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FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Montana State University has been awarded a \$19,280 grant by the U. S. Air Force Research and Development Command to support a two-year study of the communications process, MSU officials announced.

Dr. Forrest L. Brissey, associate professor of speech at MSU, is director of the research, which is concerned with the loss or distortion of information as it passes from one person to another.

Serving as consultants on the study are Dr. Clyde E. Noble, MSU psychology professor, and Dr. Fred Attneave of the University of Oregon. Other consultants may be brought in as the work progresses, Dr. Brissey said.

The official title of the project is "The Factors of Urgency, Mastery and Set in the Serial Reproduction of Information." In explaining what the researchers are setting out to do, Dr. Brissey points out that communication may be regarded as "a process in which symbols representing information are transmitted from one individual or group to another." Ideally, the symbols mean exactly the same thing to the transmitter and the receiver.

Just as important as this "message fidelity" is the effect of the transmitter's message on the receiver's behavior. In successful communication, the receiver must know not only what the transmitter means but must also be moved by the message to take the appropriate action. A goal of the MSU research is the detection and assessment of the communication processes that trigger the right action on the part of the receiver.

(more)

Another objective of the current study is to find out more about the process known as "serial reproduction." This refers to the transmission of a message through a sequence of individuals. Communication of information in a complex society may involve essentially this kind of process, Dr. Brissey says.

The whole process is influenced by a number of conditions that need to be detected and measured, according to Dr. Brissey. Three of these conditions have been singled out for special study at MSU: Urgency, mastery and set.

Urgency refers to how pressed for time the transmitter is when he is sending the message. Mastery refers to how well acquainted he is with the event he is sending the message about. Set might be loosely translated for the layman as "frame of mind" or "readiness." That is, it makes a difference whether the transmitter knows at the time he is observing an event if he will later have to send a message about it.

Dr. Brissey has designed and tested an apparatus and procedure called, for the sake of brevity, Vocom. The MSU project has the dual purpose of exploring the usefulness of the Vocom approach to communications research and finding out more about the process of serial reproduction. If the Vocom method works out as expected in the MSU study, it will be a contribution to future communications research not only at MSU but wherever such work is carried on.

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