

THE COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS OF LINGUISTIC ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Work in folk linguistics and the social psychology of language has made little impact on social psychology in general. There is no citation of language attitude work in the compendious 2005 Handbook of Attitudes (Albarracín, Johnson, and Zanna) nor in a 2000 work on cognitive aspects of social psychology (Kunda). This failure to be appreciated leaves those of us devoted to such aspects of language disappointed, and it establishes a pattern of neglect that might go both ways. Are students of language attitude and belief ignoring developments in social psychology, perhaps particularly recent advances in its cognitive foundations? Could we miss what might be important influences on experimental design and the interpretation of findings?

This paper reviews current trends in social psychologists' work on attitudes and tries to relate them to the concerns of linguists. It will touch on the following:

- 1) The cognitive repository of attitudes
- 2) The structure of attitudes in the repository
- 3) The etiology of attitudes
- 4) The permanence, strength, and malleability of attitudes
- 5) The triggering or eliciting of attitudes (and the question of *context*)
- 6) The distinction between *explicit* and *implicit* attitudes, with reference to all the previous concerns.

Although this presentation will use the framework of a connectionist model (that proposes a delightfully-named *attitudinal cognitorium*), it will not assume the correctness of that model.

For example, this model suggests that the distinction between *explicit* and *implicit*, a mainstay of the older *matched-guise* research tradition, is extremely problematic, both with regard to the elicitation of one type or another and to the assumption that implicit attitudes have greater strength and are more lasting, more consistent, and more likely to be accurate indicators of a respondent's "actual" beliefs and attitudes. The model also suggests that both types have a common cognitive source but differ in the degree to which working memory contributes to their selection and evaluation.

The six concerns listed above and current findings in these areas by social psychologists will be examined for their specific relevance to frequently used devices in the study of linguistic beliefs and attitudes, both

- 1) ethnographic interviews typical of anthropological and folk linguistic work, including those that are follow-ups to more quantitatively oriented investigations or part of a more general sociolinguistic interview, and
- 2) paper and pencil, computer response, or other specific task responses that utilize actual language samples or concepts related to language diversity, including those in which response time may be measured.

For example, recent work suggests that there is a difference between attitudes held about an *attitude object* and those held about objects associated with it, but language attitude

studies often fail to make this distinction or to point out that the so-called *attitude object* (language) may be indistinguishable from an associated object (the group of speakers who are thought to speak that way).

One exemplary study will be used as a backdrop for these considerations.