

The Civic Personality: Personality and Democratic Citizenship

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This article examines the foundations of democratic citizenship along three dimensions: generalised trust in other people; norms of citizenship; and participation in organisations. Contrary to previous research, which mainly focuses on situational factors, this article scrutinises how individual predispositions, in terms of personality traits, influence the three dimensions of democratic citizenship. In accordance with recent research, personality is conceptualised according to the Big Five personality model encompassing the five traits Openness (to experience), Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Based on a nationally representative Danish survey, which includes a 60-item Big Five personality inventory, we show that personality traits to a considerable extent influence all three dimensions of democratic citizenship. Furthermore, for norms of citizenship and organisational involvement, the personality traits have differential impacts contingent on the norm and type of organisational involvement in question.

Keywords: democratic citizenship; generalised trust; citizenship norms; organisational involvement; Big Five personality model

Democratic citizenship is an essential element of a civic culture which underpins democratic government (Almond and Verba, 1963). When citizens think and act in accordance with the virtues of democratic citizenship, they form the basis for a thriving democracy characterised by widespread political participation and cooperation to solve collective action problems (Putnam, 1993). Given its importance for democratic governance, previous research has attempted to explain how democratic citizenship is formed and this article adds to this research agenda by examining the foundations of democratic citizenship along three dimensions: generalised trust in other people;¹ norms of citizenship; and participation in organisations. These comprise both the cognitive (trust and norms) and structural (organisational involvement) aspects of democratic citizenship, or what Christopher Anderson and Aida Paskeviciute (2006, p. 784) have collectively labelled ‘citizenship behaviour’, which they define as ‘attitudes and behaviors thought to be conducive to high-quality civil society and representative (mass) democracy’.² So far, research has primarily looked at situational factors, that is, the context and life circumstances of the individual, when explaining democratic citizenship. Conversely, dispositional factors – fundamental individual behavioural predispositions – have largely been overlooked in the study of civic attitudes and behaviour. **The purpose of this article is not to question the importance of situational factors in forming democratic citizenship, but rather to highlight how one important class of dispositional factors – personality traits – may also contribute to the explanation of civic attitudes and behaviour.**

Situational factors are important in shaping the various forms of democratic citizenship. Our trust in others, participation in organisational life and civic norms critically depend on our life circumstances and experiences in the environment in which we live. This is perhaps

best illustrated by the immense variation in generalised trust and organisational involvement across countries (Freitag and Bühlmann, 2009; Paxton, 2002; Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). In some countries citizens trust each other more and participate more in civic life than in others, which indicates the importance of the national context in forming democratic virtues of citizens. Similarly, within a given country, indicators of democratic citizenship vary systematically with levels of education (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Denters *et al.*, 2007; Verba *et al.*, 1995). That said, it is also clear that variation still exists between individuals living in the same environment and being in the same life situation. Even in the most civic of countries some citizens do not think or act accordingly, and among low-educated citizens, who are generally the least engaged, we also find people who are very civically oriented. In this article we take a step towards explaining this variation among individuals by examining how democratic citizenship depends upon psychological predispositions in terms of personality. Specifically, we examine the role of the five personality traits – Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Neuroticism and Openness to experience – in the Big Five personality model, which is a broad-scale framework for assessing personality. We employ an extensive survey instrument rarely used in political science, namely the 60-item Neo-FFI inventory, which provides more robust measures of the five personality traits than shorter instruments do. By examining how indicators of democratic citizenship depend on personality, we add to the burgeoning literature on how personality affects various aspects of political attitudes and behaviour. Moreover, in line with recent contributions (Gerber *et al.*, 2010; Mondak *et al.*, 2010), we investigate the conditionality of the impact of personality on civic engagement and attitudes, as two of the three indicators of democratic citizenship, associational activity and citizenship norms, vary in nature and scope. This way we attempt to understand in more detail when and how personality affects civic behaviour and attitudes.

In the following we briefly review the literature about the Big Five personality framework before theorising its relevance for the three dimensions of democratic citizenship examined. Then we describe the data and variables employed in the empirical analysis. After that we present the results of the empirical analyses before finally discussing the implications of the findings for future research.

Personality and Democratic Citizenship

Personality psychologists have to some extent reached a working consensus that personality traits can be measured by the Big Five personality model (Costa and McCrae, 1988; 1992; Goldberg, 1992; 1993; John *et al.*, 2008), which conceptualises personality by five global traits: Openness (to experience), Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (or its inverse, Emotional stability). These personality traits are influenced by genetic differences and are only to a limited extent susceptible to changes in environmental factors after adolescence (Bouchard and McGue, 2003; Costa and McCrae, 1988). As such, personality traits have been considered largely exogenous to political behaviour and attitudes (compare Mondak, 2010), although recent studies have challenged this view with regard to political attitudes (Verhulst *et al.*, 2010; 2012).

The five traits can briefly be described as follows (Costa and McCrae, 1988; 1992; Goldberg, 1992; 1993). People who score high on *Openness* tend to be open-minded,

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Looking for Efficiency: How Online News Structure and Emotional Tone Influence Processing Time and Memory

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Abstract

The research reported here investigates how news story structure and emotional tone affect news story processing efficiency. Two theoretical frameworks employing the forced-choice paradigm and the free-choice paradigm are used to pose competing hypotheses about how news writing structure (inverted pyramid versus narrative) affects story reading time and memory. Participants browsed a website featuring target news stories. Time spent reading stories and story recall was measured. Participants spent less time reading stories with an inverted pyramid structure yet recalled these stories better than stories in a narrative structure, supporting the free-choice processing framework.

Keywords

online message processing, inverted pyramid, news websites, limited capacity model

With the rise of the digital age, information saturation has become a central characteristic of today's modern society, leaving many feeling overwhelmed and overloaded (Bawden & Robinson, 2009; Holton & Chyi, 2012; York, 2013). An abundance of news information, in particular, is now widely proliferated across a number of digital news outlets (Pew Research Center, 2011). Users seek to prioritize efficiency—spending less

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time with the news website while learning a lot—when deciding how to allocate limited cognitive resources to news. Understanding how journalistic writing techniques can best satisfy this need for efficiency can improve both news story visibility and comprehension. The study reported here is an attempt in this direction.

The structure of a news story is a production technique often utilized by journalists to convey stories effectively (Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2008). Journalists have long considered packaging news reports across two contending news writing formats: the narrative structure versus the inverted pyramid structure. These formats largely differ in story element organization: Whereas a narrative organization places emphasis on storytelling and chronology, an inverted pyramid form organizes story elements according to order of newsworthiness and importance, such that it begins with a summative lead containing the most important information followed by story elements arranged in descending order of importance (Brooks et al., 2008).

The effects of these structures have previously been compared in offline presentation formats, such as in television and print (Emde, Klimmt, & Schluetz, 2016; Lang, 1989), and in online formats through computer displays (Wise, Bolls, Myers, & Sternadori, 2009; Yaros & Cook, 2011). However, **these studies exposed participants to news stories in forced-choice contexts, where information was presented in a controlled manner such** that viewers had little control over the pace and/or order of news presentation. **No study to our knowledge, thus far, has explored how these structures—the inverted pyramid versus narrative—affect memory and information processing efficiency in a more generalizable research setting** where users have the freedom to control the order of news exposure.

The primary goal of this article, therefore, is to determine which of these news structures improve online information processing. Specifically, when users navigate news in an online setting, which structure maximizes processing efficiency in terms of improving story recall and reducing cognitive effort? To address this question, this study will assess and compare effects of the inverted pyramid structure and the narrative structure on users' time spent reading and memory (free recall) for online news content.

This study draws on the assumption that news consumers have a finite number of cognitive resources to devote to information processing and that message characteristics affect such processing. Building on prior research conducted within the theoretical framework of the limited capacity model of motivated mediated message processing (LC4MP; Lang, 2006), which suggests message characteristics activate cognitive motivational systems and affect resource allocation, this study outlines how these two structures affect resource allocation. Specifically, this study draws from two lines of research to pose competing hypotheses with regard to their affect on cognitive effort and memory: One line suggests that a narrative structure will reduce time spent reading and improve memory for story content, whereas the other suggests that an inverted pyramid structure will reduce time spent reading and improve memory for story content, as it may better suit user behavior in an online environment. Therefore, we designed a study to test which of these is likely to be true. Furthermore, this study uses emotionally toned news content to address the effect of cognitive motivational system activation on story recall and its possible interaction with news structure.

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The 2011 *College English* manifesto, "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Turn," written by Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur, and endorsed by fifty established scholars in US college composition, encourages the field to recognize the inherent plurality of language resources at play in any communicative act and compels teacher-scholars in composition to view language differences as resources to be cultivated. Beyond emphasizing the importance of developing intercultural communicative competence, the authors make the point that all language users today need to adopt a "translingual disposition" (Horner et al. 311). Suresh Canagarajah elaborates on this point by analyzing interviews with Subsaharan African migrants who use English as a foreign language to demonstrate the centrality of "a strong ethic of collaboration" to translingual competence (*Translingual* 180). Rebecca Lorimer Leonard makes a similar point in arguing that certain language users, through a lifetime of treating linguistic and cultural plurality as the norm, develop "rhetorical attunement," or "a literate understanding that assumes multiplicity and invites the negotiation of meaning across difference" (228). In other words, it may be argued that a translingual disposition, a general openness to language plurality and difference, is requisite to the development of skills such as translingual competence and rhetorical attunement. This article seeks to understand and analyze the ways in which translingual dispositions manifest themselves in textual artifacts.

In this essay, we investigate how translingual dispositions emerge in student writing that was composed as part of a global partnership between two courses, one delivered in a US university and another in a Hong Kong university. However, it is not our intention to simply offer suggestions and advice for teachers wishing to adopt a similar partnership. Rather, the purpose of this essay is to articulate how our experiences enable a reconsideration and extension of the critical point that a translingual approach to writing is of central significance to all students of composition, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to explore the multilayered and unpredictable ways in which translingual dispositions can manifest themselves in student writing. We show that an examination of writing provides a window into the varied ways in which students negotiate their linguistic identities and construct their ideological commitments to language difference. Although composition can become a space that facilitates opportunities for students

to “do” translingual dispositions, these dispositions are constitutive of a constellation of highly complex sociocultural issues and experiences and therefore cannot be expected to be actualized or articulated in a preconceived and uniform manner.

We first draw on existing scholarship to explain what translingual dispositions are and argue for the urgency of doing translingual dispositions in composition. Next, we describe the rationale for the global partnership, along with an explanation of the pedagogical value of the associated readings and major assignment. We then identify the various ways in which students, including ostensibly monolingual students, can develop a disposition toward linguistic openness. Afterward, we provide further analysis of student writing in order to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of, as well as the pedagogical value of doing, translingual dispositions. We conclude by identifying several theoretical and pedagogical issues that warrant discussion in further developing a translingual turn in the field of composition.

What Are Translingual Dispositions? Why in Composition?

A translingual disposition is described by Horner et al. as a general openness “toward language and language differences” (311). This disposition allows individuals to move beyond preconceived, limited notions of standardness and correctness, and it therefore facilitates interactions involving different Englishes. Considering the historical marginalization of “nonstandard” varieties and dialects of English in various social and institutional contexts, translingual dispositions are essential for all users of English in a globalized society, regardless of whether they are “native” or “nonnative” speakers of English.

But translingualism is not simply about language practices that contain elements from multiple “languages” in the traditional sense, such as Korean, Spanish, and Hindi. It has long been argued in sociolinguistics that the boundaries that differentiate one language from another are ideological (Reagan). Lachman M. Khubchandani, for instance, notes that language practices in India have always been characterized by the “fuzziness of language boundaries,” “fluidity in language identity,” and the “complementarity of intra-group and inter-group communication” (87). As Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook point out, the very “concept of language” and the assumed categories of language “are firmly located in western linguistic and

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Toward a Pedagogy of Materially Engaged Listening



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Abstract: As writing teachers increasingly engage students with audio media, it has become crucial to coach listening explicitly in the classroom, activities that students may otherwise approach passively. In this article I suggest that a rhetorical approach applicable to (or derived from) print texts is not enough to help students listen actively, and offer instead a materially engaged practice of listening that helps students to understand their interactions with compositions on a material level that involves bodily activity. My proposed pedagogy moves students toward a reflective awareness of their practices, encourages purposeful listening, and acknowledges the role that attention plays in listening. Such a pedagogy can help students to engage with audio compositions on their own terms, encourage them to understand listening as a dynamic practice with critical heft worthy of their time and attention, and open insights into affordances of sound that are obscured by print-centric approaches.

Recently I taught an elective digital composing course at my university, the first course I had taught that was entirely focused around digital literacies. In addition to creating video, audio, and web-based compositions, I asked students in the course to interact with—or to read, listen to, view—course materials that ran the gamut from traditional print genres (book chapters, scholarly articles) to radio podcasts, video clips, and experimental new media webtexts. As I open all my courses with explicit conversations on rhetorical reading strategies and thought a rhetorical frame would be useful for students approaching nonprint modes, in the first week of class we discussed a go-to reading of mine, Karen Rosenberg’s chapter “Reading Games: Strategies for Reading Scholarly Sources,” from the open-access textbook *Writing Spaces*. Rosenberg frames rhetorical reading as “a set of practices designed to help us understand how texts work and to engage more deeply and fully in a conversation that extends beyond the boundaries of any particular reading” (212), and the conversations her chapter inspires are largely organized around strategies for first recognizing the rhetorical situation—identifying the intended audience, discovering the main argument, observing how the composer situates herself within a larger conversation, and so on—and then adjusting reading practices accordingly. Rosenberg grounds these rhetorical moves in suggested practices like reading the abstract, paying attention to section headings, or using the introduction to discern the structure and direction of the text.

Because Rosenberg (like many other scholars and textbook editors) frames reading as a rhetorical practice, my rationale for assigning her article in a class where only half of our “readings” would be made up of traditional print texts was my thinking, my *insistence*, that these ideas could travel. I thought that over the ensuing weeks my students would see connections between purposeful, rhetorically aware interactions with scholarly print texts and purposeful, rhetorically aware interactions with audio media, like podcasts from NPR.^{1} But this transfer did not happen: it seemed that our rhetorical—and on reflection, medium-specific—conversations around reading in the first week of the semester were not enough to help students to critically and productively engage with audio media. For despite our discussions on active, rhetorical reading strategies, I found that students in my course had trouble making it through the length of a podcast and missed crucial details that betrayed they hadn’t paid close attention while listening. In fact, in talking with them I discovered that they were browsing the internet, even trying to read other texts, while listening to class assignments and so were tuning out what they were listening to.^{2}

I discovered that semester that for my students to be successful listeners, my instruction had to go beyond rhetorical interactions with a composition; it was also necessary to help students consider the very nature of the medium as well as what listening might require of them in terms of bodily activity. And so while I agree with the prevailing wisdom that writing instructors should introduce to students the rhetorical layers of engaging with compositions like recognizing how composers reach their intended audiences or discovering a composer’s main intervention in a conversation, I argue that there is not enough in a rhetorical approach applicable to (or derived from) print texts alone to help students shift their activities and disrupt their passivity. Students also need to understand how listening is intimately connected to the materiality of audio media and therefore demands bodily interactions related to but fundamentally different from reading. In a way, my argument echoes a key concern that Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes express in their book *On Multimodality*. We have not yet sufficiently embraced multimodality on its own terms, they write, and instead limit multimedia with print-centric perspectives:

our embrace of new and multimedia for composing often ignores the unique rhetorical capabilities of different media ... [and] we often elide such considerations—consciously or not—in order to colonize the production of multimedia texts with more print-driven compositional aims, biases, and predispositions. In the process, we hamper our students’ appreciation of and ability to manipulate multimedia texts. (19)^{3}

To impose text-centric frames onto multimodal work, as I did by coaching listening through a reading model, is to ignore the material differences, affordances, and constraints of nonprint media; and students need to understand these differences in order to engage with these compositions productively. Or, to put this all another way: a rhetorical framing influenced by print texts is a start, but unless it is paired with an awareness of the materiality of audio compositions and the bodily activities of listening—like considering one’s listening environment or what to do with one’s body while listening (e.g., walking, cleaning, sitting still)—students may have difficulty developing effective material listening practices. Such material practices are crucial for helping students pay attention to the form and affordances of the mode and for helping them to see listening as an active, dynamic practice with critical heft that is worthy of their time and attention.