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**The Effects of High Status Speech on
Supervisor Status in Small Groups**

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Abstract

How much are the vocabularies we use shaped by the person(s) to whom we are speaking? Do people attempt to sound more intelligent in order to make others think more highly of them, i.e. to achieve a certain status? We know that the words we choose have an effect upon how we are perceived by others (Levin, Giles, and Garrett 1994). We also know that our particular audience affects the lexicon from which we draw our speech (Hayes 1988). Language, therefore, has a strong potential for manipulation. This thesis examines assistants' status perceptions of their supervisors in thirty-eight task-oriented small groups. I predict the status achievement of supervisors as perceived by group assistants through the use of lexical pitch and word origin. I also examine the effects of gender on both lexical pitch and status achievement of group supervisors. I found that high status speech is positively related to the status achievement of supervisors and that gender norms do play a role in how we speak to different people, namely that both men and women speak "smarter" to men, and that women do not speak as smart to men as they do to other women. My findings support much of the current research being performed in the areas of authority, legitimacy, gender, and conversation dynamics, though they should be read with caution because of the small sample used in the study.

Introduction

High Status Speech in Small Groups

Do people attempt to achieve higher status in small groups through manipulating the formality of their language? Levin, Giles, and Garrett (1994) argue that listeners believe speakers who use more formal sounding language to be more intelligent. Levin and Garrett (1990) define formal sounding language as “the kind of speech that you would use...in a situation where you want the listener to think you are intelligent and competent” (515). Can, and do, people actually increase or decrease their formality of speech according to their status characteristics within a group?

In this thesis I examine whether the use of formal sounding words in speech predicts supervisor status achievement in small groups, and the effects of gender on word choice and status achievement. We are socialized to believe that the supervisor role is a high status role within a group. According to expectation states theory, group members will form opinions about other group members, which then affect their behavior during interaction (Berger et al. 1974). People in leadership roles should then try to behave, theoretically, with more authority in order to convince others that they are in fact playing the role of the supervisor. Supervisors will want the other members to interact with them as if they possess the proper status for the position. I believe that supervisors will, in accordance with this theory, attempt to elevate themselves to their internal status by using what I call a high status vocabulary. They will, in other words, play up to their role.

For the purpose of this paper, a high status vocabulary is defined as the use

of a relatively higher proportion of Latin-origin words in a conversation than of German-origin words. This study examines the speech patterns of supervisors in thirty-eight controlled-topic small group settings. I argue that the use of more “intelligent” sounding language on the part of the supervisor will, in fact, have a positive effect on the “status achievement” perceptions made by the subordinates. Verbal language is a key component in communication and the transmission of ideas from one person to another. I argue that the origins of the words used by people in conversation play a critical role in the determination of status within a group, and that supervisors will use a high status vocabulary as one method of achieving status. After all, how others categorize us is based largely upon how we sound (Levin, Garrett, and Giles 1994), and how we sound is determined in part by the words that we choose to speak.

Classical Theory on Language and Interaction

This thesis is based upon ideas developed by George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman. Language is critical to the survival of humankind. Whether it is verbal language, body language, or any other form of human communication—language is important. Social scientists have recognized this and have begun to study just how it is that we communicate ourselves to others of our species. Mead’s theory of language and the gesture and Goffman’s theories of status perception and role expectation, in particular, are two theoretical foundations from which to build a discussion on the importance of the different uses and meanings of language in groups.

George Herbert Mead

A philosopher by all accounts, George Herbert Mead developed several theories in the areas of sociology, social psychology, and philosophy, though of most interest here are his theories concerning language development. Mead introduces the concept of the *gesture*: “A gesture is an act performed by an organism, but for the act to be a gesture, it must be sensed by a second organism and it must evoke a response by the second organism.... It is social in the sense that it is a sign to another living form” (Miller 1973: 70). Each gesture inevitably has a meaning, which is interpreted, correctly or incorrectly, by another living being. This gesture may hence be seen as a symbol, or what Mead terms a *significant* symbol (Miller 1973: 72).

If language is symbolic, and symbols are communicated from one being to another, then why do different words and gestures not mean the same things today as they used to? How is it that many have evolved to symbolize something completely different from their original meanings? Mead believes that “language and the meaning of words are not fixed, but open” (Miller 1973: 75). Language is used as a medium of communication when the initiator of the sign cannot duplicate a particular action. In the process of communication, symbols will invariably change and acquire new meanings, hence making available a wider variety of choices for communication, such as has occurred in today’s spoken Modern English language. We only need to look as far as greeting another person for a verbal example of this variety. How many different ways are there in the English language to signify a simple “Hello,” or “Good morning,” to someone?

The basis of language as a set of significant gestures by human beings is society. Language was created as an effective means of communicating stimuli and intended responses between organisms of the species. The singular ability of humans to comprehend and act upon intended responses makes human gestures significant rather than non-significant, indicating a more advanced species that has not only an internal concept of itself, but also the external concept of society, which is added to the ability to share specific meanings for particular acts. This, in turn, makes the acts universal for the species. Society, therefore, was necessary for the creation of language, just as language was a necessary development for the continuation and elaboration of society.

Mead's *gestures* are acts performed by one organism that evoke a response by a second organism (Miller 1973: 70). As they evoke responses from other organisms, words are *gestures*, and the particular words that are used often determine the responses of neighboring organisms. For instance, the sentence, "Get out of my sight!" might be more likely to evoke indignation and anger than would the sentence, "Remove yourself from my presence!" which has essentially the same meaning. The second sentence is more formal than the first, and hence the second speaker may tend to be more respected. (Irvine 1978: 4)

Language must be studied as it occurs between human beings. This requirement makes small task groups an ideal setting through which to observe the interplay of language. Will people use certain types of language to achieve particular goals within the group? Most certainly. The sentence, "Hand me that paper," for instance, is very clear and will be understood by all group members. It

will, more than likely, succeed in realizing the goal of physically handling the desired object. What I am interested in, and what is the purpose of this study, however, is a qualitatively different kind of achievement. Is it possible to achieve status within the group by manipulating the actual words used in conversation? For example, would the sentence, "Hand me that document," have a different effect upon the other party involved in the conversation? The only difference between the first sentence and the second one is that in the second sentence the word "document" is substituted for the word "paper". Most people would agree that the word "document" is more formal sounding than the word "paper" because it denotes a more specific item. The words actually have the same meaning, but the word "document" is of Latin origin, whereas "paper" is of Germanic origin. In terms of Mead's philosophy, though each of these words is a *gesture* carrying basically the same meaning, they will evoke different feelings on the part of the listener. Can these different *gestures* be used to achieve status within a group?

Erving Goffman

Erving Goffman's The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) deals with how we perceive ourselves and how we appear to others in social situations. Of most interest here, though, are his theories concerning perceived and actual status. Goffman uses the terms *appearance* and *manner* as designations for the stimuli which function to tell us, respectively, of a performer's social status and as an indicator of the interaction role that the said performer will expect to play in a social situation, between which, he states, we may expect a "confirming consistency"

(Goffman 1959: 24). Goffman is speaking of *role expectation*: either we will attempt to live up to our appearance, or we will try to downplay it.

Goffman also discusses the idea of status maintenance, which is heavily involved in the concept of role expectation. He argues that status is a pattern, something that must be continually polished and upheld. Here we find the basis of role expectation: if we put forth a certain appearance, then our manner should suggest that the appearance is in fact reality. This social behavior of upholding a certain appearance becomes a pattern, which is either believed or disregarded by the targeted audience.

If heightened sentence structure and formality dictate a higher level of respect toward the speaker (Irvine 1978), then it stands to reason that people who wish to gain respect will tend to use a more formal pattern of speech. Formality of speech may, therefore, be viewed as a bridge between Goffman's concepts of *appearance* and *manner*. For instance, the head of a corporation belongs to his or her title; it designates them, and they, in turn, designate it. Goffman's status maintenance promotes the idea that status is a pattern, which must be constantly upheld (Goffman 1959: 24). If the head of the corporation, therefore, wishes to fulfill the requirements for his or her status maintenance, then he or she must conform to the social stereotype of *appearance* and *manner*. In other words, for the performance to be believed and accepted, an actor must conform to the public expectations of his or her particular role.

Small task-groups are the ideal setting in which to study these theories. Here, we are able to observe and record human linguistic behavior as people

interact to accomplish a common goal. Combining theories from both Mead and Goffman on language and status, if a *significant gesture*, which includes the realm of human language, evokes a shared response between two organisms, then the use of formal speech patterns by one in a power position makes the act believable not only to others, but also to the actors themselves. In this thesis study, I will attempt to test the theory of status achievement through word origin in small task group interactions.

Contemporary Theory on Language and Interaction

Authority, Status, and Conversation

Authority is a widely discussed subject in relation to status and conversation dynamics. Most of the social psychological studies that have been conducted in the area, however, have examined nonverbal characteristics of—and theoretical approaches to—interactions (Smith-Lovin, Skvoretz, and Hudson 1986; Ridgeway 1987; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1990; West 1992; Johnson 1993; Walker et al. 1996; Massey, Freeman, and Zelditch 1997; Troyer and Younts 1997; Johnson, Funk, and Clay-Warner 1998). This research also supports the idea that verbal interaction makes a difference in how we are perceived (Hayes 1988; Levin and Garrett 1990; Levin, Giles, and Garrett 1994). I would like to argue that verbal behavior of participants might also be used to predict status achievement in task groups.

Levin, Giles, and Garrett (1994) find that listeners believe speakers who use more formal sounding language to be more intelligent. We know from empirical

evidence that social hierarchies emerge in task groups, and that one explanation for this phenomenon is a performance-based theory of status achievement (Ridgeway 1987). Stemming from expectation states theory and status characteristics theory, a performance-based theory of status achievement in groups says that group members who demonstrate a relatively higher competence level for a certain task will achieve higher status within the group (Ridgeway 1987). In other words, if you act like a leader, then you are more likely to be thought of, as well as to be treated, as such. Findings from Ridgeway's 1987 study on status in task groups support the idea that this is a strong factor involved in the acquisition of status through nonverbal behavior. If this theory of status achievement may be seen through nonverbal characteristics of conversation, then might it also be applicable to verbal characteristics? If what we know is that acting like a leader makes us more likely to be thought of as a leader, then one logical conclusion is that people in authority positions will try to act up to their high status roles by using a higher status vocabulary.

An experiment conducted by Levin, Giles, and Garrett (1994) examined different levels of vocabulary formality on listeners. The study, using both American and English university students, measured different traits attributed to speakers with different accents and to speakers who used different formality levels of speech. They found that among the English students, regional accents made a great difference in how the speaker was perceived by listeners, and that among both American and English students, lexical formality often determined the qualities attributed to the speakers. Levin and Garrett's study (1990) on sentence structure

and formality—testing speech as well as document formality through the decomposition of sentences into their grammatical parts of speech, and then comparing the formality in terms of whether they were left brain or right brain structures—states that word origin has an effect on the perceived intelligence and difficulty of the sentences. They define lexical formality here as “the kind of speech that you would use...in a situation where you want the listener to think you are intelligent and competent” (1990: 515).

Levin and Garrett (1990) make a distinction between written verbal formality and spoken verbal formality. A study on patterns of word choice by Hayes (1988) also asserts this claim. Different vocabularies are used for spontaneous speaking and planned documentation (Hayes 1988). He argues that the more common, widely used words are more salient in the human mind when speaking, whereas a greater selection, representing an increased capacity for expression, is available when writing. Both Levin and Garrett (1990) and Hayes (1988) suggest that conscious differentiation and selective use of high status speech by a speaker may be able to improve a listener’s impressions of that speaker. Therefore, if people are able to utilize wider and more impressive sounding vocabularies, such as are usually only available to people when writing, while speaking, then they may be able consciously to manipulate their own speech in conversation in order to make the listener think more highly of them.

These three studies measure speech formality, though not in context of natural, spontaneous, human interaction. Levin, Giles, and Garrett (1994) use recorded and written sentences to test their hypotheses on real subjects. Levin and

Garrett (1990) used only written statements, and Hayes (1998) uses texts from “all major language resources” for his study (572). From this research, we know that the words we use have an effect upon how we are perceived by our audience, which turns verbal behavior into a variable that we have the possibility of, consciously or unconsciously, manipulating in conversation. We can either simplify our vocabulary, perhaps to show deference or to communicate with children (Hayes and Ahrens 1987), or we can use a high status vocabulary, which is known to be perceived as more intelligent and more authoritative by listeners (Levin, Giles, and Garrett 1994).

I believe that language formality may be used to predict the status achievement of supervisors in task groups. The use of high status speech is one method of “acting up” to a particular role or position, and I believe that supervisors will use this unconscious knowledge to achieve the status that their position within the group demands. I argue that higher status speech, when used by a group supervisor, will produce higher scores on a post-experimental survey in which the assistants are given a chance to rank their respective supervisors on different qualities of leadership.

Gender, Status, and Conversation

Gender is a subject that has been so widely discussed in relation to authority, status, and conversation dynamics that it is almost impossible to study status achievement in small groups without considering the impact of gender differences on any theoretical outcome. Many researchers have found that gender has

significant effects upon status and authority in groups (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1990; West 1992; Johnson 1993; Ridgeway, Johnson, and Diekema 1994; Ridgeway, Diekema, and Johnson 1995; Walker et al. 1996). Research has found that men, in general, contribute more to the conversation and receive more respect within the group than do women (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1990). Walker et al. (1996) found that men are five times more likely to exercise leadership than are women when a pre-task assignment of leaders is not made in mixed gender groups. When pre-task assignments in this study were made, however, gender differences seemed to disappear. Johnson (1993) offers evidence of the same phenomenon, reporting that both male and female subordinates perceive women to exhibit more leader-like behavior in legitimated group settings. As is portrayed by these two studies, much of the research on gender and status hierarchies support the same claims, namely that men tend to achieve, as well as to exhibit, higher status in groups where external status characteristics (Ridgeway, Johnson, and Diekema 1994) are not controlled. These studies examine only nonverbal characteristics of interaction. What will happen if we apply these theories to verbal interaction?

According to expectation states theory, gender operates as a status-differentiating dimension in most small groups (Wagner 1988; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1990). Robinson and Smith-Lovin (1990) and Smith-Lovin and Robinson (1992) argue that language use is related to structural inequality. Researchers have also argued that *how* something is phrased has significant implications on how other participants in a conversation respond to the speaker (Tannen 1990; West 1992). Gender plays an important role because men, due to historical socialization,

have a higher external status than women, and are therefore expected to contribute more to a conversation than are women (Ridgeway, Johnson, and Diekema 1994). Men, as high status group members, will also have higher performance expectations for themselves and from other group members, which will make them more likely to actively participate in decision-making processes within the group (Smith-Lovin, Skvoretz, and Hudson 1986). According to Wood and Rhodes (1992), these performance expectations, which are oftentimes based upon gender, are the reason for differential behavior of group members.

Each of the studies mentioned above relates gender in some way to authority and to the development of status hierarchies. I believe that by examining the speech registers of group members and coding them as either high or low status we may effectively predict status achievement within the group. The question that I put forth here is that of the role of gender in our lexical choices. How is the relationship between speech register and achieved status mediated or conditioned by gender?

In keeping with previous research, I believe that if gender plays a role in this particular arena, then it will be through status. I argue that a useful picture of the status achievement of supervisors will be visible through the post-experimental reactions of the group assistants. Using expectation states theory, which seems to be more strongly supported by statistical data than does a socialization theory (Johnson 1993), I predict that male supervisors will use a higher status speech than will female supervisors because (1) they have higher performance expectations for themselves, and (2) because the other group members also expect more out of them. Expectation states theory also leads me to predict that male supervisors'

speech will be highest when they are speaking to female assistants. This prediction stems from experimental research conducted by Johnson (1993), who found that male supervisors used much more directive behavior when they interacted with female assistants than with assistants of the same sex. Along the same lines, I also believe that female supervisors interacting with male assistants will use the lowest status speech, again due to an expectation states theory.

Theory and Hypotheses

Based on existing sociological theories and an analysis of relevant literature in the areas of status, authority, gender, and conversation dynamics, I have formed the following five hypotheses:

First, based on an expectation states theory of the formation of group hierarchies, and operationalizing high status speech (the ratio of Latinate to Germanic words spoken) as a relevant status cue within the task-group interaction, I predict:

Hypothesis 1: High status speech by supervisors will increase assistants' impressions of their supervisors' leadership qualities (supervisors' *status achievement*).

I make no predictions about the effects of low status speech on the dependent variable of *status achievement*. Further, based on expectation states theory I predict that higher performance expectations for male supervisors, which will lead them to use a higher status speech in attempting to conform to their roles, will produce higher performance ratings for male supervisors than for female

supervisors, especially in mixed gender groups.

Hypothesis 2: Male supervisors will use a higher status speech than will female supervisors due to higher performance expectations for male supervisors by themselves and others.

Hypothesis 3: Based on Hypothesis 2, male supervisors will have higher levels of status achievement than will female supervisors.

Finally, I argue that the degree of vocabulary change will be based on the degree of status distance. Specifically:

Hypothesis 4: The highest status speech will be found in groups composed of a male supervisor and two female assistants.

Hypothesis 5: The lowest status speech will be found in groups composed of a female supervisor and two male assistants.

Methods

Word Origins—Background

Why might we use Latin and German word origin as coding references for conversations in English? The English language is the “melting pot” language of the world, and the two main ingredients are the Latin and German based languages. It has taken 1500 years to compile and compound words into the language that we name Modern English. The history began in A.D. 449, which is the date given by the Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*: Angles, Saxon, and Jutes (Germanic invaders from mainland Europe), seized control of Britain from the ancient inhabitants of the island, the Celts (Pyles

and Algeo 1993, p96). The Germanic dialects that are commonly dubbed Old English—Kentish, West Saxon, Mercian, and Northumbrian—were introduced to the island by the invaders from the continent (Pyles and Algeo 1993, p101). The Norman invasion, marked by the 1066 Battle of Hastings, brought a new influence to the forming language and culture of Britain—French was introduced to the British mainland. Only those within an economically secure social status were able to afford education in the new languages; therefore, a limited number of people spoke and/or wrote in the linguistically challenging Latinate tongues (such as members of the aristocracy and the clergy), which made them a sign of importance and intelligence. Hence, the Romance, or Latin-based, languages became associated with nobility and/or knowledge (Pyles and Algeo 1993, p135). Over many years, the more common Germanic and the considerably more noble Latinate dialects melded, forming the massive conglomeration of words and meanings that compose the majority of spoken Modern English today.

English words of Germanic origin have a tendency toward simpler structure and less complexity in definition and meaning than do English words of Latin words, which tend to be both longer and more specific in terms of the degree to which something is described. Consider the differences between these pairs of words:

flood/inundation	house/domicile
front/façade	inside/interior (<i>Levin et al. 1994</i>)

The first word in each pair is of Germanic origin, while the second word, though having the same meaning as the first, is of Latin origin. Not only do the words of Latinate origin connote greater descriptive detail than do the Germanic

words, but they also suggest a higher level of formality and intelligence on the part of the speaker (Levin et al. 1994). While Latinate words tend to produce a higher opinion of the speaker's formal qualities, however, they may also produce a lower opinion of the same speaker's personal qualities. Levin et al. (1994) find that speakers who use more Latin-origin words are judged by listeners to be less sincere than speakers who use more words of Germanic origin, and that speakers using more German-origin words are more likeable. If these findings are true, then speakers must also choose whether they wish to sound more sophisticated and authoritative or more amiable and pleasant.

Procedures

The data for this study come from 38 3-person groups, each composed of one supervisor and two assistants. The participants were all Louisiana State University undergraduates enrolled in introductory Sociology courses. The students were assigned the task of creating a radio advertisement for LSU designed to target out-of-state students. They were also assigned specific roles that they should play in the group discussion, these being either a supervisor or an assistant.

Surface legitimacy was achieved in the initial design for this experimental setting through a pre-task assignment of roles. One person was told that he or she would be the group supervisor while the other two participants were told that they would be assistants. To aid in this role manipulation, supervisors wore badges, read from a "supervisor's" manual (which only differed from the assistants' manuals in that they said "Supervisor" on the cover instead of "Assistant"), and sat in a

designated chair. There was, however, no differentiation in the role instructions given to supervisors and assistants.

Each group was then given a packet containing directions for the task as well as a sample radio advertisement. Following the experiment, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire in which they were each able to rate the other members of their group on nine different aspects of participation: (1) creative, (2) motivated, (3) interested, (4) involved, (5) good leader, (6) intelligent, (7) talkative, (8) influential, (9) strong. Each item was measured on a seven-point semantic differential using the anchors listed in the Appendix. The average of the assistants' ratings of the supervisors on these nine variables comprise the dependent measure of *status achievement*. A copy of the original questionnaire appears in the Appendix. The 20-minute discussions were recorded through a video camera and later fully transcribed by group, turn number, and speaker.

In this study, I examine the level of speech formality used by supervisors and whether this affects the *status achievement* variable. The formality of speech variable, for the purpose of this paper, is labeled as *lexical pitch*, which is defined as the use of a relatively higher proportion of Latinate words than Germanic words in a conversation.

I have used Latinate and Germanic word origins as coding references for my study because the majority of the English language is composed of words owing their origins to these two language traditions. Certain fields and professions have a tendency to rely more heavily on one contributory language than another—the medical field, for instance, uses many Greek and Latin words, and the legal field is

also known for its many Latinate terms. Professional jargon is controlled for in this study by taking the sample from an undergraduate student population and by pre-selecting a topic of discussion that is unbiased toward or against any particular college undergraduate ethnicity or organization.

I also examine *status achievement* and *lexical pitch* in relation to gender. We know that men and women, when left to their own devices, talk about different things using different language (Tannen 1990; West 1992). Gendered conversation is therefore controlled out in this study. The problem is alleviated through the assignment of the same task to all of the groups. Because of the structural similarity of the subjects, the off-topic conversation that occurs in each of the groups is of the same genre—"Who is in what class?", "Do you know this person?", etc. None of the language used in the conversations is considered to be gendered speech, such as discussions geared toward one gender circle or another (i.e. shopping, automotive, etc.), and may therefore be coded as legitimate conversation.

The method for coding the data, which consists of the 38 aforementioned 20-minute long transcripts, involves a series of word categorizations. There are many "function words" in the English language, and these words, true to their title, perform the function in a dialogue or conversation of forming the basis of English grammar. Consider this sentence:

C. You're right, home of the fighting tigers, there we go, that's pretty good...wait, well that, I think we're out a word here, but you know, that's a good idea... (*grp 121*)

The words *of*, *the*, *there*, *that's*, *a*, and *but* are all function words. They serve the

purpose of grammatically moving the conversation along. They consist of such word categories as articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. These words should not be coded because they do not truly indicate a specific word choice; function words are simply words that must be used in a sentence for it to be both grammatically correct and understandable. Words that are unable to be coded, such as contractions, abbreviations or half-formed words, unintelligible mutterings, compound words, and proper names (people, sports, schools, animals), and pronouns must also be discarded. Take, as an example, these two sentences:

C. Now, umm, what's, I- I must have missed, what's supposed to be the point of the radio commercial?

A. It's to out attract, I mean to attract out-of-state students to LSU.

(grp 121)

In speaker C's statement the umm should be discarded because of its lack of definition as a specific word. We must also strike the two *what's* because of their status in this particular sentence as a contraction, the word *I* because it refers to a specific person, and the words *to*, *the*, and *of*, because of their statuses as function words. For the same reason, we must strike the word *to* from the second statement, as well as *It's* because it is a pronoun and a contraction, the pronoun *I*, *out-of-state* because it refers to the target audience, which is a phrase given to the group in the task directions, and *LSU* because it is a proper name. The words that are left to be coded in these two statements are as follows:

C. Now...must have missed,...supposed...be...point...radio commercial

A. out attract,...mean...attract...students

The remaining usable words are coded according their origin listings as may be found in the 3rd Edition of the American Heritage Dictionary. They are placed into one of three categories: Germanic, Latinate, or Other. Tenses of verbs and adverbs should be coded as the origin of the root form of the word. Words such as *radio*, which is a modern word and has no recorded origin, or colloquial or ethnic words, such as *lagniappe*, *bayou*, and *jazz* should be placed into the Other category. The Other category also receives words that fall into language categories other than Germanic or Latinate, such as the word *psychic*, which is Greek. Most of the usable words, however, may be traced to either a Germanic or a Latinate origin. The word *sound*, for instance, has four dictionary definitions:

1. a noise (Latin)
2. free from damage, or healthy (Germanic)
3. long, wide body of water (Germanic)
4. to measure the depth of water (Latin)

The 3rd Edition of the American Heritage Dictionary is helpful in recording word origins because it lists such information for each of the words it defines. The origins are found at the end of each complete definition. Take the word *total* as an example:

Total [ME, whole < OFr. < Med. Lat. *totalis* < Lat. *totus*.] (*found at the end of the definition*)

The English word *total* can be traced from Middle English, to Old French, to Medieval Latin, and finally to Latin. The word *total*, therefore, should be coded as

Latinate.

The pair of statements, when coded, would appear as such:

C. Now, umm, what's, I- I must have missed, what's supposed to
be the point of the radio commercial? **G=5, L=3, O=1**

A. It's to out attract, I mean to attract out-of-state students to LSU.

(grp 121) **G=2, L=3, O=0**

Each group was coded by speaker turn, and the results were then entered into Microsoft Excel. The data sets were transferred from Excel into SPSS, merged, and analyzed according to status, gender, and assistants' impressions of supervisor.

Results

In general supervisors spoke an average of 316 Latinate words per conversation, with a minimum number of 94 and a maximum number of 678. They also spoke an average of 89 Germanic words per conversation, with a minimum number of 24 and a maximum number of 237. While Germanic words are more common in everyday speech (Hayes 1988), these data show that people are using more Latinate words than Germanic words. These results are true for *content words*, which are the words coded in the study. *Function words*, such as articles, prepositions, etc, have not been coded, and the majority—if not all—of these words are of Germanic origin. Germanic words are more common in speech, though Latinate words tend to express greater detail. It is for this reason that we find a

greater number of total Latinate words as opposed to Germanic words in a content word analysis.

The means for total Latinate words and total Germanic words produce a mean ratio of 3 Latinate words per Germanic word spoken, with a minimum ratio of 2.5 and a maximum ratio of 6. I have called this ratio of Latinate words to Germanic words *lexical pitch* because it measures the “pitch,” or formality or sophistication level, of a person’s speech.

The results of the study support four of the five hypotheses, though the effect is less dramatic than originally anticipated. Each of the significance levels for which I have made a directed prediction is a one-tailed test. All others are two-tailed tests. It should be noted that the patterns found in these data may be due to a relatively small sample number ($n=38$), and that the figures could change were this study to be repeated with a larger sample.

The first hypothesis was that higher status speech, which, for the purposes of this study, consists of a higher proportion of Latin-origin words than German-origin words in conversation (or *lexical pitch*), when used by supervisors, would produce higher ratings from group assistants for supervisors. In other words, the prediction was that higher status speech from supervisors and a rise in the status achievement of supervisors would be positively and significantly correlated, turning lexical pitch into a relevant status characteristic within the task group.

Table 1 examines separately the two independent variables that compose the lexical pitch variable, revealing that the number of *total Latinate words* spoken by the supervisor does positively affect the dependent variable *status achievement*

($t = 1.963$; $p < .05$), which is the measure being used to gauge how highly assistants rate supervisors. However, it also appears that the positive effects of higher status speech are coupled with the negative effects of lower status speech. While *total Latinate words* is positively related to *status achievement*, the second predictor, *total Germanic words* used by supervisors, was negatively related to *status achievement* ($t = -2.381$, $p < .05$). These unexpected results reveal that not only does talking smarter seem to improve the supervisors' apparent status vis a vis the assistants, but "dumbing down" their language seems to have the opposite effect in that their status achievement appears to decline.

The next four hypotheses deal with the diffuse status characteristic of gender, which seems to be very important in how people choose to speak as well as how they are perceived when they speak. Hypothesis two predicts that male supervisors, due to higher performance expectations by themselves and others, will lead them to use a higher status lexicon in attempting to conform to their roles as supervisors. This higher status lexicon will then produce higher performance ratings from assistants for male supervisors in general, though the phenomenon should be extremely apparent in mixed gender groups.

Table 2 shows that male supervisors, with a mean *lexical pitch* of 3.993 ($n = 19$), use a higher ratio of Latinate to Germanic words, than do female supervisors, who have a mean *lexical pitch* of 3.419 ($n = 19$). The difference is small, but the higher mean here for male supervisors is consistent with my second hypothesis. The test for the relation of the lexical pitch variable to gender is further supported by a T-value of 2.063, $p < .05$. These results also support existing research on gender

authority in groups. According to Johnson (1993), gender-role socialization and status characteristics theory both predict that group members, whether male or female, will have higher performance expectations for men because of their social advantage. A higher *lexical pitch* for men, when examined in the context of these two theories, then supports the idea that formal language may be used as a status indicator in groups.

In support of hypothesis three, the data also show that male supervisors are given higher ratings by assistants than are female supervisors. Table 2 contains data on the impressions of supervisors by both male and female assistants. In general, female assistants rate supervisors slightly higher (mean = 5.948), regardless of supervisor gender, as compared to male assistants (mean = 5.739), though these results are not statistically significant ($t = 1.604$, $p < .20$; the lack of significance for this test is due to the fact that I did not make a directed prediction, and the test, therefore, is two-tailed). The male supervisors, however, are consistently rated higher than the female supervisors by both genders of the assistants (mean = 6.050). The relation of supervisor gender to the *status achievement* variable is further supported by a T-value of 1.580, $p < .10$, which is statistically significant, though only marginally. This seems to suggest that the female assistants, while still rating male supervisors higher than females, are being “nicer” in their ratings of both genders, which seems to support a theory of gender-socialization, or, alternatively, that supervisors are more competent when they have female rather than male assistants.

The fourth hypothesis, which predicts that the highest *lexical pitch* (the ratio of Latinate words to Germanic words) will be found in groups composed of a male supervisor and two female assistants, is not supported by the data. Table 3 displays the results for the different gender combinations within groups. The highest mean for the dependent variable *lexical pitch* is found in mixed gender groups composed of a male supervisor and two male assistants (mean = 4.992), not in groups composed of a male supervisor and two female assistants (mean = 3.806), which is inconsistent with my predictions. However, the highest mean for *status achievement* is found in groups composed of a male supervisor and two female assistants (mean = 6.057). While male supervisors are talking “smarter” to male assistants, they are consistently being rated higher by female assistants, though the difference here is very small.

The fifth hypothesis makes a prediction on the reverse side of hypothesis four, stating that the lowest lexical pitch will be found in groups composed of a female supervisor and two male assistants, which are the groups with the greatest number of status inconsistencies. This prediction is supported by the data. The results recorded in Table 3 show that groups composed of a female supervisor and two male assistants have the lowest mean for *lexical pitch* (mean = 3.233). This type of group also has the lowest mean for *status achievement* (mean = 5.600).

Unexpected results of the data include the means for both *total Latinate words* and *total Germanic words* used by female supervisors. Johnson (1993) and Robinson and Smith-Lovin (1990) review evidence from literature on status characteristics theory suggesting that because males are high status group

members, they will tend to contribute more to the conversation. The data in this study, as well as in their respective studies, suggest otherwise.

The data recorded in Table 2 shows that female supervisors are actually talking more than their male counterparts, which is evidenced by their higher means for both *total Latinate words* (mean = 325.105) and *total Germanic words* (mean = 98.000). Male supervisors, however, are talking “smarter.” Also visible on Table 2, male supervisors are using a slightly higher *lexical pitch* (mean = 3.993) than are female supervisors (mean = 3.419). These results support recent research in the area in finding that men do not speak more than women (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1990). They also support an expectation states theory approach to gender in finding that men are speaking “smarter” than women.

Discussion

This study began with the question of whether or not the formality level of a person’s speech may be used as a predictor of status achievement in small groups. Specifically, I have examined the status achievement of group supervisors, measured by the assistants’ impressions of their respective supervisors on nine different qualities of leadership. Do people achieve high status in groups through manipulating the formality of their language? The results of my study show that they do, though the effects of language formality on status in groups may be less dramatic than originally anticipated by previous research.

Levin, Giles, and Garrett (1994), Levin and Garrett (1990), and Hayes (1988) report that lexical formality has a significant effect on how a person is perceived by

his or her audience. These research projects, however, only test the theory of language formality in non-interactive situations. Levin, Giles, and Garrett (1994) and Levin and Garrett (1990) imply the probable results of small groups testing, but their own results are based on pre-programmed language and no personal interaction. My study examines their ideas in the context of 3-person task groups, and the data are taken from pre-recorded and transcribed conversations in which the language is not purposefully manipulated.

Drawing on language performance in task group interactions, I have designed and implemented another method of measuring status achievement in small groups. My results show that the use of a higher status language by group supervisors does indeed produce a rise in that member's status as perceived by other group members. This is not surprising when we consider the empirical evidence already stacked in its favor (Levin, Giles, and Garrett 1994; Levin and Garrett 1990).

A consistent but unanticipated result is the flip side of this particular finding: not only does supervisor status increase with high status speech, but it also decreases with low status speech, which is marked by a much larger percentage of German-origin words. The results from the test of my first hypothesis, which states that higher status speech by supervisors will produce higher status achievement for supervisors, show that trying to sound "smart" in conversation can help you to gain status, but that "dumbing down" your language could make you more likely to lose status among other group members. Improbably as it may seem that someone would "dumb down" their language based on gender, my results imply that this is

actually occurring among some of the female supervisors. This seems “out of character” for the supervisor role, especially because the roles were legitimized in the groups by a pre-task assignment, which caused gender differences to vanish in a study conducted by Walker et al. on gender, interaction, and leadership (1996). Legitimacy, however, does not seem to make a difference in this particular study. This information supports a performance-based theory of status achievement, as discussed by Ridgeway in her 1997 study on status in task groups. If a measured decrease in the intelligence level of a supervisor’s speech causes him or her to lose status within the group, then status must be, at least in part, performance-based.

My first hypothesis is derived from an expectation states theory approach to the formation of status hierarchies in task groups. If language formality causes a fluctuation in perceived status, thereby contributing to the formation of the in-group status hierarchy, then language may be viewed as a relevant status characteristic in task groups. Table 1 shows that language formality is definitely linked to the perception of status, albeit very slightly. This says that language is a status characteristic, though other characteristics contribute more heavily to status formation and perception.

The second hypothesis also supports an expectation states theory of status formation in task groups. The hypothesis posits that male supervisors will use a higher status speech than will female supervisors due to higher performance expectations for male supervisors by themselves and other group members. The results from the test for this hypothesis show it to be accurate. According to expectation states theory, group members expect more out of men than they do out

of women because gender is a diffuse status characteristic that becomes relevant in many mixed gender group situations. These higher performance expectations for men, which are known, perhaps unconsciously and perhaps not, to all group members, lead men to exhibit more leader-like behaviors within the group as well as to be given more opportunities to contribute to the conversation (Ridgeway and Berger 1986; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1990; Smith-Lovin, Skvoretz, and Hudson 1986; Smith-Lovin and McPherson 1993; Ridgeway, Johnson, and Diekema 1994; Ridgeway, Diekema, and Johnson 1995; Walker et al. 1996; Berger et al. 1998). This belief is based in expectation states theory, though a gender-socialization theory could also be argued for as an explanation for why there are higher performance expectations for men in the first place.

Johnson (1993) describes gender-socialization as “learned personality differences between men and women that affect their behavior consistently across situations [that] produce gender differences in behavior in organizations” (194, brackets added). This means that we are socialized from an early age to conform to gender stereotypes, and through this gender socialization we learn what behaviors are expected of us from others (Tannen 1990), i.e. men are socialized to be more leader-like than women. Three leader-like people in a group may lead to increased levels of competition, which may explain the high lexical pitch finding for all male groups. In this sense, then, the use of higher status speech by men in conversation may be viewed one effect of gender socialization. The results of this study show that status may be gained through the manipulation of lexical patterns,

and from expectation states theory and gender-socialization theory, men are expected to perform better than women.

The third, fourth, and fifth predictions for this study hypothesize about the results of status differences in mixed gender interactions. The third hypothesis states that, based on hypothesis two, male supervisors will have higher levels of status achievement than will female supervisors because they will use a higher lexical pitch. The assistant results on Table 2 reveal that female assistants (mean = 5.948) tend to rate supervisors, in general, higher than do male assistants (mean = 5.739). Table 2 also shows that male supervisors use a higher lexical pitch than do female supervisors, as well as that they are consistently rated higher by assistants, both male and female, than are the female supervisors (male supervisor status achievement mean = 6.050; female mean = 5.742). Male supervisors achieve higher levels of *status achievement*. I argue that this higher status achievement is a result of the higher performance expectations for males. According to expectation states theory, all group members will expect more from men than from women, especially if the man is in a high status position. The male state of the gender characteristic is externally legitimated in the supervisor role, whereas the female state is not. Male supervisors, then, are acting up to their performance expectations.

The fourth hypothesis is that the highest lexical pitch (the ratio of Latinate words to Germanic words) will be found in mixed gender groups composed of a male supervisor and two female assistants. This hypothesis is not supported by the

data in that the highest lexical pitch is found, instead, in groups composed of a male supervisor and two male assistants.

My original prediction for this result was directed toward groups with a male supervisor and two female assistants because of the general status consistencies involved in such groups. Men have higher external status than do women, and the gender composition of this type of group reflects these status consistencies. The highest lexical pitch should then have been found in the group with the most external consistency. So, while status achievement by supervisors still conforms to these results, it seems as though internal competition and legitimacy issues are more important in the lexical pitch findings in the context of group gender composition.

All male groups have the highest lexical pitch recorded on Table 3. This finding, though inconsistent with my prediction, also supports expectation states theory. Men have higher external status than do women. This status characteristic is made clear when we examine the lexical pitch results for groups with a male supervisor and two female assistants and for groups with a female supervisor and two female assistants (Table 3). The groups formed with external status inconsistencies have a lower mean lexical pitch than do the groups that are externally consistent on status. The all male groups place three externally high status actors in a group together, legitimizing only one of them into the status consistent role of supervisor. There are high performance expectations for each of the participants, and this may lead them increase the formality levels of performance characteristics such as language. The character situation places a

strain on role legitimacy as the three externally high status actors vie for internal legitimacy as high status actors, resulting in the highest lexical pitch result recorded on Table 3.

These explanations for the negative results of hypothesis three do not mean that the finding is anomalous. They are consistent with expectation states theory, though in a way unanticipated by my original hypothesis.

My fifth hypothesis states that the lowest lexical pitch will be found in groups composed of a female supervisor and two male assistants, each due to the higher performance expectations for males. The results displayed in Table 3 disprove my third prediction, but they support my fourth. The lowest lexical pitch is indeed found in groups composed of a female supervisor and two male assistants (mean = 3.233). Are female supervisors “dumbing down” their language? The evidence certainly seems to point in that direction...

Females in the supervisor role have an external status disadvantage because of their gender. In groups composed of a female supervisor and two male assistants women have conflicting status characteristics: externally, they are low, but internally, they are in the supervisor role, which places them higher than their male assistants. This conflict makes it more difficult for them to conform to their internal status, and it seems that the lower external status characteristic of gender seems to take over. According to expectation states theory, we should try to act up to our role status because this is what others and ourselves expect us to do. When role status conflicts with external status, though, external status seems to be taking precedence in group interactions.

Groups composed of a female supervisor and two male assistants have the lowest mean *lexical pitch* as well as the highest mean for *total Germanic words* (Table 3). The results reported on Table 1 show that as the *total Germanic words* variable increases, the *status achievement* variable decreases. If we now return to Table 3, we will find that the lowest mean score for *status achievement* is in fact for the groups composed of a female supervisor and two male assistants. Female supervisors are not only talking less smart than are male supervisors, but they are actually “dumbing down” their language as well.

Previous research makes it rather interesting that gender should have such an effect on language and status in this study. Findings by Johnson (1993) state that role status overrules the external status characteristic of gender. Walker et al. (1996) report similar findings in that the influence of gender seems to disappear when a pre-task role assignment is made. My results seem to suggest the opposite of this research, though a plausible reason for the non-conformity of my findings may be the small sample numbers used in this study. It is possible that were this study conducted again with a much larger sample number, the results could change.

Considering the previous research traditions cited by both Johnson (1993) and Robinson and Smith-Lovin (1990), the results for the numbers of *total Latinate words* and *total Germanic words* used by female supervisors should be surprising. However, qualitative work by West (1992) and Tannen (1990) seem to suggest otherwise. These results point toward a gender-socialization theory. West (1992) states that “men and women talk about decidedly different things” (132). These

“different things” are associated with different words and speech patterns. Women tend to talk more about things that require an increased number of words to express, such as emotions (Tannen 1990). The conversation topic is controlled in this study through a specific task assignment, though the greater number of words in the independent categories may be from “off topic” conversation. Off topic conversation was not eliminated from the data because this study was performed to gain a sense of how people speak, and off topic material is part of how people speak. In this study, therefore, I have found that female supervisors are talking more, but they are not necessarily talking “smarter,” which supports a gender-socialization theory in that they are generally talking more than male assistants and male supervisors overall, as well as that they are allowing their external status as women to outweigh their internal status of group supervisor.

Conclusion

In this thesis I examined whether the use of formal, authoritative words in speech predicts supervisor status achievement in small groups. Previous research on the subject of lexical formality (Levin, Giles, and Garrett 1994; Levin and Garrett 1990; Hayes 1988; Hayes and Ahrens 1988) suggests that, in non-interaction situations, at least, it is possible to use language as a status indicator, and that these results should carry over into groups. I have reviewed relevant classical literature on language, status perception, and role expectations, as well as modern literature in the areas of authority, status, gender, and conversation. I have tested my hypotheses using data from naturalistic interactions and found that it is in fact

possible to use language as a measure of achieved status within small groups, and that the effects of language on status are significant, though not very great. Both status and gender predicted lexical pitch. The results of the study are not wholly conclusive, and further and more extensive research will be required to fully explore the possibility of formal language as a status indicator in task groups.

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Table 1. Regression results for Total Latinate Words and Total Germanic Words by Status Achievement

Measure	Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig.
Total Latinate Words	0.627	1.963	p < .05
Total Germanic Words	-0.761	-2.381	p < .05
Dependent Variable: Status Achievement			

Table 2. Means for word usage and assistants' impressions of supervisors' by gender

Table 2. Means and error scores for the 1000 words in the 10						
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†One of the group members did not complete the post-experimental questionnaire. Therefore, one of the groups has been necessarily omitted from the results for *status achievement*.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Status Achievement, Lexical Pitch, Total Latinate words and Total Germanic Words by Group Gender Composition

Measure	Lexical Pitch	Total Latinate Words	Total Germanic Words	Status Achievement
Male Supervisor w/ 2 Male Assistants (n = 3)	4.992 (1.239)	3.658 (1.265)	0.807 (0.451)	6.017 (0.855)
Male Supervisor w/ 2 Female Assistants (n = 16)	3.806 (0.782)	2.852 (1.367)	0.791 (0.468)	6.057† (0.545)
Female Supervisor w/ 2 Male Assistants (n = 6)	3.233 (0.851)	4.230 (1.650)	1.303 (0.269)	5.600 (0.677)
Female Supervisor w/ 2 Female Assistants (n = 12)	3.527 (0.738)	3.150 (1.248)	0.926 (0.432)	5.813 (0.565)

†One member of a male/female/female group did not complete the post-experimental questionnaire. Therefore this group has been necessarily been omitted from the results for the *status achievement* variable.

Appendix

Post-Session Questionnaire

Please rate each member of your group on the following topics:

Supervisor

<i>very creative</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>not at all creative</i>
<i>unmotivated</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>motivated</i>
<i>boring</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>interesting</i>
<i>involved</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>uninvolved</i>
<i>pleasant</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>unpleasant</i>
<i>bad leader</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>good leader</i>
<i>intelligent</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>unintelligent</i>
<i>talkative</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>quiet</i>
<i>influential</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>non-influential</i>
<i>strong</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>weak</i>

Assistant 1

<i>very creative</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>not at all creative</i>
<i>unmotivated</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>motivated</i>
<i>bored</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>interested</i>
<i>involved</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>uninvolved</i>
<i>pleasant</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>unpleasant</i>
<i>bad leader</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>good leader</i>
<i>intelligent</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>unintelligent</i>
<i>talkative</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>quiet</i>
<i>influential</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>non-influential</i>
<i>strong</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>weak</i>

Assistant 2

<i>very creative</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>not at all creative</i>
<i>unmotivated</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>motivated</i>
<i>bored</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>interested</i>
<i>involved</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>uninvolved</i>
<i>pleasant</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>unpleasant</i>
<i>bad leader</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>good leader</i>
<i>intelligent</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>unintelligent</i>
<i>talkative</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>quiet</i>
<i>influential</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>non-influential</i>
<i>strong</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>weak</i>

2. On what basis were these roles determined?

- Thank you!**