Celebrate Voices in The Workplace
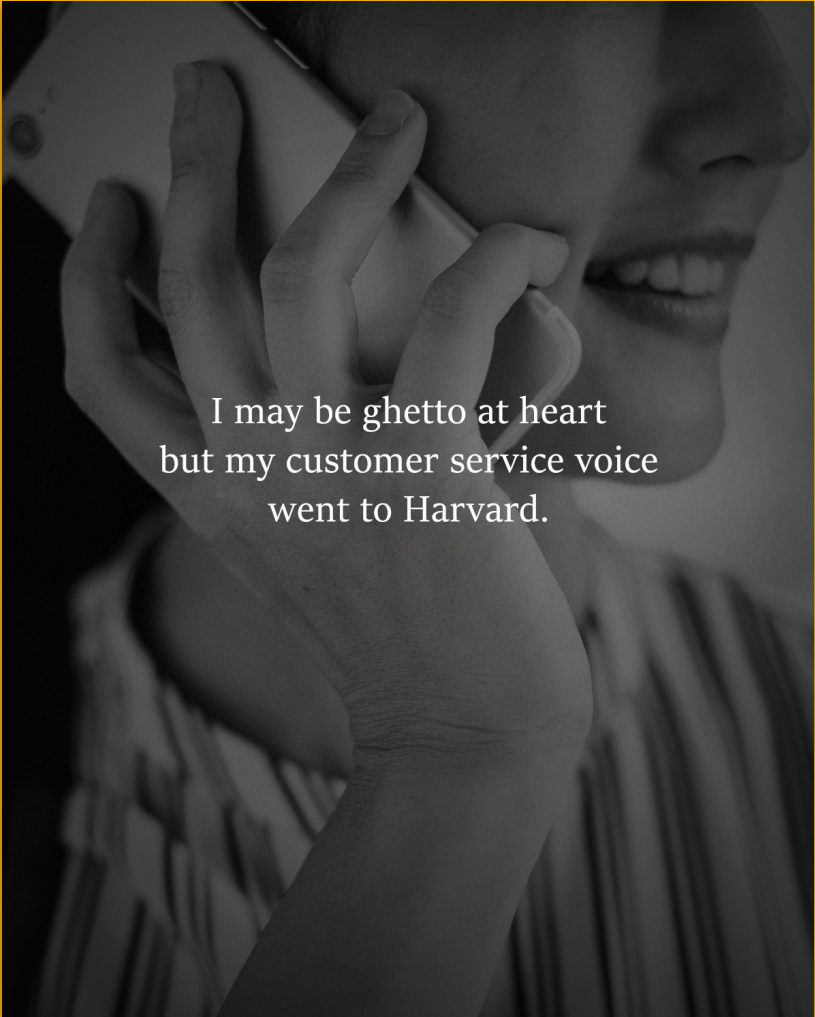## LSA Opportunity Hub

Kelly E. Wright
LSA Department of Linguistics
On Peoria, Anishinabewaki, Potawatomi land
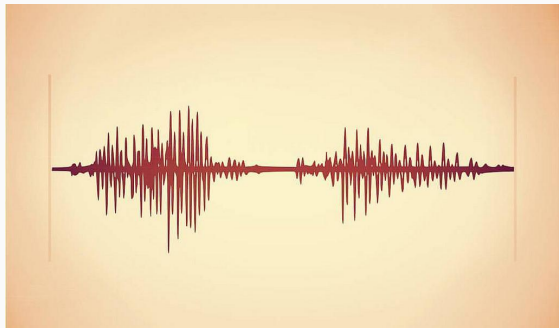
I may be ghetto at heart
but my customer service voice
went to Harvard.

Overview

- ❖ What is Voice?
- ❖ Speech Perception
- ❖ Linguistic Discrimination in the real world
- ❖ Next Steps
    - ➢ What matters for YOU!
- ❖ Spaces to Celebrate

Voice

❖ One physical instantiation of thought.

Voice
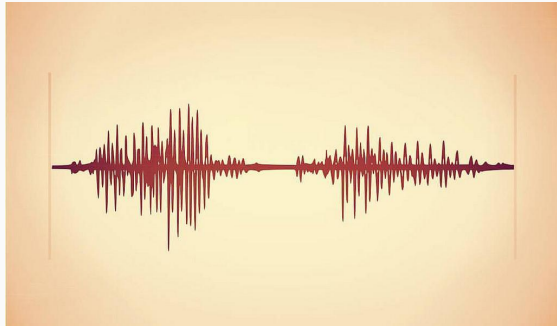
- ❖ One physical instantiation of thought.
- ❖ Idiolect
  - ➢ Your personal way of speaking.

Dialects

❖ Groups of idiolects

Dialects

❖ Groups of idiolects
❖ Develop over time

Dialects

❖ Groups of idiolects
❖ Develop over time
❖ Similar ways of speaking

Dialects

- ❖ Groups of idiolects
- ❖ Develop over time
- ❖ Similar ways of speaking
  - ➢ Sounds

Dialects

❖ Groups of idiolects
❖ Develop over time
❖ Similar ways of speaking
➢ Sounds
➢ Words

Dialects

- ❖ Groups of idiolects
- ❖ Develop over time
- ❖ Similar ways of speaking
  - ➢ Sounds
  - ➢ Words
  - ➢ Phrases

Categorizations

(Linguistics is not that old)

❖ Not gospel!

Dialects

Ways of speaking, groups of idolects, develop over time

- ❖ Regional
- ❖ Ethnic
- ❖ Racial

What is a language?

❖ "A dialect with an army and a navy."

What is a language?

- ❖ "A dialect with an army and a navy."
- ❖ National Language Authorities
  - ➢ Officialdom
  - ➢ Power

What is a language?

❖ Spoken, Signed, Written

Language vs Dialect

Key points

- ❖ Equally complex and systematic
  - ➢ Difference not inherent in form or function

Language vs Dialect

Key points

- ❖ Equally complex and systematic
  - ➢ Difference not inherent in form or function
- ❖ Wider recognition
  - ➢ Public use and perception

What is an Accent?

❖ A way of speaking associated with a language or dialect or group.

What is an Accent?

❖ A way of speaking associated with a language or dialect
  ➢ Most commonly Regional

What is an Accent?

- ❖ **A way of speaking** associated with a language or dialect
  - ➢ Most commonly Regional
  - ➢ Racial or Ethnic

What is an Accent?

❖ A way of speaking associated with **Gender**, **Age**, or **Class**

What is an Accent?

- ❖ A way of speaking associated with Gender, Age, or Class
  - ➢ **Function the same way as** regional, racial, or ethnic **dialects**

What is an Accent?

- ❖ A way of speaking associated with Gender, Age, or Class
  - ➢ Function the same way as regional, racial, or ethnic dialects
- ❖ Easiest to pick up on with **characterizations** of other people

Quick Review

❖ Dialects are groups of **idolects** which develop over time.

Quick Review

❖ Dialects are groups of idolects which develop over time.

❖ Languages work no differently (or better) than Dialects

➢ Recognized by an explicit authority

➢ **Publicly perceived** as official

Quick Review

- ❖ Dialects are groups of idolects which develop over time.
- ❖ Languages work no differently (or better than) Dialects
  - ➢ Recognized by an explicit authority
  - ➢ Publicly perceived as official
- ❖ Accents are ways of speaking **associated** with a language or a dialect or group.

Questions?

Ways of Speaking

❖ EVERY speaker has multiple ways of speaking!

Ways of Speaking

- ❖ EVERY speaker has multiple ways of speaking!
- ❖ Not just identity-based!

Ways of Speaking

❖ Knowing which voice to use with whom and when.

Ways of Speaking

❖ Knowing which voice to use with whom and when
  ➢ Parents
  ➢ Friends

Ways of Speaking

❖ Knowing which voice to use with whom and when
  ➢ Parents
  ➢ Friends
  ➢ Boss

Ways of Speaking

(pet-directed speech. It's a thing.)

❖ Knowing which voice to use with whom and when
  ➢ Parents
  ➢ Friends
  ➢ Boss
  ➢ Puppies

Speech Perception

❖ Magic

Speech Perception

- ❖ I **think** of a thing to say.

Speech Perception

- ❖ I think of a thing to say.
- ❖ Flap **bits of meat** around in my head.

Speech Perception

- ❖ I think of a thing to say.
- ❖ Flap bits of meat around in my head.
- ❖ Sets air molecules into **motion** between us.

Speech Perception

(Google *Organ of Corti* and have yourself a nerdy cool time)

❖ I think of a thing to say.
❖ Flap bits of meat around in my head.
❖ Sets air molecules into motion between us.
❖ Hits your **eardrum**

Speech Perception

- ❖ I think of a thing to say.
- ❖ Flap bits of meat around in my head.
- ❖ Sets air molecules into motion between us.
- ❖ Hits your eardrum
- ❖ You **understand** the thing I thought.

Air in Motion →Eardrum → Meaning

❖ **The Human** is a discerning individual.

Air in Motion →Eardrum → Meaning

- ❖ **The Human** is a discerning individual.
- ❖ Parsing.

Parsing

❖ Breaking up the sound waves hitting your eardrum

Parsing

❖ Breaking up the sound waves hitting your eardrum
➢ Sentences

Parsing

❖ Breaking up the sound waves hitting your eardrum
  ➢ Sentences
  ➢ Words

Parsing

- ❖ Breaking up the sound waves hitting your eardrum
  - ➢ Sentences
  - ➢ Words
  - ➢ Sounds

Adapt to Patterns Around Us

Parsing the Familiar

❖ We're most familiar with the sentence, word, and sound **patterns** we hear most often.

Adapt to Patterns Around Us

Parsing the Familiar

- ❖ Patterns we hear most often
  - ➢ Dominant Language in our communities

Adapt to Patterns Around Us

Parsing the Familiar

❖ Patterns we hear most often
➢ Dominant Language in our communities
➢ First language(s) or dialect(s) we learned as babies

Adapt to Patterns Around Us

Parsing the Familiar

❖ Patterns we hear most often
➢ Dominant Language(s)
❖ Common patterns of language use that strongly affect our **perception**

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Categorical Perception

Patterns = Categories

- ❖ Listeners perceive speech categories on a **continuum**

Categorical Perception

Patterns = Categories

❖ Listeners perceive speech categories on a continuum
  ➢ Language Specific

Categorical Perception

Patterns = Categories

❖ Listeners perceive speech categories on a continuum
- ➢ Language Specific
- ➢ Individual Experience

Categorical Perception

(ask me about phonetic continua later)

- ❖ Affects all of our perceptual systems (or senses)

Categorical Perception

The McGurk Effect

❖ Affects all of our perceptual systems (or senses)

❖ Audio Visual perception

Categorical Perception

❖ Affects types of knowledge about the world

Categorical Perception

The Stroop Effect

- ❖ Affects types of knowledge about the world
- ❖ [Social Categories](#)

Parsing = Sensing

❖ How we interact with the signals we receive from the physical world.

Parsing = Sensing

- ❖ How we interact with the signals we receive from the physical world.
- ❖ A fluid experience of now.

Quick Review

Speech Perception is Magic

❖ (my) Thought > Bits of Meat > Motion > Ear > (your) Thought

Quick Review

Speech Perception is Magic

- ❖ (my) Thought > Bits of Meat > Motion > Ear > (your) Thought
- ❖ Break up the sounds using **patterns most common to** us

Quick Review

Speech Perception is Magic

- ❖ (my) Thought > Bits of Meat > Motion > Ear > (your) Thought
- ❖ Break up the sounds using patterns most common to us
- ❖ Our **expectations** about the world really matter

Questions?

How does all this work in the real world?

Perceptual Dialectology

❖ How we place people on a map based on how they sound?

Let's do an experiment!
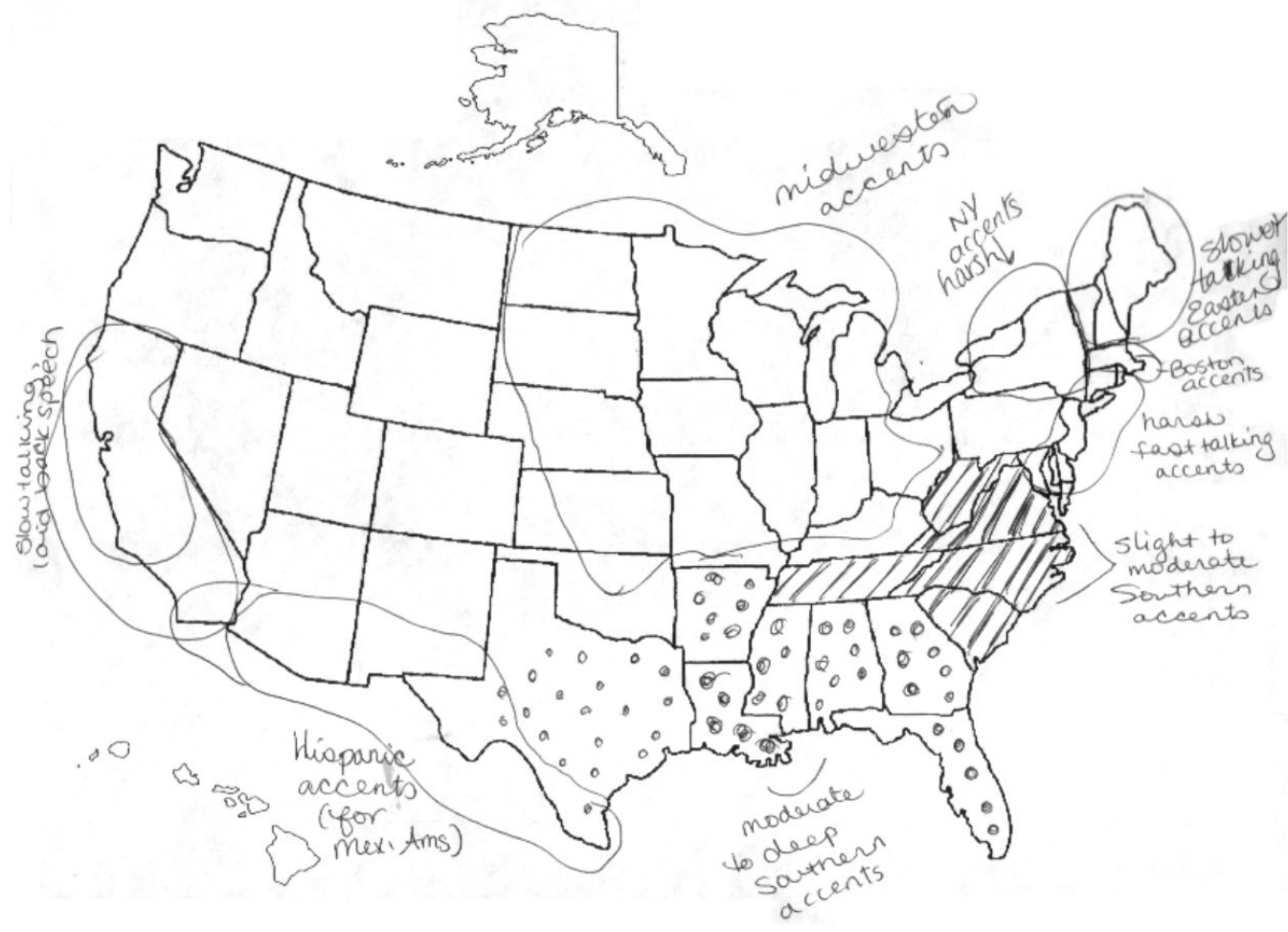
Perceptual Dialectology

- ❖ How we place people on a map based on how they sound.
- ❖ **Evidence** of Regional Dialect knowledge

Local Voices

- ❖ Michigan Voices are "Normal"

Local Voices

- ❖ Michigan Voices are "Normal"
- ❖ Michigan Accent
  - ➢ Cynthia Canty

Local Voices

❖ Michigan Voices are "Normal"
❖ Michigan Accent
  ➢ Cynthia Canty
❖ Northern Cities Shift
  ➢ Gretchen Whitmer

Dive into the Science

Sociolinguistic Variables

Recognizing an accent

❖ **Features** of Dialects

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Sociolinguistic Variables

❖ **Features** of Dialects
  ➢ Vowels and Consonants

Sociolinguistic Variables

❖ Features of Dialect
  ➢ Vowels and Consonants
❖ **Associated** with a specific community

Sociolinguistic Variables

- ❖ Features of Dialect
  - ➢ Vowels and Consonants
- ❖ **Associated** with a specific community
  - ➢ Women
  - ➢ Californians

Study on Sociolinguistic Variables

Niedzielski (1999)

❖ Data collected right here in Michigan

Study on Sociolinguistic Variables

Niedzielski (1999)

- ❖ Data collected right here in Michigan
- ❖ Social Information

Study on Sociolinguistic Variables

Niedzielski (1999)

- ❖ Data collected right here in Michigan
- ❖ Social Information
  - ➢ Michigander or Canadian?

Study on Sociolinguistic Variables

Methods

❖ Listen to some words
  ➢ Detroit female speaker

Study on Sociolinguistic Variables

Methods

- ❖ Listen to some words
  - ➢ Detroit female speaker
- ❖ The *house* vowel

Study on Sociolinguistic Variables

Methods

- ❖ Listen to some words
  - ➢ Detroit female speaker
- ❖ The *house* vowel
- ❖ Piece of paper for answers
  - ➢ Either CANADIAN or MICHIGAN written at the top.

Study on Sociolinguistic Variables

Methods

- ❖ If CANADIAN, heard more raised vowels.
- ❖ If MICHIGAN, heard canonical vowels *not* NCS vowels.

Takeaways

Niedzielski (1999)

❖ Subject position is *really* strong

Takeaways

Niedzielski (1999)

- ❖ Subject position is *really* strong
- ❖ So strong, we hear things that aren't there

Takeaways

Niedzielski (1999)

- ❖ Subject position is *really* strong
- ❖ So strong, we hear things that aren't there
- ❖ AND we don't hear things that are!

One more study.

Sociolinguistic Parsing

Scharinger et al. (2016)

❖ We are parsing sentences, words, and sounds, but

Sociolinguistic Parsing

Scharinger et al. (2016)

- ❖ We are parsing sentences, words, and sounds, but
- ❖ **When** do we start parsing social information from speech?

Sociolinguistic Parsing

Scharinger et al. (2016)

❖ Age & Gender, then Race
  ➢ 30 to 300 milliseconds

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Sociolinguistic Parsing

Scharinger et al. (2016)

❖ Age & Gender, then Race
❖ Early
  ➢ "**H**ello"

Sociolinguistic Parsing

Scharinger et al. (2016)

- ❖ Age & Gender, then Race
- ❖ Early
  - ➢ "**H**ello"
- ❖ Without Attention

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Quick Review

❖ Our brains are keyed into social information

Quick Review

- ❖ Our brains are keyed into social information
- ❖ **Who we are** and **where we are** from has a lot to do with **how we hear** other people

Quick Review

❖ Our brains are keyed into social information

❖ Who we are and where we are from has a lot to do with how we hear other people

❖ Our ears listen for social stuff **while** also listening for sentence stuff

Questions?

Voice Matters

❖ We don't only **use our voices** to convey who we are and where we are from

Voice Matters

❖ We use our voices to convey a wealth of information about our **intentions**.

Voice Matters

❖ But also, We use our voices to convey a wealth of information about our **intentions**.
  ➢ Happy
  ➢ Sketchy
  ➢ Confused

Linguistic Discrimination

Discrimination

In every sense.

❖ Natural Phenomenon

Discrimination

In every sense.

- ❖ Natural Phenomenon
  - ➢ Picking out **different types of things** (here we care about sounds)

Discrimination

In every sense.

- ❖ Natural Phenomenon
  - ➢ Picking out different types of things
- ❖ Nasty Consequences

Discrimination

In every sense.

- ❖ Natural Phenomenon
  - ➢ Picking out different types of things
- ❖ Nasty Consequences
  - ➢ **Treating someone differently** based on social knowledge you have about them

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Linguistic Stereotypes

❖ Pattern with Social Stereotypes

Linguistic Stereotypes

❖ **Pattern with Social Stereotypes**
➢ Equate ways of speaking (dialects, languages, voices) with certain social groups

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Linguistic Stereotypes

❖ Pattern with Social Stereotypes
  ➢ Equate voices with social groups
❖ Black voices sound **aggressive** or **lazy**

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Linguistic Stereotypes

- ❖ Pattern with Social Stereotypes
  - ➢ Equate voices with social groups
- ❖ Black voices sound aggressive or lazy
- ❖ Female voices sound **shrill**, **pitchy**, **creaky**

Linguistic Stereotypes

- ❖ Pattern with Social Stereotypes
  - ➢ Equate voices with social groups
- ❖ Black voices sound aggressive or lazy
- ❖ Female voices sound shrill, pitchy, creaky
- ❖ Southern voices sound **uneducated** or **slow-paced**

Linguistic Stereotypes

- ❖ Pattern with Social Stereotypes
  - ➢ Equate voices with social groups
- ❖ Black voices sound aggressive or lazy
- ❖ Female voices sound shrill, pitchy, creaky
- ❖ Southern voices sound uneducated or slow-paced
- ❖ New England voices sound **fast-paced**, **confident to-a-fault**

Linguistic Discrimination

❖ Co-opts the speech perception system

Linguistic Discrimination

- ❖ Co-opt the speech perception system
- ❖ Same system that lets us constantly hear the spaces between words

Linguistic Discrimination

- ❖ Co-opt the categorical perception system
- ❖ Same system that lets us constantly hear the spaces between words
- ❖ Also convinces us that a person is ignorant when they say *aks* instead of *ask*

Dialect Discrimination

Legally, Discrimination is an act which must occur in physical proximity.

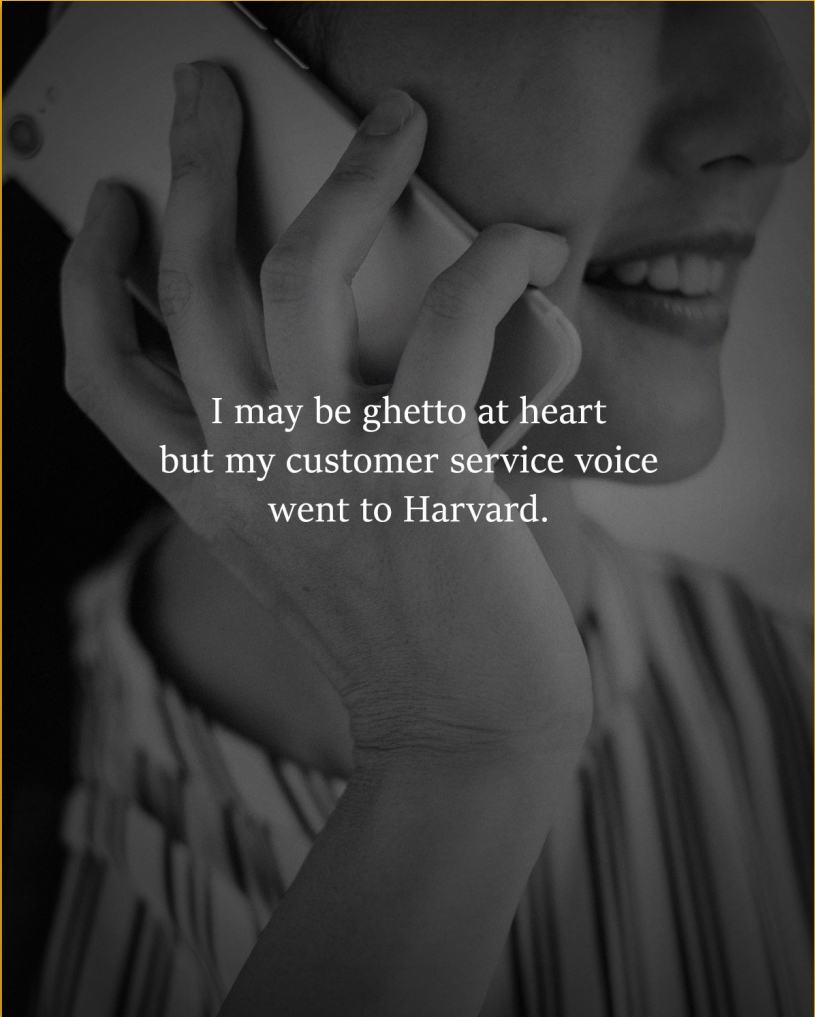# Dialect Discrimination

(check out this [hot podcast](#))

- ❖ Discrimination on the basis of voice is - to this day - not protected under law
  - ➢ A voice isn't enough to establish social class membership.

Dialect Discrimination

❖ Discrimination on the basis of voice is - to this day - not protected under law
  ➢ A voice isn't enough to establish social class membership.
  ➢ Simply not proveable.

But...

I may be ghetto at heart
but my customer service voice
went to Harvard.

We Know

❖ The way we sound shapes the way people treat us!

We Know

❖ We pull social information out of a voice early and reliably
➢ ("Hello")

We Know

- ❖ We pull social information out of a voice early and reliably
  - ➢ ("Hello")
- ❖ We use that information to make social judgments about other people
  - ➢ Age, Race, Gender

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We Know

❖ We pull social information out of a voice early and reliably
  ➢ ("Hello")
❖ We use that information to make social judgments about other people
  ➢ Age, Race, Gender
❖ Sometimes our judgments are so strong that we hear things that aren't even there!
  ➢ Canadianness

Discrimination on the basis of voice E X I S T S.

And, I'm doing a study to try and fix it.

US Housing

❖ Always been separated along color and class lines

Covert Segregation

❖   Highway Project

![University of Michigan LSA Opportunity Hub logo]

Eisenhower's Highway Project

Projects

Suburbs

Covert Segregation

❖ Highway Project is just one method

Covert Segregation

(ask me later)

- ❖ Highway Project
- ❖ Home Loans
- ❖ Suburbs
- ❖ Redlining
- ❖ Blockbusting
- ❖ White Flight
- ❖ Gentrification
- ❖ Redistricting
- ❖ Racialization of Media

Fair Housing Act

Protects Homebuyers from Discrimination

- ❖ Race, National Origin, Color, Religion (1968)
- ❖ Sex (1974)
- ❖ Disability and Familial Status (1998)

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Dialect Discrimination is Insidious

- ❖ Happens in **a moment**
- ❖ Happens outside of a legally protected space

My Three Native Dialects

- ❖ **African American (AAL)**
  - ➢ Who I Am
- ❖ **Standard American (MUSE)**
  - ➢ What I Do
- ❖ **Southern American (SA)**
  - ➢ Where I Am From

Results

MUSE Sample

Raced at 89% White

AAL Sample

Raced as 89% Black

SA Sample

Raced as 97% White

Region Rating

14% Northeast 17% West Coast 17% East Coast

Region Rating

29% South 22% East Coast

Region Rating

71% South 2% Alabama, Texas, Georgia, Arkansas, respectively.

How many voices? 97% identified three distinct speakers

Initial Attitude Impression

❖ How do you feel about **the person behind the voice** you heard?

Southern American Voice

Pleasant	Feminine	Educated	Attractive	Poor
72.09	89.11	52.46	62.71	37.26
Masculine	Confident	Trustworthy	Rich	Difficult
7.69	65.74	69.23	46.69	26.4

Red boxes represent **positive extremes** (meaning that the voice possesses characteristics which invoke this impression) and **Yellow boxes** represent **negative extremes** (meaning that the voice does not possess such characteristics).

Mainstream US Voice

Pleasant	Feminine	Educated	Attractive	Poor
74.06	81.11	80.74	69.66	16.4
Masculine	Confident	Trustworthy	Rich	Difficult
17.11	77.46	71.43	64.54	32.91

Red boxes represent **positive extremes** (meaning that the voice possesses characteristics which invoke this impression) and **Yellow boxes** represent **negative extremes** (meaning that the voice does not possess such characteristics).

African American Voice

Pleasant	Feminine	Educated	Attractive	Poor
54.11	76.97	38.29	48.54	54.47
Masculine	Confident	Trustworthy	Rich	Difficult
18.03	58.8	51.6	24.43	47.37

Red boxes represent **positive extremes** (meaning that the voice possesses characteristics which invoke this impression) and **Yellow boxes** represent **negative extremes** (meaning that the voice does not possess such characteristics). **NOTE: the AAL voice conveys extremes only!**

Preliminary Results

❖ Listeners heard three distinct speakers
  ➢ Dialects and races distributed as expected

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Preliminary Results

- ❖ Listeners heard three distinct speakers
  - ➢ Dialects and races distributed as expected
- ❖ Listeners heard three different **people**

Preliminary Results

❖ National Survey of Rental Professionals

Preliminary Results

- ❖ National Survey of Rental Professionals
  - ➢ Because, we need to know what the target group of listeners thinks!

Preliminary Results

Preliminary Results

❖ National Survey of Rental Professionals (target listeners)

❖ "Be well spoken and considerate on the phone"

➤ Speaking MUSE is like putting a business suit on your voice.

Taken Together

Preliminary Results

❖ We can begin to understand how if **AAL sounds poorer**, and people hear AAL 89% of the time I talk like my family, how this affects **my chances of finding a home** in whatever neighborhood I can afford.

Quick Review

What we know now.

(ask me about the ongoing study later)

- ❖ 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

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This Matters.

Homeownership

- ❖ Cornerstone of economics
  - ➢ Generational Wealth
  - ➢ Determines Tax Base
  - ➢ In turn determines school district funding
  - ➢ Which in turn determines individual social mobility.

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

Anytime you have to open your mouth to accomplish a task, linguistic discrimination is at play.

Anytime

- ❖ Housing

Anytime

❖ Housing
❖ Healthcare

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Anytime

❖ Housing
❖ Healthcare
❖ Banking

Anytime

❖ Housing
❖ Healthcare
❖ Banking
❖ Policing

Anytime

- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Healthcare
- ❖ Banking
- ❖ Policing
- ❖ Education

Anytime

- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Healthcare
- ❖ Banking
- ❖ Policing
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Career

Examples

Sureshbhai Patel

➤ **2015 [assault and arrest](#)**

➤ **Walking in his son's neighborhood**

➤ **"No English"**
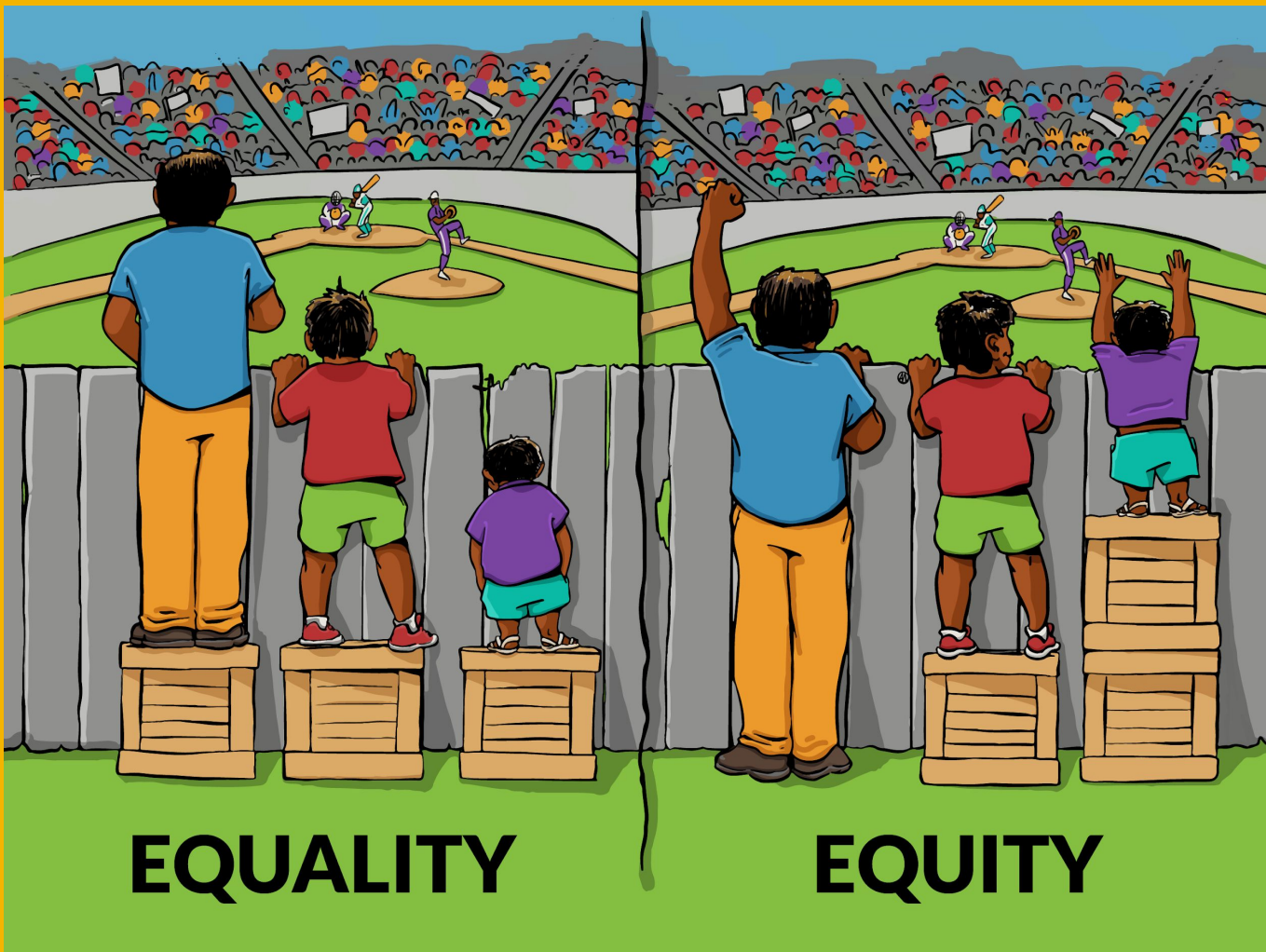
Ana Suda and Mimi Hernandez

➢ **Detained at Minnesota border for speaking Spanish**

➢ "the fact that it has to do with you guys speaking Spanish in the store, in a state where it's predominantly English-speaking, OK?"

What are the Next Steps?

We need to become more aware that sounding Non-Standard is not about ignorance or laziness.

Normalization

EQUALITY   EQUITY

Normalization

Change is coming!

❖ Career and Style guides ARE being overhauled **right now**!

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Normalization

- ❖ Career and Style guides ARE being overhauled right now!
- ❖ Be up front about the fact that **your way of speaking does not define your character** as an employee or scholar or person.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ✔ @AOC · Mar 20 ⌄

If by 'the Latina thing,' she means I actually do the work instead of just talk about it, then yeah, I'm doing 'the Latina thing.'

Unless of course she's talking about being multilingual, which we know isn't a 'Latina thing.'

It's a '21st century' thing.

Laura Ingraham And Guest Mock 'Anastasio' Ocasio-Cortez For Doi...
Laura Ingraham and a guest on her prime-time Fox News show mocked Rep
yahoo.com

💬 6.0K   🔁 22K   ♡ 125K

Normalization

Your way of speaking does not define your character as an employee or scholar or person.

❖ If you feel comfortable, fight the pressure to acculturate.

Bring in Your story

- ❖ In Cover Letters, in Interviews, in your own Research!

Bring in Your story

❖ In Cover Letters, in Interviews, in your own Research!
❖ Use your flexibility as a speaker to your advantage!
  ➢ We all have it!

Be empowered to make a choice!

Questions and Comments!

CELEBRATE!!

UM Language Matters

umlanguagematters@gmail.com

❖ Linguistic Diversity Initiative on Campus
   ➢ BiWeekly Meetings :)
❖ We care about your stories!

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LingoMatch

Contact Syeda Mahmood at szmah@umich.edu

power of language

Join LingoMatch for a night of art and presentations centered around the language experiences of people of color. Captioning and English ASL interpretation will be provided at the event.

Food will be provided.

**april 5th
7:00 pm
2435 north quad**

Curated by LingoMatch. Sponsored by UM Linguistics Department, Language Resource Center, Global Scholars Program, English Language Institute, Sweetland Center for Writing, Lloyd Hall Scholars Program

Opportunity Hub

Shout Out!

- ❖ This workshop and campaign were entirely designed by women of color!!!
- ❖ They are dedicated to Your success and representation.

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Thanks!

All Y'all!

Alia Orra, Kierra Trotter, Zanib Sareini
The Opportunity Hub and LSA

Drs. Patrice Speeter Beddor and Robin Queen
LSA Department of Linguistics

Kelly Wright

Kellywri@umich.edu

@raciolinguisitc