Accent Bias in Britain
Methodology overview

Labels Survey

Files: Labels_Survey.pdf, LabelsRawData.csv

This study examines evaluative responses to accent labels. Surveys were administered through the online software Qualtrics and were completed by 827 individuals recruited through a market research firm. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 79 and included a representative number of people in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The sample was balanced for gender and included all major ethnic groups.

In this study we replicate the procedures of Bishop and colleagues (2005). Participants were presented with a list of the 38 accent labels and were asked to rate each one (on a scale of 1-7) for its prestige and pleasantness. Once participants finished rating the answers, they provided information about their personal background (including gender, ethnicity, age, region of origin, highest level of education, occupation, English accent, languages spoken), and completed a short questionnaire about their exposure to different UK accents, the diversity of their own social networks, their beliefs about bias in Britain, and a set of psychological measures such as their level of concern about being perceived as prejudiced.

Nationwide Survey

Files: Nationwide_Survey.pdf, NationwideRawData.csv

We asked 1062 members of the British public to listen to ten mock interview answers and assess the speaker's suitability for a job in a law firm. Respondents were recruited through a market research company, allowing us to reach a typical sample of the UK population. Surveys were administered through the online software Qualtrics. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 79 and included a representative number of people in England (890), Wales (51), Scotland (90), and Northern Ireland (31). The sample was balanced for gender and included all major ethnic groups.

The participants heard 10 short mock answers to typical questions in law firm job interviews. The clips were 20 seconds in length. These mock answers were developed in coordination with senior professionals in the legal sector. All the answers were pre-tested with a group of 25 lawyers unrelated to the project. Some of these questions required legal expertise (expert questions) whilst others focused on more general professional skills (non-expert questions). The quality of the answer is indicated by the file name notation, G = good/ P = poor.

The answer texts were in a formal register using standard grammar, regardless of accent, to approximate an interview speech style. The texts were recorded by 10 young men (18-25 years old) – two native speakers of each of five accents. Male speakers were used to avoid any effect of gender on the assessment of the candidate. The sound clips are deposited in the project files. The five accents we studied were:

- Received Pronunciation (RP)
- Estuary English (EE)
- Multicultural London English (MLE)
- General Northern English (GNE)
- Urban West Yorkshire English (UWYE)

After listening to a recording, participants rated the candidate's overall performance, knowledge, suitability, and hireability on a 10-point Likert scale, responding to the following questions:

1. "How would you rate the overall quality of the candidate's answer?"
2. "Does the candidate's answer show expert knowledge?"
3. "How likely is it that the candidate will succeed as a lawyer?"
4. "Is the candidate somebody that you personally would like to work with?"
5. "How would you rate the candidate overall?"

Audio stimuli were pseudo-randomised, so that each participant heard two versions of each accent, and no answer or speaker more than once. After participants finished rating the recordings, they were asked to provide demographic information, including their gender, ethnicity, age, region of origin, highest level of education, occupation, English accent, and languages spoken. They then completed the same short questionnaire about their background and beliefs as in the accent labels study.

Accentedness Survey

Files: Accentedness_Survey.pdf, AccentednessRawData.csv

We developed an online survey that tested the effect of accentedness on evaluations of professional suitability. Qualtrics surveys were administered to 80 UK listeners recruited through Prolific. Participants were asked to rate 10 speakers of five UK accents (MLE, RP, UWYE, GNE, and EE) for the "strength" of their accent and how "professional" they sound. Half of the participants heard Q6P from all 10 speakers and half heard Q13P from all 10 speakers. Participants also provided demographic information and responded to a set of psychological measures such as their level of concern about being perceived as prejudiced.

Interventions 1 Survey

Files: Interventions_Survey1.pdf, InterventionsRawData1.csv

To assess the effectiveness of different bias interventions, we developed an online survey that asked 480 members of the general UK public to rate three candidates for an entry-level job at a major British law firm. Each mock candidate was a native speaker of either RP, MLE, or EE, and listeners heard each candidate respond to one interview question. Before hearing the candidate's response, listeners received information on one of five different intervention conditions. A sixth control group had no interventions. The five interventions were:

1. Raising Awareness:
   Individuals are alerted to the existence of accent bias.
2. Identifying irrelevant information
   Individuals are asked to commit to ignoring irrelevant information when making their decisions, e.g. If I hear that the candidate has an accent, I will pay no attention to it.
3. Committing to fairness and objectivity
   Individuals are asked to commit to an agreed set of objective criteria before making judgments.
4. Increasing accountability
   Individuals are told that they will have to justify their decisions.
5. Appealing to multiculturalism
   Individuals' attention is drawn to diversity and its positive benefits.

Participants then listened to each of the three candidates and rated them on the same five evaluation scales used in the accent label survey:

1. "How would you rate the overall quality of the candidate's answer?"
2. "Does the candidate's answer show expert knowledge?"
3. "How likely is it that the candidate will succeed as a lawyer?"
4. "Is the candidate somebody that you personally would like to work with?"
5. "How would you rate the candidate overall?"

After rating all three candidates, participants provided demographic information and responded to a set of psychological measures such as their level of concern about being perceived as prejudiced.

Interventions 2 Survey

File: Interventions_Survey2.pdf, InterventionsRawData2.csv

This is a modified version of the interventions survey detailed above that assesses the effect of the interventions of accent bias and race. Participants were first presented with one of the five intervention conditions or a control condition as described above. 300 UK listeners recruited through Prolific. Participants were presented with one of five interventions (listed above). A sixth control group had no interventions. All respondents were exposed to the same three recording presented in a fixed order. Finally, and after rating the three candidates, participants were asked to complete three questionnaires: the Social Dominance Orientation, the self-reported strategy of reducing bias, and the MCPR (Motivation to Control a Prejudiced Response).

Realtime Survey

File: Realtime_Survey.pdf, RealtimeRawData.csv

To examine the real-time evaluative ratings of the different mock interview answers, we recruited 318 UK listeners through Prolific. 159 of these respondents were asked to provide real-time evaluations of the five accents via an online survey, designed in Qualtrics. The other 159 were asked to provide evaluations of answers as per the method described in the nationwide study. Those who were selected to provide real-time evaluations asked to use a 'slider' to indicate any improvement or decline in the candidate's chances of doing well whilst they listened to the mock interview answer. Participants were then asked to evaluate the candidate on general measures of professional success.