Imprecise Argumentation and Pseudo-Agreements – Theory and Experimental Results

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"More Precise" vs "Less Precise"

U is more precise than T.

Every reasonable interpretation of U
is a reasonable interpretation of T.

There is at least on reasonable interpretation of T
that is not a reasonable interpretation of U.

(Naess, *Communication and Argument*, 1966)

What Makes an Expression More/Less Precise?

1) Fuzzy borders (="vagueness")

"child" (less precise)
  vs
"twelve-year-old" (more precise)

2) Shifting borders (dependency on implicational context)

"child" (less precise)
  vs
"child in the implication that a child is less reliable as a witness" (more precise)

Pseudo Agreement

Pseudo agreement in negotiations: (Naess, 1966)

X and Y "agree" on a statement but interpret it differently
(verbal agreement – substantial disagreement)

"a child is less reliable as a witness"

Pseudo Agreement

Pseudo agreement in argument assessment: (Naess, 1966)

X "agrees" with an argument committing the *fallacy of equivocation*

(1) A child is less reliable as a witness.
(2) Jessica Miller is a child.
(3) Therefore, Jessica Miller is less reliable as a witness.

Jessica Miller is twelve years old.
X agrees that a twelve year old is a child in some implicational contexts.
X does not agree that a twelve year old is less reliable as a witness.
"Agreeing" with the argument, X interprets "child" differently in (1) and (2).
This "agreement" is therefore a pseudo agreement.

Deprecization Effect

"I would like to draw your attention to one important circumstance regarding Jessica Miller. A person who is under thirteen years of age is less reliable as a witness. Jessica Miller is therefore less reliable as a witness." (A)

"I would like to draw your attention to one important circumstance regarding Jessica Miller. A child is less reliable as a witness. Jessica Miller is therefore less reliable as a witness." (A*)

more agreement with (A*) than (A)   deprecization effect

agreement with (A), disagreement with (A*)   pseudo agreement

The Experiment

Six different scenarios: Jessica's age = 4, 9, 12, 14, 17, 19

Two arguments per scenario: "a person under … is less reliable..."
                                 "a child is less reliable..."

Participants: 1187
                                 Amazon Mechanical Turk

Hypothesis

disagreement with the argument in the precise version (A)

 +

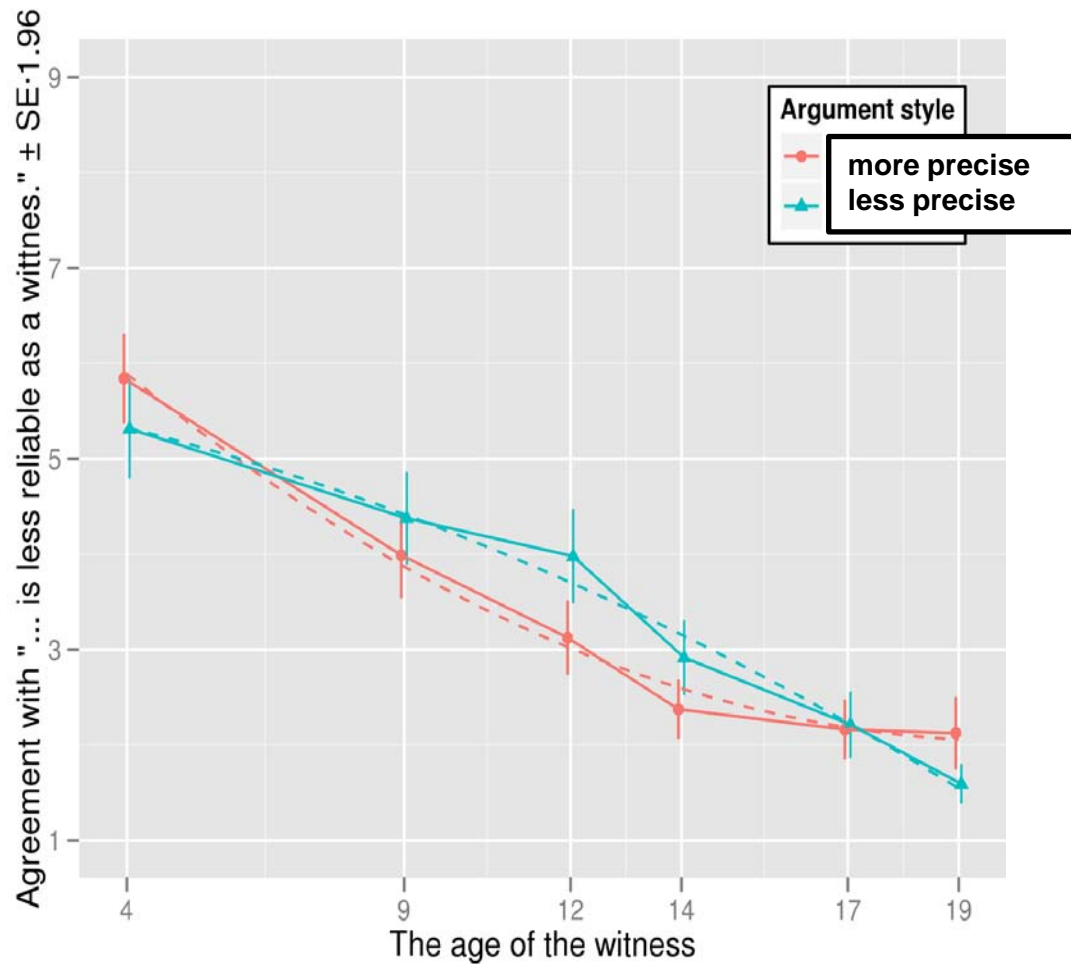agreement with the attribution of the deprecization term ("child")

=>

more agreement with (A*) than (A)   (deprecization effect)

Results

Deprecization as a Argumentation Strategy

Deprecization can be used in argumentation to make X "agree" with an argument that contains a premise that X disagrees with.