5-9-2016

"fired Up About Education:" A Quantitative Exploration Of Positive And Negative Slang

Richard Heyne
Illinois State University, rheyne@ilstu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd

Part of the Education Commons

"FIRED UP ABOUT EDUCATION": A QUANTITATIVE

EXPLORATION OF POSITIVE

AND NEGATIVE SLANG

Richard L. Heyne

86 Pages

This study examines the variables of immediacy, clarity, classroom climate, professionalism, and credibility as they relate to instructors use of slang in the classroom. This investigation advances our understanding of how students perceive an instructor or professor who uses "slang language" while teaching a lesson. While all of these variables will make up the student's overall perception of the teacher, the student also examines how these results vary depending on the age of the instructor. Thus, the central focus for the present study is how different types of slang are perceived by students when used by instructors of different age. Research participants include students from a large Midwestern university students who watched a video of a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) or professor using positive, negative, or no slang while teaching a brief lesson.

KEYWORDS: Classroom Communication, Communication Accommodation Theory, Slang

"FIRED UP ABOUT EDUCATION": A QUANTITATIVE

EXPLORATION OF POSITIVE

AND NEGATIVE SLANG

RICHARD L. HEYNE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

School of Communication

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2016

© 2016 Richard L. Heyne

"FIRED UP ABOUT EDUCATION": A QUANTITATIVE

EXPLORATION OF POSITIVE

AND NEGATIVE SLANG

RICHARD L. HEYNE

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Stephen K. Hunt, Chair

Kevin R. Meyer

John F. Hooker

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I consider myself to be an incredibly lucky individual because of the people I get to surround myself with on a daily basis. Several individuals at Illinois State University have guided me as a scholar and a student over the last two years. To begin, I want to thank Dr. Stephen Hunt, advisor of this thesis and perhaps the most patient person I know. Steve, for some crazy reason I chose to go with a quantitative study despite the fact that my undergraduate background was in rhetoric. Not only that, but I got a much higher grade in the qualitative methods class. Whoops? Your unwavering desire to help me grapple something that does not come easy was incredible. Thank you so much, man. Second, I want to thank Dr. Kevin Meyer. Your background in Speech & Debate gave me a talking point with at least one of the professors when I first got to ISU. Switching from creative writing to this crazy world was definitely a bumpy ride. But you relating a lot of key concepts back to speech made it a whole lot easier. Thank you for being such a positive force for me throughout this whole experience. To Dr. John Hooker, I think you are a total badass. I do not have the words to articulate why I felt a strong connection with you when I first got to ISU. I am so happy you were part of this journey with me. Thank you for all of your guidance, and just know that I have seen at least one video of your wrestling.

Steve, John, and Kevin, the praise I can give the three of you will never paint the full picture of what you did for me over the past two years. Every single class I have taken has been with one of you, with the exception of Dr. Baldwin. Through those classes and writing this thesis I have been able to learn so much about education and myself. I do not know if there is an adequate way for me to repay you. Perhaps the promise of an eventual beer will do for now!

I would like to give a shout out to the entire faculty and staff in the School of Communication. I was terrified to enter a graduate program for something I had never studied prior. Several individuals assisted in making my transition as seamless as humanly possible. Dr. Baldwin, during your qualitative methods class I wrote a very honest autoethnography about my time in graduate school. It was very hard for me to write because of everything I disclosed. I am so happy I chose to share that with you.

To all of my homies at Illinois State University—thank you for the memories. I am sorry that I did not leave my apartment nearly as much as I probably should have. I cherish the times that I did and I am glad I got to spend that time with all of you. Keep kicking ass, and I will try to do the same.

Craig and Michelle Heyne, if I write another kind thing about the two of you I am afraid you both might spontaneously combust. Best parents ever. I love you. I am not half the person I am today without you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

R. L. H.

CONTENTS

Page

iii

v

TABLES

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

Statement of the Problem

As soon as an instructor stands in front of the classroom, students begin to formulate opinions of him or her based on what they perceive. Filled with preconceived notions as to how a teacher should "sound," the teacher is responsible for those expectations being fulfilled or violated. Variables such as dress, posture, and attitude are undoubtedly all part of the communication equation. However, the language employed by the instructor is potentially the most potent variable for students' perception. Traditional student/teacher relationships cause the student to believe that the teacher is bound to use jargon-laden language that will at times be difficult to understand or relate to (Giles & Williams, 1992). This led Mazer and Hunt (2008) to posit that if a professor violated the expected norm by using "positive slang" (e.g., "awesome" or "sweet"), it would have an overall positive impact on the classroom. In order to further solidify their findings, they added negative slang as a variable (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). The results indicated that instructors who used positive slang enhanced their credibility, classroom climate, affective learning, and students' motivation to learn. Alternatively, instructors who did not use positive slang yielded consistent but lower marks for the aforementioned variables, and instructors using negative slang produced inverse results (Mazer & Hunt, 2008)

Previous instructional communication scholars working in this area have surveyed students by first showing a video of a professor teaching a class using positive slang (Mazer, 2006). An underlying assumption in their design was that the instructor was comfortable using slang in the classroom. However, Plax, Kearney, and Tucker (1986) highlight the idea of a professor's "working knowledge" while engaged with their students. A professor's extensive experience teaching in the classroom setting gives her or him the ability to spontaneously alter and adapt their communication style. Experienced faculty are typically more comfortable making decisions than inexperienced teachers who may lack the skillset that allows for them to act on the spot (Osam & Balbay, 2004). Simply put, a professor has accumulated a broad group of experiences while in front of the classroom. These experiences prepare them for future interactions with students. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) may lack such experiences. As such, when they are met with evolving circumstances within the classroom, they do not have the same wealth of experience a professor might have. This does not necessarily mean the GTA will react poorly in the classroom (Osam & Balbay, 2004). However, it poses the concern as to how students perceive a professor in comparison to a traditional GTA. While there is an extensive list of literature that focuses on the difference between professors and GTAs regarding a variety of educational strategies, slang has largely gone unaddressed. Perhaps a contributing factor is the aforementioned stigma surrounding slang language.

Slang is commonly associated with younger people. Therefore, when a professor, who is typically older than a majority of their students, begins to use language more

2

familiar with their audience, she or he is bridging a gap between the two and attempting to make him or herself more relatable. It is unknown as to whether or not this violation will occur when performed by a traditional GTA. Furthermore, Nyquist and Sprague (1998) argue that young instructors are still in the developmental stage as professional educators. While it is possible for young instructors to hone their craft by reading case studies and developing a theoretical understanding of education, their ability to perform is still largely dependent on real life practice (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998). Regardless of whether or not slang is a comfortable language mode for GTAs, asking for a young professional to commit to a language mode for the sake of enhancing their classroom might ultimately backfire due to how young they are. In other words, a GTA could actually negatively affect their ability to teach by using positive slang, rather than enhancing it. The current study directly addresses the gap in literature by comparing how students evaluate an instructor's immediacy, clarity, classroom climate, professionalism and credibility when using positive or negative slang in the classroom based on whether they are a professor or GTA.

Review of Literature

Eble (1996) defined slang as "an ever changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group or with a trend or fashion in society at large" (p. 11). Mazer (2006) was intrigued by how such linguistic cohesion could have ripple effects within a classroom setting. Hurt, Scott, and McCroskey (1978) began an academic discussion on communication in the classroom. What followed was a plethora of literature examining instructor

3

immediacy (c.f., Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998; Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1994; McCroskey, Sallinen, Fayer, Richmond, & Barraclough, 1996; Sanders & Wiseman, 1990). These studies depict relationships that begin to develop in the classroom depending on students' perceptions of the instructor's immediacy.

However, instructional communication scholars have examined a variety of communication variables beyond immediacy. For example, communicator style has also been cited as a key variable that influences student learning outcomes (Javidi, Downs, & Nussbaum, 1988; Potter & Emanuel, 1990; Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994; Wanzer & McCroskey, 1998; Wooten & McCroskey, 1996). Keeping the current academic discussion in mind, Mazer (2006) attempted to break relatively new ground by exploring positive slang's application to the classroom. He asserted:

> From the graduate teaching assistant to the tenured full professor, students are
> likely to encounter the teacher who tries his or her tongue at adopting the speech
> pattern of a traditional college student by using positive slang in the classroom (p.
> 3-4).

While this is a fair claim, it does group a GTA in the same category as a professor. While this might have been a fair assumption to build a foundation for such research, assuming one's age or status, an indicator of power, does not directly impact the communicator's style disregards a fairly large body of literature (Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1984, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Richmond & McCroskey, 1984; Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, & Plax, 1987). This study will

4

ultimately seek to find out if students detect an age/ experience difference between GTAs and professors using slang, and then how they perceive the instructor as a result.

Due to the nature of slang, this study focuses solely on consistent and broad slang speech, such as the terms previously mentioned. It is beyond the scope of this study to incorporate slang that directly pertains to current trends and allusions because such results could be less applicable in a few years when those terms or ideas no longer carry the same meaning. Limiting the amount of slang terms used in a classroom setting will ultimately yield more consistent results and give readers a better understanding of the scope of the present study. These terms and phrases are selected based on what previous scholars have deemed appropriate for the classroom. Martin, Weber, and Burant (1997) illustrate slang as form of language that contains verbally aggressive messages. This assumption lumps positive and negative slang in the same category. When distinguishing between the two, positive slang may be perceived as less aggressive than negative slang. Throughout the course of this thesis, an effort will be made to discuss the difference between the two. However, there is a compelling argument that the sender of a message has little to no control over how the receivers interpret the message. Instructors can run the risk of being misinterpreted within the classroom setting, especially since positive and negative slang might catch the students off guard.

Understanding Positive and Negative Slang

For the purpose of employing slang in the classroom, positive slang is a form of affirmation for a student (Mazer, 2006). The result of using positive slang should be a shared identity between the student and teacher. For example, when a student answers a

5

question posed to the class correctly, the teacher might respond by saying "sweet" or "awesome" as opposed to the expected "correct." This is not to say positive slang can only be used when students are performing well, because this is unfortunately not always the case. When addressing a student's negative habits, an instructor can still use positive slang. A teacher using traditional language might say, "the deadline was clearly outlined in the syllabus. You will lose credit according to the course's policies." This same response can be translated into positive slang and sound something like "totally understandable, everyone makes mistakes and falls behind at some point. The syllabus does say you need to turn assignments in on time, but as long as you continue to make deadlines from now on, you'll be doing awesome!" While both approaches outline where the student went wrong, the example of positive slang softens the blow to a student who may be experiencing a fair level of stress throughout the conversation. Furthermore, the relationship being forged between student and teacher is being enhanced as a result of the two sharing communication fidelity (Martin, Weber, & Burant, 1997; Mazer, 2006).

Positive slang has been proven to be an effective, and even favorable, method of classroom communication (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). In the case of positive slang, it is easy for a receiver to pick up on the positive affirmation being provided by the teacher and interpret the message to be anything but insulting or offensive. As a result, the use of positive slang will positively impact the teacher's immediacy and enhance the classroom climate.

However, negative slang can be more ambiguous since the meaning is not so cut and dry (Martin et al., 1997). Negative slang consists of words such as "jerk," "waste," or

"shit" (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). There is no denying that those words can all be used in a positive context. For example, a teacher may say to their class "now, I'm not going to be a jerk and not prepare you for this freakin' test." The teacher has demonstrated a desire to assist the students in their learning experience. However, the instructor often sets the linguistic expectations with their own language. If an instructor is comfortable cursing in front of their students, it is only a matter of time before the students are comfortable cursing in front of them. This mimicking is supported by communication accommodation theory.

Fein (2011) believes that because the teacher is the "leader" of the classroom, the language they use sets the standard for the class. If the teacher says something in a positive context like, "failing sucks. That shit ain't cool," it may just be to encourage students to do better and succeed. However, that teacher has just opened up a figurative floodgate. Students may perceive that language to be appropriate because their own teacher has embraced it. It may be difficult for students to imagine the hypocrisy of an instructor penalizing them for simply mirroring their behavior. Scholars like Fein (2011) discourage slang in the classroom because they believe the mode of language will inevitably lead to vulgarity. This is also a result of societal expectations associating slang with common swearwords, such as "shit" and "suck." However, this study does not assume that negative slang will be perceived negatively by the students. If the instructor is deploying negative slang in a positive manner (i.e. affirmation) then the underlying purpose of the slang is positive. However, negative slang can also be used in a negative, aggressive manner. A teacher combining these two elements runs the risk of offending

their students and severely damaging their classroom environment, sense of professionalism, as well as clarity. On the other hand, they might earn the students trust by increasing immediacy through downwards convergence. If students perceive the instructor as purposefully giving up professionalism in order to relate to them, this could result in earning their trust. In other words, this study does not examine negative slang as a damaging mechanism. None of the language is directed at a specific individual. Rather, it is used strategically as a part of the lesson in an effort to establish a connection with the students.

Slang as a Linguistic Bridge

Wolfee and Kelly (2011) posited that students are often at a loss when formulating expectations for a teacher. This uncertainty can result in anxiety or other negative effects. However, the teacher can act in a way that counteracts these expectations and enhances their ability to teach (Wolffe & Kelly, 2011). Since language can often serve as a divide between teacher and student, positive slang can serve as a tool to break down barriers in the classroom (Giles & Williams, 1992). If a student has a code of language they use amongst their peers, they tend to develop a special relationship with those who use such a code. The inherent bond is something a student often lacks with their teacher. When a professor walks in on the first day of class and begins to say things like "sweet" or "awesome," the student acknowledges something is different about the class (Mazer & Hunt, 2008b). Whether or not the student realizes it, he or she is forming a closer bond with their instructor due to the language they are using. Words like "awesome" and "sweet" are just a small portion of the slang dictionary. However, the goal of the teacher

is not to impress the students with their wide knowledge of a code that is considered sacred amongst youth. Rather, the teacher must simply flex enough of their slang muscle to demonstrate to the class that a linguistic bridge has been formed between the teacher and the student.

Previous studies regarding slang in the classroom have revealed the positive impact positive slang has on student motivation, affective learning, and teacher credibility (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). While their investigations were thorough for what they were looking for, the design had a gap. All videos the participants watched while a part of the research featured a middle-aged professor (roughly forty years old) dressed in business casual attire teaching a brief lesson while using positive, negative, or no slang (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). In this study, the students responded positively to the professor, thinking he was "cool" for the language he used and his ability to connect with students. This is largely attributed to his ability to violate the students' expectations of a professor and bridge a linguistic gap.

However, the ability for positive slang to influence students' perceptions may be disrupted if this gap is not expected in the first place. Ambrose and Bridges (2010) highlighted the issue young GTAs have when they step into the role of the teacher. For the purpose of this study, "traditional GTAs" will be understood as GTAs who are teaching classes at a university and are under the age of 25. A further discussion of this label will be covered in the limitations section. Doctoral students are beyond the lens of this research. Due to the fact that these teachers may be younger than the traditional professor most students are used to, there is a chance that they will be treated differently

9

in the classroom. This is not to say that every GTA has the same experience. Several GTAs are able to teach for their time at the university without their students' ever suspecting they are not full time faculty. However, many other GTAs tend to disclose to their class that they are students as well, revealing they are young (Benner, 1984).

If students do not perceive a large age gap between themselves and the teacher, the expectations of the student may have already been violated as soon as they walked into class. This would cause the student to adjust their expectations on the spot. In other words, a younger teacher may be perceived as more relatable to begin with. This could diminish the need for a linguistic bridge (Black & Kaplan, 1997).

Communication Accommodation Theory

Beginning with speech accommodation theory and eventually evolving into communication accommodation theory, researchers have focused on the concepts of convergence, divergence, and maintenance of relationships through our methods of communication (Shepard, Giles, & LePoire, 2001). As Mazer and Hunt (2008) posited, "perhaps the reason that students perceive friendly, relaxed, animated, or dramatic instructors positively is that teachers adjust their behaviors toward the students in a form of 'downward convergence'" (p. 21). Language is thus the key to establish the desired social distance between a teacher and their students (Giles, 1973). In order for convergence to take place, at least one party must be willing to adapt to meet the needs of the other party.

Mazer (2006) draws attention to direction of convergence being either upwards or downwards. Upwards convergence is the adjustment of language that shifts away from

10

the norm to something that is seen as more "prestigious" or "desirable." On the other hand, downward convergence reflects a shift to a stigmatized or less socially desirable form of communication (Shepard et al., 2001). Slang is not commonly associated with a professional setting, such as a classroom, due to the stigma surrounding the language. Many stereotype slang as vulgar and unprofessional due to how it has been portrayed in popular culture (Fein, 2011). Furthermore, slang may be seen as a "lazy" mode of communication because the linguistics associated with it often seem as shortcuts to the expected norm. One example of this is the shortening of the word "because" to "cause" which is commonly typed or written out as "cuz." Due to the many irregularities between slang and language norms, linguists (Fein, 2011) are quick to undermine investigations that promote the use of slang, labeling it as downwards convergence. However, studies like Mazer and Hunt's (2008a) demonstrate that when the application is proper, slang can actually be an instance of upwards convergence in the classroom. To better understand slang as a mode of language, scholars must be willing to delve deeper into what makes it a linguistic style that has survived and adapted from generation to generation. We can also broaden our understanding of what slang is and what it hopes to accomplish. The "positive slang" language being examined in this study is not meant to serve as a shortcut to traditional linguistic choices (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). Rather, it is an attempt to forge stronger relationships in the classroom and enhance an instructor's ability to relate to his or her students.

Discussing the concept of accommodation without considering how to actually accommodate seems counterproductive. It has long been understood in academia that

11

there is a divide between teachers and their students (Benner, 1984). This is the result of growing up during different times and having very different linguistic pallets. While it would be unrealistic to ask teachers to completely change the way in which they communicate to better accommodate their students, it is very possible to refine their language that allows them to better relate and speak to their students. Since slang is a universal language amongst young minds, it serves as an ideal catalyst (Cooper, 2001; Hummon, 1994; Kiesling, 2004; Nunnally, 2001; Stowell, 1992).

However, slang studies, such as the study conducted by Mazer and Hunt (2008b), do have their limitations that require refinement. GTAs are often already perceived by students as much younger than the professors that they probably have in other classes (Osam & Balbay, 2004). This is not to say that students are keen on age. Regardless of their ability to perceive a set number, they are to some degree aware that there is a more severe age gap between them and their traditional instructor (Plax et al., 1986). As a result, accommodation may not be as pressing of an issue. The warmness a student feels to someone who is younger may be enough to build a bridge between the two parties. This is often why students are so fond of the GTAs they have throughout their college experience (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998).

The question then becomes, is attempting to accommodate one's communication necessary if convergence has already taken place? Furthermore, is there such thing as too much convergence? GTAs are immediately negotiating the need for respect the moment they walk into the classroom. The implementation of slang may compromise those negotiations and ultimately set the GTA back. On the other hand, it may just continue to

12

enhance the framework that is already very much present in order for convergence to take place.

Teacher Communicator Style

Teacher communicator style refers to the way an instructor verbally engages their audience (Kearney, Plax, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1984, 1985). Using slang in the classroom is a modification of an instructor's style of communication.

Instructor immediacy. Investigations regarding teacher immediacy have linked it to enhanced clarity as well as an overall improvement to the classroom's environment (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001). In fact, scholars often regard immediacy as one of the most important bodies of research for communication and education scholars (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998, 2000, 2001). For the purpose of this study, immediacy will be understood as the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between teachers and students (Andersen, 1979; Mehrabian, 1969). Moving around the room and using the dimension of their teaching space act a means for the teacher to appear more invested into the lesson. This contrasts the stereotypical lecture hall in which the teacher is physically distant from the students and will often be behind a podium or computer, preventing them from engaging their students.

Teacher immediacy is theorized to have verbal and nonverbal dimensions (Mehrabian, 1971). A teacher utilizing immediacy will deploy several strategies to maximize their effectiveness (Christensen & Menzel, 1998). Verbal immediacy may include an instructor varying up vocal pitch or loudness and tempo. Nonverbal immediacy may include walking towards a person, smiling, and facing the students. All

13

of these individual actions together enhance the instructor's immediacy. Nonverbal immediacy may include a teacher walking from one side of the room to the other in order to get those students more engaged in the conversation. Not only does this reduce physical distance between the teacher and the students, but it also makes students feel as though the instructor is seeking out information that can be found on their side of the classroom. This method will result in students engaging more in the class' conversation (Gorham, 1988). It is a commonly held belief amongst instructional communication scholars that nonverbal immediacy often mediates verbal immediacy. Verbal immediacy deals with what is actually said in the classroom by the instructor. Slang qualifies as a method that a teacher can implement to increase verbal immediacy and build rapport with students (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). Developing this relationship will often determine the level of success a student has in the class, as a positive relationship with the instructor will have a direct impact on the student's desire to learn. While slang is not the only verbal method of increasing immediacy, it is unique in the sense that it relates to students on a linguistic level that is often times difficult to achieve in the professional classroom setting (Mazer, 2006).

One of the many benefits of teacher immediacy is the relationship it forges between the student and teacher (Gorham, 1988). While the rule has not been spoken, students know that if the teacher is standing near them they are expected to participate. This also allows the teacher to have control over the pace of their classroom and maximize the students' ability to learn. However, the use of slang adds another variable to the equation making the outcome a bit more complex (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). The

14

purpose of positive slang is to break down linguistic barriers to help strengthen the relationship being developed between the teacher and the student.

A potential drawback to teacher immediacy is that a student may begin to feel too close to a teacher (Kelley & Gorham, 1988). If a teacher is too immediate with a particular student, or group of students, this could result in complacency or students trying to take advantage of the relationship they have with their teacher. Similarly, slang offers the opportunity for the students and teacher to further develop their relationship. Using a similar linguistic code as one another may result in a student struggling to code-switch within the classroom setting (Alfonzetti, 1998). This could result in common immediacy drawbacks, such as a student lowering their participation because they believe the teacher will go easy on her or him. However, the dimension of slang opens up the opportunity for students to incorrectly read what is appropriate and inappropriate to say in class. Thus, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H1: Students will perceive professors that use positive slang as more immediate than professors who use negative slang or neutral language.

The development of the student/ teacher relationship through slang as a method of enhancing verbal immediacy is suggested by previous findings (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). However, negative relationships can bloom between a student and teacher, interfering with their ability to learn (Kelley & Gorham, 1988). For example, if a teacher is perceived as too laid back by their students, there may be an increased possibility for misbehavior (Fein, 2011). The results of a young teacher using slang language to decrease the distance between themselves and their students is unknown. Furthermore, a

15

student's perception of the instructor's age may impact his or her perception of the use of slang. Because there is a perceived risk to such a practice, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: Do students' perceptions of immediacy differ based on the age of the instructor using slang in the classroom?

Instructor clarity. Instructor clarity refers to the teacher's ability to deliver course content in a way that students can easily understand and retain (Simonds, 1995). If a message is not received by the students, or the information is not retained once they have been dismissed from class, clarity has not been achieved. There are degrees of clarity based on the students' ability to recall the material that was presented (Simonds, 1997). A higher level of cognitive learning is achieved if a student can recall the information taught in the classroom and effectively apply it to their lives, as opposed to a student that is simply able to summarize the key concepts that were presented in the class (Chesebro, 2003). Clarity is often not achieved when the teacher is unable to present the material in a way that is tangible for the students (Simonds, 1997).

Furthermore, if the teacher is unable to adequately respond to students' questions on the material, communication can become muddied. The questions posed by students are often a means to perform a "clarity check" to ensure understanding has occurred (Civikly, 1992). If an instructor is unable to package information in a way that students find tangible, their clarity will be negatively impacted. The former is an uncommon occurrence since the teacher should theoretically be a professional on the material they are presenting (Simonds, 1995). However, if the teacher is presenting complicated

16

material to their class and has a moment where they get lost in their own content and deliver improper instructions, their clarity will suffer. The teacher will then have to work to rectify their mistake and reestablish clarity with the corrected material. The more common issue teachers have when they are attempting to achieve clarity is the inability to package their material in a way that is tangible for their students (Civikly, 1992). As previously mentioned, teachers are professionals when it comes to the material they are presenting. At times it may slip the professional's mind that the material they are presenting is not as simple to dissect to the untrained eye (Frey, Leonard, & Beatty, 1975). This can cause a teacher to cover material in a fashion that is too fast for students to keep up with. If a clarity check does not occur immediately, the material may become unclear to students. Clarity has commonly been linked to student satisfaction, achievement, and student's perception of the teacher caring (Frey et al., 1975; Hines, Cruickshank, & Kennedy, 1985; Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007). Similar to immediacy, clarity can help develop or deteriorate the relationship between a student and teacher. Maintaining a high level of clarity is necessary to effectively teach in the classroom setting.

The use of slang in the classroom has the potential to enhance or threaten a teacher's clarity. Positive slang can be used for affirmation when a student is responding to a teacher's question (Mazer, 2006). The teacher may respond to a correct answer with an "awesome!" Whereas an incorrect answer may be met with a "cool, you are on the right track, but not quite!" However, the application of slang language alongside the lesson's core content is bound to occur if a teacher is trying to use positive slang in a way

17

that feels genuine and not forced. Since this study will take place with students watching a video, as opposed to sitting in an actual classroom where they can interact with the teacher, affirmation is not widely included in the lesson's script. As a result, the slang is mostly used throughout the course of the teacher attempting to communicate the core ideas to their students. While the students may feel closer to their teachers, this does not inherently suggest clarity is enhanced (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). Since slang language is a type of coded language that evolves from generation to generation, a teacher using such a technique runs the risk of being misinterpreted. Something that means one thing to the teacher may mean something entirely different to the student. While these misinterpretations will mostly be minor, the risk for clarity to be muddied is ever-present. Furthermore, negative slang may turn off students to the teacher as a whole, causing them to tune out and become less invested in the class (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). On the other hand, if the slang language lacks overbearing misinterpretations, it may cause students to get more involved in the class by asking questions. This heightened level of student participation should greatly increase clarity. As a result, the following hypothesis is posited:

H_2: Students will report higher levels of clarity with professors that use positive slang than professors who use negative slang or neutral language.

Once age is taken into account, teacher clarity is presented with a whole different set of potential issues. A young GTA will strive to become a credible source for the students to seek information from throughout the semester. While their young age and use of positive slang may make them more approachable, it could easily backfire. Teachers are

18

bound to make mistakes while extemporaneously speaking in front of a group of students (Christophel, 1990). By the time students reach the collegiate level they have probably experienced occurrences where a teacher misspeaks. While it is typically easy to recover from such face threatening occurrences, GTAs may have a more difficult time. Being younger, and potentially less credible on the subject than a professor, a minor slip up could throw off the vibe of the entire lesson. Slang is naturally a freer flowing type of language than the jargon-laden form implemented by traditional professor. When a student hears a professor make a mistake during a lecture, they may not even notice an issue as a result of their efforts to simply keep up with what is being said. However, if the class is being led by a GTA using slang language, this mistake may appear more evident. As a result, the teacher can confuse their class and struggle to recover.

GTAs are typically introduced to the material they will be teaching to students through some sort of training hosted by the school's faculty (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998). These training sessions also serve as a way for the faculty to provide teaching pedagogy for a group consisting of young and potentially inexperienced educators. This is not to say that GTAs are unskilled instructors. Rather, they lack the professional development as an educator. Professors have taught for a number of years that allow them to develop a teaching skillset, equipping them to respond to issues as they arise in the class. GTAs may not have such a skillset at their disposal. A focus for a young GTA is to ensure they are effectively relaying the information to their students and achieving clarity (Osam & Balbay, 2004). If a GTA begins to implement positive slang as a language mode in their classroom, there is no current research that suggests this will be detrimental to their

19

ability to present material clearly (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). However, if the students begin to question the instructor based upon the language mode being utilized in the classroom, clarity may be threatened. The language the GTA is using may distract students, causing them to get hung up on the verbiage being used in the classroom as opposed to the actual content being presented. Thus, the research question is posed:

RQ2: Do students' perceptions of the teacher's clarity differ based on the age of the instructor using slang in the classroom?

Classroom climate. A classroom climate is the environment crafted by the students and instructor throughout the duration of the class (Gokcora, 1989). The setting a message is sent and received in can greatly impact how it is interpreted. Thus, researchers and teachers alike have devoted time to developing an understanding of the dynamics of classroom climate. No two classes have identical climates because variables such as the time of day, number of students, as well as the personalities of the students and instructor all go in to developing the climate (McBride & Wahl, 2005). Obviously the instructor plays a large role in the development of the climate of the classroom (Hays, 1970). The instructor's choice of language, apparel, rules, and many other variables establish the foundation for how a climate will develop. A powerful tool instructors have at their disposal for influencing climate is self-disclosure (Hays, 1970). While it should be limited, instructors who are able to bring "part of themselves" to the class create a climate that is open and friendly. However, too much self-disclosure runs the risk of forging inappropriate relationships with students who know too much about the instructor's personal life. The students also significantly influence classroom climate (Dwyer,

20

Bingham, Carlson, Prisbell, Cruz, & Fus, 2004). Preexisting relationships amongst students may relieve and stir up tension. The energy students bring to class discussions can affect how often students speak up in class. One modern factor that goes into constructing a classroom's climate is the degree of mediated use of technology. Some faculty allow students to have laptops, and even cell phones, out at all times in order to enhance their educational experience. On the other hand, some faculty strictly prohibit these devices and even threaten punishment at sight of their involvement. While arguments can be made as to which approach is ultimately more beneficial, that ventures beyond the realm of this study. The key takeaway is that teachers have the power to construct a classroom climate, and that the climate is related to a student's ability to learn and engage with the materials presented.

Since GTAs are perceived differently than the average professor, their classroom climate is inherently unique (DeNeef, 2002). The degree of the difference is dependent on how keen the students are on the age difference and how the GTA handles them. For example, the researcher immediately discloses to all classes that he teaches that is GTA taking classes at the university and that they should not call him "Dr. Heyne." This offers the opportunity for the teacher to create an honest climate through self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is noted as one of the strongest and most effective means of fostering a positive classroom climate (Black & Kaplan, 1997). As noted previously, too much self-disclosure, especially as a GTA, may backfire for the teacher. The amount of self-disclosure that is appropriate for the class will be dependent on the climate itself. Thus,

21

the instructor will use their best judgment to decide when it is and is not appropriate to disclose to their students.

As a result, slang can either threaten or enhance the classroom's climate. If the students perceive the classroom to be a safe place to self-disclose, and for the teacher to be someone they can relate to and talk to, they may begin abusing the right to talk about their personal lives. While some personal narratives are harmless for an instructor to know about, talking about weekend parties, binge drinking, drug use, or any other aspect of their college lives can drastically alter the classroom climate (Fein, 2011). On the other hand, students who feel comfortable disclosing to their instructor and peers are provided a new outlet to engage in the class' discussion. As slang impacts the teacher's immediacy, the climate of the classroom begins to shift in a way that fosters communication. If done in a tasteful manner, education can be greatly enhanced (Gokcora, 1989). Considering the importance of classroom climate in regards to this research, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H3: Students will rate a professor that uses positive slang to have a more supportive classroom climate than a professor that uses negative slang or neutral language.

GTAs also carefully craft their classroom climates to fit their strengths as an instructor (Osam & Balbay, 2004). This includes a varying degree of self-disclosure, especially in regards to age and experience with teaching. Using positive slang to affirm a student's participation (i.e. "Awesome!" or "Sweet!") encourages students to continue talking and exploring the material they are being presented. However, if students choose

22

to interpret the instructor's language coming from a younger GTA as immature and inappropriate for the classroom setting, the classroom's climate will be negatively impacted (Nyquist & Sprague, 1998). Still, it is unclear as to whether or not slang is detrimental to younger GTAs' classroom's climate. As a result, the researcher posits the following research question:

RQ3: Does the age of an instructor using slang in the classroom influence students' perceptions of classroom climate?

Professionalism. Maintaining an air of professionalism is a key part of being a successful teacher (Simonds, 1997). Numerous elements go in to measuring one's degrees of professionalism. These include, but are not limited to, the individual's dress, appearance, attitude, body language, drive, and sense of humor (Butler, 1996). These elements all influence students' perception of the instructor and will undoubtedly vary from student to student. Thus, the instructor's goal is typically to develop a level of professionalism that is both approachable and appropriate for the class they are teaching (DeNeef, 2002). For the purpose of this study, elements such as dress and appearance will be consistent from professor to GTA in order to reduce potential bias. This will ensure that these elements are not negative inhibitors for the teacher's measurement of professionalism. All other elements (i.e., attire, body language, etc.) will be measured by the scales, but only for the purpose of ensuring students perceived them to be as similar as possible between professors and GTAs.

While positive slang has proven to yield benefits within the classroom, studies have not delved into the potential drawbacks of coding the teacher's language in relation

23

to their degree of professionalism (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). Many of the issues mentioned in previous sections of this research come back to the idea of the teacher (specifically the GTA) losing face with their students (Osam & Balbay, 2004). Since slang brings the teacher down to the "student's level" in regards to language, they do run the risk of hurting their own professionalism (Ayers, 1989).

Unlike the other variables mentioned thus far, a student's perception of an instructor's professionalism can be threatened by any variation of slang (Fein, 2011). If a student finds the language the instructor is using to be inappropriate for the classroom setting, he or she could potentially adjust the way he or she perceive that instructor. While positive slang is meant to build up a positive rapport with student by giving them a high level of affirmation, this strategy is not guaranteed to work with every student (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). While this may not immediately lead to a negative impact within the classroom, it could have a long term effect (Ayers, 1990). If a student perceives their teacher to be unprofessional and is later given a poor grade on an assignment, they may lash back. For example, a student may question the teacher's ability to properly grade said assignment. While this is a specific case, the rapport instructors are trying to build with their students is often diminished or completely lost when such conflict arises (Butler, 1996). This is just one of many opportunities in which a teacher's lack of professionalism could hurt his or her ability to teach.

Professionalism is not an all or nothing situation. It may be acceptable for a teacher to sacrifice some level of professionalism in order to better relate to their students if it enhances the learning experience. The reason this can become a slippery slope goes

24

back to inherent flaws of being a GTA. Since the GTA is much younger than the average university professor, he or she will be inherently perceived as less professional. If slang proves to decrease a teacher's professionalism, even if ever so slightly, this could prove to be detrimental to a GTA. This adverse effect could also impact the professor's degree of professionalism as well, since they are not immune to the judgments of their students. Communication research regarding professionalism and how it relates to the language an instructor implements is currently quite limited. To attempt to fill this gap, the following research questions were posed:

RQ4: Do students' perceptions of a professor's professionalism differ when using positive slang, negative slang, and neutral language?

RQ5: Do students' perceptions of a GTA's professionalism differ when using positive slang, negative slang, and neutral language?

Instructor credibility. A teacher's credibility can be divided up into three dimensions: competence, character, and caring (McCroskey, 1994). Competence is simply the knowledge the instructor possesses and how they are able to relay it to their students. Character relates to and the receiver's judgment of the trustworthiness of the sender. Instructors who are caring are perceived as concerned and sensitive with their students' best interest at heart (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). When these three dimensions intersect, they make up a teacher's overall credibility. For the purpose of this study, competence and character will be measured by the survey items. Goodwill, or caring, will be excluded because of the lack of longevity and the nature of the design of the research. Watching a short video lesson does not give participants the adequate opportunity to

measure an instructor's goodwill. Competence and character, on the other hand, can be measured from a brief demonstration. Research shows that an increase in a teacher's credibility is partially related to a host of important student learning outcomes (Beatty & Zahn, 1990; Butner, 2004; Tantleff-Dunn, Dunn, & Gokee, 2002; Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Wheeless, 1974, 1975).

Language is a common device in which teachers can bolster their credibility (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011). Language can package a message in a way that is more tangible for the students. While the students may not consciously realize what is occurring at the time, a teacher's ability to create clear and concise messages for a class in a way that is simple enough for them to immediately pick up on is highly regarded (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). This shows that an instructor is competent on the subject matter. Furthermore, it demonstrates a level of caring as well. Language allows the instructor to engage with their students and ensure they receive the message.

In regard to character, slang can act as a double edged sword. While the mode of language may be favored by the students because it is easier to digest, it may also be seen as more immature or juvenile (Fein, 2011). The latter could serve as a threatening force when discussing the teacher's credibility. However, the researcher believes that positive slang will avoid any potential negative drawbacks. Positive slang can maintain the inherent credibility of being the student's teacher, while further bolstering credibility by being more relatable. A teacher using negative slang may turn off their students and greatly hurt their credibility as a whole. This leads to the final hypothesis:

26

H₄: Students will perceive a professor that uses positive slang as more credible than a professor who uses negative slang or neutral language.

Without the title of being a university professor, GTAs are left to establish credibility largely based on students' perceptions character and caring (Osam & Balbay, 2004). This is not to say that GTAs lack competence; rather, it suggests that professors have an inherent air of competence due to their standing as faculty at a university. GTAs are devoid of this title and establish competence throughout the course of the semester (DeNeef, 2002). Positive slang should not inhibit students' perceptions of character and caring. However, its impact on competence could be larger than that of the impact made upon a professor. Thus, the final research question is posed:

RQ₆: Do students' perceptions of credibility differ based on the age of the instructor using slang in the classroom?

Summary and Research Objectives

Even after Mazer and Hunt's (2008b) effort to include instructor's use of positive slang to the communication discipline, it remains largely under-investigated. This is an area worthy of additional study especially considering how communication accommodation theory emphasizes social identity as a key component to establish when forging a relationship (Giles, 1973). Eble's (1996) definition of slang highlights its ability to reinforce social identity through the use of informal words and phrases. Mazer's (2006) focus on positive slang has expanded the relatively small library of research involving slang (Cooper, 2001; Hummon, 1994; Nunnally, 2001) and expanded the scope of research to some degree. However, current research has lumped traditional GTAs and

professors in the same power level, assuming that the use of slang will have similar effects for both.

A professor moving towards a stigmatized form of communication may be more drastic than a traditional GTA doing the same. Communication accommodation theory suggests that the language gap between two individuals could partly correlate to their age difference (Giles, 1973). If a student perceives a traditional GTA to be less professional, or appropriate, than a professor, there is less downwards convergence taking place when the GTA uses slang. Negative slang is introduced to the research model to represent a wider selection of slang terms (Kiesling, 2004; Stowell, 1992). Eble (1996) outlined an academic understanding of slang that does not imply that all students share the same understanding of slang due to the stigma surrounding its connotative variations. This introduces two new communicator styles to Norton's (1983) advancements. The instructor using positive slang creates a style based lowering professional expectations in order to relate to their audience. The instructor using negative slang creates a similar style, but sacrifices professionalism in a manner that might be interpreted as off-putting, using verbal aggression, curse words, and other terms not traditionally used in a professional setting.

Mazer (2006) originally examined how "positive slang effected student motivation, affective learning, and perceptions of teacher credibility" (p. 36). This study adds teacher immediacy, clarity, and professionalism as variables because the issue of power emerges when comparing to a traditional GTA and a professor. By adding these variables, this study explores differences in how students react to the instructor if they

28

were to actually take a class with them, even though they are simply watching a video online. Frymier and Thompson (1992) suggested that teachers use of affinity-seeking strategies can positively or negatively impact students' perceptions of their credibility. It is acceptable for an instructor to want their students to like them; however, if they make their efforts too obvious to students, it could potentially backfire on them. Since students are likely to pick up on the fact that the instructor is using slang (which will be measured in the results of this study) they may mark slang off as too extreme of an affinity-seeking strategy. This study seeks to measure the consistency of slang as a viable communicator style.

The importance of this research is summarized by Richmond (1990) who asserts that when educating, the instructors' opinion of their students is not critical; it is the students' opinion of the instructor. Pulling from communication accommodation theory (Giles, 1973) and the foundation for research on positive slang in the classroom (Mazer, 2006; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a) this research examines scholarship relating to slang in the classroom and how it relates to teacher immediacy, clarity, classroom climate, professionalism, and teacher credibility.

This chapter provided a foundation for this thesis by reviewing literature on positive and negative slang, slang as a linguistic bridge, communication accommodation theory, and teacher communicator style. The next chapter presents the methodology for this thesis.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

This chapter covers the methodology for this thesis. Content is divided in several sections including a brief description of the participants, the procedures followed to conduct this study, and an overview of measures and data analysis.

Participants

In all, the sample consisted of 231 participants. Specifically, 153 participants were members of the experimental group and 78 participants were members of the control group. Participants were those who responded to a survey in a large Midwestern university's research pool. The aforementioned communication course is required of all students at the university. As a result, the participants represented various academic disciplines. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 50 years of age with an average of 20.45. In total, 60.7% of the participants were female and 33.9% were male. The sample consisted of 35.1% first year students. Nearly 73.2% of participants indicated they were Caucasian, 6.7% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.9% were African American, 4.6% were Latino/Latina, 2.1% were Bi-Racial or Mixed, 1.3% were other, and .4% were Native American.

Research Design and Procedures

All procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Videos used were created in order to simulate the use of slang in the classroom. In the following section, the experimental study is described.

Experimental Study

To investigate the hypotheses and research questions posed in this study, a quantitative survey was conducted through a secure web-based software program called SelectSurvey. Participants were recruited through the university's online research pool. Some instructors provided extra credit to student who participated in the research while others did not. Those who rewarded students extra credit for participating in this study made students aware that they could complete an alternative assignment (as opposed to participating) if they pleased. Responses were based upon a brief video participants watched at the beginning of the study. Through the use of a random number generator, participants were assigned to one of the experimental conditions or the control condition. Participants were made aware that the study was voluntary and their responses would not affect their individual class standing, and that their responses would remain anonymous. The researcher obtained informed consent from the research participants by having them read an informed consent passage, which they were instructed to keep for their records (see Appendix A).

Participants in the control group viewed a video of a GTA or professor presenting a classroom lecture on the basic course using "normal" language. No slang was used

31

during this lecture. Throughout the presentation, the speaker used professional speech (i.e., speech free of grammatical errors or shortcuts).

Participants in the experimental groups viewed a video with the same GTA or professor using positive or negative slang while lecturing on the same topic. Language used in these videos included terms like "sweet" or "shitty" as mentioned previously in the study. In total, there were six possible groups a student could be put into with six different videos that could be watched. Grouping was completely random and every student answered the same survey after watching the video they were assigned to.

The GTA selected was a 24 year old male who had three semesters of experience teaching in a college classroom. The professor was a 47 year old male who had 48 semesters of experience teaching in a college classroom. They were selected to be the instructors based on convenience.

After the participants in each condition watched the video, they completed the survey (Appendix B). The survey included scales to measure the participant's perception of the teacher's immediacy, credibility, clarity, classroom climate, and professionalism. Participants were also asked to provide individual demographic information.

Measures

The survey items were borrowed from preexisting scales for teacher immediacy, clarity, classroom climate, and credibility, as well as an original scale for professionalism. The survey item pool was constructed through a comprehensive literature review and evaluation of the possible variables that will be affected by slang in the classroom. The survey items were arranged on a 7-point Likert-type scale, asking

32

participants their level of agreement with the items, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) as well as some survey items that provide two opposing terms and ask participants to rate which term applies better to the teacher they just watched.

Instructor Immediacy

In section one of the research questionnaire, teacher immediacy was operationalized using O'Sullivan, Lippert, and Hunt's (2004) mediated immediacy scale (questions 1 to 13 on the research questionnaire). Participants responded to a 7-point scale. Two central statements were asserted with items provided to measure the participant's feelings towards that statement. The first was "In your opinion, the teaching style of this instructor is very immediate." The following bipolar responses were: 1) Agree/Disagree; 2) False/True; 3) Incorrect/Correct; 4) Wrong/Right, 5) Yes/No. Items one and five were reverse coded. The second statement was "Please select the number that corresponds to the word that best describes the teaching style of your instructor." The following bipolar responses were: 6) Immediate/Not Immediate; 7) Cold/Warm; 8) Unfriendly/Friendly; 9) Close/Distant. Items six and nine were reverse coded. Participants were instructed to fill in the circle that best fit their perception of the GTA or professor. In this study, O'Sullivan, Lippert, and Hunt's (2004) measure of mediated immediacy was found to have an alpha reliability of .90.

Instructor Clarity

In section two, clarity was operationalized using Chesebro and McCroskey's (1998) measure of teacher clarity (questions 14 to 25 on the research questionnaire). Participants responded to a series of seven-point scales by selecting the number that

33

represented their feelings of watching the instructor in the video. Some sample items included: "The teacher clearly defines major concepts" and "The teacher's objectives for the course are clear" (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998). Several items were reverse coded to reduce participant response bias. In this study, Chesebro and McCroskey's (1998) measure of teacher clarity was found to have an alpha reliability of .90.

Classroom Climate

In section three, classroom climate was operationalized using Gokcora's (1989) measure of classroom climate (question 26 to 31 on research questionnaire). Participants were asked to complete a series of seven-point differential scales reflecting upon the video's content to imagine how comfortable they would be as a student in that classroom (uncomfortable/comfortable), their willingness to participate (encouraged/discouraged; relaxed/tense; tight/loose), and the attitude they would have in the class (dull/exciting). Participants responded to a series of 7-point scales by selecting the number that represented their feelings of watching the instructor in the video. No items were reverse coded. In this study, Gokcora's (1998) measure of classroom climate was found to have an alpha reliability of .94.

Professionalism

In section four, professionalism was operationalized using a unique scale designed by the researcher specifically for the purpose of this study to measure professionalism (questions 32 to 36 on the research questionnaire). Participants were asked to complete a series of 7-point scales reflecting upon their perception of the GTA or professor in a professional setting. The focus of the items was the language the

34

instructor used (offensive/not offensive) and their dress (appropriate/ not appropriate). Participants responded to a series of seven-point scales by selecting the number that represented their feelings of watching the instructor in the video. Both the GTA and professor wore similar outfits to ensure there was consistency amongst responses. A few items were reverse coded in order to reduce participant response bias. In this study the researcher's measure of professionalism was found to have an alpha reliability of .87.

Instructor Credibility

In section five, credibility was operationalized using McCroskey and Young's (1981) measure for teacher credibility (questions 37 to 45 on the research questionnaire). Participants were asked to complete a series of seven-point, semantic differential scales. The bipolar scales used to measure credibility consisted of the following items: 1) intelligent/unintelligent; 2) untrained/trained; 3) expert/inexpert; 4) uninformed/informed; 5) competent/incompetent; 6) stupide/bright; 7) sinful/virtuous; 8) dishonest/honest. Participants responded to a series of seven-point scales by filling in the circle that represented their feelings of watching the instructor in the video. In this study the estimated alpha reliability estimate for each subscale of credibility was .85 for competence and .81 for character. The overall reliability estimate for the credibility measure was .89.

Manipulation

For the experimental study, six videos were created. Three featured a professor engaging in either positive slang, negative slang, or professional language. The other three feature a GTA engaging in either positive slang, negative slang, or professional

35

language. Both videos engaging in professional language serve as the control group, while the four slang videos serve as the experimental groups.

Description of Professor

The professor was a 47 year-old male communication teacher and scholar with a doctoral degree in instructional communication and 24 years of university teaching experience. The professor was instructed to limit his facial expressions and gestures during the lecture in order to best mirror his GTA counterpart. Attire and physical actions were kept close to identical across the course of all six videos.

Description of GTA

The GTA was a 23 year-old male communication teacher and scholar studying to get his master's degree in communication and has one and a half years or university teaching experience. The GTA was instructed to limit his facial expressions and gestures during the lecture in order to best mirror his GTA counterpart. Attire and physical actions were kept close to identical across the course of all six videos.

Videos

In the control group video, either the GTA or professor presented a classroom lecture on group conflict (see Appendix B for a copy of the script). In this version, the instructors utilized professional speech (i.e., speech with no grammatical errors or swear works). This version of the video was shown to participants randomly selected to be in the control group. In the experimental video, the same GTA or professor presented the same lecture on the same topic. However, the instructors utilized either positive or

36

negative slang throughout the presentation. This video was shared with the four experimental groups (see Appendix C and D for a copy of those scripts).

During the making of the videos, a video technician filmed at an angle to capture a "shoulder shot" (mid-chest and up) of the GTA and professor in order to limit the gestures and physical ticks that the participants would be able to see. Both instructors read the script from a teleprompter to provide consistency in word usage for all three conditions. After recording, the researcher watched the videos to make sure the emphasis was being put on the instructor's words, not the way they acted. The key difference between the three conditions was the inclusion of positive or negative slang. Facial expressions, rate, tone of voice, and head movements were all carefully inspected to ensure they were not distracting for the participants.

Manipulation Check

In order to assess the effectiveness of the manipulation of the independent variables (i.e., positive, negative, and neutral slang), participants were asked to respond to the following items on the research questionnaire: "The instructor in this video used slang," "The instructor in this video used positive slang," "The instructor in this video used negative slang" (Questions 46, 47, and 48 on the research questionnaire). Participants indicated their response on a five-point Likert scale with items ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

www.manaraa.com

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

A 2x3 MANOVA with two levels of apparent age/experience (GTA and professor) and three levels of slang (positive, negative, and neutral) was run to test for the hypotheses and research questions advanced in this study. The MANOVA compared students' perceptions of professors and GTAs using positive and negative slang in regard to immediacy, clarity, classroom climate, professionalism, and credibility. Three separate ANOVAs were run to test the manipulation check. Participants were asked to report if the instructor they watched used slang, positive slang, and/or negative slang. Alpha was set at .05.

This chapter enclosed the methodology for this thesis. Specifically, the procedures, measurement, manipulation, and data analysis procedures were discussed. The next chapter presents the results of the project.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

This chapter summarize the results of this thesis. First, the results of the

manipulation check are presented. Next, the results of the quantitative measurements are

presented in relation to the hypotheses and research questions guiding this study.

Manipulation Check

Three separate ANOVA procedures were calculated to determine whether or not

the manipulation of teacher slang cues were valid. The first ANOVA tested for mean

differences in participants' perception of the instructor's use of slang between the various

groups with the following question: "The instructor in the video used slang" (question 46

on the research questionnaire). The ANOVA for the slang manipulation check was

significant, $F(2, 227) = 31.69$, $p < .01$. The second ANOVA tested for mean differences

in participants' perception of the instructor's use of positive slang between the groups

with the following question: "The instructor in the video used positive slang" (question

47 on the research questionnaire). The ANOVA for the slang manipulation check was

significant, $F(2, 228) = 3.47$, $p = .33$. The third ANOVA tested for mean differences in

participants' perception of the instructor's use of negative slang between the various

groups with the final question: "The instructor in the video used negative slang"

(question 48 on the research questionnaire). The ANOVA for the slang manipulation

check was significant, $F(2, 228) = 30.93$, $p < .01$. Taken together, the results of the

ANOVAs indicate the manipulation of slang in this research project was successful.

www.manaraa.com

Across the board, participants in the slang condition reported higher levels of slang use. Participants in the negative slang condition for the GTA and professor reported the highest levels of slang use. Descriptive statistics for these variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Manipulation Checks (Experimental Group X Slang Manipulation Check Question)

	Instructor Used Slang			Instructor Used Positive Slang			Instructor Used Negative Slang		
	M	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Positive Slang	2.73a	1.25	75	3.29b	1.01	75	2.01c	.85	75
Negative Slang	3.62a	1.04	77	2.95	.94	78	3.12cd	1.01	78
Neutral	2.24a	.98	78	2.88b	1.01	78	2.19d	.88	78

Note. Means with the same subscripts in columns are statistically different, *p* < .05.

To test the hypotheses and answer the research questions, a 2x3 MANOVA was calculated. The Box M Test of Equality of Covariance was insignificant indicating that there were no significant differences between the covariance matrices, Box M = 92.50, $F(75, 41002.52) = 1.14$, $p = .19$. The multivariate test demonstrated significant main effects for the age, Wilks $\lambda = .94$, $F(5, 177) = 2.26$, $p = .51$, $\eta^2 = .06$, and slang variables, Wilks $\lambda = .86$, $F(10, 354) = 2.82$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .07$. A significant interaction effect was not observed, Wilks $\lambda = .97$, $F(10, 354) = .61$, $p = .81$, $\eta^2 = .02$.

40

Instructor Immediacy

Hypothesis one predicted that participants watching an instructor using positive slang would report higher levels of instructor immediacy compared to participants exposed to an instructor not using positive slang. The results do not support this hypothesis. A univariate ANOVA indicated no significant differences between participants' report of immediacy between professors using positive, negative, and no slang, $F(2,181) = .20$, $p = .82$, $\eta^2 = .002$. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Immediacy

	Positive Slang			Negative Slang			Neutral		
Age	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
GTA	4.75	1.02	35	4.57	1.19	31	4.62	.92	41
Professor	4.35	1.42	21	4.31	.95	32	4.37	.91	27

Research question one examined whether or not the age of the instructor would influence participants' perceptions of immediacy. A univariate ANOVA indicated a significant difference between the groups on the immediacy variable, $F(1,181) = 4.57$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Across all of the slang conditions, participants perceived the GTA ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.03$) as more immediate than the professor ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.07$).

Instructor Clarity

Hypothesis two predicted that participants watching an instructor using positive slang would report a higher level of clarity than participants watching an instructor using negative or no slang. The results do not support this hypothesis. Specifically, a univariate

41

ANOVA indicated no significant differences between the groups on the clarity variable, $F(2,181) = .62$, $p = .54$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Descriptive statistics for clarity are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Instructor Clarity

	Positive Slang			Negative Slang			Neutral		
Age	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
GTA	2.80	.71	35	2.77	.62	31	2.90	.58	41
Professor	2.76	.74	21	2.60	.62	32	2.72	.72	27

Research question two examined whether or not age of the instructor in the video influenced participants' perceptions of instructor clarity. A univariate ANOVA indicated no difference between the groups on the clarity variable, $F(1,181) = 1.86$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$.

Classroom Climate

Hypothesis three predicted that participants watching an instructor using positive slang would report a more supportive classroom climate than participants who watched an instructor using negative or no slang. An univariate ANOVA indicated no significant differences between the groups on the measure of classroom climate, $F(2,181) = .53$, $p = .59$, $\eta^2 = .01$. See Table 4 for descriptive statistics.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Classroom Climate

	Positive Slang			Negative Slang			Neutral		
Age	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
GTA	5.11	1.29	35	4.67	1.46	31	4.72	1.42	41
Professor	4.61	1.76	21	4.54	1.11	32	4.66	1.27	27

Research question three sought to investigate if age would influence participants' perceptions of classroom climate. A univariate ANOVA indicated no significant difference between the groups in regards to the classroom climate variable, $F(1,181) = 1.24$, $p > .05$ $\eta^2 = .03$.

Instructor Professionalism

The fourth research question sought to determine if there was a significant difference between the groups on a measure of professionalism based on the instructor's use of slang. A univariate ANOVA indicated significant differences between participants' report of professionalism between professors using positive, negative, and no slang, $F(2,181) = 10.04$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Specifically, post hoc tests revealed participants evaluated the instructor using positive ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.15$, $n = 56$) and neutral slang ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.29$, $n = 68$) as more professional than the instructor using negative slang ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.36$, $n = 63$). Descriptive statistics for the professionalism variable are presented in Table 5.

43

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Professionalism

	Positive Slang			Negative Slang			Neutral		
Age	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
GTA	5.72	1.23	35	4.86	1.46	31	5.70	1.36	41
Professor	6.20	.95	21	5.08	1.28	32	5.83	1.20	27

Similarly, the fifth research question sought to find out if there was a significant difference between the groups on the professional variable based on the age of the instructor. A univariate ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference between the groups, $F(1,181) = 2.04$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$.

Instructor Credibility

Hypothesis four posited that participants would perceive the professor who used positive slang at as more credible compared to the professor using negative or no slang. The results do not support this hypothesis. An univariate ANOVA indicated no significant differences between the groups on the measure of credibility, $F(2,181) = 2.05$, $p = .13$, $\eta^2 = .02$. See Table 7 for descriptive statistics.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Credibility

	Positive Slang			Negative Slang			Neutral		
Age	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
GTA	5.22	.89	35	5.02	1.08	31	5.09	.90	41
Professor	5.33	.98	21	4.92	.68	32	4.88	.91	27

44

Research question six examined if age influenced participants' perceptions of instructor credibility. A univariate ANOVA indicated no significant difference between the groups on the instructor credibility measure, $F(1,181) = .24$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .00$.

This chapter presented the results of this thesis. The next chapter offers a discussion, addresses the limitations of the study, and recommends areas for future research.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Mazer's (2006) study of slang in the classroom stemmed from Hurt et al. (1978) composing the first book examining communication behavior in the classroom in relation to its impact on the growing institution of higher education. Despite Eble's (1996) clear definition of slang, it has still largely gone unaddressed in communication research. While there have been attempts to fill that gap in the extant literature (Eble, 1996; Martin et al., 1997; Mazer, 2006; Mazer & Hunt, 2008), there is still a significant amount of unexplored ground. When discussing effective and ineffective approaches to communication in the classroom, instructional slang traditionally falls on the former. As such, contributing to the body of literature regarding the use of slang in the classroom further cements it as a legitimate mode of communication.

This thesis examined instructors' use of positive and negative slang in the classroom, both from the perspective of the "traditional" professor and "traditional" GTA. For the purpose of limiting scope, a traditional professor was understood as a tenured instructor. On the other hand, a traditional GTA was a graduate student who was only a few years removed from being an undergraduate and under the age of 25. Employing an experimental design, this study examined the effects of an instructor's use of positive and negative slang on students' perceptions of immediacy, clarity, classroom climate, professionalism, and credibility.

46

In this chapter, a summary of the quantitative data is presented. In addition, pedagogical and theoretical implications are presented along with the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

Primary Quantitative Analysis

The hypotheses predicted participants exposed to a professor using positive slang would report higher levels of immediacy, clarity, classroom climate, and credibility than their counterparts exposed to negative slang. The variable of professionalism was addressed through two research questions due to a lack of literature on the subject matter in regards to communication in the classroom. Each hypothesis was followed up by a research question investigating if age played a part in the participants' perception of the instructor. Hypotheses one and two were not supported by the data as there was not a significant difference between reported teacher immediacy and clarity based on the instructor's mode of communication. However, hypothesis three was supported by the data. There was a significantly more supportive classroom climate reported when the instructor used positive slang. Similarly, hypothesis four was partially supported. The data revealed that when the instructor used positive slang or no slang he was perceived as more credible than the instructor using negative slang.

The follow up research questions for each hypothesis sought to determine if participants reported significantly different results based on the age of the instructor. For the first three research questions, there was no significant difference reported. The results between a professor and GTA remained consistent. However, the fourth research

47

question sought to find if there was a significant difference between the participants' perception of professionalism based on the mode of communication they use. The results revealed that when the professor used positive or no slang, the participants reported higher levels of professionalism. Further, the fifth research question considered age and found that participants still reported higher levels of professionalism for positive and no slang with the GTA. However, the GTA overall had slightly lower means than the professor.

These results support Mazer's (2006) original findings that there is no clear disadvantage to using slang as a form of communication in the classroom. Furthermore, there is only a slight difference between the reported perceptions of GTAs using slang, as opposed to professors. This might mean that participants did not perceive age as a variable in the study. The manipulation check revealed that participants were sensitive to the use of slang in the video. This suggests that while students clearly perceive slang being used, it may not significantly alter their perceptions of the instructor. Students might consider slang normal because they engage with it in some way on a day to day basis. Nonetheless, the quantitative findings presented in this thesis offer no apparent disadvantages for professors or GTAs using positive slang in the classroom.

The findings presented in this thesis have significant implications for both classroom pedagogy and communication theory. These implications are addressed in the following section.

Implications

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this thesis have significant implications for professors and GTAs alike. The results suggest that using slang in the classroom can be somewhat like walking a linguistic tight rope. Using slang helps instructors avoid falling into the pitfall of jargon-laden speech (Giles & Williams, 1992). However, an individual's feeling towards slang is unknown to the instructor (Eble, 1996). On one hand, the instructor is implementing a form of communication accommodation that has been proven to advantageous by this research. However, negative slang has reported inverse effects on classroom climate, professionalism, and credibility. Since teaching in the classroom setting is to some degree a form of impromptu speaking, an instructor utilizing instructional slang should be careful to maintain its positive nature. If an instructor slips into negative slang without realizing it, using some of the terms highlighted previously, she or he could do damage to the classroom environment and student learning outcomes. Instructors may also consider keeping students' cultures in mind when utilizing slang due to the stigma surrounding it. When first implementing positive slang, the instructor should pay attention to how all of their students are responding and adjust her or his communication style accordingly.

Slang is also not a one size fits all communication style. Giles (1973) highlighted several modes of communication and how implementation of such can cause ripple effects in a social setting. Since training instructors to use slang would be a difficult task, it should only be considered if the instructor is comfortable with such language. Part of

49

what makes slang appealing is how laid back users can appear when engaging in it (Eble, 1996). Possible tension in the classroom can be slightly eased if the instructor engages students in a relaxed manner. If an instructor is seen as "faking it" the students might catch on and can potentially be turned off by the instructor's discomfort with slang.

Positive slang should also not be considered a standalone variable in the equation of teaching. Students perceive an instructor's sex, culture, and assumed age along with a host of other variables. While this study attempted to account for age, there are still several variables that need to be studied in the future. As such, an instructor should use her or his best judgment when determining if slang would be appropriate for their classroom. Furthermore, positive slang is not necessarily a solution to a problem. While participants to this study reported more positive levels of classroom climate, professionalism, and teacher credibility, these results were similar to instructors using no slang. In fact, the results were only higher than instructors using negative slang. As a result, if an instructor is looking to boost students' perceptions of classroom climate, professionalism, or credibility, positive slang may not necessarily accomplish the task.

The results from this project clearly support prior research in regards to positive slang in the classroom. Cooper (2001) found that students were perceptive of slang being used in the classroom setting and were more comfortable as a result. Mazer (2006) further asserted that positive slang had no reportable disadvantages compared to other modes of communication. Other research found that students engaged with instructor's using positive and reported higher levels of immediacy (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). This thesis found that age would not diminish such results. Eble (1996) related the use of slang

50

to one's identity. The current research reinforces that if a young GTA or tenured professor alike feel comfortable using slang in their classroom, they are all the more empowered to do so.

However, not every instructor is savvy to slang. Since instructional slang has not been explored much in the realm of academia, despite how common it may be in the classroom, many educators may feel inclined to shy away from the practice. This in turns prevents them from developing their ability to effectively deploy slang while maintaining a professional composure. It is beyond the scope of this study to list off a slang dictionary. As a result, there are few tools at the disposal of an instructor who is interested in utilizing slang, but is not innately familiar with it.

Beyond the pedagogical implications, this thesis offers theoretical implications for scholars in the communication discipline.

Theoretical Implications

The implications of this study stretch well beyond the classroom and in to the communication field. To begin, similar to the Mazer (2006) study, the results of this thesis support the idea of positive slang functioning as upwards convergence in the classroom. While some scholars might argue that slang is stigmatized, it appears to be a language that students commonly perceive positively. Upwards convergence in relationship to Communication Accommodation Theory occurs when a traditional language is substituted for a more favorable way of speaking (Shepard et al., 2001). Since the results of this study suggest that students are able to detect and positively react to positive slang, there is no denying the instructor deploying it is capitalizing off of

51

upwards convergence. Whether the person using positive slang is a professor or GTA, students do not baulk at the idea of instructors utilizing a language more familiar to them.

This study also makes a strong case for continuing to forge a linguistic bridge between instructors and their students. Starting with the manipulation check, the results of this research suggest that students are receptive of the language their instructors are using. If an instructor is using jargon-laden language that the student is less familiar with, they may not be as receptive as they could be (Giles & Williams, 1992). Positive slang provides substitutes for the traditional jargon, allowing instructors to vary up their word choice. Negative slang might also accomplish this. However, it does so in a way that is more aggressive, and thus, riskier in the classroom setting. This demonstrates slang's potential importance in keeping students engaged. The environment fostered by tastefully accommodating one's language for another will undoubtedly yield positive results (Wolffe & Kelly, 2011). This assumes that in the process of accommodating, the accommodator does not accidently mock or offend the receiver's preferred method of communication.

While several of the hypotheses were not directly supported by the results of this study, the data suggest that positive slang has no clear disadvantages compared to using no slang. Mazer (2006) suggests that the use of slang to accomplish humor in the classroom can positively link to variables both discussed and not discussed in this paper. For example, lack of humor in the classroom can damage a student's motivation (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997).

52

Further investigation would better link instructional slang to the long term impacts it has in the classroom.

Practical Implications

An underlying assumption throughout educational slang research has been that the use of slang is unintentional (Mazer, 2006). In other words, the instructor is using slang because it is simply their inherent communicator style. However, what goes unaddressed is positive slang's effectiveness when it is being used strategically by an instructor. If an instructor has to deliberately decide to use slang with their students, it may come off a different way than the instructor who naturally speaks that way without putting any thought in to it. When going back to the idea of communication accommodation theory, it may be possible for an instructor to over-accommodate for their students. Slang could serve as a central point to uncover the effect of such accommodation.

Furthermore, this research showed no significant differences in the results between the GTA and professor. Professionalism was the only variable that yielded any significant results, and they were exclusively observed under the professor condition. This leads to a deceptively simple conclusion; there is no measurable difference between GTAs and professors using slang. Previous bodies of research have validated positive slang as a legitimate communicator style for the classroom (Mazer & Hunt, 2008b). This thesis sought to expand upon this notion by determining the advantages or disadvantages a GTA might encounter when deploying positive slang. The results show that students will react to a professor using positive slang the same as they will a GTA doing the same.

53

This means that the advantages of slang that have been highlighted throughout the course of this thesis, in regards to professors, cross apply to GTAs.

Limitations

While this study yielded intriguing results, it is not without limitations. First, the design of the study was limited in the fact that it only used quantitative measures. Previous studies, such as Mazer's (2006) initial ground work combined a qualitative component in order to identify specific reactions participants had to instructors using positive slang. While this study broadened the scope of instructional slang by including age as a variable, participants were only asked to watch a four-minute video and fill out a brief survey afterwards. By not engaging with participants, the researcher is unable to gauge how their perceptions would evolve over the course of a semester.

Previous research has found that instructional slang has no clear disadvantages compared to traditional instructional communication (Mazer, 2006). To add to that, age should not discourage an instructor from attempting to utilize slang in their classroom. Since participants were simply watching a video of the instructor teaching a single four-minute lesson, their reactions largely went undocumented besides what they reported on the survey. The minimal exposure participants had with the instructor may make measuring the reactions difficult. Attitudes can change through the course of a semester. Instructors may vary the degree to which slang is implemented based on the students' attitude towards them. If students are agreeable and comply with most of what the instructor dictates, positive slang might be used more freely to suggest the classroom is in a relaxed state. However, if students begin to act in ways that are inappropriate or

54

underperform, the instructor might limit slang in order to communicate that the students have damaged the relationship by not meeting the expectations of the class.

Participants' exposure to the instructor was the second limitation of this study. Several of the questions being posed on the survey asked for participants to judge their instructor based on if they were "Virtuous vs. Sinful" or "Approachable vs. Not Approachable." To ask participants to determine such based on a brief video makes answering such items a bit difficult. So much so that many participants responded with "4- Undecided" for a majority of the items that asked for such information. An improvement would have been to select several instructors who utilize positive or no slang in their classroom and give their students a similar survey midway through the semester and then again at the end. This would give the participants a chance to form a bond with the instructor and give more decisive answers to these rather ambiguous items. Similarly, the fact that goodwill, or caring, was not a part of the credibility scale limited the potential scope of these findings.

The scripts utilized in the videos were also somewhat problematic. Neither the professor nor GTA memorized the scripts prior to filming due to time constraints. Instead, they both read the script from a teleprompter. This limited eye contact with the camera (the instructor was always looking off into the distance) created what could have been interpreted as a somewhat "stiff" reading of the script. Some of the items on the survey asked if the instructor seemed at ease, or comfortable with the materials. If the instructors being filmed memorized the script, this could limit a bias from emerging.

55

Since the manipulation check yielded significant results, it can be concluded that students were able to recognize positive, negative slang, as well as neutral language.

Both the professor and the GTA were white, male instructors. They were selected simply based upon availability and relationship to this study. However, that does limit the generalizability of the findings. This study does not account for sex or race when addressing instructional slang in the classroom. Assuming students come into the classroom with a predetermined set of biases, it is impossible to conclude how they would react to sex or race using slang. This limitation was not addressed throughout the course of the study. In short, generalizability is not a byproduct of this research.

The final limitation of this thesis was the sample size. Due to an issue with the survey's functionality, participants were able to mark multiple answers for one item. Furthermore, they were allowed to move on in the study without answering each item. About midway through the study this error was corrected without modifying the survey's content. However, a large portion of the initial respondents was thrown out if they did not correctly fill out the survey. In order for each cell to detect a medium effect at a power of .80, they require at least 44 respondents. Cells in this study had as few as twenty-seven respondents in them. This could explain why many of the hypotheses were not supported. The mean's trend was potentially headed in the right direction in several cases. However, the sample size prevented the detection of a significant difference between groups.

Suggestions for Future Research

There are several directions future research can be taken based on the results of this thesis. To begin, Eble (1996) suggests that slang is closely associated with identity.

This study linked slang to the straight, white, male instructor. Future research should imitate this or Mazer's (2006) design and test slang's potency in the classroom with instructors of varying sex and race. This could further investigate the preconceived notions students may have about their instructors just by looking at them. Consistent results would suggest that sex and race have little to do with the language students expect their instructors to use. However, if the results were significantly varied, they could be representative of a larger underlying bias. Expanding the base of literature to that of slang and its relationship specifically to race would greatly expand its current academic understanding.

The experimental design of this study was a bit cookie cutter suggesting that slang could fairly be divided up as positive, negative, and no slang. Since negative slang was largely deemed as unnecessary and ineffective in the realm of education, future research can avoid it as a complication of the research and focus on varying degrees of positive slang. This study focused solely on positive slang as a means to reinforce positive ideas (see the positive slang script in Appendix C). Expanding upon what positive slang is, outlining more terms and phrases that can be used, and creating new subsections of such would greatly contribute to the current discussion regarding slang in the classroom.

Similar to having instructors with different racial backgrounds implement slang in the classroom, future research could look to how students coming from different walks of life view slang. Examining the students solely based on their race may yield bias results. However, a research design that attempt to gauge a student's relationship with slang before they engage with an instructor using such may offer an explanation as to why

57

some students prefer slang-using instructors more than others. Simply put, if students have a positive relationship with someone in their life who uses slang they could potentially view an instructor deploying such in a positive light. If they have a negative relationship with someone in their life who uses slang, it may cause them to feel tense towards that same instructor. If the student has no preexisting relationship with someone who uses slang, they may have trouble detecting its use to begin with.

Looking towards the instructors themselves would also serve as an appropriate lens for future research. Some instructors may be intimidated by the idea of using slang in front of students, while other might feel it come more naturally. Understanding the underlying reasons for why instructors feel this way may better guide who is fit to use instructional slang, or how to teach instructors the use of slang. Ethnographic methods could provide valuable insight into the mind of a professor or GTA using slang. What reactions they look for, their favorite catchphrases, could be accumulated and analyzed through such research. By doing such, research would have a better understanding as to why an instructor might feel more comfortable using slang as opposed to more traditional communications styles. A lens for such research could be communication apprehension. Perhaps an instructor desires to increase their immediacy through the use of slang in order to reduce the pressure of public speaking for their class. Branching the study of slang in the classroom to other areas of communication, such as apprehension, would further legitimize the importance of studying slang. Furthermore, it would enrich the understanding scholars have of "cool" communication.

58

Conclusion

Positive slang in the classroom could potentially be just as effective as any other means on instruction communication. Similar to other methods, it does have its risks. This study showed that when an instructor relies on negative slang, they begin to distance themselves from their students, damage the classroom environment, and hurt their own credibility. Furthermore, it would seem that younger educators are at an even greater risk of damaging such. However, if an instructor can correctly implement instructional slang into their classroom, they may better engage their students without the class realizing that the mode of communication has been shifted.

This study has expanded upon research regarding a unique brand of instructional communication (Mazer, 2006). Communication Accommodation Theory provided the platform for an investigation as to how the linguistic gap between instructors and students can be reduced (Shepard et al., 2001). Considering that slang has largely gone undiscussed in the academic field, this thesis seeks to further legitimize such. Every classroom creates a unique bond between the students and the teacher. Instructional slang is just one extra tool to ensure that the bond yields positive results.

59

REFERENCES

Alfonzetti, G. (1998). The conversational dimension in code-switching between Italian

and dialect in Sicily. In P. Auer, (Ed.), *Code-switching in conversation:*

Language, interaction and identity (pp. 180–211). London, UK: Routledge.

Ambrose, S. A., Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M. C., & Norman, M. K. (2010).

How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching. San

Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Andersen, J. F. (1979). Teacher immediacy as a predictor of teaching effectiveness. In D.

Nimmo (Ed.), *Communication yearbook 3* (pp. 543-559). New Brunswick, NJ:

Transaction Books.

Ayers, J., & Hopf, T. (1989). Visualization: Is it more than extra-attention?

Communication Education, 38, 1-5. doi: 10.1080/03634528909378735

Ayers, J., & Hopf, T. (1990). The long-term effect of visualization in the classroom: a

brief research report. *Communication Education, 39,* 75-78. doi:

10.1080/03634529009378788

Benner, P. (1984). *From novice to expert.* Menlo Park, CA: Addison Wesley.

Beatty, M. J., & Zahn, C. J. (1990). Are student ratings of communication instructors due

to "easy" grading practices?: An analysis of teacher credibility and student-

reported performance levels. *Communication Education, 39,* 275-292.

doi:10.1080/03634529009378809

60

Black, B., & Kaplan, M. (Eds.). (1997). *A guidebook for University of Michigan graduate student instructors* (6th ed.). University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: Center for Research on Learning and Teaching.

Butler, J. (1996). Professional development: Practice as text, reflection as process, and self as locus. *Australian Journal of Education*, *40*(3), 265–283. doi: 10.1177/000494419604000305

Buttner, E. H. (2004). How do we "dis" students?: A model of (dis)respectful business instructor behavior. *Journal of Management Education, 28*(3), 319-334. doi: 10.1177/1052562903252656

Chesebro, J. L. (2003). Effects of teacher clarity and nonverbal immediacy on student learning, receiver apprehension, and affect. *Communication Education*, *52*, 135-147. doi: 10.1080/03634520302471

Chesebro, J. L., & McCroskey, J. C. (1998). The relationship of teacher clarity and teacher immediacy with students' experiences of state receiver apprehension when listening to teachers. *Communication Quarterly, 46,* 446-456. doi: 10.1080/01463379809370114

Chesebro, J. L., & McCroskey, J. C. (2000). The relationship between student's reports of learning and their actual recall of lecture material: A validity test. *Communication Education, 49,* 297-301. doi: 10.1080/03634520009379217

Chesebro, J. L., & McCroskey, J. C. (2001). The relationship of teacher clarity and immediacy with student state receiver apprehension, affect, and cognitive learning. *Communication Education*, *50*, 5968. doi: 10.1080/03634520109379232

61

Chesebro, J. L., & Wanzer, M. B. (2006). Instructional message variables. In T. P.

    Mottet, V. P. Richmond, & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), *Handbook of instructional*

    communication: Rhetorical and relational perspectives (pp. 89-116). Boston:

    Allyn & Bacon.

Christensen, L. J., & Menzel, K. E. (1998). The linear relationship between student

    reports of teacher immediacy behaviors and perceptions of state motivation, and

    of cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning. *Communication Education*, *47*,

    82-90. doi: 10.1080/03634529809379112

Christophel, D. M. (1990). The relationships among teacher immediacy behaviors,

    student motivation, and learning. *Communication Education*, *39*, 323- 340. doi:

    10.1080/03634529009378813

Civikly, J. M. (1992). Clarity: Teachers and students making sense of instruction.

    Communication Education, 41, 138-152. doi: 10.1080/03634529209378876

Comadena, M. E., Hunt, S. K., & Simonds, C. J. (2007). The effects of teaching clarity,

    nonverbal immediacy, and caring on student motivation, affective- and cognitive

    learning: A research note. *Communication Research Reports, 24*(3), 241-248. doi:

    10.1080/08824090701446617

Cooper, P. J., & Simonds, C. J. (2003). *Communication for the classroom teacher* (7th

    ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Cooper, T. C. (2001). "Does it suck?" or "Is it for the birds?" Native speaker judgment of

    slang expressions. *American Speech, 76(1)*, 62-78. doi: 10.1215/00003128376162

DeNeef, A. L. (2002). *The Preparing Future Faculty program: What difference does it make?* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Dwyer, K. K., Bingham, S. G., Carlson, R. E., Prisbell, M., Cruz, A. M., & Fus, D. A. (2004). Communication and connectedness in the classroom: Development of the connected classroom climate inventory. *Communication Research Reports, 21*, 264-272. doi: 10.1080/08824090409359988

Eble, C. (1996). *Slang & sociability*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Fein, D. A. (2011). Promoting Vulgarity by Teaching Slang in the Classroom. *Rocky Mountain Review*, 97-101.

Fraser, B. J., & Fisher, D. L. (1982). Predicting students' outcomes from their perceptions of classroom psychosocial environment. *American Educational Research Journal*, *19*, 498–518. doi: 10.3102/00028312019004498

Frey, P., Leonard, D., & Beatty, W. (1975). Student ratings and instruction: Validation research. *American Educational Research Journal, 12,* 435-447. doi: 10.3102/00028312012004435

Frymier, A. (1994). A model of immediacy in the classroom. *Communication Quarterly, 42*, 133-144. doi: 10.1080/01463379409369922

Frymier, A. B., & Thompson, C. A. (1992). Perceived teacher affinity-seeking in relation to perceived teacher credibility. *Communication Education*, *41*, 388-399. doi: 10.1080/ 03634529209378900

Giles, H. (1973). Accent mobility: A model and some data. *Anthropological Linguistics*, *15*, 87–105.

Giles, H., & Williams, A. (1992). Accommodating hypercorrection: A communication model. *Language and Communication*, *12*, 343–356. doi: 10.1016/0271-5309(92)90021-Z

Goodboy, A., & Bolkan, S. (2011). Students' motives for communicating with instructors as a function of perceived instructor power use. *Communication Research Reports*, *28*, 109-114. doi: 10.1080/088240962011541368

Gorham, J. (1988). The relationship between verbal teacher immediacy behaviors and student learning. *Communication Education*, *37*, 40-53. doi: 10.1080/03634528809378702

Gokcora, D. (1989). *A descriptive study of communication and teaching strategies used by two types of international teaching assistants at the University of Minnesota, and their cultural perceptions of teaching and teachers*. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Conference on Training and Employment of Teaching Assistants, Seattle, WA.

Hays, E. R. (1970). Ego-threatening classroom communication: A factor analysis of student perceptions. *Speech Teacher, 19*, 43-48. doi: 10.1080/03634527009377791

Hines, C. V., Cruickshank, D. R., & Kennedy, J. J. (1985). Teacher clarity and its relationship to student achievement and satisfaction. *American Education Research Journal, 22,* 87-89. doi: 10.3102/00028312022001087

64

Hurt, H. T., Scott, M. D., & McCroskey, J. C. (1978). *Communication in the classroom.*
Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Hummon, D. M. (1994). College slang revisited: Language, culture, and undergraduate
life. *Journal of Higher Education, 65*, 75-98. doi: 10.2307/2943878

Jannedy, S., Poletto, R., & Weldon, T. L. (1994). *Language files* (6th ed.). Columbus,
OH: Ohio State University Press.

Javidi, M., Downs, V. C., & Nussbaum, J. F. (1988). A comparative analysis of teachers'
use of dramatic style behaviors at higher and secondary educational levels.
Communication Education, 37, 278-288. doi: 10.1080/03634528809378729

Kelley, D. H., & Gorham, J. (1988). Effects of immediacy on recall of information.
Communication Education, *37*, 198-207. doi:10.1080/03634528809378719

Kearney, P., Plax, T. G., Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (1984). Power in the
classroom IV: Alternatives to discipline. In R. Bostrom (Ed.), *Communication
Yearbook 8* (pp. 724-746). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Kearney, P., Plax, T. G., Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (1985). Power in the
classroom III: Teacher communication techniques and messages. *Communication
Education, 34*, 19-28. doi: 10.1080/03634528509378579

Kiesling, S. F. (2004). Dude. *American Speech, 79*, 281-305.

King, P. & Witt, P. (2009). Teacher immediacy, confidence testing, and the measurement
of cognitive learning. *Communication Education*, *58*, 11-123. doi:
10.1080/03634520802511233

Martin, M. M., Weber, K., & Burant, P. A. (1997, April). *Students' perceptions of a teacher's use of slang and verbal aggressiveness in a lecture: An experiment*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Eastern Communication Association, Baltimore, MD.

Mazer, J. P. (2006). *Cool communication in the classroom: Instructor use of positive slang and its effects on student motivation, affective learning, and perceptions of teacher credibility*. Unpublished master's thesis, Illinois State University, Normal, IL.

Mazer, J., & Hunt, S. (2008a). "Cool" communication in the classroom: A preliminary examination of student perception of instructor use of positive slang. *Qualitative research Reports in Communication*, *9*, 20-28. doi: 10.1080/17459430802400316

Mazer, J., & Hunt, S. (2008b). The effects of instructor use of positive and negative slang on student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate. *Communication Research Reports*, *25*, 44-55. doi: 10.1080/08824090701831792

McBride, M. C., & Wahl, S. T. (2005). ''To say or not to say?'' Teachers' management of privacy boundaries in the classroom. *Texas Speech Communication Journal*, *30*, 8-22.

McCroskey, J. C. (1994). Assessment of affect toward communication and affect toward instruction in communication. In S. Morreale & M. Brooks (Eds.), *1994 SCA summer conference proceedings and prepared remarks: Assessing college student competence in speech communication*. Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.

McCroskey, J. C., Sallinen, A., Fayer, J., Richmond, V. P., & Barraclough, R. (1996). Nonverbal immediacy and cognitive learning: A cross-cultural investigation. *Communication Education, 45*, 200-211. doi: 10.1080/03634529609379049

McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1983). Power in the classroom I: Teacher and student perceptions. *Communication Education, 32*, 175-184. doi: 10.1080/03634528309378527

McCroskey, J. C., Richmond, V. P., Plax, T. G., & Kearney, P. (1985). Power in the classroom V: Behavior alteration techniques, communication training, and learning. *Communication Education, 34*, 214-226. doi: 10.1080/03634528509378609

Mehrabian, A. (1969). Some referents and measures of nonverbal behavior. *Behavioral Research Methods and Instrumentation, 1,* 213-217. doi: 10.3758/BF03208096

Mehrabian, A. (1971). *Silent messages*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Moore, R. L. (2012). On swearwords and slang. *American Speech*, *87*, 170-189. doi: 10.1215/00031283-1668199

Norton, R. W. (1983). *Communicator style: Theory, application, and measures*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Nunnally, T. E. (2001). Glossing the folk: A review of selected lexical research into

    American slang and Americanisms. *American Speech, 76*, 158-176. doi:

    10.1215/00031283-76-2-158

Nyquist, J. D., & Sprague, J. (1992). Developmental stages of TAs. In J. D. Nyquist & D.

    H. Wulff (Eds.), *Preparing teaching assistants for instructional roles:*

    Supervising TAs in communication (pp. 100-113). Annandale, VA: National

    Communication Association.

Osam, U. V., & Balbay, S. (2004). Investigating the decision-making skills of

    cooperating teachers and student teachers of English in a Turkish context.

    Teaching and Teacher Education, 20(70), 745-758. doi:

    10.1016/j.tate.2004.07.003

Plax, T. G., Kearney, P., McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1986). Power in the

    classroom VI: Verbal control strategies, nonverbal immediacy, and affective

    learning. *Communication Education, 35*, 43-55. doi:

    10.1080/03634528609388318

Plax, T. G., Kearney, P., & Tucker, L. K. (1986). Prospective teachers' use of behavior

    alteration techniques on common student misbehaviors. *Communication*

    Education, 35, 32-42. doi: 10.1080/03634528609388317

Potter, W. J., & Emanuel, R. (1990). Students' preferences for communication styles and

    their relationship to achievement. *Communication Education, 39*, 234-249. doi:

    10.1080/03634529009378805

Richmond, V. P. (1990). Communication in the classroom: Power and motivation.

Communication Education, 39, 181-195. doi: 10.1080/03634529009378801

Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (1984). Power in the classroom II: Power and

learning. *Communication Education, 33*, 125-136. doi:

10.1080/03634528409384729

Richmond, V. P., McCroskey, J. C., Kearney, P., & Plax, T. G. (1987). Power in the

classroom VII: Linking behavior alteration techniques to cognitive learning.

Communication Education, 36, 1-12. doi: 10.1080/03634528709378636

Shepard, C. A., Giles, H., & LePoire, B. A. (2001). Communication accommodation

theory. In W. P. Robinson & H. Giles (Eds.), *The new handbook of language and

social psychology* (pp. 33–56). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Simonds, C. J. (1995). *Have I made myself clear: The effects of teacher clarity on

challenge behavior in the college classroom.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation.

University of Oklahoma, Norman.

Simonds, C. J. (1997). Classroom understanding: Expanding the notion of teacher clarity.

Communication Research Reports, 14(3), 279-290. doi:

10.1080/08824099709388671

Stowell, J. (1992, October). *I'm LIKE, fed up! Observations on the use of nonstandard

"like."* Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association,

Chicago, IL.

Tantleff-Dunn, S., Dunn, M. E., & Gokee, J. L. (2002). Understanding faculty-student

conflict: Student perceptions of precipitating events and faculty responses.

Teaching of Psychology, 29(3), 197-202. doi: 10.1207/S15328023TOP2903_03

69

Teven, J., & McCroskey, J. (1996). The relationship of perceived teacher varying with student learning and teacher evaluation. *Communication Education, 46,* 1-9. doi: 10.1080/03634529709379069

Thomas, C. E., Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (1994). The association between immediacy and socio-communicative style. *Communication Research Reports, 11*, 107-115. doi: 10.1080/08824099409359946

Wanzer, M. B., & McCroskey, J. C. (1998). Teacher socio-communicative style as a correlate of student affect toward teacher and course material. *Communication Education, 47*, 43-52. doi: 10.1080/03634529809379109

Wheeless, L. R. (1974). The relationship of attitude and credibility to comprehension and selective exposure. *Western Speech Communication, 38,* 88-97. doi: 10.1080/10570317409373815

Wheeless, L. R. (1975). The relationship of four elements to immediate recall and student-instructor interaction. *Western Speech Communication, 39,* 131-140. doi: 10.1080/10570317509373858

Wolffe, K., & Kelly, K. M. (2011). Instruction in the areas of expanded core curriculum linked to transition outcomes for students with visual impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, *105*(6), 340–349. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-12-420039-5.00002-2

Wooten, A. G., & McCroskey, J. C. (1996). Student trust of teacher as a function of

    socio-communicative style of teacher and socio-communicative orientation of

    student. *Communication Research Reports, 13*, 94-100. doi:

    10.1080/08824099609362075

APPENDIX A

ONLINE CONSENT FORM

ONLINE INFORMED CONSENT

You have been invited to participate in a research study regarding your perceptions of educators' use of slang in the classroom. Areas of concern are the teacher's immediacy, classroom climate, clarity, professionalism, and credibility. You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because you are 18 years or older and you belong to a community within Illinois State University.

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to gain understanding and your specific perspective regarding an instructor's use of slang in the classroom.

Duration and Process of the study:
The brief survey will take approximately 15 minutes and consists of a series of short questions where you will agree or disagree with a series of statements.

Volunteer Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study:
Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you have the right to not participate. Any risks associated with the study are minimal and there no direct benefits for participating. If at any point during the survey a question causes stress or discomfort, please skip this specific question or stop your participation. If any feelings of distress linger, as a result of participation in this survey, please contact Student Counseling Services at (309) 438-3655.

Confidentiality:
Your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty for not wishing to participate. Your responses will remain confidential and private with no personal identifiers being used. All data reporting will be in aggregate form and data storage will be in a secure database behind university firewall protection.

Contacts and Questions:
Our primary investigator is Richard Heyne and he can be reached at (954) 937 2156 or by email at rheyne@ilstu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, you are encouraged to contact the Research Ethics and Compliance office at Illinois State University by phone at (309) 438-2520.

Statement of Consent:
Please indicate that you understand your rights as a participant and your consent to participate in the survey by selecting "next" below the affirmation of consent.

I have read the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in this study – I understand that I may freely withdraw my participation at any time.

NEXT

73

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Questions

Directions: Please answer the following questions using your personal reference and perspective based on the video you just watched. The goal of this study is to gain an understanding as to how the teacher's lesson reached you as a student, and if it was a pleasurable experience. Please keep a consistent point of reference throughout the entirety of the survey.

Directions will be provided for you before each section of the survey. There are seven sections in total.

Mediated Immediacy Scale (O'Sullivan, Lippert, and Hunt, 2004)
For the next set of items please indicate your evaluation of instructor by circling the number toward either word which best describes your impressions of them.

1.	Inviting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Uninviting
2.	Disclosing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Non-Disclosing
3.	Helpful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unhelpful
4.	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Closed
5.	Kind	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unkind
6.	Tense	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Relaxed
7.	Distant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Close
8.	Engaging	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Aloof
9.	In-accessible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Accessible
10.	Expressive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Non-expressive
11.	Informal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Formal
12.	Friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unfriendly
13.	Warm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Cold

Teacher Credibility Scale (McCroskey and Young, 1981)
For the next set of items please indicate your evaluation of instructor by circling the number toward either word which best describes your impressions of them.

My instructor in this course is:

14.	Intelligent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Unintelligent
15.	Untrained	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Trained
16.	Expert	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Inexpert
17.	Uninformed	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Informed
18.	Competent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Incompetent
19.	Stupid	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Bright

74

20. Sinful	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Virtuous
21. Dishonest	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Honest
22. Unselfish	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Selfish
23. Sympathetic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Unsympathetic
24. High character	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Low Character
25. Untrustworthy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Trustworthy

Classroom Climate Scale (Kaufmann, Sellnow and Frisby, 2015)

For the next set of items please indicate your evaluation of instructor by circling the number toward either word which best describes your impressions of them.

Based on the video that I watched, I perceived the instructor:

26. As understanding. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. As respectful toward me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. As supportive. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. As responsive (e.g., provides feedback on assignments). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30. As engaged in the course. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31. As approachable (e.g., someone I would email or visit in virtual office hours). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Teacher Professionalism

For the next set of items please indicate your evaluation of instructor by circling the number toward either word which best describes your impressions of them.

32. The teacher was dressed appropriately for class. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
33. The teacher used language that was appropriate for the class. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
34. The teacher offended me.* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
35. The teacher spoke in a way that was professional. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
36. The teacher was not professional.* 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

*Note: reverse coding.

Teacher Clarity (Simonds, 1997)

Below are a series of descriptions of things some teachers have been observed doing in some classes. Please respond to the statements in terms how well they apply to this teacher. Please use the following scale to respond to each of the statements: Never = 0 Rarely = 1 Occasionally = 2 Often = 3 Very Often = 4

37. Is clear when presenting content.
38. Uses examples when presenting content.
39. Relates examples to the concept being discussed.
40. Gives previews of material to be covered.
41. Gives summaries when presenting content.
42. Stresses important points.
43. Stays on topic.
44. Clearly explains the objectives for the content being presented.
45. Defines major/new concepts.

75

For the next set of items please indicate your evaluation of instructor by circling the number toward either word which best describes your impressions of them.

For the next section, please circle the number on the following scale that best represents your opinion of the instructor in the video:

46. The instructor in the video used slang.

Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Undecided**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1	2	3	4	5

47. The instructor in the video used positive slang.

Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Undecided**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1	2	3	4	5

48. The instructor in the video used negative slang

Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Undecided**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1	2	3	4	5

Finally, we would like to get some information about you. Your answers to these questions will help us better understand the opinions you express in other sections of this questionnaire. Please answer the following questions about yourself.

What is your age? _____

What is your sex? _____ Male _____ Female

What is your ethnic background/race?
_____ African American/Non-Hispanic
_____ American Indian/Alaskan Native
_____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ Caucasian/Non-Hispanic
_____ Hispanic
_____ Other (Please specify: _____)

What is your major? _____

What is your year in school?

76

_____ Freshman   _____ Sophomore   _____ Junior   _____ Senior _____
                Graduate

APPENDIX C

CONTROL GROUP VIDEO SCRIPT

Control Group Script

Over the course of your lifetime some of your most important communication will take place in one group or another. Some researchers estimate that over 11 million meetings are held each day and that at least 40 percent of your work life will be spent attending group meetings and conferences. Therefore, knowing how to relate to others in a group setting and handle group conflict is not only vital if you are to attain personal success, but also if you are to attain professional success. We experience conflict everyday--in our relationships with friends, significant others, or even with colleagues on the job. However, the opportunities for conflict are likely to increase when you are working in a group.

We've all worked in groups for a class assignment. It is possible that some of you may have a bad group experience. In fact, some of you may have had bad group experiences already. What makes the experience so bad? Some people in the group don't do their fair share of the work, are hard to contact, won't adjust their schedule to meet the needs of the group, some don't come to meetings at all. Some members that do come to meetings joke around and are very unproductive. If you've had such an experience, how did you handle it? If you've been fortunate to not have had that experience, just imagine the situation. How would you handle it?

78

Blake and Mouton developed what has become a very popular conflict grid. The model contains five conflict styles—the Avoider, Accommodator, Compromiser, Competitive Forcer, and the Problem-Solving Collaborator. You are likely to exhibit at least one of these styles in each conflict situation.

The Avoider's goal is to maintain neutrality at all costs. He or she views conflict as a useless and punishing experience. Avoiders will physically and mentally remove themselves from the situation rather than deal with the frustrations of conflict. In other words, they will "lose and walk away."

The Accommodator will "give in and lose." Accommodators overvalue the maintenance of relationships and undervalue achievement of their own goals. If you are an Accommodator, your main concern is that others accept you and like you. You are afraid to make others angry and you avoid being perceived as a troublemaker. The Accommodator needs to maintain the appearance of harmony at all costs.

The Compromiser will try to "find a middle ground." As the name suggests, the guiding principle is compromise. The Compromiser's goal is for everyone in a conflict to gain something.

The Competitive Forcer feels that attaining personal goals is far more important than concern for other people. Competitive Forcers have an overwhelming need to win and dominate others. You've all probably encountered a Competitive Forcer.

The Problem-Solving Collaborator has a "win, win" attitude. Problem-Solving Collaborators actively seek to satisfy their own goals as well as those of others. They

view conflict as normal and helpful. They are able to discuss differences without making personal attacks.

Think about each of the five conflict styles. Which style would be the best conflict style? Most agree that the Problem-Solving Collaborator is the best style to have if you are engaged in conflict. Think about it. The Problem-Solving Collaborator has a "win-win" attitude. They not only want to satisfy their own goals—they want to help you reach your goals as well. To them, conflict is acceptable. It's normal. It's helpful. Problem-Solving Collaborators are able to talk about the problem at hand without attacking you.

Effective communication during conflict is essential. With the amount of group experiences you will have in your professional career, use the time now to polish your skills and learn from your experiences. Conflict is everywhere. When you find yourself in a conflict, remember Blake and Mouton's five conflict styles. Thank you for your participation and good luck in COM 110 this semester!

APPENDIX D

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP VIDEO SCRIPT- POSITIVE SLANG

Experimental Group Script (Positive Slang)

Over the course of your lifetime some of your most important communication will take place in one group or another. Some researchers estimate that over 11 million meetings are held each day and that at least 40 percent of your work life will be spent attending group meetings and conferences. Therefore, knowing how to relate to others in a group setting and handle group conflict is not only vital if you are to attain personal success, but also if you are to attain professional success. We experience conflict everyday--in our relationships with friends, significant others, or even with colleagues on the job. However, the opportunities for conflict are likely to increase when you are working in a group.

We've all worked in groups for a class assignment. It is possible that some of you may have a bad group experience. In fact, some of you may have had bad group experiences already. What makes the experience so bad? **LET'S GET FIRED UP AND EXPLORE A FEW POSSIBLE EXPLINATIONS.** Some people in the group don't do their fair share of the work, are hard to contact, won't adjust their schedule to meet the needs of the group, some don't come to meetings at all. Some members that do come to meetings joke around and are very unproductive. If you've had such an experience, how did you handle it? If you've been fortunate to not have had that experience, just imagine the situation. How would you handle it?

Blake and Mouton developed a **REALLY SWEET** conflict grid. The model contains five conflict styles—the Avoider, Accommodator, Compromiser, Competitive Forcer, and the Problem-Solving Collaborator. You are likely to exhibit at least one of these styles in each conflict situation.

The Avoider's goal is to maintain neutrality at all costs. He or she views conflict as a useless and punishing experience. Avoiders will physically and mentally remove themselves from the situation rather than deal with the frustrations of conflict. In other words, they will "lose and walk away."

The Accommodator will "give in and lose." Accommodators overvalue the maintenance of relationships and undervalue achievement of their own goals. If you are an Accommodator, your main concern is that others accept you and like you. You are afraid to make others angry and you avoid being perceived as a troublemaker. The Accommodator needs to maintain the appearance of harmony at all costs.

The Compromiser will try to "find a middle ground." As the name suggests, the guiding principle is compromise. The Compromiser's goal is for everyone in a conflict to gain something, **WHICH CAN BE REALLY COOL!**

The Competitive Forcer feels that attaining personal goals is far more important than concern for other people. Competitive Forcers have an overwhelming need to win and dominate others. You've all probably encountered a Competitive Forcer.

The Problem-Solving Collaborator has a "win, win" attitude. Problem-Solving Collaborators actively seek to satisfy their own goals as well as those of others. They

view conflict as normal and helpful. They are able to discuss differences without making personal attacks. **PROBLEM-SOLVING COLLABORATORS ROCK!**

Think about each of the five conflict styles. Which style would be the **COOLEST OR MOST EFFECTIVE** conflict style? Most agree that the Problem-Solving Collaborator is the best style to have if you are engaged in conflict. Think about it. **IT'S AWESOME!** The Problem-Solving Collaborator has a "win-win" attitude. They not only want to satisfy their own goals—they want to help you reach your goals as well. To them, conflict is acceptable. It's normal. It's helpful. Problem-Solving Collaborators are able to talk about the problem at hand without attacking you.

Effective communication during conflict is essential. With the amount of group experiences you will have in your professional career, use the time now to polish your skills and learn from your experiences. Conflict is everywhere. When you find yourself in a conflict, remember Blake and Mouton's five conflict styles. Thank you for your participation and good luck in COM 110 this semester!

APPENDIX E

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP VIDEO SCRIPT- NEGATIVE SLANG

Experimental Group Script (Negative Slang)

Over the course of your lifetime some of your most important communication will take place in one group or another. Some researchers estimate that over 11 million meetings are held each day and that at least 40 percent of your work life will be spent attending group meetings and conferences. Therefore, knowing how to relate to others in a group setting and handle group conflict is not only vital if you are to attain personal success, but also if you are to attain professional success. We experience conflict everyday--in our relationships with friends, significant others, or even with colleagues on the job. However, the opportunities for conflict are likely to increase when you are working in a group.

We've all worked in groups for a class assignment. It is possible that some of you may have a bad group experience. In fact, some of you may have had bad group experiences already. What makes the experience so bad? **MAYBE SOME OF YOUR CLASSMATES WERE SHITTY. MAYBE THEIR ATTITUDES SUCKED. LET'S EXPLORE SOME POSSIBLE EXPLINATIONS.** Some people in the group don't do their fair share of the work, are hard to contact, won't adjust their schedule to meet the needs of the group, some don't come to meetings at all. Some members that do come to meetings joke around and are very unproductive. If you've had such an experience, how

did you handle it? If you've been fortunate to not have had that experience, just imagine the situation. How would you handle it?

Blake and Mouton developed a **KICK ASS** conflict grid. The model contains five conflict styles—the Avoider, Accommodator, Compromiser, Competitive Forcer, and the Problem-Solving Collaborator. You are likely to exhibit at least one of these styles in each conflict situation.

The Avoider's goal is to maintain neutrality at all costs. He or she views conflict as a useless and punishing experience. Avoiders will physically and mentally remove themselves from the situation rather than deal with the frustrations of conflict. In other words, they will "lose and walk away."

The Accommodator will "give in and lose." Accommodators overvalue the maintenance of relationships and undervalue achievement of their own goals. If you are an Accommodator, your main concern is that others accept you and like you. You are afraid to make others angry and you avoid being perceived as a troublemaker. The Accommodator needs to maintain the appearance of harmony at all costs.

The Compromiser will try to "find a middle ground." As the name suggests, the guiding principle is compromise. The Compromiser's goal is for everyone in a conflict to gain something, **WHICH DOESN'T SUCK!**

The Competitive Forcer feels that attaining personal goals is far more important than concern for other people. Competitive Forcers have an overwhelming need to win and dominate others. You've all probably encountered a Competitive Forcer.

85

The Problem-Solving Collaborator has a "win, win" attitude. Problem-Solving Collaborators actively seek to satisfy their own goals as well as those of others. They view conflict as normal and helpful. They are able to discuss differences without making personal attacks. **PROBLEM-SOLVING COLLABORATORS DON'T HAVE TO BE A PAIN IN THE ASS!**

Think about each of the five conflict styles. Which style would be the **LEAST SHITTY OR AWKWARD** conflict style? Most agree that the Problem-Solving Collaborator is the best style to have if you are engaged in conflict. Think about it. **IT'S NOT SO DUMB OR LAME!** The Problem-Solving Collaborator has a "win-win" attitude. They not only want to satisfy their own goals—they want to help you reach your goals as well. To them, conflict is acceptable. It's normal. It's helpful. Problem-Solving Collaborators are able to talk about the problem at hand without attacking you. Effective communication during conflict is essential. With the amount of group experiences you will have in your professional career, use the time now to polish your skills and learn from your experiences. Conflict is everywhere. When you find yourself in a conflict, remember Blake and Mouton's five conflict styles. Thank you for your participation and good luck in COM 110 this semester!