The Influence of Person-based vs. Identity-based language on Attitude and Prosocial
Behavior

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10   Abstract

11   This study examines the influence of language framing on prosocial behavior towards the

12   homeless. It contrasts the effects of identity-based language ("homeless people", "unhoused

13   people") with person-based language ("people who experience homelessness") on donation

14   intentions and attitudes. Conducted with 32 U.S. English speakers, the experiment employed

15   a between-subjects design, where participants were exposed to varied language framing in a

16   news article context. Measures included hypothetical donation amounts to homelessness

17   support, attitudes towards homeless individuals, and support for relevant government

18   policies. These insights are vital for policymakers and advocates in promoting inclusive

19   discourse and support for marginalized populations.

20   *Keywords:* prosocial behavior

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Introduction

25   Language framing can profoundly influence people's perceptions, attitudes, and

26 behaviors. The concept of framing, as posited by Tversky and Kahneman, illustrates how

27 different presentations of equivalent information can lead to diverse outcomes in

28 decision-making processes (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). This principle extends into the

29 realm of prosocial behavior, where language framing of social issues can significantly affect

30 individuals' decisions and willingness to engage in prosocial behavior towards others. Studies

31 in social psychology and behavioral science have consistently demonstrated that shifts in

32 language framing can alter prosocial intentions and actions (Ceylan & Hayran, 2021)

33 (Granello & Gibbs, 2016).

34   In the current study, we focused on the effect of identity-based framing and

35 person-based framing, analyze how such factor influence people's attitude to marginalized

36 group and their prosocial behavior. To be specific, identity-based language focused on one's

37 identity (eg. disabled people, homeless people, etc.), whereas person-based language put the

38 person at the center of language expression (eg. people who experience homelessness, people

39 who have mental illness). By examining the effects of using identity-based language against

40 person-based language, the study seeks to reveal how subtle shifts in language framing can

41 impact empathy, reduce stigma, and influence the willingness to support social causes.

42   The discourse around identity vs. person based language framing occurred among

43 various domains, including disability, mental health, and autism, where the preference and

44 criteria for using different language framing are still vastly debated. The American

45 Psychological Association (APA) and other authoritative bodies like the American Medical

46 Association (AMA) and the National Institute of Health (NIH) have traditionally advocated

47 for the use of person-based language to describe individuals with disabilities or conditions,

48 aiming to emphasize the personhood over the their physical and/or mental condition (CDC,

49 2022), (NIH, 2022), (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). However, within the disability and autism

50 communities, there's a growing debate between the preference for identity-based language by

51 people within the marginalized community and advocation for person-based language by

52 medical professionals (Buijsman, Begeer, & Scheeren, 2023), (Taboas, Doepke, &

53 Zimmerman, 2023).

54   Despite the ongoing discourse around use of person-based vs. identity-based language,

55 there has been a gap in empirical research, in which less research has focused on the effect of

56 language on people's perception and prosocial behavior outcomes. Furthermore, much of the

57 existing literature has focused on specific areas like disability or mental health, without

58 exploring the broader implications of these findings for other social issues, including

59 homelessness. Thus, the current research focused specifically within the context of

60 homelessness, analyzing the effect of identity-based and person-based language on people's

61 general attitude and prosocial donation behavior.

62   The current research offers a more comprehensive understanding in language-framing

63 and prosocial behavior within the context of homelessness. Through the experimental

64 manipulation of language framing, we are able to gain insight to the causal consequence of

65 language framing and subsequently measuring its impact on participants' donation

66 intentions. This research also provides a more integrated theoretical framework for

67 understanding the role of language in social issues. It can provide practical guidance for

68 policymakers in crafting more effective information to gain support for marginalized

69 populations, thereby supporting more inclusive public discourse.

⁷⁰ **Methods**

⁷¹ **Study Design**

⁷²   The current study used between-subjects design, where participants were randomly

⁷³ assigned to one of three language framing conditions: identity-based language ("homeless

⁷⁴ people"), identity-based language ("unhoused people"), and person-based language ("people

⁷⁵ who experience homelessness"). The primary dependent variable was the participants'

⁷⁶ willingness to engage in prosocial behavior (how much are they likely to donate their money

⁷⁷ out of 100 dollars to support the targeted population if they win lottery)

⁷⁸ **Participants**

⁷⁹   We recruited 33 native English speakers from the U.S. on Prolific (age range: 18 to 67,

⁸⁰ Mage = 42.97 years, SD = 13; 52% male, 48% female). Participants received 9 pounds/hour.

⁸¹ On average they needed 7 minutes to complete the study. Participants were randomly

⁸² assigned to one of three labelling groups: unhoused people ($n = 10$), homeless people ($n =$

⁸³ 12), people who experience homelessness ($n = 11$). We excluded one participant as they had

⁸⁴ a duplicated IP address and Prolific ID. The final sample consists of 32 participants.

⁸⁵ **Procedure**

⁸⁶   After providing informed consent, participants read a news article about an

⁸⁷ organization aiming to find affordable housing for people who experience homelessness.

⁸⁸ Within the news article, we varied the language-framing that is referring to people who

⁸⁹ experience homelessness/unhoused people/homeless people. Participants were informed that

⁹⁰ the study aims to understand how informative online news articles are.

⁹¹ **Measures**

⁹²   **Recognition Measure.**   The participants were first asked to answer three

⁹³ recognition check for the online news article. The three multiple choice question asked: "who

is Dan Valdez?", "what is the main goal of Brilliant Corners", and "what is a major issue in Los Angeles mentioned in the article?". The recognition measure were developed based on the content of the news article, and the answers were obvious if the participants carefully read the article.

Article Perception Measure.   The participants were asked to report their perception of the online news article in five dimensions (informative, understandable, interesting, read in detail, concentration), in which the five item survey was measured through 7-point Likert scale (0 = *Not at all*, 6 = *Very*).

Donation Intention.   Participants were presented with a hypothetical scenario where they could win 100 dollar in a study lottery and were asked how much they would like to donate to support the homeless population, with options ranging from 0 dollar to 100 dollars.

Attitude Measure.   Participants reported their thoughts and feelings about the homeless population through several statements related to mental and material resources, dishonesty, and other dimensions. Responses were captured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The attitude measure is adapted from measures of stigmatization scale (Newman, Tang, & Bakina, 2022).

Tax Support for Housing Program.   Participants were asked about their willingness to pay extra taxes for a "Housing-for-all" program from 0 (*Very unlikely*) to 6 (*Very likely*) and their general support for such a program, indicated by binary measure of yes or no.

Government Support and Policy Measures.   Questions in this section explored the perceived priority of government support for homeless individuals and willingness to sign a petition for initiatives to help the homeless population. Responses varied from 0 (*very low priority*) to 6 (*very high priority*) for budget priorities and 0 to 100 for petition signing willingness.

120 **Demographics.** Participants provided information on age, ethnicity, education level,
121 employment status, and annual household income.

Data analysis

123 We used R (Version 4.2.3; R Core Team, 2023) and the R-packages *dplyr* (Version
124 1.1.0; Wickham, François, Henry, Müller, & Vaughan, 2023), *forcats* (Version 1.0.0;
125 Wickham, 2023), *ggplot2* (Version 3.4.2; Wickham, 2016), *ggsci* (Version 3.0.0; Xiao, 2023),
126 *lubridate* (Version 1.9.2; Grolemund & Wickham, 2011), *papaja* (Version 0.1.2; Aust & Barth,
127 2023), *purrr* (Version 1.0.1; Wickham & Henry, 2023), *readr* (Version 2.1.4; Wickham,
128 Hester, & Bryan, 2023), *stringr* (Version 1.5.0; Wickham, 2022), *tibble* (Version 3.2.1; Müller
129 & Wickham, 2023), *tidyr* (Version 1.3.0; Wickham, Vaughan, & Girlich, 2023), *tidyverse*
130 (Version 2.0.0; Wickham et al., 2019), and *tinylabels* (Version 0.2.4; Barth, 2023) for all our
131 analyses.

132 **Results**

133 **Discussion**

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