
Reflections on Language and Social Psychology Research From ICLASP 11, Tucson, Arizona

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Abstract

This introductory essay outlines the rationale for this special issue. It reports on the background to the International Conferences on Language and Social Psychology (ICLASPs) and establishes the importance of a special issue representing the work from ICLASP 11, held in Tucson, Arizona, in the summer of 2008. After describing the keynote presentations at the conference, specific articles making up the special issue are introduced. Finally, the future of the conferences is addressed with the announcement of the location for ICLASP 12 (Brisbane, Australia).

Keywords

ICLASP, conferences, language and social psychology

We are delighted to introduce this special issue of work representing the wide-ranging scholarship presented at the 11th International Conference on Language and Social Psychology (ICLASP11) in Tucson, Arizona, during the summer of 2008. These articles only scratch the surface of the scholarship presented at the conference, but they do provide exciting and innovative examples of the research currently being conducted at the intersection of language and social psychology.

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Looking Back

In 1997, the University of Ottawa hosted the Sixth International Conference on Language and Social Psychology (ICLASP6). That year was significant not only because it marked a continued tradition of scholarly meetings (first started in 1979 at the University of Bristol) but also because it was the inaugural year for the International Association of Language and Social Psychology (IALSP). Since the first meeting of language and social psychology scholars in 1979, ICLASP has met every few years all over the globe: Bristol, England; Santa Barbara, California, USA; Brisbane, Australia; Ottawa, Canada; Cardiff, Wales, UK; Hong Kong, China; University Park, Pennsylvania, USA; Bonn, Germany; and, most recently, Tucson, Arizona, USA. The purpose has always been and continues to be to foster interdisciplinary and international scholarship, to create an atmosphere for the scholarly exchange of ideas, to facilitate scholarly networking with particular attention toward the development of collaborative research initiatives, to develop interdisciplinary and international task forces, to create outlets for the publication of articles and books, and, most important, to convene (now every other year) with a variety of scholars from all over the world reaching a diverse array of scholarly disciplines and professional fields.

ICLASP11: Tucson, Arizona

This special issue highlights some of the ongoing scholarship and the diverse areas of interest represented by members of the association. It is an extension of works that were presented at the most recent ICLASP held in Tucson in July 2008. By all accounts, ICLASP11 met the standards of excellence set by previous conferences. Participants enjoyed 3 full days of scholarship and professional networking that were enhanced by local receptions, shared meals, and group excursions. ICLASP11 can boast that along with its regular loyal participants, 30 new members joined the association, thus adding to its rich diversity. This diversity is seen not only in the topics undertaken by IALSP scholars but also in the disciplinary and professional backgrounds, methods, and national origins!

The Tucson conference featured a magnificent group of keynote speakers. Howard Giles presented a fascinating discussion of the role of communication in law enforcement and the role of intergroup theory in influencing research on this topic. Scott Reid, presenting the James J. Bradac Award Lecture, provided a theoretical integration of language, power, and social identity that drew on a massive array of theory from a range of social scientific disciplines. Bonny Norton presented a discussion of language learning processes that integrated identity theories and featured truly compelling personal narratives from research participants. Jon Nussbaum delivered the presidential address. Drawing on many years of research at the intersection of communication, personal relationships, and health, the talk focused on the interactions between communication, intimacy, and sexual behavior in older adulthood. Chris

Segrin presented data on dyadic processes occurring in adjustments to cancer among women with breast cancer and men with prostate cancer, and their partners. The data suggested some fascinating links between social interaction and psychological/physical adjustment. Finally, Tadasu Todd Imahori presented the 2008 Gudykunst Memorial Lecture, a metatheoretical discussion of epistemologies in the study of intercultural communication, emphasizing particularly the opportunities for more direct dialog and exchange between qualitative and quantitative scholars. It was a fitting end to a conference that always features and values direct exchange across epistemological and disciplinary boundaries.

In addition to lively plenary sessions and special lectures, the Health Communication Task Force, launched in 2006, presented two symposia at ICLASP11 that focused on *Concepts and Methodological Approaches to Studying Health Communication*. Cochairs Liz Jones (Griffith University) and Bernadette Watson (University of Queensland) facilitated sessions that ranged from research dedicated to enhancing effective and appropriate health care among specific groups (e.g., the elderly, people with mental illness, Native American populations) to research on professional communication in health care settings. The IALSP Health Communication Task Force also presented research results at the 2008 International Communication Association conference and have published various research papers resulting from the task force in *JLSP*.

Finally, of course, the conference featured a multitude of individual scholarly research presentations, and it is from these that the articles in this special issue are drawn. It is impossible for a small sampling of articles to represent the entire conference, but the articles here do represent the diversity of the conference and provide a taste of what participants in past and future ICLASPs are studying.

The special issue begins empirically with an article by Zhang and Lin, who analyze conflict scenarios in intergenerational encounters presented by American young adults. Their work reveals seven “conflict initiating” factors that appear in young adults’ reports of recent conflict with an older adult (family or nonfamily). Although primarily a quantitative analysis of conflict scenarios, Zhang and Lin provide rich narrative examples selected from participants’ written accounts, which offer contextual depth necessary to fully appreciate these findings. Results are interpreted through a communication accommodation lens with particular attention to the communication predicament of aging model. The study reveals that there are more similarities than differences among conflict initiating factors presented by a Chinese sample in earlier research and those reported here.

Next, Mange et al. report the results of two studies investigating the role of lexical choices in representing social identity and influencing attitudes. A content analysis reveals different lexical choices by political leaders talking about a controversial issue. An experiment demonstrates that texts varying along these same lexical lines have subtle, yet important, effects on individuals’ attitudes. Unique to this study is consideration of the idea that attitudinal effects are dependent on both preexisting attitudes and perceptions of the local opinion climate.

Both the Llamas et al. and the Purnell articles provide fascinating contributions to a dominant theory in the area of language and social psychology—communication accommodation theory. Each article uses very detailed examinations of spoken language data to investigate how shifts in pronunciation are influenced by phenomena that have previously received insufficient attention. Llamas et al. focus on identities in a border region (England/Scotland in this instance). Noting the multifarious possible identifications in the region (identifying with either country, both, a superordinate entity, or indeed the border region), they demonstrate a variety of patterns indicating not only the influence of those identities but also of speech shifts in response to different interviewer speech styles. Purnell also examines the influence of interaction partner on accommodative phenomena, but he takes a slightly different approach. Examining African American speakers in Milwaukee, he examines the influence of both the immediate interaction context (whether you are talking to a White speaker right now) and the lifespan experience (whether you have been exposed to many White speakers during your life). Hence, both these articles consider accommodation in innovative and creative ways.

Campbell provides a unique perspective on an important and underexamined social issue—sexual abuse, particularly of children. Using a fascinating (if disturbing) data set of offenders' narratives, she examines their reports of strategies they use to gain the cooperation of their victims and to conceal their offenses. The strategies uncovered should be valuable in developing future theoretical accounts of this behavior and for applied attempts to intervene and prevent such occurrences.

The other research reports are concerned primarily with stereotyped evaluations of speech. Kang and Rubin investigate the reverse linguistic stereotyping phenomenon (stereotyped evaluations of a person's speech based on social group features) that often occurs as native speakers judge nonnative speakers' language abilities. Specifically, this report outlines procedures for measuring a listener's proclivity to reverse linguistic stereotype as well as investigates the degree to which multicultural exposure influences likelihood to stereotype. This study holds particular importance, because, as the authors argue, reverse linguistic stereotyping can trigger language-based discrimination across various professional and personal sectors (e.g., teachers, job interviewers, police, and immigration officials), wherein discriminatory language practices can yield devastating results. Odató and Keller-Cohen also investigate the role of group-based stereotypes on language evaluation. Specifically, they sought to uncover whether and how stereotypes of age and gender interact with speech situation (comparing canonical narratives with noncanonical narratives) and evaluator age (older and younger adults) to influence ratings of off-topic speech. Odató and Keller-Cohen incorporate a unique method asking participants not only to assess irrelevant speech but also to mark utterances participants thought were off-topic in the transcript using a highlighter. This feature of their design allowed the authors to make additional conclusions, noting, for example, that younger participants were more likely than older participants to mark portions of the narrative as off-topic. In

general, older adults were more “forgiving” of irrelevant speech appearing in larger narratives pointing toward a potential generational effect in the evaluation of speech relevance.

Looking Forward

A highlight of each conference is the announcement of the upcoming conference and the task force that will be undertaken in the 2-year interim by a diverse range of language and social psychology scholars. We are delighted to announce that ICLASP12 will be held on the Griffith University Southbank campus in Brisbane, Australia, from June 16 to 19, 2010. Following the ICLASP tradition of scholarship and professional networking, ICLASP12 will offer innovative scholarly exchange opportunities, a diverse selection of distinguished speakers, shared meals, receptions, and, *this year*, an inviting subtropical venue. The conference includes competitive panel and symposia presentations, plenary sessions, and special lectures such as the James Bradac Lecture and the Gudykunst Memorial Lecture.

In preparation for the 2010 conference, Professor Peter K. Austin (Endangered Languages Academic Programme, SOAS) will chair and Professor Itesh Sachdev (Language and Communication, SOAS) will cochair the Task Force on Endangered Languages. The task force represents a multidisciplinary and multimethodological approach to the study of language vitality from a sociolinguistic and social psychological framework. Specifically, it has been charged with (a) understanding how and why languages become endangered and (b) what strategies might be developed to support, revitalize, and provide policy frameworks for endangered languages.

Many of these works will appear in upcoming issues of the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, as undoubtedly will much of the other research to be exchanged in Brisbane. We invite you to participate in all these scholarly exchanges and certainly hope you will join us at ICLASP12. Continued updates and information on submission and registration can be found on the IALSP Web site (www.ialsp.org). On behalf of IALSP, we would like to express our appreciation of the support of IALSP11 by the Department of Communication and the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Arizona, as well as all the work by individuals that made the conference happen. See you in Brisbane!

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Bios

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