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About Schwa

We are an academic journal produced by the students of Brigham Young University. Our mission is to increase the amount and the accessibility of linguistic scholarship—especially for those without graduate school experience—while simultaneously training editors and designers in the ways of modern publishing.

Some of our articles are strictly theoretical and academic. Others are less technical and more personal in nature. Experiments, surveys, corpus analyses, and essays are all acceptable. We have published on all the following subdisciplines of linguistics and more:

—Phonetics, the perception and production of speech sounds.
—Phonology, the system of speech sounds used in a given context.
—Semantics, the meaning constructs of words and sentences.
—Syntax, the structure of permissible and meaningful sentences.
—Pragmatics, the real-world use of language and other speech-related actions.
—Sociolinguistics, the variation of language based on sociological factors.
—Psycholinguistics, the cognitive tasks necessary for language.
—Fieldwork, notes, or reports from living in a community speaking a foreign language.
—Forensics, the role of language in creating and carrying out the law.

We are always accepting submissions. Papers on any language are welcome, including cross-linguistic studies, but papers must be written in English. To maintain a high standard of quality, our staff includes both editors and graphic designers. We extend an open invitation for new staff members.

Go to schwa.byu.edu to submit a paper or join our staff.

Editor's Note

A blank screen is intimidating. When I sit to write the editor's note, I never know how to begin. You'd think it'd be easier this semester; I could just start by mentioning the global pandemic and all, but I feel that that topic has been beaten to a pulp.

Yet there's no denying that the pandemic did affect our process this semester. While there's no real substitute for the connection we feel when we meet in person, I'm thankful for the technology that permitted us to meet during this time of widespread caution, even when many other groups and activities had to be canceled.

I'm thankful for the staff members as they stayed engaged in the process from afar, kept deadlines, and taught each other. I'm thankful for the authors, because they shared their work, worked with our suggestions, and were partners in the revising and refining process. I'm thankful for Amanda LaFrance, the design director this semester; the time and care that she put into her role made the design and typesetting process move smoothly. I'm thankful for our new editors, who brought new life to the staff, and the returning editors, who brought their wisdom and experience. I'm grateful to our new faculty advisor, Dirk Elzinga, as we coordinated for our first semester together to fulfill our mission of furthering the accessibility of linguistic scholarship at BYU.

So, in spite of the new obstacles this semester brought, we now present to you Issue 23 of *Schwa: Language and Linguistics*.

Mikaela Wilkins
Editor in Chief

A Preference for Pretense:
Reader Bias in Evaluating Writing

Wendy Jennings

Previous studies have demonstrated that students often use an overly elaborate academic writing style that readers respond to negatively. These studies, which have focused on vocabulary, have not discovered whether readers identify clarity as a mark of better writing. Do readers confuse lack of clarity with good writing? The following study explores this question through a survey observing how readers compare clear and unclear sentences. Most respondents marked sentences that were unclear and hard to understand as examples of better writing. Thus, this study concludes that readers tend to consider unclear writing as better writing.

Introduction

Clarity in writing is difficult to teach and even more difficult to learn. The challenge of balancing sophistication and clarity often results in writing that is either convoluted or transparent. The trend of most students is to err on the side of elaborate, tangled writing. Many studies have explored the propensity of writers to mimic sentence structures and styles that are far more complex than is necessary or even effective. For example, in his study on writing error, Bartholomae (1980) explains that beginner writers often "get into trouble by getting in over their heads, not only attempting to do more than they can, but imagining as their target a syntax that is *more* complex than convention requires" (p. 254). These errors, then, are generally the result of writers reaching beyond the traditionally instructed guidelines for good writing.

Some researchers have taken the next step with this phenomenon and studied whether this instinct to complicate is well founded. Oppenheimer (2005), for example, observed that unnecessarily complex diction is usually seen by readers as a sign of lower intelligence (p. 151). Thus, in most cases, readers have demonstrated the ability to differentiate between aspiring intellectuals and professionals. While studies have been done about deliberately complex writing styles and the effect on readers, most of these discussions have centered on vocabulary, and the discussed implications have surrounded writers. None have thus far explored how this phenomenon manifests in writing with clarity or how it might affect educators or editors.

Research Question

While it has been observed that readers are unimpressed by pretentious vocabulary, it has yet to be discovered if readers identify clarity as a mark of better writing. Do readers confuse lack of clarity with good writing? This study will attempt to explore this question by observing the comparison that readers make between sentences that adhere to guidelines of clarity and sentences that do not. After describing the methods and results of the study, a discussion will follow of the implications of this research for editors.

Methods

I conducted this study by digitally distributing a survey composed of five pairs of sentences that demonstrated five of the "Ten Principles for Writing Clearly" found in *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (Williams, 2017). Example sentences were pulled from the text and paired into five sections. These sentences and their text citations can be found in the appendix. Section 1 of the survey illustrates principle 2, which focuses on how concrete subjects improve clarity in writing (pp. 46–52). Section 2 relates to principle 1, which is about "distinguishing real grammatical rules from folklore" (pp. 10–12). Section 3 is based on principle 3, which explains the significance of using verbs for key actions in sentences (pp.

32–39). Section 4 was crafted from principle 5, which focuses on "getting to the main verb quickly" (p. 141), and section 5 demonstrates principle 8, which is about concision (p. 124). For every pair of sentences, the participants were asked which sentence was easier for them to understand and which sentence demonstrated "better writing." In both cases they had the opportunity to mark the sentences as equal.

Fifty-four people participated in the survey. Of these, thirty-one were women and twenty-three were men. All were between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, and all were students at Brigham Young University.

I totaled the instances in each of the five sections in which participants marked sentences as *unclear* and as *better writing* and compared these instances with the instances in which students marked sentences as *clear* and as *better writing*. I then calculated the average number of instances across all five sections in which participants marked sentences as *unclear* and as *better writing.* After that, I calculated the average number of instances across all five sections in which participants marked sentences as *clear* and as *better writing*. I then conducted a t-test to determine whether these averages were significantly different, assessed at a 0.05 alpha level. In this way I was able to assess whether there was a difference in participants' perceptions of better writing having clarity and better writing lacking clarity.

Results

There was a significant difference ($p = 0.0288$) in the average number of times that participants marked a sentence as *clear* and as *better writing* ($M = 21.8$, $SD = 6.18$) and the average number of times that participants marked a sentence as *unclear* and as *better writing* ($M = 32.2$, $SD = 6.18$). Specific totals for each of these instances can be seen in Figure 1. In almost every section, more participants marked sentences that were harder to understand (unclear) as better writing. This pattern is broken only in Section 5, where the majority of participants marked the sentence that was easier to understand as better writing.

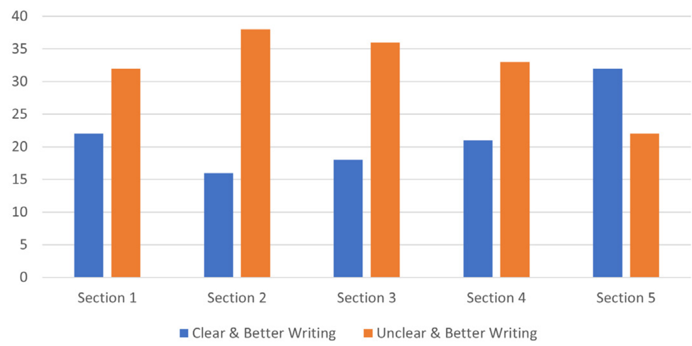

Figure 1. Relationship Between Perceptions of Clarity and Quality

Discussion

The significant correlation between participants' perceptions of clarity and quality is telling. Clearly, the readers' perceptions of better writing gravitated overall toward writing that violated principles of clarity. Though participants almost unanimously admitted that these unclear sentences were harder to understand, the majority of participants still decided that the unclear sentences were better writing than their edited counterparts. There was a significant variance in this pattern in section 5, in which the majority of participants marked the clearer sentence as better writing. This section was framed around the principle of concision (Williams, 2017, p. 124), and the example sentence specifically exemplified redundancy. The participants clearly had a greater sensitivity to this principle than to the other principles, which is a compelling aspect of the research and an opportunity for further study.

Several factors might explain these results. For example, the participants of the study were all college students between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. One could argue that this demographic includes primarily beginner writers who tend to complicate their own writing by reaching for an academic style. If so, their perceptions of writing may be skewed toward their own tendencies. There was also a higher percentage of female participation in the study and a range of participants' academic majors, both of which may have impacted the data.

Despite the limitations of this study, I can conclude that, based on these results, readers tend to consider unclear writing as better writing. This is an interesting trend, and one that if developed in further study could comment on the flaws of academic style. If readers do equate confusing complexity with quality, it must be because they have been taught to do so by an education system that emphasizes academese more than clear communication. As a result, student writing aims for an already flawed style and overshoots until the student can no longer discern between the goal and overdone mimicry. An awareness of this potential problem is valuable not only for educators but also for editors, who usually take on the frontline task of clarifying the obscure. With further study on this topic and perhaps a gradual revolution of academic writing, we might, with time, see the last of readers who have a preference for pretense.

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Appendix

Survey

<u>Section 1</u>

Compare these two sentences:

> Sentence A: "Medieval theologians often debated issues that modern philosophers consider trivial" (Williams, 2017, p. 48).
>
> Sentence B: "Medieval theological debates often addressed issues considered trivial by modern philosophical thought" (p. 48).

Which sentence is easier for you to understand?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Which do you think is better writing?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

<u>Section 2</u>

Compare these two sentences:

> Sentence A: "The man I met with was the man I had written to" (Williams, 2017, p. 17).
>
> Sentence B: "The man with whom I met was the man to whom I had written" (p. 17).

Which sentence is easier for you to understand?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Which do you think is better writing?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Section 3

Compare these two sentences:

> Sentence A: "A revision of the program will result in increases in our efficiency in the servicing of clients" (Williams, 2017, p. 39).
>
> Sentence B: "If we revise the program, we can serve clients more efficiently" (p. 39).

Which sentence is easier for you to understand?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Which do you think is better writing?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Section 4

Compare these two sentences:

> Sentence A: "The company was able to pursue opportunities in Africa because it understood what drove profitability in the Asian market for small electronics" (Williams, 2017, p. 141).
>
> Sentence B: "The company's understanding of the drivers of its profitability in the Asian market for small electronics helped it pursue opportunities in Africa" (p. 141).

Which sentence is easier for you to understand?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Which do you think is better writing?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Section 5

Compare these two sentences:

> Sentence A: "Do not try to predict future events that will completely revolutionize society, because past history shows that it is the final outcome of minor events that unexpectedly surprises us more" (Williams, 2017, p. 124).
>
> Sentence B: "Do not try to predict revolutionary events, because history shows that the outcome of minor events surprises us more" (p. 124).

Which sentence is easier for you to understand?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Which do you think is better writing?

A. Sentence A

B. Sentence B

C. The sentences are equal.

Clauses of Worship:

An Analysis of Clausal Complexity in Old and Modern Hymns

Beau McMurray

This study analyzes the clausal patterns of select hymns in the hymnbook of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The hymns were analyzed to determine whether modern hymns employ less complex sentence structures (which would reflect simple modern speech) when compared to hymns written before the nineteenth century (when speech was somewhat more complex). Not only did the results show modern hymns to be more structurally complex, but their complexities are tied to a modern tendency to write about action-oriented worship rather than the simpler vocal worship that was expressed in older hymns.

Introduction

English vocabulary and structure have changed dramatically over the past several hundred years, and we note those changes in public records and literature. But are changes in sentence structure reflected in hymns? I set out to compare the sentence structures of hymns in the current version of the hymnbook of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Instead of focusing my research on inversion or word choice, I was interested to see if the clausal structure of the hymns had been simplified over time. Researchers Rogers (1962) and Compton (1967) have shown that sentence complexity has an effect on aural comprehension. I was curious to see if hymns written for a modern day would have a simplified structure to reflect modern speech and improve aural comprehension. On the other hand, I also considered the possibility that hymns would maintain the same structure to imitate scriptural and traditional praise language.

Method

Because it is nearly impossible to determine the specific date the lyrics of each hymn were written, I divided them into three categories based on the birth- and death-date ranges of their authors: pre-nineteenth century, nineteenth century, and post-nineteenth century. For the purpose of this study, I focused my research on fourteen hymns written pre-nineteenth century and fourteen hymns written post-nineteenth century. The hymns were selected to include a variety of themes (sacrament, Christmas, Zion, etc.). I also deliberately avoided selecting more than two hymns from the same author, because it has been shown time and time again that the same authors tend to repeat the same sentence structure patterns (Levitsky & Melnyk, 2011). In my analysis, I did not include repeated lines (i.e., choruses) and looked at every sentence of every verse, regardless of hymn length.

After selecting the twenty-eight hymns, I wrote out each lyric sentence on its own line and identified each clause within the sentence. In my identification, I used various chapters of the *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English* to distinguish clause types (Biber et al., 2002). I also used Larsen's (1986) "sentence patterning" sheet as a quick reference for common subordinators, coordinators, and conjunctive adverbs (p. 103). Once each sentence had been analyzed and labeled, I counted the clauses and ignored peripheral tags and non-clausal elements.

Results

The results of my analysis are shown below in table 1. In terms of qualitative data, it was surprising to note that although both categories of hymns were full of inverted speech and similar vocabulary, modern hymns were significantly more complicated to read and diagram. Both categories had comparable themes and an even distribution of lyrics addressed to God and lyrics addressed to worshippers of God. The majority of sentences in the pre-nineteenth century category were made of declarative independent clauses—simple statements of truth or opinion. Second to declaratives were exclamatory statements of praise. Most imperative statements were calls for worshippers or nature to “shout for joy the Savior’s name” (Watts, 1748, p. 90). Most dependent clauses were either adverbials that expressed time or manner of worship, or relative clauses that further described the grandeur of God, such as “that hand which bears all nature up” (Doddridge, 1751, p. 125).

Contrastingly, the post-nineteenth century hymns are more complex and use substantially more dependent clauses. Even the independent clauses are used differently. Instead of prompting the reader to praise, imperatives almost exclusively ask God to help and to “guide us,” “forge our souls,” “lift us,” and “take us” (Bennett, 1948, p. 20). Most of the dependent clauses are adverbials expressing purpose and manner of worship or conditions to receive desired blessings. Examples include “when faith endures” (Randall, 1985, p. 128) and “that I might live forevermore, and grow, dear Lord, to be like thee” (Sabin, 1985, p. 171).

Sentence Type	Pre-19th Century	% of total	Post-19th Century	% of total
Total Sentences	96	--	75	--
Simple	42	43.75	11	14.67
Compound	22	22.92	11	14.67
Complex	14	14.58	36	48
Compound-complex	18	18.75	17	22.67

Table 1: Sentence Complexity in Hymns

Clause Type	Pre-19th Century	% of total	Post-19th Century	% of total
Total Clauses	208	--	196	--
Total Independent Clauses	156	75	102	52.04
Declarative	94	60.25	43	42.16
Imperative	32	20.51	55	53.92
Exclamative	27	17.31	2	1.96
Interrogative	3	1.92	2	1.96
Total Dependent Clauses	52	25	94	47.96

Table 2: Clause Patterns in Hymns

Discussion

This shift in complexity seems to follow a shift in religious context. This does not mean that either group refers to divinity more than the other—I counted the number of vocatives and appositive phrases that referred to God and Christ only to discover that there was not any variation between old and new hymns. Singing to proclaim God's divinity has not been lost; however, the context of proclaiming God's divinity has changed. Modern writers use their lyrics to teach worshippers what they need to do in addition to singing praises. These lessons require more complex sentence structures.

Increased complexity could be attributed to changes in dialect, but it seems to be a reflection of changes in discipleship specific to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Instead of using imperative clauses to incite the world to praise God, writers are using imperative clauses to beg God to help us. To access that help, writers are also including more clauses that call the saints to act, to work, and to strive. Instead of using relative and adverbial clauses exclusively to describe divine nature, they explain how, when, where, and why the Saints worship. In other words, pre-nineteenth century hymns declare that there is a God who has all power. Post-nineteenth century hymns teach us in detail how to access that power.

Conclusion

It is important to note that this information is taken from a limited sampling of twenty-eight hymns and has been compiled by a student with a limited knowledge of clausal structures. I would be interested in analyzing all 341 hymns to get a better data sample and to observe changes in hymns written in the 1800s. It would also be necessary to enlist a few other grammarians in this analysis. Finally, it is important to remember that change does not happen in isolation, and further research would require an analysis of Christian hymns from other denominations to determine if this change in structure really is related to doctrinal understanding.

My original suspicions that hymn complexity has decreased over time were not supported by any of my findings. Hymnal sentence structure has become more complicated over time. For now, the data suggests a possible correlation between increased complexity in sentence structure and a shift in understanding of discipleship. Hymns written by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after the year 1900 exhibit an increased focus on action-oriented worship. Their complexity is reflected in subordinate adverbial clauses that clarify how to access divine help and imperative clauses that ask God to lead us in our efforts.

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The Developments of the Singular Reflexive Pronoun *Themself*

Kennadie Halliday

This article investigates the properties, rules, and features of reflexive pronouns, with a special interest in the topic of the singular reflexive pronoun themself *(corresponding to the singular* they*). The author researched usage dictionaries, English corpora, and contemporary media examples to analyze current trends in and opinions of the usage of* themself. *Although* themself *is currently considered improper usage, it will likely become increasingly common over coming years and—in accordance with the recently standardized singular* they *pronoun—will inevitably become a standard form of English.*

Introduction

As many have noted in recent months of 2020, we as a global community are witnessing history in the making. As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, people are contemplating how the world might change; we might see the end of handshakes, cash, and public touch screens, and the introduction of masks and gloves into our everyday wardrobes. However, as someone who studies linguistics, I have witnessed another historical change: the standardization of the singular *they/them* pronoun. This change is significant because the English language very rarely sees a change in personal pronouns. When Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and the American Psychological Association (APA) accepted the singular *they*, I wondered how this shift would affect the reflexive form of *they*. Would *themself* become acceptable as well? This question piqued my interest in reflexive pronouns in general, and I set out to understand this intriguing topic of grammar.

Reference Grammar

In order to investigate this matter, I first turned to *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage*, a usage dictionary authored by Pam Peters, a linguistics professor at Macquarie University. Peters explains that reflexive pronouns "typically refer back to the subject of the sentence" and can serve multiple functions (2004, p. 465). They can operate as the object of a preposition or verb ("He hurt himself."), they can be used to add emphasis to the antecedent ("I met the president himself."), or they can replace regular pronouns ("Sarah and myself went to the park.") (Peters, 2004, p. 465–466). Reflexive pronouns must agree with the antecedent in person and number. Peters (2004) also discusses the issue of the reflexive pronoun *themself*, pointing out that it was considered standard English until the sixteenth century (p. 536). She argues that the singular reflexive pronoun *themself* is useful in referring to indefinite pronouns or the singular pronoun *they*. In addition, it is not a gendered pronoun, which makes it a more concise and inclusive usage (a usage that does not exclude or discriminate against individuals based on gender) than the standard *himself*, or *himself or herself*. Though Peters (2004) acknowledges that the usage of *themself* is not currently considered standard English, she insists that "it's time to reinstate it to the set of reflexive pronouns" (p. 536).

Corpus Examples

Next, I turned to English corpora to further investigate reflexive pronouns. The corpora revealed several interesting details about their nature and history. First, I looked into reflexive pronouns that refer to the personal pronoun *they*—primarily *themselves*, *themself*, *himself*, and *himself or herself*. According to the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), in the period of 2000–2009, the frequency of reflexive pronouns that refer to the antecedent *them* (per million words) is as follows: 175.46/mil for *themselves*, 379.20/mil for *himself*, 0.44/mil for *himself or herself*, and 0.10/mil for *themself* (Davies, 2010–).

This research also revealed several interesting trends in the use of reflexive pronouns over time. For example, according to the COHA, the use of *themselves* has been decreasing since 1830, with the usage per million words falling from 424.04 to 175.46 as of 2009. The use of the phrase *himself or herself* has risen, highlighting the increased societal focus on sexist language over time. According to the Contemporary Corpus of American English (COCA), the use of *themself* is currently on the rise, more than doubling in frequency per million words between 2000 and 2019 (Davies, 2008–). This upward trend is likely due to the standardization of the singular *they*. Inversely, *themselves* is decreasing in frequency, dropping from 177.26/mil to 117.08/mil over the same period. The inverse trends of *themselves* and *themself* are illustrated in the COCA charts below (Davies, 2008–).

Chart A: Themselves

1990-1994	24,650	139.1	177.26	
1995-1999	23,158	147.8	156.71	
2000-2004	22,517	146.6	153.63	
2005-2009	20,826	144.9	143.68	
2010-2014	18,636	145.3	128.29	
2015-2019	16,946	144.7	117.08	

Chart B: Themself

1990-1994	35	139.1	0.25	
1995-1999	37	147.8	0.25	
2000-2004	21	146.6	0.14	
2005-2009	22	144.9	0.15	
2010-2014	24	145.3	0.17	
2015-2019	45	144.7	0.31	

Furthermore, when I looked into the context of these usages, I found that *themself* is an informal usage most commonly found in blogs and spoken English (0.93/mil and 0.73/mil, respectively), while it is almost never found in academic writing (0.06/mil) (Davies, 2008–). For example, in the COHA, the frequency of *themself* spikes in the year 1910, when Ring Lardner's *The Real Dope* was published (Davies, 2010–). This book used informal usages, much like the writings of Mark Twain. In one excerpt, Lardner writes, "Well Al I suppose it is kind of foolish to be writeing you a letter now when they won't be no chance to mail it till we get across the old pond but still and all a man has got to do something to keep *themself* busy" (1919, p. 1; italics added). All of the examples of *themself* in the years 1910–1919 come from this piece of fiction. Meanwhile, *themselves* is a formal usage found most commonly in academic writing (287.69/mil) (Davies 2008–).

I then discovered that reflexive pronouns are most commonly found in fiction, likely because reflexive pronouns emphasize the individual, and fiction by nature focuses highly on individuals (Davies, 2008–). For example, *himself* and *herself* occur in fiction at a frequency of 576.09/mil and 423.27/mil, respectively, whereas they occur at a frequency of 139.13/mil and 46.20/mil in academic writing. The latter trend also demonstrates the use of *himself* in reference to the generic pronoun *he*.

My research also revealed that pronouns do not typically change drastically over time. Over the period of 1990–2019, the frequency of *myself* remained steady, only changing from 146.10/mil to 139.60/mil over three decades (Davies, 2008–). Similarly, the frequency of *herself* only shifted from 99.06/mil to 100.44/mil over the same period. Interestingly, the use of *himself* decreased from 229.92/mil to 192.92/mil in that period, suggesting that the use of the generic *he* has become less acceptable.

Shifts in accordance with standards on sexist language are further demonstrated by data in the COHA regarding reflexive pronouns. Looking at the period between 1960 and 2010, one can see how the feminist movement impacted American English. During that period, the frequency of *himself* decreased from 616.29/mil (more than triple the frequency of *herself*) to 379.20/mil (only 1.5 times more frequent than *herself*) (Davies, 2010–). The usage of *herself* has increased in frequency from 171.58/mil to 253.45/mil. In addition, the phrase *himself or herself* was introduced as a form of inclusive language, increasing in frequency from a meager 0.04/mil in 1960 to 0.44/mil by 2010, becoming eleven times more common.

Media Examples

My prior research revealed that personal pronouns very rarely change. However, the pronoun *they* has recently undergone a shift. Within the last year, using *they* as a singular personal pronoun has been recognized by sources such as APA and *Merriam-Webster* as a standard English usage. Logically, the singular reflexive pronoun *themself* will likely also become standard. Thus, when searching for media examples of my construction, I focused on the use of *themself* in today's media.

I found the usage of *themself* frequently on social media formats. This occurrence patterns accordingly with the data from the COCA, which states that *themself* is found commonly in blogs and informal writing (Davies, 2008–). For example, I saw the use of *themself* in a blog post, which reads, "Someone who's chaotic good (me) should never be allowed to run a bakery by themself (my job)" (@automaticfave, 2018). Although this example is in an informal setting, it still demonstrates that *themself* is becoming a more standard usage. In the example from the 1919 book *The Real Dope*, Lardner used *themself* to make the narrator sound uneducated. However, in this example from a blog post we see *themself* being used with a more educated, grammar-conscious voice. Furthermore, the use of *themself* in the blog post highlights the fact that the subject is alone; the phrase *by themselves* would have sounded somewhat contradictory, especially when coordinating with the singular pronoun *someone*.

I also found multiple examples of *themself* being used in recent, relevant news. I observed that most of these examples were actually spoken English in the form of quotes. For example, one article quotes Kelsey Singer, a graduate from the University of North Carolina, saying, "People are forced to put themself in unhealthy and dangerous situations regarding the virus" (Berg, 2020, para. 8). In this example, using *themself* highlights that people are individually—as opposed to collectively—experiencing "unhealthy and dangerous situations." In another article, New York City's Transit Authority Interim President, Sarah Feinberg, is quoted as saying, "People have to be very vigilant about mask usage and putting as much space between themself and others as they can" (Layne & Goldberg, 2020, para. 9). Even though these examples are taken from spoken English, like the blog example, they illustrate that *themself* is now considered a more acceptable and educated English usage. These examples also demonstrate how useful the singular reflexive pronoun *themself* is. By using *themself* instead of *themselves*, the speakers stress the fact that an action is being performed by an individual, whereas using *themselves* might cause confusion.

The final example of *themself* that I found in the media was interesting for two reasons: it was written, not spoken, and it was located in an article published by the United States Army. Unlike all of the prior examples, this example occurs in formal, written English. The article reads, "From there, the medics instructed on how to collect the sample themself" (Getsie, 2020, para. 6). While this usage may seem like a careless mistake, within the context of the article it clarifies the meaning of the reflexive pronoun. "Themself" refers to the patients whom the medics are instructing. It clarifies that "themself" does not refer to the medics, and the usage also adds emphasis to the fact that the patients are collecting samples on their own.

Conclusion

I foresee that *themself* will soon be recognized as a standard English usage, in accordance with the standardization of the singular pronoun *they*. Reflexive pronouns must agree with the antecedent in person and number, so the only logical reflexive pronoun to accompany the singular *they* is *themself*. Furthermore, *themself* is an incredibly useful term because it is gender neutral and, as contemporary examples have shown, it stresses that an action is done by a single individual. However, *themself* is currently still considered an informal or uneducated usage (Peters, 2004, p. 536). That may change soon, but in the meantime one should be careful not to use *themself* in formal writing. Unfortunately, I would not advise using the term *themselves* when referring to the singular *they* either, as it does not follow the rule that reflexive pronouns must agree with the antecedent in number. Thus, during this time of shift in standard usage, it seems there is a gap in the reflexive pronouns. I hope *themself* fills that gap, and soon. Once it does, I would fully encourage speakers and writers alike to embrace this beneficial usage.

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Beowulf and Litotes:
A Pragmatic Approach

Alexander Christensen

Understatement is a critical feature of the Old English tradition. One rhetorical figure that has been seen as a type of understatement, litotes, is particularly prominent in Beowulf. Lacking rigorous definitions to distinguish between understatement, litotes, and irony, scholars have often used the terms interchangeably; however, recent pragmatic scholarship shows that these three figures are not equivalent in their conditions or effects. This article performs an investigation of some uses of litotes in Beowulf. In light of pragmatic scholarship, better understandings of these uses emerge, which lead to more accurate interpretation of the poem.

"Litotes" is defined in an eighth-century Anglo-Latin glossary as *duo negativa unum adfirmant* (two negatives affirm one thing), but this definition is one of many in classical and literary studies. Dr. Gideon Burton's *Silva Rhetoricae* defines litotes as "deliberate understatement," "meiosis" (the rhetorical term often used in place of Modern English "understatement") as "a kind of litotes" and as "a kind of understatement." In describing irony, Burton names understatement itself as "one of the two principal means of communicating through irony." *Silva*, indeed. Despite cloudy distinctions and delineations, scholars have long noted the prominence of these three figures—litotes, understatement or meiosis, and irony—in Old English and Germanic literary traditions, especially in poems like *Beowulf*, which is perhaps the prime surviving example of Old English literature. Lacking rigorous definitions to distinguish between these devices, scholars have sometimes used the terms interchangeably, or without recognizing non-overlap cases. For example, a study by Leslie Harris—one of the most in-depth studies to be performed on *Beowulf* and litotes—analyzes only examples of litotes which are used by the *Beowulf*-poet as a tool for ironic understatement and tends to assume that any case of litotes is used only for this purpose. According to her, "litotes entails all methods of achieving understatement" (1988, p. 2). This is understandable, given the overlap of the three rhetorical figures, both in conditions and in effects, but it can cause problems for analysis of the poem, problems which could potentially be solved or mitigated through proper pragmatic separation of these figures, their conditions, and their effects. Recent scholarship in pragmatics, especially the work of Laura Neuhaus, can shed light on the differences between the figures and give scholars a better framework for interpreting the poet's use of them. By putting these new pragmatic approaches in conversation with past scholarship on *Beowulf*, I demonstrate some of the range and restrictions of semantic purposes for which the *Beowulf*-poet utilizes litotes. The findings generated by this method complicate past approaches to litotes in *Beowulf* and point to the necessity of rigorous pragmatic analysis in attempting to make conclusions about the overall function of litotes in the poem.

Scholarly approaches to litotes in *Beowulf* have generally consisted of analyzing a few examples of litotic ironic understatement—the overlap of all three figures—and then drawing some conclusion about the overall function of litotes in the poem. In 1988, Harris did just this. She came to the conclusion that the figure is so widely used because of its necessary engagement with the expectations of the society and thus ties the use of litotes to the themes throughout *Beowulf* of expectation and disappointment (1988, p. 1). In 2015, Stephen Graham also wrote on the topic of litotes in *Beowulf*. He concluded that the figure is a favorite of the Germanic tradition because it requires greater audience participation than most figures, since it requires the audience to infer the opposite of the negated term. However, the weakness of both analyses is that they only analyze the overlap cases of the three figures to draw their conclusions about litotes, ignoring examples of litotes that are neither ironic nor understated.

In 2017, Neuhaus clarified the definitions of the three figures by delineating their necessary conditions. I adopt her definitions in my analysis. For any utterance to be considered an example of irony, **(1) it must present some kind of stark contrast with the situation in which it is uttered,** and **(2) it must carry an implied critical attitude.** Situational contrast means that there must be "a difference between what is said and what is expected by the interlocutors to be meant in such a situation" (Neuhaus, 2017, p. 120). Likewise, there are two necessary conditions for an utterance to be considered understatement: **(1) "what is said is a scaling downward from what is expectable (from the context),"** and **(2) "what is meant is more than the default,** i.e., more than what usually would have been expected" (Neuhaus, 2017, p. 128). The tie to irony is clear. Both require situational contrast, but understatement requires a *specific kind* of situational contrast, i.e., "a scaling downward." Because of this connection, understatement can be a tool for creating irony, but it is not equivalent to irony. Litotes is the only one of the three that has a formal necessary condition: **(1) a term has to be negated**. Additionally, **(2) the opposite of that term has to be salient enough to be recognizable by the audience** (Neuhaus, 2017, p. 133). "He was not happy" would fulfill both conditions because "sadness" is a salient opposite to "happiness"; "He did not go to the store," in most contexts, would not fulfill the latter condition because there is no obvious opposite for "going to the store." Litotes, like understatement, can be used as a tool for ironic understatement, but covers a range of other uses as well, such as ordinary denial, the denial of potential presumptions, and mitigation between extremes (Neuhaus, 2017, pp. 133–34).

All three figures, like most figurative language, work by flouting one or more of the conversational maxims outlined by Paul Grice in 1989. There are four maxims. First, the maxim of quality: do not say what you believe to be false or that for which you lack adequate evidence. Second, the maxim of quantity: make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange. Third, the maxim of relation: be relevant. Fourth, the maxim of manner: avoid obscurity of expression, ambiguity, unnecessary loquaciousness, and disorder. These maxims are useful in analysis of figurative language because figurative language often works by breaking one or more of these rules (Grice, 1989, pp. 22–40).

This research project gathers a few examples of litotes from *Beowulf* and puts them in conversation with current scholarship on litotes. It is not necessary, nor possible, to analyze every example in this study. For the purpose of demonstrating some of the range of uses of litotes in *Beowulf*, it is sufficient to present an example of both overlap cases (litotic ironic understatement and litotic understatement) and then an example of litotes that is neither ironic nor understated. These examples will be analyzed principally by comparing and contrasting them with each other. Their context in the poem and semantic and pragmatic analyses will help to determine their meanings. Examples from *Beowulf* will be analyzed in the original Old English (hereafter, OE), as presented by George Jack in his 1997 edition of the text. These examples are relatively simple to identify because of the formal condition necessary for litotes outlined above. In the OE examples I have chosen, the necessary formal negation is represented either by *ne*, the separate negative particle comparable to Modern English (hereafter, ME) "not," or occasionally as *næs*, which appears in OE both with the same meaning as *ne* and as a contraction of *ne* and *wæs*, signifying "was not". Each example given will be accompanied by a grammatical breakdown of the utterance and a ME translation.

Litotes as Ironic Understatement

We begin by looking at an example of the kind of litotes that is normally recognized and surveyed: litotes as an instrument for ironic understatement. This example is from the speech made by Beowulf in reply to Unferth's criticisms of his valor. For our purposes, it is necessary only to understand that Beowulf is explaining why he was delayed in a certain swimming (or rowing) contest: as he was going along in the sea, water monsters pulled him to the bottom of the ocean and tried to eat him, but he fought them with his sword and (it is implied) killed them. To imply their death, he states:

1. OE: Næs hie ðære fylle gefean hæfdon. (line 562)

   Gram: Not they the feast-DATAdv joy-ACC had-PAST3P

   ME: They did not have joy in the feast.

   KEY: DATAdv: Adverbial dative
   ACC: Accusative direct object
   PAST3P: 3rd person plural past tense

Here, we see all the necessary conditions for litotic ironic understatement outlined by Neuhaus. First, the negative *næs* fulfills the formal requirement for litotes of negation. Second, the opposite of joy, sorrow, is salient and obvious. The hypothetical non-ironic-understatement litotic implicature generated would thus be something like the following:

1b. They had sorrow in the feast.

However, it is clear from the context that Beowulf does not just mean that the water monsters were sad. Beowulf has already stated that he *aglæcan orde geræhte* (hit the assailant with the point) and that *heaþoræs fornam mihtig meredeor þurh mine hand* (the storm of battle destroyed the mighty sea-beast by means of my hand) (lines 556–8), and he will go on to say that *on mergenne mecum wunde be yðlafe uppe lægon, sweordum aswefede* (in the morning they lay up along the shore, wounded by swords, asleep [figuratively, dead] by means of swords) (lines 565–7). Thus, the beasts did not just have sorrow; they were actually killed.

Such a dramatic situation gives the audience the expectation of a dramatic description of how Beowulf bested the beasts. Instead, the utterance of Beowulf flouts Grice's maxim of quantity—"Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange)" (Grice, 1989, p. 26). His "did not have joy" is a scaling downward from what is expected. Therefore, an understatement condition is filled: what is said is a scaling downward from what is expected. The second condition for understatement is also filled. In the context of feasts—whether of men in a mead-hall or of beasts in the ocean—the expected circumstances rarely allow for the death of the feasters. Hypothetical example (1c) seems normal, but (1d) does not, except figuratively.

1c. They did not enjoy their feast.

1d. Their feast killed them.

Thus, what is meant by Beowulf in (1) is a scaling upward from what is usual for the circumstances of feasting. So, reading (1) as a case of litotes as a tool for understatement would render (1d).

However, this cannot be the entirety of Beowulf's meaning. An implied critical attitude (the condition for an ironic reading) toward the water monsters is inferable from the expectations of feasting. It is belittling and embarrassing for a predator to be killed by its prey, especially if that prey has already been prepared for eating in a feast. Merely saying their feast (Beowulf) killed them would perhaps sufficiently defend his manhood from Unferth's attack, but Beowulf does more than this: using an ironic implicature, he shifts the object of belittlement from himself to the water monsters. Thus,

1e. Those [insert derogatory term here] were killed by their own feast!

might be the final meaning of (1).

Litotes as Understatement

Examples like (1) are often analyzed by scholars of *Beowulf*, perhaps because the overlap of litotes, understatement, and irony has a stronger effect than any one figure alone. However, "litotic form has the potential of multitude meanings" (Neuhaus, 2017, p. 139). It is not restrained to the meanings Harris identifies: "'mocking irony or hatred and aversion', humor, emphasis, and moderation or tempering" (Harris, 1988, p. 2). We turn to an example of litotes that is used as a tool for understatement but carries no ironic implicature. In this example, Grendel's mother has just broken into Heorot and seized Æschere, later described as one of Hroðgar's best advisors. The poet comments on this "trade" made between the Danes and Grendel's mother; namely, that they had killed her son, and she had killed Æschere. Example (2) comes from line 1304:

2. OE: Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til

Gram: Not be-PAST3SG that trade-NOMsub good

ME: That trade was not good.

KEY: PAST3SG: 3rd person singular past tense
NOMsub: Nominative subject

Again, the necessary conditions for litotes are filled: *ne* fulfilling the first, the salience of good's antonym, bad, fulfilling the second. But again, it is clear from the context that the poet does not just mean that it was a bad trade. Both sides had to pay for the trade with the lives of their friends or household (lines 1305–6): Grendel's mother lost her son, and Æschere is described at length by the poet and by Hroðgar as a particularly good thane (see lines 1308–9 and 1323–9), one which all warriors should imitate. The death of Æschere for Hroðgar and the death of Grendel for his mother were not just "bad;" they were traumatic. Just as in (1), Grice's first maxim of Quantity is flouted because the traumatic and dramatic situation gives the audience the expectation of a traumatic and dramatic description, and "not good" is even a further scaling downward from the more direct "bad." Additionally, in the context of trading, the death of friends is not usual currency. To call the exchange of a good sword for a bad sword a trade (whether qualified by "bad" or not) is acceptable, but to say that the exchange of the death of a friend for the death of a son is a trade goes against the expectations at work in the context of trading. Grice's third maxim of relation, be relevant, is thus flouted, and what is meant is a scaling upward from what is expected. These conditions already constitute the first necessary condition for irony (stark contrast between the situation and the utterance); however, given the poet's consideration of the loss and grief on both sides of the trade, it is hard to find an implied critical attitude in (2), what Colston and O'Brien describe as an illocutionary act of "condemnation" (Colston and O'Brien, 2000, pp. 1564–5). The poet emphasizes that lives of friends were paid *on ba healfa* (on both sides). If there is any implied attitude in (2), it is more sympathetic than anything else, a possible function of litotes in *Beowulf* not mentioned by Harris. Thus, the final implicature generated might be:

2b. That trade was traumatic (for all involved).

It seems useful at this point, before turning to examples of litotes that do not work as instruments for understatement and are therefore not ironic, to see an example of non-litotic understatement in *Beowulf*. Lines 1677–93 describe the huge sword that Beowulf found in Grendel's mere and used to slay Grendel's mother. When it is given to Hrothgar, the poet comments that the biblical story of the flood was engraved on the hilt which, in this version, included the destruction of *cyn giganta* (the kin of giants). In this context, the poet states:

3. OE: Frecne geferdon (line 1691).

Gram: Badly fared-PAST3P

ME: They fared badly.

The obvious way to distinguish between this and litotes is the lack of formal negation; the utterance does not deny anything; it only affirms. Furthermore, while this could be used as an instrument for irony, it cannot perform the other functions of litotes outlined by Neuhaus, such as simple denial or mitigation. For example, (3b), the litotic equivalent of (3), could be read in a context that believed that giants *did* fare well in the flood as simply and literally denying those presumptions.

3b. They did not fare well.

Utterance (3) cannot be read this way. We now turn to these other possible readings unique to litotes.

Litotes as Denial

In example (4), the poet refers to Hrothgar in his prime, just after the construction of Heorot. The poet's statement is as follows:

4. OE: He beot ne aleh (line 80).

GRAM: He vow-ACC not belie-PAST3SG

ME: He did not belie a vow.

The conditions for litotes, as with (1) and (2), are again immediately obvious. *Ne* is the necessary formal negation and the opposite of belying a vow is salient: fulfilling a vow. While Harris does not analyze this example at length, she does offer a loose translation, which is indicative of common assumptions about litotes, i.e., that it always denotes understatement. She translates, he "never failed to fulfill his boasts" (Harris, 1988, p. 4). What she translates as "never" is just the common negation *ne*, as seen in (4). Harris has added to the OE some of her own interpretation of litotes as a tool for understatement, representing in her translation some of what would be the understatement implicature. The question, then, is if (4) also fulfills the conditions for understatement as (1), (2), and (3) did. First, does (4) represent a scaling downward from what is expected for the circumstances? I argue that it does not. There is nothing dramatic or outstanding about Hrothgar that would create in the audience an expectation for a sensational description of him; on the contrary, an audience familiar with the story of *Beowulf* might have negative expectations of Hrothgar. While he does fulfill his promises of gift-giving to Beowulf (see lines 1020–4, for example), the whole issue of Grendel could be seen as failure on Hrothgar's part to fulfill his role as *helm Scyldinga* (the helmet, or protector, of the Shieldings). Thus, Grice's maxim of quantity is actually kept in (4) by succinctly speaking to the thoughts the audience already has about Hrothgar. Additionally, in order to be used for understatement, this example of litotes would have to mean something more than what is usual for the circumstances; in saying that Hrothgar did not belie a vow, the poet would have to be implying that Hrothgar did more than fulfill every vow, that Hrothgar went above and beyond and did even more than he promised. The poem does not tell this story, though. Based on the context, we are forced to reject the understatement reading of (4). Since there is no situational contrast and no critical attitude, irony is also absent. We are left with a simple litotes implicature, which in this case performs the illocutionary function of denying potential presumptions about Hrothgar. The implicature generated might be something like (4b):

4b. Contrary to what you might believe about Hrothgar, he fulfilled his vows.

The main problem with scholars' readings of litotes in *Beowulf* has been that they force an unwarranted understatement implicature onto examples of litotes that may be performing other functions, as with (4).

Conclusion

Examples (1), (2), and (4) are sufficient to show the various functions of litotes in *Beowulf*, and therefore in the OE poetic tradition generally. Focusing on litotes only as a means for ironic understatement, like Harris and Graham, can lead to misunderstandings—or outright ignorance—of examples like (2), which is understated but not ironic, and (4), which is litotic but neither understated nor ironic, while using Neuhaus's criteria facilitates a more nuanced analysis of the poet's meaning. Of course, this study does not represent a comprehensive survey of all examples of litotes in the poem nor in the corpus of OE. Such a survey may very well find that the ironic understatement use of litotes is more prevalent than any other function of litotes, but this still would not justify the assertion that "litotes entails all methods of achieving understatement" (Harris, 1988, p. 2) or that it is a type of irony. Alternatively, such a comprehensive survey may find that examples like (4) are much more prevalent than previously thought. Indeed, examples like (4) abound in the poem. On Beowulf's return from Hrothgar's court, Hygelac says that *siðe ne truwode leofes mannes* (I did not trust the journey of the beloved man [Beowulf]) (line 1993). This clear example of litotes resists an understatement implicature because we have no other descriptions of Hygelac's reactions or feelings toward Beowulf's journey, so there are no expectations that can be scaled downward. Beowulf's statement on line 2141 that *næs ic fæge þa gyt* (I was not then yet fated to die) likewise appears to be an example of litotes as non-figurative denial of presumptions rather than an instrument for understatement or irony. If such cases are found to be common, much work would then be necessitated in combing through those examples to see what their contexts show their functions to be and what greater understanding of the poem then unfolds.

These findings of the varied functions of litotes in *Beowulf* constitute a complication of past scholars' assertions regarding the function of litotes in the poem. Harris (1988) focused on the reversal of expectations as the central function of litotes in *Beowulf* (p. 1), but as we've seen, this reversal of expectations only occurs in uses of litotes as an instrument for understatement and irony. Similarly, Graham (2015) analyzes a number of examples of litotes—all assumed to be instruments for ironic understatement—and concludes that "fundamental to litotes . . . was the participation of the audience" (p. 86). Graham's conclusion does seem more likely to be true of all uses of litotes than Harris's; however, the conclusion should be reached by proper pragmatic analysis of all those uses, not by focusing on ironic and understated uses. The findings in this paper point to the need for future conclusions about the function of litotes in *Beowulf* and elsewhere to be made only after consideration of a varied sample of litotic uses.

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Using Directness with Grace

Rachel Hulet

This study explores methods of feedback from editors and the balance between clarity and politeness. Following the Mackiewicz and Riley study on directness in relation to clarity and politeness, an online survey in which each method was presented in the form of feedback was given to twenty staff members from Brigham Young University, aged thirty or older. The participants were asked to pretend they were hiring an editor to review their own works, were provided with a variety of editorial comments, and were asked to rank each comment on its clarity and politeness. Results demonstrated that each comment that was rated high for clarity had a low score for politeness, and vice versa. This study revealed that in order to obtain both clarity and politeness, an editor must not give feedback in the extreme for either. Instead, an editor should strive for professional directness.

Introduction

The work of an author may be the culmination of years of writing, countless tears of frustration, and numerous drafts filled with unfinished characters and plots. Authors pour their very lives into their work. Writers of any genre are guided by a strong emotional investment in their creations; however, like the rest of us, they are human and make mistakes. Thus, the relationship between author and editor is vital to an author's success. Editors of any genre are guided by a logical need for correctness and clarity. Correction is necessary—even for great authors—but because writing is an emotional investment, correction without sensitivity can create conflict and tension between the author and the editor. In such cases of correction, editors must always be aware of the effects their language may have on an author. Throughout the editing process, editors are expected to leave comments or queries as they assess the author's work. The purpose of these comments or queries is to suggest changes that will help enhance the reader's experience. Effective authors write with their audience in mind, and they desire to give their readers the best experience possible. Thus, the editor becomes an important diplomat between author and reader. An editor has the responsibility of drawing the author's attention to errors and directing them toward corrections that will improve the manuscript; a professional has the task of carrying out these responsibilities with respect. Editors must practice professionalism in order to be effective diplomats.

Social norms—and hopefully, conscience—dictate a certain amount of respect and civility toward those with whom we communicate professionally. This communication may be brief, or it may be the foundation of a lifelong relationship. Just as with any relationship one wishes to preserve and sustain, editors must use language that is carefully considered and purposeful when making suggestions. Finding a balance between clarity and politeness in making suggestions is a responsibility that exists in many professional capacities. However, any professional knows that the balance between clarity and politeness in correction can be a precarious one that requires a certain thoughtfulness. As Friedrich Nietzsche said, "It takes less time to learn to write nobly than to learn to write lightly and straightforwardly" (Williams, 2013, p. 27). Difficult as it may be, editors are no exception, and the difficulty of such a task may be heightened as they struggle to assist in perfecting a piece of writing that has become an emotional investment for the author. The hallmark of an effective editor is the ability to tactfully establish authority within the bounds of professionalism and to avoid insult in correction.

The Present Study

How can editors best balance clarity and politeness? They may follow several approaches to correcting a document, all of which fall on a scale of directness. While directness is parallel to clarity, this study is intended to analyze how politeness intersects with the scale of directness. The main questions researched in this study are the following: "When does directness become insulting?" and "When does politeness hinder authority or reduce clarity?'

Jo Mackiewicz and Kathryn Riley (2003) researched how linguistic forms influence levels of clarity and politeness in editor-author interaction with the intent to discover which linguistic forms create a balance between the two. After completing their research of linguistic forms, they created a list of editorial comment strategies that focuses on placing comments on a scale of directness. These strategies vary based on wording, inclusion of downgraders (hedge words), first- and second-person pronouns, and question versus statement forms (p. 92). I have extended my own research to include other points of directness that Mackiewicz and Riley explored and to compare all the research together. These other points of the article explore more variations of directive strategies with the inclusion of downgraders (p. 87).

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of each of these strategies in relation to both clarity and politeness. The study seeks to answer how to strike a balance between politeness and directness in an editorial comment, and the effects that politeness may have on clarity of the editor's intentions. In conjunction, the study provides some insight as to when it is necessary to be more direct than polite in order to reach clarity. The study I have conducted will shed light on the answers to these important questions.

Methods

In an effort to reach a general consensus on the topic of politeness and clarity, I implemented Mackiewicz and Riley's various strategies. I addressed the issue of directness by conducting a survey regarding the levels of clarity versus the levels of politeness, and the subsequent relationship between the two.

The scope of this research extended to twenty faculty and staff members of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. This particular group of target participants is composed of males and females, aged thirty and older, and is specific to persons native to the United States. This specificity is intended to focus on the culture of Americans concerning politeness and clarity and to narrow the scope to a professional setting.

The survey was conducted through an online survey software where participants could anonymously give their responses. The survey consisted of ten examples of editorial comments based on strategies given in Mackiewicz and Riley (see examples in appendix A). These strategies were intended to demonstrate various options editors have for conveying a necessary correction, which represent different levels of directness. The participants were asked to pretend that they had hired an editor to review material they had authored (see appendix B). This scenario was intended to integrate the participant into the writing and editing world. They were then given a list of the editorial comment examples and were asked to rank the examples in order of politeness, with the numeral *1* indicating most polite and the numeral *10* indicating least polite. Then they were asked to rank the examples in order of clarity, with the numeral *1* indicating most clear and the numeral *10* indicating least clear.

Results

The reports shown in Table 1: Average Choice for Politeness and Table 2: Average Choice for Clarity indicate the averages of which editorial comments the participants found to be most polite, least polite, most clear, and least clear. According to the participants, the highest-ranked example of politeness was the statement, "You could include a table in this section." This example averaged 3.62 in popularity (on the scale of one to ten), and the lowest-ranked example, "This section should have a table," averaged 7.92. These numbers are neither extreme nor especially indicative of an ultimate preferred choice. Neither fall close to one or to ten, and both are small integers of adjacent example averages. However, the average ratings for clarity were relatively extreme when compared to the rated example of politeness. The statement "Include a table in this section. That will help keep your readers' interest," was almost unanimously chosen as the option with the most clarity. The statement "Graphic aids create interest" was least preferred in terms of clarity, even more so than the statement "This section should have a table" was least preferred for politeness.

Example	Mean
You could include a table in this section.	3.62
You could include a table in this section. That's just a suggestion.	3.92
Could you include a table in this section?	4.62
Graphic aids create interest.	4.69
This section could have a table.	5.15
I would include a table in this section.	5.62
Include a table in this section. That will help keep your readers' interest.	6
You should include a table in this section.	6.46
You should probably include a table in this section.	7
This section should have a table.	7.92

Table 1: Average Choice for Politeness

Example	Mean
Include a table in this section. That will help keep your readers' interest.	1.33
You should include a table in this section.	3.17
This section should have a table.	3.33
You could include a table in this section.	5.5
I would include a table in this section.	6
This section could have a table.	6.33
You should probably include a table in this section.	6.67
Could you include a table in this section?	6.92
You could include a table in this section. That's just a suggestion.	7.08
Graphic aids create interest.	8.67

Table 2: Average Choice for Clarity

There are two particular patterns and three obvious outliers shown in the comparison of these two tables of averages. The first pattern is that the statements, "This section could have a table" and "I would include a table in this section," both remained rankings 5 and 6 across both lists, indicating that neither is decidedly impolite or unclear. While some may feel that this is good enough reason to use these examples in their own editorial comments, they must also keep in mind that while neither is decidedly impolite or unclear, they are also not perfectly polite or clear. The second pattern shown is a mirror effect. Many of the least polite examples are reflected in the high-ranking portion of the list examining clarity. Likewise, many of the more polite examples are reflected in the low-ranking positions of the list examining clarity. The top averages for the examples given in the table on clarity are strategies Mackiewicz and Riley give as direct strategies. This mirror effect indicates that directness and politeness can often contradict one another, and that clarity can sometimes be sacrificed when striving for politeness.

The three obvious outliers found in the tables are as follows: "Graphic aids create interest"; "Include a table in this section. That will help keep your readers' interest"; and "You should probably include a table in this section." The first, "Graphic aids create interest," is a "hint" strategy that Mackiewicz and Riley suggest avoiding (p. 92). This "hint" strategy was ranked lowest as a strategy of clarity. The second, "Include a table in this section. That will help keep your readers' interest," is an example of the bald-on-record strategy, which includes some sort of payoff. Not only is it clear because of the beginning imperative, but the editor has provided reasonable justification for the command. Perhaps this is why it does not fall last on the list of politeness, despite being the most direct. Lastly, "You should probably include a table in this section." Like the hint, this ranked in the bottom five examples of each average table, perhaps indicating that downgraders or hedge words like *probably* don't assist politeness or clarity and ought to be avoided altogether.

Discussion

Upon review of the survey results, there are a few key elements to remember when assisting an author with their material. One key element is to avoid hints. A professional editor, one who has done the work to become a good editor, has the authority to give more than a hint. The job of an editor is to dive into the work and make suggestions that are specific to that work. Hints simply do not do a sufficient job of directing the author to specific corrections that can be made, and they fall in the uncomfortable space of passive-aggressive, undermining the authority of editor and the sensibility of the author. Following this line of thought, it is essential that an editor have satisfactory reasoning for suggesting the corrections that they do. As shown in the above results, giving justification for a directive can avoid insult and create an important balance between clarity and politeness. Above all, the first step to knowing the right amount of directness is to know the author. Each author is an individual and all individuals have different needs and levels of sensitivity. Opening a respectful line of communication can lead to discussions about whether the author wishes to have firm and clear direction or sensitive suggestions. By knowing the author, the editor can taper his or her editorial comments to the needs of the author.

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Appendix A

Table A1: Summary of Strategies

Strategy	Example
1. Opinion	I would include a table in this section.
2. Derivable—active	You should probably include a table in this section.
3. Bald-on-record	Include a table in this section. That will help keep your readers interest.
4. Preparatory—active	You could include a table in this section. That's just a suggestion.
5. Interrogative	Could you include a table in this section?
6. Derivable—passive	This section should have a table.
7. Preparatory—passive	This section could have a table.

Table A2: Additional Research—Directive Strategies

Category of Strategy	Example
A. Direct	You should include a table in this section.
B. Conventionally Indirect	You could include a table in this section.
C. Nonconventionally Indirect	Graphic aids create interest.

Appendix B
Survey Questions and Results

Section I: Introduction

Pretend that you have hired a professional editor to review some material that you have authored prior to it being published. You have spent a lot of time writing this material, but you feel that it is ready for the editing stage. The editor returns the material to you and has included some editorial comments, which are generally designed to enhance writing to be more reader-friendly and professional. Consider how you would like to have this editor suggest corrections to your material.

Section II: Question 1

Below is a list of editorial comment examples. Although they are worded a little differently, each one is asking you to make the same correction. Please rank them based on politeness, 1 representing a polite example and 10 representing an impolite example. Do any of these feel offensive or insensitive?

(You can drag the examples up and down until they are in order of politeness.)

Graphic aids create interest.
You could include a table in this section.
You should include a table in this section.
This section could have a table.
This section should have a table.
Could you include a table in this section?
You could include a table in this section. That's just a suggestion.
Include a table in this section. That will help keep your readers interest.
You should probably include a table in this section.
I would include a table in this section.

Section III: Question 2

Below is the same list of editorial comment examples. This time, you will please rank them based on clarity, 1 representing a clear example and 10 representing an unclear example. Do you understand what the editor is asking you to do?

(You can drag the examples up and down until they are in order of clarity.)

Graphic aids create interest.
You could include a table in this section.
You should include a table in this section.
This section could have a table.
This section should have a table.
Could you include a table in this section?

You could include a table in this section. That's just a suggestion.
Include a table in this section. That will help keep your readers interest.
You should probably include a table in this section.
I would include a table in this section.

Language Sculpts Perception:

How Language Makes You Human

Julia Hope Evans

For years linguists have debated whether language influences perception and to what extent. The Sapir-Whorf linguistic relativist theory has been largely discredited in recent years. Although the theory is somewhat extreme, it is more valid than invalid and should not be completely discounted in modern research because it helps in understanding and resolving sociological differences. This article explores how language modifies human perception of sensory phenomena in support of Sapir and Whorf's controversial claim. Language does not determine thought, but it does create and magnify various human abilities and construct cognitive predispositions to sensory stimuli.

The question of whether language determines how humans think and to what extent has been around for centuries. A widely known theory related to this debate is the Sapir-Whorf theory, which, in its largest sense, states that "language determines thought" to the extent that if one's language doesn't have means to express an idea, then one cannot even "conceive" of the idea (Dmunger, 2008). Since then this theory has been contradicted, or at least modified by modern research claiming that people can think of new ideas without having words to describe them. One important part of the Sapir-Whorf theory, however, has been and will remain undoubtedly true—that language influences how people perceive the world around them. It may seem like everyone in the world perceives sensory phenomena uniformly; however, perception is modified—if not constructed—by the language someone speaks.

Although the human eye across cultures sees potentially millions of colors, over the years color has been categorized into "sets appropriate to each culture and language" (Roberson et al., 2004). For example, the English language has eleven basic color terms, but other languages such as Himba, spoken in Namibia, have only five primary color groups (Adelson, 2005). The Tarahumara language, spoken in Mexico among other languages, has only one word for both green and blue (Harms & Sanders, 2006). Other languages, like Russian, have specific words differentiating light and dark blue (Winawer et al., 2007), and in Northern Australia the Warlpiri people don't even have a word for the concept of color (Casaponsa & Athanasopoulos, 2018). These idiosyncrasies are all examples of humans attempting—or neglecting—to label the abstract concept of color and have enormous effects on perception. These examples also show that there is no link between color terms and the visual system, so perceiving color through labels is theoretical and constructed by language.

One major effect on perception shown through the aforementioned linguistic differences is how easily one can identify shades of color. Modern linguistic studies show that the more color terms a linguistic group has, the better they are at identifying and describing shades of color. A study done in 2006 shows that Russians, with their different words for light and dark blue, are faster at differentiating between shades of blue in different linguistic categories (Winawer et al.). This illustrates a common linguistic trend wherein the more terms a language has to describe something, the more efficiently its speakers perceive it.

This trend is accurate not only for color discrimination, but also for olfactory perception. Among English speakers, olfaction is arguably the least valuable sense and typically ranked lowest on what is called the "hierarchy of senses" (Westmaas, 2018; Majid & Kruspe, 2018). However, smell is not the least valuable nor least developed sense for everyone. According to a research study done in 2014, the Jahai people in the Mayan Peninsula find "it as easy to name odors as colors," (Majid & Burenhult). This remarkable ability to identify and describe odor stems from their unique language, which has twelve different terms chiefly for describing types of odors. Their ability to identify and describe specific smells contrasts with most Westerners, who tend to attribute odors to something they're already familiar with, like "banana" (Majid & Kruspe, 2018). Similarly, the Cha'palaa language spoken in Ecuador has fifteen different olfactory terms that are embedded into their language's sentence structure (Floyd et al., 2018). These words have helped Cha'palaa speakers acquire a fully developed sense of smell because they use those terms to describe and communicate smells daily. In fact, the most commonly used terms in their language translate to "fragrance" and "stench" (Floyd et al., 2018). These studies show that there is no universal hierarchy of senses and that differences in olfactory perception across cultures can be created by language. The more linguistic terms a language has to describe sensory stimuli, the more proficient speakers in that language group become at identifying and describing them.

Language not only influences perception of color and smell, but it also shapes how the brain reacts to sound over its lifetime. A study published by *Nature Communications* in 2015 shows that the first language people are exposed to determines how their brains will interpret unintelligible sounds for the rest of their lives (Pierce et al.). In the same study, researchers performed functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans on monolingual Chinese-born French-speaking children while they listened to unintelligible pseudo-French words to see which parts of the brain the language input activated. Their brains lit up in the same areas as the native Chinese speakers' because the Chinese-born French-speaking children had been trained to process Chinese sounds until the age of three. The effects of their first language on sound perception remained for the rest of their lives. Additionally, native Japanese speakers have a difficult time differentiating between the *r* and *l* sounds because they are represented by a single phoneme in Japanese (Mackey, 2014). The Japanese speakers' brains light up on fMRI scans in the same place for both sounds, a conditioned response due to the nature of the language of their early years. Both of these phenomena observed through fMRIs show that language molds people's literal perception of sound.

Another way that language affects sound perception is through the ability to describe and identify pitch. Research done by the University of California, San Diego shows that speakers of tonal languages such as Mandarin, Vietnamese, or Thai are more likely to have "perfect," or absolute, pitch than speakers of non-tonal languages (Deutsch, 2009). This is because speaking tonal languages has trained such speakers to differentiate pitch on a regular basis, which makes it easier for their brains to perceive and identify isolated pitches. This is yet another way language forms perception and has physical effects in the brain that are observable through fMRI scans (Taylor, 2018).

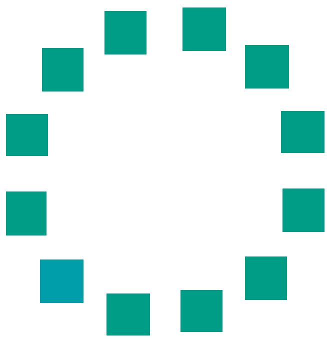
Another way that language influences perception across cultures is the way people think of and communicate direction. Most world languages use *left* and *right* to distinguish direction and location; however, two notable exceptions to this rule are the Kuuk Thaayorre and Guugu Ymithirr languages spoken in Australia (Cameron, 2015; Boroditsky, 2017). These languages use cardinal directions (e.g., north, west) to distinguish where things are; in Kuuk Thaayorre, the Pormpuraawan people even use them to say "hello" (Boroditsky, 2017). As a result, even the youngest members of their tribes are always aware of which way is north, a skill that is rather rare in the Western world. Thus, the way speakers of Kuuk Thaayorre and Guugu Ymithirr perceive direction and their ability to identify cardinal directions effortlessly has been constructed entirely by their languages.

In addition to using cardinal directions for location, the Pormpuraawan also use them to describe the abstract concept of time (Boroditsky & Gaby, 2010). According to Tanya Bredow, the concept of "time" may seem universal, but it is actually complicated by language. The Greeks view time as large or small, English speakers see time as left to right, Chinese speakers see it as over and under, and the Pormpuraawan see it as east to west (Bredow, 2018; Boroditsky & Gaby, 2010). These different means to describe time affect how people picture it, both in their minds and verbally. As part of Boroditsky and Gaby's research expedition, the Kuuk Thaayorre-speaking individuals ordered sets of cards chronologically (from east to west), which shows that the concept of time first came from their minds and then was represented geographically. These linguistic discrepancies demonstrate how language can initially be used to describe abstract concepts, but as time passes, language can control the way people perceives those concepts.

Not only is time viewed differently directionally, but it can also be treated differently grammatically. In English and many other Latin-based languages, there are past, present, and future tenses. However, some languages, like varieties of Chinese, are considered "timeless" because they do not have past or future verb tenses (Bredow, 2018). This has obvious immediate implications on thought. The "timelessness" of Chinese languages and other languages affects not only how people imagine time but also how they behave as a result of it. Dr. Keith Chen believes that "languages that make little or no distinction between the present and the future induce speakers to make more future-oriented choices," such as saving more money and making better health decisions (2013). Not only does language influence how people perceive time, but it also influences how they act upon those perceptions.

The word *perceive* is most often associated with visual stimuli than with anything else. Similarly, perception is constructed by language primarily through the way people visually see things. In all of the previous examples, sight can and often does play a major role. Obviously, people see color with their eyes, but smells are often associated with what the sensory stimuli look like, especially for English speakers who commonly associate odors with objects they're familiar with. If an English speaker attempted to imagine a "musty" smell, he or she might picture dust, dirty laundry, or perhaps a damp cellar. The majority of Westerners with perfect pitch probably associate pitch with images of the notes of an instrument like the piano or the violin. People have to be able to physically see location before they can describe where it is with language. Finally, perception of time brings the inevitable visual—although theoretical—representation of "where it is," and "where it's going" (e.g., left to right). Visual stimuli cannot be separated from other senses; in turn, they are crucial in how language shapes perception.

The influence of language on vision is evident in all the previously stated phenomena, but language also has large effects on vision alone. Although, like color, the human eye sees potentially all the same sights across cultures, the way people encode and interpret them is largely constructed by language. One study dealing specifically with language and visual perception was done by researchers from UC Berkeley and the University of Chicago in 2006. Researchers tested participants' abilities to pick out colors that ranged from slightly different than the rest to "very different," meaning colors labeled with a different name. The outlier was either in the left or right side of the participants' visual fields (see image).



(Harms & Sanders)

The researchers found that the participants could identify the outliers more quickly when the outlier had a different color label than the rest—but only when the outlier was in the right half of the visual field (Gilbert et al.). This is because the left side of the brain, which processes language, is responsible for the vision of the right side of the visual field. This evidence, supported by neuroscience, demonstrates that language helps people to encode visual stimuli and influences how quickly people can distinguish between the stimuli.

Many anthropologists believe that it is culture, not language, that has the greatest effect on perception. A distinct pattern seen among the discussed phenomena is that the more important something is to a culture, the more advanced means the people within that culture have to describe it. One famous example of this concerns the Inuit people who are known to have many different words to describe snow. Logically, they have a lot of ways to describe snow because they live in cooler climates that get a lot of snow—their culture has modified their languages that way. If, however, one was to claim that Inuit people are better at identifying snow than other people, it would not be because of Inuit culture. Although their culture is what "created" all of the different words for snow, it was the words for snow the people practiced using that made them better at identifying types of snow. So yes, culture does affect perception in a sense, but culture affects language first, which is what affects perception directly.

The age-old claim that language influences perception has many implications; some of them are visible outwardly and some are not. Many of them are behaviors and skills that result from unique language characteristics. One way language influences perception—and, in turn—behavior is the previously mentioned ability of "timeless" language speakers to make more "future-oriented" choices (Chen, 2013). Another way that language influences how people behave is the acquisition of skills that the speakers gain due to the language they speak. Speakers of Chinese languages and other tonal languages have a potentially better ability to develop perfect pitch than non-tonal language–speakers (Deutsch & Dooley, 2009). The aboriginal Guugu Yimithirr– and Kuuk Thaayorre–speaking people of Australia have an incredible ability to identify cardinal directions because of the practice their languages require (Boroditsky & Gaby, 2010). Speakers of Cha'palaa have an incredible ability to interpret olfactory stimuli because their circumstances and language require its use on a regular basis (Floyd et al., 2018). An example of an invisible instance where language changes perception is the way people from different linguistic groups process sound neurologically, which can be seen only through fMRI and other kinds of scans (Mackey, 2014; Pierce et al., 2016). The debate of whether language influences perception has been, is, and will continue to be investigated because of the implications discussed in this article and other implications that have not yet been discovered.

Language sculpts perception—including how people encode, identify, and communicate the abstract concepts of color, direction, and time as well as the sensory input of vision, smell, and sound. Although the Sapir-Whorf and other linguistic relativist theories may not be one hundred percent true in every circumstance, modern research has provided seemingly infinite evidence that language has massive effects on perception. No matter what language you speak, whether it be English, Mandarin, Tarahumara, Kuuk Thaayorre, Himba, Russian, Guugu Yimithirr, or anything else, it is molding you into a human being with distinct thoughts, behaviors, and perceptions of the world.

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Men? Women? Different? Well, What a Surprise:

A Literature Review of Gender and Sarcasm

Kaytee Johnson

Gender is known to be a factor that influences the way people use and interpret language. This review of literature explores gender's influence on sarcastic language by addressing three major questions: How does gender affect the way we use sarcasm? How does gender influence the way we receive and interpret sarcasm? How does gender influence the motives for using sarcasm? In the end, the author observes that the gender of both speaker and listener and the perceived relationship between conversing individuals impact the use of sarcasm.

Introduction

Sarcastic characters occupy our lives and our media. From Ron Swanson to the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air himself, witty characters always seem to swoop in to provide us the comedic relief and brutal honesty we find so entertaining and relatable. In one episode of *Friends*, Chandler Bing responds to a request for guidance with "I'm not great at the advice. Can I interest you in a sarcastic comment?"—and the studio audience goes wild. Because, as a matter of fact, they *were* interested in a sarcastic comment. It's just what they expected of him.

Our lives are similar: some "characters" are more sarcastic than others—sometimes this makes us smile, and other times it causes a bit of frustration. So many of the conversations we have—whether written or spoken, whether with friends, coworkers, or leaders—contain sarcasm. So what influences which characters in our lives use sarcasm, and when? What determines whether it is well received? There are many answers to these questions, but a major factor that has been investigated colloquially and academically is gender.

Many studies have analyzed the interaction between gender and sarcasm. The first debate to be had revolves around which gender uses sarcasm most, a debate this article will address first. Then, the synthesis of modern research—which generally falls into the following three categories—will be addressed: the influence of gender on sarcasm usage, the influence of gender on the motives behind sarcasm usage, and the influence of gender on the way people receive and interpret sarcasm. In each of these categories, as the research makes clear, the gender of both speaker and listener are relevant. This research not only measures existing patterns in the use and interpretation of sarcasm but also identifies assumed or institutionalized patterns that tell us something about the way we communicate with and understand each other. Ways for us to improve are also discussed. The synthesis of these existing discussions that this article provides seeks to raise awareness for current issues surrounding gender and sarcasm and encourage learning more about these issues so that we can improve communication professionally, casually, and intimately.

Definitions

Most of the terminology used by researchers in this field is generally understood, but it is important to understand what these terms mean in the context of this research and discussion. First, the discussions about humans and their interactions here will be largely based on gender. *Gender* (while frequently used synonymously with *sex*) herein represents only the self-identified categories of male and female and is not defined by biological sex. Additionally, the functions of language discussed here, like *sarcasm* and *irony*, have definitions specific to the field of linguistics. Although *sarcasm* is a common term, there are nuanced differences between sarcasm, verbal irony, and humor. In the research discussed here, sarcasm and verbal irony can fall under the linguistic category of humor when used in a joking manner. To understand those two terms, however, it is most important to understand how the general population defines them. When asked to define *sarcasm* in a study, most participants reported that it was a verbal phenomenon associated with a statement (usually negative) that is made even though the opposite is meant (Dress et al., 2008, p. 79). Generally, scholars agree with this definition. Some studies investigate sarcasm specifically, while others investigate *verbal irony*—defined as a statement purposefully opposite of fact. As made evident by the aforementioned survey, most people have incorporated verbal irony into their concept of sarcasm. For the purposes of this article, sarcasm and verbal irony will be investigated simultaneously and considered to be nearly synonymous. When humor is discussed, it is important to note that it may include other forms as well, not just sarcasm and irony.

Sarcasm Use

Beginning with differences in usage, one of the most debated topics among scholars is the foundational question of whether men are more sarcastic than women. Although differences in measurement and methodology have led to some discrepancies, historical and contemporary research on the subject leans toward the conclusion that men are more sarcastic than women. Seminal studies in this field that are referenced by nearly every other researcher include a 2001 study performed by Patricia Rockwell and Evelyn M Theriot of the University of Louisiana and another carried out in 2008 by Megan L. Dress, Roger J. Kreuz, Kristen E. Link, and Gina M. Caucci—all linguists from various universities that collaborated to study sarcasm. These two studies agree that men are more likely to describe themselves as sarcastic than women are. Many other studies support and rely on this claim, and the only study that disagrees with it is one performed by Lawrencia Nyamekye Adjei and Lawrence Bosiwah (2015) who used a similar self-reporting test in Ghana that found female and male college students reported similar levels of sarcasm use (p. 98).

Observational studies show even more variation in their findings as researchers try to measure actual sarcasm use among members of each gender rather than ask participants to self-report. While Dress et al.'s 2008 study did find that men more frequently *reported* sarcastic behaviors, the observational study didn't confirm that men were actually more sarcastic than women in free-response or forced-choice tasks (p. 82), whereas Rockwell and Theriot's (2001) study did. Raymond W. Gibbs, a very frequently referenced expert on irony, confirmed Rockwell and Theriot's conclusion that, in observed speech, sarcasm and verbal irony are indeed more frequent among men than women (Gibbs, 2000, p. 17). However, another very foundational study performed by Andrea Bowes and Albert Katz (2011) recorded, like Dress et al. (2008), a pattern of men reporting a greater general use of sarcasm, although they did not actually use more sarcasm in controlled production tasks. On this point, major voices in the field come to contradictory conclusions in their similar studies. Linguist Saad A. Alanazi (2019), rather than attempting to elicit sarcastic responses, used a corpus of the Saudi Arabic language to try to measure the sarcasm use of men and women. In agreement with Rockwell and Theriot (2001) and Gibbs (2000), Alanazi found that men used more sarcasm than women. Interestingly, he also saw that the uses of all politeness-related terms or phrases were higher for men than for women, indicating that perhaps this corpus just had more emotive and interactive language samples from men than women, which would explain the higher levels of both sarcastic and polite speech. David Bamman and Noah A. Smith (2015) of Carnegie Mellon University performed another study of language on digital platforms as they sought to create programming that could recognize sarcasm in Tweets. Their results indicated that "unverified, male, and from time zones in the United States" are all strong markers of sarcastic users (Bamman & Smith, 2015, p. 576). Nonetheless, it is apparent that deciding whether men are more sarcastic than women are is a complicated task.

Although the actual prevalence of sarcasm use among each gender is hard to measure, an attempt has also been made to measure general human assumptions about which gender is more sarcastic. In a slightly different type of study, Herbert L. Colston and Sabrina Y. Lee (2004) from the Department of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside reported that, upon hearing or reading a sarcastic statement, a participant was most likely to assume the speaker of that statement was male, regardless of the participant's gender (p. 301). More recent and similarly influential research done in 2004 by Albert N. Katz, Dawn G. Blasko, and Victoria A. Kazmerski (2004) builds on this idea. Their study shows that when reading a dialogue where a woman is overtly sarcastic, readers' reading times slow significantly, likely indicating that they are trying to process this diversion from paradigms of gender and sarcasm usage (p. 187). Studies of media often confirm ideas like this because they show that—whether or not men actually use more sarcasm—people *expect* them to. For example, a unique study performed by Noor Al-Yasin and Ghaleb Rabab'ah (2018) at Petra University and University of Jordan analyzed the show *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* for several factors, including sarcasm. They noted that male characters on the show were consistently "more sarcastic and jocular than females" (159). Not only does this imply that audiences are more receptive to sarcastic male characters than female characters, but it shows that our traditions and perceptions regarding sarcasm are likely perpetuated or even created by our media.

Sarcasm use by people of each gender is also affected by the gender of the person they are speaking to. Rockwell and Theriot, influential professors Martin D. Lampert and Susan M. Ervin-Tripp, and seminal researchers Anna Milanowicz and Piotr Kalowski all agree that women use irony and sarcasm much more when speaking to men than when speaking to other women (Rockwell & Theriot, 2001, p. 49; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006, p. 66; Milanowicz & Kalowski, 2016, p. 226). Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) and Rockwell and Theriot (2001) go even further in claiming that both men *and* women use more sarcasm when speaking to men than to women. This may show that the conclusions of researchers regarding the prevalent male use of sarcasm could actually be common knowledge—prompting both men and women to use sarcasm more often when speaking with a man because they (subconsciously) infer that men use it more and thus prefer it.

People use sarcasm differently depending on their gender, the things they assume society believes about them due to their gender, and the perceived gender of the person they are communicating with.

Motives Behind Sarcasm Use

Regarding motives of sarcastic speech, the research is rather diverse. Identified and studied reasons for using sarcasm include that it "provides deniability, a safe way of expressing anger, a way of exhibiting personal power and self-control, a source of humor, a means of game-playing, and a method of relationship building" (Rockwell & Theriot, 2001, p. 50). More specifically, Julia Jorgensen (1996), a researcher who published the foremost study on the purposes and functions of sarcastic irony, claims that the "most characteristic use of sarcastic irony in everyday discourse is to complain to or criticize close friends or other intimates, to whom one is speaking, particularly concerning trivial mistakes" (p. 627).

Because sarcasm is used for many different purposes, another opportunity for differences in its use between genders arises. While research regarding which purposes are most common among each gender is mostly speculative, one study did find that men listed *sarcastic* as a positive part of their social self-image, while the symmetrical positive label women provided for themselves was *funny* (Svebak, 1975). This may show that men view sarcasm as a way to build sociability while women may rely on gentler forms of humor. Many recognize, like San Francisco columnist Joan Ryan, that

> it is perfectly OK for one man to look at another man's new shirt and ask the guy if he fell through an awning. He can comment on the guy's haircut by wondering if he lost a bet. Or he can crack that the guy is so ugly his therapist probably makes him lie face down on the couch. Indeed, such comments solidify the friendship. (2001, para. 4).

Studies confirm this motive behind male sarcasm use by noting that men find literal criticism to be more mean and more negative than ironic criticism, while the same pattern does not exist among women (Milanowicz, 2013, p. 127). This shows that, while the specifics remain rather immeasurable, men and women view their own sarcastic behaviors differently and likely produce sarcastic speech for differing reasons.

In relation to the social uses of sarcasm described above, humor specifically is a highly discussed motive behind sarcasm use. There are some differences in humor-based patterns of sarcasm use between genders. Ann Colley and Zazie Todd (2002) performed a fairly often discussed study on the language used by each gender in email correspondence. They found that women used more humor in emails to men than to women, theoretically to "gain approval by providing the recipient with pleasure" (p. 389). This shows that, while the women's motive may have been to be funny, their motive was also to please. Therefore, they based their actions on their assumptions or knowledge that humor and sarcasm please men more than they do women. This observation is confirmed by Tel Aviv scholars Ari Drucker, Ofer Fein, Dafna Bergerbest, and Rachel Giora (2014), who found that "male participants displayed an overall higher enjoyment of sarcasm than female participants" (p. 564).

Interpretation of Sarcasm

It is a notable and researched idea that the way an individual receives and interprets sarcasm depends on both the gender of the sarcastic speaker as well as the gender of the listener. Charlotte Taylor of the University of Sussex performed an extensive study using corpora to analyze sarcasm or mock politeness (2017). Her conclusions, different from previous studies in that they did *not* find more occurrences among males than females, determined that it is actually the language used to describe sarcastic behaviors of men and women that vary in significant ways. In viewing the same behavior among male and female speakers, a listener is more likely to label the male speaker as *sarcastic* and the female speaker as *bitchy* (Taylor, 2017, p. 440).

In addition to outcomes related to the speaker's gender, the influence that the gender of the listener has on the recognition and interpretation of sarcasm has also been researched. In a study of children, Kathrin Rothermich, Oksana Caivano, Lisa J. Knoll, and Victoria Talwar (2020) observed that even at young ages, females are consistently better than males at identifying sarcasm as being insincere (p. 17). Melanie Glenwright and Penny M. Pexman (2010) published a similar study with Cambridge University Press that measured children's interactions with sarcasm and verbal irony. Glenwright and Pexman measured not a child's ability to mark sarcasm as insincere but just to identify sarcasm itself and found no difference between the abilities of boys and girls in any of the observed age groups (p. 445). These studies illustrate that differences among genders can be apparent, but those differences are not always apparent at young ages.

Additionally, different genders' attitudes toward sarcastic comments have been recorded. Whether females actually like sarcasm less or not, Bowes and Katz (2011) found that "both male and female participants perceive female interlocutors as feeling more victimized by all of the [sarcastic] comments" (p. 234); thus, many people *think* that women are more offended by sarcasm, even if that may not be the case when actual feelings are measured. Jorgensen (1996) suggests that our assumptions may be true, however, as she notes that, regarding sarcasm, men are “more likely to be amused and to attribute humor as a motive to the speaker” while women are “more likely to have negative feelings toward the speaker, as well as to believe that the speaker was motivated by external concerns or personal attributes” (pp. 621–622). Milanowicz (2013) builds on this by identifying that people who tend to perceive irony as threatening are recorded to have higher rates of anxiety and shyness as well. The fact that anxiety and shyness are more common among women than men may explain one reason why women are more likely to find sarcasm threatening than men are.

Another researched topic regarding the reception of sarcasm is the discussion about how we, regardless of our own gender, perceive sarcastic comments directed at men compared to those directed at women. A now historical study performed by Joanne R. Cantor in 1976 repeated a study she had previously performed with Dolf Zillmann in 1970 on how gender affects what we consider funny. Both of her studies confirmed that it is “funnier to see a woman, rather than a man, as the butt of a joke” (1976, p. 164). Likely in conjunction with the advancement of the feminist movement, recent studies have reflected a shift in this pattern. In their 2014 study, Drucker et al. found that “male participants enjoyed best the settings in which men were derided, regardless of the speaker,” and “female participants found most enjoyable the setting in which women derided men and [found] least enjoyable the setting in which women derided women” (p. 564). Despite these apparent preferences, Gibbs (2000) found that sarcastic comments are fairly evenly divided between being directed at men and women, with 45 percent of sarcastic comments being directed at men, 51 percent at women, 4 percent at groups containing both genders (p. 17).

Gaps

Major gaps in the existing research in this field include both the contributing factors to and consequences of the points discussed in this review. The existing literature really only seeks to recognize patterns, while there is no study of what those patterns mean for the behaviors and circumstances of the participants involved. For example, what would happen if a female manager were overly sarcastic? Would she have the respect of her subordinates? Would male employees like her more than female employees would or vice versa? We don’t know what would result from these measured patterns regarding gender and sarcasm. Additionally, more research is needed to identify what contributes to these gender-based patterns researchers have measured. Perhaps the relationship between members of each gender affects their sarcasm use and interpretation (e.g., friends may behave differently than strangers or romantic partners). Furthermore, it has not been identified whether the studied sarcasm differences between the two genders are mainly determined by biology or other societal influences. Hence, there is much more to study in this field.

Conclusion

Research indicates that the ways and reasons that I use and interpret sarcasm will differ significantly from my male counterparts' methods and motivations. Gender undoubtedly has an influence on an individual's behaviors surrounding sarcastic speech. This says something of our society as well as our abilities to communicate with each other. Some differences are clearly measured while others are only assumed, but even the assumed differences influence our world. For example, when I compiled the aforementioned list of famously sarcastic characters, they were all men (Ron Swanson, the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, and Chandler Bing). This demonstrates not only how I observe the sarcastic behaviors of men in my life, but also what I assume—and what media tells me—about them.

These conclusions regarding the uses, interpretations, and motivations of sarcastic speech between genders are not all inclusive, and there are gaps to be addressed; however, these conclusions can inform the interactions of people everywhere. More than just learning about behaviors that exist, this research can help communication between people. Further studies in this field could improve interpersonal communications, even through this humorous little function of our language. Understanding our own biases and habits regarding sarcasm could affect the relationships we have at work, among friends, and even in dating and romantic situations. By understanding that there are a lot of things that influence the reactions we have to what people say and by being aware of those factors, we can better react to and understand the people with whom we converse.

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