95B

# LISTENING BEHAVIOR IN COORIENTATIONAL STATES

by

Virginia Buchli and W. Barnett Pearce

Ms. Buchli (M.A., University of North Dakora, 1973), is an Instructor of Speech and Drama at Valley City State College.

Dr. Pearce (Ph.D., Ohio University, 1969), is Associate Professor of Speech in the School of Communication, University of Kentucky.

LISTENING BEHAVIOR IN COORIENTATIONAL STATES

ABSTRACT

Unlike restrictively "psychological" explanations of selectivity in communication, the Stamm-Pearce process model of coorientation describes both intrapersonal (informational) and interpersonal (social) relationships. Previous studies have demonstrated that subjects in various coorientational states give and seek information differently. This study tested the hypothesis that similar differences would occur in listening behavior. 117 subjects read 4 synopses of legal cases and compared verdicts with those rendered by the judge. Coorientation states were induced by creating expectations of agreement or disagreement with the judge's verdict, then providing a confirming or disconfirming discrimination of those expectations; listening behavior was measured by asking subjects to identify whether a series of five statements were or were not included in an audio taped playback of the judge's rationale for his decision. Partly supporting the hypothesis, subjects in the state of predicted agreement confirmed listened significantly more poorly than those in the other coorientational states. Implications of this finding for an understanding of coorientation and communication are discussed.

LISTENING BEHAVIOR IN COORIENTATIONAL STATES

Selectivity is one of the best documented but most poorly understood phenomena in communication (Freedman and Sears, 1965). Ample evidence attests the occurence of selectivity both in the message-making and message-interpreting phases of communication: individuals do not address an equal number of messages to equally accessible persons, nor do they expose themselves or attend equally to messages equally available to them. Attempts to explain selectivity, however,

have been unsatisfactory.

Freedman and Sears (1965) concluded with a "paradox": individuals are disproportionately exposed to "supportive" rather than "non-supportive" information, but there is no evidence that they "prefer" or "seek" supportive and/or "avoid" non-supportive information. On this basis, they suggested that future research abandon "questions dealing primarily with the selective exposure hypothesis" in favor of those dealing with voluntary exposure and modes of coping with persuasive messages.

The hypotheses to which Freedman and Sears referred, however, were "psychological" in the most restrictive meaning of the term. They described individuals as if they were isolated from several contexts and focused on intrapersonal relations between cognitions and information. An alternative conceptual approach to selectivity focuses on social relationships. Newcomb (1953) proposed that communication be studied as a function of the simultaneous orientation of communicators toward mutually relevant objects in the environment and toward each other. Newcomb's paradigm has been adapted in a number of ways (McLeod, 1971), including the Stamm-Pearce process model of coorientation (Stamm and Pearce, 1971; Pearce and Stamm, 1973).

The Stamm-Pearce coorientational model assumes the perspective of a participant in communication and describes the juxtaposition of two cognitions. The first cognition is the communicator's expectation of agreement or disagreement with the other about a mutually relevant topic. The second cognition is the communicator's discrimination of whether this expectation was correct or incorrect. The model identifies four states: predicted agreement confirmed (PAC); predicted agreement disconfirmed (PAD); predicted disagreement confirmed (PDC); and predicted disagreement disconfirmed (PDD).

The theoretic principle underlying this model derives directly from

Newcomb: communication behavior is understood to vary as a function of both intrapersonal balance (a preference for information which confirms expectations) and interpersonal balance (a preference for symmetrical interpersonal relationships). Each of the coorientational states may be interpretated in terms of inter- and intra- personal balance and communication behavior by subjects in different coorientational states is expected to be different.

Recent studies (Stamm and Pearce, 1971; Pearce and Stamm, 1973) have shown that message-making does in fact differ among subjects who are in different coorientational states. These studies have not, however, explored differences in subjects' message-receiving behavior. Weaver's (1972) analysis of listening demonstrates that message reception is not a passive affair, dependent solely on the physical proximity of an auditory stimulus and an unobstructed ear. Rather, listening depends on a variety of motivational and attentional factors. It is reasonable to assume that listening behavior, like message-making, will vary as a function of coorientational states.

This study tested the hypothesis that listening behavior would differ between subjects in the four coorientational states. The predicted direction of differences was based on an analysis of the meaning of each coorientational state. Both interpersonal and intrapersonal balance occur in predicted agreement confirmed (PAC), and both interpersonal and intrapersonal imbalance occur in predicted agreement disconfirmed (PAC). The other coorientational states combine one form of balance and one of imbalance. Predicted disagreement confirmed (PDC) is intrapersonally balanced (the person is not surprised by his discrimination), but interpersonally imbalanced (they do not agree). Predicted disagreement disconfirmed (PDD) is intrapersonally imbalanced (the person is surprised by his discrimination), but interpersonally balanced (they agree). Differences in listening behavior should be greatest between PAC and PAD, with PDC and PDD somewhere between these extremes.

## PROCEDURE

Subjects were 117 students in Introduction to Public Speaking courses at the University of North Dakota during the Spring semester, 1973. Sixty-one men and fifty-six women were included.

Coorientational states were induced between each subject and the judge of four legal cases. The procedure used to create the coorientational states was similar to Stamm and Pearce's (1971): 1) subjects read a synopsis of the arguments presented in each case and recorded the verdict they thought was best; 2) they indicated whether they expected the judge to agree or disagree with their verdict: and 3) an audio-taped recorded message was played. This recording, which realistically purported to be the judge's voice, clearly announced his decision ( in each case, the potential decisions were dichotomous) and summarized his reasoning. After a brief interval during which subjects wrote a summary of the rationale for their own verdict, they were asked a series of questions about the judge's statement.

Listening behavior was measured by subject's ability to identify correctly whether each of the five items of information was or was not included in the judge's statement. Subjects who identified more of these statements correctly were said to have listened better. The maximum possible score for each item was 5; the minimum score, 0.

The cases used in the study were selected on the basis of a pretest. Twelve "You Be The Judge" features were taken from The Saturday Evening Post and given to 42 students in beginning speech and English courses. The four cases used during the data-collecting phase of the study were those most closely approximating these criteria: subjects' verdicts were equally split between the alternatives and half of the subjects predicted that the actual judge in the case would disagree with them. These characteristics made it probable that the four coorientational states would occur with about equal frequency.

A recurring problem in coorientation research is that of determining whether subjects have a realistic basis for predicting either agreement or disagreement with the other. In this study, three trials were run before data was collected. These preparatory trials simply consisted of the subjects comparing their verdicts with those rendered by the judge.

## RESULTS

The hypothesis tested in this study predicted that subjects in various coorientational states would listen differently. Because Weaver (1972) described a different listening style used by men and women, responses to the listening questionnaire were analyzed in a 4 x 2 matrix, with the four coorientational states as one factor and the sex of the respondents as the other. There was no significant main or interaction effect for sex ($F = 1.4$; $F < 1$). However, there was a significant difference ($F = 7.5$, $df = 3$, $p < .01$) in listening behavior between coorientational states. A Sheffe test of the significance of differences between individual means was employed. Subjects in the state of predicted agreement confirmed (PAC) listened significantly more poorly than those in any other state.

## DISCUSSION

One form of selectivity, listening behavior, was studied in the context of the process model of coorientation. The results indicate that the juxtaposition of an expectation about agreement with another person and a discrimination either confirming or disconfirming that expectation does affect listening behavior. This finding lends support to an interpretation of coorientational states as antecedent conditions of different types of communication behaviors.

The fact that listening behavior in only one coorientational state (PAC)

differed from that in the others, however, has important implications for the theoretical basis of this approach. The process model differentiates two forms of interpersonal balance (PAC and PDD) on the basis of whether they are intrapersonally balanced and two forms of intrapersonal balance (PAC and PDC) on the basis of whether they are interpersonally balanced. In this study, the state which was balanced both interpersonally and intrapersonally (PAC) differed from all others. We had originally expected the state which was imbalanced both interpersonally and intrapersonally (PAD) to differ from PAC more than either PDC or PDD. The fact that it did not may be explained by postulating a "ceiling" effect on the listening questionnaire (average scores in these three conditions exceeded 4.0 out of a possible 5.0) or by a yet unexplored relationship between these two types of balance. Several questions are suggested. Do subjects perceive a difference between disagreement (whether surprising or not) and a surprising discrimination (whether they and another agree or not)? Are interpersonal and intrapersonal imbalance discreet or additive (that is, is PAD really more imbalanced that PDC or PDD)? Does the significance of interpersonal or intrapersonal imbalance depend on aspects of the social context of the relationship?

The answer to the last question is likely to be affirmative, paralleling findings about message making in coorientational states (see Pearce and Stamm, 1973). For example, in the context of predicted disagreement, listening is probably affected by the importance the subjects attach to mutualness in their orientations toward the topic, and disconfirmation is most likely to alter listening behavior when subjects are highly confident of their predictions and have based much of their behavior on that prediction. Subsequent research about listening behavior should attempt to control subjects' understanding of the social context in which the speaker addresses messages to them.

Finally, there is an interesting parallel between listening behavior and speaking in coorientational states: subjects in the fully balanced state, PAC, do less speaking and poorer listening than those in other, imbalanced states. In light of Bruneau's (1973) analysis of the functions of silences, two types of conceptualizing ~~is~~ are possible in an attempt to account for these patterns of communication behavior. One consists of an elaboration of balance theories, and would explain communication behaviors in terms of preferences for interpersonal symmetry and intrapersonal consistency. Although such an approach is not precluded by the data, these concepts do not appear very powerful. The alternative is to consider the function for the communicator of various types of behavior in each coorientational state. For example, the absence of a message by a person in PAC, or the relative inattention to messages coming from the other, may have a positive social function (see Bruneau, 1973; 28-36) rather than just being the absence of communicative behavior. This form of conceptualizing seems promising because ~~among other things~~, it has the potential to explain why communication behavior in particular coorientational states differs in various social contexts.

REFERENCES


1. BRUNEAU, T.J. (1973) "Communicative Silences: Forms and Functions." The Journal of Communication, 23 (March): 17-46.

2. FREEDMAN, J.L. and D.O. SEARS (1965) "Selective Exposure," 57-97 in L. Berkowitz (ed.) Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, New York: Academic Press.

3. MC LEOD, J.M. (1971) "Issues and Strategies in Coorientational Research." Paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism, Columbia, South Carolina.

4. NEWCOMB, T.M. (1953) "An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts". Psychological Review. 60 (January): 393-404.

5. PEARCE, W.B. and K.R. STAMM (1973) "Coorientational States and Interpersonal Communication", in P. Clarke (ed.) New Models for Communication Research. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.

6. STAMM, K.R. and W.B. PEARCE (1971) "Communication Behavior and Coorientational Relations." The Journal of Communication. 21 (September): 211-218.

7. WEAVER, C.H. (1972) Human Listening: Processes and Behavior. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.