

THE EFFECT OF VERBAL IMITATION ON PRAISE AND CRITICISM

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We investigated how verbal imitation impacted the perlocutionary effects of praise and criticism. Specifically, we examined whether verbal imitation could influence imitators' reactions to praises and criticisms. We also explored whether the effect of verbal imitation could be modulated by the categories of praises and criticisms. Additionally, we aimed to determine the extent to which the effect of verbal imitation, if present, could generalize from the imitatee to a new speaker.

These research questions have been inspired by studies on nonverbal imitation. Some studies have found that nonverbal imitation can evoke empathy, particularly affective empathy, resulting in an increased tendency for prosocial behavior among participants and even towards others in general. This suggests that verbal imitation, as a form of imitating nonverbal behavior, may have a similar effect of fostering empathy and subsequently promoting prosocial tendencies. Furthermore, it is possible that the effect of verbal imitation may generalize in a manner similar to nonverbal imitation.

To test these hypotheses, we elicited the participants' responses to praises and criticisms. These responses can be understood as the perlocutionary effects of speech within the framework of speech act theory (Austin, 1975). Previous research suggests that criticisms are typically perceived as negative and unpleasant, while praises are usually seen as positive and pleasant. As a result, praises and criticisms may have distinctively valenced perlocutionary effects. Indirect evidence from existing literature suggests that the perlocutionary effects of praises and criticisms may be influenced by the categories of the statements (e.g., appearance and personality), with statements related to personality carrying greater significance to individuals than statements about appearance.

The results of a statement rating task evaluating the pleasantness and truthfulness of statements after participants either imitated or read aloud a passage demonstrated that verbal imitation could influence participants' reactions to praises and criticisms in terms of pleasantness. Imitators tended to feel less unpleasant in response to criticisms and less pleasant in response to praises, compared to the participants in the read-aloud condition. Moreover, these effects could generalize from the imitatee to new speakers. However, no such effects were found in truthfulness ratings. The results of our study provide evidence for the significant role of affective empathy in influencing the perlocutionary effects of praises and criticisms, which can contribute to a better understanding of the social implications of verbal imitation.