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SELF-SERVING BIAS IN ATTITUDE JUDGMENTS: THE USE OF PERSON VERSUS ISSUE IMPLICATED LANGUAGE

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This study examines participants' perceptions of the appropriateness of judgmental language to describe own, similar, and dissimilar attitudes. The judgmental language consisted of pre-tested adjectives that varied in terms of their descriptive content, evaluative connotation and type of implication. Adjectives were classified as person implicated if they primarily implied an evaluation of person(s), and as issue implicated if their central focus was on an evaluation of the issue. Findings confirm the prediction of a differential positivity bias. Participants preferred positive person implication adjectives as compared to positive issue implication adjectives to describe their own and similar attitudes. When describing people with opposing attitudes participants preferred negative person implication adjectives over negative issue implication adjectives. This finding is related to other self-serving biases in the judgment of attitude positions and groups, and its application to different communicative contexts is discussed.

Attitudes affect preferences for the judgmental language used to characterize them and language can have subtle effects on attitudinal judgment. For example, Eiser and colleagues have demonstrated that judgments of attitudinal issues are affected by participants' own opinion and the characteristics of judgmental language (e.g., Eiser, 1971, 1973; Eiser & Mower White, 1974; Eiser & Van der Pligt, 1982). They stressed the necessity to distinguish between the evaluative and descriptive properties of judgmental language. This line of research showed that participants exhibit more extreme or polarized ratings on judgment

scales that are evaluatively and descriptively consistent with their own attitude. According to Eiser and Van der Pligt (1984) judges polarize on these scales because they make it possible to describe one's own and similar positions in evaluatively positive terms and opposing attitudes in evaluatively negative terms. Van der Pligt and Van Dijk (1979) provided direct evidence that increased polarization is also related to preference for judgmental language. According to Eiser (1990), evaluative language can be used to generate or present a positive self-evaluation. A positive description of one's own attitude (e.g., "car-pooling is responsible") also implies a positive self-evaluation (e.g., "I favor car-pooling, therefore (or because) I am a responsible person") and may help to maintain and enhance one's self-esteem.

People also use evaluative language to differentiate between attitude positions they do and do not agree with. In a study on attitudes towards nuclear energy, Eiser and Van der Pligt (1979) asked supporters and opponents of nuclear energy to select adjectives that they thought most appropriate to describe a supporter and an opponent of nuclear energy. Supporters of nuclear energy, described a similar attitude position (a supporter) as "realistic" and "rational," whereas a dissimilar attitude position (an opponent) was characterized as "emotional" and "ill-informed." Opponents of nuclear energy on the other hand, found adjectives such as "humane" and "responsible" most appropriate to describe a similar attitude and chose adjectives such as "materialistic" and "short-sighted" to describe a dissimilar attitude. In other words, participants differentiated between similar and dissimilar attitude positions by labelling similar attitudes in evaluatively positive terms, and dissimilar positions in evaluatively negative terms. Overall, their findings are in accordance with a self-serving bias in describing attitudes.

Maass, Salvi, Arcuri and Semin (1989) researched a closely related phenomenon in the context of intergroup relations and used the Linguistic Category Model (LCM) of Semin and Fiedler (1988, 1991) as their theoretical framework. They focused on group serving biases in the description of ingroup and outgroup behavior and their results indicated differences in the description of ingroup and outgroup behavior that served to maintain a positive ingroup identity. The LCM states that the words people generally use to describe actions and behaviors vary in terms of the *type of information* conveyed. Therefore the LCM distinguishes different linguistic categories representing different levels ranging from concrete to abstract. The same behavioral episode may be described in concrete terms, such as "A slaps B" or in highly abstract terms such as "A is aggressive" with different implications for the type of inferences that will be drawn from these descriptions. Concrete descriptions are mainly informative about the behavior in a certain situation and

additional contextual information is needed in order to make further inferences. Abstract descriptions, on the other hand, inform about the qualities of a person and suggest stability over time and generalization across situations.

In the study by Maass et al. (1989), groups were members and supporters of different teams taking part in a highly competitive horse race in Italy. The members of different teams were asked to describe socially desirable and undesirable behaviors of their own team and a competing team. Results showed that socially desirable behavior was described at a higher level of abstraction when displayed by an ingroup member than when displayed by an outgroup member. The opposite tendency, though less pronounced, was found for socially undesirable behavior; this behavior was described at a higher level of abstraction for an outgroup member than for an ingroup member. Thus, desirable ingroup behavior resulted in relatively abstract descriptions which were more informative about the (positive) qualities and characteristics of the actor than the more concrete description of the same outgroup behavior. Similarly, preference for relatively abstract terms to describe undesirable outgroup behavior is assumed to be more informative about the negative characteristics of outgroup members than the more concrete description of similar behaviors by ingroup members.

In the present research, we extend the work of Eiser and colleagues and Maass et al. (1989) and propose that self-serving biases in describing attitudes may be more pronounced for some types of language. Specifically, we propose a distinction between dimensions with respect to the type of information they provide. The first type concerns dimensions that, apart from a judgment about the attitude issue, *also* imply an evaluation of the person who holds the attitude. These *person implication* dimensions, imply a trait attribution and thus a dispositional inference. The second type of dimensions primarily provide an evaluation of specific aspects of the attitudinal issue. These *issue implication* dimensions, primarily focus on the issue itself and imply less about the attitude holder. The distinction between person and issue implication dimensions should be interpreted as a probabilistic taxonomy rather than a morphologically-based classification. Moreover, in our view the classification of an adjective as person or issue implicated is dependent on the attitude issue in question. In the context of car-pooling, "clean" is most likely to be classified as an issue implication adjective whereas the same adjective in the context of another issue, for example measures to combat police fraud, may be highly informative about a person and therefore person implicating. The first aim of this study was to examine whether the distinction between issue and person implication dimensions is a meaningful and useful typology in the area of attitude judgments. In particular, we expect that issue implication dimensions are

perceived as more specific than person implication dimensions.¹ It is almost axiomatic that reference to the person, and not just to the issue implies that person implication adjectives will have a more global and more generalizable realm of application.

In this study, we focused on the judgment of own, similar and dissimilar attitudes in relation to characteristics of the language people use to describe these attitudes. We expect differential preferences for either issue or person implication dimensions in interaction with the evaluative connotation of language. Eiser and Van der Pligt (1979) showed that self-enhancing motives play an important role in the description of own and others' attitudes. On the basis of their results, and those of Semin and Fiedler (1988, 1991) and Maass and colleagues (1989) we predict a self-serving bias in attitude descriptions. With respect to the joint influence of type of implication and evaluation, we expect people to describe the positive aspects or consequences of their own and similar attitudes in terms of person implication dimensions. This is because person implication dimensions focus on the positive aspects of the attitude position and also on the positive characteristics of those who hold the attitude. Negative aspects of own and similar attitude positions are likely to be described in terms of issue implication dimensions because these dimensions do not necessarily imply a negative evaluation of attitude holders but only of issue related aspects. In the case of dissimilar attitudes, we expect the reverse pattern, namely that negative aspects will be described in terms of person implication dimensions because these also imply a negative evaluation of the dissimilar attitude holder. Issue implication dimensions are more likely to be used for the positive aspects of dissimilar attitude positions so that a positive evaluation will be limited to issue related aspects. Thus for dissimilar attitudes we expect a negativity bias.

Summarizing, we predict that when describing attitude positions they favor, people display a larger positivity bias on person implication dimensions than on issue implication dimensions. When describing attitude positions they oppose, people will display a larger negativity bias on person implication than on issue implication dimensions.

METHOD

MATERIAL

Our study was concerned with the issue of private car-use, or more precisely with policy measures to reduce private car use. In a pilot study

1. It should be clear that we do not consider type of implication, and the specificity or globality of adjectives as two, distinctive or uncorrelated dimensions but rather as two closely related and even naturally confounded dimensions.

we selected a set of adjectives to be used in the main study. This selection was based on a variety of publications on the issue of private car-use (newspaper articles, publications of environmental organisations, the Dutch Automobile Federation "ANWB" and governmental institutions). Drawing on these publications, we selected 44 adjectives that were used in discussions about the issue. Thirty-six participants, 18 car-owners and 18 non-car-owners, took part in the pilot study and judged the adjectives on four dimensions that were relevant to our main study. The first two dimensions concerned the evaluative sign and the descriptive meaning of the adjectives. The third dimension was designed to measure the type of implication (does an adjective refer more to a person or to the issue). The fourth dimension concerned the type of information provided by an adjective. We asked whether each adjective provided a global or a more specific description of the issue. Prior to the pilot study, we tested different response formats for these dimensions on 15 participants. The following response scales appeared to be most comprehensible and easy to answer:

Evaluative sign; evaluative ratings were given on a 100-millimeter scale ranging from "extremely negative" (-50) to "extremely positive" (+50).

Descriptive meaning; descriptive ratings were given on a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly unfavorable toward car-use reducing measures" (1) to "strongly favorable toward car-use reducing measures" (5).

Type of implication; participants answered in terms of one of three categories: "tells me mainly something about the issue" (1), "tells me something about the issue and about a person" (2), "tells me mainly something about a person" (3).

Type of information; this measure was intended to tap the level of abstraction. Subjects were asked to what extent each adjective offered specific or global information on the attitude issue. Subjects indicated their answer on a 100 millimeter scale ranging from "extremely specific" (0) to "extremely global" (100).

On the basis of ratings on the first three dimensions, we selected from the pool of 44 adjectives a total of 16 adjectives that could be placed in a 2 (evaluation: positive versus negative) $\times$ 2 (description: describes an attitude pro car-use versus describes an attitude anti car-use) $\times$ 2 (type of implication: person implication versus issue implication) matrix. Adjectives were selected so that the evaluative ratings of the positive and negative adjectives were approximately equally extreme. The average extremity (taken from scale midpoint 50) of the positive adjectives was 22.50 and the average extremity of the negative adjectives was 25.62, a non significant difference ($t(35) = 2.08$; n.s.). We also checked that pro car-use adjectives and anti car-use adjectives did not differ with respect to descriptive extremity (taken from scale midpoint 3). Pro car-use and anti car-use adjectives were perceived to be about equally extreme (44 pro

car-use = 1.13, M anti car-use = 1.17, $t(35) < 1$; n.s.). Person implication adjectives were rated more extreme (taken from scale midpoint 2) than issue implication adjectives (M person = .87, M issue = .74, $t(35) = 5.76$, $p < .05$). The average evaluative extremity of person implication adjectives and issue implication adjectives (both taken from scale midpoint 50) was about equally extreme (M evaluative extremity person = 25.08, M evaluative extremity issue = 22.59, $t(35) = 1.98$; n.s.). The fourth dimension, type of information, was not included in our design, but served as an additional measure to tap the level of abstraction. We expected that adjectives that imply more information about a person than about the issue, will be judged as providing more global than specific information. To check this, ratings on type of information were compared between the eight selected person implication adjectives and the eight issue implication adjectives. This comparison revealed a significant difference: person implication adjectives were on average judged as more global than issue implication adjectives (M s = 73.8 and 31.6 respectively, $t(35) = 9.75$; $p < .001$).

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 228 first year psychology students of the University of Amsterdam participated in the study. The questionnaire formed part of a large "test" session. Participants received credit points for their participation.

PROCEDURE

The first page of the questionnaire provided a short introduction of the attitude issue. The issue was described as follows:

For some time now, the government has been attempting to restrict transport by private car. In order to do so, various policy measures have been suggested to persuade people to leave their car at home and to use public transport more frequently. Examples of the suggested measures are the so-called "rush-hour" tax (whereby car-users would have to buy a special pass allowing them to drive during peak hours), and increased car-taxes and fuel prices. The latter has recently been applied by raising the petrol-price by 25 cents per litre. All these suggestions imply that transport by car will be charged more heavily in the future, which should encourage people to use public transport.

Participants' attitude toward policy measures designed to restrict transport by private car was measured on a single attitude scale varying from "disagree very much" (1) to "agree very much" (7). Next, we presented participants with the 16 selected adjectives (see the Table) and asked "to

TABLE. Judgment of Adjectives on the Dimensions Evaluative Meaning, Descriptive Meaning, Type of Implication and Type of Information

Adjectives	Evaluation ^a	Description ^b	Type of implication ^c	Type of information ^d
Positive, pro car-use, person implication adjectives				
1. Liberal	+24.9	1.9	2.94	74.1
2. Independent	+23.5	1.6	2.63	88.3
Positive, pro car-use, issue implication adjectives				
3. Time-saving	+16.2	1.9	1.03	25.8
4. Convenient	+19.9	2.7	1.25	35.2
Positive, anti car-use, person implication adjectives				
5. Far-sighted	+22.9	4.1	2.50	76.2
6. Responsible	+27.0	4.0	2.78	75.5
Positive, anti car-use, issue implication adjectives				
7. Safe	+24.7	4.1	1.21	23.5
8. Clean	+19.0	4.4	1.49	21.0
Negative, pro car-use, person implication adjectives				
9. Short-sighted	-21.6	3.2	2.94	62.0
10. Irresponsible	-25.6	3.2	2.83	73.9
Negative, pro car-use, issue implication adjectives				
11. Dangerous	-25.1	3.6	1.22	38.6
12. Polluting	-36.1	3.9	1.72	38.3
Negative, anti car-use, person implication adjectives				
13. Restrictive	-26.6	2.4	2.79	62.6
14. Dependent	-24.6	2.2	2.69	78.1
Negative, anti car-use, issue implication adjectives				
15. Time-consuming	-19.3	2.0	1.20	32.7
16. Inconvenient	-19.0	2.6	1.22	37.8

Note. Adjectives are translated from Dutch.

^aScores range from "extremely negative" (-50) to "extremely positive" (+50).

^bScores range from "strongly unfavorable toward car reducing measures" (1) to "strongly favorable toward car reducing measures" (5).

^cScores range from "tells me something about the issue" (1) to "tells me something about a person" (3).

^dScores range from "extremely specific" (1) to "extremely global" (100).

what extent are these adjectives appropriate to describe your *own opinion* on the issue?" Each adjective was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from "very inappropriate" (1) to "very appropriate" (7). Subsequently, participants indicated their own attitude and the attitude positions of a typical supporter and a typical opponent of measures to reduce private car use on a 100 millimeter scale ranging from "extremely unfavorable toward measures" (-50) to "extremely favorable toward measures" (+50). The reason for this measurement was to determine whether participants saw their own position toward the issue as more similar to the typical supporter or to the typical opponent. Participants ratings of their own attitude on the 100 millimeter scale correlated significantly with the first attitude measurement on the 7-point scale; re-test reliability of these measurements was .73; $p < .01$.

After describing their own attitude, participants were asked to characterize the attitude of a *supporter* of car restricting measures. Similar to the rating of own attitude, participants indicated for each adjective to what extent they thought it was appropriate or inappropriate to describe the attitude of a supporter of restrictive measures. In the third task, participants rated the appropriateness of the adjectives in describing the attitude of an *opponent* of car restricting measures. There were eight versions of the questionnaire in which the order of presentation of the adjectives was randomly varied.

Dependent Variables and Design. Participants were categorized as supporters ($N = 113$) and opponents ($N = 94$) of measures to reduce private car-use by dividing those below and above the scale midpoint of the 7-point attitude scale. Twenty-one participants rated their attitude as neutral and were discarded.

Whether appropriateness ratings concerned a similar or a dissimilar attitude position was derived from the question in which participants had to indicate their own attitude and the attitudes of a typical supporter and opponent of car restricting measures on a 100 millimeter line ranging from "extremely unfavorable" to "extremely favorable." If the distance between own attitude and a supporter's attitude was smaller than the difference between own attitude and an opponent's attitude, own attitude was classified as more similar to a supporter. In this case, a supporter's position was categorized as similar attitude position and an opponent's position as a dissimilar attitude position. If the distance of own attitude to an opponent's attitude was smaller than the distance to a supporter, own attitude was classified as more similar to an opponent's attitude. Thus, an opponent was categorized as a similar attitude position and a supporter as a dissimilar attitude position. In all cases the smallest distance between two attitude positions was located in the same half of the continuum.

The sixteen adjectives listed in the Table consisted of eight bipolar adjective dimensions (e.g., "irresponsible-responsible"). For each participant, an index was computed that represented the difference between the appropriateness ratings of a positive pole of an adjective dimension (e.g., "responsible") and the negative pole of that same adjective dimension (e.g., "irresponsible"). This resulted in a positivity index per adjective dimension for each participant that could vary from -6 to +6. A score of -6 indicated that a negative adjective was maximally preferred to its positive counterpart. Thus, a negative adjective was rated as "very appropriate" and the positive adjective as "very inappropriate." A score of +6 represented the maximal preference for a positive adjective to its negative counterpart, that is, a positive adjective was rated as "very appropriate" and a negative adjective as "very inappropriate."

For each participant, a mean positivity index was computed of the four person implication adjective dimensions to describe own attitude (e.g., "liberal-restrictive," "dependent-independent," "short sighted-far sighted" and "irresponsible-responsible"). A similar positivity index was computed on the basis of the four issue implication adjective dimensions to describe own attitude ("time consuming-time saving," "inconvenient-convenient," "dangerous-safe" and "polluting-clean"). Using the same procedure, positivity indices were computed to describe a similar and dissimilar attitude in terms of person implication adjectives and issue implication adjectives. These positivity indices served as our main dependent variables.

RESULTS

To test for the hypothesis that participants display a "positivity bias" in preferring more positive person implication adjectives to describe their own and a similar position and a "negativity bias" in preferring more negative person implication adjectives to describe a dissimilar position, positivity indices were analyzed in a 2 (type of implication: person versus issue) $\times$ 3 (attitude target: own, similar versus dissimilar) within subjects MANOVA.² A main effect was found for type of implication

2. We also checked whether participants preferred adjectives that provided a "correct" or consistent description of their own and other attitude positions. To test this, appropriateness ratings of the unipolar adjectives were analysed in 2 (participant's own attitude: pro or anti) $\times$ 2 (descriptive meaning of adjectives: pro or anti) $\times$ 3 (attitude target: own, supporter versus opponent of car restricting measures) MANOVA. This analysis resulted in a significant interaction effect of participant's own attitude and descriptive meaning. Subjects with a pro attitude perceived pro car-use adjectives as more appropriate to characterize their own opinion than anti car-use adjectives, while subjects with an anti attitude perceived anti car-use adjectives as more appropriate than pro car-use adjectives.

($F(1,202) = 69.55; p < .001$) indicating that participants displayed a greater positivity bias on person implication dimensions than on issue implication dimensions. Attitude target also resulted in a main effect ($F(2,201) = 281.70; p < .001$); participants displayed a greater positivity effect when they described their own and a similar attitude than when they described a dissimilar attitude. However, these two main effects are rather trivial because they are based on the description of two favorable attitude targets (participants' own and a similar attitude position) against one only unfavorable attitude target (a dissimilar attitude position).

Of most interest was the interaction between type of implication and attitude target which was significant ($F(2,201) = 409.37; p < .001$). The interaction is depicted in the Figure. When participants described their own attitude and a similar attitude, positive person implication adjectives were preferred to positive issue implication adjectives ($F_{\text{own}}(1, 202) = 35.99; p < .001$; $F_{\text{similar}}(1, 202) = 78.44; p < .001$). The reverse pattern was obtained when participants described a dissimilar attitude position; in this case negative person implication dimensions were perceived as more appropriate than negative issue implication dimensions ($F_{\text{dissimilar}}(1, 202) = 112.80; p < .001$).

The preference for positive person implication adjectives to describe own and similar positions and for negative person implication adjectives to describe a dissimilar position, could be affected by the greater evaluative extremity of person implication adjectives. Although the overall evaluative extremity of person implication and issue implication adjectives did not differ significantly there were differences between specific subsets of adjectives (see the Table). For instance, the average evaluative extremity of the two person implication adjectives that described a pro car-use position positively ("liberal" and "independent" = 24.05) was greater than the evaluative extremity of their two issue implication counterparts ("time-saving" and "convenient," average evaluative extremity = 18.05).

In order to test whether participants' greater preference for person implication adjectives is mediated by the greater evaluative extremity of these adjectives, the total set of adjectives was divided in two subsets. The first subset consisted of adjectives in which the evaluative extremity of person implication adjectives was more pronounced ("liberal-restrictive"

($F(1,205) = 369.05; p < .001$). A significant interaction effect between attitude target and descriptive content indicated that pro car-use adjectives were perceived as more appropriate for characterizing a supporter of car-use whereas anti car-use adjectives were perceived as more appropriate for an opponent of car-use ($F(1,205) = 48.80; p < .01$). Because the descriptive meaning of adjectives did not qualify the interaction of the central hypothesis of this article, this factor is not systematically reported in the method section

Note. A score below zero indicates that a negative adjective is rated as more appropriate than a positive adjective; a score above zero indicates that a positive adjective is rated as more appropriate than a negative adjective. Scores may range from -6 to +6.

FIGURE. Mean positivity effect in using person implication and issue implication adjectives to describe own attitude position, a similar position, and a dissimilar position.

and "independent-dependent" versus "time saving-time consuming" and "convenient-inconvenient"). The second subset constituted those adjectives in which the differences in extremity between person and issue implications were slight or reversed as compared to the first subset ("far sighted-short sighted" and "responsible-irresponsible" versus "safe-dangerous" and "clean-polluting"). A MANOVA on participants' positivity indices with type of implication and attitude targets which included the above classification (pronounced versus slight differences in evaluative extremity) as a third within subjects factor, resulted in a nonsignificant effect of the latter factor and no significant interactions with the other factors.

The two subsets of pronounced and slight differences were also analysed separately. The analysis of adjectives for which differences in evaluative extremity were more pronounced, showed a significant interaction effect of type of implication and attitude target ($F(2, 201) = 234.72; p < .001$). In the case of the slight differences in evaluative extremity between person and issue implication adjectives, we also found a significant interaction effect ($F(2, 201) = 198.33; p < .001$). In both analyses, the patterns of the means were identical to the pattern of means obtained in the overall analysis that included the total set of adjectives. The outcomes of these analyses on separate sets of adjectives provides, albeit indirect

evidence, that the preference for person implication adjectives is not simply mediated by the evaluative extremity of those adjectives.³

DISCUSSION

These results confirm our basic hypothesis that respondents would display a differential positivity bias in preferring more positive person implication adjectives over positive issue implication adjectives to describe their own and similar attitude positions, while preferring more negative person implication adjectives over negative issue implication adjectives to describe the position of people with the opposing attitude. In other words, people have a general preference for person implication over issue implication adjectives in describing their own and others' attitudes, and the evaluative direction of the preferred pole of the response reflects a self-serving (and an other-derogating) bias in the judgment of attitude positions. This effect was not qualified by interactions involving the descriptive appropriateness of the words used.

This finding builds on previous work that has examined the relationship between language use and self-serving biases. The work of Eiser and his associates has shown that people have a preference for describing their own positions in terms that are evaluatively positive as well as descriptively appropriate, and tend as a result to display more polarized judgments on scales labelled in this way (Eiser & Stroebe, 1972; Eiser, 1990). The research of Maass et al. (1989) also showed how choice of language used to describe one's own group versus an outgroup could operate in a self-serving way. These authors demonstrated that people preferred more abstract language to describe the positive behaviors of the ingroup and negative behaviors of the outgroup, with more concrete language preferred for negative ingroup behavior and positive outgroup behavior. This "linguistic intergroup bias" serves to reinforce the positive image of the ingroup and the negative image of the outgroup by suggesting that positive features of the ingroup are stable and enduring,

3 As another way of testing the possible confound between type of implication and evaluative extremity, separate analyses were conducted on a set of adjectives of which person implication adjectives were more evaluatively extreme than the issue implication adjectives ("liberal" and "independent" versus "time-saving" and "convenient") and on a set of adjectives of which the issue implication adjectives were more extreme than their person implication counterparts ("short-sighted" and "irresponsible" versus "dangerous" and "polluting"). For these analyses, we used participant appropriateness rating on unipolar adjectives instead of positivity indices based on the bipolar index. This resulted for both analyses in a significant interaction effect of type of implication and attitude target. The patterns of the means were in the same direction as the means obtained in the analysis on the total set of adjectives.

whereas negative features are incidental or short-lived, with the reverse being true of the outgroup. The present research attempts to integrate and extend the research in these two traditions. It extends the paradigm of Maass et al. by showing that similar sorts of processes can operate in the judgments of attitudes as in the judgment of groups. Our classification of person implication versus issue implication adjectives, although not identical, shares important similarities with the concreteness-abstractness dimension of the Linguistic Category Model taxonomy (Semin & Fiedler, 1988, 1991), in that more global inferences can be drawn from person implication adjectives. In this respect we also extend the research on attitude judgment of Eiser and his associates by showing that evaluation of a particular position may not only be communicated in the evaluative extremity of the adjective, but also in the breadth of its implication. Our research demonstrates that even greater judgmental polarization in perceived appropriateness can occur on scales using evaluatively congruent person implication adjectives than on scales of equivalent valence employing issue implication adjectives.

Although the distinction between person implication and issue implication is closely related to the abstractness-concreteness taxonomy in the LCM, it is not the same, and we would argue cannot be reduced to it. Trait adjectives in the LCM have tended to be treated as a single, relatively abstract linguistic category (although some attempts have been made to distinguish adjectives with verb roots: Semin & Fiedler, 1991). Our distinction between different sorts of adjectives is based on the domain of applicability, and can be thought of and used as a meaningful taxonomic distinction in its own right. The evidence presented here suggests that people can readily draw on the greater globality of person implication adjectives to evaluatively reinforce their own position, and undermine that of the opposite standpoint. This strategy also clearly leaves more credit or blame with the attitude holders themselves, rather than suggesting that the pros and cons are simply a function of the issue.

An interesting question remains as to whether this self-serving preference for person implication language will always or equally pertain across different judgmental contexts. Although issue implication adjectives have a narrower realm of application, they could by their nature be seen to apply more to the issue, to refer more to "the facts," and to be literally less "ad hominem." Sometimes it may be especially appropriate to let the facts of the issue "speak for themselves" as it were, rather than seeing them as tied to the perspective or values of the person advocating them (as is implied in person implication descriptions). Indeed, it is one of the most well-known findings in the attribution tradition that, whereas the attitudes and behavior of others are perceived as being

dispositionally determined, our own are seen as more appropriately guided by the demands of the situation: the actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). The fact that we found no evidence of a preference for issue implication terms is therefore all the more noteworthy. However, it is interesting that we did obtain some evidence of such a preference for issue implicating language in another study set in the context of persuasion (rather than in the more purely expressive or judgmental context used here). Preliminary results indicate that people tend to present arguments that support their position using positive, issue implication adjectives although they still try to undermine arguments of the other party by describing opposing arguments in terms of negative person implication adjectives (Martijn, Van der Pligt & Spears, 1994). It seems possible that in a persuasion context the strengths of the issue implication adjectives are brought more to the fore, with the suggestion that these are diagnostic of the facts and communicate issue-relevant information rather than simply personal opinions or evaluations. This tends to support the contention that the strategic use of language implication may be sensitive to the features of the particular communicative context and whether expressive, persuasive or indeed other goals or functions are dominant. The fact that we found little evidence here of people characterizing their own or similar attitudes in terms more appropriate to describing the issue is therefore an important starting point for a broader program of research and this research should seek to investigate specific contexts or conditions that moderate the preference for person implicating terms.

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