

# Watch Your Language! Does Jargon Matter?

Katie Shemanski, Ed.S., NCSP, BCBA, Ginny Salzer, Ph.D., Jessica Kendorski, Ph.D, NCSP, BCBA – D,  
Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine  
Frank DeMatteo, Ed.D., NCSP, Marywood University



## INTRODUCTION

When engaging with teachers in the development of individual behavioral interventions through school based consultation, it is important for consultants to understand what elements influence teachers' acceptability of behavioral interventions. Of particular interest to consultants should be the type of language used when describing behavioral interventions to teachers. Specifically, should consultants be using jargon or non-jargon language when describing behavioral interventions to teachers during consultation? Research that examines these factors is conflicting and outdated (Hyatt et al., 1991; Hyatt & Tingstrom's, 1993; Kazdin & Cole, 1981; Knotek, 2003; Witt, Moe, et al., 1984; Woolfolk & Woolfolk, 1979; Woolfolk et al., 1977).

## METHOD

- 101 K-6 public school elementary teachers participated.
- Participants were given a description of a student displaying a problematic behavior in the classroom setting.
- Participants were asked to read one of two positive behavioral interventions to address the problematic behavior.
- Some participants were presented with a positive behavior intervention described in non-jargon terms while others were provided a description in jargon terms.
- Participants were asked to rate the acceptability and usage of the intervention read on the Usage Rating Profile-Intervention (URP-IR) (Briesch et al., 2013).
- In addition, teachers completed brief demographic questions such as age, grade taught, highest degree held, number of years teaching, etc.
- Complete participation in the study lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

The following jargon and corresponding non-jargon terms/phrases are samples taken from the scenarios used for this research:

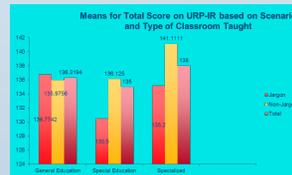
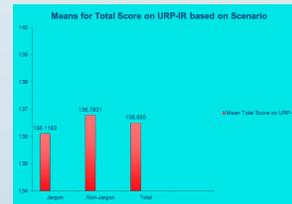
Jargon Term	Non-jargon Term
Reinforcement of incompatible behavior (RIB)	Replace behavior with more desirable behavior
Reinforcing	Rewarding
Operant Condition	Teach
Intermission	Plan
Appropriate	Right
Compliant	Positive
Control	Change
Cooperative	Appropriate
Modify	Change

\*Non-jargon and jargon descriptions of positive behavioral interventions were modified from Hall and Didier's (1987) scenarios used for their study with original thought also utilized to make the vignettes appropriate for the current investigation.

## RESULTS

A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant difference between the type of language used (jargon versus non-jargon) and total acceptability and usage ratings on the URP-IR,  $F(1, 95) = .05, p = .823$ . In addition, for the acceptability and usage ratings on the URP-IR, the variances were equal for the positive behavioral intervention described in jargon and non-jargon language,  $F(1, 99) = .123, p = .727$ .

When a two-way ANOVA was completed, results indicated that there was not a significant main effect for the scenario. The jargon ( $M = 136.12$ ) scenario was not rated significantly higher than non-jargon ( $M = 136.79$ ) scenario,  $F(1, 95) = .560, p = .456$ . Furthermore, there was no main effect for type of classroom taught. Specialized ( $M = 138.00$ ) classroom teachers did not provide a significantly higher rating than general education ( $M = 136.32$ ) or special education ( $M = 135.00$ ) teachers,  $F(2, 95) = .256, p = .775$ . Lastly, there was no significant scenario by class interaction,  $F(2, 95) = .445, p = .642$ .



## DISCUSSION

The results of this research assist in clarifying previous conflicting findings in this area (Hyatt et al., 1991; Hyatt & Tingstrom's, 1993; Kazdin & Cole, 1981; Knotek, 2003; Witt, Moe, et al., 1984; Woolfolk & Woolfolk, 1979; Woolfolk et al., 1977). This research can assist in forming the basis for a theory related to language preference (jargon versus non-jargon) and the type of classroom taught (e.g., gym, art, music, etc.). The findings of the present study also have practical implications for school psychology and applied behavior analysis graduate training problems. Courses that contain content related to behavioral consultation or applied behavior analysis can present these results as a foundation for relationship/rapport building with consultees, particularly teachers.

## CONCLUSION

- Type of language used (jargon versus non-jargon) did not affect total acceptability and usage ratings on the URP-IR.
- Type of classroom taught (e.g., general education, special education, specialized) did not affect preference on the URP-IR for jargon versus non-jargon terminology when describing a positive behavioral intervention.
- Therefore, in relation to acceptability of intervention, there may be no reason for consultants to use jargon terminology when describing behavioral interventions.
- More research is needed on the effect of jargon on other areas of behavioral consultation such as relationship building, fidelity of implementation, or willingness to collaborate

## REFERENCES

- Briesch, A. M., Chafouleas, S. M., Rak Neugebauer, S., & Riley Tillman, T. C. (2013). Assessing influences on intervention implementation: Revision of the Usage Rating Profile-Intervention. *Journal of School Psychology, 51*, 81-96.
- Hall, C. W., Didier, E. (1987). Acceptability and utilization of frequently-cited intervention strategies. *Psychology in the Schools, 24*, 153-161.
- Hyatt, S. P., & Tingstrom, D. H. (1993). Consultants' use of jargon during intervention presentation: An evaluation or presentation modality and type of intervention. *School Psychology Quarterly, 8*(2), 99-109.
- Hyatt, S. P., Tingstrom, D. H., & Edwards, R. (1991). Jargon usage in intervention presentation during consultation: Demonstration of a facilitative effect. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 2*(1), 49-58.
- Kazdin, A. E., & Cole, P. M. (1981). Attitudes and labeling biases toward behavior modification: The effects of labels, content, and jargon. *Behavior Therapy, 12*, 56-68.
- Knotek, S. E. (2003). Making sense of jargon during consultation: Understanding consultees' social language to effect change in student study teams. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 14*(2), 181-207.
- Rhoades, M. M., & Kratochwill, T. R. (1992). Teacher reactions to behavioral consultation: An analysis of language and involvement. *School Psychology Quarterly, 7*(1), 47-59.
- Witt, J. C., Moe, G., Gutkin, T. B., & Andrews, L. (1984). The effect of saying the same thing in different ways: The problem of language and jargon in school-based consultation. *Journal of School Psychology, 22*, 361-367.
- Woolfolk, R. L., & Woolfolk, A. E. (1979). Modifying the effect of the behavior modification label. *Behavior Therapy, 10*, 575-578.
- Woolfolk, A. E., Woolfolk, R. L., & Wilson, G. T. (1977). A rose by any other name...: Labeling bias and attitudes toward behavior modification. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 45*(2), 184-191.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM) and Marywood University for their support of this research.