

School Meetings

Psychological
Sciences PhD



Thursdays at 1 pm
Cesare Musatti Hall, Psico 1 building

Linguistic Agency Bias - How Cues of Agency Used in Language Reflect Group Dynamics



Madgalena Formanowicz,
SWPS University, PL

This theoretical presentation focuses on the most recent literature about linguistic cues of agency, defined as the general capacity to act in a purposeful manner. Human agency can also be described as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" because goal attainment depends on contextual factors, thus positioning agency in the center of social dynamics. The importance of agency is also reflected in language and encoded in verbal communication at various linguistic layers. This multiple encoding reflects the importance assigned to agency in information processing, as there is a general attentional bias toward agentic targets. In a similar vein, language processing prioritizes actors or players who perform an action to which we should potentially be alerted, both at the individual and group levels. This presentation elucidates the recent compelling evidence for semantic, grammatical, and metaphorical manifestations of agency as diagnostic cues for agency-related interpersonal and intergroup phenomena by focusing on multiple linguistic manifestations of agency that reference stereotyping, dehumanization, and maintaining and challenging the status quo. We highlight these findings, as they may become useful for research examining textual data, and as such, we join numerous other voices pointing out the importance of language in reflecting social order and affecting its reproduction and change. We also aim to contribute to the creation of a toolbox that scientists and policy makers can apply to reach a deeper understanding of the formative role of social communication.

Magdalena Formanowicz is an associate professor at the Center for Research on Social Relations, SWPS University in Poland. Her research focuses on social cognition and language. Her research relies on a multi-method approach that incorporates experimental studies and analyses of large textual data to investigate language pertinent to discrimination and intergroup relations. She is also interested in dehumanization, agency, and disparities in scientific publishing.

