The Semantics of Social Influence: Threats vs. Persuasion

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This study investigates how language is used to make sense of influence attempts. More specifically, the perceived potency and evaluation of both influence agents and targets and the influence tactic used are examined for their effect on the actors' perceived power and influence success. The two influence tactics examined are threats and attempts to persuade. A pilot study (N = 145) and main experiment (N = 189) were conducted to create 84 simple sentences, the units of analysis for this investigation. Agents are perceived as more powerful than targets of influence. The tactic used to secure compliance (threaten versus attempt to persuade) does not affect the perceived power of either the agent or the target. A bad agent is seen as more powerful than a good agent, and a bad target is considered more powerful than a good target. Furthermore, good agents have more success in gaining compliance by using persuasion than by using threats, and they have more success when influencing a good target than a bad target. Implications of these findings are discussed.

R esearch on social influence generally has treated the topic from one of two perspectives, message production (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Dillard, 1990; Meyer, 1996; Wilson, 1997) or message effects (e.g., Boster, Mitchell, Lapinski, Cooper, Orrego et al., 1999; Levine & Boster, 2001; O'Keefe, 2002). This article takes a third approach, one that examines how sense is made of social influence messages. In other words, when people hear about attempts by one person to influence another, they use their understanding of the agent, target, and influence tactic to judge the agent and target, and to assess the likelihood that the attempt will be successful. This study examines this attribution process, focusing on two types of influence: threats and attempts to persuade.

The perceived power of a communicator affects the success that the communicator may have in task-related communications, such as in negotiation, as well as in socioemotional communication, such as in establishing a romantic relationship.[1] The influence tactics that a communicator employs (e.g., threats vs. persuasion attempts) affect the perceived power of both the agent and the target of the influence attempt. Previous research has shown that when an agent is perceived by the target to be powerful, the agent is more likely to succeed in gaining compliance (see, e.g., Michener, Lawler, & Bacharach's, 1973, role-playing experiment). Additional research has shown that agents who gain compliance with threats are perceived by participants to be more powerful than those who gain compliance with persuasion (Kaplowitz et al., 1998). What is not known is how the influence tactic and the

perceptions of the actors independent of the influence attempt combine to affect the subsequent perceptions of the actors and expectations for the influence attempt's success.

A great deal of research has found that actors and observers differ in the attributions that they make for the actors' behavior (see Ajzen, 1996; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). People often are observers. For example, the president may be seen threatening a leader of another nation; a senator may be observed trying to persuade a colleague; in a faculty meeting observations lead to conclusions regarding who has power and who does not. Observers' future behavior is conditioned upon these attributions. In short, observers are themselves influenced by these observations.[2]

This study builds on the work of Heise (1970) and Kaplowitz and his colleagues (1998). The studies by Kaplowitz et al. examine perceptions of agents and targets of influence and the tactic used, whereas the work by Heise and his colleagues (e.g., Averett & Heise, 1987; Britt & Heise, 1992; Heise, 1965, 1970; see also Gibbons, Bradac, & Busch, 1992; Marwell & Schmitt, 1967b; Murdock, Bradac, & Bowers, 1984; Roloff, Paulson, & Vollbrecht, 1998) are concerned with how language constructs meaning regarding power. In this study, the power of a person (agent or target) will be identified by the potency value of the person's status (here, simply a noun such as farmer or poet), either by itself (noncontext) or in a sentence involving an influence attempt (in-context). This conceptualization is consistent with the approach to the semantic analysis of power established by Gollob and Rossman (1973) and Heise (1970). The focus of the present study is not on the bases of power (French & Raven, 1959; Zelditch, 2000), but rather in how language is used to create meaning from information about agents, targets, and influence attempts.[3]

The first part of this article reviews previous research on the effect of influence tactics on perceptions of power. A review of work by Heise (1969a, 1970; Averett & Heise, 1987; Britt & Heise, 1992) and Gollob and Rossman (1973) on how power is judged from language is presented. Next, this article reports the methods used for studying the perception of power within simple sentences, followed by the results of this investigation. Finally, the implications of the research along with directions for future research on influence and perception of power are discussed.

Power and Compliance Gaining

The perception or attribution of power can have important consequences (Kaplowitz, 1978). For example, those who are perceived as more powerful are less often challenged (see, e.g., Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). Those with more power "are more able to behave in ways consistent with their identity" (Cast, 2003, p. 197). Indeed, the consequences of attributing power to another affects all interactions with that other, and is a critical determinant of task and relational interactions.

Kaplowitz (1978) proposed that if an agent induces compliance, the degree to which observers think that the target is powerful depends on the agent's influence tactic. Following Gamson's (1968) reasoning, Kaplowitz proposed that observers would judge the relationship between an agent and a target to be cordial and to reflect a common interest when persuasion is used, and would be antagonistic and to reflect strongly opposed interests when threats or punishments are used. Thus, when persuasion is used, the target is perceived to be responding to a reasonable request coming from a reasonable person. In contrast, when threats are used, target compliance is more likely to be perceived as caused by the agent's power. This logic

demonstrates that the influence tactic used affects the power attributed to the target and the agent as well as perceptions of their relationship.

Threats Versus Persuasion Attempts

There are a number of different tactics by which an agent may wish to influence or affect a target's behavior. The two tactics compared here are threats and persuasion attempts. Agents *threaten* a target when they indicate that they will make the target's situation worse if the target does not comply with their request. By contrast, agents *persuade* a target when they change the target's behavior, attitudes, or beliefs, but do not propose to help or hurt the target directly as a consequence of that change or lack thereof.

These two tactics are contrasted because they imply diametrically different relationships between actors. Persuasion works well if the agent is trusted by the target (see, e.g., Hovland & Weiss, 1951). In contrast, threats are likely to be both a consequence and a cause of a negative, uncooperative relationship between two actors (see Gamson, 1968; Gaski, 1986; Shapiro & Bies, 1994) as one actor attempts to establish dominance over another (Pruitt, 1981; Putnam & Poole, 1987). The effectiveness of threats is associated with the size of the threatened punishment, the perceived likelihood that the threat will be enforced, and the magnitude of the resources that enable the threat to be enforced (see Lewicki, Barry, Saunders, & Minton, 2003; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). Finally, as Kelman (1958, 1961) has noted, the process of change associated with the presence of sanctions, which he calls "compliance," differs from the process associated with the incorporation of new information with one's prior beliefs ("internalization") and that associated with fulfilling a relationship with another person ("identification"). Threats fall into the first category; "compliance" requires the agent's surveillance of the target, whereas identification and internalization do not.

Among a variety of power strategies, threats and persuasion attempts have been found to be opposites. In Falbo's (1977) study, for example, they were polar opposites on a two-dimensional power-strategy space defined by direct—indirect and rational—irrational dimensions (see also Cody, McLaughlin, & Jordan, 1980; Marwell & Schmitt, 1967b). The use of these two tactics makes it possible to determine how much the perceived goodness and power of agents and targets depend on the tactic employed.

To suggest that threats and persuasion attempts differ for actors does not indicate how observers make sense of them. To understand and model this process, Heise's (1969a, 1970) approach to the semantics of simple sentences is examined.

Agent, Act, and Target in a Simple Sentence

One approach to measuring the perception of power and the variables that contribute to it is Heise's (1969a, 1970) technique of having respondents give ratings to components of a simple sentence (subject, verb, and object), and then examining how these ratings may be algebraically combined. These component ratings, made outside of a sentence that involves an influence attempt, will be termed *non-context assessments*.

According to Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), the meaning of a word may be captured by the word's location on three dimensions: evaluation (i.e., good vs. bad), potency (i.e., strong vs. weak), and activity (i.e., active vs. passive). Heise (1965) determined the semantic-differential scores on each of the three dimensions for

1,000 of the most frequently used English words. Extending Osgood et al.'s work, Heise (1969a, 1970) proposed that if the non-context location of a sentence's subject, verb, and object on the three semantic-differential dimensions is known, the words' revised assessments on the semantic-differential dimensions due to their appearance in a particular sentence may be determined. In other words, the non-context assessments determine the in-context assessments. Although Heise (1969a) was successful in creating regression models that predicted the in-context subject, verb, and object evaluation and activity ratings, his models that predicted the in-context potency ratings were unsuccessful. He concluded that "potency dynamics may be exceptionally complicated" (p. 212). In a follow-up study Heise (1970) successfully created a predictive model for potency dynamics, but this study had methodological difficulties that will be addressed subsequently.

Heise's approach to studying the interpretation of words in a sentence was used by Gollob and Rossman (1973) to determine the perceived power of an agent. Gollob and Rossman predicted participants' perceptions of the power of an agent from the non-context evaluation and potency of the agent's behavior (i.e., the sentence's verb) and the non-context evaluation and potency of the target. They did not use the agent's non-context potency ratings in their statistical model. This study also had some methodological problems, discussed subsequently.

Extensive research indicates that the perception of the influence tactic an agent uses tells a great deal about the agent, the target, and their relationship (Gibbons et al., 1992; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1990; Schlenker & Schlenker, 1974). The influence tactic that an agent uses (e.g., threat vs. persuasion attempts) should have an impact on the perceived potency of the target of influence. In addition, the potency of the influence tactic can vary depending on who (agent) is using the tactic on whom (target). This study builds on previous research by examining the potency and evaluation of the agent, the act, and the target, and investigating how they affect perceived power of an agent and target. In addition, the study examines how the influence tactic and the characteristics of the agent and target affect the perceived probability of compliance to an agent.

The probability of compliance with an influence tactic is a primary interest in social influence situations, and communication scholars have examined how such compliance is brought about (e.g., see Dillard, 1990). This study's goal is to provide parsimonious models that can predict how language creates perceived power and perceived compliance-gaining success for observers of influence attempts.

Methodological Issues

A major contribution of Heise's (e.g., 1969a) research is the use of equations with the sentence as the unit of analysis. In Heise's research the variables, independent and dependent, are the semantic-differential ratings (evaluation, potency, and activity) of the subject, verb, and object in simple sentences. Heise's strategy is employed here. The main experiment analyzes how meaning is created in sentences, using data for the terms in each sentence as variables.

Heise (1969a, 1970) developed separate equations to predict the evaluation, potency, and activity of a sentence's subject from the corresponding non-context ratings of the sentence's subject, verb, and object. Only in later research (Averett & Heise, 1987; Britt & Heise, 1992; Gollob & Rossman, 1973) were cross-ratings used (e.g., using the evaluation of a subject to predict the potency of the subject).

To reduce or avoid multicollinearity among predictors and to estimate the

parameters for the hypothetical lexical universe, words must be sampled systemati-
cally. Specifically, presuming that there are three meaningful semantic-differential
dimensions, the sample of words should reflect each of the eight octants of meaning
(i.e., as in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design of high vs. low evaluation, high vs. low potency, and
high vs. low activity), and orthogonally combine such words into subject—verb—ob-
ject sentences. Failing to do so results in coefficients whose standard errors reflect the
accidental sampling (see Kahneman, 1963). This problem is found in Heise (1969a)
when he reports that:

the desired sampling design for potency sentences failed to materialize ... . Thus, the potency
data ... are not representative of the total possible range of sentences. (p. 210)

Heise (1970) encountered similar problems. Verbs that were low in potency tended
to be negatively evaluated. In addition, although "a word's connotation was the
prime consideration for using it ... when a choice was possible, words were selected
that also seemed neutral on the evaluation and activity dimensions" (p. 49).

The same issue appeared in Gollob and Rossman (1973). They reported that
"nearly all of the bad verbs and objects were rated on the weak end of the potency
scale, and all of the good verbs and objects were rated on the powerful end of the
scale" (p. 396). In addition to this problem, Gollob and Rossman used a dependent
variable that conflated power and influence, asking respondents to rate the agent's
"power and ability to influence others" (p. 395) by a single scale item. The ability to
influence others, however, may connote a persuasive strategy, whereas power is
more likely to connote influence activities that could involve threat. These two
problems make Gollob and Rossman's results problematic. This investigation
attempts to overcome these difficulties.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Meaning of threat and persuasion attempts. Threats and persuasion attempts differ in
several ways. For example, threatening is perceived as a more negative communi-
cation strategy than is a persuasion attempt. There appears, however, to be no study
that has assessed the range of meaning differences between threatening and
attempting to persuade. Therefore, the following research question is posed: How do
threats and attempts to persuade differ in meaning as assessed by the semantic-differ-
ential dimensions?

Potency of the agent and target. There are several ways that attributions may be made
about the power of the agent and target. First, agency suggests power (Britt & Heise,
1992; Heise, 1970; see also Smith-Lovin, 1987). Therefore, a person engaging in an
influence attempt should be perceived as more powerful than the target of such an
attempt.

Second, people may attribute more power to one who threatens. Threats are
counternormative (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967b), so an observer may assume that if
threats are employed, the agent must be sufficiently powerful to use such a
technique. Threats also convey "indifference to the target's face needs, which
suggests great power" (Kaplowitz et al., 1998, p. 108).[4] Finally, threats are more
powerful acts than persuasion attempts, and Smith-Lovin (1987) found that an
individual engaging in powerful acts is perceived to be more powerful because of
doing so.

Third, an agent should attempt to persuade powerful targets rather than threaten

them. An observer may assume that the agent chooses to persuade rather than threaten because of the possibility of the target's retaliation if the agent were to threaten. The ability to retaliate suggests that the target is powerful (Michener et al., 1973). On the other hand, an observer could also assume that persuasion is used on a target because the target is reasonable and responsive to argument. If some observers make the first attribution (i.e., persuasion is used because of the target's power), and some make the second (i.e., persuasion is used because the target is reasonable), on the average targets who are subject to persuasion will be viewed as more powerful than targets subject to threat.

In sum, the following hypotheses on the perceived power of the agent and the target are proposed:

Hypothesis 1. The agent of an influence attempt is perceived to be more powerful than the target.
Hypothesis 2. (a) The agent is perceived to be more powerful when using threats than when using persuasion, but (b) the target is perceived to be more powerful when the subject of a persuasion attempt than when threatened.

Evaluation of the agent and target. Gollob (1968) found that agents are perceived by participants to be more powerful when they do good things to a good target or do harm to a bad target. This consistency effect was supported by Gollob and Rossman's (1973) finding of a significant interaction effect of verb evaluation by object evaluation on perceived agent power.

The just-world hypothesis (Lerner, 1980) provides an explanation for these findings. Lerner and Miller (1978) proposed that "individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve" (p. 1030). In other words, good people are viewed as deserving of, and therefore likely to receive, just rewards (e.g., power), and bad people are viewed as undeserving of, and likely to be denied, these rewards. Because threats are negative as compared to persuasion attempts (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967b), an agent who uses a threat against a bad person is acting justly, and therefore should be viewed as powerful. Because persuasion attempts are positive as compared to threats (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967b), an agent who attempts to persuade a good person is also acting justly, and therefore should be viewed as powerful. The other two cases (using threats against a good person or persuasion against a bad person) are unjust, and therefore an agent who does either should be viewed as less good and therefore less powerful (see Thorndike's research on the halo effect, 1920; see also Gollob & Rossman, 1973).

Lord Acton's statement, in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (1887, quoted in Bartlett, 1992, p. 521) contrasts with the just-world hypothesis. It suggests that power and goodness are perceived to be negatively related. Research has supported the idea that, by some measures, power indeed does corrupt (see Kipnis, 1972; cf. Overbeck & Park, 2001), although there does not appear to be any research that has looked specifically at the evaluative consequences of power.

These ideas are tested with the following hypotheses on the effect of tactic, target evaluation, and agent evaluation on perceived power:

Hypothesis 3. An agent is perceived as more powerful when attempting to persuade a more positively evaluated target or using threats on a more negatively evaluated target than when threatening a positively evaluated target or attempting to persuade a negatively evaluated one.
Hypothesis 4. More positively evaluated agents are perceived to be more powerful than more negatively evaluated agents.

Hypothesis 5.   More positively evaluated targets are perceived as more powerful than more negatively evaluated targets.

Perceived probability of compliance. There is very little research on how observers perceive a target's probability of compliance with an agent's influence attempt, and much of the existing research is not helpful for the formulation of this study (see, e.g., Murdock et al., 1984; Riccillo & Trenholm, 1983). Because the choice of compliance-gaining tactic affects compliance (e.g., Kaplowitz et al., 1998, found that threats are perceived as less likely to gain compliance than persuasion; see also Boster et al., 1999; Levine & Boster, 2001), it should also affect an observer's perception that the target will comply. According to reactance theory, a message that threatens one's freedom results in less compliance than a nonthreatening message (Brehm, 1966). Furthermore, observers understand threat dynamics (Kane, Joseph, & Tedeschi, 1977), and report that threats are a negative compliance-gaining method (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967b). Thus, observers of threats should, like the target, anticipate that these threats reduce compliance. Therefore:

Hypothesis 6. Threats are perceived as less likely to gain compliance than persuasion attempts.

Kaplowitz et al. (1998) and Michener et al. (1973) found that the greater the perceived power of the agent, the more observers assume that the target will comply with the agent. This finding was retested.

Hypothesis 7.   Greater perceived power of the agent results in greater perceived probability of compliance.

Similarly, stronger targets should be less likely to be perceived as compliant.

Hypothesis 8.   Greater perceived power of the target results in lower perceived probability of compliance.

The evaluation of the agent and the target should also affect the perceived probability of complying. Targets may be motivated to respond positively to agents who are good, and are therefore assumed to have good intentions and perhaps inclined to do good things to or for others. Therefore, such agents should be perceived as more successful in gaining compliance.

Hypothesis 9.   A more positive evaluation of the agent results in greater perceived probability of compliance.

Similarly, targets who are good are expected to be more cooperative with others, attempting to work with rather than against another's request (Thomas, 1976). Therefore, good targets may be perceived as more likely to comply.

Hypothesis 10. A more positive evaluation of the target results in the target's greater perceived probability of compliance.

A weak version of Gollob's (1968) consistency effect (that agents are perceived as more powerful when they do good things to a good target or do harm to a bad target) is that good agent's should be viewed generally as more powerful when their target is good rather than bad. Combining this idea with Hypothesis 7 (the idea that more powerful agents should be perceived as more likely to succeed in gaining the compliance of another) should result in more positively evaluated agents being perceived as more successful at gaining compliance when the target is positively evaluated.

Hypothesis 11. More positively evaluated agents are perceived to be more likely to gain compliance

when attempting to influence a more positively evaluated target as compared to a more negatively evaluated target.

Influence tactics should also affect the perceived likelihood of compliance. Persuasion attempts to create or preserve a good relationship between agent and target, whereas threats damage such relationships (Cai, Wilson, & Drake, 2000). Highly evaluated agents should be associated with influence tactics that create or preserve good relationships rather than with those that damage their relationships. Therefore, good agents should be perceived as more likely to seek compliance by using a tactic that sustains the good will between the agent and target, and persuasion is such a tactic whereas threat is not. Furthermore, strategies that are likely to be selected are also likely to be viewed as successful (see Meyer, 1990, pp. 64–66; cf. O'Keefe, 1990). Hence, good agents should be perceived as more likely to gain compliance by using persuasion rather than threats.

Hypothesis 12. More positively evaluated agents are perceived as more likely to gain compliance when using persuasion than when using threats.

The rationales underlying Hypotheses 11 and 12 combine to predict greater expected compliance when a positively evaluated agent uses positive tactics with positively evaluated targets. In addition, these rationales also justify the parallel prediction that a negatively evaluated agent will be perceived to be more successful when using negative tactics with negatively evaluated targets. Therefore:

Hypothesis 13. Persuasion is perceived to be more likely to gain compliance between more positively evaluated agents and targets, whereas threats are perceived to be more likely to gain compliance between more negatively evaluated agents and targets. Persuasion attempts involving agents, targets, and tactics that differ in evaluation are perceived as less likely to gain compliance.

Method

Pilot Study

Overview. The purpose of the pilot study was (1) to determine which person nouns to use in the final investigation, and (2) to establish the non-context ratings of the terms (the person nouns and the verbs *tried to persuade* and *threatened*) to be used in the final investigation. The non-context assessments were used as independent variables in the main experiment; they were assessed independently of the in-context ratings, which were determined in the main experiment.

Participants. Participants in the pilot study were 145 students (48 males, 80 females, 17 gender unspecified). They were volunteers from a variety of undergraduate communication courses. Course instructors asked students to participate in exchange for a small amount of extra credit, the participants' instructors not being involved with the actual data collection. An alternative class assignment was offered as an option for earning extra credit for those who did not want to participate in the research project.

Selection of stimuli. Person nouns were selected initially based on Heise's (1965) semantic-differential dictionary. Heise's list included 45 person nouns. The research goal was to have the influence agents and targets cover the universe of person types. Therefore, person nouns were selected that represented the eight combinations of high and low evaluation (*E*), activity (*A*), and potency (*P*). Some person nouns that were not on Heise's list were added because it did not provide

person nouns for all eight cells. Colleagues were asked to nominate person nouns for the empty cells. Because the role of threat versus attempted persuasion was to be assessed, and because the perceived success of the influence attempt was to be measured rather than manipulated, the verbs *threatened* and *tried to persuade* were also included in the pilot study questionnaire.[5] The final list of terms to be rated (and their placement on *E*, *A*, and *P* from Heise's reported ratings or from the expectations based on colleagues' judgments) was the following (terms not from Heise's list are underlined): *farmer, mentor, sailor* (hi *E*, hi *A*, hi *P*); *fellow* (hi *E*, lo *A*, hi *P*); *child, mother, sympathizer* (hi *E*, hi *A*, lo *P*); *poet, wife* (hi *E*, lo *A*, lo *P*); *enemy, judge, racist* (lo *E*, hi *A*, hi *P*); *human* (lo *E*, hi *A*, lo *P*); *loser* (lo *E*, lo *A*, lo *P*). (No person nouns were available from Heise or determined from colleagues' nominations for the lo *E*, lo *A*, hi *P* cell.)

Measures. The pilot questionnaire asked participants to rate the 16 terms on six scales measuring the evaluation, activity, and potency of each term. Each semantic-differential dimension was assessed by two scales. The questionnaire began as follows:

Researchers in the Department of Communication are studying how people make sense of the words that they use. Below is a list of commonly used words. We would like you to rate each word on a series of scales that will help us to learn how you personally understand each word. There are no right or wrong answers; we are interested in your views. Thank you for your help.

The terms were rated on the following scales (and the relevant semantic-differential factor for each): strong—weak (potency), lively—still (activity), tough—tender (potency), active—passive (activity), pleasant—unpleasant (evaluation), and good—bad (evaluation). The terms were placed in neutral sentences such as "He is a sympathizer." All sentences were structured to refer to men (e.g., "it is his wife"). Participants rated the terms on 1–7 Likert-type scales.

To control for the effect of term order, scale order, and the polarity of the scales, two forms of the questionnaire were created. One version had the terms in the order listed previously, with the poles of the scales in the order listed previously, with the scales in the order listed previously, whereas the other had term order, scale order, and scale polarity reversed (e.g., the first question in version 1 asked for six ratings for child, the first one on the strong—weak scale, with strong = 1; the first question in version 2 asked for six ratings for wife, the first rating on the good—bad scale, with good = 7).

The questionnaire also asked participants to report their gender, course and section number, and date and time of questionnaire completion.

Procedures. Participants were approached in class and asked to participate in the research by completing a short questionnaire in exchange for extra credit. The questionnaire was completed in class. The participants were instructed to read and sign the consent form attached to the front of the questionnaire and detach it from the questionnaire, then to complete the questionnaire. The two versions of the questionnaire were distributed randomly. Participant completion of the questionnaires took approximately 10 minutes.

Analysis and results. The scale means for each term on each of the six scales were first subjected to an unrotated principal components analysis to examine the dimensional structure of the scales. All possible factors were extracted. Only two dimensions were found to have eigenvalues greater than 1.00, together accounting for about 91% of the variance in the terms. The first, largest dimension is evaluation,

accounting for 52% of the variance among the 16 non-context terms. The second dimension is a combination of potency and activity, which accounts for 39% of the variance. This finding of two significant dimensions is contrary to Osgood et al.'s (1957) general finding of three orthogonal dimensions for the semantic-differential scales.[6]

Because there were only two significant dimensions, the eight hypothesized semantic-differential octants for the location of each term were now reduced to four quadrants. The sampling strategy now entailed sampling terms (i.e., person nouns) from each quadrant. The results of the factor analysis for the pilot study affect only the sampling strategy for selecting the person nouns from the universe of potential person nouns. In the analyses for the main experiment, power is measured by a single-item potency scale (strong—weak), either from this pilot study (non-context measure) or from the subsequent data collection for the main experiment (in-context measure).

The terms *mother*, *mentor*, *farmer*, *sailor*, and *judge* were found to be in the hi evaluation—hi potency-activity quadrant of the two-dimensional space; the terms *sympathizer*, *poet*, *child*, *human*, and *wife* were found to be in the hi evaluation—lo potency-activity quadrant; the terms *loser* and *fellow* were found to be in the lo evaluation—lo potency-activity quadrant; and *racist* and *enemy* were found to be in the lo evaluation—hi potency-activity quadrant.

Next, the effect of gender and form on the perception of each term was examined. Terms were sought whose meaning was not found to be affected by participant gender, questionnaire version, or the interaction of these two variables. Therefore, analyses of variance were performed on the two factor scores (evaluation and potency-activity) generated from the principal-components analysis for each of the 16 terms (the 14 nouns plus *threatened* and *tried to persuade*). The ANOVA design was 2 (Gender: male vs. female) × 2 (Form: the first ordered form vs. the reverse-ordered form). Table 1 reports the results of these ANOVAs. Terms whose evaluation and potency scores were not significantly affected by the independent variables (i.e., in terms of statistical significance) were candidates for use in the main experiment.[7]

In addition to these analyses of variance, the reliability of the scales for each factor (evaluation and potency-activity) was assessed using Cronbach's α. For evaluation, two items (good—bad and pleasant—unpleasant) composed the index whose reliability was assessed; for potency-activity, four items composed the index (strong—weak, tough—tender, lively—still, active—passive). The results of the reliability analyses also appear in Table 1.

Based on the ANOVA results, the terms *child*, *human*, *judge*, *mother*, *sailor*, and *wife* were eliminated for use in the main experiment. The term *fellow* was eliminated because its evaluation score was approximately zero. This elimination meant that *loser* was the only term remaining in the lo evaluation—lo potency-activity quadrant, so it was retained even though there were statistically significant effects of form and Gender × Form in the relevant ANOVA.[8]

Main Experiment

Participants. Participants were 189 students (57 males, 126 females, 6 gender unspecified). As with the pilot study, they were volunteers from undergraduate communication courses and were offered the same incentives as participants in the pilot study.

TABLE 1
The Effect of Gender and Form on, and the Reliability (Cronbach's α) of, Evaluation and
Potency-Activity for 16 Terms (Pilot Study, N = 126)

Term	Potency-Activity		Evaluation	
	Significant Effects ($p < .05$)	Cronbach's α	Significant Effects ($p < .05$)	Cronbach's α
Child	None	.433	Form ($p < .001$)	.889
Enemy	None	.767	None	.892
Farmer	None	.835	None	.872
Fellow	None	.788	None	.885
Human	Form ($p < .002$)	.840	None	.871
Judge	None	.611	Gender ($p < .001$) Form ($p < .001$)	.755
Loser	None	.832	Form ($p < .001$) Gender × Form ($p < .028$)	.884
Mentor	None	.651	None	.775
Mother	Form ($p < .001$)	.736	None	.958
Tried to persuade	None	.795	None	.746
Poet	None	.808	None	.845
Racist	None	.754	None	.868
Sailor	None	.852	Gender ($p < .027$)	.810
Sympathizer	None	.761	None	.845
Threatened	None	.869	None	.735
Wife	Form ($p < .001$)	.747	None	.883

Measures and design. Based on the results from the pilot study, four questionnaire versions were constructed. The four versions differed only in the focal terms (i.e., the person nouns and verbs) that were used. The terms used were as follows: *enemy, farmer, loser, mentor, poet, racist, sympathizer, tried to persuade,* and *threatened.*

The unit of analysis for the final study is the sentence. Each sentence was constructed by using one of the (seven) person nouns as a sentence subject (the agent of influence), one of the (six) remaining person nouns as the object (the target of influence), and using one of the (two) verbs (*threatened* or *tried to persuade*). Thus, 84 sentences were generated.

Each of the four questionnaire versions contained 21 of the 84 sentences. Each participant received one of the four versions. The 84 sentences were placed in random order across the four versions of the questionnaire. Therefore, the order of sentences within each version was random, and each sentence appears in only one questionnaire. The versions of the questionnaire were distributed to participants in random order. All versions of the questionnaire began with the following instructions:

Researchers in the Department of Communication are studying how people make sense of the words that they use. Below is a list of sentences containing commonly used words. We would like you to rate each underlined **word** on each of the three scales found above the list of sentences. You should rate each word based on how you understand what it means **within that particular sentence**. Write your rating of each word in the box next to the corresponding letter found below each word. There are no right or wrong answers; we are interested in your views. Thank you for your help.

* * *

For each of the following sentences, try to imagine the interaction between **A** and **C**. Think of **A**

and **C** as real people and then assess each of the three words (**A**, **B**, and **C**) according to the scales to the right of the sentences.

Think of each sentence as involving a new pair of people.

Prior to rating each term, participants were asked to rate the probability of success (on a 0–100% scale) of the influence attempt. For example:

The **sympathizer (A)** **threatened (B)** **the farmer (C)**. What is the **probability** that **A** got what **A** wanted from **C**?

Next, participants were asked to rate the subject (agent), verb, and object (target) of each sentence on three single-item scales: potency (strong—weak), activity (active—passive), and evaluation (good—bad). The first-listed anchor in each scale (e.g., strong) was assigned a score of 7, and its corresponding opposite anchor (e.g., weak) was assigned a score of 1.

Procedures. In classes, participants were asked to participate in the research by completing the questionnaire in exchange for extra credit. As a group in their classrooms, participants were instructed to read and sign the consent form attached to the front of the questionnaire and detach it from the questionnaire, then to complete the questionnaire. Each respondent's data collection took approximately 30 minutes.

Analysis. For each sentence the means of the following variables were computed based on the responses to that sentence: evaluation of subject, object, and verb; potency of subject, object, and verb; activity of subject, object, and verb; and perceived probability of success of the influence attempt. Each of these means is based on between 43 and 50 respondents. The unit of analysis in the main experiment is the sentence. Because the sentences employ the means for each term over participants, the reliability of the variables is expected to be very high.

In the analyses that follow a non-context assessment refers to ratings made in the pilot study, in which each term was rated in a simple sentence not involving an influence attempt (e.g., "He is a farmer"). In the analyses in which the noncontext ratings are employed as independent variables, the relevant single-item scales from the pilot study are used because these measures correspond to what is used in the main experiment. Therefore, to assess evaluation, the good—bad scale is used, and to assess potency, the strong—weak scale is used. Continuous variables are not treated as categorical variables in the analyses of covariance and *t*-tests.[9] All reported *t*-tests are two tailed.

Results

Meaning of Threaten and Attempt to Persuade

To examine the meaning of *threatened* and *tried to persuade*, the data from the pilot study were employed initially (the non-context data; non-missing $N = 143$). The scores of (1) the good—bad scale and the pleasant—unpleasant scale were averaged to create an evaluative score as a dependent variable, (2) the strong—weak scale and the tough—tender scale were averaged to create a potency score as a dependent variable, and (3) the lively—still scale and the active—passive scale were averaged to create an activity score as a dependent variable. Paired-comparison *t*-tests were employed. Table 2 shows that trying to persuade was judged to be better (i.e., higher on the evaluative score), weaker (i.e., lower on the potency score), and less active (on

TABLE 2

Mean (Standard Deviation) Evaluation, Potency, and Activity Scores for Threatened and Tried to Persuade (Pilot Study, N = 143)

	Influence Tactic	
Dimension	Tried to Persuade	Threatened
Evaluation	4.15 (0.94)	1.97 (1.08)
Potency	4.76 (1.21)	6.02 (1.24)
Activity	5.34 (1.18)	5.76 (1.20)

Note. Range of dimension ratings: 1–7, where 7 = high value.

the activity score) than threatening. These three differences were all statistically significant and two were substantial: evaluation, $t(142) = 18.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .70$; potency, $t(142) = -9.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$; activity, $t(142) = -3.47$, $p \leq .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. (The results were essentially the same when the in-context ratings from the main experiment were used to investigate this research question.)

Potency of the Agent and Target

Non-context potency scores ranged from 2.90 (for *loser*) to 5.84 (for *mentor*; $M = 4.44$). Hypothesis 1 states that an agent is perceived to be more powerful than a target. Hypothesis 2 states that an agent is perceived to be more powerful when using threats than using when using persuasion, but a target is perceived to be more powerful when the subject of a persuasion attempt than when threatened. To test these hypotheses, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted, with potency of the agent versus potency of the target as a within-subject (i.e., sentence) variable, and verb (*threatened* vs. *tried to persuade*) as a between-subjects variable. A statistically significant effect, $F(1, 82) = 5.42$, $p \leq .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .062$, was found for actor (agent vs. target), with agents being more potent ($M = 4.56$) than targets ($M = 4.23$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicts an interaction between actor and influence tactic. This interaction was not significant, so Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Evaluation of the Agent and Target

Non-context evaluation scores ranged from 1.24 (for *racist*) to 6.35 (for *mentor*; $M = 3.92$). Hypothesis 3 predicts that an agent is perceived as more powerful when attempting to persuade a more positively evaluated target or using threats on a more negatively evaluated target than when threatening a positively evaluated target or attempting to persuade a negatively evaluated one. Hypothesis 4 predicts that more positively evaluated agents are perceived to be more powerful than more negatively evaluated agents. To test Hypotheses 3 and 4, an analysis of covariance was conducted with the agent's in-context potency score as the dependent variable, and with the following independent variables: the non-context evaluation score of the agent, the non-context evaluation score of the target, the interaction of verb (*threatened* vs. *tried to persuade*) and non-context agent evaluation score, and the interaction of verb and the non-context target evaluation.

The verb by target interaction was not a statistically significant predictor of agent's in-context potency. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

The non-context evaluation score of the agent was a statistically significant

TABLE 3

MEAN (STANDARD DEVIATION) PERCEIVED PROBABILITY OF COMPLIANCE, BY INFLUENCE TACTIC, AGENT POTENCY, AND TARGET POTENCY (MAIN EXPERIMENT; N = 189; NUMBER OF SENTENCES = 84)

		Influence Tactic			
		Tried to Persuade		Threatened	
Potency of Agent		Low	High	Low	High
Potency of Target	Low	50.53 (11.22)	53.84 (11.53)	42.89 (6.91)	56.86 (6.98)
	High	35.26 (13.62)	41.64 (11.04)	28.96 (5.80)	46.84 (8.96)

Note. Range of perceived probability of compliance: 0–100%.

predictor of the in-context potency score of the agent, $F(1, 79) = 8.96$, $p \leq .004$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$, but the effect was opposite to Hypothesis 4's prediction. More negatively evaluated agents were perceived to be more powerful ($M = 4.86$) than more positively evaluated agents ($M = 4.33$, evaluation of agents is here subjected to a median split for comparison, not for the ANCOVA).

Hypothesis 5 predicts that more positively evaluated targets are perceived as more powerful than more negatively evaluated targets. To test this hypothesis an analysis of covariance was conducted with the in-context potency score of the target as the dependent variable, and with the following independent variables: non-context evaluation score of the target, verb (*threatened* vs. *tried to persuade*), and the interaction of verb and non-context evaluation of the target.

A statistically significant effect of non-context target evaluation on target potency was found, $F(1, 80) = 20.23$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$. The finding was opposite to the prediction of Hypothesis 5. More negatively evaluated targets were perceived to be more powerful ($M = 4.62$) than more positively evaluated targets ($M = 3.93$, evaluation of targets subjected to a median split).

Perceived Probability of Compliance

To test Hypotheses 6–10 an analysis of covariance was conducted. The dependent variable in this ANCOVA was the observers' perceived probability of compliance with the target. The independent variables were the non-context potency score of the agent, non-context potency score of the target, verb (*threatened* vs. *tried to persuade*), non-context evaluation score of the agent, non-context evaluation score of the target, and each of the interactions (three two-way and one three-way) between and among the last three variables.

Hypothesis 6, which predicted that threats would be considered less likely to gain compliance than persuasion attempts, was not statistically supported.

The means for Hypotheses 7 and 8 are found in Table 3. Hypothesis 7 predicts that greater power of the agent results in greater perceived probability of compliance. Consistent with Hypothesis 7, a statistically significant difference was found between low and high potency agents in their perceived probability of inducing compliance, $F(1, 74) = 66.44$, $p \leq .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .47$; M(lower potency agents) = 36.98, and M(higher potency agents) = 49.80, median split. Consistent with Hypothesis 8, high potency targets were perceived as less likely to comply as compared with low potency targets, $F(1, 74) = 66.27$, $p \leq .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .47$; M(low potency targets) = 52.47, and M(high potency targets) = 38.17, median split.

The results testing Hypotheses 9–13 are found in Table 4. Consistent with

TABLE 4

Mean (Standard Deviation) Perceived Probability of Compliance by Influence Tactic, Agent Evaluation, and Target Evaluation (Main Experiment; N = 189; Number of Sentences = 84)

		Influence Tactic			
		Tried to Persuade		Threatened	
Evaluation of Agent		Low	High	Low	High
Evaluation of Target	Low	42.04 (18.52)	41.85 (13.26)	50.61 (17.77)	39.98 (11.23)
	High	37.31 (8.84)	55.82 (9.87)	46.36 (13.81)	42.46 (10.51)

Note. Range of perceived probability of compliance: 0–100%.

Hypothesis 9, the more positively evaluated the agent, the greater the perceived probability of compliance, $F(1, 74) = 16.00$, $p \leq .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$; M(more negatively evaluated agents) = 43.33, M(more positively evaluated agents) = 45.03, median split. Consistent with Hypothesis 10, more positively evaluated targets were perceived to be more likely to comply, $F(1, 74) = 3.68$, $p \leq .06$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$; M(more negatively evaluated targets) = 42.72, M(more positively evaluated targets) = 45.49, median split.

Hypothesis 11 predicts that more positively evaluated agents are perceived as more likely to gain compliance when attempting to influence a more positively evaluated target as compared to a more negatively evaluated target. The comparison of the perceived probability of compliance for more positively evaluated agents interacting with more negatively versus more positively evaluated targets was statistically significant, $t(46) = 2.36$, $p \leq .022$, $\eta^2 = .11$; M(more positively evaluated targets) = 49.14, M(more negatively evaluated targets) = 40.92, median split. Thus, Hypothesis 11 was supported.

Hypothesis 12 predicts that more positively evaluated agents are perceived as more likely to gain compliance when using persuasion than using threats. The comparison of the perceived probability of compliance for the more positively evaluated agents using threat versus persuasion attempts was statistically significant, $t(46) = 2.17$, $p \leq .035$, $\eta^2 = .09$; M(persuasion) = 48.84, M(threat) = 41.22. Hypothesis 12 was supported.

Finally, Hypothesis 13 predicts that persuasion is perceived as more likely to gain compliance between more positively evaluated agents and targets, whereas threats are perceived as more likely to gain compliance between more negatively evaluated agents and targets; persuasion attempts involving agents, targets, and tactics that differ in evaluation are perceived as less likely to gain compliance. As seen in Table 4, the two cells with the highest means correspond exactly to the two cells predicted to have the highest means; these two cells were significantly and substantially different from the remaining six cells, $t(82) = -3.79$, $p \leq .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$. Therefore, Hypothesis 13 was supported.

The following is the least-squares equation predicting the perceived probability of compliance based on the analysis of covariance:

PerProbComp = 57.37 + 6.46(Agent Potency) − 6.45(Target Potency) − 8.68(If Persuade) − 4.11(Agent Evaluation) − 0.79 (Target Evaluation) − 1.99(Persuade × Target Evaluation) + .79(Persuade × Agent Evaluation) + .40(Agent Evaluation × Target Evaluation) + .94(Persuade × Agent Evaluation × Target Evaluation)   (1)

TABLE 5
SAMPLE SENTENCES AND THEIR DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Sentence	Agent Evaluation	Target Evaluation	Agent Potency	Target Potency	Perceived Probability of Compliance	Predicted Perceived Probability of Compliance[a]
48. The mentor tried to persuade the poet.	6.35	5.27	5.84	3.65	72.29	72.01
52. The loser tried to persuade the enemy.	2.24	1.64	2.90	5.47	18.83	25.06
15. The poet threatened the enemy.	5.27	1.64	3.65	5.47	25.27	26.12
40. The enemy threatened the loser.	1.64	2.24	5.47	2.90	67.14	66.95

Note. Evaluation and potency scores are derived from non-context ratings.
[a] Predicted perceived probability of compliance is based on Equation 1.

where PerProbComp is the predicted perceived probability of compliance, and where all the independent variables are non-context (i.e., from the pilot study). Coefficients statistically significant at $p \leq .05$ (two tailed) are indicated in italics. The first two effects after the intercept show that it was the difference in the potency of the agent and target that helped determine the perceived probability of compliance:

$$6.46(\text{Agent Potency}) - 6.45(\text{Target Potency}) \approx 6.46(\text{Agent Potency} - \text{Target Potency}). \qquad (2)$$

The adjusted R for Equation 1 is 85%. Thus, the model predicts the perceived probability of compliance quite well.

Table 5 contains examples of the sentences perceived to be most and least effective for both threats and persuasion attempts. Sentence 48 was predicted to generate the highest level of compliance. It depicts a good, powerful agent who attempted to persuade a good but not very powerful target. Sentence 40 was also perceived to be very effective in gaining compliance; it depicts a bad but powerful agent who threatened a bad but not very powerful target. Sentence 52 was expected to yield the least compliance; it depicts a bad, not very powerful agent who tried to persuade a bad but powerful target. Sentence 15 was also expected to result in a very low level of compliance; it depicts a good, not very powerful agent who threatened a bad but powerful target.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

Results of this study showed that agents of influence attempts are perceived as more powerful than targets of such attempts (Hypothesis 1). This finding suggests that, if negotiators wish to be perceived as powerful, they should attempt to influence the other, by, for example, making proactive offers. Because the perceived probability of success at gaining compliance is, in part, a function of the relative perceived power of the agent versus the target, this strategy is also likely to make the influencing individual perceived to be more likely to succeed at negotiation.

Surprisingly, no support was found for the notion that agents are perceived as more powerful when they threaten than when they attempt to persuade, nor did

variability in tactics alter perceptions of the targets' power. The combination of tactic and the target's goodness also had little effect on the perception of an agent's power. As may be expected from Lord Acton's maxim, a bad agent was seen as more powerful than a good agent and a bad target was considered more powerful than a good target. Perceptions of power were influenced more by evaluation of the agent or target than by influence tactic employed.

No support was found for the notion that threats are viewed as more effective than persuasion attempts. Agents perceived to be more powerful and more positively evaluated agents were perceived as more likely to induce compliance than lower potency or more negatively evaluated agents (Hypotheses 7 and 9). Thus, in order to promote the appearance that a person might succeed at social influence, the person could choose to use the indirect route of increasing one's perceived goodness or power.

Targets perceived to be more potent and more negatively evaluated were perceived to be less likely to comply than those targets perceived to have less potency or more positive evaluation (Hypotheses 8 and 10). Therefore, in order to increase one's image as being able to resist influence attempts, a person needs to be viewed as relatively strong or relatively bad. Furthermore, organizers of influence campaigns may be less inclined to communicate with audiences composed of the powerful or of the stigmatized because the campaign's effects may be discounted as not being able to make a difference; observers are likely to regard attempts to influence such audiences as futile.

More positively evaluated agents were more likely to be perceived as gaining compliance from more positively evaluated targets than from more negatively evaluated targets (Hypothesis 11). Applying this idea, an audience will expect that mentors, who are positively evaluated, will be effective in getting students' compliance if the students are also positively evaluated. If good agents share the audience's perception of their effectiveness, they may want to believe that their targets of influence are good so that they (the agents) can believe themselves to be effective.

More positively evaluated agents were more likely to be perceived as gaining compliance when using persuasion than when using threats (Hypothesis 12). Thus, more positively evaluated agents in the presence of an audience may wish to frame threats as merely persuasion attempts or avoid threats entirely because they wish to be perceived as effective influence agents. Persuasion was perceived as more likely to gain compliance than threats when the agent and target were both relatively positively evaluated. Threats, however, were perceived as more likely to gain compliance when the agent and target were both relatively negatively evaluated (Hypothesis 13). This finding is similar to that of Gollob and Rossman (1973), that participants "form a favorable impression of an actor who behaves 'justly,' that is, one who benefits a good person [via persuasion] or harms a bad person [via a threat]; and to form an unfavorable impression of an actor who behaves 'unjustly,' that is, one who benefits [via persuasion] a bad person or harms a good person [via a threat]" (p. 400). If parties know how an audience evaluates them, they can determine the influence strategy to employ in order to be viewed as effective.

The statistical model (Equation 1) showed that it is the difference in the perceived power of the agent and target that was a significant predictor of perceived success of the influence attempt. Note that in Equation 1 the coefficient for the agent's power predicting perceived probability of compliance was not constrained by the corre-

sponding estimate for the target, yet the coefficients were essentially equal and of opposite sign (see Equation 2).

Implications

These findings have broad implications for interpersonal communication as well as for negotiation, diplomacy, and organizational communication. As Miller (1987) stated, persuasion is "both *social* and *symbolic*" (p. 451). These findings broaden understanding of how the meaning of and relationship between a target and an agent combine with choice of tactic to affect an observer's perceptions of an agent's power. This understanding advances knowledge about how people interpret communication strategies to influence others, an issue not fully addressed in the compliance-gaining literature (see Berger, 1985; Perloff, 1993).

The results of this study have important implications specifically for research on compliance gaining. Boster (1990) noted that more descriptive work is needed to better understand the "kinds of people [who] use compliance-gaining messages, in what kinds of situations, and with what outcomes" (p. 13). The findings presented here describe how words create the meaning of social influence messages, and how different influence situations are judged through various combinations of good or bad and strong or weak agents, good or bad and strong or weak targets, and persuasion attempts or threats.

Of course, this study investigated the creation of meaning in a social vacuum. This approach is parsimonious in that context was not investigated. Nevertheless, the social context is not irrelevant to the creation of meaning; rather, a constructed or even a contrived sentence system is used here as a starting point. This approach is similar to what scientists in other domains do: Simplify context to clarify process and structure. If this approach is successful, variation in context can surely be investigated.

This social vacuum also applies to the person nouns and the relationships between agents and targets in the sentences employed. The extensive research by Heise (Averett & Heise, 1987; Britt & Heise, 1992; Heise, 1965, 1969a, 1970) and Gollob (1968; Gollob & Rossman, 1973) is consistent with and thus validates the procedures used here. As these studies and the presented results demonstrate, participants are able to make sense of the sentences even though they are extremely limited in context and relational information.

One limitation of this study is that mediating attributional variables (e.g., reasonableness of agent, perceived ability and motivation of agent to retaliate) were not measured. Future research should explicate the attributional process used by observers by measuring these variables.

The evaluative and power relationship between agent and target were found to be determining factors in the perception of power and influence success. Zelditch (2000) has suggested that an agent's power exercised over a target implies more of a relationship than an attribute. Thus, perceptions of power and expectations about influence success are embedded in perceptions of relationships (Dillard, Palmer, & Kinney, 1995). Persuasion presumes that an agent offers a target a choice to comply or not to comply. These choices, in turn, help preserve social relationships. On the other hand, threats are perceived to harm relationships.

A universal semantics of social influence assumes that the members of all language communities make meaning about influence attempts in the same way. Yet cultures differ along several dimensions, such as power distance, individualism–collec-

tivism, and masculinity–femininity (Hofstede, 1980). Perhaps the use of threats is more normative in high power-distance cultures. This study should be replicated in other cultures to determine if the model found here is the same even in the presence of language and other cultural differences that may influence perceptions and meaning of power and compliance.

Finally, in this investigation only two tactics of social influence were considered, threats and persuasion attempts. The compliance-gaining literature has suggested several tactics and categories of tactics (e.g., Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Marwell & Schmitt, 1967a, 1967b; Wheeless, Barraclough, & Stewart, 1983). Punishment, rewards, moral appeals, altruism, and a variety of other tactics also can be incorporated into the model of social influence generated by this investigation. Each tactic may affect perceptions of power and outcomes of influence by interacting with the judgment of the agent and target. Understanding how social influence tactics differ in meaning and incorporating this meaning into the model are fruitful areas for future study.

What is unusual about this study is that a small and fixed set of variables within simple sentences were examined. These variables were the act and the evaluation and potency of the actors. With this limited set of variables a great deal about how sense is made of influence attempts could be explained. Of course, more research is needed to extend the research beyond the limitations of this study.

Footnotes

[1]Kaplowitz, Fink, and Lin (1998) use Nagel's (1975) definitions of power: "An agent *exercises power* over an outcome to the extent that the agent's preferences helped cause that outcome (Nagel, 1975). The agent has *potential power* over that outcome to the extent that he/she has the *ability* to exercise power over it" (p. 104). "Nagel (1975) defines power as causation through preferences, rather than through overt actions, to take into account the notion that powerful actors often need not act because others fear to challenge the known preferences of the powerful" (p. 117). This framework is employed here.

[2]The observer's perspective provides insight into the attribution of responsibility related to an influence attempt (Heider, 1958). When the agent causes a target to do x, is the target or agent responsible? Attributions about both a target and an agent are based on the target's response to a threat from the agent. These attributions in turn depend on whether a person thinks that any normal person would give in to the threat or if any normal person would be able to resist it. If every normal person would give in, then responsibility is placed on the one threatening, but if every normal person would be able to resist the threat, then responsibility is placed on the target. In other words, "as is usual with attribution, in the attribution of an induced action, the whole causal structure is taken into account and not merely the proximal conditions" (Heider, 1958, p. 247).

[3]In other words, the focus is on how people make sense of influence attempts through language. Study participants, like people in general, assess influence attempts by imagining scenarios for the situations provided. An imagined scenario that is idiosyncratic to a given participant (e.g., "I saw the threatening agent carrying a gun") will not be the determinant of study outcomes. Rather, the results will reflect the social consensus derived from the simple sentences employed. This method uses the sentence as the unit of analysis, so participant differences in imagined scenarios are, in effect, averaged out (see, e.g., Woelfel & Fink, 1980, p. 124ff).

[4]Although Kaplowitz et al. (1998) showed that if a compliance attempt was successful, the use of threats increased the perception of the agent's power, threats were also shown to reduce the expectation of compliance.

[5]The verbs *threatened* and *tried to persuade* are assumed to mean that an influence attempt was made, and that the outcome of the attempt was not necessarily successful. To determine if this understanding of these verbs is a reasonable one for undergraduates at the university from which participants were drawn, this point was investigated. Data were gathered from a convenience sample of 30 undergraduates willing to complete a short questionnaire (only two people contacted refused to complete the questionnaire). The questionnaire asked whether the terms *threatened, persuaded, tried to persuade,* and *tried to threaten* represented an influence attempt, and whether the term indicated that the attempt was successful. In addition, respondents were asked their gender, age, and native language. The questionnaire took less than 5 minutes to complete. Although all four terms were interpreted to be influence attempts, *threatened* differed significantly ($p < .001$, McNemar Test, binomial distribution used) from *persuaded* in being viewed as successful, but did not significantly differ from *tried to*

persuade in this regard (10% thought the term *threatened* meant that the attempt was successful, 93% thought the term *persuaded* meant that the attempt was successful, and 10% thought the term *tried to persuade* meant that the influence attempt was successful). Thus, the choice of terms used (*threatened* and *tried to persuade*) results in a comparison of influence attempts that do not differ in their implied success.

[6]Although factor analysis of semantic-differential data has generally found three substantial dimensions, there are many exceptions to this pattern. Indeed, Osgood et al. (1957) reported studies that found four, five, and eight such factors. Heise (1969b) mentioned research in which the potency and activity dimensions were represented by a single dynamism dimension, which is what was found here.

[7]In other words, nouns were sought that were not interpreted differently by males and females, or by the form order that happened to be used. Nouns that were affected by these variables have a meaning that is unstable, and this instability detracts from the ability to create parsimonious models of perceived social influence. On the other hand, this strategy limits this study's generalizability to nouns that are not differentially affected by gender and form.

[8]One might question why *loser* was included in the study given that the effect of form was statistically significant ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$), and the interaction of Gender $\times$ Form was also statistically significant ($p < .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Results for the evaluation of *loser* were as follows: males, form 1: $M = -0.17$, $SD = 2.47$, $n = 29$; males, form 2: $M = 0.25$, $SD = 1.37$, $n = 18$; females, form 1: $M = -1.24$, $SD = 1.38$, $n = 34$; females, form 2: $M = 0.78$, $SD = 2.01$, $n = 45$. Colleagues were asked to nominate person nouns that fit within cells that, based on Heise's list, were otherwise empty. The failure to find nouns for a given cell may reflect the fact that such nouns are rare. Of the 45 person nouns found in Heise (1965), no person noun was located in the lo E, lo A, lo P cell or the lo E, lo A, hi P cell. Colleagues were unable to suggest nouns other than *loser* and *fellow* that would be located in the lo evaluation, lo potency-activity quadrant. *Fellow* was eliminated because of its evaluative neutrality. Given the statistical results regarding *loser*, the methodological question becomes whether inclusion of *loser* detracts from the validity of this study's results. If anything, this unstable noun should make significant results more difficult to obtain. In any case, it is hard to argue that it invalidates the study or biases the results in any particular direction.

[9]Note that the hypothesis-testing analyses used a simple dummy variable to represent all the relevant tactic information. The use of this dichotomy represents the use of two verbs, *threatened* and *tried to persuade*. Heise (1970) and Gollob and Rossman (1973) used semantic-differential scores of the verbs they employed.

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