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EVOCATION OF FREEDOM AND COMPLIANCE: THE "BUT YOU ARE FREE OF..." TECHNIQUE

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ABSTRACT

Many investigations showed that the semantic characteristics of a request could lead to more compliance. A feeling of freedom is also a factor favoring compliance to numerous types of requests. An experiment was carried out, in which the evocation of freedom was formulated verbally, following a demand for money made by confederates. Results show that the verbal incentive used (demand for money + "but you are free to accept or to refuse") increased the rate of subjects' compliance as well as the average amount of granted gifts. The semantic activation of the feeling of freedom is discussed within the framework of numerous paradigms of research on compliance.

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INTRODUCTION

Research on helping behavior have traditionally emphasized the characteristics of the donor, the beneficiary, and the context. Some research however concerned the linguistic aspect of the requests for help. Thus Cialdini and Schroeder (1976) showed that the addition of the sentence "even a penny will help" leads the solicited people to give more to an humanitarian organization. This sentence also increased the rate of donors. Numerous replications of this technique (Reeves, Macolini and Martin 1987; Reeves and Saucer 1993) give evidence of its efficiency on compliance behavior. By manipulating the semantic contents of the request, Enzle and Harvey (1982) showed that an indirect negation request (e.g. You will help me, won't you?) elicited greater helping than either a direct negation (e.g. Won't you help me?) or a control form (e.g. Will you help me?).

In the same way, Howard (1990) had demonstrated that asking someone how he feels improves compliance with a helping request made immediately after the subject's response. Another procedure that improves compliance to a request is the "that's-not-all technique" (Burger 1986). When applying this technique, the requester presents a recipient with a first request at a certain price but does not allow the subject the instant opportunity to decline or to accept the offer. As the subject considers the price, the requester then improves the deal by including an extra product or by lowering the price of the offer. In Burger's first experiment, people approaching a bake sale table were told that the price of a cupcake was \$0.75. At this moment, the seller was interrupted by a second seller who needs help. The first seller then asked the subject to "wait a second." Then after a brief exchange between the two salesmen (5-10 seconds), the first seller returned to the client and announced to him that the offer also included two cookies. Results showed that 73.0 % of the subjects in this "that's-not-all condition" bought the cupcake with the two cookies package whereas 40.0 % bought this package when the complete offer was made at the same price.

Another factor facilitating compliance to requests, but which does not proceed from the semantic characteristics of the request, is the feeling of freedom of the subject. This feeling of freedom would be one of the main factors predisposing to the compliance (Kiesler 1971). Now, we cannot keep count of research on the compliance without pressure, which gives evidence of the efficiency of techniques facilitating the activation of this feeling of freedom: foot-in-the-door (Freedman and Fraser 1966), door-in-the-face (Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, Wheeler and Lee Darby 1975), low-ball (Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett and Miller 1978) or also the technique of the lure (Joule, Gouilloux and Weber 1989). Surprisingly, experimental research concerning this feeling of freedom have compared some situations where the subject's freedom was

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reduced, comparatively to a situation of free choice (Beaman, Svanum, Manlove and Hampton 1974; Chartrand, Pinckert and Burger 1999). According to the reactance theory of Brehm (1966), this feeling of loss of freedom comes along with a drastic fall of compliance. Few studies were made on conditions favoring a feeling of increased freedom in the decision of the subject, notably by means of the semantic characteristics of the requests. With the benefit of hindsight, we realize that the effect of sentences such as "it is up to you to see," "up to you to choose," "but you are free of..." which are generally expressed to punctuate the end of a request in the case of the techniques of compliance without pressure, were never the object of a direct investigation. This is the objective fixed by the experiment presented below.

HYPOTHESIS

Accounting for the persuasive effects contained in the semantic properties of requests, shown by the various research quoted above, we could expect that the direct semantic evocation of the freedom of subject's decision facilitates the request's compliance.

METHOD

Subjects

Forty men and 40 women (age range 30-50 years old), alone, chosen at random in the street. Forty people were random in the experimental group (20 men and 20 women) and 40 in the control group (20 men and 20 women).

Procedure

Four people, 2 men and 2 women (average age 20-22 years old), played the role of confederates in this experiment. They were dressed neatly and in a traditional way for young people of this age (jeans/sneakers/T-shirt). The experiment took place in a mall during particularly sunny spring days. A confederate approached a subject taken at random after counting the passage of a definite number of pedestrians in a defined zone. If the subject was a child or a teenager or an old man or a group, the confederate took the person coming just after so that she corresponds to the expected profile. In the control condition, the confederate approached the subject by saying to him or her politely: "Sorry Madam/Sir, would you have some coins to take the bus, please?" In experimental condition, the confederate formulated with the same tone the following request: "Sorry Madam/Sir, would you have some coins to take the bus, please? But you are free to accept or to refuse." The confederate then estimated if the subject agreed or not to his request. In the case of a positive answer, the confederate waited for the subject to give him the money. He estimated the amount and then gave back the sum to the subject and proceeded to completely debrief the subject.

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RESULTS

On all measures employed in this study, no differences were found between male and female subjects. This is also true with the differences between the four confederates of this experiment. So, data was aggregated. In the control condition, 10.0 % of solicited people accepted the request of the confederate, whereas 47.5 % accepted in the experimental condition. The comparison of these two rates gives evidence of a significant difference [$X^2(1, 80) = 13.73, p < .001$]. The evocation of the freedom of subject's decision leads to favor the request compliance. When we consider the mean amount of the gifts granted by the people having accepted the request in each of the groups, we observe that it is FF 3.25 (US \$ 0.48) in the control condition versus FF 7.05 (US \$ 1.04) in the experimental condition. Here also, this difference is significant [$t(21) = 3.03, p < .01, two-tailed$] and this is in spite of a weak compliance rate in the control group (4 persons over 40). The evocation of freedom favored the generosity of solicited people and the average amount of the granted gifts corresponds to the price of a bus ticket at the time of the experiment (FF 6.80 or US \$ 1.00).

DISCUSSION

We observe that the semantic evocation of freedom in the content of the request increases the probability of compliance, but also favors the implication of the subject, as this one grants twice more money to the requester. This experiment confirms that we can obtain more compliance in a request directly by manipulating its verbal contents. This goes along the same lines of numerous

previous works as those concerning the technique of "even a penny will help" (Cialdini and Schroeder 1976; Reeves, Macolini and Martin 1987; Reeves and Saucer 1993), that of the "foot-in-the-mouth" (Howard 1990) or that of "that's not all" (Burger 1986; Pollock, Smith, Knowles and Bruce 1998). The results of this experiment seem to show that we can add to this set of techniques the one of "but you are free of..."

Why is there such efficiency with this technique? Naturally, it is not the additional verbal contents which explains our results, but rather what the contents of it activates among the subjects. In this stage of the evaluation, four explanations can be proposed. Firstly, it is possible that the verbal evocation of the freedom contained in the request really activates the feeling of freedom for the subject. Now, numerous researches show that the increase of this feeling of freedom acts as a facilitator of commitment towards the expected behavior (Kiesler 1971; Cialdini 1993). Secondly, perhaps this evocation of freedom leads the subject to feel socially more involved towards the demand for help formulated by the confederate. Now, this norm of social responsibility, when activated, makes a powerful facilitator for spontaneous help by others and of compliance to requests (Berkowitz and Daniels 1963; Harris 1972). Furthermore, the activation of this norm improves compliance with the

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request but also the degree of implication of subject (Guéguen and Fisher-Lokou 1999). Thirdly, the evocation of the freedom in the contents of the request would limit the weight of external causes to compliance, and favors the activation of internal causes. Now, in compliance without pressure, notably within the framework of the paradigm of the Foot-in-the-door, when requests strengthen the weight of external factors to compliance, less further compliance is obtained (Zuckerman, Lazzaro and Waldgeir 1979). Conversely, more compliance is noticed when the attribution of internal causes is favored (Gorassini and Olson 1995). Finally, it is also possible that the evoked freedom arises a guilty feeling from the subject if he does not answer to the request. We know for a long time now that guilt favors helping behavior (Konecni 1972) and certain classic paradigms of the compliance without pressure, as the Door-in-the-Face, see their results interpreted in this way (O'Keffe and Gigge 1997).

Naturally, these interpretations appear for the moment premature and the effect of the "but you are free of..." technique still remains to be confirmed and more factors explaining its efficiency require further research. Nevertheless, because more compliance was obtained in the experimental group, the research reported here demonstrates the effectiveness of this technique based on the simple evocation of freedom.

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