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PART 3

LANGUAGE, INTERGROUP RELATIONS AND STEREOTYPES

6

Stereotypes and Language Use

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Language is a primary vehicle for communication. It is an important element in the social processes by which we adjust to, interact with, and perhaps even influence others in our interpersonal world. A prominent feature of many of those social interactions concerns the group memberships of the interactants. We are often cognizant of whether another person belongs to the same or a different group than we do. And we have well-developed stereotypes about numerous groups, based on race, gender, age, nationality, religion, and other features. These group concepts can influence our use of language in both our comprehension of and communication in those social interactions.

This chapter is concerned with the relationship between stereotypes and language in the context of communication. Stereotypes based on a person's group membership can be particularly influential in social perception, guiding not only the processing and use of information but also the course of one's actions based on that information. Stereotypes can influence our attention to stereotype-relevant aspects of the information and the inferences we make based on a target person's group membership; our evaluations of and causal attributions for a target person's behaviors; what aspects of that information we are most likely to retain and how it is stored in memory; and what information is retrieved and how overt responses are generated. This approach to understanding how stereotypes function within an information processing system has generated an impressive research literature (for reviews, see Hamilton et al., 1990; Hamilton and Trolier, 1986; Stephan, 1985). The question we address in this chapter is: Where does language fit

into this system? How can the relationship between stereotypes and language be conceptualized in this framework?

The interface between stereotypes and language use has been investigated in a variety of ways, spawning research on a number of specific topics. We briefly review several of these approaches, highlighting their implications for intergroup perception. We then report the findings of our own research investigating manifestations of stereotypic thinking in perceivers' spontaneous language use. Finally, we offer some speculations on a system for thinking about intergroup descriptions and how preexisting stereotypes might influence language use in this context.

Varieties of Research on Stereotypes and Language

In this section we briefly discuss several lines of research that have explored various aspects of the interface between stereotypes and language use.

Language as the Content of Stereotypes

From its beginning, social science research has defined the content of stereotypes in the language of traits. The implicit assumption has been that trait terminology effectively captures the fundamental aspects of perceivers' stereotypic conceptions. This emphasis on trait language can be traced back to the first empirical study of stereotypes, in which Katz and Braly (1933) presented subjects with a list of trait words and asked them to indicate which terms characterized members of various national and racial groups. Ever since then, the reliance on trait terms to assess stereotypes is clearly evident in the literature on the measurement of racial, national, and ethnic stereotypes (for reviews, see Brigham, 1971; McCauley and Stitt, 1978; Miller, 1982).

Although the richness of our trait terminology affords considerable diversity for a language of stereotypes, we do not believe that the content of stereotypes is adequately captured solely in terms of trait-descriptive adjectives. It seems likely that these cognitive structures also include mental representations of specific instances of experiences with group members (Smith, 1990) as well as of other general, nontrait features, such as physical features, occupational and socioeconomic characteristics, and likely behavior patterns (Hamilton and Trolier, 1986). The content of stereotypes, then, is more diverse than is represented in trait terminology.

It follows that analyses of the effects of stereotypes on language use should not be limited exclusively to the study of subjects' use of trait terms. Analyses of linguistic forms other than adjectives may shed useful light both on the content of stereotypes and on the rules governing perceivers' use of language in their characterizations of and interactions with group members.

Language as Stimulus Information

There is a long tradition of research examining ways in which language influences impressions of a speaker. Various properties of language can serve as important stimulus cues that activate group stereotypes and thereby influence intergroup perceptions.

Research has shown that both men and women hold a number of stereotypic *beliefs about gender differences* in speech (Kramer, 1977). These beliefs can affect how people evaluate male and female speakers. Specifically, subjects consistently rate women's speech as more aesthetically pleasing and men's speech as more dynamic, a gender-linked language effect (Mulac and Lundell, 1980). Moreover, sex-role stereotypes and this gender-linked language effect have independent effects on naive raters' evaluations of speech transcripts. Mere identification of a speaker as male or female can influence a perceiver's evaluations of a message. Additionally, however, even when the transcripts provide no information about speaker sex, subjects differentially evaluate men's and women's transcripts in the systematic ways noted above (Mulac et al., 1985).

It is important to note that these subtle linguistic features produce positive evaluations of women's speech as aesthetically pleasing rather than the negative evaluations of 'weakness' suggested by earlier work (Lakoff, 1975). Thus, language features can function to influence perceptions of the speaker.

Several other properties of language have also been shown to affect evaluations of communicators. For example, there is strong evidence that there are differences in speech style as a function of social power. *'Powerful'* and *'powerless' speech* have been associated with communicators ostensibly high or low in social power, regardless of gender (Bradac and Mulac, 1984; O'Barr, 1982). Speakers using the powerless style are rated as less attractive and less competent that speakers using a powerful style in a number of communication contexts (Gibbons et al., 1991).

Lexical diversity (sometimes referred to by its opposite, verbal redundancy) refers to the richness of a communicator's manifest vocabulary, and this variable also has evaluative consequences for how a speaker is perceived. High diversity messages typically yield higher ratings of speaker competence, dynamism and effectiveness than low diversity (redundant) messages (Bradac and Wisegraver, 1984).

Linguistic intensity reflects the strength of a communicator's feelings about a particular target or group, indicating a move away from neutrality (Bowers, 1964). The effects of linguistic intensity are importantly influenced by aspects of context, especially the listener's perception of who the speaker is and the role that he or she plays. For example, studies on persuasion have shown that females are judged to be more predictable, more persuasive, and are more positively perceived when they use low intensity language, whereas the opposite is true for men (Burgoon et al., 1975).

In addition to the language variables we have briefly discussed, research has also examined the effects of other linguistic variables on impression formation, including linguistic immediacy (the positivity or negativity of a speaker's feelings about a particular topic as manifested in language), good and bad grammar, silences and interruptions, and other paralinguistic cues such as pitch, speech rate and volume. In sum, a large variety of linguistic features provide stimulus cues that can make group memberships salient and activate stereotypes, which in turn can guide the listener's inferences and evaluations about the communicator.

Group Influence on Language Effects in Encoding

Behaviors that we observe others perform are often ambiguous and open to interpretation. Therefore those behaviors take on meaning only when the perceiver has imposed some interpretation on them. Recently Semin and Fiedler (1988; Fiedler and Semin, 1988) demonstrated the potential importance of linguistic factors in this process. The Semin–Fiedler model posits a four-category system of linguistic choices that reflect increasingly abstract levels of encoding of behavioral events: descriptive action verbs (DAVs), which describe specific, observable actions; interpretive action verbs (IAVs), which also refer to a single behavioral episode but in addition summarize and give interpretation to the action; state verbs (SVs), which refer to an actor's psychological state and not to any specific action or episode; and, at the highest level of abstraction, the use of adjectives that describe an actor's disposition. Semin and Fiedler (1988) have argued that more abstract descriptions of behavior are considered to be more revealing about the actor, imply greater persistence over time, are less verifiable, and provide less information about circumstance, and thus arguably, perpetuate stereotypes.

Research by Maass et al. (1989) demonstrated that group membership can influence the language used to describe intergroup behavior. In one study they asked members of a particular social group to evaluate both ingroup and outgroup members performing either socially desirable or undesirable behaviors. Subjects had well developed conceptions of their own and the other group, the result of a long-standing rivalry based on historic and geographic divisions between the two groups. For each stimulus behavior, respondents were given four linguistic choices varying in degree of abstractness, based on the Semin and Fiedler model, and their task was to indicate which option best described the stimulus event. The results showed that subjects described ingroup members performing desirable behaviors in more abstract terms than when the same behavior was performed by outgroup members. In contrast, undesirable behaviors performed by outgroup members were characterized in more abstract terms than were the same behaviors when performed by ingroup members. These findings indicate that beliefs about ingroup and outgroup members produced differential interpretations and evaluations of the same behavior, and consequently influenced the linguistic label applied to it as it was encoded. Subsequent studies have replicated and extended these results (see Maass and Arcuri, this volume). This research provides evidence for the influence of a linguistic encoding effect on differential mental representations of ingroups and outgroups.

Group Influence on Language Production

The attentional and encoding effects we have discussed so far influence what aspects of the available stimulus information are processed, how they are interpreted, and therefore the nature of one's cognitive representation of that information. We have seen evidence for the role of both linguistic factors and stereotypic beliefs in the way this representation is formed. However, the primary function of language is communication, and hence involves a process in which knowledge and thoughts are retrieved from memory and translated into speech. Numerous factors can influence the process of communication in conversational discourse (see Kraut and Higgins, 1984). One potential influence on this language production process is the speaker's cognizance of group memberships, both his or her own and that of the recipient of the communication.

Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1980) is a cognitively based theory focusing on how interactants' speech behavior may converge or diverge from that of their partners, particularly when an encounter is construed in intergroup rather than interpersonal terms. The motivation for speech adjustments is derived from the values, attitudes and intentions of the interactants toward their own and other social groups. Convergence adjustments (minimizing differences in speech pattern between interactants by adopting similar speech characteristics) reflect the speaker's desire for social approval. Convergence is most likely to occur when there is minimal social cost for adopting such a strategy, when doing so is not in opposition to social norms, or in some cases, for efficiency's sake. Divergence (emphasizing the speech patterns that distinguish one's own social group from that of one's interactant) reflects a focus on the positive self-identity of one's own group (Street and Giles, 1982). If an intergroup encounter is perceived as threatening, or when the motivation is to differentiate one's own group from the other group, speech divergence is likely to occur.

Convergence and divergence moves are based on an interactant's perceptions of message characteristics rather than on the objective features of the message (Bourhis et al., 1979). This suggests that cognitive structures, such as stereotypes, may influence these perceptions. That is, the speech patterns of an outgroup communicator can activate a stereotype and thereby influence the likelihood of convergence or divergence.

In Speech Accommodation Theory, speech convergence and divergence are part of the speaker's response to the perceived intergroup relationship with his or her partner. These effects, then, are defined in terms of the differentiation between ingroup and outgroup and hence are not specific to the stereotype of any particular group. Other research, however, has shown that a communicator's linguistic choices in speech production may be influenced by the stereotype activated by the partner's group membership. For example, Caporael (1981; Caporael et al., 1983) studied the communication styles of caregivers when interacting with residents of a nursing home for the elderly. She found that caregivers used a high degree of 'babytalk' with care receivers. Presumably, stereotypic beliefs about the dependency of the elderly guided the type of speech style caregivers used when conversing with these patients.

Summary

Our discussion of past research on language and stereotypes illustrates the important point that there is no single relationship between language and stereotyping. Even our brief review reveals several ways in which language and stereotypes can influence each other. On the one hand, linguistic features can be important stimulus cues provided by a speaker, and these cues can activate a stereotype that will affect subsequent perceptions of the speaker. Conversely, a stereotype activated by a stimulus person's group membership can influence the linguistic terms used in interpreting and encoding that person's behavior, and can also guide the perceiver's own language productions in the communication process.

Effects of Stereotypes on Spontaneous Language Use

Our research has focused on how stereotypes influence people's use of language in their free, unconstrained characterizations of members of significant ethnic groups. Specifically, we investigated the effects of stereotypes on the production of language describing group members.

Stereotypes are cognitive structures that contain one's beliefs about groups and their members. Perception of or interaction with a member of a stereotyped group activates that stereotype such that subsequent processing is colored by the content and evaluative tone of those beliefs. If one's thought processes are influenced in this way, then we might expect one's language use to reflect those effects. Such influences might occur in a variety of ways. Some of these effects would be obvious manifestations of stereotyping, such as characterizing members of disliked groups in negative terms and using stereotypic content to describe group members. Other influences of stereotypes might be more subtle. The complexities of language afford remarkable versatility in the way people and events are characterized. Stereotypes, through their effects on thought processes, might guide language use such that seemingly minor differences in word selection and usage can create important differences in the meaning of what is communicated. Our research sought to investigate some of these distinctions.

We do not presume, of course, that language will reflect the effects of stereotypes on thought processes in every circumstance. Language is a tool of communication and hence is an inherently social process. The nature of any communication will reflect many aspects of that process, including the speaker's relationship to his or her audience, his or her goals for this particular communication, and the social context in which the communication occurs. As speakers we are quite facile in managing our language presentations to fit our immediate purposes, and an issue as sensitive as stereotypes of ethnic groups is certainly a sufficient cause for monitoring and controlling the nature of our verbal expression. However, in situations where such concerns are minimized, one's spontaneous language use may reveal the influence of stereotypic conceptions.

A major problem, of course, in studying spontaneous free descriptions is how one can assure that subjects' responses are indeed spontaneous. Our approach to dealing with this problem was to create a context in which free, spontaneous description was encouraged; in fact, our subjects were told that the purpose of our experiment was to investigate people's ability to generate such thought.[1] The task presented for our subjects involved spontaneously generating stories about people they would see. Subjects (67 white UCSB students) were shown a slide providing a head-and-shoulders photograph of a person, and simultaneously the experimenter identified a situational context in which the person is seen. The subjects' task was then to generate a story about this person in that setting.

Subjects completed this task for four male stimulus persons. Two of the photos were of whites and two were of blacks, and within each race one photo showed a smiling face, the other a nonsmiling face. Thus race and facial expression were manipulated within subjects. In addition, two different stimulus sets were used such that the age of the stimulus persons was manipulated between subjects. One set consisted of photos of college-aged men, the other set portrayed middle-aged men. For each photo the experimenter indicated the setting by indicating, for example, 'You see this person at a bank.' The four settings used – a bank, a basketball game, a hospital, and a shopping mall – were counterbalanced with the independent variables so that across subjects every photo was paired with every setting.

The descriptive stories generated by the subjects were tape recorded and later transcribed. The stories were then coded for a number of variables that constitute the basis for our analyses. In all cases the design of our analyses was a 2 (age) × 2 (race) × 2 (facial expression) analysis of variance.[2] The following subsections summarize the results of several such analyses.

Favorability of Descriptions

Our first analysis examined the overall favorability with which the target person was described, as assessed by judges' ratings.[3] This analysis produced a significant main effect due to race as well as an interaction of race with age, the means for which are shown in Figure 6.1 Overall, black target persons elicited more favorable descriptive stories than did white target persons. However, the interaction indicates that this difference was actually true only for older black target persons, who where described more favorably than the other three categories of target persons. Favorability ratings of the descriptions of the younger black and the two white target persons did not differ significantly.

The fact that subjects generated more favorable descriptions of black than of white target persons may suggest that subjects were

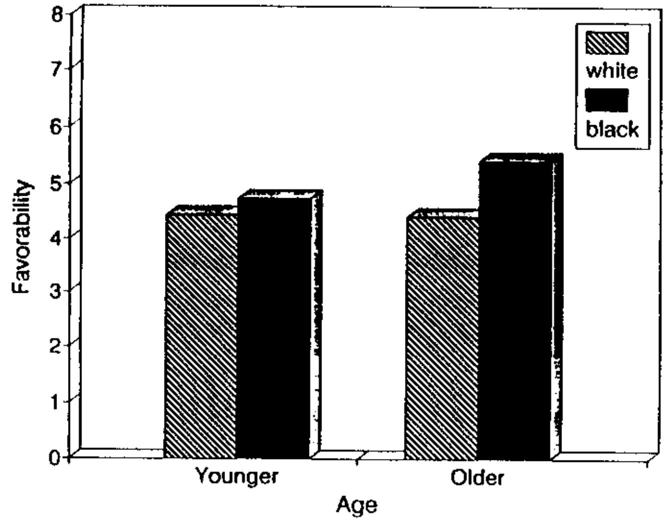

Figure 6.1 *Mean favorability of descriptions of target persons*

in fact being cautious in their characterizations of blacks due to their sensitivity to racial stereotypes. This would imply that subjects were quite controlled in the stories they generated, carefully avoiding the appearance of being prejudiced. If so, then our assumption that the descriptions reflect spontaneous thought would be questionable at best. Although this interpretation cannot be definitively refuted, it does encounter difficulties that make it less plausible. One immediate problem it faces is the significant interaction of this race effect with age. That is, it isn't clear why a desire to appear unbiased would affect stories about middle-aged black men, but not stories about younger black men. Beyond this specific problem, the results of several other analyses, reported below, make it difficult to maintain that subjects were responding to the black target persons in a socially desirable manner.

Length of Descriptions

We next analyzed the length of the descriptions that subjects generated, coded as the number of words in each story. This analysis again produced a significant race-by-age interaction (the means for which are shown in Figure 6.2) which reveals the same pattern observed in the favorability ratings. Specifically, subjects generated shorter stories about middle-aged black target persons than for any of the other three cases.

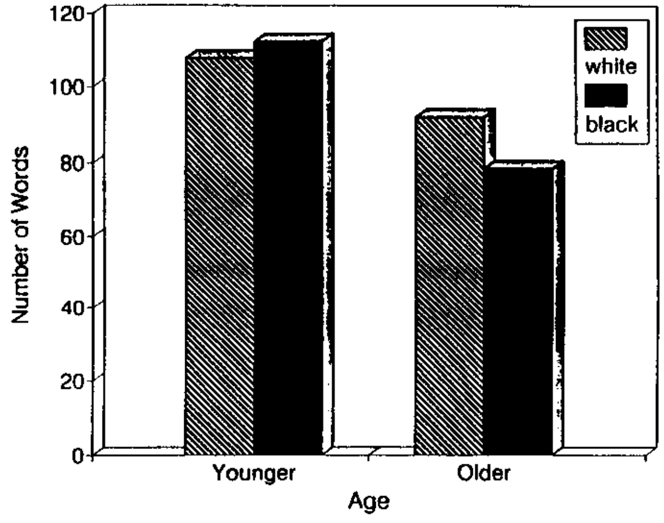

Figure 6.2 *Mean number of words in subjects' stories*

How should this finding be interpreted? Some past research (Siegman and Pope, 1972) indicates that the length of verbal productions often reflects the speaker's affective state, such that longer productions reflect positive affect whereas more constrained output is indicative of anxiety, discomfort, or other negative affects. In the present case, however, this is not a viable interpretation in that the shortest stories, on average, occurred in the same condition that had the highest mean favorability ratings. In fact, the correlation (across all stories) between length and favorability was −0.12.

Alternatively, a cognitive processing approach suggests that, given the impoverished stimulus cues they were presented with, subjects generated their stories largely on the basis of knowledge representations stored in memory. The race and age of the target person, as well as the specified setting, would activate relevant cognitive categories, and subjects' knowledge and beliefs about those categories would provide the basis for the descriptions they generated. The richer and more differentiated the knowledge representation, the greater would be the basis for developing detailed descriptions, which in turn would generate greater length of story. Differences in cognitive differentiation presumably are a function of experience with members of the relevant category – the more experience one has with category members, the more differentiated one's representation of that category becomes.

This interpretation seems quite plausible in understanding the differences in the lengths of the stories shown in Figure 6.2. Our subjects would have had more experience with people in the same age group as the younger target persons (the main effect for age was marginally significant), and the white middle-aged target person represents the same category as the subjects' fathers. Thus, the only category of target person with whom they would have had relatively little experience is the older black male, and it is here that they generated the shorter, less developed stories. It seems plausible, then, that in the present case the length of the descriptions is at least partially a function of the richness, differentiation and complexity of the cognitive structures that subjects would have used in generating them.[4]

Verb Phrases

We analyzed subjects' use of verb categories by adapting Semin and Fiedler's (1988) classification system to our materials. In their system, the same act can be characterized by using a descriptive action verb (Jack carries Jill's pail of water), an interpretive action verb (Jack helps Jill), a subjective state verb (Jack likes Jill), or with an adjective (Jack is helpful). Their research has demonstrated the importance of these distinctions for both the way behavior is encoded and understood and the way its meaning is communicated. Our interest was in determining whether group stereotypes would have an influence on the use of these alternative levels of abstractness in the descriptions our subjects generated.

Our analysis differed in one important respect from the typical studies reported by Semin, Fiedler, and others. In their analyses the focus has been on specific verbs used in sentences describing interpersonal actions. To use a frequently cited example, their analysis would examine what difference it makes to encode an action as A hit B, A hurt B, or A hates B. In our study, however, subjects generated stories that were wide ranging in both form and content, yet were rich in the scenarios they created. For our purposes, then, a focus on specific verbs pertaining only to interpersonal actions was deemed too constraining. Therefore, we analyzed verb phrases instead of verbs, adapting the distinctions specified in Semin and Fiedler's system. To preserve the distinction between the original coding system of Semin and Fiedler and our adaptation of it, we will use the terms descriptive action phrase (DAP), interpretive action phrase (IAP), and state descriptive phrase (SDP) for the categories used in our analyses. Examples of each of these categories are shown in Table 6.1.

It is also important to note that the task we presented to our subjects required them to generate descriptions of episodes in particular settings. This task naturally induced a rather concrete level of description, with relatively little abstract characterization. Because of these task constraints, DAPs were used most frequently in each target person condition, adjectives were used least frequently in each condition, and neither measure differed significantly as a function of any of the target person variables. These general patterns were a consequence of the fact that the task did not encourage character development in the stories.

Table 6.1 *Examples of Descriptive Action Phrases, Interpretive Action Phrases, and State Descriptive Phrases coded from subjects' stories*

Descriptive Action Phrases	Interpretive Action Phrases	State Descriptive Phrases
'walks up to the teller'	'does well in school'	'hopes his wife is OK'
'was talking to a friend'	'is hanging out (in the mall)'	'feels lost in this environment'
'went to the hospital'	'helps patients'	'expects everyone to like him'
'is shopping for an engagement ring'	'tries to save as much as he can'	'wants to make everyone laugh'
	'was driving a little too fast'	'wishes he could play'

There were, however, meaningful differences associated with the subjects' use of both IAPs and SDPs. Subjects used significantly more IAPs in their stories about white target persons ($M = 2.92$) than about black target persons ($M = 2.39$). In contrast, the analysis of SDPs produced a significant race by age interaction which, as can be seen in Figure 6.3, was similar in form to comparable interactions observed already in previous measures. Specifically, SDPs were used more frequently in stories about the middle-aged black than in those about the other three target persons.

We can consider these results in terms of the relationship between IAPs and SDPs. IAPs provide relatively concrete and specific descriptions of action which, combined with the high rate of DAPs, suggests that subjects generated fairly rich and detailed stories. IAPs include modest interpretive character, for example, an inference as to the actor's motivations underlying a given behavior. This pattern, which presumably would reflect a fairly well developed cognitive structure, was more prevalent in subjects' stories about white target persons. SDPs, on the other hand, provide more abstract characterizations of the target person's wants, fears, and the like that are less tied to detailed aspects of the specific situation at hand. These more generalized descriptions may reflect a more impoverished, but stereotyped, knowledge base from which the stories were derived. It is interesting, then, that these SDPs were most prevalent in that category of target person with which, according to our earlier

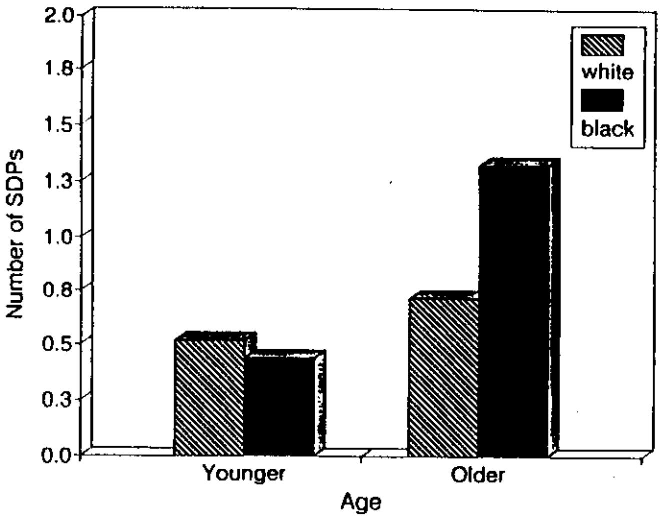

Figure 6.3 *Mean number of state descriptive phrases (SDPs) in subjects' stories (adjusted for story length)*

argument, subjects would have had the least experience and familiarity.

This relative lack of complexity in subjects' thinking about middle-aged blacks is thus reflected both in their comparatively short descriptions and in their greater use of abstract verb phrases. These differences may have consequences for both the producer and the recipient of such messages. Abstract verbs, such as state verbs, remove the focus from the specifics of the situation in which the action occurred. Instead, they refer to properties of the person(s) involved, often locate causality in those persons, and hence can be difficult to disconfirm. Such verbs can subsume a large number of diverse behaviors, and consequently a large amount of disconfirming information would be necessary to change beliefs stated in such terms. By characterizing behaviors in more abstract terms, then, existing expectancies can seemingly be reinforced. Moreover, these effects can be manifested in the minds of both the perceiver and the recipients of messages from the perceiver. That is, stereotypes might affect the representation formed by the perceiver as information is initially encoded, and this representation in turn might generate a more generalized, abstract level of language that is communicated to others.

Trait Ratings

After subjects had completed generating their spontaneous descriptions of each of the target persons, the experimenter projected their photos again, one at a time, and for each one the subject was asked to rate him on a series of trait-descriptive rating scales. For purposes of analysis we grouped the attributes into three categories or clusters that intuitively seemed pertinent to the issues of interest to us, which we refer to as (a) a traditional black stereotype cluster, (b) an ability–achievement cluster, and (c) a sociability cluster. In each case a measure was derived by averaging subjects' ratings on several scales and the resulting measure was analyzed in a 2 (age) × 2 (race) × 2 (facial expression) analysis of variance.

Traditional Black Stereotype Cluster Ratings on seven attributes reflecting the predominant stereotype of blacks were combined to define this cluster index. These attributes were aggressive, musical, lazy, powerless, flashy, athletic, and religious. This analysis produced a significant main effect for race, with blacks being rated higher than whites on this composite measure. In making their trait ratings, then, our subjects conveyed a rather traditional view of blacks compared to whites. We view this result as another indication that our subjects were not responding even on these rather transparent ratings, in a manner that would convey a favorable impression or avoid the appearance of racial bias.

Ability–Achievement Cluster The six attributes comprising this measure were intelligent, competent, cultured, educated, successful, and wealthy. Neither race nor age main effects, nor their interaction, were significant in this analysis. The fact that black and white target persons were *not* differentially rated on this dimension, which is loaded heavily with evaluation (albeit in a specific domain), indicates that the differences observed above on the stereotype measure were not simply due to generalized differences in intergroup evaluation but rather were specific to the stereotypic attributes.

Sociability Cluster Four scales all seemed to pertain to a generally happy, amiable nature and were combined into a single measure. These attributes were happy, friendly, exciting, and sociable. Obviously this dimension is most relevant to the manipulation of smiling versus nonsmiling faces, and indeed the main effect for this manipulation was highly significant. Beyond this obvious outcome, however, there was one additional finding of considerable interest, namely, a significant interaction of race and age. Means for this interaction are shown in Figure 6.4. It is apparent that the form of this interaction parallels earlier results, with the older black target

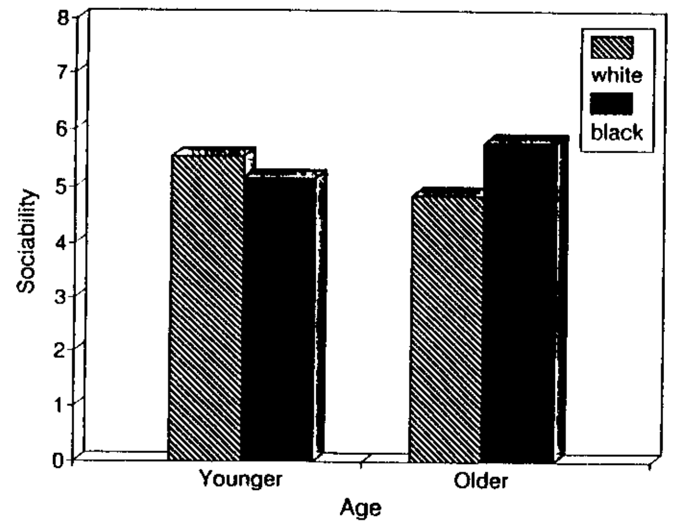

Figure 6.4 *Mean ratings of target persons on sociability traits*

persons being rated happier, friendlier, and so on, than the other three target persons. It is noteworthy that this interaction is not moderated by, but generalizes across, the distinction between smiling and nonsmiling faces. These differences, then, appear to reflect subjects' differential beliefs associated with the stimulus categories represented by this interaction.

Issues of Interpretation

These findings from the trait rating data, when considered in conjunction with the results from our other analyses, raise a number of interesting interpretive issues. One possibility, always a potentially important influence on ratings of significant social groups, is that subjects were sensitive to social norms and/or were defensive about appearing prejudiced, and hence they rated the black target persons in a socially desirable manner. As a general explanation for our findings, however, this interpretation encounters several serious difficulties. First, these motivational biases would lead to significant main effects due to race, with blacks being portrayed more favorably than whites. However, although some race main effects were obtained, they were relatively infrequent. More typical were race-by-age interactions. Second, the tendency to evaluate blacks more favorably than whites, or even older blacks more favorably than the other target persons, was not impressively consistent across dependent measures. For example, blacks were not rated higher on the

ability-related cluster, even though these are certainly evaluation-laden attributes. Third, and most importantly, if subjects were strongly influenced by these motivational and self-presentation concerns, they clearly would not have rated blacks so stereotypically on the stereotype-related traits.

Alternatively, our preferred interpretation is that subjects were basing both their descriptions and their ratings on stereotypic conceptions that varied somewhat for the different categories of target person. That is, subjects have a general stereotype of blacks that is defined primarily by the traits traditionally considered stereotypic of blacks, and this stereotype produced the race main effects in several of our analyses. In addition, however, subjects have a more specific, if less well developed, stereotype of older black males than of younger black males. As we suggested earlier, most of our white undergraduate students have probably had relatively little direct interaction with adult black males, but rather have formed their conceptions of this group primarily through media exposure.

Historically, in film and other media, black males have often been portrayed in 'happy servant' roles ranging from the hotel doorman to a worker in the cotton fields. Though in clearly subservient positions, these characters were often portrayed as good-natured and as spreading happiness to those with whom they interact. The prevalence of this kind of portrayal raises the interesting possibility that our subjects, having only a poorly developed conception of this group from personal experience, relied on this stereotypic conception in generating their stories and in making their trait ratings. It is also clear that younger blacks are not portrayed in these roles, and hence were differentiated from their older counterparts in a number of the analyses.

Although this interpretation must remain quite speculative at this point, it does raise some interesting possibilities. Specifically, it suggests not only that our subjects' stories and ratings reflect a reliance on broad stereotypes of racial groups but also that *different* stereotypes were used for different target conditions, revealing the existence of subtypes in subjects' conceptions of blacks (Brewer et al., 1981; Taylor, 1981).

Language and the Use of Traits in Intergroup Perceptions

Semin and Fiedler's (1988) classification system has proven to be a valuable tool in understanding a number of properties of language use, as evidenced in the productivity of their research program (see chapters by Semin and Fiedler in this volume). The results reported above indicate that our own adaptation of their verb classification system was useful in revealing some aspects of our subjects' spontaneous descriptions of members of stereotyped groups.

The highest or most abstract level in Semin and Fielder's system is the use of adjectives to encode or characterize behavior. Certainly the use of adjectives is a more abstract, generalized level of comprehension and description than is captured by any of the verb types, as the adjective removes the characterization from a focus on the specific action to a more pervasive property of either the actor who performed the behavior or the situational entity that elicited it. There is, however, similar variability within the realm of trait-descriptive adjectives themselves. In fact, such variability is the focus of a research program conducted by Hampson, John, and Goldberg (1986; Hampson, Goldberg and John, 1987) investigating what they call breadth versus narrowness in the trait domain. This distinction refers to differences in the extent to which the trait encompasses a broad range of behaviors versus being specific to a narrow subset of behaviors. To cite one of their examples, the trait 'responsible' encompasses a broad range of behaviors that can occur in a variety of situations and can be manifested in a variety of ways. In contrast, the trait 'punctual' refers to a more specific domain of behavior, having to do with promptness, being on time for appointments, and the like. Thus 'responsible' would be considered a broad trait, whereas 'punctual' would be a narrow one.

Note that both traits refer to the same behavioral domain. Behaviors that would be characterized as responsible include, but are not limited to, those that would be characterized by the term 'punctual.' Put another way, being punctual is one way, but not the only way, of being responsible. In fact, Hampson et al. (1986) argue that traits exist in hierarchical structures with broad traits subsuming narrow traits that refer to the same behavioral domain.

Consider, then, a graduate student who is never late for class, who always shows up for research meetings on time, and who has a well-planned schedule and is generally successful in carrying it out. One might characterize this student as being punctual, a trait that certainly captures this behaviour pattern. Alternatively, one might describe her as responsible, which also seems like an apt characterization. By using a broad trait, however, one is conveying much more about her in the latter description than in the former, for it implies that she will manifest her responsibility not only in being on time for appointments but also in completing tasks thoroughly, remembering to carry out a promised favor, exercising discretion in social and work relationships, and in other ways of being a responsible person.

Given that we have this flexibility in the way we characterize

persons and the behaviors they perform, what determines whether we will use a narrow, domain-specific adjective or a broad, more generalized attribute? One factor that can influence this process is the perceiver's liking for the person. John et al. (1991) have shown that perceivers described a liked person by using broad desirable and narrow undesirable traits, whereas for a disliked person the opposite pattern was observed – broad undesirable traits and narrow desirable traits.

The narrow–broad dimension underlying this research is similar in some important respects to the concrete–abstract dimension underlying the Semin–Fiedler verb classification. In both cases the authors propose a continuum moving from the specific (narrow, concrete) level of description to more general, inclusive (broad, abstract) characterization. In both cases the more general level is more removed from specific behavioral data, involves greater inference, implies more about the person so described, and is more immune from disconfirmation. Although one could focus instead on differences between these conceptual dimensions, we suggest that it may be useful to explore their similarities. If the similarities are meaningful, then we might expect to find parallels in the functions of these dimensions across linguistic forms. It is noteworthy, then, that John et al.'s (1991) results in the trait adjective domain essentially parallel the results of Maass et al. (1989) for verbs. In both cases differential evaluations of targets (liked versus disliked other; ingroup versus outgroup) were systematically related to the use of general (broad, abstract) versus specific (narrow, concrete) terminology in characterizations of others. To extend this analysis of similar patterns of results across domains, we tested the hypothesis that characterizations of groups would differ in terms of the breadth or narrowness of the traits ascribed, as a function of the perceiver's evaluation of the group.

A Study of National Stereotypes

As noted earlier, historically traits have been the language of stereotypes, at least as studied by social scientists, and this is certainly true of research on national stereotypes. Therefore, to examine our hypothesis, we analyzed the use of trait terms in perceptions of various nationalities. To do so, we made use of results reported by Eagly and Kite (1987).[5] In their study, American college students rated each of 28 nationalities on 41 rating scales, indicating in each case the percentage of members of a given nationality that possessed that attribute. To test our hypothesis, we first identified the seven most liked and the seven least liked nationalities, based on subjects' ratings of the groups on a likeability

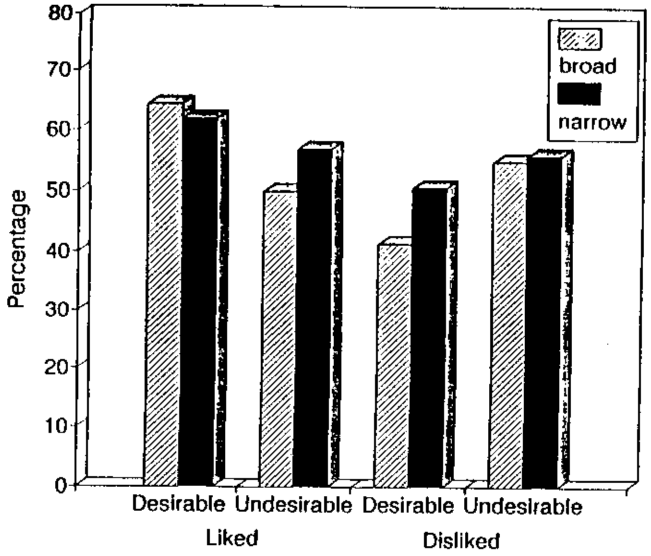

Figure 6.5 *Mean judgments of liked and disliked nationalities*

scale. We then ranked the attributes in terms of desirability and breadth, based on norms reported by Hampson et al. (1987). From these criteria, we selected desirable and undesirable broad traits as well as desirable and undesirable narrow traits from those used in the Eagly and Kite (1987) research.[6] Mean ratings of the liked and disliked nationalities on these attributes are shown in Figure 6.5.

Several findings from an analysis of variance of these data were informative. First, and not surprisingly, subjects made higher ratings of liked nationalities on the desirable traits ($M = 63.09$) than on the undesirable traits ($M = 53.53$). Similarly, mean ratings of disliked nationalities were higher on the undesirable than on the desirable traits ($M = 55.56$ and 46.05, respectively). Thus, we have evidence of both a favorability bias for liked groups and an unfavorability bias for disliked groups.

Of greatest relevance to our predictions, however, was the significant predicted three-way interaction. Separate analyses for liked and disliked nationalities both yielded significant two-way interactions. Liked nationalities were believed to exhibit significantly more broad than narrow *desirable* traits and significantly fewer broad than narrow *undesirable* traits. In contrast, disliked nationalities were believed to exhibit fewer broad than narrow *desirable* traits. Ratings of disliked nationalities on undesirable traits did not differ by breadth.

These statistical results can be best interpreted by examining the pairs of bars in Figure 6.5. The pairs of bars on the extreme left and extreme right indicate ratings on traits that are evaluatively consistent with group expectancies. Liked groups were described with desirable traits while disliked groups were described with unfavorable traits, and these ratings were relatively unaffected by trait breadth. In contrast, trait breadth had a substantial impact on judgments on traits that were evaluatively inconsistent with group stereotypes. Specifically, liked groups were seen as exhibiting more narrow than broad undesirable traits. Disliked groups, on the other hand, were seen as exhibiting more narrow than broad desirable traits.

These results provide further evidence of the differential use of broad and narrow trait descriptors in judgments of liked and disliked targets. To the extent that undesirable traits are ascribed to liked groups, and desirable traits to disliked groups, they are likely to be narrow attributes with a limited range of application. These narrow traits acknowledge that groups may be characterized by stereotype-inconsistent attributes, but do so in a way that constrains their implications for the overall evaluations of the groups. These findings also have implications for understanding a well-known property of stereotypes, namely, their resistance to change. Broad traits not only imply greater stability and generality but are also more difficult to disconfirm. Therefore, the greater assignment of broad desirable and narrow undesirable traits to liked groups and of narrow desirable traits to disliked groups may contribute to the preservation of perceived intergroup differences. Finally, it is noteworthy that the basic pattern of these results parallels Maass et al.'s (1989) findings for verb usage in describing the behaviors of ingroup and outgroup members.

Groups as Noun Categories

Whereas verbs convey properties of action and adjectives describe features of an entity, it is important to recognize that our stereotypes are belief systems about the entities themselves. Therefore, when thinking and communicating about groups our thought and speech often pertain to *categories* rather than to features of categories, and this suggests that important linguistic effects of stereotyping may be captured in nouns rather than in verbs or adjectives. Assigning a person to a noun category – 'jock,' 'German,' 'lesbian,' 'nigger,' 'Jew,' 'nerd' – invokes an abstract concept that immediately and simultaneously conveys an entire organized cluster of descriptive features. It invokes a structure that can subsume an enormous variety of features and specific behaviors, and one that often activates a strong affective component as well. Describing a person with a noun category in communication thus conveys a rich characterization.

In accordance with this view, recent research by Andersen and Klatzky (1987; Andersen et al., 1990; Klatzky and Andersen, 1988) has shown that the concepts we use in thinking about types of people are stereotypes (for example, politicians, 'jocks', and housewives), rather than trait-based categories (for example, extraverted, athletic, and feminine types). An important distinction between these two kinds of categories is that stereotypes are identified by nouns, whereas trait-based categories are identified by adjectives. The Andersen–Klatzky studies have shown that, compared to trait-based categories, these noun categories (1) are richer, having more features that afford a wider variety of inferences about category members; (2) are more imaginable, due to the fact that their features include not only traits but also physical characteristics, typical behaviors, and demographic characteristics; (3) are more distinctive in that they have idiosyncratic features not shared with other categories; and (4) function more efficiently in information processing tasks.

Other research indicates that these group concepts have a structure similar to those we have considered in previous sections on verbs and adjectives. Our cognitive structures about types of persons are organized hierarchically, such that some categories are superordinate in the structure, with several subordinate subtypes organized under them (Cantor and Mischel, 1979). Thus our concepts of significant stereotyped groups may include a variety of subtypes, and these subtypes can be important in processing information about group members (Brewer et al., 1981; Mackie and Worth, 1989; Park and Rothbart, 1982; Rothbart and John, 1985) and in whether disconfirming information affects change in those concepts (Hewstone, 1989; Weber and Crocker, 1983).

Although we know some of the structural properties of these noun categories and their relationships, a lot more remains to be learned. The issues raised in this chapter suggest some interesting directions for further work. For example, do the different levels of a hierarchical structure function in ways similar to the broad and narrow traits (which are also hierarchically organized; Hampson et al., 1986), and to the levels of abstractness in the verb domain? Are we more likely to use broad (superordinate?) than narrow desirable nouns in describing liked groups, but more broad than narrow undesirable nouns in describing a disliked group? How do the various factors influencing the communication context affect the choice of noun categories used in conversation with others? How does the intergroup relationship between speaker and audience affect these linguistic choices, and with what consequence?

A Language Hierarchy in Communicating about Groups

We have discussed verbs, adjectives and nouns and how their use might be influenced by the intergroup context in which perception and communication occurs. We have seen the usefulness of Semin and Fiedler's (1988) differentiation among three verb types – descriptive action, interpretive action, and state verbs – that vary along a continuum from concrete descriptions of action to more abstract, inferred characterizations of the internal states of the actor. A given action can be characterized by any of these verb types, yet the meaning of that action can differ substantially depending on the verb level used in its characterization. Research by Maass and her colleagues (Maass et al., 1989; Maass and Arcuri, this volume), applying this verb system to the intergroup context, has demonstrated differences in the interpretation and encoding of behaviors of ingroup and outgroup members; and our own work has revealed the influence of stereotypes on the differential use of these verb types in spontaneously generated descriptions of group members in various settings. Hence the use of these differing levels of abstractness can be influenced by group concepts and has the potential to shape not only our own conception of events we have witnessed but also the conception of those events that we convey to others in speech.

Trait adjectives, rather than being tied to action, portray features of an actor and hence move the characterization to a more abstract level (Semin and Fiedler, 1988). We have seen, however, that as with verbs, there is considerable variation in abstractness within the domain of trait adjectives. Building on the work of Hampson, John, and Goldberg (Hampson et al., 1986; John et al., 1991), we have shown differences in the extent to which traits are ascribed to stereotyped groups as a function of the breadth or narrowness of those traits.

Although breadth and abstractness are not equivalent concepts, they do share some important properties. Abstract terms are broad in that they are inclusive; that is, there are many ways of instantiating the concept. Similarly, broad terms are abstract in that they are removed from the specific behaviors from which they are inferred. And because of these features, both abstract and broad terms are more immune to disconfirmation than their lower-level counterparts.

Finally, we have considered the potential importance of noun categories in thinking about the relationship between language and stereotypes. Although stereotypes are often defined as consisting of the attributes believed to characterize a group, they nevertheless refer to groups that are identified by nouns. These noun categories themselves exist in hierarchical representations whose levels differ in breadth and abstractness, suggesting parallels with the findings and conceptualizations discussed earlier for verbs and adjectives.

These considerations lead us to propose the following framework for thinking about the relationship between language and stereotyping for both construing and communicating about interpersonal behaviors. The framework consists of three major linguistic categories – verbs, adjectives, and nouns – each of which can vary in concreteness or abstractness. We begin with verbs, basically adopting the Semin and Fiedler (1988) differentiation of three verb types. Using their common example, an action might be described as 'Bob hit Tom,' 'Bob hurt Tom,' or 'Bob hates Tom' – three alternative construals that convey different meanings of the action.

The most abstract level in the Semin–Fiedler system is the adjectival description – 'Bob is aggressive.' Rather than regarding adjectives as the most abstract level of a verb classification system, we regard them as a distinct category, the terms of which themselves vary in specificity or generality, much as the verbs do. Thus it makes considerable difference whether the perceiver construes Bob as 'temperamental' or as 'aggressive,' the latter presumably being much broader than (and perhaps superordinate to) the former. John et al. (1991) showed the importance of these differences, and our own results have extended this work to the perceptions of stereotyped groups.

Finally, our thinking about stereotypes in this framework has led us to question whether adjectives should be considered the most abstract level for construing interpersonal behavior. Rather than interpreting Bob's behavior as implying that he is aggressive, the perceiver might simply conclude that 'Bob is a fascist,' which would carry with it a whole new set of meanings. Thus we would further extend the analysis of language effects by including noun categories as a linguistic form that might be used in construing behavior. Although there is little existing work investigating the social psychological implications of noun use as a linguistic option, we believe such research is potentially important, particularly when group concepts are involved.

We have presented this framework in the context of a perceiver construing interpersonal behavior as that information is processed. The linguistic alternatives we have discussed would seem to be important determinants affecting the perceiver's processing of this behavioral information – the interpretation initially imposed, the evaluations and inferences based on that interpretation, and hence the representation of the event in memory. As we have seen, both the nature of stereotypes activated by the target person's group membership and the intergroup relationship between the perceiver and the target person can affect the outcome of this construal process.

It is important to note, however, that these language alternatives are influential not only for the perceiver's construal but also for the communication process. In communicating this information to another person, the perceiver's description would be based on his or her representation of the relevant information in memory. In conveying that information to another person, the communicator has available the diversity of linguistic options that we have discussed. Again, the salience of relevant stereotypes and/or intergroup contexts can strongly influence the communicator's choice of terminology, and the language choices made in this communication process can shape the audience's conception in meaningful ways.

Notes

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1. Specifically, our instructions stated that, based on past research, we know a great deal about some kinds of abilities (such as, verbal, quantitative) but that much less is known about other abilities on which people differ, and that our study investigates one of them – the ability to think quickly and spontaneously, to generate new ideas 'on the spot,' etc. To further establish this scenario, the first tasks given to subjects asked them to generate, as quickly as possible, as many uses as they could think of for certain common everyday objects (such as a rubberband). They were given 30 seconds to do this for each of three objects by speaking out loud as a tape recorder recorded their responses. This initial exercise was intended to accomplish three goals: first, to bolster our cover story that we were studying an ability that can be manifested in various ways; second, to give subjects experience in spontaneous generation of thoughts; and third, to accustom them to producing these thoughts orally as they were recorded on tape.

2. Not surprisingly, for many of the dependent measures the target person's facial expression (smiling or not smiling) produced a highly significant main effect. Usually these effects fit well with intuitive expectations and, by themselves, are fairly uninteresting. What was particularly noteworthy, however, was that this variable rarely interacted significantly with either of the group membership factors, age and race. Because this chapter is primarily concerned with group-based stereotypes, these general effects of facial expression will not be reported. Our presentation focuses instead on age and race effects and their interaction. Thus, unless otherwise noted, the analyses to be reported collapse across (and generalize across) whether the target person was or was not smiling.

3. Two judges read each of the stories subjects had generated, and rated the overall favorability with which the target person was described. Their ratings were moderately correlated (r was between 0.65 and 0.75 for various conditions) so the two ratings of each target person were averaged for purposes of analysis.

4. Because of these differences in length, the frequency of various linguistic forms would be confounded with the number of words in the story as a whole. Therefore analyses of these other variables were corrected for overall length by dividing raw frequencies by the total number of words, and then multiplying that value by 100 (which was approximately the average length of the stories).

5. We are indebted to Alice Eagly for providing us with these data.

6. Because trait breadth is typically correlated with desirability, we employed breadth ratings that were residualized to remove the influence of desirability (Hampson et al., 1987). The desirability and residualized breadth ratings of the traits were split into thirds, and traits representing either middling breadth or desirability were excluded. Consequently, analyses were based on four traits each that were broad desirable, broad undesirable, and narrow desirable, and five traits that were narrow and undesirable.

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7

The Role of Language in the Persistence of Stereotypes

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Since the very beginning of social psychology, the study of prejudice and stereotyping have been at the center of the field. One of the most striking aspects, noted early on, is the persistence of stereotypes in the face of contradicting behavioral evidence. Apparently, people are reluctant to revise their stereotypic beliefs even when confronted with evidence that disconfirms their expectations. We will argue in this chapter that biased language use contributes in predictable ways to the remarkable resistance of social stereotypes to change. Using Semin and Fielder's (1988) Linguistic Category Model as a conceptual framework and methodological tool, we will advance the thesis that stereotype-congruent episodes tend to be described in abstract linguistic terms such as adjectives (for example, Levine is stingy) whereas stereotype-incongruent behavioral episodes tend to be described in concrete linguistic terms that do not generalize beyond the specific event (for example, Levine donated five hundred dollars to the National Heart Association). In particular, we will argue that desirable in-group and undesirable out-group behaviors tend to be communicated in abstract terms, whereas undesirable in-group and desirable out-group behaviors are communicated in concrete language – referred to as the linguistic intergroup bias (LIB) throughout this paper. Considering that information encoded at an abstract level is relatively resistant to disconfirmation and implies high stability over time (Semin and Fiedler, 1988), we will also argue that this language bias contributes to the persistence of preexisting ideas about social groups. Thus, we propose a model in which existing stereotypes produce a biased language use which in turn contributes to the maintenance of existing biases. We will briefly outline Semin and Fiedler's model and subsequently describe our own research program in which we attempted to (1) demonstrate biased language use in intergroup settings empirically; (2) investigate the mechanisms that underlie the observed linguistic intergroup bias;