Love Language: Does your relationship status appear in your writing?

Lillian Linder, Quinn Downey, Kristie Chok, Morgan Stosic, & Frank Bernieri, PhD

Research Question
Do individuals in a relationship use more inclusive pronouns and emotive language when writing?

Introduction

Past research has shown that an individual’s word usage can reveal aspects of who they are (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). For example, couples who use inclusive pronouns such as “we,” as opposed to singular pronouns such as “I” cope better in relationships (Moran, 2018). In addition, the use of negative emotion words has been related to unstable and unsatisfying romantic relationships (Slatcher, 2008). For the present study, we were interested in examining these findings to better understand how individuals in relationships think differently than those who are single. We predicted that individuals in a romantic relationship would use more inclusive pronouns and emotive language than those who are not. We also predicted that those in a relationship may use more emotive language compared to the other groups. This suggests that individuals who are in a relationship may use more emotive language than those who are not.

Method

Participants.
The participants were Oregon State University students enrolled in a psychology research practicum regarding psychological testing (N=130).

Procedure.
Participants completed an 11 item questionnaire about their relationship status, duration of relationship, and intensity of their relationship. Additionally, they were asked to write a response to the prompt “how socially skilled are you?” These samples were later analyzed by a text analysis program (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). The participants who were in a relationship were split into additional categories that were based on the duration and intensity of the relationship.

Results

There was no relationship found between inclusive pronoun usage and relationship status. However, we did find slight evidence that individuals in a relationship use more emotive language than individuals not in a relationship, although this difference was not significant (t = 1.03, p > .05, r pb = .10). Additionally, we found evidence that the duration of a relationship may be predictive of one’s emotive language usage (F(3,65) = 2.97, p < .05, η pb = .12).

Discussion

Contrary to our hypothesis, we did not find significant evidence of a difference between those who were in a relationship and those who were single. However, the pattern of our results suggest that those in a relationship may use more emotive language than those who are not. Interestingly, we discovered that those who were in a relationship that spanned from 4 months to a year used more emotive language compared to the other groups. This suggests that individuals who are in a relationship of that specific duration tend to be more emotional. Could this be the “sweet spot” for emotion in relationships?

In order to make any conclusions, we need investigate these anomalies further. Perhaps a prompt such as “What is your love life like?” as opposed to “How socially skilled are you?” would provide individuals with more of an opportunity to use more emotive language and inclusive pronouns.

Figure 1: Examples of texts by individuals who identify as “single” and “in a relationship”

References

