

THE USE OF LIWC TO UNDERSTAND HOW UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS LEARN THE APA STYLE

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Introduction

- APA Style emerged as a part of the Behaviorist movement in Psychology
- APA writing style is a genre different from ones in Science and Arts & Humanities
- This archival study examined student papers in electronic department portfolio
- We asked whether and how papers vary from first to fourth year in both linguistic features and psychological processes
- Both our approach and results must be regarded as exploratory and tentative

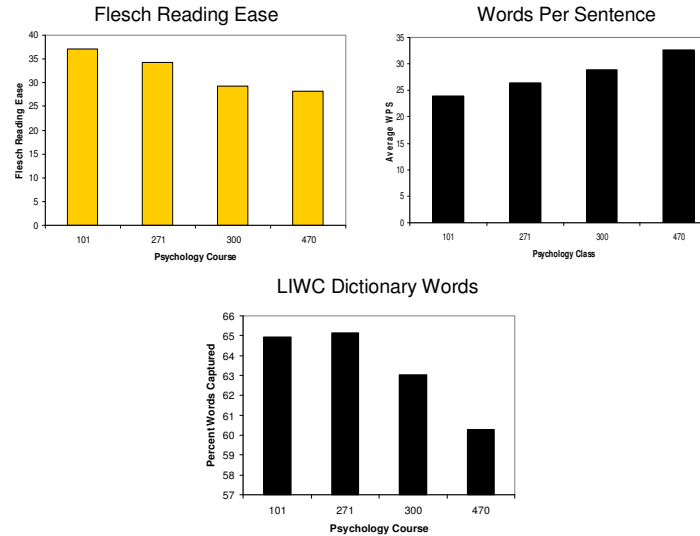
Method

- Analyzed the structure and language of research papers from four different levels of undergraduate psychology classes
- Papers obtained from University WebPortfolio for Psychology majors
- This is an exploratory study where N = 13
- Assignments converted to text (.txt) files
- Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) Software was used to analyze papers
- Performed analysis for 13 variables selected from the 5 dimensions of LIWC

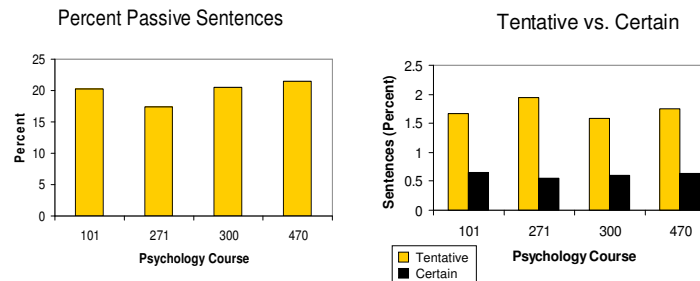
LIWC Dimensions

- **Standard Linguistic**
 - Dictionary Words *Percent captured*
 - Words Per Sentence
- **Psychological Processes**
 - Percent Passive Sentences
 - Tentative *Maybe, perhaps, guess*
 - Certainty *Always, never*
- **Microsoft Flesch Reading Scale**
 - Score: 30-49
 - Reading Age: 18-20 Years
 - Difficulty Level: Difficult

LIWC Linguistic Results



LIWC Psychological Processes



Psychology Courses and Objectives

Psyc 101	Psyc as a Discipline and Profession	Learn to write in APA Style
Psyc 271	Psyc Research Methods	Write first full APA research report
Psyc 300-level	Any upper Psyc class	Continue assignments in APA style
Psyc 470	Senior Research Seminar	Write final APA research report

Results

- Results imply that students in upper-level psychology classes have a better grasp on aspects of APA style
- Flesch Reading Ease decreased significantly across classes
- Words per Sentence increased significantly across classes
- Percentage of passive sentences was not significant, but showed a decrease in "Research Methods"
- There was significantly more use of tentative vocabulary than certain vocabulary.
- LIWC dictionary words captured decreased suggesting a trend toward more disciplinary language use.

Discussion

- Students acquire aspects APA style as they work through their psychological coursework.
- Professors can require students to submit a Word Count and Flesch Reading Ease score in with their submitted papers to verify progress
- Future research will include information gathered directly from students on how they learned APA style
- Future research will include surveys from students and a APA writing test to compare the scores of their papers to how accurate they can find APA writing mistakes on the spot

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