VALIDATION OF THE READER PREFERENCE PROFILE AND INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LISTENER PREFERENCE PROFILE AND READER PREFERENCE PROFILE

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Abstract

The Reader Preference Profile(RPP) was designed to identify habitual communication responses using a decoder perspective. A total of 519 subjects participated in two phases of the current study. A questionnaire was developed to identify individual preferences associated with the reading of printed information. The original questionnaire contained twenty-six items and was administered to 192 undergraduate students. Responses to these initial twenty-six items was subjected to a principal components factor analysis. Four clusters emerged, with factor loadings ranging from .58 to .83, that were subsequently labeled to parallel the Listener Preference Profile(LPP) developed by Watson and Barker, 1992: people-, content-, action-, and goal-oriented reading. Based on the results from the first study, a second questionnaire was administered to a different group of 327 undergraduates that contained a total of twenty-eight items. The LPP was also administered to this population concurrently. Results from the second study revealed significant relationships between several reader and listener orientations. There was an overall significant relationship between people-oriented reader preference and action-oriented listener preference ($r = .38$, $p < .001$), and between action-oriented reader preference and content-oriented listener preference ($r = .19$, $p < .001$).
Gender differences were explored and the results differed for both males and females. The findings indicate significant gender differences exist among reader preference orientations and that multiple reader orientations are common, especially for males. Even so, approximately twenty percent of the sample indicated no preference for any of the reader orientations. The results from this study suggest that an instrument for the measurement and study of reader preferences has been developed. In addition, this study suggests that one's preference for listening may compliment their reading preference, or in contrast may differ quite substantially.

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There is substantial evidence to support the assertion that people manifest differences in their willingness to speak (Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988; Burgon, 1976; McCroskey & Richmond, 1985, 1987, 1990; McCroskey, 1992; Zakahi & McCroskey, 1989). While research investigating differences in the willingness to listen is more limited, recent work has documented that people differ in their listener preferences (Luttrell, E.S., Weaver, J.B., Barker, L.L., & Watson, 1992; Mahon, 1991; Watson, 1984; Watson & Barker, 1992; Watson, Barker, & Weaver, 1992; Weaver, Watson, & Barker, 1993).

A listener's predisposition or preference to listen not only influences the selection and perception of incoming messages, but also influences a listener's attitudes about the process itself. Research in information processing strongly supports the view that individuals use multi-dimensional cognitive structuring to receive, process, interpret, store, and recall information (Bobrow & Norman, 1975; Fitch-Hauser, 1990; McReynolds, 1976; Priess, 1987; Schank, 1982). It appears that while cognitive structure affects the storage and recall of information, it also interacts with underlying schema. Therefore, existing schema may explain some of the reasons why individuals may choose to decode information differently.

While research in the area of communication provided some insight as to the possible orientations that might exist,
specific research in the area of reader preferences has been minimal. Several articles discuss reader interests (Ashley, 1970; Delong, 1975; Smith, 1980); these studies focus primarily on the types of books children and adolescents choose to read. While this information provides insight into the person's likes and dislikes it does not necessarily reflect their reading preferences.

Similarly, other studies have focused on reader attitude (Healy, 1965; Mathewson, 1976) which reflect internal characteristics of the reader. Selected attitudes certainly may underlie reader preferences, but their manifestation differs from reader preferences in significant ways. One's interest in a particular topic may not reflect how or when that person prefers to read about a given topic. Similarly, a person attitudes towards reading in general may not be exhibited by his/her preference for obtaining written information.

The limited amount of research that has been conducted on reader preferences to date can be classified under one two constructs: reader interests and reader attitudes. Research on reader preferences is sparse. Consequently, the concept of reader preferences examined in the present study builds on the model proposed by Watson, Barker, & Weaver (1992) that explores individual differences in listening preferences.

In their model Watson and Barker identified four orientations that characterize a person's listening preference: people-, content-, action-, and time-oriented. These orientations reflect an individual's habitual listening preference, or the pattern of listening behavior an individual is most comfortable with. The present study represents an attempt to determine whether individuals demonstrate similar habitual responses when reading. The study also investigated possible relationships and differences between individual listening and reading preferences.

Development of the Instrument

Initial items for the RPP were generated from both an empirical and theoretical perspective. A review of both the reading and listening literature provided the basis for items that focused on types of information people prefer to read, while additional items were created that would reflect specific behaviors of the reader. The initial instrument contained 26 items and was administered to several pilot groups to test for contextual

understanding and ease of administration. After item analysis, the RPP was refined to include 14 items which were later subjected to factor analysis.

Preliminary test results identified four clusters. Descriptive labels were given to the clusters of items that paralleled those for the LPP. Due to the fact that reader preferences reflected many of the same general characteristics reflected by listeners, the current labeling system allows for a direct comparison of the two instruments. Three of the four preferences, people-, action-, and content-oriented, were identical on the LPP and RPP. The fourth preference was labeled time-oriented in the LPP and goal-oriented in the RPP.

Description of the Instrument

The item and factor analyses provided valuable information about distinctions among the four clusters. The items used in the revised version of the RPP are presented in Figure 1. The four descriptive labels identifying the independent clusters of reading are illustrated below. The four preferences have been labeled people-, content-, action-, and goal-oriented reading.

People-Oriented. Readers demonstrate people-oriented preferences when they: prefer to read about other people and can empathize with the characters in stories.

Content-Oriented. Readers demonstrate content-oriented preferences when they: read strictly for meaning, read non-fictional materials, prefer highly structured texts, read to learn.

Action-Oriented. Readers demonstrate action-oriented preferences when they: are frustrated by an abundance of detail, read only parts of a complete work, lose their train of thought when reading disorganized material.

Goal-oriented. Readers demonstrate time-oriented preferences when they: read to escape, read for relaxation and pleasure.

Methodology and Data Collection

Subjects

Subjects in the present study were drawn from a population of 640 undergraduates enrolled in a basic professional communication class at a Southern University. The majority of class members were freshman and sophomores. The actual number of participants included in the study was 327.

Administration of the Instruments

Both the RPP and the LPP were administered to all members enrolled in the professional communication course. The order of Reader Preference Profile items were randomly assigned within each form, and were presented simultaneously with the first twenty items stemming from the LPP and the remaining items from the RPP. Students were required to put their social security number and gender on the instrument during the administration. This allowed the research team to compute gender specific analyses as well as to gather normative data.

Results

Analysis of the data involved three stages. First, in order to highlight the underlying reading preferences, a factor analysis was conducted on the RPP. Next, the form was readmininstered with new items generated as a result of the first factor analysis. Finally, the prevalence of different reading preference orientations was examined in the total sample and between genders.

Factor Analysis

The subjects' responses on the RPP were subjected to a principal components factor analysis. This procedure yielded a four factor solution that accounted for approximately 57.1 percent of the variance.

The simplified factor structure following from oblique rotation is presented in Table 1. As can be seen, the first factor, labeled people-oriented reader preferences, was defined by high loadings on four items such as "I prefer to read stories about people similar to myself." Factor two was defined by our items including "I like to read informative, factual, or expository material." The second factor was labeled content-oriented. Factor three, labeled action-oriented, was defined by high loadings on three items such as "I lose my train of thought when reading unorganized material." The fourth factor was labeled goal-oriented reader preference and was defined by three items including "I read to relax."

Based on the overall results, an examination for reader preferences by gender was carried out. Results indicate that males generated higher loadings on the content-oriented and action-oriented preferences, while females generated higher loadings for goal- and people-oriented preferences; however the overall distributions by gender were not significantly different from the overall results.

These next series of analyses examined the relationship between reader and listener preferences. Correlations among the preferences are presented in Table 2. Weak, but significant relationships were observed between several of the preferences. People-oriented preferences from both profiles were correlated at $r=.19$, $p< .001$. Action-oriented reader preferences were significantly correlated with content-oriented listener preferences, $r=.13$, $p< .01$. The strongest relationship was observed between content-oriented preferences from both profiles, $r=.38$, $p< .001$.

A slightly different pattern of results emerged when gender was examined. Female people-oriented preferences from the RPP, were significantly correlated with people- $r=.20$, $p<.01$, action-$r=.19$, $p< .01$, and content-oriented $r=.29$, $p< .001$ from the LPP. Male people-oriented preferences from the RPP were significantly correlated with action-oriented preferences from the LPP, $r=.20$, $p< .01$. Likewise, action-oriented preferences from both profiles were significantly correlated, $r=.18$, $p< .01$. The

strongest relationship demonstrated for males was between the content-oriented preferences from both profiles, $r=.51$, $p< .001$.

In order to explore for patterns in reader preferences, the tertile distribution of each orientation was computed. Respondents scoring within the upper tertile on any of the four orientations were defined as evidencing a preference for that reading style. As can be seen in Table 3, approximately 39% percent of the sample reported a single reader preference with action and content orientations proving the most prevalent among males, and people and goal orientations the most prevalent among females. The data also revealed that over a third of the sample endorsed two or more reading preferences. About 19% of the sample failed to indicate a strong preference for any of the orientations.

Differences in the number of male and females respondents scoring in the upper tertile on the reader preferences were also examined (see Table 3). These tests revealed that those endorsing the people and goal orientations were predominantly female, while males tended to demonstrate multiple preferences.

Discussion

The present study evaluated the RPP, an instrument developed to identify individual preferences for obtaining written communication. Four reading orientations were identified: people-, action-, content-, and goal-oriented preferences with factor loadings that ranged from **.48- .85**. These loadings were comparable to those generated by a similar instrument the LPP that was designed to identify listening preferences. Results suggest that not only do people differ in their preference for obtaining written communication, that differences within individuals may carry over as one changes the mode of communication. Individuals who demonstrate one kind of listening preference tend to manifest similar reading preferences. It was observed that males, who generally display action- and content-oriented listening preferences also obtain higher factor loadings on action- and content-oriented reading preferences.

Likewise, females, who are predominantly people- and time-oriented listeners are also people- and goal-oriented readers.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the present study. First, people do differ in how, why, and what they prefer to read. This has been demonstrated to closely parallel the differences already examined on how people differ in how, why, and to what they prefer to listen. Second, males and females exhibit somewhat different reading and listening patterns from one another, however, these patterns appear to be fairly stable within gender.

Finally, the fourth factor identified in the RPP, as goal-oriented reading preference, is different from the fourth factor, time-oriented listening preference in the LPP. The goal-oriented factor in the RPP reflects the observed phenomenon that some people read to achieve specific goals or rewards. Conversely, the time-oriented preference found in the LPP factor analysis suggests that the desire to acquire oral information rapidly is unique to the listener setting.

As a result of this study, an instrument for the measurement and study of reader preferences has been developed. The results suggest that different reader preferences tend to have corresponding listener preferences. These results are consistent with previous research and provide the foundation for continued study of reader preferences.

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Table 1

Factor Loadings for RPP

	Factor	Eigenvalue	Pct of Var	Cum Pct
1	CONTENT	2.52169	18.0	18.0
2	GOAL	2.46529	17.6	35.6
3	PEOPLE	1.73024	12.4	48.0
4	ACTION	1.27159	9.1	57.1

	FACTOR 1 CONTENT	FACTOR 2 GOAL	FACTOR 3 PEOPLE	FACTOR 4 ACTION
Q3	-.00004	.26233	**.71650**	-.12791
Q4	.19191	.01803	**.58411**	.15993
Q25	.03722	-.32720	**.50902**	.11350
Q28	-.06545	.18422	**.81136**	-.09158
Q11	.13646	-.13632	-.16606	**.48147**
Q17	-.01753	.07808	.11544	**.74911**
Q21	-.15747	-.09094	.08186	**.73713**
Q2	**.75103**	.06067	-.12058	-.00162
Q8	**.61149**	-.09064	.20685	.02188
Q12	**.83949**	-.08061	.08008	-.03913
Q10	**.82393**	.04825	.00649	-.01390
Q6	-.07250	**.84538**	.03098	-.04495
Q15	.10712	**.75419**	.06130	-.05589
Q27	-.08907	**.83223**	.14116	-.03997

Correlations Among RPP Factors:

	FACTOR 1 content	FACTOR 2 goal	FACTOR 3 people	FACTOR 4 action
FACTOR 1	-.38394	.82166	.38672	-.16710
FACTOR 2	.89707	.22785	.36791	-.08934
FACTOR 3	-.18654	-.36873	.79223	.44901
FACTOR 4	.11424	.37015	-.29572	.87321

Figure 1. Simplified Item Clusters from Factor Analysis

FACTOR ONE-PEOPLE ORIENTED

"When I read about other people, I can put myself in their shoes."

"I prefer to read stories about people similar to myself."

"I am very conscious of how long it takes me to read a piece of literature."

"I tend to visualize myself as the main character in stories."

FACTOR TWO-ACTION ORIENTED

"Reading poetry frustrates me."

"I lose my train of thought when reading unorganized material."

"I get frustrated when reading elaborate descriptions of simple phenomenon."

FACTOR THREE-CONTENT ORIENTED

"I prefer to read technical material."

"I prefer to read non-fictional materials."

"I prefer to read books that contain facts."

"I like to read informative, factual, or expository material."

FACTOR FOUR-TIME ORIENTED

"I read to relax."

"I usually read the entire book or article."

"I read to escape."

Table 2. Correlations among the RPP and LPP overall.

	RPP1	RPP2	RPP3	RPP4
LPP1	.19**	-.13	-.13	.05
LPP2	.19**	.03	.11	.05
LPP3	.15*	-.13*	.38**	-.01
LPP4	.11	.11	-.01	-.07

**$p < .001$, *$p < .01$
RPP1=people-oriented, RPP2=action-oriented, RPP3=content-oriented, RPP4=time-oriented: LPP1=people-oriented, LPP2=action-oriented, LPP3=content-oriented, LPP4=time-oriented.

Table 3. Gender preferences by orientation

TOTAL n=327

PEOPLE	ACTION	CONTENT	GOAL
38(12%)	35(11%)	15(5%)	40(12%)

MULTIPLE	NO PREFERENCE
137(42%)	63(19%)

MALES n=160

PEOPLE	ACTION	CONTENT	GOAL
10(6%)	20(13%)	13(8%)	7(4%)

MULTIPLE	NO PREFERENCE
76(48%)	34(21%)

FEMALES n=167

PEOPLE	ACTION	CONTENT	GOAL
28(17%)	15(9%)	2(1%)	33(20%)

MULTIPLE	NO PREFERENCE
61(36%)	29(17%)