

# Power in Language: Verbal Communication and Social Influence (Language and Language Behavior)

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## Power and Persuasion: Processes by Which Perceived Power Can Influence Evaluative Judgments

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The present review focuses on how power—as a perception regarding the self, the source of the message, or the message itself—affects persuasion. Contemporary findings suggest that perceived power can increase or decrease persuasion depending on the circumstances and thus might result in both short-term and long-term consequences for behavior. Given that perceptions of power can produce different, and even opposite, effects on persuasion, it might seem that any relationship is possible and thus prediction is elusive or impossible. In contrast, the present review provides a unified perspective to understand and organize the psychological literature on the relationship between perceived power and persuasion. To accomplish this objective, present review identifies distinct mechanisms by which perceptions of power can influence persuasion and discusses when these mechanisms are likely to operate. In doing so, this article provides a structured approach for studying power and persuasion via antecedents, consequences, underlying psychological processes, and moderators. Finally, the article also discusses how power can affect evaluative judgments more broadly.

**Keywords:** power, attitudes, persuasion, validation, elaboration

Power is recognized as a motivating force central to human interactions (Emerson, 1962; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Turner, 2005). Presently, the topic of power is a focus of substantial scientific interest. Among several major research publications, articles on power in the last five years are close to double those of the previous 5 years (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2015). The current review explores and emphasizes the role of power in persuasion and in evaluative judgments more generally. By *evaluative judgments*, we refer to people's attitudes or the overall degree to which they like or dislike any given object or concept, such as a person, place, or idea.

The study of power and its effects on persuasion has a long history in psychology. Early persuasion research was founded, in part, out of the motivation to understand wartime propaganda as a means of social control (e.g., Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949; McGuire, 1969). However, a consequence of this surge of interest is that the role of power in persuasion appears far more complex and less straightforward than represented by early research. Whereas early work demonstrated that persuasion was mostly enhanced as the recipient's power decreased relative to the source, contemporary findings suggest that a source's power can

either increase or decrease persuasion (Briñol, Petty, Valle, Rucker, & Becerra, 2007; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whiston, & Lijonquist, 2008; Lammers, Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2013; Min & Kim, 2013).

The developing interest in the relationship between power and persuasion, as well as potentially conflicting findings, makes it timely to provide a general framework as to the critical mechanisms by which power influences individuals' evaluations of people, objects, and issues. In fact, without an organizing framework, it might seem that the relationship between power and persuasion is in dire straits where any result can occur and a priori prediction is difficult. In contrast, this review provides a conceptual framework to help researchers understand how power affects persuasion and the multiple processes by which it can do so. The present review focuses on the perception of power in the form of the perceived power of the source (e.g., a message source that is seen as powerful relative to the recipient) as well as individuals' perceptions of their own power (e.g., the sense of power they experience).

### Perceived Power: Source Versus Recipient

Social power is often construed and defined as, "asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations" (Magee & Galinsky, 2008 p. 361; see also Fiske, 1993). This definition can be thought of as encompassing hierarchical and structural differences between two actors. However, within persuasion, power likely operates through the perceived power related to the source or the recipient. That is, even if some induction produces structural differences in power, it is likely to impact judgment through perceived or subjective differences in power. With regard to the

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223

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