Strategy selection

Seeking Compliance: The Production of Interpersonal Influence Messages
by James Price Dillard. Scottsdale, Ariz.: Gorsuch Scarisbrick, 1990.
x + 212 pages. $23.00 (soft).

A review by Kathy Kellermann
University of California, Santa Barbara

This well-conceived, well-written, and thoughtfully edited book focuses on an important and oft-neglected issue in the study of interpersonal interaction: the design and enactment of influence messages. The book's focus on interaction, coupled with its consideration of such matters as constraint satisfaction, knowledge acquisition, and repertoire development in the generation of interpersonal influence messages, makes it unique, absorbing, and intriguing.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, "Beginnings," provides interesting historical notes on how the study of compliance gaining was initiated theoretically (Marwell and Schmitt) and developed as a research tradition (Boster). I was struck by Marwell and Schmitt's reflections concerning the stripping of their strategy list from the theoretical front-end of their work. I was also struck by the heuristic provocativeness of such theoretical stripping as I read Baster's review of the variety of issues addressed and methods employed in compliance gaining research.

The five chapters in the second section of the book, "Orientations to Interpersonal Influence," offer innovative theoretical accounts of the production of interpersonal influence messages. Harkness explains how the need for resources (to have needs met and goals fulfilled) propels children to acquire the ability to generate influence messages such as directives, as well as how and why subtle and varied linguistic forms are acquired in the course of development.

Dillard offers a nicely conceived and detailed cognitive account of how people come to select particular influence tactics. Dillard usefully and insightfully differentiates a variety of influence goals from each other (e.g., gaining assistance, sharing an activity, giving advice) and from other types of goals (e.g., identity, interaction,

relational resource, personal resource), though unfortunately categorizes all goals other than influence goals as "secondary." Nonetheless, the detailed analysis of goals, plans, and actions and how they influence tactical selection is a nice theoretical addition to our understanding of interpersonal influence.

Meyer focuses on the implicit rules used to produce interpersonal influence messages by outlining a fairly abstract and nonspecific model of memory based on schema, PDP, and other cognitive theories that is then applied to the specific instance of retrieving compliance-gaining strategies. In this rather long chapter, Meyer makes the simple point that strategy selection is situation-based; the situation representation precedes and excites associated compliance-gaining strategies.

Taking a different turn, Lim examines how motivations for being polite constrain which strategies and tactics are selected and enacted. Lim offers a major revision of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness that, while interesting, is only loosely tied to interpersonal influence. I was thirsty for more discussion of how marked politeness behaviors (solidarity moves, power displays, and distancing moves) are systematically related to interpersonal influence.

O'Keefe's chapter on message design logic rounds out the book's theoretical orientations to interpersonal influence. O'Keefe focuses on individual differences in message design in regulative situations, outlining a developmentally acquired progression of complexity in the logic used to design messages. Unlike the strategy selection approaches of the four other chapters in this section, O'Keefe's approach highlights how an individual's set of beliefs about the nature of communicative interaction influences the message that is generated. The five theoretical chapters represent fundamentally new conceptual approaches to thinking about interpersonal influence and, consequently, serve as excellent readings to stimulate creative thought and discussion.

The context of informal, non-intimate, dyadic encounters that underlies the theoretical orientation section serves as an implicit contrast for the final section of the book, "Contexts," which examines interpersonal influence in specific settings. Edgar and Fitzpatrick focus on what might be the inherently most interesting (arousing?) setting: that of making or resisting sexual advances. The review of the literature of strategies used to communicate sexual desire is interesting and well written, though I wished the authors had compared these strategy lists to the more general typologies of compliance gaining.

Krone and Ludlum review compliance-gaining factors that are uniquely important to persons in an organizational context. While not all the literature reviewed in the chapter adheres closely to that focus, a number of very interesting differences are noted (e.g., organizational goals are pursued with stronger tactics than personal goals; the formal structure of the organization affects influence attempts). The chapter provides an excellent review, though it leaves to others the task of explaining the theory of influence practices in organizations.
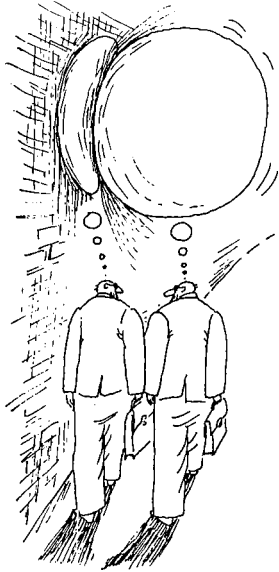
Haslett, like Harkness, focuses on the development of communication skills for goal satisfaction. Haslett describes a variety of acquired communicative skills as well as when they appear in the developmental sequence.

Burgoon and Burgoon take compliance gaining into a health care setting and, additionally, extend the concept of influence strategies to include nonverbal as well as verbal means of compliance (but not mixed strategies). I was particularly intrigued with the report of differences in perceptions between patients and doctors: Patients do not believe doctors are "doing" compliance gaining (in contrast, of course, to the doctors themselves). These authors review a number of other interesting findings related to compliance-gaining attempts by doctors and noncompliance by patients.

These four "contextual" chapters are interesting, provide a great deal of information, and raise questions that certainly extend well beyond the particular settings from which they ensued. Furthermore, most reflect one or more of the theoretical approaches articulated in the previous section of the book. For example, appropriateness and politeness (the focus of Lim's chapter) appears as an issue in all four contextual chapters. Similarly, developmental (Harkness, O'Keefe) and cognitive (Dillard, Meyer) approaches are generally explicitly acknowledged as being simultaneously critical in each of these contexts.

In the concluding chapter of the book, "Final Considerations," G. R. Miller provides a useful analysis of the book's profusion of terminology that results from the diversity of theoretical orientations taken. Miller also offers an alternative view of strategy selection: the indiscriminate use of a limited number of strategies without consideration of situations, constraints, and the like. Miller's evaluative review of the chapters in the book might have been usefully complemented with an "issues and questions" chapter that attempted to point out the similarities in orientations and perspectives across the chapters. Because the book's chapters interrelate in numerous ways related to development, politeness, individual differences, cognitive skills, strategic repertoires, and the like, and implicitly talk to each other at many points, it would have been nice to have these implicit similarities and differences made explicit in a final chapter.

This 200-page paperback is a well-written volume on interpersonal influence that will generate ques-

tions, discussion, and thought in both upper-level undergraduate and graduate classes. This excellent book encourages the reader to think and go beyond what is on the printed page.