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# A Comparative Study of Standard American English and Non-Standard American English Accents

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [Speech Communication](#) at Eastern Illinois University.

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A Comparative Study of Standard American English and

Non-Standard American English Accents

BY

Casey S. Gleason

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THESIS

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A Comparative Study of Standard American English and  
Non-Standard American English Accents

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## Abstract

Through the birth and maturation of the American society, dominant cultures have developed and become the accepted norm of America. However, with the constant flow of immigrants entering America, a variety of cultures and languages entered, also. The English language has remained the dominant language, while Standard American English has remained the dominant accent. Those who do not display Standard American English (SAE) often fall victim to a lower level of speaker credibility than those who speak SAE. One's sex may also affect speaker credibility due to different communication styles. The affect one's combination of accent and sex has on his or her speaker credibility is explored in this study. The first study attempts to determine one's accent, sex, and the combination thereof, affects speaker credibility based on speech evaluation scores. The second study attempts to determine if the speech's subject matter affects one's evaluation scores, both non-SAE and SAE accented speakers. The research questions answered in the studies are the following: What is the difference in the evaluation of non-Standard American English accent speakers and Standard American English speakers based on accent? What is the difference in the evaluation of non-Standard American English accent speakers and Standard American English speakers based on sex? What is the difference in the evaluation of non-Standard American English accent speakers and Standard American English speakers based on the social-identity of the speaker? What is the difference in the evaluation of non-Standard American English accent speakers and Standard American English speakers based on the subject matter of the speech? The results of this three level study suggest that a significant difference exists in the evaluation scores based on the speakers' accent.

I dedicate this thesis to Don and Joan Dehart.

Your love and support was key to my successful graduate career.

Looking back, I know that I could not have succeeded without you both.

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### Accent Modification in Cultural and Sex Differences

Theodore Roosevelt quotes that “[W]e have but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, have American nationality,” (King, 1997). This quote reveals the intense, significant role that language has taken in the birth and maturation of America. In researching this idea, one’s accent of the American language cannot be ignored. The English language history is quite unique due to the entrance of the immigrants and the sense of pride developed by the Americans speaking the English language.

This sense of pride created a bond between all Americans, extending to the variety of American accents. However, throughout history, the most predominant accent is the American Standard English accent, which has become known as the no accented, understandable, clear English language spoken in the United States (Gill, 1994; Hamel & Schreiner, 1989; Jordan, 1996). In a sense, the American Standard English has developed and defined the American culture, thus identifying Americans. Language creates, “cultural ethnic unity and cultural identification,” (King, 1997). For example, to be Arab is to speak Arabic; therefore, to be American is to speak American, or Standard American English.

The English language has never been declared the official language of the nation, because some fear that (non)native American cultures will suffer. Moreover, the constitution is silent on language. There have, however, been attempts to declare English as the official language in America. The Emerson Bill, “specifies English as the official language of government, and requires that the government preserve and enhance the

official status of English,” (King, 1997). Many are opposed to this bill because it may alienate other ethnic backgrounds, causing them to cease expansion in America, such as the Hispanic Republic (King, 1997; Munro & Derwing, 1999). Even though some Americans want to use the English language as the common bond that unites each, some want to preserve the existence of their native tongue (King, 1997; Munro & Derwing, 1999).

The various accents that exist in the English language also enjoy a unique history, representing the various cultures. Accent, defined by linguistics expert, Professor John Honey, is, “not simply a question of birthplace, it defines social origin and aspirations,” (1989). This entails not only the language in question in the previous example of Arabic, but the sounds, rhythms, and phrasing patterns an Arab speaks Arabic. Therefore, it is the sounds, rhythms, and phrasing patterns an American speaks English.

With every accent, society assigns a stereotype, which lasts for an undefined time and affects an uncountable number of individuals. Giles and Powesland (1975) state that one’s perception of another is an active process. Upon meeting, one immediately begins to make judgments and inferences about the other based merely on what one sees and hears from the other. General appearance, facial expressions, and gestures are clues that one may consider when attempting to determine who he or she is facing (Giles & Powesland, 1975). Studies have focused on a variety of elements and characteristics of persons to determine if such elements and characteristics contribute to others’ impressions of the persons. Dating back to 1931, Pear (1931) looked at voice and personality as means of affecting ones perception and evaluation of another person. Since

then, several studies suggest that noncontent cues have a more significant effect than the content of speech itself.

Mehrabian and Weiner (1967) studied vocal qualities and verbal content to the impressions people form of the speaker, creating a like or dislike toward the speaker. Seligman, Tucker, and Lambert (1972) take a greater look at how speakers' personality affects listeners' evaluation of them. Brown, Strong, and Rencher (1973) focused their studies on the separate effects of intonation and speech rate on the speakers' evaluation. Pearce and Conklin (1971) compared speech evaluations in conversational mode to those presented in a dynamic mode. However, by taking the results of such studies and applying them to cultural aspects individuals possess based on their cultural upbringing, assumptions can be made. Giles and Powesland (1975) conclude that there may be some kind of hierarchical structuring of regional dialects in the United States.

The Southern American, British, and Asian English accents are examples of such stereotypes. In 1993, the Odom Institute at the University of North Carolina conducted a test attempting to determine the impact the "strong," "detectable," and "none" southern accented English played on the individual's life (Reed, 2000). The results suggested that those rated to have a strong Southern accent were assumed to fit the stereotype of the deep southerner, typically from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana (Reed, 2000). These individuals were assumed to be Democrats, regular churchgoers, having a low income and little education (Reed, 2000). Those having no or only "detectable" accents were assumed to be Republican, unchurched, of higher income and education levels (Reed, 2000).

However, the British accented English experience a somewhat different stereotype (Exard, 1994; Honey, 1989; Mano, 1995). Those who speak in a “received pronunciation” or British accent were rated higher in intelligence and ambition and were perceived as being taller, having better personal hygiene habits, and more attractive (Honey, 1989). Typically, when Americans hear “received pronunciation” (Honey, 1989), they feel intimidated, because they assume the Britain is of royalty, high class, and of high morality (Mano, 1995). This stereotype may be credited to the American associating the British speech to proper enunciation and clear speech, thus implying anger, firmness, or angry firmness (Mano, 1995).

When associated with the Asian-American accent, Americans may perceive the accented individuals to be unorganized, lazy, inferior, and unprofessional (Cargile, 2000). However, it can also be assumed that Americans would consider the Asian accented to be suitable for high technological, low-communicative jobs (Cargile, 2000). In these circumstances, it is apparent that one’s accent can cause assumptions of the origins, intelligence, and professionalism of an individual (Upton, 1999).

The American workforce is also being affected by the increase of immigrants and the stereotypes associated with them. Every year, the number of individuals who speak English as a second language is growing. Statistics show that since 1990, the United States suburban area has been the most popular place for the settlement of immigrants (Jordan, 1996). The Chinese population alone accounts for 1.1 million on the West Coast (Lum, 1991). This is primarily due to job opportunity and location. Therefore, learning to speak English clearly and understandably is a main priority for these immigrants.

Not only do these immigrants have to learn to speak English clearly and understandably, they also must learn to incorporate their culture of American business and presentation. Because the Asian population is the third largest and fastest growing in number, wealth, and education in the U.S., than any other ethnic group, it's obvious that they play a significant role in the workforce (Cargile, 2000). Therefore, the Asian culture will be the immigrant population referred to in this review. In the Asian culture, their business practices are somewhat different than the American business practices; therefore, they must acknowledge and accept these differences. For instance, Asians are instructed to remain modest, to not brag, criticize their superiors, or laugh at their own jokes, and to respect those of age and experience (Sayle, 1997). They are also instructed to hand out many plain, modest business cards to be exchanged freely only during the day (Sayle, 1997). They are also taught that a fast deal is a bad deal. The Japanese tend to take those of opposition to the deal to drink an abundant amount of alcohol, while the Chinese tend to take their business opposition to great meals rarely participating in alcohol related associations (Sayle, 1997). Asians also view human interaction, friendship and loyalty detrimental to trusting business practices (Rights, 1994). Perhaps this stems from the origins of Asian culture. Because Asian cultures, such as the Japanese, can trace their origins back to 10,000 B.C., they developed a strong sense of national identity and cultural loyalty (Kiawah-Smith, 1999).

As the Asian culture and other immigrants enter the American workforce, they must put aside some of their business practices and learn those of the American business culture. The American business practices suggest first impressions are extremely important (Fetching, 1993; Sayle, 1997). The American businessperson wants to be

considered a regular guy known on a first name basis (Sayle, 1997). American business presentations are to grab the attention of listeners, remain brief and enthusiastic, and seek feedback from the listeners (Fetching, 1993; Sayle, 1997).

American businesses also want to improve the quality of communication in the work environment. Wall (1998) reported that 26.3% of the professionals surveyed in the International Society of Certified Employee Benefit Specialists, wanted to improve the quality of their communication. This is very important to companies who wish to differentiate themselves from other companies and establish internal credibility (Lamb, 1999; Wall, 1998). One strategy mentioned is repeating the message at least seven times to establish its importance (Wall, 1998). Lamb (1999) reported that some American businesses wish to show empathy to their cliental through their human resource department locating young (under 35 years), slim, attractive, and having little or no detectable accent to promote a “stylish” appearance. It is apparent that Asian and American business practices are somewhat different.

In order for the increasing number of immigrants to succeed in the American business world, they must fit in (Bantz, 1993; Hess, 1993; Lum, 1991; Martin, Hecht, & Larkey, 1994). Adapting assimilation and pluralism are two ways that characterize how immigrants adapt to the traits of the dominant society. Assimilation is the process where the immigrant acquires the traits of the dominant society and is ultimately absorbed into the society (Lum, 1991; Martin, Hecht, & Larkey, 1994). Pluralism, by contrast, is the process where the immigrant group both acquires some traits of the dominant society and keeps their own cultural norms; they practically adapt and participate in the dominant society (Lum, 1991; Martin, Hecht, & Larkey, 1994). Adapting to the dominant society

indicates that the immigrant should adapt cultural norms, including the Standard American English accent of the dominant society. Although both processes may be a threat to their sense of cultural identity, they must adapt to the dominant society in order to survive (Bantz, 1993; Hess, 1993; Lum, 1991; Martin, Hecht, & Larkey, 1994).

Although some Americans admire those who speak with an accent, some do not accept those who disrupt smooth communication. Americans consider accents to be beautiful, until they make a person difficult to understand (Hamel & Schreiner, 1989). Standard American English is therefore the most accepted accent; because it provides speech clarity, correct formation of sound and immediate understanding for most Americans. To help immigrants and newcomers adapt to a new environment, such as a company or organization, several strategies can be actualized. If the organization communicates its goals and standard affectively to the new comers, the behaviors, standards, and values of the new comer will coordinate with the company's or organization's behaviors, stands, and values (Hess, 1993). The more effective this communication is, the more productive and satisfied the new comer will be (Hess, 1993). One way to ensure effective communication is to be sure that all employees understand each other.

To assist the immigrant in adapting to the dominant society's standard accent, Accent Reduction courses are available. The courses are designed to focus solely on the verbal delivery of English (Hamel & Schreiner, 1989; Jordan, 1996; Munro & Derwing, 1999), enabling all employees to better understand each other. The courses include instruction on articulation, rate, rhythm, and speech clarity to help them to reduce their accented speech and allow them to be better understood by those speaking Standard

American English (Hamel & Schreiner, 1989; Jordan, 1996). These courses provide students with, “an opportunity to learn techniques that will improve their speech, work with those techniques, and acquire the fundamentals so they can continue improving on their own,” (Jordan, 1996). The courses may help the accented speaker advance to a position that requires greater communication skills (Hamel & Schreiner, 1989; Jordan, 1996; Munro & Derwing, 1999). Even though the courses may cost \$60 to \$100 per hour (Jordan, 1996), students enrolled leave the class feeling more confident and in control of their speaking ability (Hamel & Schreiner, 1989; Munro & Derwing, 1999). Once the immigrants have mastered Standard American English accent, their speaker credibility will be enhanced.

Another aspect that needs to be addressed when discussing speaker credibility is the possibility of sex bias based on the different communication styles that exist in the female and male (Bonebright, Thompson, Leger, 1996; Campbell, 1991; Capo & Hantzis, 1991; Fanzwa & Lockhart, 1998; George Mason University, 1999; Lages, 1992; Leger, 1996; Marshall, 1995; Martell, 1996; Natayama, 1994; Rothschild, 2000; Tavakolian, 1994). Since the 1970's (George Mason University, 1999), the distinction between masculine and feminine communication have been studied. These distinctions are natural in human beings and should be encouraged in each and every culture. The female distinctions have been traced back to 1872, as Susan B. Anthony spoke on women suffrage, and other female speakers, such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Helen Caldicotts, and Senator Nance Landon Kassebaum (Campbell, 1991). However, because such speeches, women were stereotyped to speak about women in business, women in politics, and women in the classroom, (Campbell, 1991; Marshall, 1995; Martell 1996). In contrast,



male distinctions have been traced back to speeches about the steel industry, individual rights, sports coverage, declarations of war, etc. (Campbell, 1991; Marshall, 1995; Martell 1996).

These distinctions suggest that the female and male have different speech and communication styles. Researchers have consistently proven that female's express and can recognize the emotions of fear and sadness, while males can express and recognize the emotion of anger (Bonebright, et al., 1996). Therefore, the research suggests that females are responsive to emotions and are more apt to encourage emotional expression than the male (Bonebright, et al., 1996). Instead, males are more responsive and encourage the expression of anger (Bonebright, et al., 1996).

Taking this one step farther, the female and male see the social world and proceed in social relation differently. For example, the female uses conversation to get intimate and share feelings, (Franzwa & Lockhart, 1998). Taking this information to the workforce, it is justified that the female and male do not manage the same, however can have similar leadership styles, motivations for working, and career aspirations (Franzwa & Lockhart, 1998; Marshall, 1995). For example, females favor a more interactive managerial style than males do (Marshall, 1995).

Because of these assumptions and stereotypes, sex bias, discrimination allegedly exists for women in the workplace, just as discrimination allegedly exists for those of accented English who wish to advance in the workplace (Lages, 1992; Richard, 1996; Tavakolian, 1994). This discrimination is visible when comparing the number of female college students (females holding the majority) and the number of female white collar workers (females holding 69% of these jobs) to the number of females represented in

senior level managerial positions (very few) (Tavakolian, 1994). Even though women delay having a family to invest in their education and career and government agencies, acts, and support groups exist, sex discrimination still exists in the workplace (Lages, 1992; Martell, 1996; Tavakolian, 1994). However, improvements are being seen. As of March 2000, women's' earning of 69% of men's' has increased to 74% (Rothschild).

Just as government acts and agencies have discouraged and prohibited sex bias in the workplace, perhaps something can discourage accent bias in both society and the workplace. This review of literature suggests those with accented English have experienced discrimination because of assumed stereotypes based on their accent. This literature review also suggests females have experienced discrimination because of assumed stereotypes based on their generalized communication styles. Can it be assumed that those who do not speak Standard American English can also be discriminated based on their sex? Research does not explore this possibility. However, Study One attempts to determine if such a bias exists through a self-developed test. By answering the following questions, it is apparent that one's accent and/or sex affects his or her speaker credibility.

RQ1: What is the difference in the evaluation of non-Standard American English accent speakers and Standard American English speakers based on accent?

RQ2: What is the difference in the evaluation of non-Standard American English accent speakers and Standard American English speakers based on sex?

The results of the research questions raised other questions. As a result a second study was conducted to answer such questions. Study Two attempts to determine if the amount of the speaker credibility was hindered based on the social identity of the speaker (Swan & Wyer, 1997; Hogg, 1996). The research question addressed was the following:

RQ3: What is the difference in the evaluation of non-Standard American English accent speakers and Standard American English speakers based on the social-identity of the speaker?

Study Two also attempts to determine if the subject matter being presented affects one's speaker credibility. This concern was derived from several studies, such as Hollander (1971). Hollander (1971) states,

Much of the research on the role of the communicator as a source of influence has centered on his credibility. This general characteristic embodies several features, which the recipient may perceive to give the source validity, including expertise and trustworthiness. There are also such factors as background, appearance, and other identifiable features of the communication, therefore, is the impression he conveys to the audience in terms of these characteristics (p. 92).

For example, if a dentist were to give a speech on tooth decay, the dentist would receive more credibility than a fireman giving a speech on tooth decay. The fourth research question is posed.

RQ4: What is the difference in the evaluation of non-Standard American English accent speakers and Standard American English speakers based on the subject matter?

### Theoretical Framework

#### Study One

The theoretical framework of this problem consists of the accent, SAE and non-SAE, and sex, male and female, of individuals in the American society. The framework allows studies to compare speaker credibility among accents and sexes. The framework

also allows the comparison of the combinations of male/accented, male/non-accented, female/accented, and female/non-accented

Past studies have analyzed opinions about disfavored and preferred accents. One study examined the reactions to Anglo- and Hispanic-accented speakers when they spoke in English. It focused on the affect, identity, persuasion, and the English-only controversy regarding Anglo-Americans and Hispanic Americans. The study observed that Hispanic Americans' speech style is significantly influenced by subjects' views on issues concerning national identity. The results concluded that those who comprised the study "considered Hispanic American accented speakers to be inferior to Anglo-accented speakers." Another study investigated a multiple-process model of evaluations. Three theories: the extremity theory, the assumed characteristic theory, and expectancy violation theory, examined how stereotypes influenced one's perception of the speaker. Those conducting the study predicted that by manipulating one's speech style, his or her ability to obtain a target job would be affected. The results showed strong support of the expectancy violation theory, which concluded that the speech styles did affect the judges hiring decisions.

This framework hypothesizes that accent and sex affect speaker credibility an individual is granted by the American society. More specifically, the American society grants a greater amount of speaker credibility to those possessing the non-accented, SAE accent. Therefore, those who possess an accented English language receive a lesser amount of speaker credibility. Alternatively, the opposite may be observed; the accented English may receive greater speaker credibility than those speaking SAE. By comparing the result of the current study to those of a previous identical study using female

speakers, speaker credibility based on the sex of the speaker is also apparent. The framework offers the hypothesis that female speakers receive less speaker credibility than males.

## Study Two

The theoretical framework of this study consists of the accent, SAE and non-SAE, and the subject matter presented in the speech used in the study. The framework provides the comparison of speaker credibility among accents and subject matter. The framework allows the comparison of accented SAE and non-accented SAE speakers speaking about a subject matter that includes terms pronounced in the native tongue.

The Social-identity theory offers a framework suggesting that the social group, in which an individual is assumed to belong, is awarded the social norms of that group (Swan & Wyer, 1997, Suzuki, 1998). People have a concept of group memberships that vary in terms of their importance and credibility (Hogg, 1996). Social-identity theory focuses on status differences between groups and the implications of these status differences for the self-concept. This theory also emphasizes subjective belief structures that people have regarding the stability and legitimacy of status differences between their in-group and out-groups (Swan & Wyer, 1997).

Therefore, by incorporating this theory to this study, it can be assumed that people may assume particular characteristics of the speaker based on their social-identity. The social-identity valid for each speaker may then apply the amount of speaker credibility granted to each speaker. Suzuki (1998) suggests that characteristics and behaviors such as shared feelings of acceptance and rejection, trust and distrust, and liking and disliking

form attitudes toward specific groups in the social system. Therefore, if someone assumes an individual to be a member of a social group, he or she also gives assumptions of shared feeling, trust, distrust, acceptance to the individual based on his or her perception of the social group assigned to the individual.

The framework in Study Two attempts to determine if the subject matter influences the evaluation scores based on the speakers' assumed credibility in the subject matter. This framework is derived from past studies suggesting that a dentist will receive more credibility than a fireman when giving a speech on tooth decay regardless of content of the material presented (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Hollander, 1971)

### Hypotheses

#### Study One

Study One specifically hypothesizes in the first hypothesis (H 1), that one's accent affects the amount of speaker credibility granted to the individual in American society. In the second hypothesis (H 2), states that one's sex affects the amount of speaker credibility granted to the individuals in the American society. In contrast, the null hypothesis is that one's accent and sex does not affect the amount of speaker credibility granted to an individual by the American society. By proving the null hypothesis false, the hypotheses presented are supported, encouraging further research to transpire to determine what the American society's next step should be.

This problem is significant because the existing stereotypes in Corporate America have created speaker credibility bias based on accent and sex of an individual. Courses should be made available to all who do not speak in the SAE accent. Courses should also

be created that help sexes minimize the difference between their communicative styles, thus helping destroy any credibility bias existing based on one's sex in the workplace.

In study one, the accent and sex of the individuals were nominal variables. Nominal variables are concepts taking two or more values differentiated only on the bases of type. Accent and sex were also the independent variables in the study because they are thought to influence changes in another variable, the speaker credibility. Therefore, speaker credibility was the dependent variable because it is thought to change because of other variables. Speaker credibility was measured by the speaker's organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, and voice throughout the presented speech.

#### Study Two

Study Two focuses on the third (H3) and fourth (H4) hypotheses. H3 states that one's social identity affects the amount of speaker credibility granted to the individual in American society. H4 states that subject matter influences the evaluation scores based on the speakers' assumed credibility in the subject matter. In contrast, the null hypothesis is that one's social identity and presented subject matter does not affect the amount of speaker credibility granted to an individual by the American society. By proving the null hypothesis false, the hypotheses presented are supported, encouraging further studies to be conducted.

This problem is significant because the results may reveal reasons such bias exists in Corporate America. If bias were suggested, existence of accent modification in the American society would be further supported. Furthermore, it could be assumed that the

American society is extremely ethnocentric and assumes that the Standard-American accented speaker inevitably receives more credibility, thus greater evaluation scores.

In Study Two, social identity determined by accent, and subject matter the individuals presented were nominal variables. Accent, social identity, and subject matter were the independent variables in the study because they were thought to influence changes in speaker credibility. Therefore, speaker credibility was the dependent variable because it is thought to change because of other variables. Speaker credibility was measured by the speaker's organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, and voice throughout the presented speech.

### Participants

#### Study One

The Eastern Illinois University (EIU) environment that the study takes place affects the sampling procedures utilized in the study. The speakers were between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-seven. The speakers were members of EIU's speech communications program. One female spoke in a SAE accent, one female spoke in an Asian non-SAE accent, which was evaluated in Gleason's (2000) previous study. In the current study, one speaker was male speaking in a SAE accent, and one was a male speaking in an Asian non-SAE accent. The Asian accented English was tested because the Asian population is the third largest and fastest growing population in the US, therefore, playing a significant role in the American society and workforce.

The 292 evaluators were also members of the EIU environment, of them 97 evaluated the accented male SAE, 96 evaluated the non-accented SAE male, 48 evaluated



the non-accented SAE female, and 51 evaluated the accented SAE female. All evaluators were currently or previously enrolled in the introductory speech course, SPC 1310. This enrollment signifies their knowledge and recognition of the speaking qualities they evaluated. Even though EIU's environment is not one of the typical American workforces, those included in the study demonstrate their desire to be future members of the American workforce. Therefore, the results illustrate the possible bias that may or may not exist in speaker credibility of the American workforce of the future.

### Study Two

The participants of the second study included participants of study two. The accented speaker, a 27-year-old Chinese EIU speech communication student, remained constant in both studies. This allowed accuracy in the accentor's voice, delivery, and social identity. The participant who represented the SAE accented speaker was a 23-year-old EIU communication student. This study also incorporated a "control" participant. This participant was a 26-year-old Chinese student, but did not display an accented SAE. In this study, the speakers were all male. This occurred accordingly to Study One and for control measures. Because the results of Study One reveal that there is no significant difference in evaluation scores based on the sex of the speaker, sex was not tested in Study Two. In order for a constant in the speakers to occur, the same sex was utilized. Because the accented SAE speaker was male in both studies, the speakers were all male in the second study.

The evaluators in the second study were similar to Study One. They were all students, 18-23, enrolled in the introductory speech course, SPC 1310. This enrollment

signifies their knowledge and recognition of the speaking qualities they evaluated. A total of 179 evaluations were submitted. 60 students evaluated the accented SAE participant/speaker. 53 evaluated the “controlled” SAE participant/speaker, portraying a Chinese ethnicity. 63 evaluated the SAE speaker. The results of the evaluations reveal if a difference in evaluation scores exists among the three speakers/participants. The only difference between the speakers is the portrayal of a Chinese ethnicity, or social identity.

For the remainder of the study, those who presented the speech and were evaluated will be referred to as the speakers. Those who evaluated the participant will be referred to as the subjects of the study.

### Apparatus

#### Study One, Study Two

A variety of apparatus were used throughout this study. First, an outline of the speech that was to be evaluated was given to the speakers a week before they were to be videotaped. The speakers, a week later, were videotaped in Coleman Hall room 117 (Study One) or room 115A (Study Two), at Eastern Illinois University, with the same camcorder and volume. In Study One, a well-lit room revealed the facial features of each speaker clearly. In Study Two, the room was poorly lit, causing the faces of the speakers to be shaded, therefore making social identity difficult. The speakers stood in the front of the room, in front of a plane white backdrop, behind a desk with a lectern placed in front of them. They were allowed to use the outline as they presented the speech; all did so.

When showing the videotaped speech to the subjects, the speech was observed on a television screen as it played from an available videocassette recorder. The subjects

evaluated the speech using an evaluation sheet, rating the speaker's organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, and voice on a Likert scale from 1 – 10; one being poor; four being inadequate; seven being average, and ten being superior.

### Procedure

#### Study One, Study Two

The design of this study compared the difference in the speakers' evaluations scores established by the subjects. The individuals who presented the speech were given identical formal speech outlines that they used to present a videotaped 4-6 minute informative speech. The speakers were allowed one week to prepare for the videotaped presentation. Each presentation was shown to a sample of EIU students who evaluated the speaker. The speakers' organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, and voice will be evaluated based on the previously mentioned speech rating scale of 1 – 10. Because the speeches were identical, the organization, material, and analysis should have been unaffected due to the accent and/or sex of the speaker. However, if a significant difference is obvious, a bias in any of the categories is present. The language, voice, and delivery should be different if accent and/or sex affects the evaluation scores.

The subjects were instructed to watch the videotape of the speeches and evaluate the speakers' performance. They were handed the evaluation sheets prior to the viewing of the speeches so they could make comments and evaluate the performance throughout the speech. They were told the nature of the study, speaker credibility. They were not, however, be told that the speaker evaluations will be compared based on the accent and

sex of the speaker. This eliminates some conscious personal and deliberate bias that may exist before the speech evaluations.

Based on the description of the study, a pretest was necessary to ensure that each speaker possesses and speaks the accent tested. The pretest took place before videotaping the speeches. Each speaker presented the speech as his or her accent was observed. Once it was observed that each speaker possessed and spoke the accent being tested, the study proceeded and the speakers were videotaped. A trial run was performed to make certain that the researcher practiced an introduction of what to say and what not to say consistently when instructing the evaluators.

### Study One

The speakers' scores were then compared to the scores of a previous identical study (Gleason, 2000). The studies used identical apparatus, however, the speakers in this study were female. One female spoke in a SAE accent, and the other was an Asian female who spoke in a non-SAE accent. The scores of the current study were combined to the scores of the previous study. The male and female SAE accented speakers were considered one condition, and the Asian non-SAE accented speaker were considered a second condition. A T-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in their evaluation scores due based on the accent of the speaker. Then, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to the current study to determine if the sex or the accent or the combination of both affected the speakers' evaluated scores in each category. Then the scores from the previous identical study were combined to the current study to determine if the sex of the speaker affected the evaluation scores.

## Study Two

The evaluation scores of the Chinese accented SAE speaker, the Chinese non-accented SAE speaker, and the non-accented SAE speaker were compared to each other using an Analysis of Variance method. This method was used to determine if the social identity or accent or the combination of both affected the speakers' evaluation scores in each category. These scores were then compared to the evaluation score of Study One to determine if the subject matter affected the evaluation scores of the Chinese accented SAE speaker and the non-accented SAE speaker.

## Results and Discussion

### Study One

The results of the conducted T-test revealed that there was a significant difference in the organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, voice, and total score of both conditions based on the accent of the speaker. The mean score of the 144 evaluations of the SAE accented speakers in organization was 8.82. The mean score of the 148 evaluations of the non-SAE accented speakers in organization was 8.07. The T-test concluded that the probability level was less than 0.01, suggesting that the speakers' accent caused a significant difference in the scores ( $t = 4.625, p > 0.01$ ). The mean score of the SAE accented speakers in language was 8.82, while the mean score of the non-SAE speakers in language was 5.95. The T-test concluded that the probability level was less than 0.01 ( $t = 15.506, p > 0.01$ ), suggesting that the speakers' accent caused a significant difference in the scores. The mean score of the SAE accented speakers in

material was 8.64 ( $t = 2.921$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ), while the mean score of the non-SAE accented speakers in material was 8.17, causing the probability level to be less than 0.01. The mean score of the SAE accented speakers in delivery was 8.34; while the non-SAE accented speakers were 5.50, causing the probability level to be less than 0.01 ( $t = 14.454$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). The mean score of the SAE accented speakers in analysis was 8.78, while the non-SAE accented speakers' was 7.91, causing the probability level to be less than 0.01 ( $t = 10.577$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). The mean score of the SAE accented speakers' in voice was 8.56, while the non-SAE accented speakers' was 6.36, causing the probability level to be less than 0.01 ( $t = 4.800$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ). The mean score of the SAE accented speakers' in total score was 51.96, while the non-SAE accented speakers' was 41.96, causing the probability level to be less than 0.01 ( $t = 12.247$ ,  $p > 0.01$ ).

Because every probability level less than 0.01, every category had a significant difference in the scores. Because the only difference between the speakers was the accent of the speakers, it can be assumed that the accent of the speaker caused the significant difference in the scores. Thus, supporting research question 1, and the first hypothesis that the accent of the speaker affects the speakers' credibility. Especially, because the mean scores were very different in the speakers' language, delivery, voice, and total score.

When the T-test was conducted using only the male scores, there was a significant difference only in the speakers' language, delivery, voice, and total score. However, when the T-test score was conducted in the previous study using only female scores, there was a significant difference in the evaluation scores in every category. Because the addition of the female scores caused a significant difference in each category, suggests

that the sex of the speaker may have affected the test. Therefore, two analysis of variance tests (ANOVA) were conducted. This test determines if a condition combined with another condition affect the results of the study. In this study, the conditions were the sex of the speaker and the accent of the speaker. The conditions were considered to determine if they affected the scores in the speakers' organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, voice, and total scores. If the results of the test reveal that the probability level in terms of the condition is less than 0.05, then that condition affected the results of the study. The test also breaks down each condition and the combination of conditions in terms of each category that was evaluated.

When conducted in the current study with only the male speakers scores being compared, the results reveal that the sex of the speaker did not cause a significant difference in the evaluation scores. This is apparent because in terms of each category, the probability level based on the sex of the speaker, was greater than 0.05. This does not support the second research question or H2. However, when the accent of the speaker was compared, the test reveals otherwise. The probability level in terms of organization was significant, because the level was 0.004, which proves that the accent of the speaker affected the scores. This was true in terms of the language ( $p = 0.000^*$ ), delivery ( $p = 0.000^*$ ), analysis ( $p = 0.001$ ), voice ( $p = 0.000^*$ ), and total score ( $p = 0.000^*$ ). The results suggest that accent of the speaker affects the evaluation score, thus supporting research question 1 and H1. However, when the combination of the sex and the accent were tested in terms of organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, voice, and total score, the probability level of each category was greater than 0.05. Therefore, not supporting the

second research question or the H 2. This is not surprising because the sex of the all the speakers in the current study were male.

When the ANOVA test was conducted after the scores from the previous female study were included in the current study, the results were similar. The test compared only the accent of the speaker, rather than taking into consideration the sex of the evaluators or the sex of the speakers. If the probability level is less than 0.05, then it is determined that the condition, the accent, of the speaker affects the evaluation scores, thus the credibility of the speaker. The probability level was less than 0.05 in terms of the organization, language, delivery, analysis, voice, and total score of the speaker. The fact that material is not included may be because the material in each speech was identical. Here, again, suggesting that the accent of the speaker does affect the evaluation scores of the speaker, thus affecting speaker credibility.

Overall, the mean score of the females in term of each category were greater than the males, therefore not supporting the research finding that society prefers male's communication style more so than the female's communication style. This suggests that the sex of the speaker may affect the speaker credibility, but according to the T-test and the ANOVA test, the results are not significant. However, each test that was conducted suggested that the accent of the speaker, regardless of the sex, did indeed make a significant difference in the evaluation scores. Therefore, giving indication to the first research question and supporting the first hypothesis.

After conducting the T-test and the ANOVA tests, the hypothesis that the accent of the speaker affects speaker credibility is supported. However, because the organization, language, material, and analysis of each speech was identical, and the tests



suggest that the accent affected the score in such terms, suggests that the accent is extremely influential in the credibility of the speaker. By comparing the results to the previous study using female speakers further proves that accent does affect speaker credibility regardless of the sex of the speaker.

## Study Two

The results of Study Two support H3; that the social identity of the speaker plays a role in the evaluation scores of the speaker. The results do not, however, support H4; that the assumed credibility granted to the speaker based on subject plays a role in the evaluation scores of the speaker. The results of the conducted ANOVA method revealed a significant difference in the organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, voice, and total score of both conditions based on the accent of the speaker. This test determines if a condition combined with another condition affects the results of the study. The conditions in this test were subject matter and accent of the speaker. The conditions were considered to determine if they affected the score in the speakers' organization, language, material, delivery, analysis, voice, and total scores. If the results of the test reveal that the probability level based on the condition is less than 0.05, the condition significantly affected the results of the study. The test also breaks down each condition and the combination of conditions by each evaluated category.

When conducted in Study Two, the results reveal that the social identity of the speaker based on his accent did cause a significant difference in the evaluation scores. This is apparent because the probability level in each category is less than 0.05. However, when the scores of Study Two were compared to the scores of Study One, it is apparent

that the subject matter does not affect the speakers' evaluation scores. In every category, the SAE accented speaker (speaker 3) received the greatest scores, the SAE accented Chinese speaker (speaker 2) received the second greatest scores, while the non-SAE accented Chinese speaker (speaker 1) received the lowest evaluation scores in each category. Please note that the speech was the same for each speaker. The only variable between the speakers was their accent.

The probability levels in each category are the following: organization ( $p = 0.000^*$ ); language ( $p = 0.000^*$ ); material ( $p = 0.000^*$ ); material ( $p = 0.000^*$ ); delivery ( $p = 0.000^*$ ); analysis ( $p = 0.000^*$ ); voice ( $p = 0.000^*$ ); and total ( $p = 0.000^*$ ). The results undoubtedly suggest that the accent of the speaker, even though the speech's subject matter was based on aspects of the Chinese culture, does effect the evaluations scores.

The results can further be identified in the mean score granted to each speaker. The mean scores are the following for the SAE accented speaker (speaker 3): organization, 8.87; language, 8.95; material, 8.54; delivery, 8.62; analysis, 8.70; voice, 8.86; and total, 52.54. The mean scores for the SAE accented Chinese speaker (appearing Chinese, but lacking a Chinese accent) were less than speaker 3, but were greater than speaker 1. The mean evaluation scores are the following for the SAE accented Chinese speaker (speaker 2): organization, 8.71; language, 8.54; material, 8.27; delivery, 7.72; analysis, 8.05; voice, 7.92; and total, 49.21. However, the non-SAE accented Chinese speaker (speaker 1) evaluation scores were drastically less than the other speakers' scores in every category. Speaker 1's mean evaluation scores are the following: organization, 7.83; language, 5.48; material, 7.13; delivery, 6.02; analysis, 7.1; voice, 6.20; and total, 39.76. By merely considering the total scores, speaker 1 scored 12.78 points less than

speaker 3. This suggests that even though the speeches used in the study were identical in organization, language, material, and analysis, the speakers' accent made a significant difference in the evaluation scores.

The results of this study did support H3, but did not support H4. H4 suggested that the subject matter presented in the speech will make a significant difference in the speakers' evaluation scores. It was assumed that because speaker 1 was a Chinese person, speaking in a non-SAE accent (one of a Chinese accent), the evaluation scores would be higher than the speakers not possessing a Chinese accent, or a SAE accent. However, the results revealed just the opposite.

#### Study One/Study Two

By comparing the results of Study Two with those of Study One, it can be suggested that the subject matter of the speech does not play a significant role in speakers' evaluation scores. This suggestion is reached by remembering that the subject matter in Study One was of Organ Donation. This subject is very broad and can relate to all speakers, of all accents. The results of this study revealed that accent made a significant difference in speakers' evaluation scores. The non-SAE accented speaker receiving evaluation scores less than those of the SAE-accented speaker.

However, in Study Two, the subject matter was that relating to Chinese martial arts. Even though social-identity theory suggests speaker 1 should be granted greater evaluation scores than speaker 3, it was not suggested in these studies. It could be assumed from this theory that the evaluators would have been likely to grant the Chinese-accented speaker (speaker 1) greater scores, because the social identity placed on that

speaker. In other words, because speaker 1 spoke in a Chinese accented about a subject matter directed towards the Chinese culture, speaker 1 should have received the greatest evaluation scores. In fact, speaker 2 should have also received greater evaluation scores than speaker 3. However, speaker 3 received the greatest evaluation scores overall in both studies, suggesting flaws in the social identity theory and not supporting H3. Study Two did not use female speakers because that hypothesis was not supported in Study One.

### Further Study

However, further research should be conducted to add validity to Study One and Study Two. For example, further studies need to be conducted using other accents. Because the American society is overflowing with a variety of accents, a variety of accents should be studied. The current study only took into consideration the Asian accent because that population is increasing dramatically, but other accents existing in the American society are also increasing and are included. However, based on the support this study suggests, the existence of accent reduction courses are necessary in today's society and the American workforce. Such courses need to be offered, especially to the Asian non-SAE accented speakers, to those entering the American workforce who does not speak in the SAE accent.

Another example of a further study is using different demographic characteristics for the evaluators. Perhaps, when studying the Chinese accent as compared to the SAE accent, it would be beneficial to use Chinese evaluators. The results or their evaluation scores could then be compared to the evaluation scores presented in these studies.

A final example of a further study is using a different subject matter as the evaluated speech. Professional speeches or subject specific speeches could also be used to determine if the social-identity theory can be supported. A speech based demonstrating how to prepare a gourmet Chinese meal, the effects the Internet has played on the Chinese economy, or police patrol in China could be used as topics for such speeches.

### Limitations

Although all the studies presented in this document were conducted in a professional and ethical manner, some limitations were presents. The participants involved in the studies are one such limitation. Because the participants were between the ages of 17 – 22, the exact representation of the American workforce was not represented. Perhaps a study using participants of different ages would be beneficial.

Giles & Powesland (1975) suggest that most speakers are “respecters of persons”, or adapt their speech style and content of speech to the receivers. Sex, age, race, and social status of the receivers were discussed as reasons the speaker may change his or her speech style and/or content. In relevance to this study, the speakers may have changed their speech style in respect to their audience. Perhaps because the audience’s demographic aspects and the casual environment the study took place, the speakers presented the speech in a more casual manner than in a professional environment.

Another limitation involved in the study was the clothing/appearance of the speakers. All speakers were dressed in casual attire, but perhaps a more professional/formal appearance would have affected the scores. All of the participants also spoke English as their native language. This may have created a bias against the

Asian non-SAE accented speakers. Because the participants could relate to the SAE speakers, perhaps they granted SAE speakers greater scores than the non-SAE speakers. To determine if this is a factor, further similar studies should include participants who do not speak English as their native language. In any event, this study should be studied further.

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