NOTING that message variables offer communication scholars a conceptually rich body of information, this 30-item annotated bibliography reflects the diversity of research conducted in the area of language intensity. The journal articles, conference papers, and chapters of books in the annotated bibliography are divided into sections on general message intensity and persuasion, perceptions of sources using intense language, language intensity and inoculation theory, counterattitudinal advocacy and intensity, language intensity and cognitive stress, language intensity and interpersonal influence, axiomatic theories of intensity, and semantics and language intensity. Materials listed were published between 1955 and 1985. (RS)
LANGUAGE INTENSITY
A Comprehensive, Annotated Bibliography
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July, 1986

Message variables offer Communication scholars a conceptually rich body of
information with application to every Speech Communication context. This
bibliography reflects the diversity of research conducted in the area of language
intensity. While comprehensive, this work excludes topics marginally related to
the intensity construct: Opinionated language, obscenities, threats, metaphors,
fear appeals, and obscure terms. Also, the section on semantics is limited to
articles cited in intensity studies for message construction purposes.

Part I: General Message Intensity and Persuasion.

change. Speech Monographs, 30, 345-352. This study defined intensity as
language indicating source deviation from attitudinal neutrality, and linked
intensity to message discrepancy. Unexpectedly, low intensity messages were
found to be more persuasive than high intensity messages. Extroverts
exhibited more attitude change than did introverts.

Speech, 50, 415-420. A benchmark study linking language intensity to
perceptions of the direction and strength of a communicator’s attitude
toward a concept. Intensity was correlated to metaphors, polysyllables,
modifiers, and obscure words.

Franzwa, H.H. (1969). Psychological factors influencing use of "evaluative-
dynamic" language. Speech Monographs, 36, 103-109. An underreported study
indicating that subjects use "dynamic" (intense) language when speaking to a
partisan audience and "non-dynamic" language when addressing a hostile
audience. Persuasion produced under these conditions was not explored.

Smith, M.J. (1977). The effects of threats to attitudinal freedom as a function
of message quality and initial receiver attitude. Communication Monographs,
44, 196-206. 'Certainty terms' were used to urge agreement with an
experimental message. Results supported reactance theory predictions.

Part II: Perceptions of Sources using Intense Language.

Greenberg, B.S. (1976). The effects of language intensity modification on
perceived verbal aggressiveness. Communication Monographs, 43, 130-139. The
study found evidence that language qualifiers were better able to subtract
from perceptions of source aggressiveness than to add to them. ERIC EJ 146 286

predictions were found to be most accurate when source and concept intensity
were matched with message intensity levels.

Mehrabian, A. (1967). Attitudes inferred from neutral verbal communication. Journal of Consulting Psychology, 31, 414-417. "Verbal immediacy" was conceptualized as degrees of the intensity and directness of interaction between source and receiver. Testing neutral messages, immediate communications were judged to indicate more positive communicator attitude.

III: Language Intensity and Inoculation Theory.

Burgoon, M., Burgoon, J.K., Riess, M., Butler, J., Montgomery, C.L., Stinnett, W.D., Miller, M., Long, M., Vaughn, D., and Caine, B. (1976). Propensity of persuasive attack and intensity of pretreatment as predictors of resistance to persuasion. Journal of Psychology, 92, 123-129. Uncertainty of subsequent attack and language intensity were reasoned to induce resistance to persuasion. The intensity of hypothesis was not supported.


Chase, L.J. and Kelly, C.W. (1976). Language intensity and resistance to persuasion: A research note. Human Communication Research, 3, 82-85. The authors found that inoculation predictions were facilitated by low language intensity. This conclusion was inconsistent with previous findings and was attributed to audience expectations. ERIC EJ 150 070

Miller, M.D. and Burgoon, M. (1979). The relationship between violations of expectations and the induction of resistance to persuasion. Human Communication Research, 5, 301-313. Receiver expectations and the intensity of the appeal were found to mediate resistance to persuasion. ERIC EJ 217 449

Part IV: Counterattitudinal Advocacy and Intensity


Part V: Language Intensity and Cognitive Stress.

Carmichael, C.W. and Cronkhite, G.L. (1965). Frustration and language intensity. Speech Monographs, 32, 107-111. This study links the intensity research to the fear appeal and aggression literature. Highly aroused subjects tended to reject stimuli that further increased activation.


Part VI: Language Intensity and Interpersonal Influence.

Bradac, J.J., Hosman, L.A. and Tardy, C.H. (1978). Reciprocal disclosures and language intensity: Attributional consequences. Communication Monographs, 45, 7-17. Language intensity mediated third-party judgments of intimacy when intimacy level was reciprocated. Also, the intensity of a reciprocated self-disclosure was found to affect perceptions of source internality.


Part VI: Axiomatic Theories of Intensity.


Bradac, J.J., Courtright, J.A., and Bowers, J.W. (1979). Effects of intensity, immediacy and diversity upon receiver attitudes toward a belief-discrepant message and its source. In H. Giles, W.P. Robinson, and P.M. Smith (Eds.), Language: Social psychological perspectives. Oxford: Pergamon Press. The authors tested several of the hypotheses generated in their axiomatic theory of language variables. Generally, results did not conform to the intensity predictions. However, when intensity was high, low verbal immediacy produced higher source likeability ratings.

Part VII: Semantics and Language Intensity.

Jones, L.V. and Thurstone, L.L., (1955). The psychophysics of semantics: An experimental investigation. Journal of Applied Psychology, 39, 31-39. Successive-interval scaling was used to rate the intensity of 51 descriptive adjectives. These "known" values were used in later studies to build experimental messages.


Part VIII: Critiques of the Intensity Literature.


Jackson, S. and Jacobs, S. (1983). Generalizing about messages: Suggestions for design and analysis of experiments. Human Communication Research, 9, 169-191. The authors warn against using research designs that treat single instances of a message category as fixed effects. This results in random effects being viewed as systematic variance, thus threatening the validity of findings. More optimistic essays by Bradac and Hewes follow the article.

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