The aim of this study was to investigate a concept of uncritical inference behavior and to measure one of its manifestations. Uncritical inference behavior was defined as the making of a conjecture, supposition, guess, assumption, etc., but thinking and acting as if one had remained with what had actually been observed. Perhaps one of the most notorious manifestations of uncritical inference behavior appeared in the action of Lt. General George S. Patton during World War II, when he slapped an American private who seemed to Patton to be malingering in a hospital ward near the front. The soldier had been diagnosed as 'psychoneurosis anxiety state - moderately severe.' Immediately after the slapping incident the soldier was found to have had a temperature of 102.2. In addition, he showed a positive blood test for malaria and presented a month long history of diarrhea. (Deadline Delayed, New York, E.P. Dutton, 1947.)

One form of uncritical inference behavior is described as the unconscious identification or confusion of statements of inference and statements of description. A statement of inference was defined as a statement which went beyond what had been observed. A statement of description, on the other hand, can be made only after observation, must conform to what has been observed, and must not go beyond observation.

A review of theoretical literature provided ample documentation for the assertion that the inference-description confusion is indeed a phenomenon with which to cope. A survey of the experimental literature suggested numerous contributing factors to the behavioral pattern.

However, research revealed no published test purportedly designed to describe uncritical inference behavior by measuring the ability to distinguish between statements of inference and statements of description. Consequently, it was necessary to construct such an instrument. The test consisted of brief narratives and statements about the narratives. Subjects were instructed to read the stories carefully and to classify the statements about the narratives as either descriptive or inferential. A descriptive statement was defined, in terms of the test, as a statement which was either definitely verified or definitely contradicted by the data contained in the narrative. Inferential statements were those which were neither definitely verified nor contradicted but which stated something which went beyond the information in the story. A copy of the test instructions including a short sample test follows:

**THE UNCIRITICAL INFERENCE TEST**

by

William V. Haney

**INSTRUCTIONS**

This test is designed to determine your ability to think accurately and carefully. Since it is very probable that you have never taken this type of test before, failure to read the instructions extremely carefully may lower your score.

1. You will read a brief story. Assume that all of the information presented in the story is definitely accurate and true. Read the story carefully. You may refer back to the story whenever you wish.

2. You will then read statements about the story. Answer them as they occur. Do not go back to change or to fill in answers.

3. After you read carefully each statement, determine whether the statement is:

   'T' - meaning: On the basis of the information presented in the story, the
statement is definitely true.

'T' - meaning: On the basis of the information presented in the story, the statement is definitely true.

'F' - meaning: On the basis of the information presented in the story, the statement is definitely false.

'? ' - meaning: The statement MAY be true (or false) but on the basis of the information presented in the story you cannot be definitely certain. (If any part of the statement is doubtful, mark the statement '?' .)

4. Indicate your answer by underlining with a thick, heavy line either 'T' or 'F' or '?' opposite the statement.

**SAMPLE TEST**

The Story

The only car parked in front of 619 Oak Street is a black one. The words, 'James M. Curley, M.D.,' are spelled in small gold letters across the door of the car.

The Statements About The Story

1. The color of the car in front of 619 Oak Street is black. T F ?

   (This statement is definitely true because it is directly verified by the information contained in the story.)

2. There is no lettering on the door of the car parked in front of 619 Oak Street. T F ?

   (This statement is definitely false because it is directly contradicted by the information contained in the story.)

3. Someone is ill at 619 Oak Street. T F ?

   (This statement MAY be true, but there is insufficient information in the story to classify it as either definitely true or as definitely false.)

4. The black car parked in front of 619 Oak Street belongs to James M. Curley. T F ?

   (Another statement which may or may not be true. There is insufficient information in the story to classify the statement as either definitely true or as definitely false.)

**REMEMBER:** Answer ONLY on the basis of the information presented in the story. Refrain from answering as you think it might have happened. Answer the statements as they are presented. Do not go back to fill in or to change answers.

* * * * *

It was reasoned that should a subject identify or confuse the two types of statements, and thus classify an inferential statement as descriptive, he would necessarily go beyond the data contained in the narrative. In doing so, he would be, in essence, inferring - that is, going beyond what had been observed. Furthermore, since the subject had been instructed to refrain from such identification, it was concluded that he was making the inference without being aware that he was doing so. Hence, by definition, the subject was said to be manifesting uncritical inference behavior.

Over 900 undergraduates in a midwest university (Northwestern) were tested in the refining and experimental stages of the construction of the test. Coefficients of reliability indicated that the test was sufficiently reliable to discriminate among groups and to make coarser discriminations among individuals. Two indications of test validity were demonstrated. First, the items of the test were judged valid by a committee of experts. Secondly, a highly
significant improvement in test performance was preceded by special inference-description discrimination instruction.

The uniqueness of the test was established to an extent. Research revealed no test explicitly purporting to measure that purported by the present Uncritical Inference Test. Moreover, representative tests from three areas thought to be related to the present test were correlated with that test. Negligible to moderate correlations indicated that the Uncritical Inference Test was measuring something other than that which was being measured by these representative tests of 'reading comprehension,' 'verbal intelligence,' and 'critical thinking.'

Implications for further use of the Uncritical Inference Test and for further studies in regard to uncritical inference behavior were listed. A particularly interesting application of the test seemed to be in the screening of applicants for positions which require a high level of inference-description discriminatory ability. Occupations which appear to call for such ability include policemen, detectives, jurists, jurymen, doctors, government and business executives, certain types of industrial workers, newsmen, engineers, etc.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WILLIAM V. HANEY considers his dissertation topic ('Measurement of Ability to Discriminate Between Inferential and Descriptive Statements') a fortunate choice for he has been able to pursue the subject with post-doctoral research. His studies completed or in process include a testing of the Chicago Police Force. He is attempting to construct a screening device to weed out police candidates who, because of their 'inference-proneness,' may be likely to embarrass themselves and their departments and to endanger the lives of citizens. Another provocative study underway is that dealing with accident prevention. It is based upon the hypothesis that many 'accident-prone' drivers may be such at least partially due to their 'inference-proneness.' Dr. Haney and colleagues are planning to set up an experimental accident-driver training program in an effort to decrease traffic accidents. Haney's thesis was reported in Dissertation Abstracts, 1953; also Speech Monographs, Vol. XXI, No. 2, pp. 145-46.

After three years in the service, Dr. Haney entered Iowa State College and a year later transferred to Northwestern. There he received his BS (Graduated With Distinction), MA, and PhD in the field of Public Speaking. His dissertation (of which his article is a precis) was written under the guidance of Dr. Irving J. Lee. He has taught at Beloit College, Northwestern University, and De Paul University in Chicago. He is currently at De Paul as assistant professor of speech and as a staff member of the Institute of Industrial Psychology.

Haney's special interests include semantics, public speaking, conference speaking and leadership, and business and industrial communications. Currently he is inaugurating a course, 'Communication in Business and Industry,' at De Paul University. Students will include executives from the Chicago industrial area who are interested in the communication processes of their own firms. The course, sponsored by the Institute of Industrial Psychology, will be organized largely on a case-study basis with the focus on communication breakdowns. He has recently done a film strip, 'Words and You,' on the role of language as a determinant of human behavior. He cites an interesting example illustrating the public's increasing awareness of and interest in general semantics. Following the presentation of his paper, 'Measuring the Inference-Description Confusion,' at the St. Louis Conference on General Semantics, the Chicago Daily News published a feature article on the paper and circulated the story via its news service. As a result Haney has received numerous inquiries from across the nation from educators, business and industrial leaders, and military leaders.

As for his non-professional life, Haney is married and is the father of two children. The Haney family lives in Evanston, Illinois. He enjoys playing golf and particularly with Irving Lee whom he claims he comes dangerously close to beating. 'But somehow,' he reports, 'the old pro manages to keep a few strokes ahead.'