


Chapter 6


Navigating Language Attitudes: Refining the Verbal Guise Test

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ABSTRACT

The verbal guise test, also known as the verbal guise technique, comprises a long-standing history in linguistic research, particularly within the realms of language attitudes and language variations. This method is considered a modified iteration of the classical matched guise test (or matched guise technique). Over the years, the verbal guise test has found application in a spectrum of studies concerning language attitudes toward different accents and varieties, encompassing both inner circle Englishes and outer circle Englishes. Despite its widespread use in language attitude research, the verbal guise test is not without inherent challenges, such as the quality of audio clips and participant sampling techniques. These limitations have been acknowledged by researchers as commonplace, but thorough discussions and practical solutions to address these limitations have been relatively scarce, with Chan being a notable exception. This chapter endeavors to offer valuable recommendations to researchers who employ the verbal guise technique in their studies by examining recent research endeavors that have incorporated the verbal guise test and by providing a comprehensive overview of the test's historical evolution. The chapter aims to reintroduce this classical tool to contemporary language attitude

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researchers while engaging in a modern discourse about effective approaches to mitigate its limitations.

INTRODUCTION

The study of language attitudes examines how people assign social meanings to languages and users – it has a long history and spans a multitude of academic disciplines (Dragojevic et al., 2021). One major type of these studies is the evaluation of how people view certain languages and/or language variations in given contexts. However, the vast amount of language attitude studies over the years have consistently relied on traditional approaches to language attitudes – both on the adopted methods and the theories that are pursued (Li & Wei, 2022). Scholars have examined and discussed the problems inherent to traditional approaches in language attitudes studies, including the samplings, measurements, and more fundamentally, the concepts of language attitudes (Chan, 2021; Kircher & Zipp, 2022). One approach that has been discussed at length due to its longstanding popularity is the Verbal Guised Technique (VGT). While the method has been adopted by multiple scholars for years in language attitude research, there have been limited discussions of its inherent problems which must be addressed to adapt to modern research environments.

This chapter will start with an extensive review of the history of the VGT paving the ground for a thorough discussion on the inherent problems of VGT and then the solutions. Several of the recent language attitude studies which involved the use of VGT will also be reviewed and discussed as examples these inherent problems of VGT. The final chapter aims to initiate the discussion on the use of VGT in language attitude research, in the hope of giving some suggestions for refining the VGT method in future language attitude research.

The History of VGT

Among existing literature on language attitude, various research approaches were adopted which could be classified into societal treatment approach, direct and indirect approach (McKenzie, 2007). With limited discussions on the societal treatment approach, direct and indirect approaches are more prevalent (McKenzie, 2010). Conventionally, direct approaches encompass instruments like interviews, questionnaires or surveys, permitting researchers to explicitly investigate participant's preferences toward languages (Zhang, 2022). However, as attitudes represent internal emotions that are not directly observable in nature, individuals' attitudes may diverge from their authentic language use (Rangel et al., 2015). Researchers

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