and the subsequent increase in persuasion was mediated by participants’ cognitive responses (Blankenship & Craig, 2007a).

**Linguistic intensity.** When motivation and ability are not constrained to be high or low, linguistic intensity has been shown to influence amount of message processing. Craig and Blankenship (2010) found that linguistic extremity (a component of linguistic intensity; Bowers, 1963) increased message processing relative to a control message. Linguistic extremity led to increases in intentions to sign a petition when the message contained strong arguments but decreases in intentions when the message contained weak arguments.

**Linguistic style in high elaboration likelihood conditions**

When individuals have the motivation and ability to effortfully consider an appeal, linguistic style may serve one of three roles. First, linguistic style can act as an argument by becoming a central merit or characteristic in the persuasion setting, thus the linguistic style is treated as a piece of information relevant to quality of a persuasive attempt. Second, linguistic style may bias the processing of the issue-relevant information. For example, when thinking more carefully about the message, linguistic style can bias the thoughts that come to mind and create the same overall favorable (unfavorable) bias in persuasion (especially if the available information is relatively ambiguous; Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Third, linguistic style may influence the perceived validity of thoughts generated and used in forming one’s attitudes (Petty, Briñol, Tormala, & Wegener, 2007). That is, in addition to influencing the number and favorability of the thoughts produced, linguistic style can influence the perceived validity of thoughts or whether the thoughts are viewed as appropriate in determining one’s attitude (Petty, Briñol, & Tormala, 2002). For example, bolstering or undermining the confidence one has in their thoughts about an appeal can influence the success of the appeal (Tormala & Petty, 2002), with greater thought confidence leading to greater resistance to persuasion (Petty et al., 2002; Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2006).

**Powerless language.** Given high amounts of motivation and ability, powerless language may serve as an argument when the message source is the attitude object of interest. As in the case of a witness asked to testify in court, testimony plagued with powerless language may result in low speaker credibility (Burrell & Koper, 1998) and low believability of the testimony (Erickson et al., 1978).

Although no direct experimental work has examined the possibility that tag questions can serve as an argument, one can imagine that under conditions of high message processing, tag questions may serve as a ‘central merit’ when forming an attitude about a message source. A politician using the phrase ‘don’t you think’ in a message may serve as support for whether he possesses or lacks a quality relevant to the style (e.g., competence, certainty, etc.). In other words, linguistic styles may be used as information about the message source, and the types of speech in turn create impressions relevant to his or her candidacy (intelligence, humility, certainty, decisiveness, morality, etc.).

Powerless language may also bias the interpretation of the information presented (Sparks & Areni, 2008). For example, if one were motivated and able to process a politician’s message and she was hemming and hawing, one may use this to interpret the speech negatively. This would result in a negative attitude toward the message that would be rather thoughtful. Consistent with this reasoning, powerless language creates the
impression that the communicator lacks confidence in his or her own arguments (Bradac & Mulac, 1984), which may increase motivation to counterargue (Sparks & Areni, 2002). With tag questions as the low power marker, Blankenship and Craig (2007a) found that when a low credible source used tag questions, participants distinguished between strong and weak messages (evidenced high levels of message processing), but were less persuaded relative to a control message (perhaps indicating a negative bias in processing). Recent work on tag questions provides an example of a linguistic style that may influence information processing and persuasion positively or negatively depending upon the role of the tag question and the recipients’ initial elaboration likelihood, suggesting tag questions may be more powerful than once thought.

Powerless language may also influence the confidence in one’s thoughts, which may influence the extent to which one attends to subsequent information relevant to the message/appeal. For example, powerless language has been viewed as distracting under high elaboration conditions (e.g., when instructions to carefully process the message are given; Sparks & Areni, 2008), in part because recipients stop attending to the message and focus on the message source (Sparks & Areni, 2002). Under these conditions, we may see increased susceptibility to later persuasion due to decreased confidence in the counterarguments generated by recipients because their thoughts are focused on the source rather than the message. Powerless language may also disrupt the perceived strength of the information, perhaps making weak messages seem less weak compared to a weak control message and making strong messages seem less strong compared to a strong control message.

Much like with a combination of powerless language markers, tag questions may also influence the perceived validity of a recipient’s thoughts that occur during exposure to a persuasive appeal. This new role leads to some interesting predictions about how linguistic styles like tag questions may influence subsequent attempts at persuasion. For example, exposure to an initial message containing tag questions may influence how effectively individuals believe they resisted the appeal. Successfully counterarguing an appeal containing strong arguments increases confidence in one’s position and bolster the thoughts supporting the position, but counterarguing weak arguments can actually decrease confidence in attitudes and thoughts (Tormala et al., 2006, 2007). Given that, in general, tag question use can decrease the perceived strength of a message under high elaboration conditions (Blankenship & Craig, 2007a), successfully resisting an initial appeal containing tag questions and strong arguments might lead to less resistance to a later attacking message. Because tag questions undermine the perceived strength of the appeal, perceived thought confidence following successful resistance of a weak message may also decrease (relative to a control message with weak arguments), thus creating the opportunity for message recipients to be open to later change. In other words, resistance efforts may be undermined when tag questions are added to the message. The use of tag questions may actually increase later persuasion (i.e., decrease the ability to resist) by undermining the confidence one has in their counterarguments.

Of course, these effects may be moderated by a stylistic marker’s perceived ‘power’. Some stylistic markers such as tag questions have their effect on persuasion moderated by source characteristics like credibility (Blankenship & Craig, 2007a), suggesting that tag questions may not be as powerless as once thought. Tag question use by a source low in credibility may lead to less confidence after counterarguing (thus opening the possibility for future change), as outlined above, but if the source is high in credibility then tag question use may lead to greater confidence after counterarguing, thus creating a strong attitude. Future work should explore the possible paradoxical effects of linguistic styles and resistance to change.
Linguistic intensity. Linguistic intensity may influence persuasion when motivation and ability are high by interacting with recipients’ prior attitudes. As such, linguistic intensity may be a particularly useful way to manipulate the level of similarity or agreement a recipient has with the message. For example, if a person is generally favorable toward a policy, using intense language to indicate a level of favorability that exceeds the initial attitudinal position may result in more persuasion compared to the same message without linguistic intensity (Craig & Blankenship, 2010). On the other hand, linguistic intensity may also bias processing such that a counter-attitudinal message may be seen as ‘stronger’ and thus resisting this stronger message may lead to more durable attitudes as the recipient successfully refutes the linguistically intense message (Abelson, 1987).

Linguistic intensity may also affect thought confidence under high elaboration conditions by increasing thought confidence and resistance to a later counterattitudinal message. Because a message source’s linguistic extremity is related to attitudinal extremity (Craig & Blankenship, 2010; Hamilton & Hunter, 1998), resisting a message containing linguistic extremity may increase confidence in one’s attitude, which would increase later resistance to an attacking message. These effects may also be moderated by argument quality, such that greater confidence would especially occur from resisting a strong argument-intensive message than a strong message absent of intense language.

Conclusion

Guided by the multiple roles conceptualization outlined by the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), we attempted to organize previous research on the effectiveness of a number of linguistic style variables on persuasion. Understanding the way in which linguistic styles can be viewed from a multiple roles perspective provides a viable framework for hypothesis testing and extending these findings to other linguistic styles not covered here.

It should be noted that the effects described here are based largely on research conducted in ‘Western’ cultures such as the United States, which has a particular cultural and linguistic context. It is likely that certain styles such as powerless language may be strategically adopted in persuasive appeals or conversation in other cultures as a matter of politeness or culturally specific norms (e.g., face-saving strategies or to elevate the reader’s status and show respect; Chakorn, 2006; Schroder, 2009) rather than as sign of low status or expertise. Thus, message recipients’ perceptions of the message and source may be moderated by the culture in which the recipient resides. Future work should address cross-cultural comparisons of linguistic style in persuasion settings.

Of course, the above list does not reflect the entire category of linguistic styles. Variables like speech rate (Smith & Shaffer, 1995) and rhetorical questions (Blankenship & Craig, 2006; Zillman, 1972) have been outlined from a multiple roles perspective elsewhere (e.g., Petty & Wegener, 1998). However, there are many more styles that may influence persuasion a number of different ways, similar to those outlined above. For example, lexical diversity (Bradac, Bowers, & Courtright, 1979), implicit causality (Brown & Fish, 1983), abstract versus concrete language (MacLachlan, 1984), linguistic intergroup bias (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, & Semin, 1989) and indirectness (Holtgraves, 1997), to name a few, may serve multiple roles in the persuasion process. It is clear that various linguistic styles can influence persuasion through a number of different psychological processes, and we hope that this review will stimulate interest in the domain and help generate a number of hypotheses about the underlying processes discussed in this paper.
Short Biographies

Kevin L. Blankenship is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Iowa State University, where he is also affiliated with the Communication Studies Program. He received his BS from Ball State University and his PhD in Social Psychology from Purdue University. His research interests focus on three primary areas in attitudes and social cognition: (i) the effects of characteristics of persuasive messages on attitude structure and change; (ii) the role one’s values play in the formation and strength-related consequences of one’s attitudes; and (iii) the possible contributions of attitude theory in judgment and decision-making.

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Endnotes

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1 We direct readers interested in the persuasiveness of metaphor to Ottati and Renstrom (2010), as we will not cover metaphor in our review.

2 In the past, researchers have equated intensity with extremity (see Hamilton & Hunter, 1998; for a review). Although the two constructs are related, they are not necessarily the same. In fact, in a recent meta-analysis examining the effects of linguistic intensity on persuasion, the relation between intensity and message extremity was moderate ($r = .37$), suggesting that the two concepts are related yet distinct (Hamilton & Hunter, 1998).

3 Although the current framework could be applied to any linguistic style variable, we focus on the styles for which data exist.

4 Although an individual’s place on the elaboration continuum may influence the amount of persuasion, it need not. Equal amounts of persuasion may occur at any point along the continuum, but the quality of the persuasion will vary in strength. For example, person A can be just as persuaded by a message as person B, but the two may have formed their attitudes through different amounts of thought, which then affects the extent to which the attitude has a lasting impact on thinking and behavior.

5 Although much has been written on what makes a strong argument (Areni & Lutz, 1988; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Wegener, 1991), the main idea here is that relative differences in attitudes based on the quality of arguments is more likely under conditions of effortful thinking, not that the arguments are truly strong or weak per se.

References


