Linguistic Discrimination

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On Peoria, Anishinabewaki, Potawatomi land
Linguistic Discrimination

On Deck Today

➢ Terminology
➢ Background and examples from US context
➢ Experimental Results
➢ Questions
Accent

➢ Big 5: Age, Race, Gender, Region, Socioeconomics
  ○ Awareness and importance determined by location in spacetime. (Sam Epstein 2018)

➢ Standard and Non-Standard
  ○ Determined by wider social beliefs and practices
  ○ Flexible by individual positionality
Standard Variety

MUSE (Mainstream US English)

- Learned in school
- Most similar to written form (if applicable)
- Understood by many people
- (usually) Does not have elements which are associated with a particular region
- Socially prized
- Used in government or other official contexts
- Can be used to, intentionally or unintentionally, disadvantage those who do not speak it well or at all.
Non-Standard Variety

African-American Languages
Southern Dialect
Indian-Accented English
Chinese-Accented English

➢ Not Learned in school
➢ More similar to spoken forms
➢ Understood by certain groups of people
➢ Usually associated with a particular region
➢ Socially stigmatized
➢ Rarely used in government or other official contexts
Language and Nation

- A language is a dialect with an army and a navy
- A nation is the totality of people who speak the same language
Passing for American meant speaking without an accent.
Citizenship

➢ Race is the key distinction between citizens and non-citizens.
➢ 1790 Naturalization Act citizens are: “Fair-complexioned people of European descent”
Under the law, races, ethnicities, and nationalities all had ways of appearing and behaving.

Use these standards to determine who can become a citizen.
Ah Yup (1878)

- Man from China who applied for citizenship
  - Claiming whiteness
- Arguments in front of the court:
“White person doesn’t refer to color of skin, but instead an understanding in popular speech acquired in the literature or common parlance.”
Ah Yup (1878)

**In re Ah Yup**

- Whiteness is about language
  - “A distinguishing *civilizing* factor”
- Judges Look up the definition of Whiteness and Mongolian isn’t there.
  - (see Biological Racism)
Shahid (1913)

Ex parte Shahid

- Syrian man applies for citizenship, under precedent set in *Najour* (1909)
- “Browner than a walnut and hardly understands English”
  - Language is so poor that Mr. Shahid could be of no benefit to the US.
US vs Thind (1923)

- An upstanding Hindu businessman applies for citizenship
  - Recent minority opinion had been filed arguing for Indic peoples as Whites because “Caucasian”
US vs Thind (1923)

- Court finds that “Lesser peoples of Europe” Germans, Irish, Poles, etc. can count as White because they:
  - “quickly merge and lose the distinct hallmarks or their heritage. Hindus retain marks of ethnicity indefinitely, particularly in accent.”
Naturalization

Cases and Amendments

- 230 years of group-based amendments.
- As more people who sound less (White) Standard are brought in, the more they are encouraged to assimilate.
  - *America, The Melting Pot*
Deficit Models

- Deviations from the typical seen as something needing to be fixed.
  - The fault of the individual/group
- Native American and d/Deaf boarding schools
  - Assimilationist policies
    - Force and Isolation
30,000 Native American children were placed into Boarding Schools between 1880 and 1902
Read petition to designate still operating school as a hate group.
Assimilation

➢ Education
➢ Workplaces
➢ Social Advancement
Consequences of not Assimilating

“Accent is the first point of gatekeeping.” Rosina Lippi-Green

➢ Hispanic English-learners
  ○ More likely to work in high risk professions
  ○ Deaths and injuries rose 86% from 1992-2006
    ■ Craft, Wright, Weissler, Queen (2020); Davila et al. (2011)
Assimilation ➢ Personal Safety
Consequences of not Assimilating

“Accent is the first point of gatekeeping.”
-Rosina Lippi-Green

➢ Two women detained at the MN border for speaking Spanish
Ana Suda and Mimi Hernandez

- Detained at Minnesota border for speaking Spanish
- “it has to do with you guys speaking Spanish in the store, in a state where it's predominantly English-speaking, OK?”
Shibboleths

Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan. -Judges 12:6

➢ 40,000 Ephraimites are killed at the River Jordan
➢ Identified by their inability to pronounce shibboleth like the Gileadites.
The Parsley Massacre

➢ Rafael Trujillo, president of the DR orders any Haitian entering the country be killed.
  ○ Identified by shade of skin (darker)
  ○ Ability to pronounce the Spanish word for ‘parsley’ *Perejil* with an Alveolar trill *[r]*
➢ Haitians, who speak Kreyol (French Contact Variety), pronounced with a Uvular trill *[ɾ]*
The Parsley Massacre

- 30,000 Haitians killed in 6 days.
- October 2-8 1937
If you know you could be judged or killed for sounding a certain way, a natural reaction is changing the way you sound for a better outcome.
Summary

Questions?

➢ Accents are about sounding Standard or Not.
➢ Sounding American means sounding Standard.
   ○ At stake: Being entitled to the full rights of citizenship
➢ Institutions are built around rewarding those who sound Standard
Fair Housing Act

Protects Homebuyers from Discrimination

➢ Race, National Origin, Color, Religion (1968)
➢ Sex (1974)
➢ Disability and Familial Status (1998)
Fair Housing Act

Protects Homebuyers from Discrimination

➢ Discrimination must occur in physical proximity.
Linguistic Discrimination is insidious

➢ Dialect identification happens in a moment
➢ Happens outside the space of canonical, legal discrimination
Landmark Study Purnell, Idsardi, & Baugh (1999)

“Given that discrimination according to race or national origin is illegal under the Fair Housing Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 as amended, we seek to demonstrate that the identity of race (or national origin) is reflected, not only visually but also auditorily in an individual’s speech. In addition, we endeavor to establish that listeners hear and positively identify a speaker’s dialect with great accuracy. The following experiments reveal the possibility of auditory discrimination and the probability of social discrimination by auditory identification of dialects. Auditory cues thus comprise a significant factor in establishing evidence in effecting a prima facie case where the Fair Housing and Civil Rights Acts are involved.”
Linguistic Profiling

Baugh (2003)
Rubin (2011)

- Operates similarly to racial profiling
- "Informal, on-the-spot, and largely nonconscious speech judgments," which are then linked to social stereotypes.
Audit Study

Purnell et al. (1999)
Massey & Lundy (2001)

- Pre-Planned call protocol
- Pre-Planned list of target population
- Participants hear each voice only once.
My Three Native Dialects

➢ African American (AAL)
  ○ Who I Am

➢ Standard American (MUSE)
  ○ What I Do

➢ Southern American (SA)
  ○ Where I Am From
Target Neighborhoods

Racial and Socioeconomic demographics

- White Working Class (WW) $18,000/year
- Middle Class (MC) $22,000/year
- Black Working Class (BW) $11,000/year
Predictions

Higher Commitment Level, Local Prestige Effects

- SA voice: WW > MC > BW
- MUSE voice: MC > WW > BW
- AAL voice: BW > MC > WW
Ordinal Logistic Regression

- Consistent with raw data and predictive modeling
- Consistent with predictions
  - SA voice: WW > MC > BW
  - AAL voice: BW > MC > WW
- MUSE voice: MC > WW, BW
Social Assessment Survey

➢ What race do you hear?
➢ What region do you hear?
➢ What kind of speaker is this?
Race and Region

- Better than chance
  - Voices are representative samples of the target dialects
- SA is a regional dialect, so Southern regional assignments are the target.
- AAL is a racial dialect, so Black racial assignments are the target.
Race and Region

- MUSE is explicitly racially and regionally unmarked, but is indexed to Whiteness and Midwestern and Coastal regions, so these assignments are the target.
If you were asked to do so, what race would you assign the speaker?
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If you were asked to do so, what race would you assign the speaker?
Attribute Assessment

- Participants asked to rate each voice on ten character attributes
- 100-point, non-binary slider
  - Endpoints 0 and 100
## Attribute Percepts

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<th></th>
<th>Pleasant</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Educated</th>
<th>Attractive</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<td>84.10</td>
<td>55.75</td>
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<td>MUSE</td>
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<td>86.50</td>
<td>74.10</td>
<td>74.95</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(13.48)</td>
<td>(13.10)</td>
<td>(19.37)</td>
<td>(13.07)</td>
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<td>AAL</td>
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<td>48.48</td>
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<td>(22.15)</td>
<td>(21.97)</td>
<td>(27.80)</td>
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<table>
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<th>Trustworthy</th>
<th>Rich</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
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<td>(20.47)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15.60</td>
<td>59.70</td>
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<td>(19.14)</td>
<td>(22.86)</td>
<td>(18.78)</td>
<td>(25.92)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Green = Possesses Positive Characteristics; Red= Possess Negative Characteristics, meaning this table is NOT color coded for voice. Values presented as means out of 100, Standard Deviations in parenthesis; N=40
AAL Voice

- The least pleasant, the least trustworthy, the least attractive, and the least confident sounding
- The most poor, the most masculine, and the most difficult sounding
The most rich (and least poor) and the most educated sounding.

Receives the most positively valenced ratings in other categories, however...
SA Voice

- Standard deviations make the SA voice ostensibly on par with MUSE in terms of **confident**, **masculine**, **feminine**, **difficult**, **trustworthy**, and **pleasant**.
Distinctiveness playing out in ratings for rich and poor, educated, and attractive.
Linguistic Profiling

- General agreement among participants on the built schema for each voice.
- Factor analysis suggests that perceiving even one negatively-valenced social trait can have consequences for the entire profile.
This Matters.

➢ 190 years of racialized housing discrimination
➢ People accurately hear social information
➢ People make judgements based on voice alone
➢ Property owners care about how you sound
Anytime you have to open your mouth to accomplish a task, Linguistic Discrimination is at play.
Questions?

Thank you!

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