

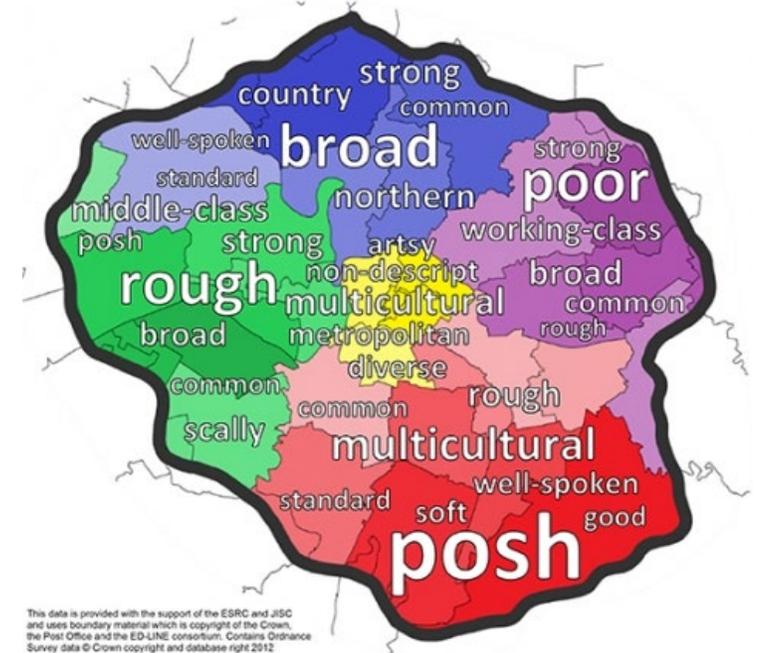
Language, identity and accent (and attitudes!)

Ella Jeffries

e.jeffries@essex.ac.uk

Lecturer in Sociolinguistics

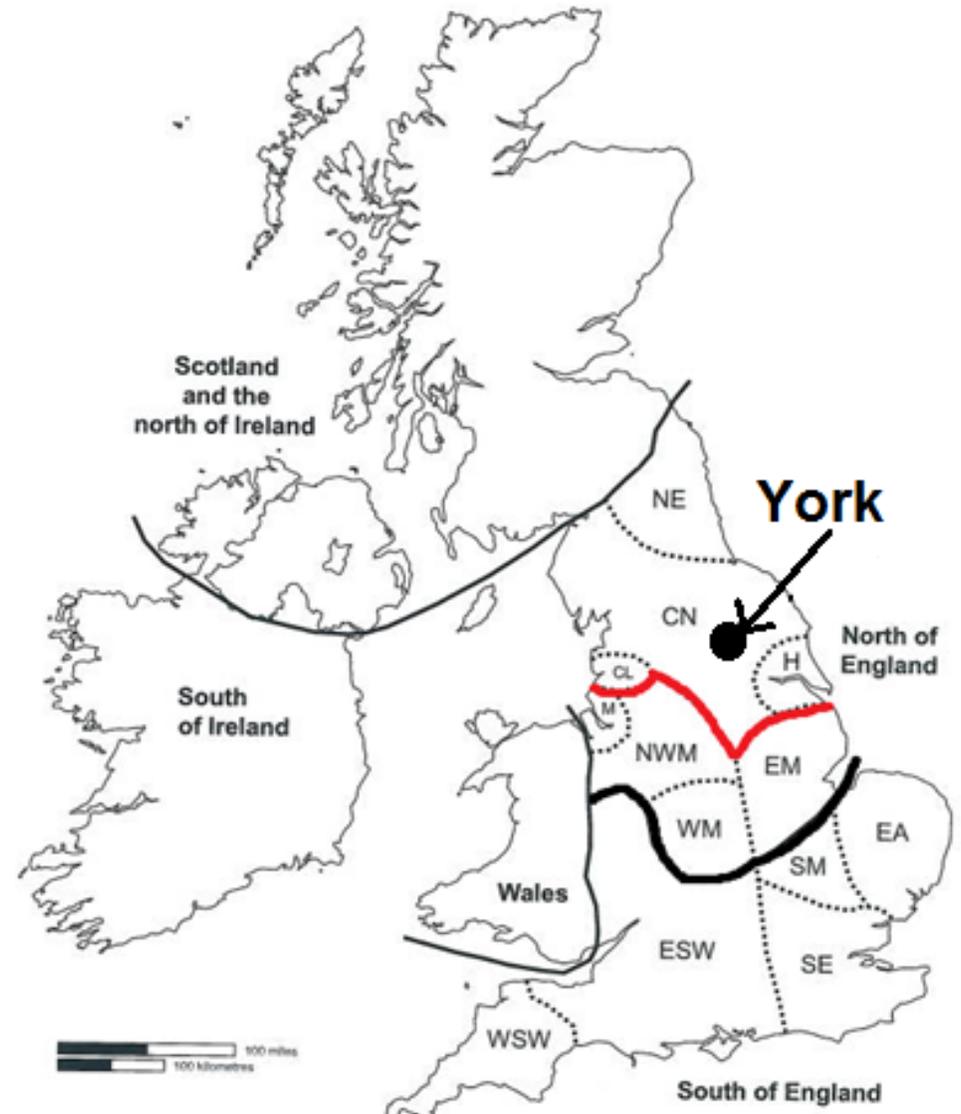
University of Essex

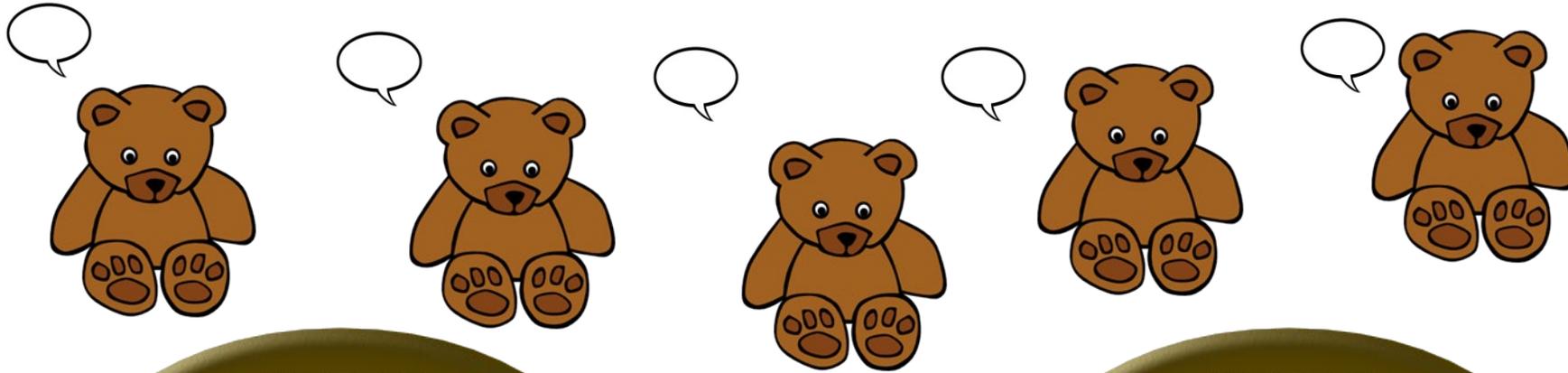


My research

- Within the field of **sociolinguistics**
- Perception of regional variation among
- Can they group speakers according to
- E.g. the **North/South** divide in the UK
- Any examples?

	NORTH	SOUTH
<i>bath, grass</i>	[a]	[ɑ:]
<i>face, gate</i>	[e:]	[eɪ]





“b[ɑ:]sket”



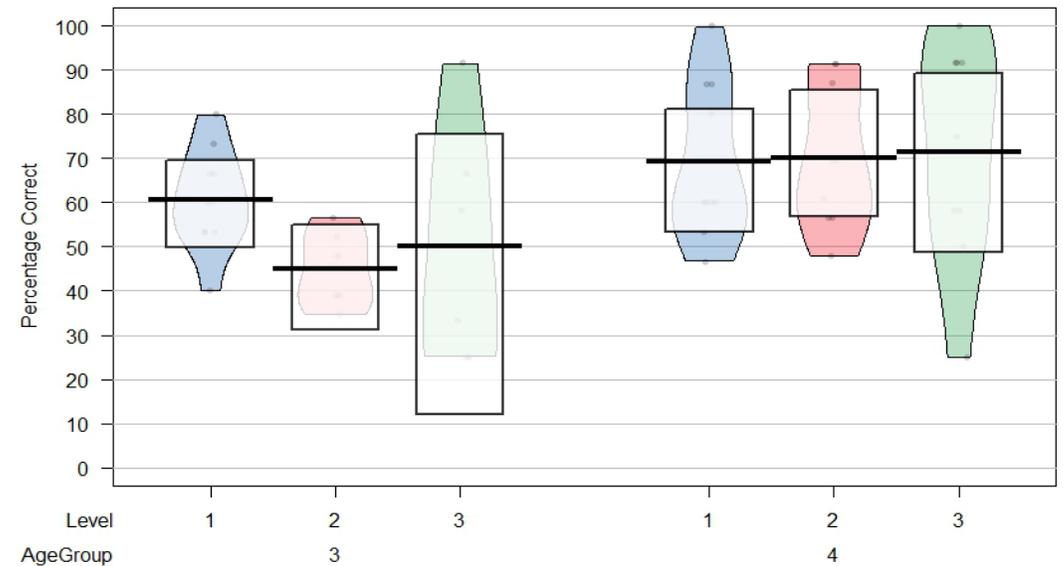
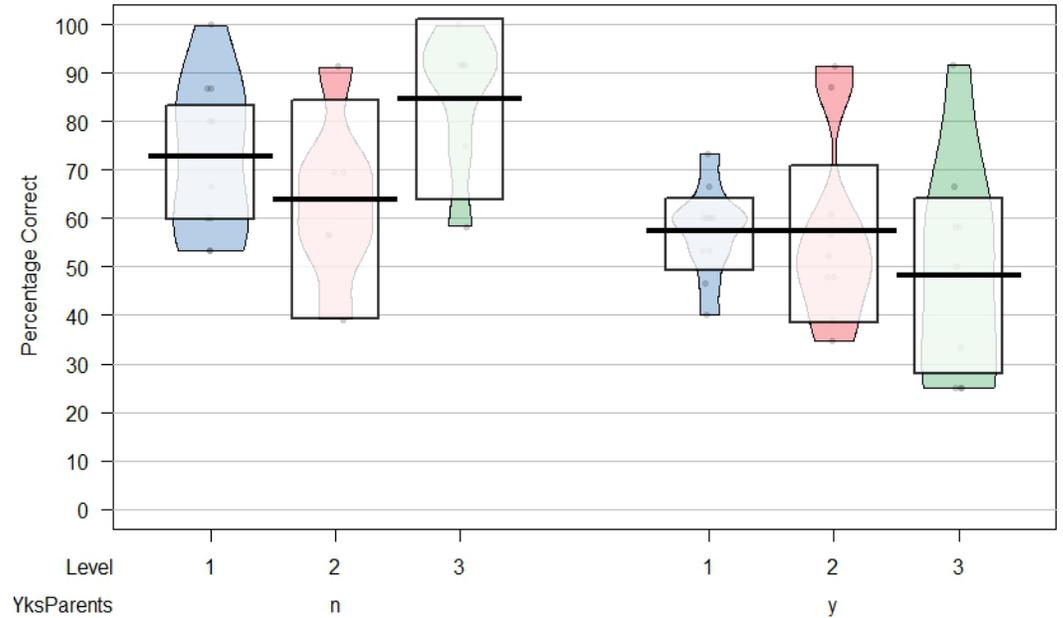
“b[a]sket”

Research in action...



Findings

- **Age and exposure** played a significant role
- 4-year-olds better at categorising than 3-year-olds
- Children with non-local parents better at categorising



Regional variation in the UK

Guess the accent!

- Where do you think these speakers are from?
- Which particular features of their accent were you picking up on when making your decision?

Speaker 1 

Speaker 2 

Speaker 1 is from...

- A. Merseyside
- B. Lancashire
- C. London
- D. Birmingham
- E. Yorkshire
- F. Bristol

Where are the speakers from?

- **Speaker 1**

- From Lancashire (Rawthenstall – between Accrington and Blackburn)
- were for first person
- Definite Article Reduction – *in t'slipper factory*
- Rhoticity – *were, here*
- Dark // in all positions - *left*
- /h/ dropping – *ard*



Speaker 2 is from...

- A. Merseyside
- B. Lancashire
- C. London
- D. Birmingham
- E. Yorkshire
- F. Bristol

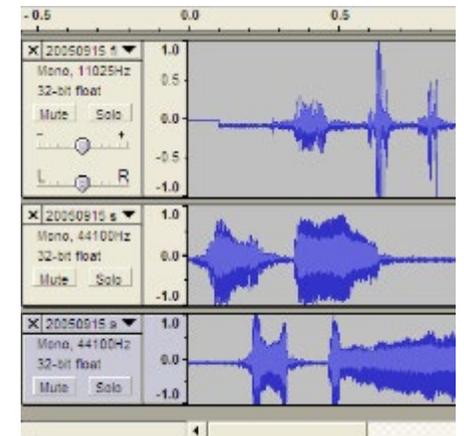
Where are the speakers from?

- **Speaker 2**

- From London
- *come* for past tense
- [ʌ] vowel – *Sunday*
- [ɑ:] vowel - *chance*
- Other vowels - *about, morning,*
- /h/ dropping - *home*
- [ɪn] for 'ing' – *going, morning*

What is an accent? Does everyone have one?

- How would you define an accent? Would you say that everybody has an accent?
- It's not possible to have no accent, but it is possible to have:
 - an accent that is the same as everyone around you (i.e. no accent that marks you out)
 - an accent that is accepted as 'Standard'
- Parts of the auditory stream are conveying
 - **individual information** (voice quality, etc.)
 - **socially/emotionally** important variation
 - underlying **linguistic** content
- An accent conveys information about **identity and individual history**



Accent ↔ Identity

- Esling (1998)
- By 'accent' we mean several things:
 - how consonants, vowels etc. are realised (**segmental properties**)
 - intonation, rhythm/melody (**suprasegmental features**)
 - **voice quality** (nasal, low/resonant, breathy, high pitched, etc.) – individual speakers
→ can **identify** us as individuals
- Accent defines and communicates who we are:
 - **region** - we were born and raised, where we went to school, where we have lived
 - **gender**
 - **age**
 - **occupation**
 - **ethnicity**

Accent ↔ Attitudes

- **Language attitudes** - linked to people's **perception of variation**
- Some varieties of language are **socially superior** – have more **social prestige**
 - this links to language ideology and in particular **standard language ideology**
 - people's ideas of what is **'correct'** or not, but also their ideas of what sounds **'pleasant/unpleasant'** **'intelligent/stupid'**

Let's see what your attitudes are...

(courtesy of Dr Dave Sayers, Sheffield Hallam University)



Speaker 1



Speaker 2



Speaker 3

Give the speakers a score of 1-7 on how:

- **Intelligent** you think that they sound (**1= Extremely intelligent → 7 = Extremely unintelligent**)
- **Friendly** you think that they sound (**1 = Extremely friendly → 7 = Extremely unfriendly**)
- **Trustworthy** you think that they sound (**1= Extremely trustworthy → 7 = Extremely untrustworthy**)

Elephants are herbivorous and can be found in different habitats including savannahs, forests, deserts and marshes. They prefer to stay near water. They are considered to be keystone species due to their impact on their environments. Other animals tend to keep their distance, and predators such as lions, tigers, hyenas and wild dogs usually target only the young elephants (or "calves"). Females ("cows") tend to live in family groups, which can consist of one female with her calves or several related females with offspring.

Attitudes to Language

- **Giles'** Matched-guise technique
- Same speaker using different accents & reading the same passage (originally devised by Lambert et al. 1960)
- Tone of voice irrelevant here
- Results: consistent
 - **RP scored high for intelligence**
 - **Regional accent guises scored high for friendliness and honesty**

1 extremely pleasant	2 moderately pleasant	3 pleasant	4 neutral
5 moderately unpleasant	6 unpleasant	7 extremely unpleasant	

Howard Giles (1970) *Evaluative reactions to accents*

3 primary dimensions for Attitude-rating scales:

- **Superiority** (prestige, intelligence, competence)
- **Social attractiveness** (friendliness, trustworthiness)
- **Dynamism** (enthusiasm, liveliness)

TABLE I

GENERALISED STRUCTURE OF THREE DIMENSIONS OF ACCENT EVALUATION IN RANK ORDERS FROM VOCAL STIMULI

The figures in brackets indicate mean rating scores.

<i>Aesthetic content</i>	<i>Communicative content</i>	<i>Status content</i>
1. R.P. (2.9)	1. R.P. (3.1)	1. R.P. (2.1)*
2. French (3.4)*	2. N. American (3.6)	2. Affected R.P. (2.9)*
3. Irish (3.8)	3. French (3.8)*	3. N. American & French* (3.6)
4. S. Welsh (4.0)	4. Irish (4.0)	5. German (4.2)*
5. N. England (4.2)	5. S. Welsh (4.2)	6. S. Welsh (4.3)
6. Indian, Italian & Somerset (4.3)	6. N. England & Somerset (4.3)	7. Irish (4.6)
9. N. American (4.5)*	8. Cockney & Italian (4.6)	8. Italian (4.7)
10. Cockney (4.6)	10. Indian (4.8)	9. N. England (4.8)
11. Affected R.P. & German (4.8)	11. Affected R.P. & Birmingham (5.0)	10. Somerset (5.1)
13. Birmingham (5.1)	13. German (5.1)	11. Indian & Cockney (5.2)
		13. Birmingham (5.3)

* indicates age differences in rating, the 17/18 yr. attitude is presented.

TABLE II

GENERALISED STRUCTURE OF THREE DIMENSIONS OF ACCENT EVALUATION IN RANK ORDERS FROM CONCEPTUAL STIMULI

<i>Aesthetic content</i>	<i>Communicative content</i>	<i>Status content</i>
1. R.P. (2.5)*	1. "accent identical to your own" (1.5)	1. R.P. (1.9)*
2. "accent identical to your own" (2.9)*	2. R.P. (2.3)	2. French* & "accent identical to your own"* (3.3)
3. French (3.0)*	3. French (3.5)	4. N. American & Scottish (3.8)
4. Scottish (3.4)	4. Irish, S. Welsh & N. American (3.8)	6. German (3.9)*
5. Irish (3.7)	7. N. England & Scottish (3.9)	7. Irish (4.2)
6. N. England & Somerset (4.0)	9. Somerset (4.0)	8. S. Welsh, N. England & Somerset (4.3)
8. Italian & German (4.1)	10. Liverpool, German & Italian (4.4)	11. Italian (4.7)
10. S. Welsh (4.2)	13. W. Indies (4.5)	12. W. Indies & Liverpool (5.0)
11. W. Indies (4.3)	14. Cockney, Indian & Birmingham (4.7)	14. Indian & Cockney (5.1)
12. N. America (4.5)		16. Birmingham (5.2)
13. Indian (4.6)		
14. Birmingham & Liverpool (4.7)		
16. Cockney (4.8)		

* indicates age differences in rating; 17/18 yr. attitude presented.

What are these attitudes driven by?

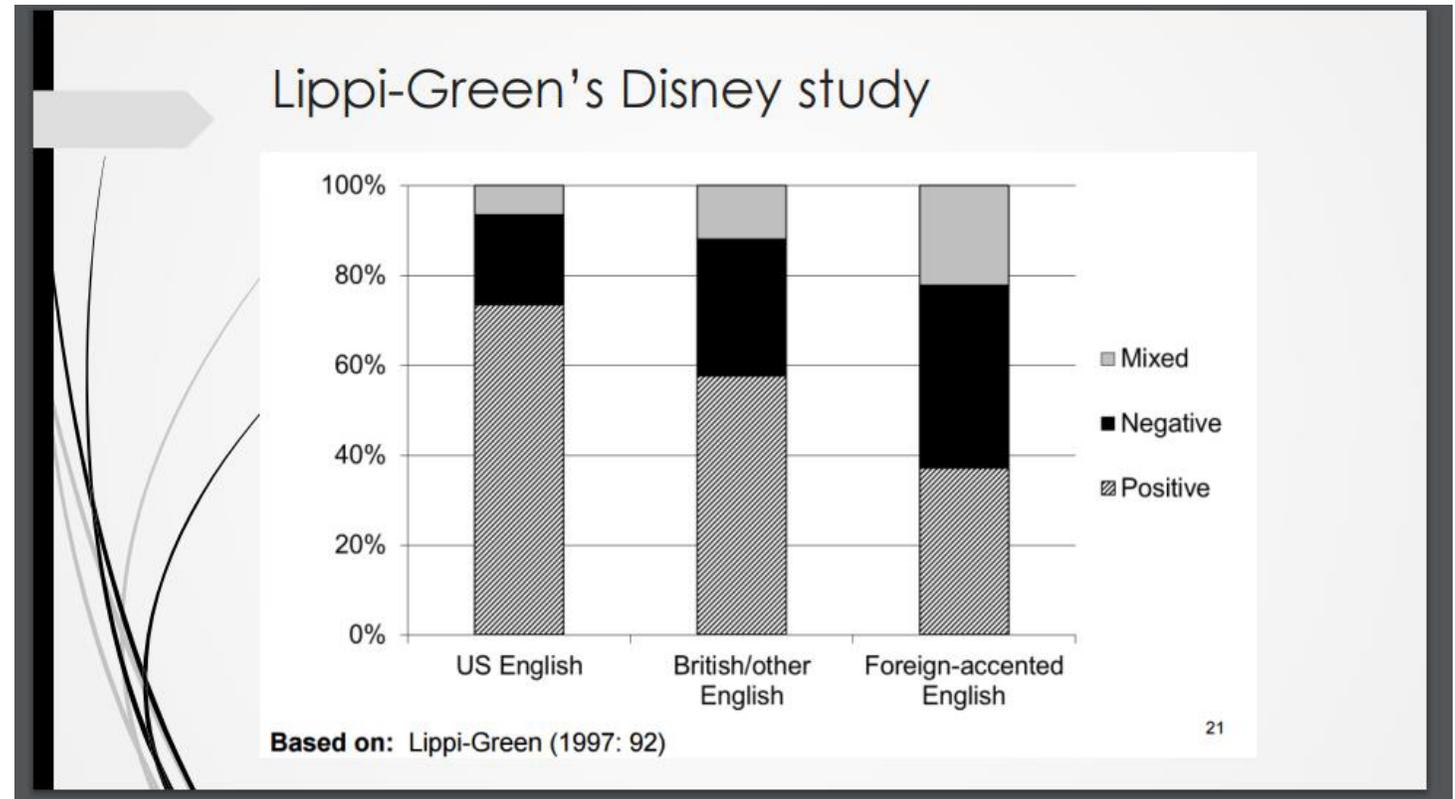
- The **ideology** of the standard language – e.g. Milroy (2006)
- Widely used languages often have a **standard variety** – making us part of a standard language culture
- **Attitudes** driven by ideological positions based on the existence of a standard language → standard language ideology
- Standard language = **an idealisation**, a constructed entity, driven by forces of **correctness and authority** (but still prone to change)
- Standard varieties hold more **prestige**, other varieties prone to **stigma**

Standard language myth?

- The standard language myth – e.g. Lippi-Green (2012)
 - Most people are able to describe their idea of what a standard language – the ideology is so ingrained
 - But essentially **what is standard vs. what isn't is arbitrary**
 - 'rules' are written for some, about some and supposed to apply to all
- 'The myth of the standard language persists because it is carefully tended and propagated, huge, almost universal success, **so that language, the most fundamental of human socialisation tools becomes a commodity.** This is the core of an ideology of standardization which empowers certain individuals and institutions to make these decisions and impose them on others'*
- (Lippi-Green 2012:61).

Lippi-Green's research

- These attitudes are also often seen in native/non-native contexts
 - “About **20 percent of U.S. English** speakers are bad characters, while about **40 percent of non-native** speakers of English are **evil**”
(Lippi-Green, 2012)



Language Attitudes

(Garrett 2006)

- Attitude, broadly accepted as:
 - *'a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects'* (Sarnoff, cited in Garrett 2006:97)
- 3 components:
 - **Cognitive** (beliefs and stereotypes)
 - **Affective** (evaluations)
 - **Behavioural**
- Attitudes are a mental construct so how do we find out about them?
 - **Indirect vs. Direct** approaches
 - **Explicit vs. Implicit** measures

Attitudes → Identity → Behaviours & actions

- What we **think** we say vs. what we **actually** say
- The differences we can actually hear / are aware of
- The different **kinds of social variation** we can perceive –age, gender, social class, regional background, ethnicity
- The links between the perception of variation and the formation of **language attitudes/stereotypes**
- This also links to **socio-psychological** questions related to language use and behaviour
- Development of **stereotypes** → Potential to lead to **linguistic profiling/discrimination**
- How to investigate this?

Research on Accent bias

- Managerial respondents **actively discriminate** in telephone-based job interviews against applicants speaking **Chinese-, Mexican- and Indian-accented** English
 - Timming (2016). Study in the U.S.
- Teachers who were told to **modify their accents** to varieties deemed more “professional.” This is an issue that goes beyond the British context and **can apply to both L1 and L2 teachers**
 - Baratta (2017). Study in Britain.
- Although mainstream classroom teachers are generally accepting of diversity, they may **subconsciously hold prejudicial reactions** to certain accents
- We discuss a **consciousness-raising activity** designed for pre-service teachers that may help explore the nature of such reactions
 - Munro et al. (2006)
- The effect of regional accent on the attribution of guilt. The results suggested that the suspect was **rated as significantly more guilty when he employed a Birmingham rather than a standard accent**
 - Dixon et al. (2002)

Accent Bias and Fair Access in Britain (ABFAB)

- Current research project, Queen Mary University & University of York
- To investigate attitudes to regional accents in Britain today
- The **effects that accent bias may or may not have on access to the professions** among speakers of different varieties of English in the UK
- Testing how listeners' rate speakers' 'employability' (at a law firm) based on their accent
- So far results suggest less bias against Multicultural London English accent/General Northern accent
- **Stronger bias towards Essex accent** – this ties in with what PhD student Amanda Cole (here at Essex) has found in her recent study (compared to Surrey, Hampshire for example)



Accent stereotyping and accent discrimination

<https://accentism.org/>

<https://twitter.com/AccentismProj>

The screenshot displays the BBC News website interface. At the top, the BBC logo is visible alongside navigation links for News, Sport, Weather, iPlayer, TV, and Radio. A red navigation bar contains the word 'NEWS' and sub-links for Home, UK, World, Business, Politics, Tech, Science, Health, Education, and Entertainment. Below this, regional links for Wales, Wales Politics, North West, North East, Mid, South West, South East, and Cymru are listed. A secondary navigation bar includes 'Your account' and links for News, Sport, Weather, iPlayer, and Sounds. The main content area features a red 'NEWS' header with sub-links for Home, UK, and World. The 'Politics' link is highlighted. The article title is 'Could a pri Brummie a', with a sub-headline 'Leave off, will you? Britain should celebrate 'regional' accents'. The author is listed as 'By Chris Mason & Joey D'I' and the date as '18 July 2018'. A large image of a woman with long brown hair is shown at the bottom of the article. To the left, a vertical sidebar from 'The Sun' is partially visible, showing a headline 'The 33 many' and a date '16 Jul 2018'.

John Baugh's research on linguistic profiling

- African American English 
- Chicano English 
- Standard American English 



He would make phone calls in response to newspaper advertisements for apartments, and assess whether they said the apartment was available depending on which of the three voices he used. Repeating this test many times gave quantitative evidence of **'linguistic profiling'**, i.e. more people said no if he was speaking in the non-standard varieties.

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJ778_tsqjs

Love Island

- In general, **speakers with more standard southern accents are less criticised**, and those with accents that we are socially conditioned to think of as funny, friendly, and socially attractive, such as Welsh, Scottish and Newcastle accents, also get off lightly.



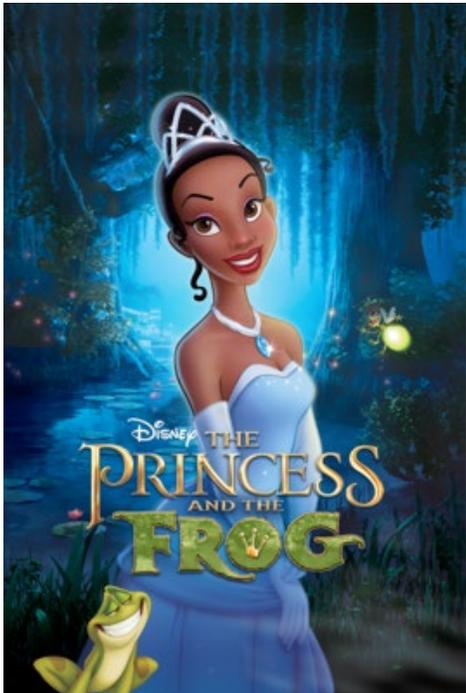
- However, the **Liverpool accent is frequently found near the bottom** of the list when people are asked to rate how much they like the sound of different accents. One young islander, Hayley – from Liverpool – has been widely criticised on Twitter. Viewers have variously stated that her voice is **“annoying”, “cringeworthy”, “makes [your] skin crawl”**.
- “What level of education does this girl have” because “it’s so difficult listening to [her] speak.”
- Although we now hear more regional dialects on the TV and radio, **more than a quarter of Britons feel discriminated against because of their accent**. Teachers feel that they need to change their accent to be taken more seriously and teachers with northern accents have even been [told to “push up”](#).
- Our standard language ideology maintains that standard accents are associated with the upper classes, privilege, education and opportunity.

Gerry Howley, University of Sheffield

<https://theconversation.com/love-island-audience-reaction-shows-deep-snobbery-about-accents-98418>

Can be positive...

- Essex voted sexiest accent in UK!
- More diversity being represented now?



E.g. more accents heard in children's films & TV and in the broadcast media



<https://inews.co.uk/light-relief/offbeat/essex-accent-voted-the-sexiest-in-uk-full-list-of-most-attractive-accents/>

Relevance to language teaching/the classroom/Qs for discussion

- Awareness of individual identities, how this links to the way that they speak
- Building in tolerance which can propagate to the work-force
- Variation in different language situations
- Non-nativeness
- Your own experiences of accentism/linguistic discrimination?
- How important/not important is it for students to have a native-like accent when speaking a second language?
- Would it help, particularly young children, gain confidence to not worry so much about having a 'non-native' accent when they are first learning their second language?

Next steps

- Research looking at children's building of accent stereotypes
- Will be looking for primary school age children to take part – let me know if you think your school would be interested in taking part!



This data is provided with the support of the ESRC and JISC and uses boundary material which is copyright of the Crown, the Post Office and the ED-LINE consortium. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012

Drummond and Carrie (2015)

References

- Baratta, A. (2017). Accent and linguistic prejudice within British teacher training. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 16(6), 416-423.
- Baugh, J. (2005). Linguistic profiling. In *Black linguistics* (pp. 167-180). Routledge.
- Dixon, J. A., Mahoney, B., & Cocks, R. (2002). Accents of guilt? Effects of regional accent, race, and crime type on attributions of guilt. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 21(2), 162-168.
- Drummond, R., & Carrie, E. (2015, August 6). Manchester's first "accent and dialect map" created Social stereotypes of language revealed by research [University blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/news/news-items/3687/>.
- Esling, John H. 1998. Everyone has an accent except me. In Bauer and Trudgill(1998), pages 169–175.
- Garrett, P. (2006). "The Ideology of the Standard Language." Chapter 16 in C Llamas, L Mullany & P Stockwell, eds., *The Routledge companion to sociolinguistics*: 116-121. London: Routledge. Online: <http://serlib0.essex.ac.uk/record=b1709254~S5>
- Giles, H. (1970). Evaluative reactions to accents. *Educational review*, 22(3), 211-227.
- Lambert, W. E., Hodgson, R. C., Gardner, R. C., & Fillenbaum, S. (1960). Evaluational reactions to spoken languages. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 60(1), 44.
- Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. Psychology Press.
- Milroy, J. "Language attitudes." (2006). Chapter 14 in C Llamas, L Mullany & P Stockwell, eds., *The Routledge companion to sociolinguistics*: 116-121. London: Routledge. Online: <http://serlib0.essex.ac.uk/record=b1709254~S5>
- Munro, M. J., Derwing, T. M., & Sato, K. (2006). Salient accents, covert attitudes: Consciousness-raising for pre-service second language teachers.
- Timming, A. R. (2017). The effect of foreign accent on employability: a study of the aural dimensions of aesthetic labour in customer-facing and non-customer-facing jobs. *Work, employment and society*, 31(3), 409-428.