

ACCENTS MATTER: AN ANTICOLONIAL EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTS OF STANDARD ACCENT HEGEMONY ON LINGUISTIC MINORITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT Around the world, English is spoken with a variety of accents. However, due to the legacy of linguistic imperialism, American and British English accents remain the most valued ones. As a result, those whose accent is different are often ill-perceived and treated unjustly in society. This article draws on several case studies and the work of postcolonial theorists and sociolinguists and participants' narratives collected over a semester to examine ways in which English speakers from diverse linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and countries of origin have been subject to accent discrimination in colleges and universities. Study findings suggest that the intersection of participants' native language, ethnicity, and country of origin played various roles in the way and the degree to which they experienced accent discrimination.

KEYWORDS: English, Narratives, Ethnicities, Native language, Immigrants

Around the world, English is spoken with a variety of accents. However, due to the legacy of linguistic imperialism, American and British English accents remain the most valued ones (Phillipson, 1992). Specifically, because of social status being accorded to so-called standard English accents, those whose accent is different

are often ill-perceived and treated unjustly in society. For example, an American Standard English accent is highly valued in American schools and mainstream society. As a result, people who speak with this accent are generally perceived as smart and linguistically sound. By contrast, those whose accent is different are often ill-perceived and treated unjustly in society as well as in schools (Baugh, 2018; Eisenclas and Tsurutani, 2011; Gee, 2010b; Lippi-Green, 2012).

Indeed, linguistic minorities who speak with a different English accent routinely face “linguistic profiling” (Baugh, 2018). As for immigrants, they are often blamed for not trying hard enough to learn the standard American English accent regardless of their life circumstances (Lippi-Green, 2012; Macedo, 2019; Neuliep and Speten-Hansen, 2013; Wolfram and Schilling, 2015). Speaking English with an identifiable non-dominant English accent often presents a problem for linguistically and culturally diverse groups in the United States, including bilingual students and professionals (Garcia and Kleifgen, 2018; Macedo, 2019; Nieto and Bode, 2018). Nonetheless, these groups have faced such challenge with much resilience. This article draws on several case studies and the work of postcolonial theorists and sociolinguists (Baugh, 2018; Donaldo, 2019; Gee, 2010; Thiong’o, 1986) and participants’ narratives collected over a semester to examine ways in which English speakers from diverse linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and countries of origin have been subject to accent discrimination in colleges and universities. While some participants directly experienced this systemic linguistic oppression, others witnessed family members, classmates and family members being subjected to it. The intersection of participants’ native language, ethnicity, and country of origin was explored, for the study aimed to highlight the role such intersection played in various forms and the degrees to which they experienced accent discrimination

Language, Accent, and Ethnic Diversity in The United States

There is a tendency in mainstream society to focus on one form of identity and sideline others to the margins, even though research shows that all forms of identities intersect and impact our lives (Crenshaw, 2016; Matsuda, 1991; Omoniyi, 2016). For instance, one might be privileged in one context and disenfranchised in another, depending on whether or not one's identity, like one's native language, is valued and respected. Individuals whose linguistic identities reflect the reality of, and fit into, the mainstream Standard English accent tend to receive better treatment than those whose accents are looked down upon in schools and society at large (Baugh, 2018; Macedo, 2019). Specifically, in the United States, linguistic minorities, including immigrants, African Americans and Latinx, whose English accents differ from the alleged standard American accent experience accent discrimination (Baugh, 2018; Rosa and Flores, 2017). Linguistic minorities have faced linguistic discrimination partly because linguistically prejudiced individuals often assume that the latter are intellectually inferior because of their accent. As a consequence, they often do not receive the respect they deserve, despite their academic and professional accomplishments (Omoniyi, 2016; Rosa and Flores, 2017; Torres, 2004).

However, it is worth noting that it is not merely their native language that is the determining factor leading to the discrimination that linguistic minority groups face in schools and society. Other factors, such as their ethnicity and race, play an equal role. For example, Rosa and Flores (2017) examined in their study the manner in which Latinx were routinely mistaken for Mexican immigrants and were treated as second language English learners even though they were born and raised in the United

States. Specifically, Rosa and Flores (2017) noted that the way many Latinx spoke was often linked to their ethnicity and an immigrant status attached to their sociolinguistic identity.

Minoritized linguistic groups often feel pressured to speak in Standard American English accent in schools as well as at work in order to fit in, as it is the accent most valued in these institutions (Lippi-Greene, 2012). However, when they return home from work or school, they switch back to the accent or language familiar to their family members, friends, or neighbors—something those from dominant linguistic groups do not have to do in order to fit in (Rosa and Flores, 2017). While this study is not arguing against Standard English accent, it draws from participants' heartfelt narratives to challenge the hegemony of the Standard American English accent, pointing out its effects on English speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and countries of origin.

Study Design

The data for the case studies stem from a graduate seminar course on language and literacies that I taught at a state university located in Las Cruces, New Mexico. There were 12 students who attended this seminar, and they were from diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. The idea of conducting the case study stemmed from engaging discussions about accent and language hegemony occurring in class during the semester. After the semester ended, I sent an email invitation along with a consent form to students who attended the seminar, asking them if they would volunteer to take part in the study. Although all the attendees were invited to participate in the case study, only eight agreed to do so. While some wrote about their personal experiences with standard accent hegemony, others talked

about classmates, friends, and family members they witnessed experiencing this form of domination. Students expressed their opinion about these issues, drawing from personal, academic, and professional experiences.

Participants' Backgrounds

Individuals taking part in this study spoke in diverse forms of accented English. Specifically, while some were native speakers of English, others were not. They were dominant English speakers but whose first language was Spanish, among others. They were from Ecuador, Colombia, Puerto Rico, India, Ghana, Jamaica, and New Orleans (USA). Whereas, some were k-12 teachers, others were school administrators pursuing doctoral degrees. Their ages varied from 30s to 50s, and they were at different stages in their academic and professional careers (see Table 1 below depicting participants' backgrounds).

Table 1

Participants' Background

Participants' Backgrounds

Total:	3	1	1	1	1	1
Ethnicity/ Race	Latino/as	Chicana	African American	Asian	European	African/ Caribbean
Age	36-48	42	52	56	38	23-33
Gender	Female/ male	female	female	Male/female	Male	Male/ female
Native Language	Spanish	Spanish/ English	English/ AAV	Gujarati	Spanish/ Catalan	English/ Twi
Social Class	Working / Middle Class	Middle class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Countries	Mexico/ Puerto Rico/ Columbia	USA	USA	India	Spain	Ghana/ Jamaica
Social Status	Students/ Professor	Administrato r	Professor	Instructor	Professor	Teacher/ students

Data Analysis

From the whole dataset, two linguistic minoritized groups were selected, based on their experiences with accent discrimination. Since participants' native and dominant languages were English and Spanish, I compared and contrasted speakers of these two languages. This comparative analysis was done to underscore various ways in which diverse English speakers might have been subjected to various degrees of accent discrimination. I used narrative analysis drawing from Johnson's (2014) work in sociolinguistics to interpret and analyze the data.

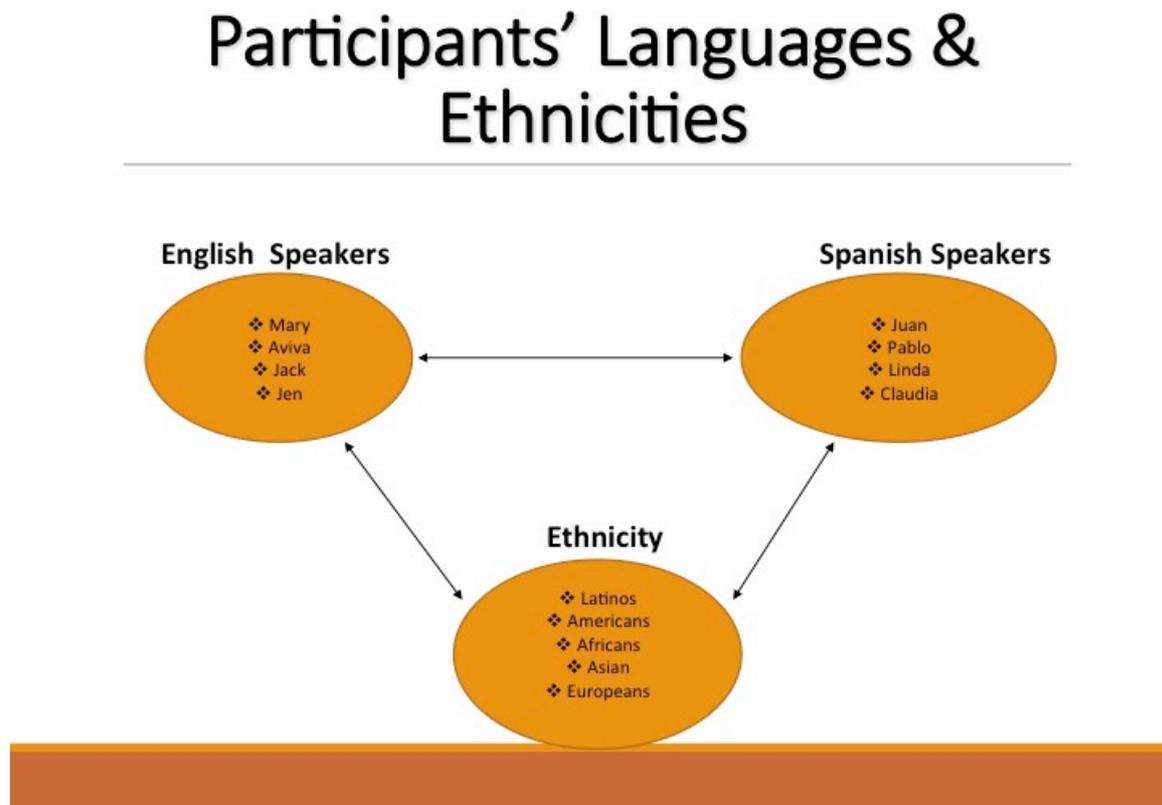
Narrative analysis helps understand the "personal and social world" of the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Indeed, such analysis helps capture participants' various experiences with language and accent discrimination as well as their views on it. Through this lens, I began the data analysis process by focusing on identifying specific themes emerging from participants' narratives. Patterns, variances, resemblances, and differences in participants' accounts about accent discrimination were noted. Carefully identified themes were highlighted to illuminate plausible connection between accent discrimination participants' experienced and their first language, ethnicity, and country of origin.

Through narrative analysis, the root causes of accent discrimination and the degree to which it affected participants involved in the study surfaced. However, for validity and transparency reasons, participants were granted the opportunity to revisit their stories. Specifically, I emailed participants the interpretation and analysis of their narratives. Some added to comments made about their lived experiences with accent discrimination, while others simply confirmed and approved what was sent to them. Their narratives were

divided in two units addressing their experiences with accent discrimination. For clarity and precision purposes, Figure 1 below features the two groups of participants, divided by their native languages and ethnicities.

Figure 1

Participants' Languages and Ethnicities



Analysis of Case Studies

Unit One: Participants Whose First Language is English

In this unit analysis, narratives across the dataset were used to examine ways and the degree to which study's participants might have experienced accent discrimination because of their diverse English accents. While for some, English is their first language, for others, it is their second language. Their cases draw attention to

the fact that merely being dominant speakers of English, even as one's first language, does not necessarily guarantee protection from accent discrimination. Mary's experience is a case in point.

Mary's Case

Mary (pseudonym) was a former high school English teacher in her 30s, recently pursued a doctoral degree. She immigrated to the United States from Jamaica when she was 11 years old, and she has been living here since. Mary experienced English accent hegemony in American schools when she first moved to the United States. When asked to talk about her experience as an immigrant whose first language is English, Mary began by retracing her journey from her native Jamaica to the United States; she talked about her schooling experiences during which she endured accentism:

I was born and raised in Jamaica. It hadn't occurred to me when I left Jamaica for the US that my dialect would somehow come to define so much of my social and academic identities. Almost immediately as I arrived, my teacher wanted to place me in a bi-lingual class, never mind that I spoke English. My accent was enough to distinguish me as a non-standard English speaker (My teacher thought I was speaking French creole).

Mary's narrative unveils the extent to which schoolteachers, consciously or not, often impose the hegemony of Standard American English accent on linguistically minoritized groups speaking in distinct English accents. Like many immigrants of color from formerly colonized English-speaking countries, Mary found herself being caught between two accented English worlds. In Jamaica, her middle class English accent is

accepted and treated as standard, whereas in the United States, such accent is seen and treated as a problem that needs immediate remedy rather than being seen as a linguistic asset to cherish, maintain, and build on to teach her.

As soon as Mary's teachers realized that Mary had a distinct English accent, which, according to Mary, was not even recognized as English, she was placed in a bilingual program to learn English even though she already spoke it.

The complexity of my language experience has made me realize that I sort of exist in an imperfect speech place. I can no longer master my first dialect, and yet I am still not able to master the standard variety I engage with daily. I am self-conscious often, especially because unlike my friends who do speak other languages, English is my first language.

Mary is not the only participant who experienced accent discrimination in American schools despite the fact that English is her first and dominant language. Other speakers of English, born and raised in former British colonies, like India and Ghana, are also targeted because of their distinct English accents, as Aviva's case illuminates.

Aviva's Case

Aviva (pseudonym) is an immigrant from India. She had her first master's degree in Bengali, one of the languages spoken in her native land. While living in India, she taught literature at the Visva-Bharati University, founded by the Nobel Laureate poet and educationist Rabindranath Tagore. After immigrating to North America–Canada and then United States–some 25 years ago, she obtained her

second master's degree in English at a state university. Aviva is currently an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition at a Community College located in the Southwest of the United States while pursuing a doctoral degree in Language, Literacy, and Culture at a US university. Aviva talked about her experience with accent discrimination:

A lady is there sitting by me. She and I, too, begin chit-chatting about this and that. Where are you from? Kolkata, India. Oh, how I love talking about my country and my hustling and bustling city! What brings you here? Well, my husband's work. The questioning continues: What do you do? I tell her I teach English at the community college here in town. She pauses, stares at me, and breaks into a laugh. I don't hear the hum anymore.

Aviva's typical South Asian English accent instantly made her become a marker, a foreigner, or simply an outsider. Aviva was ridiculed by this woman who at first showed curiosity to know her and then ridiculed her distinctive English accent. Aviva, who grew up speaking English in her native land and who has lived in two English-speaking countries, continued to face insensitive linguistic comments from both random individuals and her students because of her English accent.

Suddenly, the world around me falls silent while her laugh in my head keeps on ringing and ringing. Sometimes students, those who do not do well in my composition course, leave comments in course evaluation stating that they do not understand the content subject of what I teach because of my accent. These comments, however, are few and far between.

It does not seem to matter that Aviva is an English college professor who is pursuing a doctoral degree; she is still prone to insensitive linguistic comments about her English accent. Like Mary, Aviva is caught between two accented English worlds without her choosing, and she is not alone. That is, other English-speaking immigrants, like Jack, from a formerly British colony, Ghana, have faced similar linguistic challenges.

Jack's Case

Jack (pseudonym), a 23-year-old college student, is from West Africa. Specifically, Jack was born in Ghana, and he grew up in a middle-class family. Although Twi is one of the dialects spoken in his tribal group, Jack grew up speaking English, which has been his dominant language, particularly since he moved to the United States. Jack stated that his English accent was considered and treated as foreign in comparison to American Standard English accent, particularly when he first moved the United States.

Like other immigrants, Jack moved to the United States to go to college pursuing his dream. At the time of the study, he was on his second year in college. Jack explained how he felt when he was discriminated against in class because of his distinctive English accent.

When I first started college—I had been at the United States only for a couple of months—my accent was very different. Every time I tried to ask questions in class, I could see some of the students giggling. This continued for a while, which made me feel embarrassed and never wanted to speak uttering a word again in class.

Jack was tongue-tied in his class. He feared his classmates would make fun of his English accent differing

from theirs. Jack's accent was very different when he first started school in the United States, and his peers laughed at it each time he asked questions in class. Facing this form of discrimination must have been frustrating for Jack as an immigrant who grew up speaking English as one of his dominant languages. However, his instructor intervened and tried to stop his peers from bullying him. Jack says, "But the class instructor stepped in and warned those students. I was always overwhelmed with fear when homework, particularly oral presentation, was due because I didn't know how my classmates would react to my English accent."

Like Mary's and Aviva's experiences, Jack's accent discrimination experience shows that growing up speaking English as one's first and/or dominant dialect does not automatically guarantee historically disenfranchised individuals or groups' protection from accent discrimination. Like Jack and Aviva, Jen, an African American University Professor, was subjected to accent discrimination at a store, despite the fact that English is her first language and the only language she speaks.

Jen's Case

Jen (a pseudonym) was born and raised in New Orleans. She is African American. She earned all three of her degrees in Louisiana. She is currently a tenured professor at a university located in the Southwest of the United States. At the time of the accent incident she was narrating below, she was working on her doctorate in education administration and was considered middle class. This was a first-time event. Until then, most people commented on how much she did not sound like she was from New Orleans, so to now be told that she could not be understood because of her accent (and in New Orleans) was news to her.

All my life, I have hated my voice. I am from New Orleans, and I am reminded often that I do not sound like I am from New Orleans. I guess that could be a compliment, but I am never sure. When I lived in the Northeast, the students told me that they could not tell that I was from the South. However, my husband's Southern accent is more pronounced than mine, and he received negative feedback regularly. My challenge came once when I wore a decorative head wrap to a car dealership. One of my students had visited Greece and bought me a wrap. I was launching a complaint in the car dealership, and I thought I was very clear about my complaint. I thought I had been charged for a diagnostic that was attributed to a recalled part. I thought I should not have to pay the diagnostic fee, so I requested a refund. The White woman became very angry and called over a Hispanic guy to “deal with me” because I wasn't speaking English.

The manager appeared to have assumed that Jen was an immigrant possibly because of her speech pattern, that is, her African American Vernacular English (AAVE) accent combined with the African attire she was wearing. African Americans, particularly those from the South, speak in African American Vernacular English accent. However, Jen stated that people, including students, could not figure out whether she was from the South based on her accent.

Nonetheless, she was discriminated against. Jen added:

I was disturbed by that because the only thing I think she did was look at the ethnic head wrap

and made assumptions about my ethnicity. I explained to the gentleman that I was not sure which language she thought I was speaking, but I assured him that English was my primary language.

American African vernacular (AAVE) is a language, or dialect, that plays a fundamental role in cultural and historical aspects of African Americans' lives. Yet, AAVE has hitherto been constructed as inferior in comparison to Standard American English—a view challenged by linguists, like Gilyard (2011), who stated:

Linguistics teaches us that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a legitimate language variety in its own right. It is not a broken version of any other verbal system and has the same standing among linguists as any other variety of language, be it an English version or otherwise. Like spoken languages worldwide, AAVE is fully conceptual; is composed of between ten to seventy meaningful sounds; has rules of syntax; and contains statements, commands, questions, and exclamations. (p.53)

That AAVE accent is inferior to the Standard American English accent is a faulty claim in that up until now, no scientific research has proven that a particular language or accent is superior to or better than another (Baugh 2018; Green, 2002; Labov, 2011; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 2016; Wolfram & Schilling, 2015). Participants' cases show that speaking English, even as one's first language, does not necessarily exempt one from accent discrimination. That being discriminated against because of one's English accent also depends on underlying factors, such as one's race, ethnicity, and country of origin, as the following narratives illustrate.

Unit 2: Narratives of Participants Whose First Language is Spanish

This unit contains the stories of participants whose first language is Spanish but grew up speaking English as their second language before moving to the United States. Like participants for whom English is their first language, they were discriminated against because of accent, as shown in the following narratives.

Juan's Case

Juan (a pseudonym) was born and raised in Puerto Rico. He grew up speaking English as his second language. After finishing high school in Puerto Rico, Juan moved to the mainland, the United States, to pursue graduate studies. Juan is currently teaching History at a university located in New York; he has been a professor for over a decade. He has been subject to accent discrimination both as a graduate student and a professor. Juan has experienced this form of discrimination both in his first language, Spanish, and his second language, English. Juan maintained, "At the university, the discrimination came from a professor who not only wrote in my first evaluation that my accent in English made me difficult to understand but who also rejected my Spanish because she was used to 'Colombian and Mexican Spanish which were superior to Caribbean Spanish.'" Juan elaborated:

Mind you that she was not fluent in Spanish, not really. And that Spanish was my only language for 22 years, and my BA-granting institutions was Spanish-Language-based. Finally, though the hundreds of students I had in Rutgers and UMass never complained about my accent, one semester at Marist College (New York), in a particularly difficult section, some five students, aware that they were failing the class, banded

together and stated in their class evaluations that to improve the class they should “hire an American who spoke English to teach it” and several variations of that comment. I suspect that had something to do with not having my contract renewed next year.

Juan was reminded that his Spanish was not standard enough to be understood and to earn the respect of his professor. The irony is that Spanish is neither the first nor dominant language of this professor, but she deems Juan’s Caribbean Spanish accent to be inferior to the Colombian and Mexican Spanish accents to which she is mostly accustomed. Juan was not facing accent discrimination only with his professor. He received unfavorable and a low score on student course evaluation apparently because of students’ prejudice against his accent.

Juan claimed that his teaching contract was terminated because students complained about his accent. Juan’s experience shows that defenders of the hegemony of standard accents can be linguistically insensitive to those who speak in different accents. In this professor’s view, Juan’s Spanish accent, originating from Puerto Rico, sounds foreign and incomprehensible, even though such accent reflects Juan’s linguistic and social identities. Juan’s accent is part of a variety of Spanish accents—some of which are socially constructed as standard, while others are seen and treated as non-standard. Juan was frustrated and disappointed; he felt discriminated against by a university language professor, whom one would expect to be linguistically sensitive and accepting.

Juan’s experience is different from that of Pablo, who is from Spain. Even though they are both Spanish

speakers and English second learners, they experienced accentism differently. Juan is from Puerto Rico, while Pablo is from Spain; their ethnicity and race played a role in their linguistic experiences in the United States, as Pablo's narrative illuminates.

Pablo's Case

Pablo (pseudonym) was born and raised in Spain. He is married and has three children who are bilingual. Pablo is mixed; his mother is Spaniard, while his father is an immigrant from Ecuador. Pablo, a former EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher, is currently an assistant professor at a university located in the West Coast of the United States. Pablo immigrated to the United States to work as a Spanish teacher.

He then pursued graduate studies after years of teaching both in his native land and the United States. Upon finishing his doctoral studies, he pursued and secured a university faculty position. Pablo stated that in many of his encounters with people in the United States and Europe make positive comments about his Spaniard accent, while being looking down on by that of his wife, who is from Ecuador.

People seem to celebrate more some countries over others, same as they do with races. They probably celebrate some countries over others influenced by country variables. When some people have asked me where I'm from and when I say Spain, some of them seem to kind of celebrate. However, when they ask my wife, who is from Ecuador, I notice they don't celebrate anything.

Pablo's narrative further illustrates unequal power relations between standard Spaniard Spanish accent and

Latin American Spanish accents. People who are from Spain, speaking in Standard Spanish accents tend to be seen through positive linguistic lenses, whereas those from former colonized Spanish territories are often perceived and treated poorly. This linguistic disparity is connected to the persistent effects of the Spanish colonial legacy on Latin America, as linguistically diverse individuals from Latin America and the Caribbean are often ridiculed because of their marked accents. Pablo added:

Although some people probably celebrate because they know more about Spain than about Ecuador, it seems that same as race (people in Spain are lighter than in Ecuador, a country that is more associated to Indigenous peoples), ethnicity (the culture in Spain is better considered than the culture in Ecuador), class (a European country versus a third-world country), and language (some people tell me about the Castilian Spanish and insist that the Spanish from Spain is the correct and formal Spanish and that Spanish in Latin America is wrong, informal, and non-educated).

Because of European colonial legacy, Spanish accents from Latin America and the Caribbean are treated as low class . This complicates the accent matter. The colonial legacy lingers on and, consequently, places formerly colonized people from Latin America in disadvantageous linguistic position, as Linda's case further illustrates.

Linda's Case

Linda (pseudonym) was a doctoral candidate in a flagship university located in the Midwest of the United States at the time of the study. She was born and was raised in a city near the Atlantic Coast of Colombia, so Spanish is her

first language. She got her undergraduate education in Colombia and started learning French, which became her second language. By the end of her graduate studies, she decided to focus on learning English only, so her French was not used much, and it was quickly forgotten.

She lived and taught English as a foreign language in Europe, Asia, and Central and South America before coming to the US to pursue graduate studies. She considers herself bilingual but has studied at least 5 other languages throughout her life. Linda was pursuing a master's degree at a university located in the Southwest of the United States at the time of the study. Linda stated that one of the most painful discriminations she has ever endured over the years has been connected to her distinctive accent.

When I think about any experiences with accent discrimination throughout my personal and professional journey, many incidents come to mind. The following is from my professional and personal journey. As the coordinator of a children's program, I was in charge of overseeing groups of young volunteers from different states in the US. These undergraduate students spent their summer helping with our summer ESL camps. I specifically remember one of the volunteers telling me how "thick" my accent was in English and how difficult it was for him to understand me.

Linda was not only looked down because of her accent but also because of her race, ethnicity, and nationality—a brown skinned Latina woman from Latin America with a "foreign Spanish-sound English accent." The White male American student that Linda referred to in her narrative was convinced that Linda was not and could not be

qualified to be the coordinator of that program because of her non-standard English accent. Linda, on the other hand, found his behavior and attitude toward her distinct accent to be discriminatory and biased. Linda went on to say:

From that incident, I particularly remember the emphatic way in which this male White American student made me feel that no matter how qualified and professionally capable I was as an ESL teacher, my English language skills were not good enough because I didn't have a native accent.

White native-born Americans might not face institutional challenges teaching English as a second or foreign language, the high competence of qualified non-native speaker teachers of English is often questioned. Linda was reminded that her accent did not sound like the typical American English accent; therefore, she could not possibly be qualified to be the coordinator of a program that required strong communication English skills. Regardless of her competence as a coordinator and teacher, Linda's authority was interrogated and doubted because she spoke in a distinct English accent similar to that of many linguistic minorities in the United States.

Linda felt that she was discriminated against because she is a brown Latina whose English accent is constructed as colloquial. However, the last participant's narrative in this unit challenged Linda's assumption about the unearned linguistic privileges associated with merely growing speaking English as one's first and dominant language.

Claudia's Case

Claudia (pseudonym) is a Chicana who was born in El Paso, Texas, a third-generation US-born citizen. She is bilingual and bicultural and attended public elementary, middle, and high school in El Paso. She grew up with both English and Spanish because her mother spoke Spanish and understood English (She was an immigrant from Mexico), and her father spoke English but understood Spanish. (He was second generation US-born) So, she and her brother benefitted greatly from their mother with whom they spoke Spanish, while speaking only English with their father. Claudia has a B.A. in political science, an M.A. in higher education, and a Ph.D. in educational leadership with a focus on higher education. She is currently a high school college counselor and academic advisor. At the time of the study, Claudia had just finished her doctorate in educational leadership. What follows is Claudia's experience with accent discrimination.

I have been told, time and again, that it's surprising I speak my English without a "Mexican" accent and that I pronounce words "so well" as if pronouncing them with a different accent would interrupt their wellness. In true form to my Chicana experience, living in the liminal space of neither here nor there, I have similarly been told by Spanish speakers that it is unfathomable that I speak Spanish so properly and without sounding like a "gringa."

Claudia's experience with accent discrimination underscores that linguistic privileges are also linked to one's ethnicity, race, and country origin. Although Claudia is a third-generation US-born citizen, she is still perceived and treated as a Mexican immigrant, a second language English learner. Claudia received compliments from random individuals about both English and Spanish

accents, depending on the context and the circumstances. She was told that her English accent was very good, as if she was not expected to speak proper English. In other contexts, Spanish speakers were impressed with her oral Spanish skills, as though she was not expected to speak like them. Claudia's narrative suggests that she was mistaken for a Latina immigrant, a second language learner who speaks good English. Perhaps people expect that someone who is Chicana/Mexican American/Latinx should sound like they have an accent from a specific geographic region, usually Mexico or elsewhere in Latin America. Simultaneously, those who do not expect Claudia to speak "good Spanish" presume that as an American, she should have an Anglicized accent and a limited vocabulary in Spanish. Claudia added:

In people's assessment of my use of either language, I am positioned as different/other/anomaly. Otherwise, why point it out? Is it my sound or their hearing that is actually to be pointed out? The act of "correcting" is an act of pointing a finger, cornering, marginalizing, and putting someone in her place. It is an interruption to the storytelling, an attempt to manipulate the narration, and a hyper act of situating someone away from the center, even of her own story.

In both situations, the limitations exist in the other people by having specific and erroneous presumptions about Claudia and what it means to be of her ethnicity, instead of in her with an inability to speak a language.

General Discussion of Findings

Accent discrimination has affected not only second language English learners but also minority speakers whose English is their first language. For example,

although English is Claudia's first and dominant language, she was perceived and treated as a second-class citizen, a second language English learner. Jen was treated as if she could not make herself understood to the manager at the retail store in the English language she only knows. The manager felt that she had to call another minority, a Spanish guy, to deal with Jen, supposedly because she could not understand her accent. What this manager seemingly failed to realize is that, like Jen, everybody has an accent, including her. Instead of discriminating against Jen, this manager could have inquired about her accent.

This inquiry could have generated conversations about language and accent diversity, including regional diverse accents, while creating space for human closeness and bonding between her, the manager, and Jen, the customer. Unfortunately, this manager, who apparently believed in racial and linguistic stereotypes, ill-treated Jen, an educated African American woman. Similarly, although Claudia is a Chicana, growing up speaking Spanish as her mother's language and English as her father's first language, individuals assumed that Claudia was a second language English and Spanish learner altogether. Claudia finds such comments hurtful and disappointing. Claudia stated, "I have been told time and again that it's surprising I speak my English without a 'Mexican' accent and that I pronounce words 'so well' as if pronouncing them with a different accent would interrupt their wellness." It appears that Claudia was discriminated against because people associated her accent with her ethnicity.

Likewise, Mary, who grew up middle class speaking English with a Caribbean Jamaican English accent, was placed in a bilingual classroom to learn proper English upon the recommendation of one of her school teachers.

The case of English-speaking participants facing accent discrimination in the English language is unfair because they all grew up speaking English as their first language. In the case of Jen in particular, the manager assumed that as a doctoral student then, she was unable to make herself clear in English—a language she grew up speaking in Jamaica. Like African American Vernacular English accent in the United States, Spanish from Latin America and the Caribbean, like that spoken by Pablo's wife and Juan, is hierarchically assessed to be inferior to the Spaniard accent. This is linked to the colonial legacy that has historically influenced hierarchical power relations between dominant languages and marginalized ones (Thiong'o, 1986).

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Participants' narratives underscore ways and the degree to which accent discrimination has affected minorities across native languages, ethnicities/races, nationalities, and countries of origin. Their narratives suggest much work needs to be done for accent diversity and inclusion to become a reality for linguistically and culturally disfranchised groups whose distinct English accents do not fit the Standard American accent label. Because of their distinct English accents, these groups frequently face accent discrimination, whereas those whose accents fit such standard are often praised and placed on a higher linguistic pedestal.

As the United States of America is increasingly becoming linguistically and culturally diverse, there must be institutionalized anti-colonial language policies that protect linguistic rights of linguistically minority groups. Such policy should enable all people to speak in accents that deviate from the alleged Standard American English accent without being subjected to accent discrimination.

In institutions, like schools and the workplace, professional workshops and seminars on accent and language diversity need to be offered in which attendees could acquire knowledge and develop understanding and sensitivity about various speech patterns that have shaped different English speakers from diverse linguistic communities across the United States and beyond.

Such workshops or seminars would help attendees acquire knowledge about, and develop understanding of, diverse accents and the cultural and linguistic speech patterns among various linguistic minorities who speak in different accents. Teachers need to embrace in their classrooms various accents spoken by students of diverse linguistic backgrounds. More specifically, teachers must interact with, and show genuine curiosity about, students speaking with different accents. This will serve as a model for other students, by making them less likely to laugh at their classmates speaking with an accent different from the norm, but rather try to engage them with genuine, reflective and friendly curiosity in inquisitive and respectful manner.

Teachers also need to make a genuine effort to incorporate in their lesson plans language-based activities revolved around accent diversity. Doing so would help foster a classroom environment conducive to linguistic awareness about diverse English accents spoken around the world. Likewise, teachers need to engage monolingual English speaker students in such activities, as they might not have had much exposure to diverse accents and dialects growing up. Along the same lines, members of dominant linguistic groups need to be proactive seeking opportunities to interact with linguistic minorities so that they can develop their own awareness about different English accents. Finally, the social construction and imposition of an American Standard English accent must

be challenged, for such construction constitutes an obstacle to accent diversity and inclusion. There are many benefits in accepting and embracing accent diversity and inclusion, and there are teachers who respect, embrace and accept different languages and accents in their classrooms (Nieto and Bode, 2018). However, more work needs to be done to ensure the acceptance of, and respect for, diverse English accents.

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