

A white, cloud-like thought bubble containing the title 'Behavioural Linguistics'. The bubble is connected to the two stylized human figures by thin black lines.

# Behavioural **Linguistics**

Communication and the  
science of language



*Hello there,  
friend*

The link between  
language, decision-  
making and behaviour  
is powerful.

Once you start  
thinking about your  
communication in  
ways that are  
intrinsically linked to  
**how people think  
and act**, you'll be far  
more likely to create  
**credible content  
that persuades.**



# Move to minimal marketing

Any type of successful brand or  
business today involves the  
**business of behaviour.**

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**MULTIPLE DECISIONS**

**+**

**SO MUCH NOISE**

**+**

**TOO MANY OPTIONS**

**Enter Behavioural Linguistics**



Think about the last time you needed to persuade someone:

As communicators, our main aim is to persuade someone to do something: buy into our brand story, support our products and/or services and ultimately become loyal ambassadors. And the more authentically we can do this; the better.

This can be the difference between **brand success** or failure.

A leads-generation campaign?

Need a sales pitch?

Driving uptake of a new product?

## Get ready to nudge

New to the world of behavioural science, Behavioural Linguistics is the **science-based use of language** to persuade. It's rooted in nudge theory combined with psychology, sociolinguistics and principles of marketing.

**Behavioural Linguistics is about nudging responsible action using communication — with the core belief that language is a powerful way to change behaviour.**

Decision-making processes are more intricate **than we think,** and on any given day we **make multiple choices**<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Duque MJ, Turla C & Evangelista L, 2013. Effects of emotional state on decision making time. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 97(2013). 137-146.

# PS: we're lazy!

As human beings, we don't want to work too hard to process information which means we want things to be presented **simply; briefly, with enough context and timeously**<sup>2</sup>.

And **we're hard to please**. If it's not the trifecta of complete comprehension (so, easy to understand; short; relevant) we discard it. And the hours spent on that particular communication are lost. **Forever**.

Try our **7 Behavioural Linguistic tips** to cut through the noise and stand out from the crowd.



<sup>2</sup> Shah D, McLeod J & Yoon, SH, 2001. *Communication, Context, and Community: An Exploration of Print, Broadcast, and Internet Influences. Communication Research, 28(4).* 464-506.

# 01 | Keep it simple

**It's age-old advice but worth repeating and following.**

Your communication should be pitched at a 13-year old's comprehension level with short sentences, few syllables and accessible vocabulary<sup>3</sup>. This doesn't mean that you're "dumbing down" your copy. Instead it means you're making the effort to frame content clearly and make it easy to understand. This comes across as more credible to your audience, and is MUCH MORE persuasive.

***TOP TIP:** Try out the Flesch-Kincaid readability tool in Microsoft Word (in the Spelling / Grammar section) which will help guide you to simpler writing. As a target, you should be aiming for a score of around 65.*

<sup>3</sup> Balmford C, 2002. Plain Language: beyond a 'movement'. The Plain Language Association International (PLAIN).

## 02 | Use the present tense

The simple present tense is the “nudgiest” tense there is.

This means we're **more likely to follow a call to action if it's presented to us in the 'now' because we have an inherent present bias**. Present bias is the reason we don't save enough money, don't eat healthily enough and don't exercise enough (etc.) for our future and instead favour more immediate rewards<sup>4</sup>. Where you can frame your marketing messages in the present, and offer a now-based value proposition, you're more likely to be successful.

**FUN FACT:** *People who speak languages that grammatically associate the future and the present (like Mandarin and Finnish), foster better future-oriented behaviours like saving and exercising more. Because through their language perception, their forward focus is framed within the present, making them act now for their future selves<sup>5</sup>.*

<sup>4</sup> O'Donoghue T & Rabin M, 1999. *Doing It Now or Later*. *American Economic Review*, 89(1). 103-124.

<sup>5</sup> Chen K, 2013. *The Effect of Language on Economic Behavior: Evidence from Savings Rates, Health Behaviors, and Retirement Assets*. *American Economic Review*, 103(2). 690-731.

## 03 | Highlight the herd

No. We aren't always the *unique* individuals we like to think we are.

In fact, we're quite the opposite — **we look for decision validation from others.** Social proofing or herding suggests that **people adopt the actions of those around them.** A great way to use social proofing in communication is to frame content through member testimonials or product reviews of your brand. These highlight the value of your product through the voices of satisfied customers and have shown sales increases<sup>6</sup> by **as much as 34%.**



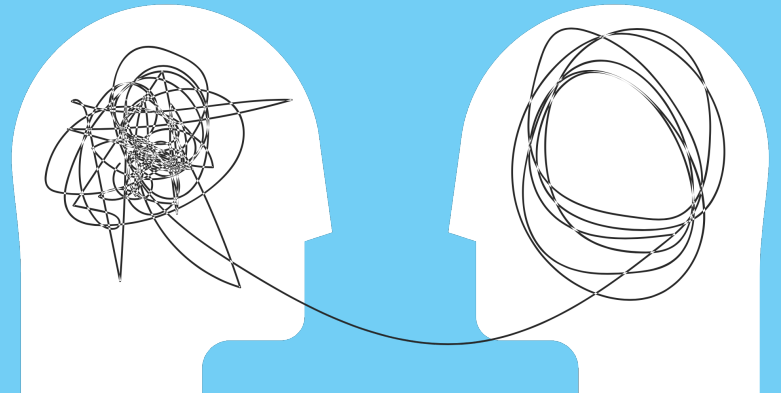
<sup>6</sup> VWO and Wikijob, 2019. Case study: Wikijob A/B Tested Social Proof, Leading To Increased Purchases.

## 04 | Add nudgey numbers

**Odd or unusual numbers (like 7, 9, 57) catch attention, are more memorable and are more likely to persuade your customer to engage with your content<sup>7</sup>.**

If you're trying to show scale, consider writing the number out in words rather than numerals. Helping provide *two hundred and thirty five thousand and twelve meals* to the needy holds more weight than *235 012 meals*. **Why?** Because we battle to read this in words so the scale comes across as **far greater**.

**TOP TIP:** *Be specific. If you're selling a service, quoting R43 580 signals an authentic calculation. Too often we round up or down, and lose the persuasive nudge of a real number.*



<sup>7</sup> Prettyman A., 2019. *Perceptual precision*. *Philosophical Psychology*, 32(6). 923- 944.

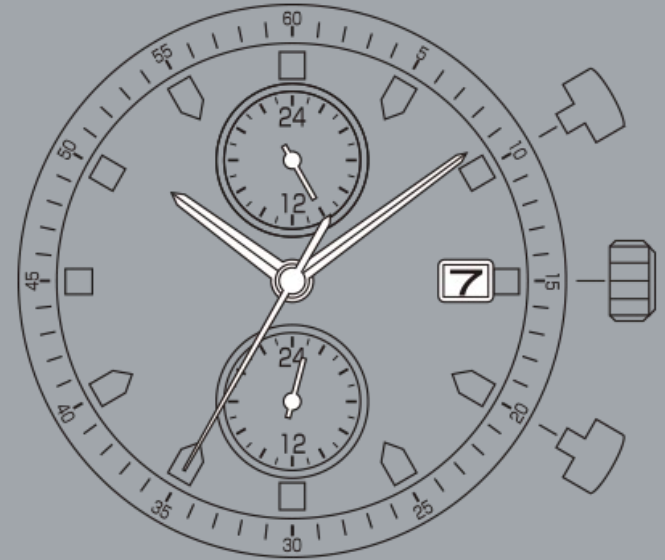


# 05 | Time it right

Did you know that Monday morning is the worst time to send an email that requires action?

We're all busy catching up on mails from the weekend or previous week and so we experience what's known as **decision-paralysis** — so many decisions need to be made that **we end up not choosing anything at all.**

In an ideal world, you want your communication to land with your consumer at a time **when it's relevant**, where their inbox isn't overwhelming, and preferably within an hour after they've eaten **(we know, how nuts?!)**



Post-meal timelines are hard to judge, but significant in nudge-value. Research on parole proceedings has shown that prisoners seen at the start of a session (straight after breakfast or lunch) **were more likely to be paroled** than those seen later<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Danziger S, Levav J & Avnaim-Pesso L, 2011. Extraneous factors in judicial decisions. *PNAS*, 108(17). 6889-6892.

# 06 | Get rhyming

**The rhyme-as-reason behavioural bias is a thing of linguistic beauty.**

Used commonly in above-the-line marketing, the theory suggests we're more likely to believe something is truthful and credible (and therefore more likely to be persuaded by it) if it rhymes<sup>9</sup>.

*But why?* **Because it's an inherent behavioural bias linked to the trust figures we had in our lives growing up.** Our caregivers often read and sang rhyming narratives to us as children. As a result, we've come to associate rhyming with **trust and credibility.** With that comes the increased likelihood of us supporting a message when rhyme is used.



<sup>9</sup> McGlone M & Tofiqbakhsh J, 2000. *Birds of a Feather Flock Conjointly (?): Rhyme as Reason in Aphorisms.* *Psychological Science*, 11(5). 424-428.

## 07 | Pick the perfect pronoun

**Make no mistake: pronouns are important.**

They can be used to signal solidarity and build intimacy (**we, us, our**) and help a consumer connect your words to their own lives (**you, your, yours**) making them part of a brand's story. The more human and sincere we can be in our communication efforts, the better our audience will connect with us<sup>10</sup>.

**Connection = conversion**

<sup>10</sup> Crymble L, 2019. *Make your pronouns personal*. BizCommunity Online.

# Words matter.

*(They really do!)*

**BreadCrumbs is the first Behavioural Linguistics™ firm using principles of language to drive (positive) action.**

**We'd love to chat more.**

*Get in touch.*



*Hello.*



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