Instructor-Student Classroom Interactions: An Experimental Study of Language, Sex-Differences, and Student Perceptions of Instructors

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INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS: AN EXPERIMENTAL
STUDY OF LANGUAGE, SEX-DIFFERENCES, AND STUDENT
PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTORS

by

Carl Joseph Brown

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of Communication Studies
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF LANGUAGE, SEX-DIFFERENCES, AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTORS

by Carl Joseph Brown

August 2016

Higher education instructors must establish meaningful relationships with students in order to be effective. Student ratings of instructor dynamism, approachability, and credibility impact overall evaluations of instructors. Instructor use of strategic language choices, such as slang use in the classroom, impacts these student evaluations. Here, the outcome of language choices’ impact on student evaluations is explored. To do so, both instructor and student sex main effects and interactions are tested. Last, specific methods, findings, as well as meaning and application are covered. Overall, instructor use of slang impacts student evaluations.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Charles Tardy and my doctoral committee for guiding this project. Your mentorship has been invaluable. Thank you to each and every member of my academic and professional support system for pushing me through this process.
DEDICATION

To my wife, Ashley, I say both thank you and I love you. Without your support over the past years, this dissertation would not be possible. I also thank and love my parents, Samuel and Barbara Brown. My entire life has been filled with support and encouragement because of you. Finally, this project is dedicated to my late Grandmother, Cora Viers. You taught me how to read, how to speak, and, most importantly, how to live. You are always with me. When I felt like giving up on this project, I heard your voice speak to me. You are everything.
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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Practitioners of higher education are charged with, at least, one critical task: preparing students for various aspects of their futures. Faculty at research-focused universities, liberal arts institutions, comprehensive programs, and community colleges take on the responsibilities of educating and mentoring the next generation of society. The emphasis that American culture places on education makes the ability of faculty members to create real and meaningful connections with students practically invaluable. However, a monetary amount can be calculated. In the short term, students pay in excess of $24,000 for four years of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In the long term, having a higher education positively correlates with higher earning potentials and negatively correlates with high levels of unemployment (U. S. Department of Labor, 2013). Moreover, individuals with higher educations have increased social status, influence, and even life expectancy (Villoutierx, 2013). However, the large number of students engaged in the higher education system can complicate the creation of meaningful interpersonal connections. In fact, thirty-one million 18 to 24 year olds were enrolled in colleges and universities across the nation in 2012 (U. S. Department of Education, 2013). These enrollment numbers are remarkable considering the fact that less than three million faculty members serviced this enormous number of students. Given the incredible responsibilities with which higher education faculty members are charged, it is important to know more about faculty-student interactions, how students evaluate these interactions, and how faculty can improve the quality of these interactions.

Classroom interactions between instructors and students are vital to the process of higher education (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Wallace, 2003). While instructors and
students interact in various settings, the focus of this research is classroom interactions—a virtually inescapable site of educational communication. Many instructors struggle to create meaningful classroom interactions and to encourage student participation (Gooblar, 2015). However, the quality of classroom interactions between instructors and students act as predictors of classroom climate (Fassinger, 1995) and student success (Duffy, Warren, & Walsh, 2001). During these interactions, instructors often wish to appear dynamic (Basow, 2000), approachable, and credible (Bennett, 1982), in order to increase the likelihood of positive interactions with students. High levels of dynamism, associated with instructor enthusiasm (Wheeless, Witt, Maresh, Bryand, & Schrod, 2011), energy, and excitement (Patrick, Hisley, Kempler, & College, 2000), positively correlate with increased student recall of class material (Stewart, 1989), as well as increased ratings of instructor effectiveness (Haleta, 1996). High levels of instructor approachability, associated with students feeling comfortable interacting with instructors, positively correlate with increased student participation (Sidelinger, 2010) and increased student ratings of quality classroom climates (Cox, Zhu, Cekic, Chavela, & London, 2010). High levels of instructor credibility, associated with trustworthiness and expertise (Infante, 1980), positively correlate with increased student motivation to learn (Finn et al., 2009) and student perceptions of instructor competence (Wheeless et al., 2011). These three areas of instructor evaluation are commonly used when evaluating instructor performance (Cox et al., 2010; Finn et al., 2009; Haleta, 1996).

One reason the areas of dynamism, approachability, and credibility are used for instructor evaluation is that they are positive indicators of effective instructor-student interactions (Cox et al., 2010). While no instructor purposefully wishes to negatively
impact students’ perceptions of any of these areas, some instructors intentionally behave in ways they hope will improve student perceptions and evaluations (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). One behavior some instructors add to their classroom personas to achieve these goals is slang use during class lectures. Slang is defined as an ever changing set of words and phrases that are used to establish social identity or group cohesiveness, and are typically less socially prestigious than more standards language (Eble, 1996). Instructor use of slang in the classroom is not a rare phenomenon (Jannedy, Poletto, & Weldon, 1994). Some instructors use slang as a part of their natural or personal vernacular, while others use it strategically as a means to accomplish particular communication goals (Giles & Williams, 1992). Regardless of natural predilections, some instructors use slang in an attempt to enhance communication immediacy or to reduce the social distance between instructors and students (Gorham, 1988; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b; Mottet & Richmond, 1998). However, observations of instructor use of slang in the classroom have produced conflicting findings (Brown, 2013; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b).

On one hand, Mazer and Hunt (2008a; 2008b) found that when instructors, at least male instructors in their mid-thirties, use slang in the classroom, students react positively. When slang was examined as a form of communication immediacy, students indicated that slang helped instructors relate to students and appear humorous, aided in the delivery of course material, and increased the comfort level of students in the classroom (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). On the other hand, Brown (2013) found that when the confederate instructor, in this case a woman in her mid-thirties, used slang, students responded in largely negative ways. For example, students stated that slang was “out of place,” and “unnatural” (p. 9). While some findings from Brown’s study aligned with the
previous studies (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b), such as slang as attention grabbing, more findings did not. Even though Brown replicated Mazer and Hunt’s study closely with the exception of a female confederate, conflicting findings emerged. This seems to indicate that students evaluate male and female instructors’ use of slang differently. To explore this phenomenon further, this study measures and compares student perceptions of no-slang and slang-included messages. Additionally, this study includes evaluations of instructor slang use with sex-specific instructor conditions and sex-specific student conditions. Possible main effects and interactions of instructor sex and student sex on evaluations of instructors were examined.

Sex differences were selected as a focus of this examination, as opposed to other variables, for two reasons. First, past research (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a) suggests that sex differences should be explored as a possible cause of perceptions of slang use. While multiple variations instructor variables like ethnicity and age exist, all instructors are of one sex or the other. Second, other variables (e.g., ethnicity and age) were not included in order to avoid an overly complex study with methodological difficulties. While it is known that no distinct speech characteristics exist for male and female instructors (Krupnick, 1985), it is also known that female speakers have less linguistic latitude than male speakers (Burgoon, 1990; Burgoon, Birk, & Hall, 1991; Carli, 2001) and that male and female students evaluate male and female instructors differently (Grasha, 1994; Romano, 1994; Statham, Richardson, & Cook, 1991). Because of these conflicting findings, this study will answer both general and sex-specific questions about instructor use of slang. As a whole, this study assesses students’ perceptions and evaluations of instructor credibility, approachability, and dynamism based on both male and female
instructors’ use of slang in the classroom. This study strives to better understand how students evaluate instructor slang use as a form of convergent communication accommodation (Giles, 1977). Understanding student evaluations of classroom communication produces explanations of and predictions about instructor slang use, specifically of and about student assessment of instructor ratings of dynamism, approachability, and credibility. Finally, student evaluations of instructor-student interactions involving slang are evaluated in order to look for sex-specific interactions between slang use and the sex of the instructor and student. This project provides instructors with an understanding of how students evaluate the use of slang, gives prescriptive advice on instructor use of slang in the classroom, and supplies an overall understanding of one approach to improving instructor-student classroom interactions.

To conclude, it is important to summarize and preview important information. This paper has briefly discussed and identified a rationale for this study. Moving forward, this dissertation will review findings of several studies that focus on applicable areas of interest. These areas will begin with student evaluations of instructors as a way of measuring instructor-student interactions, focusing on student perception of instructor dynamism, approachability, and credibility. The review will continue by discussing instructor use of strategic classroom communication. Here, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is reviewed as an explanatory addition to instructor use of strategic communication. Next, selected slang literature is reviewed. Slang is defined and findings from two similar but contradictory studies are reviewed and differences between male and female language use, specifically in the classroom, are covered. Later, a methodology for studying instructor use of slang in the classroom is covered and results
of the study are described in terms of parameters, slang elicitation and production, study variables, survey, procedure, and analysis. Finally, a discussion of the findings is included.
CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of literature will cover student evaluations of instructors, sex differences of these evaluations, instructor use of strategic classroom communication, slang in the classroom as a form of strategic communication, and sex differences in language use in the classroom. As stated above, classroom interactions between instructors and students are vital to the process of higher education (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Wallace, 2003). One behavior some instructors might either strategically or naturally add to their classroom personas to improve evaluations of classroom interactions is slang use during class lectures (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). Before understanding how slang impacts evaluations, student evaluations of instructors, in general, are discussed.

Student Evaluations of Instructors

Aside from in depth interviews (Kardia & Wright, 2004), it is difficult for researchers to accurately assess students’ perceptions of interactions with instructors. While immediate feedback in the classroom is common and useful, it is not easily quantifiable. This absence of empirical feedback makes it difficult for researchers and instructors alike to understand the linkage between instructor-student interactions, students’ evaluations of those interactions, and specific perceptions of instructors established above. One way in which students’ perceptions of instructors are shared and empirically measured is end of semester instructor evaluations (Basow & Silberg, 1987). In fact, student evaluations are an increasingly important part of assessing overall faculty performance (Laube, Massoni, Sprague, & Ferber, 2007). For instructors of either sex, student evaluations provide potentially useful information. Student evaluations serve as
looking-glasses which allow instructors to see themselves as their students do (Mead, 1934a/1967). While evaluations explore multiple and various areas of students’ perceptions of instructors’, three areas remain common to evaluations: dynamism, approachability, and credibility. Below, these three commonly used dimensions of evaluation (Cox et al., 2010; Finn et al., 2009; Haleta, 1996; Marsh, Fleiner, & Thomas, 1975; Norton, 1983; Perry, 1985), dynamism, approachability, and credibility, are reviewed.

*Dynamism*

Dynamic teaching styles are characterized by enthusiasm (Wheeless et al., 2011), high energy, and excitement (Patrick et al., 2000). The use of this teaching style communicates to students that an instructor is engaged in the teaching-learning process and is willing to expend energy to facilitate that process (Andersen, Norton, & Nussbaum, 1981; Rubin & Feezel, 1986). Additionally, a dynamic style captures the attention of students. Other benefits of instructor dynamism in the classroom include increased student affect toward the course, increased student affect toward the instructor, increased student satisfaction (Myers & Knox, 2000), and increased student recall of lecture content (Stewart, 1989). Dynamism is an exceptional predictor of an effective teacher across a variety of studies (Haleta, 1996; Norton, 1983; Perry, 1985).

*Approachability*

Instructor approachability is characterized by students feeling comfortable asking the instructor questions during class and instructor willingness to interact with students inside and outside of class (Cox et al., 2010). Student perceptions of what makes an instructor approachable include factors such as the teacher’s personality and lecture style
(Perrine, 1998). Students report that approachable instructors are associated with facilitating quality classroom climates. Quality classroom climates are associated with increased class participation (Fassinger, 1995; Sidelinger, 2010). Therefore, instructor approachability seems to have a positive relationship with student participation. For these reasons, evaluations of approachability are commonly included in student evaluations of instructors (Cox et al., 2010; Marsh et al., 1975).

**Credibility**

While early research in the area of credibility grouped credibility and dynamism together as a single factor (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1970; McCroskey, 1966), later scholarship suggested the two are separate and unique factors used to evaluate speakers (Bell & Daly, 1984; Infante, 1980). According to Infante (1980), credibility is characterized by descriptors such as trustworthy and expertise. Benefits of increased credibility include positive perceptions of competence and trustworthiness (Wheless et al., 2011). Additionally, high levels of credibility in the classroom are associated with an increase in student motivation to learn and overall positive outcomes of classroom instruction (Finn et al., 2009).

While the findings discussed above represent instructors of both sexes, the following section of this review will take a closer look at student evaluations of instructors from a sex-specific view. Specifically, the following review will identify areas in which students commonly evaluate male and female instructors differently. This section might provide insight into expectations for sex-specific predictions.
Evaluations and Sex Differences

This review above has justified the study of student evaluations of instructors. However, the review has been limited to sex-neutral findings. In other words, student evaluations of dynamism, approachability, and credibility have been described using both male and female research participants. Now, this paper will review research that contains contradictory findings. Some findings do not indicate sex-based differences in evaluations. Others indicate male and female instructors are perceived differently by students and therefore have different interactions with them.

Overall, students consistently rate male and female instructors equally, with an infrequent and insignificant advantage present for men (Andersen & Miller, 1997; Basow, Condos, & Martin, 2013; Bavishi, Madera, & Hebl, 2010; Centra & Gaubatz, 2000; Chamberlin & Hickey, 2001; Feldman, 1992, 1993). This finding alone could support the idea that students see male and female instructors as equals in the classroom. However, this conclusion reflects overall ratings across multiple areas of evaluation. When individual areas of evaluation are examined, sex differences are seen.

A closer look at evaluations reveals that, on one hand, men receive higher dynamism ratings than women, while on the other hand, women receive higher approachability ratings than men (Caltabiano & Caltabiano, 2004; Fandt & Stevens, 1991; Feldman, 1993; Fischer-Clune, 2009; Sebastian & Bristow, 2008; Sidanius & Crane, 1989). It is important to note that differences in evaluations of male and female instructors’ dynamism and approachability, cited above, were significantly different, though the magnitudes of those differences were small. For example, Basow and Silberg (1987) found a statistically significant difference between male and female instructors’
dynamism ratings. Using a scale with an overall range of 5-25 where lower scores reflect more positive dynamism ratings, male instructors received a mean rating of 9.8 while female instructors received a mean rating of 11.4. While this was a significant difference, the study only produced an effect size of \( \eta^2 = .03 \). In a separate study, Bennett (1982) found a statistically significant difference between male and female instructors’ approachability ratings. Female instructors received a mean rating of 1.0 while male instructors received a mean rating of -.34. Again, the difference was significant but only produced an effect size of \( \beta = .16 \).

To review, significant sex-based differences in these areas of evaluation suggest that male instructors may have real or perceived deficiencies regarding approachability, while female instructors may have real or perceived deficiencies regarding dynamism. While the differences between males and females noted above may not indicate an overall quality of an instructor, all teachers seek methods to improve their perceived deficiencies to become more effective instructors. Becoming more effective may produce more favorable evaluations that may, in turn, affect general and specific instructor ratings.

While students generally evaluate male and female instructors equally on a macro, all-inclusive level, clear discrepancies exist on a micro level (Andersen, & Miller, 1997; Feldman, 1992, 1993; Sidanius & Crane, 1989). While sex differences should be highlighted in order to understand which area(s) of communication instructors of each sex might seek to improve upon, all instructors likely wish to improve their classroom interactions. For this reason, it is important to review research that may provide strategies for altering student perceptions of instructors in more detail. In the section below,
research centered on interpersonal strategic communication behaviors is reviewed. This research provides linguistic and behavioral tools for instructors to use in an attempt to manage and improve students’ evaluations of instructor-student interactions.

Instructors & Strategic Classroom Communication

Instructors of both sexes may wish to appear dynamic, approachable, and credible in the classroom in order to increase the likelihood of positive interactions with and evaluations from students. Considering the sex-specific evaluation differences reviewed above, should focus on improving students’ perceptions of their dynamism, while male instructors should focus on improving their perceived approachability (Basow, 2000; Feldman, 1992, 1993; Sidanius & Crane, 1989). Clearly, no instructor wishes to negatively impact students’ perceptions of any of these areas. Seminal research indicates that perceptions others have of a particular individual involve the reduction of perceived social distance between two interlocutors (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) and increasing the perceived similarity between them (Byrne, 1971). The use of accommodating language, as explained by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), can function to both reduce social distance and increase similarity. Using accommodative language allows individuals to influence perceptions that others form about them (Goffman, 1959; Hall, Johnson, Juzwik, Wortham, & Mosley, 2010). Below, CAT is reviewed followed by a subsequent discussion of one specific strategic accommodation strategy instructors may use in the classroom to better connect with students.
Communication Accommodation Theory

The process of formulating CAT began in 1972 with the work of Giles, Taylor, and Bourhis. This research, along with subsequent work produced by Howard Giles (Giles, 1973, 1977), provided a foundation for CAT through the development of Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT). In its original form, SAT was primarily focused on explaining accent and bilingual shifts during intergroup encounters (Street & Giles, 1982). In part, SAT developed in reaction to the work of William Labov (Shepard, Giles, & LePoire, 2001). Labov’s 1966 work (2006) was designed to discover if changing the context of an interview would change the pronunciation styles that interviewees used in relation to the perceived prestige of the styles. While Giles regarded this work as valuable, he hypothesized that the pronunciation style used by Labov and his co-interviewer during the experiments affected the speech styles of interviewees more so than the interview’s context (Giles, 1973). Giles suggested this interpersonal influence led interviewees to converge toward the style of the interviewer and set out to explore the social psychological processes that impact speech diversity during intergroup interactions (Giles & Coupland, 1991). In addition to reacting to Labov’s work, Giles’ new theory was also informed by Byrne’s (1971) assumption that humans are socially attracted to similar others. This combination of assumptions led to the transformation of SAT to CAT by way of a revision of SAT’s propositions and the inclusion of impression management (Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2005). In this way, CAT connects the work of Labov and Byrne by characterizing speech accommodation, specifically convergence, as a means to similarity attraction. Today, CAT aims to predict and explain multiple and various interpersonal communication adjustments (Giles & Ogay, 2007). Below, components of
CAT that explain these interpersonal adjustments as well as extensions of CAT research are reviewed.

**Accommodation.** CAT refers to communication adjustments as accommodation. Humans use accommodation to increase or decrease the social distance between themselves and others, to demonstrate solidarity with or separation from others, and/or to express attitudes about communication situations (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et al., 1991; Giles & Ogay, 2007). When humans wish to reduce social distance between themselves and others, demonstrate solidarity, or communicate a positive attitude, they may use convergence behaviors. When wishing to increase social distance between themselves and others, demonstrate separation, or communicate a negative attitude, they may use divergence behaviors. Both convergence and divergence are seen operating in upward and downward directions.

**Convergence, Divergence, and Directionality.** Convergence refers to the accommodation strategy of adjusting communication behaviors in order to make them more similar to the communication behaviors of interlocutors (Coupland et al., 1988; Giles & Ogay, 2007). One, both, or all communication participants may perform convergence behaviors. Convergence may take the form of adjusting speech style and/or rate, pauses, language, utterance length, facial expressions, and more. Convergence may be uni-modal (adjusting a single behavior) or multi-modal (adjusting multiple behaviors) (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et al., 1987). CAT posits that speakers can converge toward either the actual communication style of others, or toward a style they perceive others to use or desire. Divergence refers to the accommodation strategy of adjusting communication behaviors in order to make them dissimilar to the communication
behaviors of interlocutors (Coupland et al., 1988; Giles & Ogay, 2007). Like convergence, divergence can be uni-modal or multi-modal (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et al., 1987). CAT states that communicators use divergence to separate themselves from other individuals. Both convergence and divergence can be seen taking either an upward or downward direction.

Directionality is concerned with shifts between communication styles considered more prestigious or less prestigious. Upward convergence, first discussed by Giles and Powesland in 1975 (as cited in Giles & Coupland, 1991), refers to shifting toward a prestigious variety of communication styles and behaviors. An example of this would be an interviewee using a standardized dialect when speaking at a job interview. Here, the interviewee may be converging toward the style of the interviewer, or attempting to speak as he or she perceives the interviewer to desire. Downward convergence refers to shifting toward a less prestigious pattern of communication styles and behaviors (Giles & Ogay, 2007). An example of this would be a parent trying to appear cool in the eyes of their children and using slang in hopes of achieving a particular goal. Conversely, upward divergence is typically used to demonstrate superiority to others, while downward divergence may be used to show inferiority or to identity with a less prestigious group. Downward convergence of instructors towards students is the focus of this study. While most individuals can identify a time when they have seen and/or used convergence or divergence as an accommodation strategy, understanding the motivations and outcomes of converge is key to CAT research and application.

Motivations. Convergence is motivated by multiple factors (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et al., 1991). First, an individual’s need for integration or identification with
another person may motivate convergence. As mentioned above, Byrne (1971) notes that humans desire the approval of others. Moreover, humans want to be liked, respected, seen as socially attractive, and to gain social rewards. Byrne’s research suggests that appearing similar to others, or converging toward their communication style, is one way to appear attractive to them, which leads to gaining their approval and liking. The above example of a parent using slang when interacting with their child in hopes of appearing cool is an example of that parent being motivated in this way. Additionally, this approval and liking may increase the likelihood for future, positive interactions with the communication partner (Shepard et al., 2001). Similar to the parent-child example, research indicates that instructors use this convergence technique in the classroom when interacting with students (Giles & Williams, 1992; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b). This phenomenon, which is at the crux of this dissertation, will be explored later.

Second, convergence may be motivated by a desire to alter or strengthen a social or group identity (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et al., 1991; Shepard, Giles, & LePoire, 2001). Similar to the motivation above that relates to individuals, social or group motivations also hinge on being seen in a positive way. Here, motivation for convergence within a group is frequently seen as group members attempt to boost similarity with one another in hopes of distinguishing themselves from other groups. This display of in-group solidarity usually involves identifying a prototypical communication style for the group, followed by mass convergence toward that style by group members. Social Identity theorists refer to this as prototypical behavior or adherence to the prototype (Bourhis, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).
Third, convergence may be motivated by situational norms or expectations (Giles & Ogay, 2007). While the various locations and settings that humans visit in their lives rarely have explicitly posted communication norms, most understand that different expectations exist for different situations. This is not unlike Goffman’s (1959) notion that humans behave in accordance with social expectations. For example, Jones, Gallois, Barker, and Callan (1994) found that, in classroom settings, students are expected to demonstrate upward convergence toward the language and communication style used by the instructor. While this specific assumption will be analyzed and challenged later, the outcomes and evaluations generally associated with convergence behaviors are important to understand and are reviewed below.

*Outcomes and Evaluations.* There are several positive outcomes of communication convergence. The first positive outcome of convergence is a positive evaluation of a speaker’s attractiveness, supportiveness, intelligibility, and interpersonal involvement (Giles et al., 1987). A second positive outcome of convergence is the reduction of uncertainty and interpersonal anxiety, as well as an increase in mutual understanding between communicators (Gudykunst, 1995). The increased sense of similarity created through convergence puts interlocutors at ease while communicating, and seems to increase the likelihood of reaching an agreement or consensus. The final positive outcome of convergence is compliance gaining (Buller, LePoire, Aune, & Eloy, 1992). Individuals are more likely to comply with requests of similar others than dissimilar others. However, authority figures, police officers for example, must find a suitable level of convergence as to avoid a loss of authority when interacting with the public (Giles et al., 2005; Giles, Linz, Bonilla, & Gomez, 2012). These positive outcomes
associated with convergence are important to the application of CAT to instructors and classroom interactions. However, convergence may not always be appropriate or effective (Giles & Coupland, 1991). For this reason, it is important to next review the negative outcomes of convergence.

Convergence is typically positively evaluated by receivers and seen as a validation of the recipient’s own way of communicating (Bourhis, Giles, & Lambert, 1975), but negative outcomes of convergence are possible. First, convergence can sometimes be seen as stereotypical or condescending (Giles & Coupland, 1991). This is often seen when convergence is based on stereotypical expectations. For example, research shows that elderly adults often experience younger interlocutors using ‘baby-talk’ when addressing them (Coupland et al., 1988). Here, younger speakers may hold the stereotypical view that the elderly (seen as an all-encompassing group of people) are audibly impaired and cognitively delayed. This level of accommodation is known as overaccommodation and results when a “participant perceives a speaker to exceed the sociolinguistic behaviors deemed necessary for synchronized interaction” (Shepard et al., 2001, p. 38). Given the perceived condescension that results from interactions involving overaccommodation, it is not surprising that this level of convergence is negatively evaluated.

The second cost of convergence is a potential loss of personal or social identity (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Hogg, D’Agata & Abrams, 1989; Shepard et al., 2001). When individuals converge toward the communication behaviors of others, they lose a degree of authenticity. On a personal level, individuals may be seen as trying to be someone they are not. On a social or group level, individuals who converge toward behaviors not
aligned with the prototypical behaviors of their group may be seen as deviants (Hogg et al., 1989). Later, when CAT is applied to instructors, potential overaccommodation and loss of authenticity could negatively affect student evaluations of instructor convergence.

Since both positive and negative evaluations of convergence are seen, it is important to understand what factors may contribute to the production of each type of evaluation. First, the level of convergence used impacts the way in which convergence is received by others (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Ogay, 2007). Convergence is typically seen on two levels, partial and full, and should be viewed as a continuum. Partial convergence refers to adjusting one’s own communication behaviors to resemble the behaviors of a partner. Full convergence refers to adjusting one’s own communication behaviors to mimic the behaviors of a partner. Partial convergence is typically preferred to full convergence. The discrepancy-arousal link (Street & Giles, 1982) explains that no convergence results in no arousal of communication partners, partial convergence results in some arousal of communication partners and positive evaluations, and full convergence, or over accommodation, results in an over arousal of communication partners and negative evaluations. However, levels of convergence, levels of arousal, and type of evaluation are dependent on the context of unique situations. For example, in some cases, an absence of convergence when it is expected may result in high levels of arousal and negative evaluations of the expectation-violating experience. Since finding an optimal level of convergence is important for receiver evaluations of speakers, understanding how to arrive at that optimal level is important.

Finding an optimal level of convergence involves considering situational norms and expectations, as well as sociohistorical contexts (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et
Situational norms, as discussed above, differ from setting to setting and communicators should consider what is expected of them in various situations before attempting to adjust their behaviors towards others. Sociohistorical contexts refer to, in part, established norms about intercultural encounters or encounters between individuals with different amounts of social power. For example, Americans in Paris should not expect Parisians to converge toward them and speak English. Similarly, college students may assume they are expected to converge toward their professors when composing an email, and avoid using ‘text-speak’ (Stephens, Houser, & Cowan, 2009). This assumption is challenged, in part, by later findings of this research.

In addition to level of convergence, a speaker’s intentions and level of consciousness often impact how convergence is evaluated. First, to increase the likelihood of convergence being evaluated positively, receivers must perceive it as being motivated by positive intentions (Giles & Coupland, 1991). If convergence is perceived as motivated by negative intentions, it is very likely to be evaluated negatively. Positive intentions include a desire for understanding, closeness, and reduced uncertainty. Negative intentions include being deceptive and seeking personal gain. Second, perceived unconscious convergence receives more positive evaluations than conscious or scripted convergence (Street & Giles, 1982). For example, President Obama was criticized for his deliberate use of colloquial language when speaking to the public (Sieczkowski, 2013, September 30). While this element of CAT and others are mainly studied in the context of intergroup contact, its validity is generalizable to other extensions of convergence.

Next, instructor use of accommodative behavior and impacts on student perceptions is discussed.
Applying CAT to instructor-student classroom interactions is appropriate for three reasons. First, intergroup communication takes place as students and instructors represent two different groups of individuals when they come together in the classroom. Second, future communication between instructors and students is typically guaranteed. This promise of future interactions is a motivator for accommodating behavior (Giles & Ogay, 2007). Finally, existing research has documented the existence of communication convergence in the classroom (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b; Jones et al., 1994). These reasons justify applying CAT to classroom interactions. Specifically, it is important to understand the effects of instructor convergence as they relate to students’ evaluations of instructors and instructor-student interactions.

This paper has shown that social interactions impact perceptions of individual speakers (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Cooley, 1902/1956; Mead, 1934a/1967; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). This paper has also reviewed research that indicates communication accommodation influences the outcomes and evaluations of social interactions (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et al., 1987; Gudykunst, 1995; Buller et al., 1992). In this way, communication accommodation may influence student perceptions of instructor use of slang. In the classroom setting, the use of accommodative language shapes students’ perceptions of the instructor. Additionally, speech markers, such as the use of convergence, communicate a speaker’s identity to others (Giles, Scherer, & Taylor, 1979). Speakers, or instructors, may use speech markers they believe will present themselves in the most favorable way during interactions with students. Taken as a
whole, instructors can use communication strategies to favorably manipulate students’ perceptions of them in the classroom.

Knowing that instructors can influence how students evaluate them through communication convergence is potentially useful. However, instructors must know or have an idea about students’ speech styles in order to make this adaptation successful. Pinpointing specific student speech styles may be impossible or difficult as they may vary by region, institution, or classroom. However, CAT research shows that accommodative language may be used in response to the expected language of others (Hajek, Abrams, & Murachver, 2005). If accommodation is used in response to what the instructor expects the students’ linguistic styles to be, some level of familiarity with students by the instructor is required. If the instructor has an accurate understanding of students’ styles, their use of accommodation may have a positive outcome. If not, the outcome is more likely to be null or negative. If viewed negatively, students may see the use of accommodation as a cynical, condescending attempt to garner their favor (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Goffman, 1959). Instructors may have an accurate understanding of students’ language styles and still experience a negative outcome of convergence as students may see this linguistic adjustment as an encroachment on their established group, of which the instructor is not a part. As stated above, outcomes of convergence often depend on specific situations and contexts of interactions. Still, some instructors are willing to risk negative outcomes and use convergence strategies in an attempt to reduce the social distance between themselves and their students (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b). This study includes a pilot study used to create an accurate expectation of students’
language and use of slang. The question that should be asked now is: does instructor use of slang in the classroom equate to an effective accommodative strategy?

Slang in the Classroom

As stated above, many instructors wish to decrease the social distance that exists between themselves and their students and increase classroom immediacy (Gorham, 1988; Mottet & Richmond, 1998). Immediacy can be defined as “communication behaviors that enhance closeness and…interaction with another” (Andersen, 1979, p. 544). Given these desires, some instructors use downward convergence by incorporating slang into their lectures (Drake, 1980; Eble, 1996; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b). Currently, very little research exists on students’ perceptions of instructor use of slang in the classroom (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b). This lack of research seems to indicate that communication and education scholars understudy the area of instructor use of slang.

Below, slang is clearly defined and expositions of two studies (Brown, 2013; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a) involving slang in the classroom are provided. These studies were selected for exposition due to both the similarities of their designs and the conflicts between their findings. To begin this discussion, slang must be defined.

Defining Slang

Renowned American linguist Connie Eble, in her comprehensive review of slang, Slang and Sociability (1996), defines slang as an ever changing set of words and phrases that are used to establish social identity or group cohesiveness, and are typically less socially prestigious than more standard language. Eble says that slang reveals more about a speaker’s attitude than does more formal language. She agrees with Drake that slang use functions to bolster in-group distinction and out-group alienation (Drake, 1980) Also,
Eble subscribes to Dumas and Lighter’s (1978) criteria for identifying slang by stating that words and/or phrases must meet at least two of the following criteria to be identified as slang. The four criteria are:

1. Its presence will markedly lower, at least for the moment, the dignity of formal or serious speech or writing.

2. Its use implies the user’s special familiarity either with the referent or with that less statusful or less responsible class of people who have such special familiarity and use the term.

3. It is a tabooed term in ordinary discourse with persons of higher social status or greater responsibility.

4. It is used in place of the well-known conventional synonym, especially in order (a) to protect the user from the discomfort caused by the conventional item or (b) to protect the user from the discomfort or annoyance of further elaboration.

Slang can be divided into two categories: positive and negative slang. The delimitation between positive and negative slang is a creation of Mazer and Hunt (2008a, 2008b). This distinction was made in order to separate slang that is not seen as verbally aggressive (positive slang) from slang that is seen as verbally aggressive (negative slang). Positive slang refers to a subset of non-derogatory slang used to identify with a specific group of listeners (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). In the context of this review, the specific group of listeners is college students. In other words, an instructor may use slang because he or she knows or assumes its use is common among students. Examples of positive slang include words such as cool or sweet. In contrast, negative slang, “refers to informal
language that may be perceived offensive by the listener…and would likely have a negative effect on…perceptions of the instructor” (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, p. 22).

Examples of negative slang include words such as jerk or shit. Positive slang was selected for this review and proposed study due to students’ negative evaluations of verbally aggressive instructors (Martin, Weber, & Burant, 1997).

While words like cool and sweet are common adjectives, the context of their use can result in the use of slang terms. For example, describing the weather as cool (temperature) is not slang. However, describing an object or person, aside from body temperature, as cool qualifies as slang. In other words, saying, “Sam and Barbara are cool people,” is an example of positive slang. This use of the word cool meets Dumas and Lighter’s (1978) requirement that a slang term meet two of their four established criteria. In this case, using the word cool would lower the dignity of serious or formal speech writing, and it protects the user from further elaboration of what it means to say someone is cool.

It is important to understand the difference between slang and other forms of less formal language. First, slang is not jargon (Lighter, 1994). Jargon is technical language unique to a particular profession, interest, or skillset. Slang is “nontechnical vocabulary” (p.xi). For example, describing someone as left wing instead of liberal or progressive is jargon, not slang. Second, slang is not the use of a dialect in place of more standard language. A dialect is a regional or socioeconomic variety of a language. For example, calling a brown paper bag a poke in the Appalachian region is an example of dialect, not slang. Finally, slang is not argot or cant. Argot, or cant, refers to special vocabulary used by a secretive group (Crystal, 1995). For example, the use of pig Latin is an example of
argot, not slang. Slang is, however, often seen as a subset of figurative language, especially when used as a metaphor (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). For example, saying “She is cool” is metaphoric.

As previously stated, instructor use of slang in the classroom is not a rare phenomenon (Jannedy et al., 1994). Many individuals use slang as a part of their natural or personal vernacular, while others use it strategically as a means to accomplish particular communication goals (Giles & Williams, 1992). That communication goal often takes the form of instructors wanting social approval from students, to be seen as affiliated with a particular group (students in this case), or to appear more competent, likable, or dynamic (Norton, 1983). This desire to be seen in a particular way often stems from the more basic desire to enhance communication immediacy or to reduce the social distance between instructors and students (Gorham, 1988; Mottet & Richmond, 1998). However, this goal stands in contrast to typical CAT research (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles et al., 1991; Jones et al., 1994) which assumes that students, who have low levels of power in the classroom, may use upward convergence toward the style of the professor who has high power in the classroom. This apparent contradiction is a focal point of this research. Research findings detailed below highlight this contradiction

*Mazer and Hunt*

Interested in understanding how classroom climate influences student motivation and affect toward the instructor and course, Mazer and Hunt (2008a) conducted a study assessing the effects of instructors’ use of slang in the classroom on students’ perceptions of instructor immediacy. The researchers assumed that instructor use of slang was a form
of downward convergence from instructor to students, and that slang use was likely to
decrease the perceived social distance between instructor and student.

Participants in Mazer and Hunt’s (2008a) study were 126 students, 48 men and 78
women, enrolled in a basic communication course. The students’ ages ranged from 18 to
25; the mean age was 18. A video recording was made of a 36-year-old male instructor
using positive slang during a four-minute classroom lecture. Participants were asked what
they liked about the use of slang, what they did not like about the use of slang, and what
suggestions they would offer the speaker in regard to his presentational style. Responses
were sorted to identify themes.

Four themes emerged related to what students liked about the use of slang (Mazer
& Hunt, 2008a). The first theme was labeled **relate to students**. Students indicated that
the use of slang in the lecture was a clear attempt by the instructor to relate classroom
material to a younger audience. One participant said that the use of slang made the lecture
seem, “geared toward people my age” (p. 24). The second theme identified was labeled
**humor**. Students felt as though the use of slang added humor to the lecture. One student
stated that the inclusion of slang in the lecture was, “funny and attention grabbing” (p.
24). The third theme identified was labeled **delivery of course material**. Participants felt
that slang use helped them stay focused on the lecture. One individual said that the use of
slang “made me pay more attention” (p. 24). The final theme identified related to what
students liked about the use of slang was labeled **comfort level**. Students felt comfortable
listening to an instructor incorporate slang into a lecture with one participant stating that
slang use, “made me feel on the same level as him” (p. 24).
In response to questions asking what participants disliked about the use of slang and what advice they would offer the speaker in regards to his presentation style, no clear themes emerged as participants overwhelmingly perceived the instructor’s use of slang positively (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). However, some participants noted that the presentation did not warrant the use of slang. Additionally, a few participants felt that slang use threatened the instructor’s credibility, while another stated that the instructor was trying too hard and was out of character. However, the small number of comments like these did not constitute themes.

The authors (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a) concluded the study indicates that instructors can use downward convergence to gain the social approval of their students. Additionally, the use of positive slang seems to generally help instructors relate to students, appear humorous, aid the delivery of course material, and increase the comfort level of students in the classroom. However, the authors advise instructors to use slang cautiously and point out that some participants did not evaluate its use positively. Additionally, the authors conclude that more research is needed in order to better understand and predict students’ perceptions of instructor use of slang. Specifically, the authors point out instructor traits, including sex, which future researchers should examine as they may affect how students perceive instructor use of slang. Following this recommendation, Brown (2013) completed a study designed to detect the effects of instructor sex on perceptions of instructor use of slang. This study’s findings, reviewed below, indicate instructor sex likely impacts students’ perceptions of slang use.
Brown

Already interested in CAT research, as well as his own classroom experiences with slang use, Brown (2013) designed a replication of Mazer and Hunt’s (2008a) study to assess differences in students’ perceptions of male and female instructor use of slang. Brown contacted Mazer and Hunt and asked for assistance replicating the study reviewed above. Mazer and Hunt provided Brown with the exact transcript used in the original study, as well as detailed information about how the study was conducted (e.g., video recording equipment, confederate positioning, reading a script from a teleprompter). Using this information, Brown (2013) followed the procedures of Mazer and Hunt (2008a) with two exceptions: he had fewer participants and used a 39-year-old female to record the lecture shown to participants.

Brown’s (2013) qualitative study examined 13 participants, five men and eight women, enrolled in an introductory communication course. This maintained the male to female ratio of the earlier study (Mazer & Hunt, 2008). Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 27; the mean age was 20. Students viewed the video of the female instructor presenting a brief lecture and were asked to respond to the same questions used in the original research. Participant responses to these questions led to the emergence of three additional questions. Since Brown (2013) used fewer participants than Mazer and Hunt (2008a), he was able to ask participants to elaborate on their answers in some cases. The new questions that emerged from this elaboration addressed participant perceptions of the acceptability of instructor use of slang, slang’s impact on instructor credibility, and possible changes in participant perceptions of slang use if the instructor in the video had
been a male of a similar age. Like the original research, responses were sorted to identify themes.

The results of this study (Brown, 2013) indicate that some themes aligned well with those found by Mazer and Hunt (2008a), some were contradictory, and others were new themes not found in the original research. First, two themes aligned well with the original study. Categories identified as *slang as attention grabbing* and *instructor relating to students* were common thematic labels between the two studies. *Slang as attention grabbing* was constituted by comments that indicated participants found the use of slang made focusing on the lecture an easier task to undertake. Exemplars of this theme included, “…it [slang] just jumps out and gets your attention” (p. 9). *Instructor relating to students* was constituted by comments that indicated participants viewed the instructor’s use of slang as a method of connecting with an audience of college students. Exemplars of this theme included, “…she uses it [slang] to kind of keep it on our age group’s level” (p. 9).

Second, at least one theme seemed to be in contrast to the original research. Participant responses produced a theme identified as *slang was out of place and unnatural*. Exemplars of this theme included, “…that was awkward,” and “…It [slang use] was kind of weird” (p. 9). This finding does not fit with the original research findings that slang helps the delivery of course material and increases the comfort level of students in the classroom. While Mazer and Hunt (2008a) noted that some participants shared negative evaluations of instructor use of slang, the authors did not feel the quantity of these negative evaluations constituted a theme. However, Brown (2013) found that a
majority of participants voiced negative evaluations of slang use, criticizing it as unprofessional.

Finally, three themes not included in the original research emerged in the replication. These themes were a result of Brown’s ability to ask participants to elaborate on their responses. *Slang as not affecting perceptions of instructor credibility, slang as more natural/acceptable from men than women, and instructor is too old to use slang* were all new themes found in the replication using a female confederate. First, Brown explicitly asked participants if slang use affected their perceptions of the instructor’s credibility. Participant responses to this question indicate that the instructor’s title of professor established her credibility in a way that slang use would not threaten. However, a specific degree (e.g., Ph.D.) was not included in the demographic information. Second, participants were explicitly asked if slang used by the female confederate in the video would be perceived differently if a male had been featured in the recording. Students indicated that slang seems more natural when used by males than females. One participant justified this perception by stating that females are held to a higher standard than males when in the classroom. Finally, Brown explicitly asked participants if they felt the instructor in the recording was too old to use slang. Responses indicated that students perceived the confederate as being too old to naturally use slang. At least one participant stated that women over 30 should not use slang in professional settings. While these additional themes were identified as a result of Brown’s use of questions not included in the original replicated research (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a), they suggest that students may perceive the use of slang in the classroom very differently depending on the sex and/or age of the instructor.
The comparison of themes from Brown’s (2013) work and Mazer and Hunt’s (2008a) work shows that some differences in student perceptions of instructor use of slang may be due to the sex of the instructor. Central to this claim is an apparent difference between levels of acceptability for slang use for men and women. A male instructor using slang was perceived as increasing the comfort level of students and aiding the delivery of course content. However, a female instructor using the same slang was perceived as unnatural and out of place. Additionally, Brown’s work produced findings that were not seen in Mazer and Hunt’s work. These findings include the idea that acceptable slang use may be dictated by the age of the user, as well as slang being more acceptable when used by a man than a woman. These latter findings were a result of Brown’s use of interviews. This style allowed for the emergence of new questions. Conversely, Mazer and Hunt used a written question and answer data gathering style that prevented the addition of emergent questions. While differences in data gathering techniques, as well as locational differences—Brown studied a southern university while Mazer and Hunt studied a Midwestern university—may explain some variation in findings between the two studies, it is also possible that the variation is an effect of the confederates’ opposite sexes. In order to better understand sex differences in the classroom, sex-based instructor differences are reviewed below.

Given the research reviewed above, two of four hypotheses are proposed here. The first hypothesis involves the effect slang use may have on students’ perceptions of instructor dynamism. Dynamic instructional styles are, in part, characterized as being attention grabbing and engaging (Andersen et al., 1981; Rubin & Feezel, 1986). Similarly, instructor use of slang captures students’ attention (Brown, 2013; Mazer &
Hunt, 2008a). Even when students reported the use of slang as ineffective, they agreed that the instructor was putting forth an effort to connect and engage with them. As a result, the following hypothesis is formed:

**H1:** Instructors who use positive slang in the classroom will be perceived as more dynamic than instructors who do not use slang.

The second hypothesis involves the effect slang use may have on students’ perceptions of instructor approachability. Instructor approachability is characterized, in part, by students feeling comfortable asking the instructor questions in class (Cox et al., 2010). Additionally, students’ perceptions of instructor approachability are often formed as a result of the instructor’s lecture style (Perrine, 1998). Similarly, instructor use of slang is associated with positive student evaluations of instructor approachability (Brown, 2013; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). In fact, students report a feeling of increased similarity to professors who incorporate slang into lectures (Brown, 2013; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b). As a result, the following hypothesis is formed:

**H2:** Instructors who use positive slang in the classroom will be perceived as more approachable than instructors who do not use slang.

In addition to the preceding hypotheses, this research also aims to answer research questions for which insufficient data exists for the formation of hypotheses. The first research question deals with mixed findings that exist concerning slang use and instructor credibility. Credibility is characterized by terms such as trustworthy and expertise (Infante, 1980), and is associated with competence (Wheeless et al., 2011). Mazer and Hunt (2008a) found that some participants viewed slang use as harmful to instructor credibility. However, these reports were few and not deemed significant. Also, Brown’s
participants reported that slang did not affect their perceptions of instructor credibility. Given that no prior research indicates slang use has a significant effect on students’ evaluations of instructor credibility, the following research question is formed:

RQ1: Are students’ perceptions of instructor credibility impacted by instructor use of slang?

Sex Differences in the Classroom

A variable that may influence students’ perceptions of instructor use of slang in the classroom is the instructor’s sex (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a; Brown, 2013). Male and female instructors often approach teaching differently (Laird, Garver, & Niskode, 2007). Not only do male and female instructors often take different approaches, but also students often evaluate male and female instructors differently (Krupnick, 1985). Taken together, it can be established that differences in instructor sex influence classroom interactions. The variable of instructor sex is important to study because of the nearly even distribution of male and female classroom instructors (U. S. Department of Education, 2013). This project is specifically concerned with students’ perceptions of linguistic behaviors of male and female instructors in the classroom. Therefore, this section will review general linguistic differences between males and females as well as slang and sex-based linguistic differences in the classroom.

Male Instructors, Female Instructors, and Language

Differences in prototypical language styles exist between men and women (Mulac, 2006). On one hand, males have a wide range of acceptable language styles and features that can be used without violating social expectations. On the other hand, women have more restricted socially accepted language options that can be used and still be
perceived as an effective communicator (Burgoon, 1990). This past research suggests that women have fewer linguistic options than do men. In her widely cited work *Language and Woman’s Place* (1973), Robin Lakoff notes that “women’s language” (p. 50) is largely free from informal and nonstandard elements while men’s language is not. Similarly, Haas (1979) and, much more recently, Romaine (2003) found that men use significantly more non-standard language forms than do women across a large range of socioeconomic levels. Cheris Kramarae (1981) explains this linguistic difference by stating, “Women are not as free or as able as men to say what they wish, when and where they wish…” due to being outside of the dominant, male group (p.1). In fact, Kramarae states that women who use informal language are perceived as being less attractive than women who use more formal language. One specific style of informal language that has traditionally been atypical for women to use is, while a dated finding, slang (Labov, 1966; Trudgill, 1972). Evaluations of slang use in classroom settings, as noted above, are largely understudied.

*Sex, Language, and the Classroom*

While it is unclear if women wish to use slang in the classroom, it is clear that women are linguistically restricted. What is also clear is that sex-specific language is dynamic and always changing (Kalbfleisch, 2010). Generally, research has found no distinct speech characteristics for male or female instructors (Krupnick, 1985). Also, no significant sex-based differences have been found in the amount of words male and female instructors use during a typical lecture. Krupnick notes that instructors of both sexes speak around 4,500 words per hour-long class meeting. However, differences have been noted in linguistic behaviors of male and female instructors. Male instructors report
being more comfortable speaking in the classroom than female instructors due to life experiences and expectations requiring males to publicly and/or professionally communicate (Tannen, 1991). Additionally, females report higher overall communication apprehension levels than males (Jaasma, 1997). While, according to some research, possibly less comfortable speaking than men, female instructors’ behaviors are perceived as being more encouraging (Statham et al., 1991), more facilitating (Grasha, 1994), focused on networking (Romano, 1994), and making more adjustments during lectures (Tannen, 1991) than men. One such adjustment, as noted above, may be the strategic use of slang. However, limited research discussed above reminds us of the possibility of negative evaluations of women who use slang in the classroom (Brown, 2013). These contradictory findings between male and female instructors’ speaking styles and classroom comfort levels strengthen the rationale for this research project.

At this point, the final two hypotheses, both centered on the sex of the instructor, can be discussed. These specifically involve instructor sex differences and students’ perceptions of instructor use of slang. Existing research on students’ perceptions of instructor use of slang suggest that students evaluate slang use by male instructors more positively than slang use by female instructors (Brown, 2013; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a). This difference in evaluations can be explained by the understanding that women have more restricted socially accepted language options that can be used and still be perceived as an effective communicator than men (Burgoon, 1990). This means that a larger variety of acceptable language styles exist for men than women. Specifically, men are more likely (Romaine, 2003) and free (Lakoff, 1973; Kramarae, 1981) to use informal language than women. Since slang is a type of informal language (Lighter, 1994) that
generally unifies groups, it is worthy of further study and inclusion in hypotheses. Collectively, the research above contributed to the formation of the following hypotheses:

H3: Male instructors will be perceived as more dynamic than female instructors.

H4: Female instructors will be perceived as more approachable than male instructors.

In addition to studying dynamism, approachability, instructor sex, and slang use, it is also important to study how the independent variables above impact perceptions of instructor credibility. Overall, slang use does not seem to have an impact on perceptions of credibility (Brown, 2013; Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b). However, it is currently impossible to draw generalizable conclusions about possible interactions between instructor sex, use of slang, and credibility. No empirical study has examined the interaction between instructor sex, use of slang, and perceptions of credibility. One study (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a) has examined the intersection of male instructors, slang, and credibility, while a separate study (Brown, 2013) examined female instructors, slang, and credibility. However, neither study included variation of instructor sex. While the first research question listed above will look for general effects that slang use may have on perceived credibility, the following research questions were formed to study possible main effects of instructor sex and interactions between variables.

RQ2: Are students’ perceptions of instructor credibility impacted by instructor sex?

RQ3: Is there an interaction between instructor sex and slang use on perceptions of credibility?
Testing the hypotheses and answering the research questions above can provide useful information to classroom instructors. In order to draw meaningful conclusions, a rigorous study is needed to discount alternatives for the variation between the two studies exposed above and to fully explore possible sex interactions related to the perceptions of instructor use of slang regarding male/female instructors and male/female students. Understanding the relationship between the variables noted above might impact instructors’ approaches to instructor-student interactions by providing empirical advice, as well as change students’ evaluations of these interactions based on instructors’ strategic communication choices.

Since this study is exploratory, in part, the final three-part research question should examine possible interactions between instructor sex and student sex on ratings of dynamism, approachability, and credibility. Some studies indicate that there is no interaction between instructor sex and student sex on ratings of instructors (Jaasma, 1997). Other studies indicate that an interaction between these variables on instructor evaluations is likely (Kardia & Wright, 2004). These contradictory findings are inconclusive for hypothesis development. Therefore, the following three-part research question is asked:

RQ4: Do instructor sex, student sex, and slang use interact to affect ratings of dynamism, approachability, and credibility?

This study examines the use of slang in the classroom. Next, a discussion of the methodology used to measure student perceptions of instructor use of slang is presented. Second, a measurement and discussion of current slang use is revealed. Third, the main
study’s independent and dependent variables are described. Finally, participants and data analysis are discussed.
CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes an experiment that will test the hypotheses and answer the research questions listed above. Specifically, this chapter describes the development of messages varying in slang, construction of a questionnaire for measuring students’ perceptions of instructors, design of the experiment, as well as the collection and analysis of data. First, common local slang terms and phrases were established. Second, those terms and phrases were incorporated into multiple feigned passages an instructor might use during an initial class meeting. Third, a scale was created to measure students’ perceptions of instructor use of slang. Finally, the passages and scale were deployed to assess students’ perceptions of instructor use of slang in the classroom.

Slang Elicitation Procedure

A slang elicitation procedure was conducted in order to determine common slang terms and phrases possibly used by the pool of participants. The procedure was presented in the form of a questionnaire and produced slang terms and phrases used in the main experiment. The questionnaire included instructions and definitions of slang as they apply to this project. The procedure was completed in two parts. First, a preliminary list of slang words and phrases that meet Dumas and Lighter’s (1978) criteria for slang was generated with the help of a focus group. The focus group was made up of ten currently enrolled undergraduate students between ages 18 and 24 at a large Midwestern university’s communication center. As a result, eight words and phrases emerged. The words and phrases were: *chill, sweet, turn up, cool, about that life, clutch, on fleek,* and *sketch.*
Second, a larger group of participants were exposed to the list (Appendix A). Participants were 106 undergraduate students enrolled at a large Midwestern university. Participants identified as being 18-24 years of age, 41% male and 59% female, as well as 82% Caucasian, 8% African-American, 3% Hispanic, 2% Asian-American, and 4% Other. Each was prompted to read the list, provide a non-slang definition for each word or phrase, and provide a value reflecting the term or phrase’s frequency of use. Elicited non-slang definitions of terms and phrases were checked for consistency with the focus group’s definitions. A cut-off of 70 percent agreement was established. In other words, 70 percent of participants should agree with a common definition of an individual term or phrase. Frequency of use values ranged from zero to five. Values of zero reflected never hearing/using the term or phrase, while values of five reflected hearing/using the term or phrase frequently. For this measurement, a cut-off frequency mean score of three was established. All slang words and phrases included in the manipulation check met these criteria. Below, Table 1 provides a list of slang terms and phrases, a common definition, an agreement rate, and a mean frequency value for each. The table is sorted by agreement rating.

Control Messages

To create messages, a non-slang kernel message was generated. The same focus group described above was asked to produce messages they would expect an instructor to deliver during an initial class meeting of an introductory level course. An introductory level course was selected because each member has taken multiple entry-level courses. Also, past research (Brown, 2013) has produced findings that indicate that students evaluate instructor use of slang based on their perception of the instructor’s personality.
For this reason, an initial class meeting was selected to avoid exposure issues related to the instructor’s personality.

Table 1

Slang Terms/Phrases, Definitions, Agreement Rate, and Use Frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term/Phrase</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Agreement Rate (%)</th>
<th>M Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chill</td>
<td>Relax(ed); reduction in stress; calm down; spending time with someone</td>
<td>87.73</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>Something positive or favorable; desirable or enjoyable</td>
<td>87.73</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn up</td>
<td>Become energetic; prepared to be festive; create a fun atmosphere</td>
<td>78.94</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>Something or someone positive, favorable, admirable, or impressive</td>
<td>78.30</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About that life</td>
<td>In favor of a thing or lifestyle</td>
<td>76.84</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clutch</td>
<td>Ability to perform well under pressure</td>
<td>75.78</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On fleek</td>
<td>Something or someone positive; prepared to perform; in good form</td>
<td>75.55</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sketch</td>
<td>Situation that causes suspicion</td>
<td>73.58</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After 10 focus-group-generated control messages were analyzed for common themes, the following elements of a potential class presentation were established:

- professor introduction, confirming that students are in the correct room, general course expectations, class details, and an invitation for future instructor-student communication.

Using these common themes, a kernel control message was formed. Focus group members, faculty members, and dissertation advisors confirmed the face validity of the
kernel control message’s normalcy. All parties agreed that the kernel message used in the main experiment was valid. This message can be found in Appendix B.

**Experimental Messages**

To create slang messages, the kernel control message was augmented using the pool of eight slang terms and/or phrases produced by student responses to the slang questionnaire described above. The slang condition passages included a sampling of frequently used slang terms. Four slang condition passages, across both sexes, were created and deployed to increase the generalizability of findings. In other words, the use of multiple slang condition passages allows knowledge to be generated regarding slang, as opposed to knowledge regarding specific terms or phrases. All conditions of the passage contained approximately 173-176 words. Given this length, the slang conditions will include one slang term in every two-to-three sentence. This amount of slang was used to avoid creating a hammer effect (Bell, Zahn, & Hopper, 1984). While the control message was void of slang, all slang messages contained three slang terms or phrases. In other words, the inclusion of slang was limited in order to avoid participants feeling overwhelmed by slang use. Finally, each slang condition was equally attributed to both male and female instructor descriptions. All passages in all conditions contained the same kernel remarks from the course instructor. Each version included a welcome to the course and briefly discussed a contrived introductory level course during the initial class meeting.

To verify a difference between slang and non-slang messages, participants were asked to rate the level of slang inclusion in each message. Scores of *one* indicate no slang, scores of *two* indicate some slang, and scores of *three* indicate much slang. For
each passage version, a slang inclusion mean score was calculated. A one-way ANOVA compared the mean scores of each message version (the control and each of the four experimental messages). The test revealed control messages produced statistically significantly lower slang scores than the experimental messages, $F(4, 305)=64.747$, $p<.001$, confirming fit of message labels as control (non-slang) or experimental (slang-included). The mean score for control messages was 1.193, while the mean score for experimental messages was 2.065. Table 2 shows results from the Tukey HSD post hoc test for each message type.

Table 2

**Tukey Post Hoc Results by Message Type and Slang Inclusion Mean**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Message Type I</th>
<th>Message Type II</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slang Inclusion</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.004*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.004*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Significant difference between mean values
In order to visualize these means in a clear way, Figure 1 is included below.

![Means Plot for Message Version and Slang Inclusion](image)

*Figure 1. Means Plot for Message Version and Slang Inclusion*

**Main Experiment**

The main experiment examined the effects of instructor use of slang, instructor sex, and student sex, on and student perceptions of instructors. A questionnaire to measure student perceptions is detailed below.

**Variables**

Independent variables were instructor sex, participant sex, and slang use. Dependent variables were perceived instructor dynamism, perceived instructor approachability, and perceived instructor credibility. Demographic information of participants was collected.
**Independent variables.** Three independent variables were included in this study. First, instructor sex was separated: male and female. Second, slang use was separated into two conditions: slang-included conditions and non-slang condition, or control. Each survey contained a contrived message that conformed to either a slang or non-slang condition. Message production was carefully managed as described above. Finally, the sex of the participant was included and separated: male and female.

**Dependent variables.** Dependent variables for this study are participant’s perceptions of instructor dynamism, approachability, and credibility. All dependent variables were measured using the same semantic differential response option questionnaire. The scale was constructed from items found in existing scales that have proven to be valid and reliable. Below, scale creation is documented. Items from the scale are listed along with their previously established validity ratings expressed using factor-loading values from previous studies. Selected items were used due to strong validity data. This research did not use each item from each scale for three reasons. First, it is important to avoid potentially presenting too many items and creating participant fatigue (Fowler, 1995). Second, items with higher loading values were selected over items with lower loading values. Third, some scales measured multiple factors that did not apply to this study. For example, the first scale described below (Zahn & Hopper, 1985) measures perceptions of a speaker’s superiority, attractiveness, and dynamism. Only dynamism-related items were selected for inclusion in this study’s questionnaire.

First, dynamism was measured using all items from Zahn and Hopper’s (1985) seven-item dynamism subscale. Items include the terms active/passive (.80), talkative/shy (.80), aggressive/unaggressive (.76), enthusiastic/hesitant (.74), strong/weak (.72),
confident/unsure (.70), and energetic/lazy (.68). Second, approachability was measured using selected items from Porter, Wrench, and Hoskinson’s (2007) 20-item approachability scale. Items include the terms friendly/unfriendly (.97), cold/warm (-.97), inviting/uninviting (.98), closed/open (-.97), accessible/inaccessible (.96), welcoming/unwelcoming (.98), courteous/rude (.96), unreceptive/receptive (-.97), sociable/unsociable (.97), approachable/unapproachable (.97), easy to talk to/not easy to talk to (.96), and disrespectful/respectful (-.81). Third, credibility was measured using items selected from McCroskey and Young’s (1981) 12-item teacher credibility scale. Items include the terms intelligent/unintelligent (.74), untrained/trained (-.77), expert/inexpert (.81), uninformed/informed (-.77), competent/incompetent (.68), and untrustworthy/trustworthy (-.76). In all, the 25 selected items constituted the initial questionnaire.

Experiment

Faculty members from the university’s School of Communication were contacted and asked to donate 10 to 15 minutes of class time per section for data collection. If they agreed, hard copies of the questionnaires were brought to the classroom and administered to participants. Participants could quickly and easily complete the questionnaire during a brief period of time either at the beginning or end of a traditional class meeting.

The instrument was designed to fit on both sides of a single sheet of paper. The front side of the page contained instructions, a contrived description of an instructor, and a brief message simulating the instructor speaking during a class meeting. First, the instructions directed the participant to read the description of the instructor, envision that instructor, read the passage as though the imagined instructor was speaking the words
during an initial class meeting, then turn the page over to complete the questionnaire. The use of text as opposed to a live or recorded performance is a common research method used in instructional communication research (Sprinkle, Hunt, Simonds, & Comadena, 2006; Teven & Hanson, 2004) aimed at limiting possible idiosyncratic effects often associated with visual and auditory mediums. Next, the instructor description contained demographic data about the imagined instructor, including sex, age, and ethnicity. Descriptions of sex varied systematically between male and female instructors. Ethnicity and age were also included in the description but were consistently listed as Caucasian and 35-years-old. The reverse side of the page contained the semantic differential questionnaire and demographic questions.

Equal numbers of questionnaire versions were included in the experiment. In other words, each of the 10 versions of the instrument—four slang versions, one non-slang version, and male and female versions of each—had an approximately equal number of completed copies by the end of data collection. The surveys were systematically stacked and handed out to participants. Appendices C through G contain all versions of the control and slang passages. Appendix C contains instructions and survey items that were consistent across versions. Once participants completed the survey, they were asked to return the form to the researcher.

Instrument Reliability and Validity

In order to test for the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the complete questionnaire was deployed to 310 participants. Control, or non-slang, messages and experimental, or slang-included messages, were used for these tests. Responses produced by participants were used to statistically test the reliability and validity of the instrument.
For validity, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. For reliability, tests of Cronbach’s alpha were applied to items for each concept.

The exploratory factor analysis was conducted using all questionnaire items and responses. A principal-components extraction was selected along with a Varimax rotation. A minimum eigenvalue of 1.0 was set for factor determination. A minimum primary factor loading value of .500 was required (Hair et al., 1995) and no secondary loadings exceeded .483. The questionnaire produced five factors that aligned with these requirements. The first factor was labeled dynamism and was composed of the following items and loadings: strong-weak (.719), confident-unsure (.688), energetic-lazy (.601), and enthusiastic-hesitant (.505). The second factor was labeled approachability and was composed of the following items and loadings: approachable-unapproachable (.816), welcoming-unwelcoming (.782), easy to talk to-not easy to talk to (.749), social-unsocial (.661), accessible-inaccessible (.618), friendly-unfriendly (.586), and inviting-uninviting (.559). The third factor was labeled credibility and was composed of the following items and loadings: uninformed-informed (.783), untrained-trained (.772), expert-inexpert (.752), intelligent-unintelligent (.792), competent-incompetent (.653), disrespectful-respectful (.653), courteous-rude (.593), untrustworthy-trustworthy (.576). Finally, additional items loaded on two other factors. These factors were not labeled and items that loaded on them were not used in the final analysis. The forth factor was rejected because it only consisted of two items. Both items, talkative-shy and active-passive, were predicted to load on the dynamism factor but had weak loading values, .177 and .158 respectively, for that factor. The fifth factor included four items but these items were not predicted to load on a single factor. This diversity and divergence led to the rejection of
the fifth factor. Finally, items—disrespectful-respectful and courteous-rude—were predicted to load on the approachability factor but instead loaded on the credibility factor. The items were removed from the final analysis because they did not load as predicted by their use on previous scales or by the assumptions of this research.

Once problematic items were removed, a second exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the same parameters as the first. For this analysis, all items loaded on three factors. Each item loaded on its expected factor. Items measuring the variable dynamism produced loading values ranging from .769 to .611 with an average coefficient of .692. The alpha reliability of this scale was .766. Items measuring the variable approachability produced coefficients ranging from .842 to .549 with an average coefficient of .701. The alpha reliability of this scale was .876. Items measuring the variable credibility produced coefficients ranging from .770 to .595 with an average coefficient of .696. The alpha reliability of this scale was .878. The final exploratory factor analysis supports construct validity and the idea that the dependent variables are independent factors. Factor analysis loading values for final items can be seen below in Table 3.

Participants for main study were 309 undergraduate college students enrolled at a large Midwestern university. This population is an ideal fit as college students’ perceptions of instructor use of slang is the focus of this research. Specifically, in an attempt to achieve consistency for increased generalizability, participants were traditional college students between the ages of 18 and 24: 55.8% of participants were female, while 44.2% were male. Also, 85.8% of participants identified as Caucasian, 6.4% as African-
American, 3.2% as Hispanic, 2.3% as Asian-American, 0.3% as Native American, and 1.9% as an unlisted ethnicity.

Table 3

Varimax Rotation Loading Coefficients for Final Items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Dynamism</th>
<th>Component Approachability</th>
<th>Credibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong-Weak</td>
<td>.697</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident-Unsure</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic-Lazy</td>
<td>.691</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic-Hesitant</td>
<td>.611</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approachable-Unapproachable</td>
<td>.842</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming-Unwelcoming</td>
<td>.808</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to Talk-Not Easy</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-Unsocial</td>
<td>.687</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible-Inaccessible</td>
<td>.608</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly-Unfriendly</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inviting-Uninviting</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninformed-Informed</td>
<td>.770</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untrained-Trained</td>
<td>.760</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert-Inexpert</td>
<td>.756</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent-Unintelligent</td>
<td>.736</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent-Incompetent</td>
<td>.669</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespectful-Respectful</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courteous-Rude</td>
<td>.609</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While participants were enrolled in courses during the time of their participation, no single class enrollment (e.g., enrolled in a basic communication course) was required for participation. Finally, participant eligibility was not limited by sex or ethnicity, the researcher offered no reward to participants, and participation was voluntary.

Data Analysis

Main study participant responses were analyzed using a 2x2x5 factorial MANOVA to test for statistically significant main effects and interactions. Each
hypothesis and research question above was addressed by this test. Post hoc tests were used where appropriate. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.
CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

This chapter provides the results of data analyses described above. Specifically, it discusses the usefulness of the MANOVA and its results, tests of hypotheses, and answers to research questions.

First, these results discuss MANOVA used for statistical tests. Two tests of assumptions of variance were completed. First, Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity produced a value indicating a MANOVA was appropriate, $\chi^2 (5) = 401.14, p < .001$. Second, Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices produced a $M$ value of $173.00$ associated with a $p$ value of $.005$. This indicates that homogeneity assumption was violated and that Pillai’s Trace should be used as the multivariate test statistics. Pillai’s Trace represents a more conservative test that adjusts alpha levels appropriately (Field, 2009). The factorial MANOVA found a main effect for message type, $V = .238, F(3, 300) = 31.268, p < .001$. No other main effects or overall interaction were significant. Power analysis (Cohen, 1988) using a small effect size ($f^2 = .02$) revealed the study to have sufficient power (.80). Now, the hypotheses can be tested and research questions can be answered using the MANOVA test described below. Table 4 provides the output of the multivariate tests from the MANOVA.
Table 4

*MANOVA Multivariate Output for Experiment with Pillai’s Trace Statistics.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable(s)</th>
<th>Pillai’s Trace</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>.972</td>
<td>3507.934</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Type</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>31.268</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker Sex</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Sex</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>1.851</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker Sex*Message Type</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker Sex*Participant Sex</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>.761</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Type*Participant Sex</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>2.762</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker Sex<em>Message Type</em>Participant Sex</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.898</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Hypotheses and Research Questions*

H1 predicted that students perceive instructors who use positive slang in the classroom as more dynamic than instructors who do not use slang. This hypothesis was supported. The univariate analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in dynamism ratings between slang and non-slang messages, $F(4, 300)=18.773$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.06$. Participants reading slang messages produced significantly higher dynamism
ratings \((M=15.721, SD=2.731)\) than those reading non-slang messages \((M=14.261, SD=2.637)\). Differences between dynamism ratings are illustrated in Figure 2.

*Figure 2.* Mean Differences between Dynamism Ratings for Control and Slang Messages

Additionally, Tukey’s HSD post hoc test revealed a clear difference in mean scores for dynamism between messages predicted to be control (non-slang) and experimental (slang included). Those results are seen in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Tukey’s Post Hoc Results for Dynamism Means by Messages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Message Type I</th>
<th>Message Type II</th>
<th>(p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dynamism</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.009*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.003*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.009*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
H2 predicted that students perceive instructors who use slang in the classroom as more approachable than instructors who do not use slang. This hypothesis was supported. The univariate analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in approachability ratings between slang and non-slang messages, $F(4, 300)=5.606$, $p=.019$, $n^2=.02$. Participants reading slang messages produced significantly higher approachability ratings ($M=28.685$, $SD=5.200$) than those reading non-slang messages ($M=27.239$, $SD=5.017$). Differences between approachability ratings are illustrated in Figure 3.

![Figure 3](image)

*Figure 3. Mean Differences between Approachability Ratings for Control and Slang Messages.*

Even with a significant main effect present, Tukey’s HSD post hoc test revealed no clear difference in mean scores for dynamism between messages predicted to be control (non-slang) and experimental (slang included). Those results are seen in Table 6.
RQ1 asked if students’ perceptions of instructor credibility are impacted by instructor use of slang. The answer to this question is affirmative. In fact, students’ perceptions of instructor credibility are negatively impacted by slang use. The univariate analysis of variance revealed these significantly different credibility ratings based on slang use, \( F(4, 300)=24.245, p<.001, \eta^2=.07 \). Instructors using slang messages produced lower credibility scores (\( M=26.901, SD=5.760 \)) than those using non-slang messages (\( M=30.443, SD=4.425 \)). Differences between credibility ratings are illustrated in Figure 4.

Table 6

*Tukey’s Post Hoc Results for Approachability Means by Messages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Message Type I</th>
<th>Message Type II</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approachability</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, Tukey’s HSD post hoc test revealed a clear difference in mean scores for credibility between messages predicted to be control (non-slang) and experimental (slang included). Those results are seen in Table 7.

![Graph showing mean differences in credibility ratings between control and experimental messages.](image)

**Figure 4. Mean Differences between Credibility Ratings for Control and Slang Messages**

**Table 7**

**Tukey’s Post Hoc Results for Credibility Means by Messages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Message Type I</th>
<th>Message Type II</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.004*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 3</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>.973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 4</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.004*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experimental 2</td>
<td>.993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aside from the significant main effect of message type on variables of dynamism, approachability, and credibility noted above, no other main effects were found. For instructor sex, no effect was detected, \( F(1, 300)=.508, p=.677 \). Similarly, no effect was detected for participant sex, \( F(1,300)=1.851, p=.138 \).

H3 predicted that, under the same slang conditions, students perceive male instructors as more dynamic than female instructors. No support was found for this hypothesis, \( F(1, 87)=1.072, p=.301 \). Male instructors using non-slang messages (\( M=14.444, SD=2.599 \)) produced very similar dynamism ratings females using non-slang messages (\( M=14.070, SD=2.694 \)). Similarly, and using the same test with the experimental group, H3b predicted that, in the presence of slang, students perceive male instructors as more dynamic than female instructors. No support was found for this hypothesis. Male instructors using slang (\( M=15.929, SD=2.670 \)) provided very similar dynamism ratings as female instructors using slang (\( M=15.509, SD=2.788 \)).

H4 predicted that, under the same slang conditions, students perceive female instructors as more approachable than male instructors. No support was found for this hypothesis, \( F(1, 87)=.004, p=.951 \). Non-slang messages from female instructors (\( M=27.186, SD=5.448 \)) provided similar approachability ratings as non-slang messages from male instructors (\( M=27.289, SD=4.630 \)). Similarly, and using the same test with the experimental group, H4b predicted that, in the presence of slang, students perceive male instructors as more approachable than female instructors. No support was found for this hypothesis. Slang messages from male instructors (\( M=29.696, SD=5.567 \)) provided
nearly identical approachability ratings as slang messages from female instructors 
\(M=28.673, \ SD=4.824\). 

RQ3 asked if there is a statistical interaction between instructor sex and slang use, on credibility ratings. No significant interaction was found between these variables, \(F(1, \ 302)=.428, \ p=.513\). As noted above, slang use and credibility ratings were shown to have a negative relationship. This relationship remained intact regardless of the instructor’s sex.

RQ4 asked if a statistical interaction exists between instructor sex, student sex, and slang use on ratings of dynamism, approachability, and credibility. For each of the dependent variables, no significant interaction was found. RQ3 produced non-significant findings associated with dynamism, \(F(1, \ 302)=.228, \ p=.633\). RQ3 produced more non-significant findings associated with approachability, \(F(1, \ 302)=.337, \ p=.562\). Finally, RQ3 also produced non-significant findings associated with credibility, \(F(1, \ 302)=.001, \ p=.984\).
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

The results of this study generate knowledge that informs various areas of communication and education research. First, this study demonstrates that higher education instructors’ language choices and usage influence students’ evaluations of instructors. Second, it adds to what is known about the relationship between language and the sex of speakers and receivers, specifically in the higher education classroom. Third, these findings shape thoughts about CAT, as well as the idea that a speaker’s sex dictates acceptable language use. Finally, this study should inform real choices made by instructors about language use in the classroom.

Language Influences Evaluations of Interactions

Classroom instructors have important interactions with students (Johnson, 1981). Instructor-student interactions impact classroom experiences. For these reasons, many instructors value students’ perceptions of their dynamism (Haleta, 1996; Myers & Knox, 2000), approachability (Cox et al., 2010; Sidelinger, 2010), and credibility (Wheless et al, 2011). This research confirms that the type of language that an instructor chooses to use in the classroom impacts students’ evaluations of interactions, specifically in terms of perceived dynamism, approachability, and credibility. Instructors who use slang in the classroom are seen as more dynamic and approachable than instructors who do not use slang. However, instructors who use slang are perceived as less credible than those who do not use slang. These findings are general, meaning they include both male and female instructors and students. Given these findings, instructors must decide to either use or omit slang from their classroom vernacular.
The decision to include or omit slang use in the classroom is an individual instructor’s decision. Findings of this research indicate that the decision might be made based on which areas of student perception an instructor wishes to improve. On one hand, slang use is negatively related to students’ perceptions of instructor credibility. If an instructor has any doubt about his or her perceived credibility, slang use is not advisable. While no instructor wishes to be seen as less than credible, there may be individuals whose credibility can withstand slang use, especially in exchange for benefits in ratings of perceived dynamism and approachability. In this study, participants were only told to imagine instructors who were either male or female, Caucasian, and 35-years-of-age. No mention of academic rank or highest degree completed was mentioned. While this issue will be discussed in the limitations section of this paper, it is possible that older, higher ranking, and/or more educated instructors will be seen as very credible. This high credibility rating may offset the negative relationship between slang and credibility.

On the other hand, some instructors may wish to only improve students’ perceptions of their dynamism and/or approachability. These instructors are likely to benefit from slang use in the classroom. This research found that instructors who use slang in the classroom are seen as more dynamic and approachable than those who did not use slang. Therefore, if perceptions of these areas are in need of improvement and perceptions of credibility are strong, instructors may benefit from slang use in the classroom.

The discussion directly above applies generally to both male and female instructors. However, this study also raised sex-specific questions about instructor use of
slang in the classroom. The next section of this discussion addresses the applicable responses to those questions.

**Sex Differences, Language, and Evaluations**

Research findings vary regarding students’ evaluations of interactions with instructors based on the sex of instructors and students. Some findings indicate that student and instructor sex impacts evaluations of student-instructor interactions (Basow, 2000). Other research indicates that there is no interaction between student and instructor sex when evaluating interactions (Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 1994). While this work generally concludes that slang increases ratings of instructors’ dynamism and approachability and decreases ratings of credibility, it is important to understand how student ratings of male and female instructors differ. In short, this study did not find that either instructor- or student-sex matters when evaluating instructor use of slang in the classroom.

No interactions between instructor sex and student sex on perceptions of instructor dynamism, approachability, and/or credibility were found. This means that the general findings discussed above apply equitably to both male and female instructors and male students. Previous research notes that male and female instructors have different classroom experiences when interacting with students (Kardia & Wright, 2004). While this research does not contradict differing experiences between male and female instructors, it does highlight the notion that both male and female instructors’ use of slang is evaluated by students more similarly than not. This fact impacts the understanding of linguistic restrictions experienced by males and females, and is discussed further below.
Theoretical Implications

*Communication Accommodation Theory*

Findings indicate that convergence via slang can be beneficial and harmful. In terms of approachability and dynamism, the use of slang improves student ratings of classroom interactions. However, in terms of credibility, instructor use of slang has a negative correlation. CAT both confirms the benefits of slang use and warns against over accommodation. It’s possible that this research confirms both areas.

First, slang use improves student perceptions of instructor approachability and dynamism. Slang as a form of communication convergence seems to reduce the social distance between instructors and students by agreeing with previous CAT literature (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Giles & Ogay, 2007). While it remains unclear if students view instructors who use slang as being more similar to them, they did rate them as more approachable. Seminal work states that humans tend to see similar others as approachable (Byrne, 1971). Similar understandings may come from the discovery of higher ratings of dynamism from students for instructors who use slang.

Second, slang use negatively impacts student perceptions of instructor credibility. Communication convergence does have negative implications (Giles & Coupland, 1991). Two reasons for negative evaluations of convergence are overaccommodation and self-serving motivations. This research does not clarify which, if either, of these two reasons resulted in lower credibility ratings. However, this research suspects that students saw slang use, in some ways, as over accommodation, similar to “baby talk” findings expressed by Coupland et al. (1988). In other words, students may appreciate instructor use of slang as an attempt to connect with them (Brown, 2013) but also see it as contrived...
or fake, therefore violating situational norms or expectations (Giles & Coupland, 1991; Hogg et al., 1989; Shepard et al., 2001). This interpretation of findings accounts for both positive and negative student reactions to instructor use of slang.

**Language and Sex**

Previous research findings indicate that a speaker’s sex, either male or female, places different limitations on his or her acceptable linguistic choices or speech. As stated above, differences in prototypical language styles exist between men and women (Mulac, 2006). Males have a wide range of acceptable language styles and features while women have more restricted socially accepted language options that can be used and still be perceived as an effective communicator (Burgoon, 1990). Traditionally, “Women’s language” (Lakoff, 1973, p. 50) is shaped and positively evaluated by an expectation of being free from informal and nonstandard elements (Kramarae, 1974), including slang. Men’s language does not share these limitations (Haas, 1973; Romaine, 2003). However, this research challenges some dated findings. Not only did this research examine female instructors’ use of slang, it also objectively compared those findings to those of male instructors. No evidence was found that men and women are evaluated differently based on informal language use—specifically slang. Views about acceptable informal language use in the classroom (e.g., slang) seem to have changed. As discussed above, slang use both positively and negatively impact evaluations of both male and female instructors. This research does not indicate a fully positive view of slang. Instead, it suggests a sexually equitable evaluation of slang use. Therefore, findings clarify the known body of research dealing with social, sex-oriented linguistic limitations by indicating a much more equitable linguistic academy and culture than previous thought.
Practical Implications and Applications

This study has produced four specific insights and applications. First, findings benefit college instructors. Second, findings benefit college students. Third, findings benefit instructor evaluation authors. Finally, findings indicate that the sex of instructors and students do not impact evaluations of communication convergence via slang.

Primarily, college instructors benefit from this research’s findings. Now, instructors can make informed decisions about their use of slang in the classroom. Instructors who wish to be seen as more dynamic and/or approachable by students may choose to use slang. Conversely, instructors who are concerned with their perceived credibility in the classroom may decide to avoid slang use. Regardless of individual instructors’ wishes, this research provides an understanding of how slang use by instructors is evaluated by students. Some instructors will strategically use this information to create positive relationships with students.

Next, college students benefit from this research’s advice for instructors. The aforementioned positive relationship instructors can create, in part, through language choices will benefit students’ experiences in the classroom. Instructors who students rate as best or favorite are frequently those who students also rate as being the most “approachable” and “enthusiastic” (Basow, 2000, p. 410). Students report and research suggests that positive classroom experiences result in improved knowledge retention and participation (Cox et al., 2010; Sidelinger, 2010). This research provides a method for instructors to seem approachable and dynamic. Therefore, this research provides a potential method for creating positive classroom experiences. Overall, these findings, and the choices they inform, potentially assist instructors’ ability to effectively connect with
students in the classroom and prepare them for future interactions. As this effective preparation is an overarching goal of educators, those who are charged with evaluating instructor performance may also benefit from this research.

Academic administrators and evaluators benefit from this research. Evaluations of higher education instructors vary from department to department, and institution to institution (Laube et al., 2007). However, and as previously stated, several areas of evaluation are common across evaluation approaches. Included are the areas of dynamism, approachability, and credibility. These are frequently used in evaluations (Cox et al., 2010; Finn et al., 2009; Haleta, 1996; Marsh et al., 1975; Norton, 1983; Perry, 1985). Therefore, this research offers two benefits for administrators. First, new understandings of instructors’ dynamism, approachability, and credibility ratings are provided. The logic discussed above, including better instructor-student connections leading to better student experiences, provides a direct path to success through slang. Second, administrators who evaluate areas such as the three focused on above may benefit from inquiring about students’ perceptions of their instructor’s language choices. Specifically, this research shows that slang use impacts student perceptions of instructors. So, administrators may choose to explore instructor language as a long-term approach to training, evaluating, and selecting instructors.

Last, this research is liberating for instructors. Some instructors use slang in the classroom as a part of their normal vernacular, while others choose to use it strategically (Mazer & Hunt, 2008a; 2008b). Now, instructors can make more informed decisions about their use of slang in the classroom. Female instructors should use this research as a legitimate factor in making decisions about their language use in relation to student
evaluations. Some female instructors choose to enact an enhanced professional persona in the classroom in hopes of positive student reactions (Kardia & Wright, 2004). This research serves to liberate language choices in the classroom in an equitable way.

Generally, male and female students do not evaluate male and female instructors differently. This finding is the most important produced by this research. Conflicting studies have produced contradictory findings concerning differences in evaluations between male and female instructors. Additionally, past research has been less than clear about how male students evaluate female instructors and how female students evaluate male instructors. This research points toward no differences in any of these instructor evaluation scenarios.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this study include three areas: sample, slang terms used, and elements of the experimental design. First, this study applies to students who participated at a single, but large, Midwestern University. Findings are sufficiently generalizable for this institution. However, they may not accurately represent higher education students across the nation. Understanding if these findings are consistent with evaluations of instructors in other regions of that country is unclear and should be examined. While there is no reason thus far to expect regional differences, this more localized knowledge would pair well with a larger, more generalizable study. Second, this study represents the beginning of a potentially larger body of research related to tracking and evaluating slang terms. While it is true that this study went to extensive lengths to generate real and frequently used slang terms as well as collecting statistics on these categories, it is also true that slang fluidly changes (Eble, 1996, Mazer & Hunt, 2008a, 2008b). This research
uses current terms and phrases that are current to test the impact of instructor use of slang. However, these terms will mutate and should be continuously tracked and applied to similar research in order to determine if evaluations of slang use remain constant or change over time. While this research used four different slang messages to increase the generalizability of findings, having a current and robust collection of slang terms and phrases to include in future research will only strengthen future studies. Finally, future research should alter this experimental design. For example, both Mazer and Hunt (2008a) and Brown (2013) used both male and female instructors in their mid-thirties. New research should experiment with instructor age, as students’ perceptions of instructor slang use might change as the instructor ages. Other alterations may include instructor race, rank, and gender identity. Finally, future research should experiment with the amount of slang included in passages. It may be possible to establish an optimal level of slang, or convergence (Giles & Coupland, 1991).

While this study has limitations, it is also heuristic. Future research, in addition to opportunities stated directly above, should involve this study in multiple and various ways. These include replication using alternative experimental procedures, specific interest in both instructor and student sex, race, and age, as well as reducing slang use and regional investigations.

First, researchers should use both audio and audio/visual approaches for replications. This study used a text-only approach in hopes of avoiding idiosyncratic effects from participants, which has been used in previous endeavors (Burgoon, Dunbar, & Segrin, 2002; Sprinkle et al, 2006; Teven & Hanson 2004). This choice was made based on best intentions and previous research findings. However, future research should
use audio and audiovisual approaches as a point of comparison to this study’s findings based on experimental choices.

Second, researchers should isolate confederates and participants based on independent variable categories. Instructor and student sex, race, and age should be examined further. In other words, future studies might only explore Caucasian students’ perceptions of African-American instructors (or vice versa), traditional students’ perceptions of older instructors, male students’ perceptions of female instructors (or vice versa), and so on and so forth. This should be done for two reasons: clarity of findings and additional heuristic value. First, more specifically diverse groups of instructors will be more able to understand perceptions of their use of slang. A more detailed understanding of the interactions between these variables, if any, will assist instructor communication decision-making.

Third, the results of these more specific endeavors may prompt additional research. Knowing if and/or how interactions between sex, race, and age of instructors and students impacts students’ evaluations of instructor-student experiences via instructor use of slang in the classroom proposes beneficial knowledge. With a thorough understanding of specific sexes, races, and ages of instructors choosing whether or not to use slang in the classroom, industrious students might be able to better select the faculty members from whom they choose to take classes. Since no interactions between these variables were significant, students might feel free to choose instructors of either sex.

Next, future research should examine perceptions of instructors’ decisions to reduce slang use. In other words, if an instructor uses slang, either strategically or as a part of their natural vernacular, future studies should examine potential changes in
perceptions of dynamism, approachability, and credibility when slang use in the classroom is reduced. This study indicates that perceptions of dynamism and approachability would decrease, while perceptions of credibility would increase. However, more research is needed to accurately predict these changes.

Finally, scholars should maintain a record of usage for current, regional, and readily recognizable slang terms. The scholarship of slang terms, phrases, and usage is incomplete; therefore, studying slang is difficult. Slang is prone to frequent shifts of content, multiple and various usages by region and/or groups, and produced by unique subsets of the population (Eble, 1996). For these reasons, diverse research efforts should be required to track and understand the growth of commonly used slang as well as its use and acceptance. This study not only measured responses to slang use, but also identified a list of acceptable and applicable slang terms. Future research should collect slang terms and phrases from around the country’s regions ethnic groups, and ages. This area of basic research collaborates with the other suggestions for future research noted above.

Conclusion

This paper effectively fulfills three roles related to communication and education research. First, this research establishes a firm foundation for the exploration of slang research for theoretical and applied reasons. Second, it provides a thorough review of literature describing student-instructor interactions, CAT’s impact on these interactions, and potential sex-based linguistic differences between males and females. Finally, it provides novel findings and a discussion of their applicable implications.

First, this research provides a rationale for the study of instructor use of slang in the classroom and student evaluation of this language style. Here, readers find that slang
use impacts student evaluations of instructor use of slang in terms of perceived
dynamism, approachability, and credibility. Slang use impacts students’ ratings in each of
these areas. Significant results indicate that slang use improves students’ views of
instructor dynamism and approachability, while it diminishes their views of instructor
credibility. This information alone justifies the study of instructor use of slang and its
effects in the classroom.

Second, this research provides a detailed review of literature. The value and
process of instructor-student interactions, the role of individual sex on these interactions,
and the linguistic limitations for male and female speakers are covered. Instructor-student
interactions impact students’ experiences during higher education (Duffy et al., 2001;
Fassinger, 1995). Instructors who students rate as most effective are typically rated as
very approachable and dynamic (Basow, 2000). Additionally, conflicting findings exist
concerning the sex-specific evaluations of instructors in general, specifically differences
between male and female students (Basow, 1995, Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 1994). This
study does not indicate a difference in ratings between male/female instructors and
male/female students.

Last, novel findings from this research contradict dated ideas about social
limitations placed on men and women’s language. Previous research reveals that
language styles differ between men and women. Specifically, groundbreaking research by
Lakoff (1973) and Kramerae (1981) states that women are not socially permitted to use
informal language. However, this research did not discover a difference between men and
women’s use of informal language. While this study focused on informal language use as
slang in the classroom, the general disagreement between these findings and existing
literature are intriguing and might signal a change in social perceptions. This development alone bolsters the heuristic value and importance of this study.

To complete this work, it is important to restate the valuable role college-level instructors play in society. At the least, instructors help students prepare for their multiple and various future opportunities. At most, instructors are valuable participants in the larger effort to educate America’s future citizenry. Any and all meaningful efforts to understand and assist this process are valuable and important. This research adds to this cause. Slang use in the classroom may, at first, seem trivial. However, a closer examination reveals that choices about and reactions to slang use in the classroom by instructors could impact learning and development in higher-education classrooms everywhere.
APPENDIX A – Slang Elicitation Survey

College Classroom Slang Assessment Survey

To complete this slang survey, please follow these directions:

First, a list of slang words/phrases is listed in the table below. For each word/phrase, please provide a non-slang definition of the term/phrase. In other words, what does this slang term/phrase mean to you? Next, provide a rating of how frequently you use/hear the slang term/phrase (0=never hear this, 5=hear this very frequently). Finally, please answer the demographic questions at the bottom of this form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slang Word/Phrase</th>
<th>Non-Slang Definition</th>
<th>Frequency of Use (0-5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: “Awesome”</td>
<td>Wonderful or pleasing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About that life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clutch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>On fleek</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sketchy (Sketch)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your sex? _____Male _____Female

What is your age? _____years of age

What is your ethnicity?

___Caucasian ___African-American ___Hispanic

___Asian-American ___Other

Are you currently enrolled in a course(s) at GVSU? _____Yes _____No

THANK YOU!
Instructor Perception Survey

First, imagine that you are attending an introductory level course at the university. Your instructor for the course can be described using the information below:

Gender: Male
Ethnicity: Caucasian
Age: 35

Next, and with this description in mind, imagine an image of this instructor. With that image in mind, please read the following passage as though this instructor is speaking to the class on the first day of the semester.

Hello everyone and welcome to COL 100. My name is Professor Smith and I will be your instructor for this course. Before I continue, I want to make sure that everyone is in the right room. If not, feel free to leave now and find the correct room. I hope that you all enjoyed the break and are ready to begin a new semester. I’ll start out by telling you a little about myself. I’ve been at the university for three years and teach a variety of classes. For this class, I want you all to gain a better understanding of what it takes to be a successful college student. We will have a combination of lectures, three quizzes, and two papers during the semester. If you have regular attendance and apply yourself, you should find the class manageable and useful. If you have questions about me or the class, or if you just need to talk, feel free to stop by my office during office hours which are posted on the syllabus.

While thinking about what you just read and imagined, please turn this paper over and complete a brief assessment of the instructor.
Next, think about the passage you just read. Then, rate the imagined instructor using the following scale. For each set of words, circle the number that you feel best reflects your perceptions of the instructor.

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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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Please respond to the following items:

22. Which best describes your biological sex (not gender)?
   Male  Female

23. Which best describes your ethnicity?
   Caucasian  African-American  Hispanic  Asian-American  Native American  Other

24. Which age group are you in?
   18-24  Other

25. How much slang do you feel was contained in the passage you just read?
   None  Some  Much
Hello everyone and welcome to COL 100. My name is Professor Smith and I will be your instructor for this course. Before I turn up, I want to make sure that everyone is in the right room. If not, feel free to leave now and find the correct room. I hope that you all enjoyed the break and are ready to begin a new semester. I’ll start out by telling you a little about myself. I’ve been at the university for three years and teach a variety of sweet classes. For this class, I want you all to gain a better understanding of what it takes to be a successful college student. We will have a combination of lectures, three quizzes, and two papers during the semester. If you have regular attendance and apply yourself, you should be cool with this class. If you have questions about me or the class, or if you just need to talk, feel free to stop by my office during office hours which are posted on the syllabus.
Hello everyone and welcome to COL 100. My name is Professor Smith and I will be your instructor for this course. Before I continue, I want to make sure that everyone is in the right room. If not, feel free to leave now and not feel sketchy. I hope that you all enjoyed the break and are ready to begin a new semester. I’ll start out by telling you a little about myself. I’ve been at the university for three years and teach a variety of classes. For this class, I want you all to gain a better understanding of what it takes to be a clutch college student. We will have a combination of lectures, three quizzes, and two papers during the semester. If you have regular attendance and apply yourself, you should find the class manageable and useful. If you have questions about me or the class, or if you just need to chill, feel free to stop by my office during office hours which are posted on the syllabus.
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APPENDIX G – IRB Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the “Adverse Effect Report Form”.
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
- Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 15081804
PROJECT TITLE: Instructor-Student Classroom Interactions: An Experimental Study of Language, Sex-Differences, and Perceptions of Instructors
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Carl Brown
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts and Letters
DEPARTMENT: Communication Studies
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 09/02/2015 to 09/01/2016

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
REFERENCES


gender on student evaluations: Judged before met. *Journal of Diversity in Higher
Education, 3*, 245-256. doi: 10.1037/a0020763

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and Teacher Education, 16*, 749-764.


instructors: Evidence relating to the question of gender bias in teaching


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NJ: Prentice-Hall.


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