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“I don’t stereotype, do I?”

Developing methods for raising awareness about linguistic stereotyping

Raising Awareness about Stereotyping!

- Language is one of the major factors that we evaluate when we meet others, and it has long been demonstrated that individuals are judged in terms of intellect and other character traits on the basis of their language output.
- We also adapt our own language to fit underlying norms and preconceived social stereotypes when we communicate with others.
- Further, we help to shape individuals through the way we treat them linguistically. Social identity expressed through language is consequently something that is renegotiated during every meeting between humans.

Stereotyping

- Stereotyping is a **reductive** cognitive phenomenon in the categorization of groups of people. A **quick** and **efficient** shorthand, but which ignores individuality and variation.
- Language is a key element in this process. According to Collins & Clement (2012: 377), “language can be conceptualized as **“a lens that directs and distorts cognition”**”.
- Not only does stereotyping, based on various social categories such as gender, age, social class, ethnicity, sexuality or regional affiliation, serve to simplify how people perceive and process information about individuals (Talbot, 2003: 468), it also builds up expectations on how they are supposed to act. “People can choose to ignore such expectations, but they still have to relate to them in their interactions with others” (Talbot, 2003: 472).
- Stereotypic expectations surrounding **gender and leadership** is one area of special interest.

Some previous studies

- Holmes, 2005: successful women leaders contest or 'trouble' established gender boundaries and thereby expand the very concept of what it means to be a leader. Through their discursive practices, they give the legitimacy of power to a range of discursive strategies, including some conventionally regarded as feminine.
- Laadegard, 2011: both male and female leaders tend to prefer an indirect, normatively feminine management style but with elements in their speech that are also normatively male. However, the most significant difference is how male and female leaders' management styles are **perceived and responded** to. Here the authority of female leaders is often challenged and questioned.
- Baxter, 2017: Was able to show how gender expectations as regards leadership and communicative styles (assertive = masculine; relational practices = feminine) created problems for female leaders in the field when they did not follow gender norms and expectations.

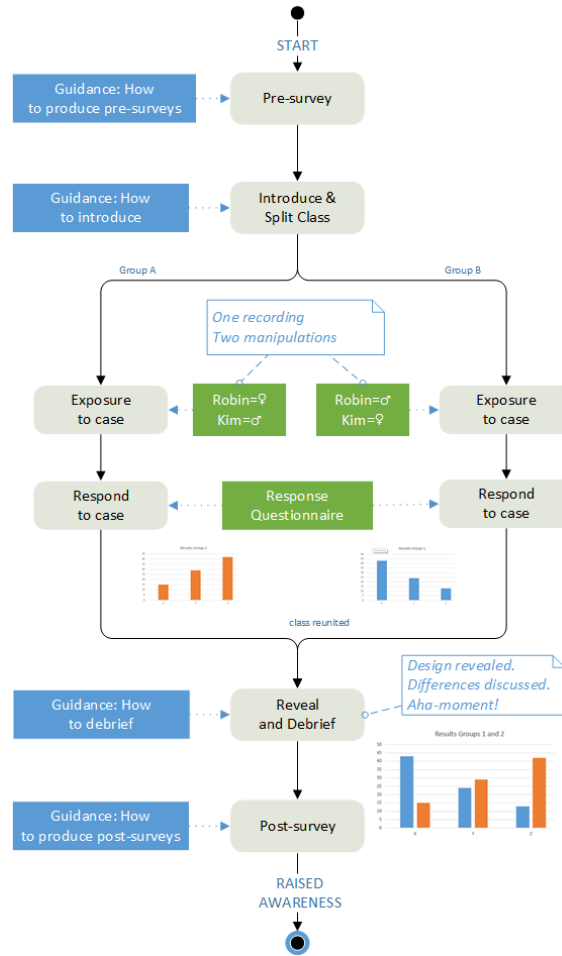
We see what we look for!

- **Reversed linguistic stereotyping:** “attributions of a speaker’s group membership trigger distorted evaluations of that person’s speech” (Kang and Rubin 2009: 441). This can be more or less salient.
- This basically means that we notice linguistic behaviours that we associate with a social category and are less likely to notice behaviours that do not fit our expectations.

RAVE project

- RAVE approaches the challenge of finding methods for raising sociolinguistic awareness on matters related to language stereotyping among students in professional programs, on all levels, with the aim that metalinguistic knowledge be translated into language awareness and practice. Methods build on digital matched-guise (Lambert et al., 1960) that give students a deeper understanding of conceived identity-related phenomena in language.
- Methods include workshops in ordinary course frameworks where student groupings are unknowingly exposed to variants of the same recording of language output which have been digitally manipulated for a specific social variable (gender or ethnicity for example). Students then evaluate the language output on a number of language and identity related criteria. Group differences in the evaluations are then used as a starting points for student- and teacher-led group discussions and self-reflections.

Method



Matched-Guise case example – Communicative leadership

- **Robin:** I assume this sort of stuff is backed up on the secure internal server, right?
 - **Kim:** Eerm. I'm.. I'm not sure.
 - **Robin:** What do you mean “you're not sure”?!
 - **Kim:** Well, eerm, I mean John and Beth are the ones that are involved with security and back-ups so ...
 - **Robin:** So if they weren't here we'd be totally lost, right... and you wouldn't have a clue!?
 - **Kim:** I'd most probably look up the formal internal routines for this sort of thing... that don't exist...
 - **Robin:** Well... Jesus! You're telling me you don't know, or worse, that there are no routines – this is a critical issue, don't you think? If we lose this type of stuff, or, just imagine if it ends up in the wrong hands! We are talking major disaster! Things can't be run like this!
 - **Kim:** No, I guess not. Sorry, I'll try to look into it.
 - **Robin:** Don't try Kim! Just do it! Give me an overview of the routines when you're done.
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Responses

Qualitative:

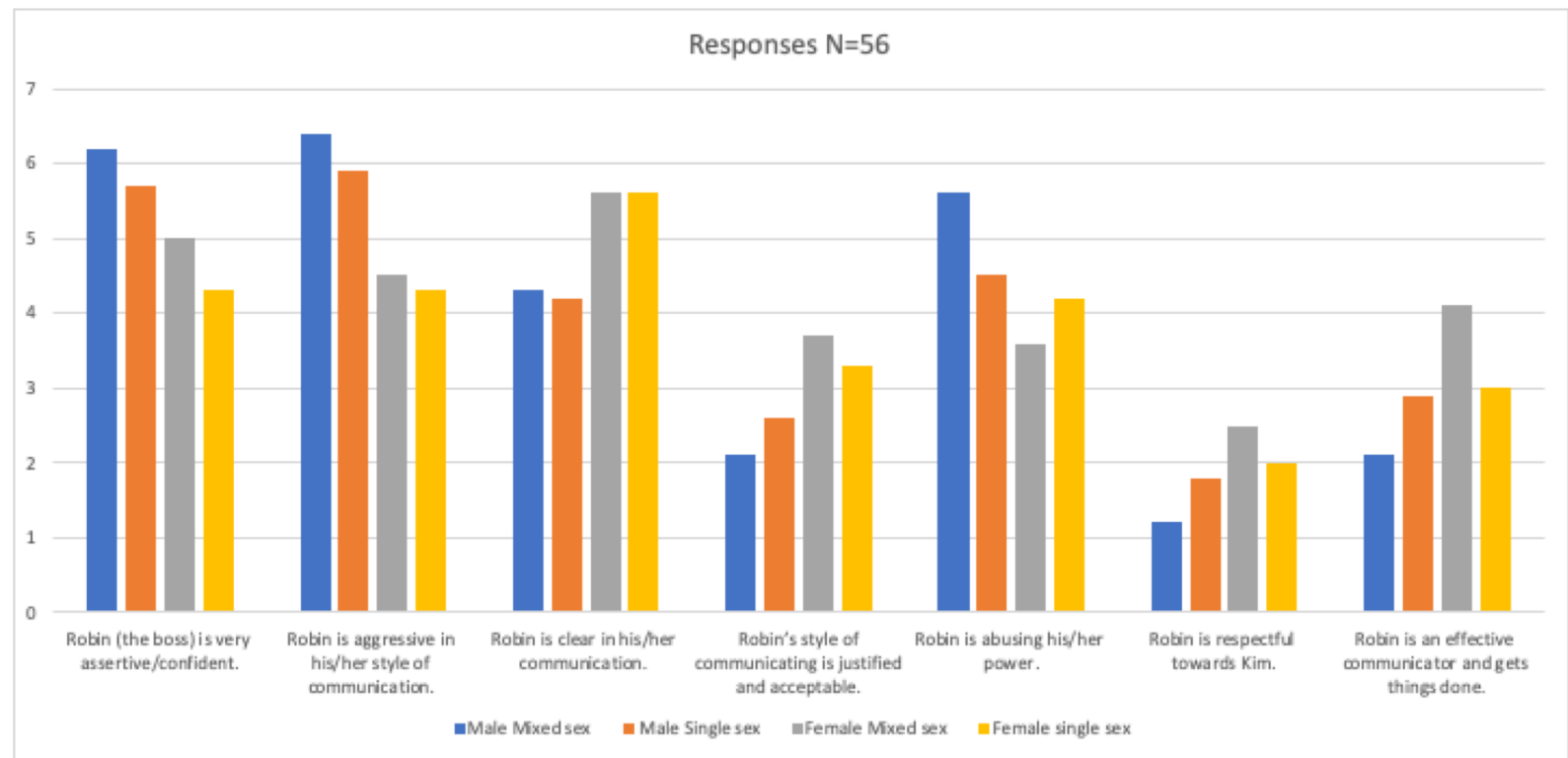
Summarise your impressions of Robin and his/her communicative style.

Quantitative:

Rate Robin as regards the following statements (1 – 7, where 1 disagree completely and 7 agree completely):

- Robin (the boss) is very assertive/confident.
- Robin is aggressive in his/her style of communication.
- Robin is clear in his/her communication.
- Robin's style of communicating is justified and acceptable.
- Robin is abusing his/her power.
- Robin is respectful towards Kim.
- Robin is an effective communicator and gets things done.

Results –impressions Robin (n=56)



Things to discuss

- What differential tendencies can you see in the evaluations of Robin as male or female in the single sex context vs the mixed sex context?
- Discuss how stereotypes surrounding gender and leadership may have affected your impressions.
- Compare your qualitative impressions of the conversations and discuss whether there were any systematic differences here.

Version 2: Open guise

- Recently we have started trialling so-called 'Open guise' experiments based on the above material.
- Difference is that students are told that they are listening to manipulated versions of the same text in advance.
- All participants listen to all versions and evaluate these.
- Very promising results! More fruitful discussions and self-reflections. We also avoid the ethical dilemma of having to 'trick' students.

Thank you!

- Feel free to visit our project website: <https://www.stereotyping.se/>