By their words ye shall know them: Language abstraction and the

likeability of describers

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Running head: Language abstraction and likeability

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Abstract

According to the linguistic category model, behaviour can be described at concrete (e.g., "Kath *hit* Kim") and abstract (e.g., "Kath is *aggressive*") levels. Variations in these levels convey information about the person being described and the relationship between that person and the describer. In the current research, we examined the power of language abstraction to create impressions of describers themselves. Results show that describers are seen as less likeable when they use abstract (vs. concrete) language to describe the negative actions of others. Conversely, impressions of describers are more favourable when they opt for abstract descriptions of others' positive behaviours. This effect is partially mediated by the attribution of a communicative agenda to describers. By virtue of these attributional implications, language abstraction is an impression formation device that can impact on the reputation of describers.

Key words: language abstraction; linguistic category model; impression formation; impression management; likeability

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Communication is responsible for the transmission of information from senders to recipients and through wider social networks, making possible the maintenance of social (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri & Semin, 1989) and cultural (Kashima, 2000) knowledge. It is also an activity used by communicators to pursue social objectives other than the transmission of information about the ostensible topic of conversation (e.g., Higgins, 1981). For example, communicators often set out to make themselves liked by others (e.g., Goffman, 1959), and in so doing will say things they do not necessarily believe about other people and important social objects such as sex, race, and crime (e.g., Sutton & Farrall, 2005).

Audiences are not passive in this process. Very often, audiences appear to be motivated to actively interpret and evaluate what speakers say, extracting information about the speaker and not just the topic of their message. For example, audiences tend to like speakers who attribute positive traits to others more than those who attribute negative traits to others (e.g., Wyer, Bundesheim & Lambert, 1990). In a self-serving strategy known as *indirect impression management*, people appear to exploit the capacity for communication about others to convey information about themselves by selectively praising people and groups with whom they are affiliated (Cialdini & DeNicholas, 1989; Cialdini & Richardson, 1981). However, if audiences detect covert tactics like this, they may backfire and result in decreased liking. This *slime effect* (Vonk, 1998) highlights audiences' active, interpretive role. It also highlights the importance for impression formation processes of the *intentions,* or communicative

agendas that audiences attribute to speakers (cf. Albright, Cohen, Malloy, Christ & Bromgard, 2004).

However, surprisingly little research has investigated how audiences attribute communicative agendas to describers. What kinds of contextual, linguistic and paralinguistic information do audiences draw upon, for example? For the most part, research on this issue has focused on how audiences are affected by the *valence* of describers' statements about others (positive or negative). This dichotomous feature of descriptive language is relatively blatant and controllable and is therefore unlikely to escape the attention of a critical audience (cf. Maass *et al*., 1989).

In this paper, we are concerned with how a more subtle, structural feature of descriptive language may shape the impressions that audiences form of describers. Specifically, we are interested in the role that *language abstraction* may play in indirect impression formation processes. The distinction between concrete and abstract language has been defined by the *linguistic category model* (LCM; Semin & Fiedler, 1998) which specifies four levels of abstraction at which people may describe behavioural events. The first, descriptive action verbs or DAVs (e.g., "Kath *hit* Kim") provide a concrete, factual description. Second, interpretative action verbs or IAVs (e.g., "Kath *hurt* Kim") provide some kind of interpretation or further elaboration. Third, state verbs or SVs (e.g., "Kath *dislikes* Kim") provide a description that relates to a state of the actor involved in the event, and finally, adjectives or ADJs (e.g., "Kath is *aggressive*") provide the most abstract kind of description, referring to a disposition or enduring trait of the actor.

The LCM has inspired much research into, for example, the *linguistic intergroup bias* (LIB) and the *linguistic expectancy bias* (LEB), where expected behaviours (e.g.,

positive behaviours of in-group and negative behaviours of out-group members) are described at higher levels of language abstraction than unexpected behaviours (Maass *et al*., 1989; Maass, Ceccarelli & Rudin, 1996; Wigboldus, Semin & Spears, 2000). Research shows that these differences in language abstraction have important implications for how targets are evaluated (Wigboldus *et al*., 2000). Language is therefore an important tool for the transmission of stereotypes and expectancies.

Aside from the transmission of ideas from sender to receiver, research has identified a number of other functions of language abstraction. The social goals that have been shown to be facilitated by language abstraction include the motive to protect the ingroup from threat (Maass *et al*., 1996), to achieve cognitive closure (Webster, Kruglanski & Pattison, 1997), to co-operate or compete with others (Gil de Montes, Semin & Valencia, 2003), to present a desirable social identity (Douglas & McGarty, 2001), to secure a prosecution or defense (e.g., Schmid, Fiedler, Englich, Ehrenberger & Semin, 1996) and to manipulate recipients' impressions of third persons (e.g., Douglas & Sutton, 2003; Wenneker, Wigboldus & Spears, 2005).

However, there may be some limitations to the utility of language abstraction to achieve these ends, consistent with audiences' active and critical role in communication processes. For example, perceivers who need to make their own judgements about described persons may see abstract language as less useful than concrete language (Rodin, 1972). Also, recipients see abstract language as less verifiable and more disputable than concrete language, indicating that some general tone of 'bias' is perceived for abstract language (Semin & Fiedler, 1988). These corollaries of abstract language may call audiences' attention to the communicative agendas of its users. Should audiences deduce that users of abstract language have an ulterior motive for

example, they may discount the description as a reliable source of information, and instead draw their conclusions about the character of the describer (cf. Vonk, 1998; Wyer *et al.*, 1990).

Some recent research demonstrates that recipients may be able to make these types of inferences. Douglas & Sutton (2006) showed that recipients of abstract positive descriptions inferred that the describer was more likely to be a friend of the described person, less likely to be their enemy, and more likely to hold a favourable attitude toward this person, than recipients of concrete positive language. The reverse was true for negative descriptions. Recipients also attributed different communication goals to describers – for example to create a positive or a negative impression of the target – based on their language abstraction. Reitsma-van Rooijen, Semin and van Leeuwen (2007) demonstrated that recipients make similar inferences when they themselves are being described. Abstract positive feedback and concrete negative feedback led to feelings of proximity to the describer, compared to concrete positive and abstract negative feedback.

The capacity of audiences to mine language abstraction for implicit information about intentions may therefore do more than merely compromise communicators' ability to transmit information about others. It may also play an important role in determining the impression that audiences form about the character of the describers themselves. Specifically, it is reasonable to predict that, all else being equal, audiences will tend to form a more positive impression of describers whom they believe have positive intentions towards the target they are describing, such as trying to create a favourable impression of them, or trying to make other people like them (consistent with abstract positive and concrete negative descriptions) rather than a negative

impression, or an attempt to make others dislike them (consistent with concrete positive and abstract negative descriptions). Theoretically, we find grounds for this prediction in the tendency for persons' character to be judged in correspondence with the positive or negative quality of their actions (e.g., Gilbert & Malone, 1995; also Wyer *et al.*, 1990) and of the intentions underlying those actions (e.g., Reeder, Kumar, Hesson-McInnes & Trafimow, 2002). Of particular interest is the tendency for critics of groups to attract more favourable trait judgements when their communicative intentions are seen to be benign rather than malign (e.g., Sutton, Elder, & Douglas, 2006).

Nonetheless, we cannot simply deduce that observers will make more favourable trait judgements about describers who demonstrate positive rather than negative linguistic biases. As we have noted, studies of indirect impression formation processes have generally examined the impact of whether descriptions are positive or negative. Perceivers may be more willing and able to base trait judgements of describers on this rather brute aspect of their language than on the more subtle, shaded and perhaps less controllable distinction between concrete and abstract language. For example, a describer's choice between "Kath *hit* Kim" and "Kath is *aggressive*" may be seen as less extreme, stark, controllable, and therefore less diagnostic of the describer (cf. Skowronski & Carlston, 1989) than the choice between "Kath is *aggressive*" and "Kath is *friendly*". Finally, Mae and Carlston (2005) have shown that speakers who voice even positive generalisations about certain stigmatized groups are disliked as a result, showing that positivity is by no means describers' high road to approval.

However, if it is the case that observers are able to make trait judgements based on language abstraction, a person observing a positive abstract description such as "Kath is *friendly*" should rate the describer as more likeable than a person observing a

concrete description such as "Kath *smiled* at Kim". Conversely, a negative abstract

description such as "Kath is *aggressive*" may lead a recipient to conclude that the

describer is less likeable than a describer who uses a concrete description such as "Kath

hit Kim. We first sought to test this new hypothesis. Participants were asked to view a

cartoon depicting a person performing a positive or negative action, and read two

descriptions of what the person is doing. Participants were asked to rate how likeable

they thought the describer was (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989). We predicted an

interaction between behaviour valence (positive/negative) and language abstraction

(abstract/concrete). For positive behaviours, recipients should rate the describer as

more likeable when they used abstract rather than concrete language. For negative

behaviours, the opposite should occur.

If the driving force behind these inferences is the perceived communicative

intentions of the describer toward the person they are describing, then observers'

perceptions of the describers' likeability should be mediated by such perceived

intentions. Our second aim was to test this proposal. Inferences about describers may

be driven by participants' perceptions of describers' intentions, such as the desire to

create a positive or negative impression of the target, or to more generally influence

what others think about the target. Despite strong evidence suggesting that recipients

are sensitive to language abstraction in making their judgments about describers (e.g.,

Douglas & Sutton, 2006; Reitsma van-Rooijen et al., 2007) we do not know exactly

why this occurs and how recipients use language as a source of information about

describers. As a starting point, we therefore devised a general measure of a describer's

communicative agenda. Here, we examined if recipients' detection of such an agenda

enables them to make judgements about describers who use abstract or concrete language.

In designing these measures, we deliberately chose items that could not be viewed as explicitly pro- or anti-social. For example, instead of choosing items such as "The describer wanted to create a positive/negative impression of the target", we instead asked more general questions such as "The describer wanted to influence the recipient's opinion of the target". We did so because we wanted to examine the general impact of the detection of a communicative agenda on perceptions of likeability rather than whether the agenda could be clearly differentiated as pro- or anti-social. Such explicitly valenced motivations would make it difficult to understand any mediating process because positive motives would be inherently more 'detectable' for positive descriptions than negative descriptions, while the opposite would be the case for negative motives. We already know that abstract descriptions are generally seen as more 'biased' (Semin & Fiedler, 1988). Therefore, this general perception of 'bias' should be matched by a general, non-valenced measure of a communicative agenda.

The mere detection of such an agenda may influence how the describer is perceived. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that detection of a person's intentions, be they positive or negative, can affect their capacity to exert social influence (e.g., Todorov, 2002) and influence how others view them personally (e.g., Vonk, 1998). It is therefore possible that the extent to which communicators are perceived to have any kind of hidden agenda in wording a description in a particular way, can affect how they are evaluated personally. We therefore investigated if perceived presence of a communicative agenda, on the part of the describer, influences how abstract and concrete descriptions can make the describer appear likeable or dislikeable.

Method

Participants and Design

One hundred and sixty one undergraduate psychology students (141 female, 20 male, mean age 19.69 years) participated in the experiment in exchange for course credit. The design was a 2 (language abstraction: concrete/abstract) x 2 (behaviour valence: positive/negative) mixed design with repeated measures on abstraction.

Materials and Procedure

A cover sheet informed participants that they would be asked to observe a scene depicting an individual doing something, and to read two descriptions of what the person is doing. Participants were informed that two different people, who are both acquainted with the person in the scene, had provided the descriptions independently of each other. Participants were informed that they would be asked to answer some questions about the describers.

At the top of the first page of the questionnaire, participants were asked to look carefully at the scene, which portrayed a person performing either a positive action (e.g., recycling some bottles) or a negative action (e.g., doing graffiti on a wall, see Douglas, Sutton & Wilkin, 2008). We used six pictures in all (three depicting positive behaviours and three depicting negative behaviours); there were therefore six different versions of the questionnaire. [1] Underneath the picture, participants were presented with a description of the scene, which described the protagonist's behaviour at either an abstract or concrete level. For example, in the 'graffiti' scene, the concrete description was "Daniel is *spray-painting*" (DAV) and the abstract description was "Daniel is *destructive*" (ADJ). All descriptions were matched for readability and grade level using the Flesch reading ease score and the Flesch-Kincaid grade level score. Descriptions

had an average Flesch reading ease score of 44.0 (on a scale from 1-100) and a Flesch-Kincaid grade of 8.2. There was no significant difference in readability or grade level across the four positive/negative abstract/concrete conditions. [2]

After viewing the scene and reading the first description, participants were asked to complete Cialdini and De Nicholas's (1989) likeability scale: "In your view, to what extent is the person who described the scene:" followed by "friendly", likeable", attractive", personable" and "pleasant". Participants were asked to respond on a scale from 1 'not at all' to 7 'very much'. The scale was reliable in both the concrete (α = .91) and abstract (α = .94) conditions.

We also attempted to control for any confounding effects of description valence. The more abstract a description is, the more likely it is to be strongly valenced (Semin & Fiedler, 1988), and the degree to which a description carries positive or negative valence may be accessible to conscious awareness (Douglas & Sutton, 2003). However, it is difficult to obtain abstract and concrete descriptions of equal perceived valence (Douglas & Sutton, 2006). Also, to some extent the objective to control for description valence methodologically is at odds with the need to use materials that have been rigorously pre-tested on other dimensions (e.g., perceived positivity/negativity of the behaviours described) and have demonstrated reliable linguistic biases in previous work (e.g., Douglas *et al.,* 2008). Therefore, we chose to *measure* participants' perceptions of the valence of each description and control for it statistically. To do so, we asked participants to respond to two items regarding how 'positive' and how 'negative' they thought each description was (from 1 'not at all' to 7 'very much').

Finally, participants answered five questions related to the describer's perceived communicative agenda. Participants were asked "To what extent do you think the

describer is:" followed by "trying to influence the recipient's opinion of XX, "trying to control relationships between XX and other people", "trying to manipulate other people's interactions with XX", "trying to shape relationships between others" and "trying to make or break relationships between others" where "XX" denotes the name of the person in the scene. These were all neutrally-worded items designed to measure the presence of a general communicative agenda on the part of the describer. Again, participants responded from 1 'not at all' to 7 'very much'.

After completing these tasks, participants turned the page and completed the same task for the second description. After completion of the questionnaire, participants were debriefed, awarded their credit, and thanked.

Results

A scale total was calculated for likeability. 'Positive' and 'negative' scores were calculated across the six different cartoons. A scale average was also calculated for the describers' perceived agenda. Results were entered into a 2 (language abstraction: concrete/abstract) x 2 (valence: positive/negative) ANOVA with repeated measures on language abstraction.

Means and standard deviations for the describer likeability ratings are presented in Table 1. There was a main effect for behaviour valence, with describers of positive behaviours perceived as more likeable than describers of negative behaviours, $F(1, 154)$ = 38.68, p = .000, η^2 = .20. There was an interaction between behaviour valence and language abstraction as predicted, $F(1, 154) = 115.07$, p = .000, η^2 = .43. Describers of positive behaviours were perceived as more likeable when they provided abstract versus concrete descriptions, $F(1, 154) = 61.90$, p = .000, η^2 = .29. On the other hand, describers of negative behaviours were perceived as more likeable when they provided

concrete versus abstract descriptions, $F(1, 154) = 53.28$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .26$. There was no main effect for language abstraction, $F(1, 154) = 0.22$, $p = .639$, $\eta^2 = .001$. [3]

Because we manipulated language abstraction within-subjects, we calculated difference scores for participants' ratings of description valence (abstract – concrete for both ratings of positivity and negativity). We included the difference scores as covariates in the ANOVA described above in order to control for perceived description valence. This analysis revealed significant interactions between perceived valence and language abstraction (for perceived positivity x abstraction, $F(1, 152) = 13.55$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .08$, for perceived negativity x abstraction, $F(1, 152) = 4.07$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2 = .03$). However, the interaction between behaviour valence and language abstraction remained significant, $F(1, 152) = 19.70$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Thus, despite the strong relationship between abstraction and perceived description valence in our materials, the interactive effect of behaviour valence and abstraction on likeability still occurred independently of the participants' judgements of description valence. [4]

Communicative agenda

The five measures of perceived describer agenda were subjected to principal components analyses to ensure that the combined scale provided a meaningful measure of a describer's perceived agenda in communicating information about a target. For concrete descriptions (eigenvalue = 4.10, proportion of variance = 81.95%) and abstract descriptions (eigenvalue = 3.37, proportion of variance = 67.41%), this was indeed the case. Only one factor was extracted indicating that the scale measures a single construct. Further, the combined scale was reliable for both the concrete ($\alpha = .93$) and abstract ($\alpha = .85$) conditions.

Further analyses of the nature of this construct revealed there was no main effect of valence for the combined scale, $F(1, 154) = .012$, $p = .914$, or for any of the items analysed individually (all $p > .393$). Communicative agenda was seen as equally present for both positive and negative descriptions. Also, results revealed a main effect of language abstraction on perceived agenda on the combined measure, $F(1, 154) = 18.46$, $p = .000$, and for all of the items analysed individually (all $p < .05$). The presence of a communicative agenda was therefore seen as higher for abstract than concrete descriptions.

We then calculated differences scores (abstract – concrete) for likeability and perceived communicative agenda to examine if the presence or absence of an agenda affects a describer's likeability. Results revealed that the abstract-concrete difference in perceived describer agenda negatively predicted an abstract-concrete difference in likeability ($ß = -.29$ $t = -4.86$, $p = .000$). Therefore, describers appeared to be seen as less likeable the more abstract their language was, to the extent that they were also perceived to have an agenda in wording their description abstractly.

Mediation analyses

This suggestion of a mediating process was further supported by analyses using additional regression procedures as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). Behaviour valence predicted an abstract-concrete difference in perceived describer agenda ($ß = .27$, $t = 3.52$, $p = .001$). This indicates that the extent to which abstract descriptions are seen as having more of an agenda in general also depends on the valence of the behaviour being described. Here, the abstract-concrete difference in perceived agenda is greatest in the negative behaviour condition (see Table 1). Behaviour valence also predicted an abstract-concrete difference in likeability ($ß = -.65$, $t = -10.73$, $p = .000$). As indicated

earlier, describers were seen as more likeable when they worded their negative descriptions concretely and their positive descriptions abstractly. When perceived describer agenda was added to the equation with behaviour valence, the effect of behaviour valence on the abstract-concrete difference for likeability was attenuated (ß = -.58 t = -9.72, p = .000). Although this is only partial mediation with a modest reduction in beta, it is the first evidence to suggest that the detection of a communicative agenda may be one variable that is responsible for a difference in how a describer is perceived based on their use of language abstraction. This effect means that the extent to which describers are seen as possessing a hidden agenda when forming their description significantly attenuates the extent to which behaviour valence predicts abstract-concrete differences in likeability. A Sobel's test confirmed the significance of this effect, Sobel z = 4.43, p = .000. [5]

Discussion

The work presented here demonstrates that language abstraction influences recipients' likeability for describers, independently of the perceived valence of the descriptions. This effect was driven by perception of the presence of a general communicative agenda on the part of the describer, to influence the social circumstances of the target.

To communicate in an effective manner, both describers and recipients must together perceive the purpose, or underlying intentions behind messages (Albright *et al*., 2004). The present results extend previous research showing that language abstraction is a subtle but important window through which recipients may gaze in their efforts to determine communicators' intentions (Douglas & Sutton, 2006). In particular, having

diagnosed communicators' agenda on the basis of their language abstraction, recipients appear in turn to diagnose their likeability as individuals.

Our finding that recipients can infer characteristics and traits of describers, and that these inferences are mediated by perceived social motives, highlights the role of language abstraction in the process of information transmission. From a describer's perspective, recipients' capacity to infer information about them from their language therefore has pros and cons. For example, if our descriptions of others make us appear dislikeable, or relay information about our communicative intentions, then our ability to communicate information about others effectively may be compromised. However, we know that communicators are able to recruit language abstraction to influence recipients' impressions of the people they are describing (see Douglas & Sutton, 2003). The present research therefore raises the interesting possibility that describers may also be able to recruit language abstraction to influence recipients' impressions of *themselves*. In other words language abstraction may indeed be a tool of indirect impression management, so that describers can manage their 'image' by strategically choosing the language they use to describe the behaviours and attributes of others (cf. Cialdini & Richardson, 1981). Following the same principles as language in general, communicators may, however, need to be careful that their language abstraction choices do not backfire (cf. Vonk, 1998) and that any ulterior motives remain undetected (cf. Albright *et al*., 2004).

The current work therefore presents some interesting implications for the role of language abstraction in impression management. Of course however, it also raises some issues to be addressed in future research. First, the mediating role of perceived describer agenda was significant but only partial. This suggests that other factors aside

from those we measured are most likely also at play in influencing recipients' likeability

for describers who use abstract and concrete language. Indeed, it should also be noted

that we deliberately chose neither pro- nor anti-social communicative agendas as

potential mediators. Detection of explicitly positive and negative intentions towards the

target could influence a describer's likeability in different ways. A further possibility

that we have not explored is that the perceived relationship between the describer and

the target (or the target and the recipient) could also influence the judgements that

recipients make based on language abstraction. Perhaps the detection of a

communicative agenda would affect recipients' judgements differently depending on

this relationship. Future research could therefore examine other factors that may

influence recipients' judgements about describers, and how the social context might

also be important.

Also, there is evidence to suggest that people may not be *aware* of their

linguistic choices (e.g., Franco & Maass, 1999) and we do not claim here that recipients

are explicitly aware that language abstraction influences the trait judgements they make

about describers. We also do not claim that describers are able to consciously employ

language abstraction for impression-management purposes. It is clear that future

research is needed to establish how aware recipients and describers are of the ways in

which they use language abstraction strategically (Douglas & Sutton, 2003).

Further, the results outlined in this paper originate from an experimental

paradigm. The cartoon characters were not real people, the supposed relationship

between the describer and describee was artificial, and the descriptions had been

designed by the experimenters. Although these features are advantageous in that they

allows us view the effects of language on impressions whilst controlling for extraneous

factors, researchers in future could consider investigating the same processes in more ecologically valid communication contexts. As a related concern, we manipulated language abstraction within-participants. Whilst also being limited in terms of ecological validity, this type of presentation may in addition to this constitute a comparative judgement where participants are sensitised, however implicitly, to differences in ways of describing behaviours. In future research, it may therefore be useful to manipulate language abstraction in an independent design.

We should also note that the processes we have discussed in this paper are not necessarily the same as those involved in making *spontaneous* inferences about describers from their language use. In our experiments, including the experiments we conducted on inferences about attitudes and goals (Douglas and Sutton, 2006), we prompted participants with the items of interest (i.e., likeability), making the process less automatic. Following other research suggesting that people are able to make spontaneous trait judgements about people based on their descriptions of others (e.g., Mae, Carlston & Skowronski, 1999; Wyer *et al*., 1990), and that the positive and negative traits that describers use to describe others can spontaneously 'transfer' onto describers themselves (Skowronski, Carlston, Mae & Crawford, 1998), future research can determine whether recipients are able to spontaneously infer describers' traits from language abstraction, or if indeed, in the eyes of perceivers, describers take on the very traits or actions they describe in others.

The present findings add to a growing body of research on the functions of language abstraction. To illustrate, it has been found recently that language abstraction plays an important role in justifying university recruitment selection decisions (Rubini & Menegatti, 2008) and that it may assist senders and recipients to converge upon a

functional construal level of social events (Clark & Semin, 2008). Language

abstraction also plays an important role in directing recipients' attention to global or

local features of the stimulus field (Stapel & Semin, 2007). Further, language

abstraction responds to bodily cues (Beukeboom & de Jong, 2008), instructions to

inhibit biases against individuals (Douglas *et al*., 2008), and allows observers to

discriminate between groups even in a minimal group situation (Moscatelli, Albarello &

Rubini, 2008). Investigating the social functions of language abstraction for describers

and recipients is therefore a flourishing area of enquiry (see also Fiedler, 2008; Semin,

2008).

In conclusion, the present research adds to an active area of research by

demonstrating recipients' ability to infer describers' likeability based on differences in

language abstraction. Although language abstraction enables describers to transmit

their expectancies and stereotypes about others, and to achieve any number of other

communication goals, the present results suggest that this may not be without

consequences for the describers themselves. Whether they intend to or not,

communicators are likely to indirectly say things about themselves through the medium

of language abstraction, even when they are overtly talking about others. Language

abstraction, therefore, is potentially both a resource and a hindrance for individuals as

they endeavour to portray an image of themselves to the world. Equally however, as

individuals try to understand and navigate their way through that social world, language

abstraction may be a valuable lens through which they can gain insight into the motives

and characteristics of their peers. Once again, this subtle, structural feature of language

turns out to be implicated in social processes in ways that almost certainly escape the

explicit attention of the people who engage in and are affected by those processes.

Footnotes

1 There were no differences in results across the cartoons, so cartoon is not
presented as a factor in the analyses reported.

2 The concrete/abstract descriptions for each cartoon were as follows:

(Positive behaviours)

Barbara is writing / Barbara is brainy

Matthew is putting bottles in the bottle bank / Matthew is sensible

Sammy is grasping for the other person / Sammy is caring

(Negative behaviours)

Daniel is spray-painting / Daniel is destructive

Jenny is chattering during the movie / Jenny is bad-mannered

Lindsey is hurling rubbish on the pavement / Lindsey is dirty

3 This interaction was replicated in prior experiment ($N = 108$) where the mediator
was not included, $F(1, 105) = 15.67$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .16$. The positive/negative,
abstract/concrete planned comparisons for likeability were also replicated.

4 The different dfs here are because not all participants completed all items.

5 The same mediation pattern was found for each of the five motive measures
independently. The only exception was for "trying to influence the recipients'
opinion of X" which was marginal at the IV-MV step
($\beta = .119$ $t = 1.49$, $p = .138$).

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Table 1

Means and (standard deviations) for describer likeability and agenda ratings

| | Valence | | | |
| | Positive | | Negative | |
	Abstract	Concrete	Abstract	Concrete
Likeability	4.84	3.67	2.90	3.96
Trying to influence recipients' opinion	4.42	3.71	4.86	3.62
Trying to control relationships	3.60	3.48	3.99	3.04
Trying to manipulate interactions	3.51	3.64	4.14	3.06
Trying to shape relationships	3.43	3.50	3.80	3.06
Trying to make/ break relationships	3.22	3.35	3.73	2.73
COMBINED AGENDA MEASURE	3.63	3.54	4.10	3.10