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The Words Matter

A Scoping Review Investigating Interpersonal Verbal Communication in Academic Libraries

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Résumé de l'article

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publiée pour trouver des exemples textuels de communication bénéfiques et
préjudiciables dans le contexte des bibliothèques universitaires. Bien que la
revue ait trouvé une littérature importante traitant des catégories de
communication interpersonnelle dans les bibliothèques universitaires, peu
d'études fournissent des exemples verbaux. Étant donné que de tels exemples
jouent un rôle important dans la compréhension des catégories linguistiques et
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ABSTRACT

The academic library milieu is replete with verbal interactions that occur between library staff and patrons, as well as within the library staff cohort. Such communication impacts the quality and results of library support provided to students, faculty, and community. It also affects workplace health and productivity. Consequently, among academic library staff, knowledge and awareness of effective language use is a crucial component of professional practice. This scoping review examines and analyzes the published literature for beneficial and detrimental verbatim exemplars of communication in the context of academic libraries. While the review found significant literature addressing categories of interpersonal communication in the academic library, few studies provide verbal exemplars. Given that such exemplars play an important role in understanding language categories, and in augmenting effective language use, this gap in the literature warrants further attention.

Keywords: academic libraries · language use · language-use exemplars · language-use categories · racism

RÉSUMÉ

Le milieu des bibliothèques universitaires regorge d'interactions verbales qui se produisent entre le personnel de la bibliothèque et les usagers, ainsi qu'au sein de la cohorte du personnel de la bibliothèque. Une telle communication a une incidence sur la qualité et les résultats du soutien de la bibliothèque fourni aux étudiant.e.s, aux professeur.e.s et à la communauté. Cela affecte également la santé et la productivité au travail. Par conséquent, parmi le personnel des bibliothèques universitaires, la connaissance et la sensibilisation à l'utilisation efficace de la langue constituent un élément crucial de la pratique professionnelle. Cette revue exploratoire étudie et analyse la littérature publiée pour trouver des exemples textuels de communication bénéfiques et préjudiciables dans le contexte des bibliothèques universitaires. Bien que la revue ait trouvé une littérature importante traitant des catégories de communication interpersonnelle dans les bibliothèques universitaires, peu d'études fournissent des exemples verbaux. Étant donné que de tels exemples jouent un rôle important dans la compréhension des catégories linguistiques et dans l'augmentation de l'utilisation efficace de la langue, cette lacune dans la littérature mérite une attention accrue.

Mots-clés : *bibliothèques universitaires · catégories d'utilisation de la langue · exemples d'utilisation de la langue · racisme · utilisation de la langue*

As Valo and Mikkola note in *Focusing on Workplace Communication*, "It is indeed through interpersonal communication that people become aware of each other, build connections to other people, construct and maintain relations with them, and develop a sense of belonging to the same social system" (2019, 4). With respect to the workplace specifically, communication influences the foundation upon which an organization is built and functions. For example, "difficulties encountered in daily work do not usually originate from unsuitable structures of the organization…. Instead, such difficulties often result either from the untapped potential of communication or imperfect communication practices" (5). Reciprocally, then, if we focus on establishing effective communication and capitalize on its potential, we are planting the seeds for a healthy and functional work environment (3).

Recognition of the importance of interpersonal communication in the academic library workplace is reflected in a significant body of related literature on interpersonal communication, and on challenges in communication that can arise from diverse perspectives or worldviews. For example, Black and Leyson (2002) discuss communication with respect to new librarian integration, while Barnett and Witenstein (2020) address communication in the context of diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, these and many other papers do not address such issues with specificity. By *specificity*, we mean that the academic library literature relating to interpersonal communication is not often accompanied by actual exemplars.

For the purposes of this study, we define an exemplar as a communication sample that contains the words a speaker uses, has used, or might use, in-person, and in a particular circumstance or context. Exemplars can move us beyond a *description* or a *discussion* of language use to an actual *demonstration* of its particularities. They specify, rather than generalize, language use, which in turn can lead to heightened awareness and understanding of the power and impact of our communications with others.

For example, in their seminal paper on microaggressions and its forms, Sue et al. provide a definition of microaggression: "Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (2007, 273). Racial microaggressions must not be part of our communications under any circumstances, but we sometimes fail to recognize them. For instance, the following are deemed to be microaggressions when said to a person of colour: "You are a credit to your race"; "As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority"; "You are so articulate" (276). These *exemplars* belong to what we will refer to as a *category* of language-use; that is, racial microaggressions.

By collecting specific, in-person language-use samples from academic literature, we can begin to see how such samples affect and shape us in conscious and unconscious ways. These samples also augment our awareness and understanding of language-use categories. From the perspective of applied cognitive linguistics, Tyler and Huang note, "much of human learning involves creating generalizations across multiple, individual exemplars, in other words, creating categories. These cognitive categories are ever changing as new exemplars are encountered and integrated into the existing knowledge categories" (2018, 5). Tyler and Huang further explain that categories have several facets: "they emerge through exposure to specific, meaningful exemplars, the emergence is generally gradual being built up over multiple exposures, the exemplars almost always occur in (meaningful) context" (5). This applies equally to beneficial language use and that which is detrimental.

To put this discussion into context, consider an exemplar drawn from a paper that examines the use of war metaphor in academic libraries (Boyd and Amedegnato, 2019). During an especially busy time of the university term, a librarian mentions to a colleague, with some chagrin, that he is working at the reference desk. The colleague replies: "You're in the trenches today? You'll be bombarded by questions!" (2) While this may seem like a supportive and commiserative response, metaphors in language-use "can lead to effects of which we are not conscious…as well as subsequent opinions and actions" (15). As such, awareness of exemplars from this particular war-based

category should give us pause before we're inclined to call the reference desk the "front line."

While there may exist illuminating language-use examples and categories outside the literature specific to academic libraries, awareness and exposure to those related to our particular discipline is foundational to effective language use in the academic library milieu, as this better enables us to put knowledge of such categorization into practice. As Murphy notes, "categorization in and of itself is not useful—it is being able to apply category knowledge that is useful" (2002, 243).

The research question that guided this study was: to what extent are exemplars of verbal communication, whether beneficial or detrimental to the listener, present in academic libraries literature? Interpersonal communication occurs in various forms, including in-person verbal, written, and virtual. Though the effect of language use in any of these forms might overlap, we focused this study on in-person verbal interactions, and on the identification and categorization of language-use exemplars in this milieu. The findings from this study are intended to be a starting point in raising awareness of such language use.

Methods

Study Design

We conducted a scoping review to map the literature on verbal communications and associated verbal exemplars in academic libraries. This approach is appropriate for addressing the above research question, given that there exist several disparate studies on this topic, and there is a need for a structured process to synthesize the totality of the evidence base, and identify future professional practice and research opportunities.

Scoping reviews are structured literature reviews that are guided by a transparent methodological process designed to comprehensively enable the identification, selection, mapping, and synthesis of "key concepts underpinning a research area, and the main sources and types of evidence available" (Mays, Roberts, and Popay 2001, 194). This structured review methodology enables research teams to identify strengths and gaps in a knowledge base to inform policy decisions and future research. This scoping review was conducted in accordance with the Arksey and O'Malley recommended framework for the design and completion of scoping reviews (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). The Arksey and O'Malley framework details the following stages required for completing a scoping review: stage 1, identifying the research question; stage 2, identifying relevant studies; stage 3, selecting studies; stage 4, charting the data; and stage 5, collating, summarizing, and reporting the

results. The PRISMA ScR reporting guidelines for scoping reviews (Tricco et al. 2018) guided the reporting of this review. These reporting guidelines have been adopted by numerous publishers of scoping review studies as a way of ensuring rigour, consistency, and transparency in the reporting of scoping review studies. The protocol for our review has not been registered or otherwise published.

Data Collection

Seven multidisciplinary databases were searched from inception to October 28, 2021 to identify English language studies suitable for inclusion in this review: Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), Communication Abstracts (EBSCO), Communication and Mass Media Complete (EBSCO), Education Research Complete (EBSCO), ERIC (EBSCO), LISA Library and Information Science Abstracts (ProQuest), and Library and Information Science Source (EBSCO).

Our searches combined terms from three themes: verbal communication (e.g. communication, language, microaggressions, speech); academic institutions (e.g. academic, college, post-secondary, university); and libraries (e.g. librarian, librarians, library, libraries). We searched terms in title, abstract, and keywords fields as appropriate. No date or study limits were applied. A detailed search strategy is documented in Appendix A.

We also investigated the potential for including additional database-specific indexing terms in our search plan (including "Interpersonal Communication" and others), but found that available indexing terms were invariably too broad to reflect our inclusion criteria or too broadly applied. We thus determined that creating a search that would be inclusive of a variety of synonyms and word variants and focusing on searching within information-rich fields (specifically title/abstract/ keyword fields) would better ensure we maintained the sensitivity required of this review methodology, while simultaneously enabling us to identify a greater proportion of relevant studies.

We also implemented additional approaches to study identification to address potential limitations in our database searching strategies. These included reviewing the reference lists of included studies and conducting citation searching to identify additional studies that may have cited this evidence.

Study Screening

Search results were downloaded into Covidence™ for de-duplication and screening. Authors independently screened abstracts and full-text papers in duplicate for inclusion in this review. Disagreements were resolved through consensus. We

included papers if they: 1) were related to academic libraries; 2) focused on in-person verbal communication; 3) provided or reported on examples of verbal communications; and 4) were situated in Australia, Canada, Europe, New Zealand, United Kingdom or United States. While we were primarily interested in investigating issues of verbal language use through a Canadian lens, we recognized that limited literature might exist in the Canadian context. Therefore, we chose to expand our study selection to also include countries and regions that share educational and cultural similarities to Canada: Australia, New Zealand, European countries, United Kingdom, and United States.

Studies were excluded if they: 1) were not peer-reviewed journal articles or 2) were theoretical papers that did not include any examples of verbal communication.

Data Extraction, Analysis, and Synthesis

Authors independently extracted, analyzed, and coded data in duplicate from included studies. As with study selection, all disagreements were resolved through consensus.

A data codebook and extraction form were created by the research team to guide the identification and labeling of data. Data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitatively, for example, we examined the data from a variety of perspectives as a way of determining the relationships between the exemplars and the potential effects of the communication.

Occasionally, to help situate readers, papers included exemplars that were illustrative rather than library-focused. If they met selection criteria, these exemplars were included in the final data.

Axial coding (Simmons 2017) was utilized to make connections between exemplars and create broader categories as a way of discovering emergent themes. We determined that to be meaningfully distinctive, a category should contain no less than five exemplars. We condensed quantitative data into graphs and charts to assist in summarizing and comparing pertinent research findings.

Prior to finalizing the data extraction processes, the data extraction form was trialed on a sample of included studies. Extracted data included: basic study details, population, number, category and content of verbal exemplars, context, speaker, recipients, and impact or effect of this communication on recipients.

Findings

A total of 1789 unique studies were identified through database and other searching. Of these, 111 were selected for full-text review, twenty-nine of which met all criteria for inclusion in this scoping review (Figure 1).

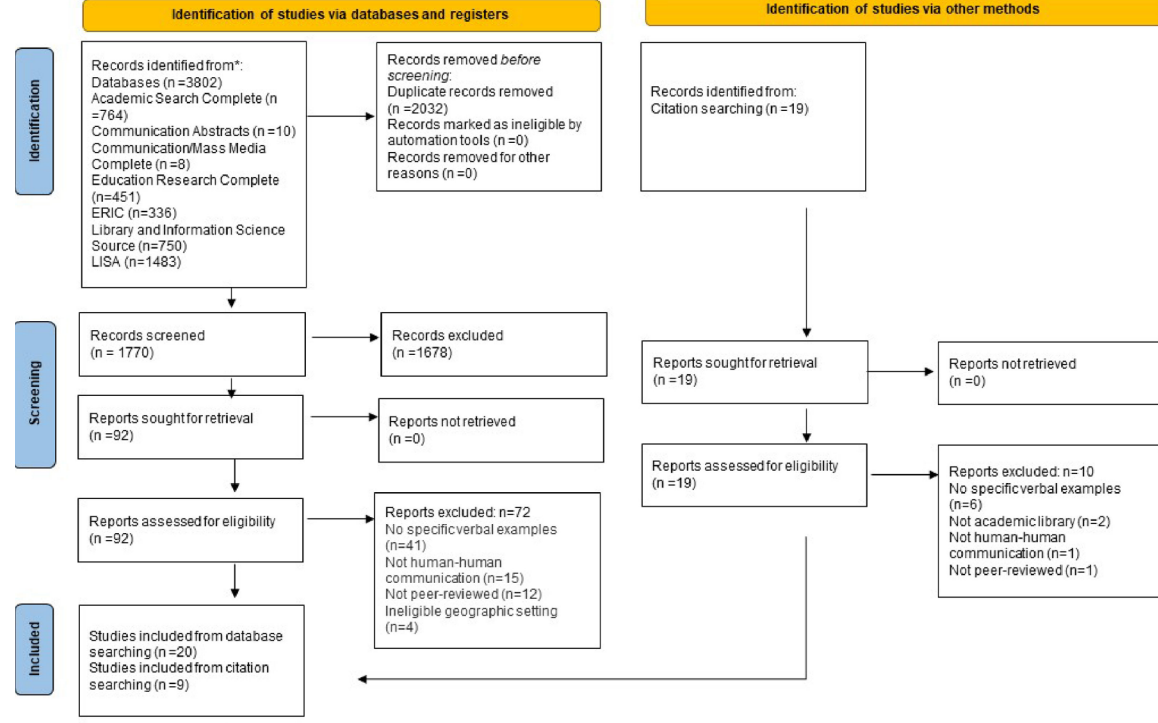

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

Categories, Coding, and Results

The twenty-nine papers in this study were published from 1984 to 2019 in eighteen separate journals, five (28%) of which are focused on academic librarianship (Table 1).

Journal Title	Papers per Journal
Reference Librarian	4
Journal of Academic Librarianship	4
Library Trends	3
College & Research Libraries	2
Reference Services Review	2
Journal of Library Administration	2
Journal of Educational Media and Library Sciences	1
Portal: Libraries and the Academy	1
Partnership: the Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research	1
Research Strategies	1
Law Library Journal	1
Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship	1
In the Library with the Lead Pipe	1
Electronic Journal of Academic & Special Librarianship	1
The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion	1
Journal of the Medical Library Association	1
Library Leadership and Management	1
Reference & User Services Quarterly	1
Total	29

TABLE 1   Papers per journal.

Over the decades, we noted a general upward trend in the number of papers that contain verbal exemplars (Figure 2).
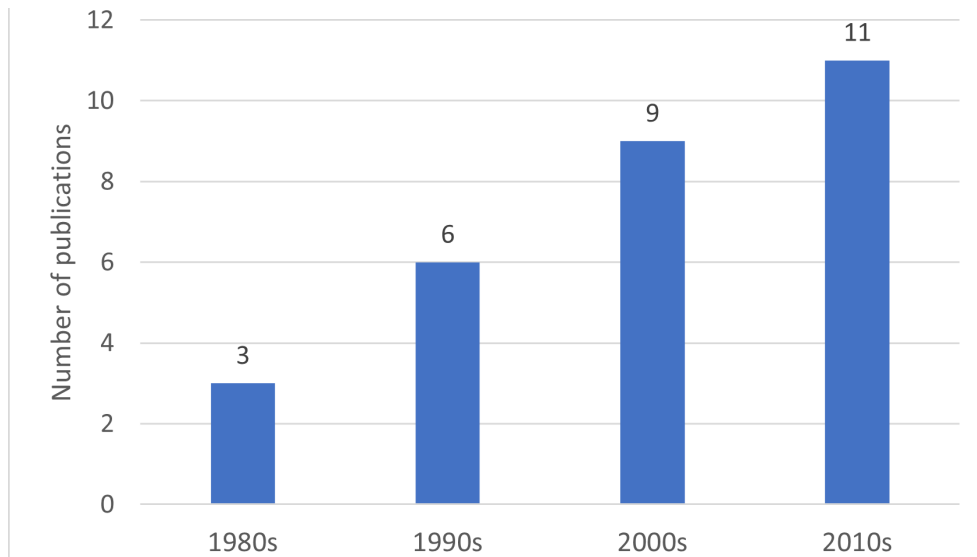
FIGURE 2   Publications per decade.

Only eight (38%) of the papers were formal research studies (Figure 3). These included surveys (e.g. Alabi 2015a, Swanson, Tanaka and Gonzalez-Smith 2018), interviews (e.g. Cook and Heath 2001), and focus group studies (Wang and Frank 2002). The remaining 21 papers (categorized as "nonstudies") ranged from descriptive to commentary to theoretical; often they were a combination thereof (e.g. Liu 1995; Chattoo 2000; Conley, Ferguson, and Kumbier 2019). In some instances, these latter papers did not focus specifically on interpersonal communication, but provided exemplars that relate to this topic nonetheless (e.g. Ormondroyd 1989).
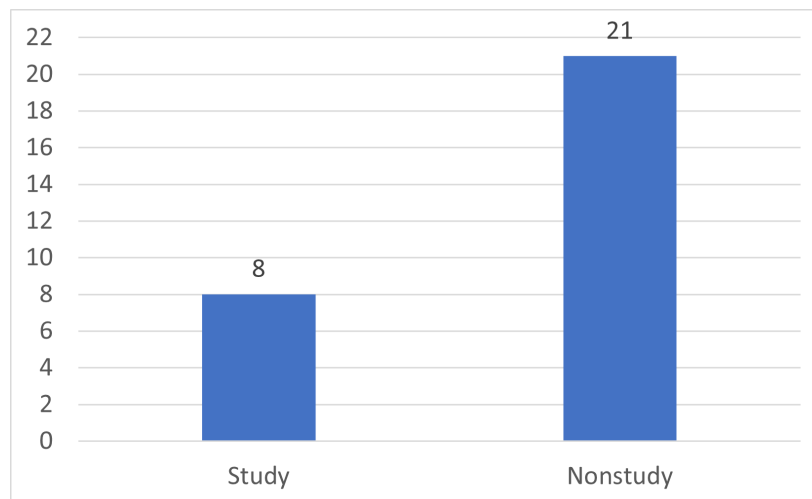

FIGURE 3   Study/non-study.

Most papers offer a limited number of exemplars. 58% (17) contain seven or fewer; 31% (9) contain eight to fourteen. Just three papers offer more than fourteen exemplars each; of the 245 total extracted, they contain 33% (81) (Figure 4).
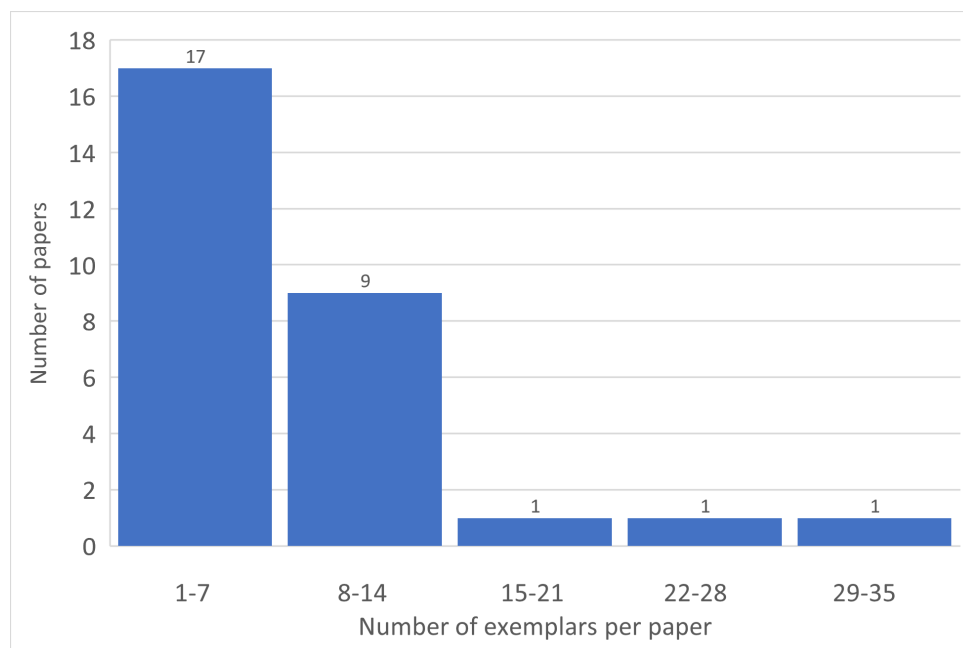

FIGURE 4   Distrubution of verbal exemplars per paper.

In total, we found 245 exemplars of specific verbal communication in twenty-nine papers. We initially coded the 'theme' of each exemplar intuitively, using words or brief descriptions. From these, ten broad themes, which we refer to as 'categories,' were derived inductively (Table 2). These are: ageism, discrimination, job-related, cultural differences in language, metaphor/idiom, plain language, question, racism, rankism, and support. Where required, more fulsome definitions of these categories are provided in the "Category Exemplars" section below. Each exemplar was then subsumed under one of the ten categories.

As noted earlier, we established categories where there existed five or more related exemplars. In only one instance did this provoke the combining of exemplars into a category with a somewhat broadened population; that is, the discrimination category comprises mental health discrimination (one exemplar), homophobia/sexual orientation discrimination (two), and sexism (two).

Some categories comprised subcategories. For example, the racism category is a distillation of subcategories such as microaggression, microassault, microinvalidation, and microinsult. Similarly, the support category captures support that is related to students, and to faculty and community. The metaphor/idiom

category contains metaphors related to war/violence, alternatives to war/violence, and student support.

In numerous instances, an exemplar might reasonably have fit into more than one category. However, for the purposes of this scoping review, where specific language use is our overarching interest, context is paramount. Therefore, we placed each exemplar only in its most dominant category; that is, the one relating most strongly to the context in which it was presented. For example, in a conversation where a racial microaggression takes the form of a question, that exemplar falls into the category of *racism*, not of *question*.

Almost half the papers (13) contained exemplars in more than one category. With only six exemplars, Ormondroyd (1989) contributed to four categories; racism, support, metaphor/idiom, and cultural differences in language. Some papers and authors contributed many more exemplars to a category than others. For instance, of the nine rankism exemplars, six (67%) were found in Alwan, Doan, and Garcia (2018). In the racism category, 37 (42%) of the 87 exemplars were from Alabi (2015a, 2015b, 2018).

Exemplars in the "question" category appeared in only one paper (de Souza 1996), while the "support" category exemplars were found in 12 papers. Second came racism, which had exemplars in 10 papers. One author alone, Alabi, accounted for three of these. See Table 2 for a summary of categories, papers, and exemplars within papers.

Category	Number of exemplars	Papers	Number of papers
question	14	de Souza 1996 (n=14)	1
employment-related	6	Blenkinsopp 1994 (n=2); Ziolkowski 1995 (n=4)	2
plain language	7	Boyd and Amedegnato 2019 (n=6); Wang and Frank 2002 (n=1)	2
ageism	10	Chu 2009 (n=9); Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012 (n=1)	2
discrimination	5	Alabi 2018 (n=1); Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012 (n=3); Kuecker 2017 (n=1)	3
metaphor/idiom	32	Boyd and Amedegnato 2019 (n=29); Wang and Frank 2002 (n=1); Ormondroyd 1989 (n=2)	3
rankism	9	Alwan, Doan, and Garcia 2018 (n=6); Chu 2009 (n=1); Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012 (n=1); Wayman 1984 (n=1)	4
cultural differences in language	19	Blenkinsopp 1994 (n=1); de Souza 1996 (n=1); Liestman 2000 (n=2); Ormondroyd 1989 (n=1); Sarkodie-Mensah 1992 (n=3); Wayman 1984 (n=4); Zhang 2006 (n=7)	7
racism	87	Alabi 2015a (n=15); Alabi 2015b (n=14); Alabi 2018 (n=8); Alwan, Doan, and Garcia 2018 (n=8); Curry 1994 (n=5); Dalton, Mathapo, and Sowers-Paige 2018 (n=13); Fraser and Bartlett 2018 (n=2); Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012 (n=16); Ormondroyd 1989 (n=1); Swanson, Tanaka, and Gonzalez-Smith 2018 (n=5)	10
support	56	Atlas 2005 (n=3); Ball and Mahony 1987(n=2); Conley, Ferguson, and Kumbier 2019 (n=1); Cook and Heath 2001 (n=7); Curry and Copeman 2005 (n=13); de Souza 1996 (n=10); Dutcher and Hamasu 2005 (n=3); Fraser and Bartlett 2018 (n=1); Liu 1995 (n=2); Ormondroyd 1989 (n=2); Sarkodie-Mensah 1992 (n=10); Zhang 2006 (n=2)	12
Total	**245**	**245**	**29**

TABLE 2 Summary: categories, papers, exemplars.

With respect to the verbal exemplars themselves, the most numerous were those included in the racism category—comprising 35% of the total. It is noteworthy that racist verbal interactions dominate discussions on communication in the academic library literature. Worth repeating is the fact that of the 87 racism exemplars extracted, 37 are attributed to one author (Alabi).

The category of support follows racism with 23% of the total exemplars; these weigh heavily toward student support, with 53 related to reference interactions. Metaphor/idiom exemplars comprise 13% of the total, but this category demonstrates a similar imbalance of distribution to that of racism; that is, from 32 exemplars, 29 derive from one paper (Boyd and Amedegnato 2019), which also has the highest number (35) in any paper studied. After metaphor/idiom, percentages shrink significantly - from 8% (cultural differences in language) to 2% (discrimination). Table 2 (Summary: Categories, Papers, Exemplars) and Figure 7 (Number of Category Exemplars and Papers) offer evidence of how the number of exemplars-per-papers varied widely.
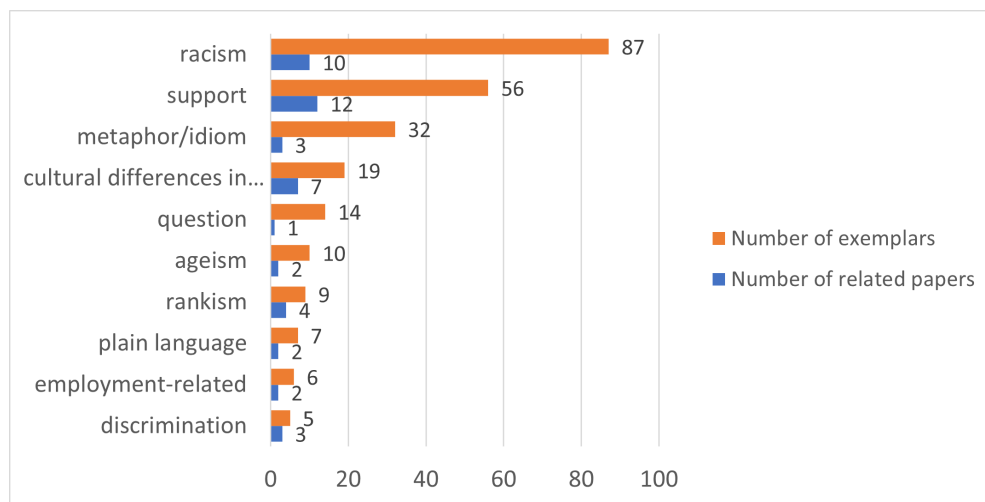

FIGURE 5 Number of category exemplars and papers.

We also observed a shift in the frequency of thematic categories over time; issues related to international students are cited more in the earlier years (1990s), with topics of racism and discrimination increasing in the later years (2010s) (Figure 6).
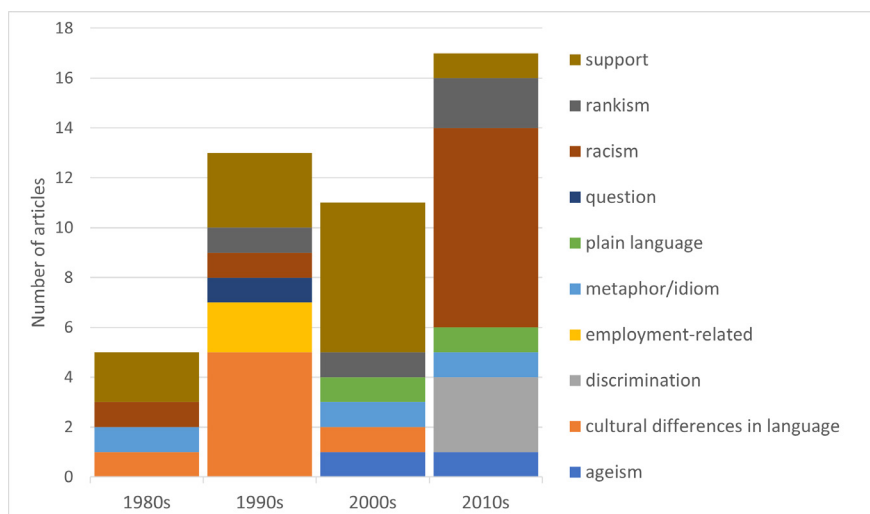
FIGURE 6   Thematic categories over time.

Similar to the difference in the number of studies and nonstudies, we also found differences in how exemplars were presented. During our analysis, we coded exemplars as one of three types: anecdotal, prescribed, and verbatim. "Anecdotal" (A) refers to verbal exemplars that are anecdotes, paraphrases, or suggestions of verbal utterances. "Prescribed" (P) refers to predetermined quotes selected by participants in a study. "Verbatim" (V) defines direct verbal exemplars that are solicited, overheard, or reported. Only those coded as "verbatim" are considered to be direct quotes. Of the 245 quotes/exemplars included in this paper, 76 (31%) are "Verbatim" quotes, while 143 (58%) are "Anecdotal" and 26 (11%) are "Prescribed" (Figure 7).
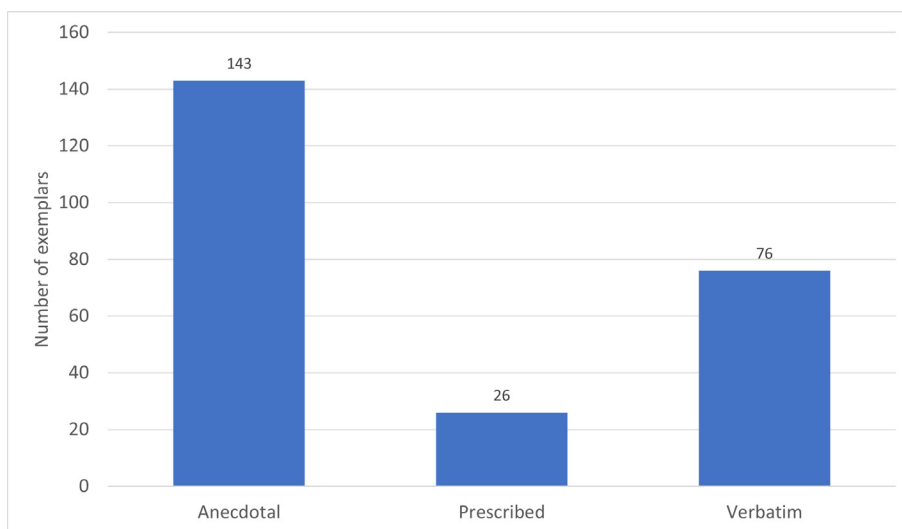

FIGURE 7   Exemplars presentation.

We ascribed speaker and recipient codes to each exemplar. These codes were derived inductively based on the collected exemplars, as follows:

- **B**: BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour): speaker/recipient identified as non-white

- **W**: White: speaker/recipient identified as white

- **D**: Domestic: speaker/recipient identified as North American, race or skin colour not specified. All the institutions referenced in papers in this study are Canadian or American.

- **I**: International: speaker/recipient identified as international or not North American; race or skin colour not necessarily specified.

- **F**: Faculty: speaker/recipient identified as a faculty member not working in a library

- **L**: Library staff: speaker/recipient identified as any staff member working in a library

- **O**: Other: speaker/recipient who is not faculty, library staff, or student.

- **S**: Student: speaker/recipient identified as a student, either graduate or undergraduate

The specificity of this coding was based on the context of the exemplar or accompanying description of the situation, if available. If it was neither relevant, nor apparent from the context or exemplar whether the speaker or recipient was B (BIPOC), W (White), D (Domestic) or I (International), none of these codes were ascribed. However, every speaker/recipient always received a code of F (Faculty), L (Library staff), O (Other), or S (Student). Thus speakers and recipients may be simply Faculty, Library staff, Other or Student; or they can be coded as Faculty, Library staff, Other, or Student, and qualified by B, W, D, or I. Note that "other" refers to exemplars where the speaker or recipient is someone outside a library setting; for example, a manager or employee in another workplace, individuals in a social setting, etc.

For example, "At some point we'll just have to pull the trigger" (Boyd and Amedegnato, 2019, 1) is coded as "L/L" for speaker/recipient because the speaker and recipient were identified as library staff, but without mention of any nationality, skin colour, etc. We inferred that the speakers were also "Domestic," given the scope of the paper. However, that code was not explicitly added. On the other hand, "Certainly! Let's see what we can find. I am going to ask you some questions so that I can get a clearer idea of what you want. Try to answer them as best you can" (de Souza 1996, 45) was coded as "DL/IS" to capture the details of the speaker/recipient, and the context in which they communicated.

By examining the speaker categories, we begin to create a picture of how our use of language affects specific populations (Figure 8). Library staff with student/faculty interactions dominated the literature with 102 examples, followed by 70 examples of library staff interactions with each other. Note that the exemplars in Figure 8 do not total 245 as some were repeated within a paper, but with different speakers.
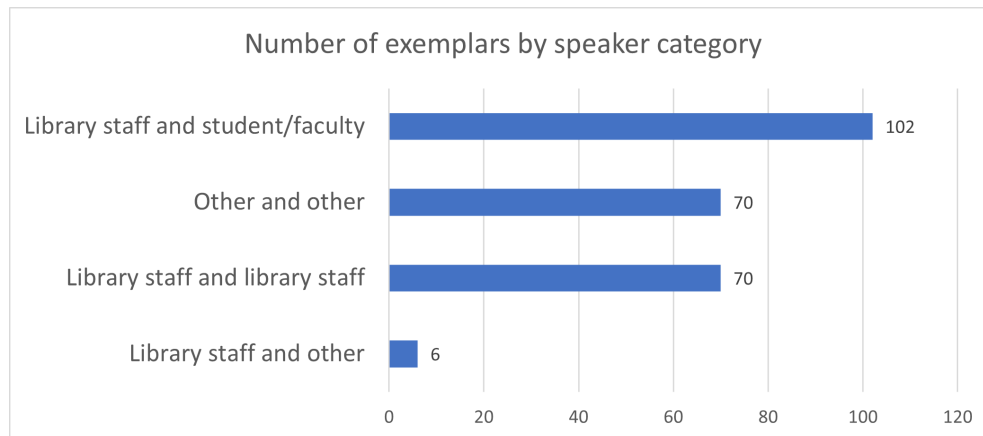

FIGURE 8   Speakers/recipients.

Exemplar Effects: Beneficial or Detrimental

To assess whether a verbal exemplar was beneficial or detrimental we used the following criteria: 1) effect was expressly stated by a study subject; 2) effect was stated by the author; 3) effect was demonstrated by the context in which the exemplar was presented by the author. We then coded each exemplar as 'beneficial', 'detrimental,' or 'neutral'. There were over three times more detrimental (182) than beneficial (59) effects. Only four were coded as neutral (Figure 9).

Beneficial exemplars refer to those that are positive in both word and consequence. Detrimental—or negative—exemplars consider not only the speaker's words, but also their stated or implied effect on the recipient. Taken out of context, some exemplars easily could be perceived as positive but, upon close analysis, reflected issues such as negative biases, incorrect information, or microaggressions.

Further, 'detrimental' includes exemplars whether or not speakers are cognisant of their negative implications, which is the case with some racist comments. 'Detrimental' is also ascribed where the language use is not effective or does not work (e.g. a student says "I'm sorry to bother you" at a reference desk), and where language causes confusion (e.g. where speaker's pronunciation perplexes the listener, or where a speaker's culture precludes them from disagreeing openly). It is important

to underscore that these latter exemplars are not detrimental in the sense of being intentionally negative, only that they do not work effectively in communicating or being understood. The code "detrimental" is applied even if the language itself does not seem negative, but causes the speaker to feel that they are on the receiving end of a negative interaction.
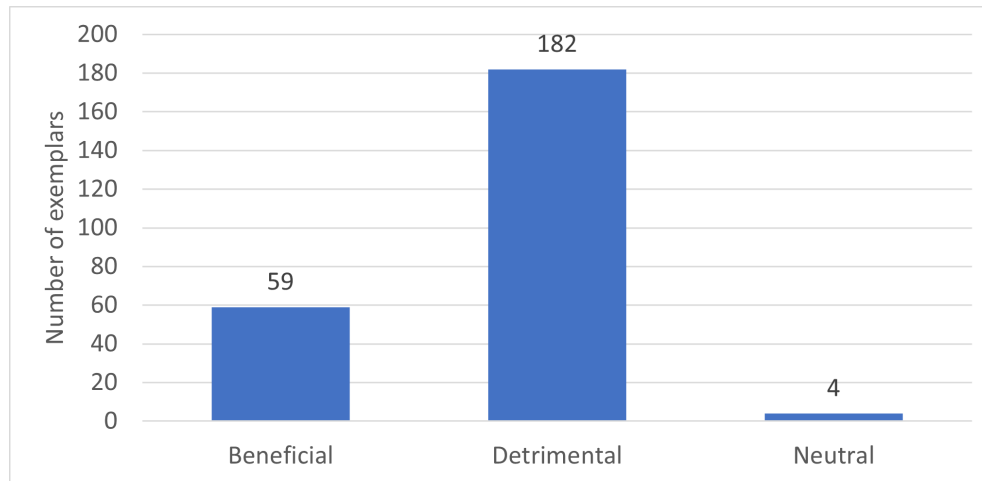

FIGURE 9 Exemplar effects.

Category Exemplars

This section describes the ten exemplar categories in more detail and provides samples from each. Using the coding outlined above, we include the following information about each exemplar:

1. the speaker and recipient (refer to Figure 8);

2. exemplar presentation: verbatim, prescribed or anecdotal (refer to Figure 7);

3. whether it is beneficial, detrimental, or neutral (refer to Figure 9).

Racism (N=87)

Racism comprises the largest category, with 87 exemplars in ten papers. Of these, eight exemplars are beneficial, in that they challenge racist comments. Seventy-seven demonstrate negative or detrimental utterances of a racist nature.

Interestingly, only eight verbal interactions include students, either as speakers or recipients of racist language. Thirty-one reflect interactions between library staff and 41 between "others" (i.e., individuals outside the library/academic setting). Most of the remaining exemplars involve library staff and others. The majority of racist exemplars (46) are anecdotal, 28 are verbatim, and 13 are prescribed.

The most common type of exemplar from the racism category is microaggression, which Sue et al. (2007, 273) refine into three subcategories – microinvalidation, microinsult, microassault – all of which are defined below. Extracted exemplars are not always ascribed one of these specific types of microaggression; rather, some are subsumed under microaggression alone. Alabi, for instance, generalizes exemplars as microaggressions in one paper (*Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 2015a), and uses the subsets in another (*Journal of Library Administration*, 2015b). The tendency toward generalization or to specificity varies across papers.

Microaggression (N=33)

As noted earlier, racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al. 2007, 274-75). The following two exemplars are from a total of 33 described as microaggressions:

- "I know you have trouble being assertive, I understand it's part of your culture, but you have to be more aggressive sometimes." (Swanson, Tanaka, and Gonzalez-Smith 2018, 885) [WL-BL/V/D]
- "A 'colleague told me that I was 'articulate' after he/she assumed I wouldn't be.'" (Alabi 2015a, 50, 51, 52) [L-BL/P/D]

Microinvalidation (N=9)

Alwan, Doan, and Garcia state that "microinvalidation, which is potentially the most dangerous form of microaggression, involves communications or environmental cues meant to exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of particular persons or groups. In such a situation, the perpetrator is directly denying or imposing upon the reality of a person or group" (2018, 30). These exemplars demonstrate microinvalidation:

- "I don't see color." (Alwan, Doan, and Garcia 2018, 30) [O-BO/A/D]
- "I've been told how lucky I am to be a minority because I get my degree paid for (assuming the scholarships I earned were not competitive)." (Alabi 2015b, 185) [L-BL/V/D]

Microinsult (N=9)

A microinsult "is usually more explicit and is meant to demean. This is typically done using interpersonal or environmental communications that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity" (Alwan, Doan, and Garcia 2018, 29). Two microinsult exemplars are:

- "Wow! You're so articulate." (Alabi 2015a, 48) [WO-BO/A/D]
- "How did you get your job?" (Alwan, Doan, and Garcia 2018, 29) [O-BO/A/D]

In the following exemplar, the listener endures a microinsult couched in a comment about their child:

- "I have heard White colleagues make 'positive' stereotypical comments about people of particular racial groups, saying things like, 'my son must have a touch of African American in him, he's such a good dancer.' The tone is sort of jokey and sort of not." (Alabi 2015b, 184) [WL-BL/V/D]

Microassault (N=6)

Alwan, Doan, and Garcia (2018) say that a "microassault can be a subtle or explicit biased attitude, belief, or behavior communicated to a marginalized group or person through environmental cues and/or verbalization. Examples can include name-calling, avoidant behavior, and purposeful discriminatory actions" (29). Alabi shares this blatant microassault:

- "One day I came out of my office and was complaining about arthritis in my knees. To which the clerk said, 'Your people are supposed to be walking on all fours anyway.'" (2015b, 183) [L-BL/V/D]

Alabi shares another exemplar where the microassault is indirect. She states:

- "Non-minority survey participants also gave examples of microassaults, such as when a librarian was told 'that photos of African Americans should be limited to February Black History month.'" (Alabi 2015b, 183) [L-BL/V/D]

Other racism exemplars (N=30)

In numerous instances, authors did not define racism exemplars as either microaggression or one of its three subcategories. Here are two of them:

- "She was told that his rebuff likely had nothing to do with race even though he spoke to everyone else-all white-at the table." (Curry 1994, 301) [WL-BL/A/D]
- "I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race." (Curry 1994, 307) [WF-O/A/D]

In some instances, a detrimental racist comment is rebutted with a beneficial comment that challenges the racism. Here are relevant exemplars:

- "Oh, Cecille, I don't think of you as black" (Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012, 10) [O-BO/V/D]
- "What's wrong with being black?" (Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012, 10) [BO-O/V/B]

- "A man at a party said, 'Well look at that Muslim congressman they elected. We keep letting people in that aren't like us and pretty soon our government won't be run by normal Americans anymore'" (Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012, 13) [O-O/A/D]
- "Oh, you mean the Iroquois?" (Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012, 13) [O-O/A/B]

Support (N=56)

Fifty-six exemplars of support, the second largest category, were found in 12 papers. All but four exemplars were based on reference interactions. Fifty of these related to support for students, with 38 specifically involving international students. The vast majority (43) were anecdotal, 12 were verbatim, and one prescribed.

Twenty exemplars referred to beneficial encounters, which demonstrate language use that has a positive effect. That is, the words used successfully express the speaker's intent and/or address the listener's needs or interests. For example:

- "I can certainly try and help you. First, is it OK if I ask you some questions? This way, I will know what you want and we can find the right things for you." (de Souza 1996, 45) [DL-IS/A/B]
- "When I went to the desk, the staff member with a smile and cheerful voice said to me, 'Hi, how can I help?'" (Curry and Copeman 2005, 415) [L-IS/V/B]

And this exemplar demonstrates an effective way of determining a preferred pronoun:

- "Sometimes, staff will ask patrons to share 'any information that will help me address you in a way that feels best' to decenter the pronoun request." (Conley, Ferguson, and Kumbier 2019, 540) [L-S/V/B]

Thirty-four exemplars referred to detrimental encounters, demonstrating language use that has a negative effect. That is, the words used negate an opportunity for a speaker to support the listener, or they do not effectively express a listener's intended meaning, thereby impeding their ability to gain support. As noted earlier, 'detrimental' does not necessarily mean *bad*; it can simply refer to confusion or failed understanding.

Here is an exemplar of a failed understanding between a library staff member (who uses complex English) and international student (who struggles with English as a second language):

- "Staff were encouraged to phrase questions in the least confusing manner, avoiding sentences like 'You didn't use the card catalog, did you?' Some students will respond to this positively, but actually mean, 'Yes, I didn't.'" (Ball and Mahony 1987, 164) [IS-L/A/D]

With English language learners, there exist language issues – based on pronunciation, rather than syntax – where issues can arise for the listener. For example:

- "Japanese students tend to use r's instead of l's and vice versa: 'I want a critique of Lomeo and Jurriett,' or 'Where is the Intelriblaly Roans Department?'" (Sarkodie-Mensah 1992, 214) [IS-L/A/D]

In this nuanced pair of exemplars, Ormondroyd (1989,157) presents the first as a simple sentence structure that is beneficial to the international student, and the second as detrimental due to its relative complexity.

- "I understand that you have to write a paper on a topic in science." [DL-IS/A/B]

- "I understand that you have been told to write a thesis on a topic of a scientific nature." [DL-IS/A/D]

Political issues can arise with international students when they are asked insensitive questions:

- "It is best to keep our-thoughts about their countries to ourselves. And this advice includes seemingly innocuous questions such as 'Are you from Main Land China [sic] or Taiwan?'" (Sarkodie-Mensah 1992, 216) [L-IS/A-D]

Here is a librarian's attempt to support an international student who is asking for information about environmental hazards. In some instances, the librarian's response would be effective. In this one, the response has the opposite effect; the student does not expect to receive a question in response to their question and becomes confused:

- "Librarian: 'What information have you already found? Tell me more about what you are looking for.'" (de Souza 1996, 44-45) [L-S/A/D]

Cook and Heath (2001, 555) note that both undergraduate and graduate students possess a tendency toward wanting to be self-reliant while, at the same time, denigrating their lack of knowledge when they ask for help:

- "I know this is a really stupid question." [S-L/A/D]

- "I know I should know where to find this book, but…" [S-L/A/D]

Of course, the beneficial or detrimental effect of a verbal exemplar can be augmented by the speaker's behaviour, as in this instance where an international student asked a question:

- "The librarian continued to look at her screen and said, 'What kind of … just a second…' After several moments and after no greeting of any kind, the librarian eventually tore her attention away from her computer terminal and asked, 'What do you want on immigration?'" (Curry and Copeman 2005, 415) [L-IS/V/D]

We found only three exemplars of communication between faculty and library staff in the support category. Below is a detrimental response to a faculty member's inquiry about a library resource, followed by a better way of supporting their question.

- "I don't know if we have it; go look in the card catalog to see if we have it." (Cook and Heath 2001, 560) [L-F/A/D]

- "Just let me check and see if we have that" (Cook and Heath 2001, 562) [L-F/A/B]

Metaphor/Idiom

The third largest category, metaphor/idiom, contains three papers with 32 exemplars: 21 verbatim, nine anecdotal, and two prescribed. In all, six are beneficial and the remaining 26 are detrimental. Only three exemplars are idioms. In this instance, a librarian uses an idiom, creating confusion for an international student:

- "Give me a ring." (Frank 2002, 212) [DL-IS/A/D]

The other 29 exemplars are metaphors, found in a single paper. Of these, 21 are metaphors of war and violence overheard in the academic library milieu (Boyd and Amedegnato 2019). Here are three:

- "If you're responsible for writing performance reviews, you've got to gather ammunition all year." (2) [L-L/V/D]

- "Put a gun to students' heads… they still can't write a paper." (11) [L-L/V/D]

- "We were torpedoed by faculty." (11) [L-L/V/D]

Two exemplars from the same paper are metaphorical alternatives to those based on war and violence; this one is a possible replacement for "torpedoed by faculty."

- "Faculty really took the wind out of our sails." (17) [L-L/A/B]

Cultural Differences in Language (N=19)

In seven papers, we found 19 exemplars demonstrating ways in which language-use varies from culture to culture. Seventeen are anecdotal and two are verbatim. Fifteen are detrimental; four are beneficial. It is important to emphasize that there is nothing inherently *bad* about these cultural differences in language. They were coded as 'detrimental' only because they can result in confusion or misunderstanding. It is through exemplars that we can become aware of differences, speak, and respond more effectively. Here are three such differences:

- "Chinese would frequently use 'perhaps', 'possible', and 'maybe' to communicate denials and rejections." (Zhang 2006, 168) [IO-DO/A/D]

- "While saying 'hi' to strangers may be friendly, it is seen as rude in other cultures." (Liestman 2000, 368) [DO-IO/A/D]
- "When the waitress asked him what he'd have, Cash remembered the word for beer but could think of no particular brand names. She then said she'd bring him a 'Bud.' Misunderstanding he replied, 'No, I'd like a good beer, not a bud beer.' 'We only have Bud,' she insisted. 'But I don't want a bud beer,' Cash insisted back. Again the exchange continued until the waitress finally said, 'Well if you don't want a Budweiser, we can't help you.' 'Ah,' said Cash, remembering the ads he'd seen on TV, 'A Budweiser is OK.'" (Ormondroyd 1989, 149) [DO-IO/V/D]

Questions (N=14)

As noted earlier, each exemplar was assigned to the category relating most overtly to the larger context in which it was spoken. In the case of the question category, only one paper's exemplars (de Souza 1996) met this criterion; they focus on the way in which questions are presented, which is evident in the paper's title: "Reference work with international students: making the most use of the neutral question." All of de Souza's 14 exemplars are anecdotal. Eight are beneficial and six are detrimental.

De Souza surfaces subtleties in question-asking. In this example, she points out questions that could easily be assumed to be beneficial, when they're actually problematic:

- "What kind of information are you looking for?" (44) [DL-IS/A/D]

While this appears to be a sound reference interview question, it "leaves the door wide open for international students to respond but they may not know how to. … Students… often make irrelevant statements at this point, just to have something to say." (44)

In this reversed-role example, an international student asks the question:

- "Where can I find the most recent issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review?" (42). [IS-DL/A/D]

Again, there appears to be an obvious approach: tell the student where they can find the journal. However, de Souza notes: "While an answer such as 'In the periodical racks' is correct, it may not necessarily help as the student has decided that the Far Eastern Economic Review is the source of the needed information when the library in this instance had more appropriate sources" (42).

De Souza notes that a librarian's question "serves as an invitation and is an indication of the librarian's receptiveness" in this exemplar:

- "Would you like to look at these materials for a few minutes and tell me which ones you think are good for your project?" (46) [L-IS/A/B]

Ageism [N=10]

In two papers, we found ten ageism exemplars. Nine are verbatim and one, prescribed. With one exception, all are sourced from a single paper (Chu 2009). All are ageist and detrimental in that they are judgmental of younger, not older, individuals. Here Chu cites instances of students making assumptions about young librarians (2):

- "Are you a student here?" [S-L/V/D]
- "Want to go out sometime?" [S-L/V/D]

She also provides exemplars of older librarians speaking to younger ones:

- "Keep your mouth shut at meetings and pay your dues. That's just the way it works in academia." [L-L/V/D]
- "When are you getting married already?" [L-L/V/D]

In Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk's single exemplar, we found this:

- "Oh these youngsters need so much praise and are so impatient. We need someone more mature to work with that department." (2012, 16) [O-O/P/D]

Rankism (N=9)

A total of nine detrimental exemplars, in four papers, fell under the category of rankism, here defined as "discrimination against people on the grounds of rank" (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2014). Two are verbatim; seven are prescribed. Three papers provided only one verbal interaction each. The fourth paper provided six. This latter paper (Alwan, Doan, and Garcia 2018) focuses on troubled relationships between teaching faculty and academic librarians, as demonstrated by exemplars of microaggressions. In these instances, a faculty member tells a librarian that:

- "I was 'smart/intelligent' as though she/he assumed I wouldn't be." (37, 39, 41, 51) [F-L/P/D]
- "There is a difference between the two of us" (52) [F-L/P/D]

Further, Alwan, Doan, and Garcia provide an instance of a library administrator confirming this attitude when they tell a librarian:

- "There is a difference between Teaching Faculty and Academic Librarians in terms of value to the institution." (52, 53) [L-L/P/D]

Chu (2009) provides an exemplar where a veteran librarian underscores the difference in rank to a novice librarian:

- "Don't ever forget others decide your tenure." (2) [L-L/V/D]

Wayman (1984) says, "Many cultures recognize only titled peoples' needs" (337). To demonstrate, she provides a rankism-related exemplar where, to gain assistance at African embassies, the director of an international student office introduces himself as:

- "Dr. ___, Assistant Director of ___" (337) [O-BO/V/D]

Plain Language (N=7)

The plain language category contains seven exemplars—five anecdotal and two prescribed. Six of these were found in a single paper (Boyd and Amedegnato 2019). In all instances, exemplars are alternatives to figurative language.

Boyd and Amedegnato offer plain-language alternatives to war metaphor (11). In lieu of saying "Put a gun to students' heads… they still can't write a paper," they suggest:

- "No matter how many information literacy sessions students are required to attend, they still can't write a solid academic paper." [L-L/A/B]

And to shift from a war metaphor like "We were torpedoed by faculty," they provide this option:

- "We received some severely critical remarks from the faculty in their review of the library." [L-L/A/B]

Frank (2002, 212) notes that idioms are not universal. "Give me a ring" can cause misunderstandings in interactions between librarians and international students. Therefore, plain language is more accurate and appropriate, as in:

- "Call me." [DL-IS/A/B]

Employment-Related (N=6)

Two papers provide six exemplars in the employment-related category. Four are anecdotal; two are verbatim. All address diversity and all are beneficial.

Blenkinsopp (1994) notes how cultural difference can lead to a BIPOC librarian referring to a person in a supervisory position by an honorific, followed by their first name, as in:

- "Mrs. Heather. In fact, [the] library director is often addressed by the staff as Dr. Betty." (41) [BL-DL/V/B]

This is indicative of the senior staff member's "informal style of being addressed by his/her first name and an employee's cultural need to show respect for authority by use of the last name" (41).

In her paper, "Managing a Diverse Workforce," Ziolkowski (1995) focuses on interviews with potential student employees and ways in which to frame questions that are non-discriminatory and non-intrusive. Here are two examples:

- "Tell me or show me how you performed a similar task in your former or present position." (57) [L-S/A/B]

- "How did you effectively balance your job and school activities?" (58) [L-S/A/B]

Discrimination (N=5)

The discrimination category contains five anecdotal exemplars; one is related to mental health discrimination, two to homophobia/sexual orientation discrimination, and two to sexism.

- "One of my employees constantly makes 'jokes' about people being 'bipolar' or 'going postal' or being 'off their meds.'" (Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012, 18) [O-O/A/D]

- "You're too pretty to be a lesbian" (Kuecker 2017) [O-O/A/D]

- Women are good at that sort of thing" (Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012, 5) [O-O/A/D]

The last comment refers to a "male manager suggesting to a female colleague that she bake cookies for their next meeting" (5).

Discussion

Language use is consequential. This becomes especially evident when we consider the language-use categories and related exemplars described herein. For instance, our ability to navigate cultural differences in language can either help or harm interactions with international students. The way we communicate with those from varied backgrounds, ages, or sexual orientations can exacerbate tensions and inequality, or foster connection and understanding. A decision to use metaphorical language that is grounded in violence might have a different effect than language-use grounded in a more positive domain.

As we have indicated, knowledge of such language-use categories is fundamental to navigating their complexities. Murphy says that "categories generally seem to form a basis for induction: a property ascribed to one member seems likely to be found in other members. Indeed, … this function is the main source of categories' importance, because *it allows us to extend what we have learned about objects in the past to new things we encounter*" (2010, emphasis added).

While definitions and explanations of communication categories such as 'microaggressions' can be instructive, when we are unfamiliar with specific

exemplars from those categories, we are less equipped to recognize and appropriately respond to *new* language exemplars that fit into these same categories. We can pose a *single* question: what are characteristics of verbal communication that constitute racism? Or we can pose *two* questions: what are characteristics of this category, *and* what are exemplars of it?

The 245 exemplars identified in this review are informative and serve to illuminate their respective categories. While more studies that provide specific instances of interpersonal verbal communication in the academic library milieu are warranted, our study also reveals that exemplars from nonstudies can be as rich and informative as those from formal research papers (e.g. Knapp, Snavely, and Klimczyk 2012; Dalton et al. 2018).

Similarly, anecdotal or prescribed exemplars generally possess value and impact equal to verbatim accounts of verbal interchange. We discovered this to be the case during the completion of this review through the application of a guiding question, which informed our decisions about extraction: does this verbal exemplar deepen understanding of its communication category? Or, to place it in the first person, will this anecdotal exemplar expand my knowledge, awareness and sensitivity about a more general category of communication and potentially affect my language use? For example, we can compare this detrimental racist anecdote: "You're a good worker. You're not like the other Mexicans" (Knapp, Snavely and Klimczyk 2012,18) with this verbatim remark: "WOW! You're Hispanic? You speak great English" (Alibi 2015b, 185). Both of these exemplars were extracted.

The dominance of detrimental over beneficial exemplars (182 to 59) is noteworthy. While a tendency to point out the problematic is perhaps not unique to the academic library literature, or even to research in general, it does represent a gap in the context of this scoping review. We can benefit as much from examples of effective language use as we do from learning those to avoid. This is especially apparent when the two are shown together in contrast. To repeat such an example from Ormondroyd (1989,157), "I understand that you have to write a paper on a topic in science," is a beneficial option to this too-complex comment to an international student: "I understand that you have been told to write a thesis on a topic of a scientific nature."

Exemplars are crucial to learning and understanding language-use categories and, subsequently, engaging in effective verbal interactions. However, inherent in the domain of language use is a challenge: in some instances, the ability to generalize exemplars into categories can be complex and/or vague. That is, one exemplar will not necessarily resemble another overtly, directly, or in any obvious way. Here is such an instance: knowing that an international Chinese student might switch her pronunciation of the English "l" to "r" does not necessarily enable a librarian at the

reference desk to recognize that an international Indian student might switch his "v" to "w." In a more nuanced situation, if a librarian clearly understands that "You should go back to your own country" is a racist comment, this knowledge might not necessarily help him to appreciate that "I don't see colour" also falls under the category of racism.

This review has caveats and limitations. One of the most significant challenges our team experienced was in the development of an effective, focused, and unbiased approach to identifying relevant studies. This was due in part to the absence and/or non-standardization of metadata—most significantly, keywords and subject headings relating to language use and verbal exemplars (see Appendix B). Though we did not include grey literature such as conference proceedings or blogs in our results, investigation into this domain is warranted. For example, the *tumblr* site, lismicroaggressions.com, is an excellent source of exemplars.

Despite the review limitations outlined above, it nonetheless appears that reports of verbal exemplars of in-person academic library interactions may be underreported. This scoping review highlights the need for further investigation into language use and consequences of the ways we use words to communicate with patrons, colleagues, and communities. It also demonstrates a paucity of language-use research, contextualized in the academic library milieu, that incorporates exemplars. Despite this challenge, more examples of one-to-one verbal interactions could serve to demonstrate the depth and breadth of a particular category. To use art as an analogy: if I don't know what good art is, I won't know it when I see it. However, the more I learn about what comprises good art and am exposed to lots of it—*even if exemplars vary greatly*—the more I'll be able to recognize it. Similarly, the penultimate goal of language-use exemplars is the augmentation of knowledge and awareness. The ultimate goal is using language that is effective and beneficial.

Conclusion

Awareness and knowledge of language use in academic libraries is a crucial element in effective interaction with students, faculty members, and the greater university community. As diversity in our organizations grows, understanding how our language affects already marginalized groups is essential to monitoring and changing how we communicate with one another. Language-use awareness is also crucial to the workplace generally for, as noted earlier, a workplace relies on effective communication to build a foundation for healthy functioning, academic libraries included. In addition to augmenting such awareness in individuals working in academic libraries, this scoping review can aid library leaders to develop training programs aimed at improving healthy, equitable, and inclusive interpersonal

communication practices for everyone. More research is needed to identify and evaluate educational and other interventions designed to increase awareness of these issues, and to support appropriate and necessary behavioural change at organizational and individual levels.

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Appendix A: Search Strategy
EBSCO Databases

4. TI ((ableism or ableist or ageism or ageist or denigrating or derogatory or discrimination or discriminatory or disparaging or disrespect* or oppression or oppressive or racial* or racism or respect* or sexism or sexist or toleran* or intoleran*)) OR AB ((ableism or ableist or ageism or ageist or denigrating or derogatory or discrimination or discriminatory or disparaging or disrespect* or oppression or oppressive or racial* or racism or respect* or sexism or sexist or toleran* or intoleran*))

5. TI ((microaggress* OR micro-aggress*)) OR AB ((micro-agress* OR microaggress*))

6. TI ((ethnic minorit* or immigrant* or international student* or minority population* or minority student*) N5 (communication* or discourse or language or speech or lingo or jargon or metaphor* or terminology or terms or vocabulary or word choice)) OR AB ((ethnic minorit* or immigrant* or international student* or minority population* or minority student*) N5 (communication* or discourse or language or speech or lingo or jargon or metaphor* or terminology or terms or vocabulary or word choice))

7. 1 or 2 or 3

8. TI ((academic or college* or post-secondary or University*) N5 (librarian* or libraries or library)) OR AB ((academic or college* or post-secondary or University*) N5 (librarian* or libraries or library))

9. 4 and 5

LISA (ProQuest)

10. TI ((ableism or ableist or ageism or ageist or denigrating or derogatory or discrimination or discriminatory or disparaging or disrespect* or oppression or oppressive or racial* or racism or respect* or sexism or sexist or toleran* or intoleran*)) OR AB ((ableism or ableist or ageism or ageist or denigrating or derogatory or discrimination or discriminatory or disparaging or disrespect* or oppression or oppressive or racial* or racism or respect* or sexism or sexist or toleran* or intoleran*))

11. TI ((microaggress* OR micro-aggress*)) OR AB ((micro-agress* OR microaggress*))

12. TI ((ethnic minorit* or immigrant* or international student* or minority population* or minority student*) N/5 (communication* or discourse or language or speech or lingo or jargon or metaphor* or terminology or terms or vocabulary or word choice)) OR AB ((ethnic minorit* or immigrant* or international student* or minority population* or minority student*) N/5 (communication* or

discourse or language or speech or lingo or jargon or metaphor* or terminology or terms or vocabulary or word choice))

13. 1 or 2 or 3

14. TI ((academic or college* or post-secondary or University*) N/5 (librarian* or libraries or library)) OR AB ((academic or college* or post-secondary or University*) N/5 (librarian* or libraries or library))

15. 4 and 5

Appendix B: Metadata Samples from Extracted Papers

de Souza (1996)
Category: questions
14 exemplars
Subject Headings = Management, Reference services (Libraries), Students, Foreign, Usage

Alabi (2015a and 2015b, 2018)
Category: racism
38 exemplars
Subject Headings and Keywords = racism, racial microaggressions, academic libraries, diversity

Boyd and Amedegnato (2019)
Categories: metaphor / plain language
35 exemplars
Subject Headings and Keywords = academic libraries, language, violence, war metaphor