

# JUDGMENTS ON WITNESS RELIABILITY

## FROM WRITTEN TRANSCRIPTS

Julia G. Hartman  
*mentored by Dr. Matt Gordon*

### Abstract

A myriad of research has been done on the ways in which different linguistic features can affect perceptions made about the speaker. The judgments made about a speaker can be particularly important in legal settings, like trials. The purpose of this research was to study how witnesses are evaluated by jurors and the aims of the study were: 1) to examine how differing representations of speech may affect judgments made about the speaker; 2) to examine how speakers belonging to differing socioeconomic classes may be judged differently; and 3) to examine how men and women speakers may be judged differently. Participants in the study read witness testimonies of a car accident, and then judged the speakers of each testimony on a five-point scale. The findings of the study were that class and writing style do have an effect on perceptions made about the speaker, but gender does not. This suggests that the way speech is represented in written transcripts, does have an effect on our judgments of the speaker, as does class of the speaker. However, the gender of the speaker does not affect perceptions about said speaker.

# INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, there has been widespread research on how impressions of others may be influenced by the accents they use and how these impressions can be carried over to purportedly bias-free environments, like the legal system. In terms of accent affecting impressions of the speaker, there has been a myriad of research on the subject, with most, if not all, researchers concluding that accent can almost always affect perceptions of the speaker. Studies have found that subjects are even willing to make personality judgments based on language *alone*, especially when the speaker employs a non-standard accent (Giles & Powesland, 1975). A standard accent is most often associated with prestige and higher socioeconomic status, and deviation from the standard is most often associated with lower status (Fishman, 1971). Ryan, Hewstone, and Giles (1984) determined that speakers with standard accents are judged positively on traits associated with intelligence or social status, but speakers with nonstandard accents are rated less positively for these same traits, even by subjects who they themselves speak with a nonstandard accent. A similar conclusion was made by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum (1960) in their study examining reactions towards French and English speakers in Montreal. English-speaking participants rated the English speakers more positively than French speakers. However, the French-speaking participants also rated English speakers more positively. The authors of the study concluded that not only do high-status groups find their own language favorable, and that these feelings have been adopted by members of the low-status group.

There are two prevalent hypotheses on what causes these differing perceptions: the *inherent value hypothesis* and the *imposed norm hypothesis*. The former states that a dialect or

accent reaches a position of higher prestige due to the fact that “it is inherently the most pleasing form of that language” (Giles & Powesland, 1979, p. 10). However, the imposed norm hypothesis claims that a prestige form came to be viewed as the most pleasing due to social norms. Two studies (Giles, Bourhis, Trudgill, and Lewis 1974; then Giles, Bourhis, and Davies 1979) worked to explore each of these hypotheses. In the first, they aimed to determine if people who had no knowledge of the French language would be able to distinguish between the multiple forms of French spoken in Quebec in terms of their aestheticism or prestige. However, they found that when these dialects were played for people totally unfamiliar with the language, there were unable to differentiate them in on aesthetic or prestigious grounds. The second study was very similar, except that it played differing forms of Greek to those in England who were completely unfamiliar with the language. Again, listeners were unable to differentiate the Greek dialects in terms of aesthetic or prestigious traits. This suggests that perceptions based on language are learned and based on a social context, rather than being linked to traits of the language itself. (However, it should be cautioned that these are only two studies on two specific languages, and it is unclear whether this pattern can be extended to all languages.)

Studies have also been done on judgments made based on written speech. Douglas Biber (1988) explores this field thoroughly, studying both the similarities and differences between speech and writing. For him, studies done on the subject give the general interpretation that “written language is structurally elaborated, complex, formal, and abstract, while spoken language is concrete, context-dependent, and structurally simple” (p. 5). Of course, these differences are contributed to by the differing natures of speech and writing themselves; written

works can be planned, changed, and rewritten, and yet they also must be able to convey meaning even without the use of non-verbal cues, which are so important in speech. Spoken language, on the other hand, is shorter and simpler, due to conversation style conventions, and it is also able to be driven by the responses of others. Between written and spoken language, there occur differences between lexicon and grammar, including differing vocabularies (as writing is generally seen as more formal, and a writer might prefer more academic words over informal ones) and writing conventions (as in rules like *don't end a sentence with a preposition*, which are oftentimes acceptable in speech) (Finegan, 2004).

However, what happens when writing and speech are combined, as with transcripts recording actual spoken events? Dennis Preston (1982) argues that “oral text will always be poorly represented by the written one” (p. 304). This is partly because written speech is unable to convey linguistic features like tone, pitch, loudness, facial expressions and body language, etc. The use of misspellings in the writing of spoken accounts is a common practice for linguists, folklorists, and others who create written records of spoken language in an attempt to combat the problem of representing differing accents or dialects. In his study (1985), Preston claims that all respellings serve “mainly to denigrate the speaker so represented by making him or her appear boorish, uneducated, rustic, gangsterish, and so on” (p. 328). He identifies three important types of respellings that are often present in transcriptions of spoken accounts: *allegro speech*, *dialect respellings*, and *eye-dialect*. **Allegro speech** refers to such spellings as *gonna*, *jeet* (for “did you eat”), and *hafta*, all of which are an attempt to record the casual nature of speech. **Dialect respellings** are attempts to document regional or social aspects of the pronunciation of speech, and include respellings like *dis* (for “this”), *crick* (for “creek”), and *wint* (for went”). **Eye-dialect**

forms are respellings that reflect no differences in their standard spellings, but are used mainly to stigmatize the speaker. These forms include words like *sez* and *wuz*. Jaffe and Walton (2000) also weigh in on this topic, arguing that written accounts are associated with social and cultural values of identity and power, and as such, “no transcriptions of speech-even ‘close phonetic’ ones- are ever neutral or transparent depictions of what someone said or how they sounded” and as such, non-standard spellings in an orthography only serve to represent low social or linguistic status in the speaker (p 562).

The negative effect of non-standard speech has been studied in medical, legal, and occupational contexts (Kalin, 1982). For legal settings, especially, speech plays a particularly important role in that it is used for interactions between lawyers, clients, judges, juries, and witnesses, and the consequences of such interactions can be of the utmost significance. Successful communication is difficult in legal settings in part due to professional language used in legal interactions. Even an experienced legal professional may at times have difficulty understanding some of the complicated language used in legal documents or court proceedings. Charrow and Charrow (1979) investigated the language used in instructions to juries and determined that a number of problematic linguistic constructions contributed to the incomprehensibility of many instructions. Once jurors are able to overcome the “legal language barrier” (of sorts), jurors are then charged with making decisions on the outcome of a case. By law, these decisions should be made solely from the admissible evidence presented during the trial. Such admissible factors are called *evidential factors* (Mazzella & Feingold, 1994). However, studies have also shown that a variety of different aspects, including linguistic traits may influence a jury’s impression of a witness, which in turn may affect the outcome of the

jury's decision. Such factors that are considered irrelevant to the legal case are called *extralegal factors* (Mazzella & Feingold, 1994). Not surprisingly, accent or native language features were shown to have an effect on judgments made about witnesses (Seggie, 1983; Dixon, Mahoney, & Cocks, 2002). Additionally, Klaus Scherer (1979) found that intonation and tone of voice can have an effect on subject's impressions of a witness, and Anne Graffam Walker (1985) concluded that hesitancy of a witness may also affect impressions of him or her. These are very significant findings; the legal system, and especially trial settings, is a situation in which we could hope judgments would be completely bias-free.

Our research study is interested in bringing all of these areas together by examining how impressions of witnesses may be affected by traits external to language, like gender and social class. However we are particularly interested in whether different writing conventions for transcribed speech can effect perceptions of the speaker. We believe that participants will judge the speaker differently both between different genders and social class and on the way the written transcript is presented.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research project was based on an interest in how witnesses are evaluated by jurors based on their testimony in combination with how non-standard written speech might affect impressions made about witnesses. We were also interested in how these impressions might differ between men and women speakers and between members of the upper class and the lower class. To work towards these questions, accounts were created for four different witnesses describing the scene of a car accident, and each account had four versions, with each version

possessing different linguistic variables that occur in spoken speech. Two of the accounts were spoken by women and two were by men; one man was presented as being upper class (a wildlife biologist) and one as lower (a motorcycle-riding union member), as was one woman upper class (a Pilates-practicing, Starbucks'-drinking wife of an oncologist) and one lower (an ex-waitress working at a convenience store). The study was presented to the subjects as that the versions were transcripts from accounts recorded by police officers at the scene of the crime. Specifically, the subjects were asked to treat them as exact representations of spoken accounts. The versions of each witness account were:

1. **Standard Written Speech Version:** This version was written following standard writing conventions. This includes splitting contractions (*it is* instead of *it's*), the use of more formal words (like *collide* instead of *crash*), and using phrases like *my husband and I* (as opposed to phrases like *me and my husband*, which might occur more naturally in some spoken speech.)
2. **Spoken Speech (Allegro) Version:** This version was written to include any characteristics that often occur in spoken speech, but weren't necessarily linked to any social or dialectal group, and generally are not acceptable in written works. This includes allegro forms like *hafta* and *kinda*, as well as dropping the *-g* on *-ing* words (making *runnin'* out of *running*, for example).
3. **Socially Marked/Dialect Version:** This version was written to include features that might be common in non-standard speech, particularly those associated with marked dialects or social conventions. This includes phrases like "this car *wasn't* going

*nowhere,*” *anyways,* or “the SUV *done* a lot of damage,” or any other features that may occur in marked non-standard speech.

4. **Typo Version:** This version was written to include general typo mistakes in the witness accounts, with at least four but no more than six typos per account. This included “understandable” typos (like *oncolagist* for *oncologist* or *aproached* for *approached*), random typos (like *somrone* or *becauwe*), homophone typos (like *too* for *to* or *haul* for *hall*), and capitalization and apostrophe typos.

**(See Appendix A for the full text of each version.)**

The study was conducted through an online survey. Participants in the study were recruited using Facebook as an online social networking site. The investigators invited “friends” on Facebook to take the survey, and those friends that were interested were given a link to said online survey.

The survey was set up so that, although there were four versions of each witness account, each survey-taker only read and answered questions for one version for each witness account. In other words, a survey that a participant might take would have the standard version of witness account 1, the allegro version of witness account 2, the dialect version of witness account 3, and the typo version of witness account 4; they never had more than one of the same version or witness. After they read an account, the subjects were then asked to rate the speaker on a five-point scale on traits from a modified Speech Evaluation Instrument, as outlined by Zahn and Hooper (1985). These traits are: trustworthy or untrustworthy, organized or disorganized, intelligent or unintelligent, friendly or unfriendly, and likeable or unlikeable. They were additionally asked to rate, again on a five-point scale, how believable the entire witness account



itself was. They were then given the opportunity to list or describe any factors in the account that might have affected their ratings.

# RESULTS

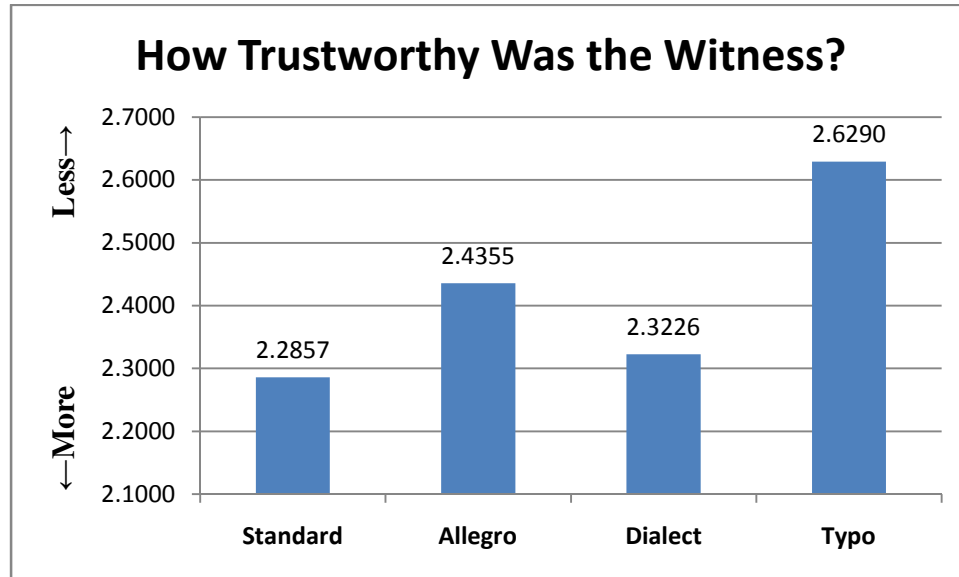
We had 63 people take the online survey, almost all of whom were recruited using Facebook. The following describes the breakdown of the demographic information of the respondents:

Gender		Age		Race		Schooling	
Male	42	18-21	24	Asian	2	High School Degree	4
Female	21	22-25	28	Black or African-American	2	Some College	30
		25-30	2	Hispanic or Latino	2	Associate Degree	1
		41-45	1	White or Caucasian	55	Bachelor's Degree	22
		46-50	2	Other	1	Master's Degree	4
		51-55	2	Prefer not to answer	1	Professional Degree	1
		56-60	2			Prefer not to answer	1
		61-65	2				

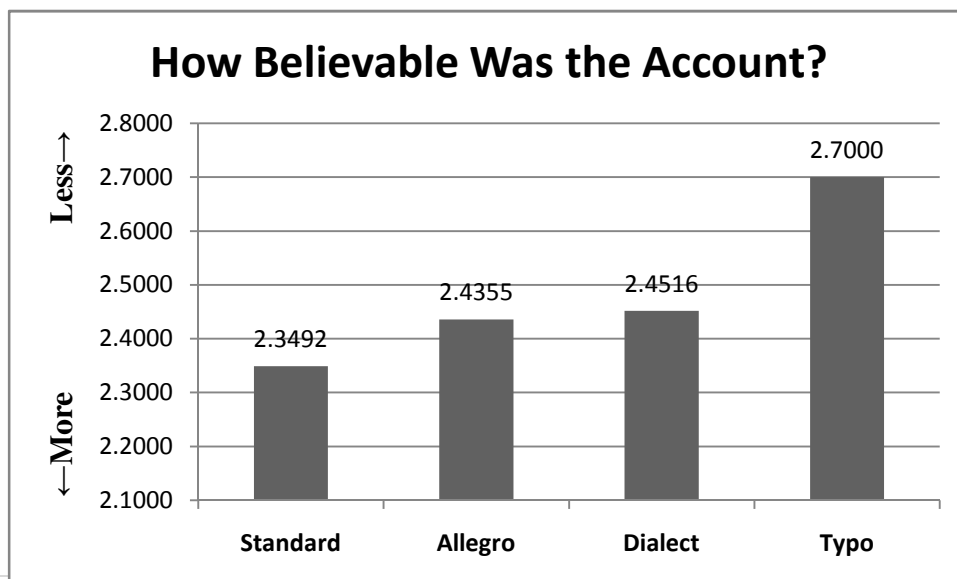
For each account they read, participants were asked to judge the speaker on a five point scale for the following traits: trustworthy/untrustworthy, organized/unorganized, intelligent/unintelligent, friendly/unfriendly, and likeable/unlikeable. They were also asked to judge the account itself on whether it was believable or unbelievable. For each of these traits, the positive trait (e.g. trustworthy) was placed at the 1 ranking and the negative (e.g. untrustworthy) was placed at the 5. It should be noted then, that because of this, the lower the number chosen for a trait, the most positively the respondent viewed the speaker. **(See figure below for how the five-point scale was set up).**

Please rate the witness in terms of the following characteristics:							
	1	2	3	4	5		Prefer not to answer
Trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Untrustworthy	<input type="radio"/>
Organized	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Disorganized	<input type="radio"/>
Intelligent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unintelligent	<input type="radio"/>
Friendly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unfriendly	<input type="radio"/>
Likeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unlikeable	<input type="radio"/>
How believable is this witness's account?							
	1	2	3	4	5		Prefer not to answer
Believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unbelievable	<input type="radio"/>

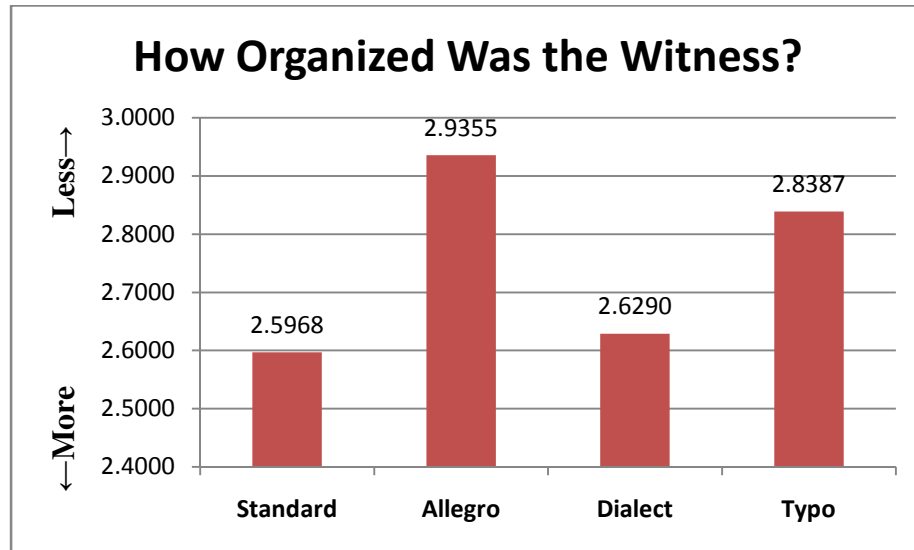
**Trustworthiness.** The accounts written with standard writing conventions were found to be the most trustworthy, followed by dialect, allegro, and typo versions.



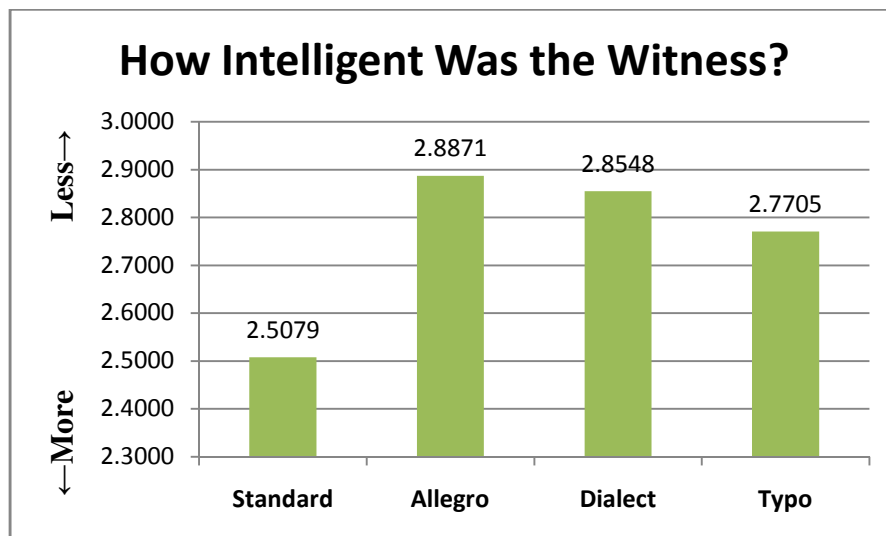
**Believability.** The believability of the accounts followed a similar pattern, with the standard version being the most believable and the typo version being the least believable; however, the dialect version was second most believable while the allegro was third (although the difference between these two was very slight).



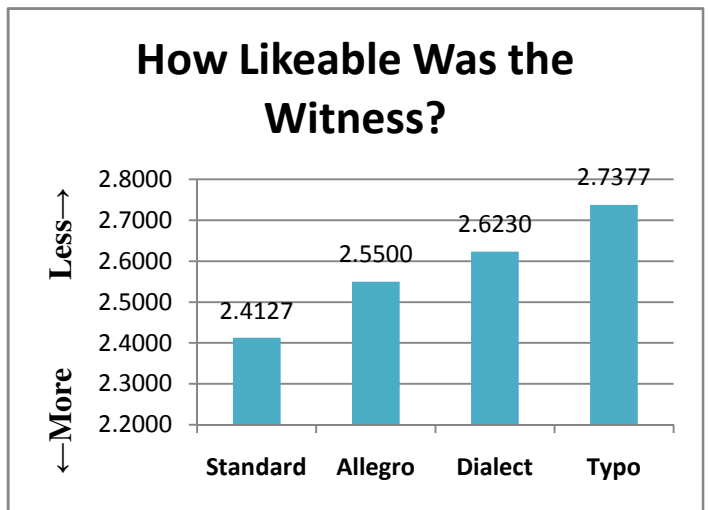
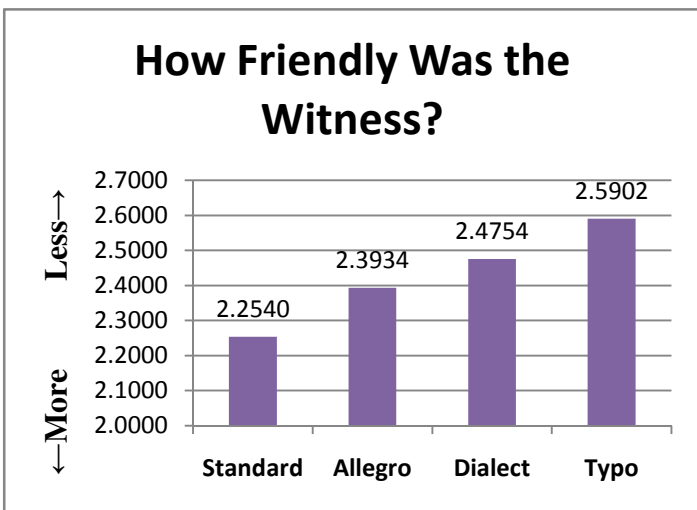
**Organization.** In terms of how organized the witness was perceived to be, the account written in the standard version was believed to be the most organized, followed by the dialect version, the typo version, and the allegro version.



**Intelligence.** We found that accounts written in the standard version were rated to be the most intelligent, followed by the typo, dialect, and finally allegro versions. It should be noted that this is the only instance where the dialect version was rated less positively than the typo version (or, the only one where the dialect version wasn't ranked as the second most positive).



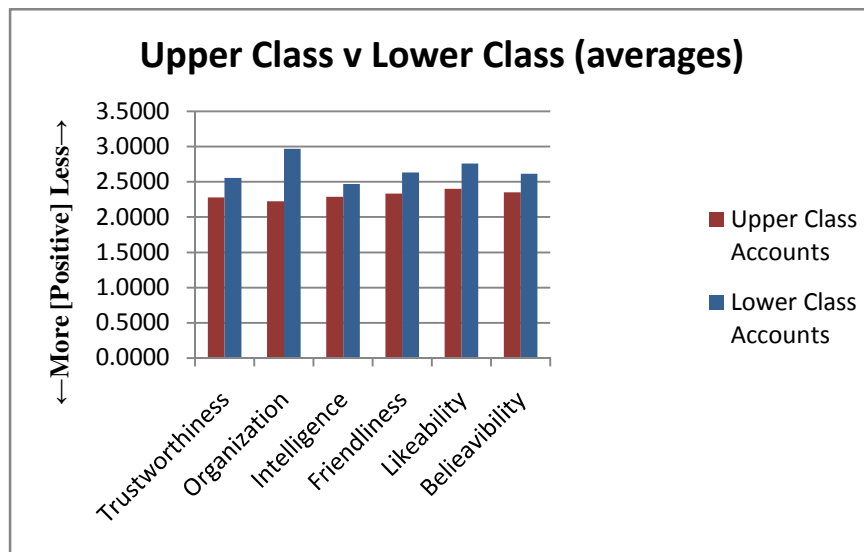
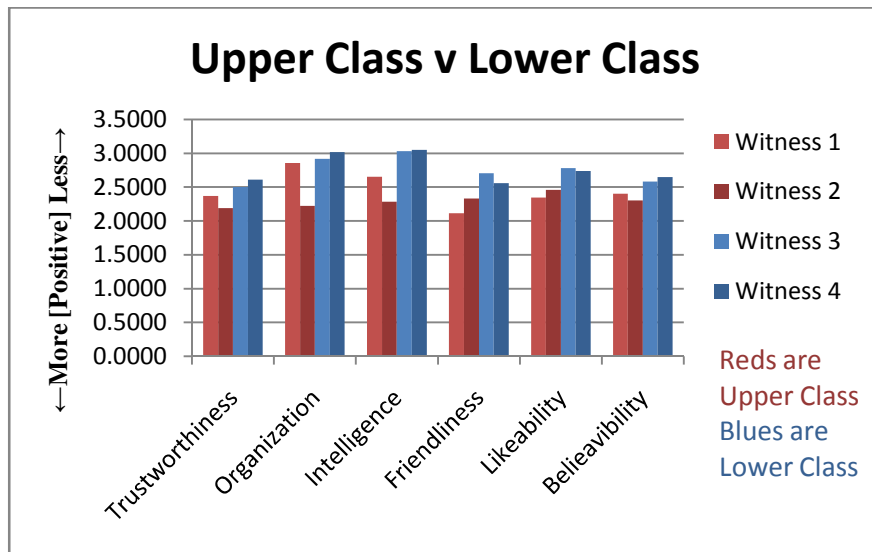
**Friendliness and Likeability.** Although respondents found all the speakers to be more friendly than likeable overall, both of these categories showed the same pattern of results: the standard version was the most friendly/likeable, followed by the allegro, dialect, and then typo version. Notice though that overall speakers were ranked as much more friendly than likeable. Comparing standard versions: the witness was ranked at 2.2540 for friendliness but at 2.4127 for likeability.



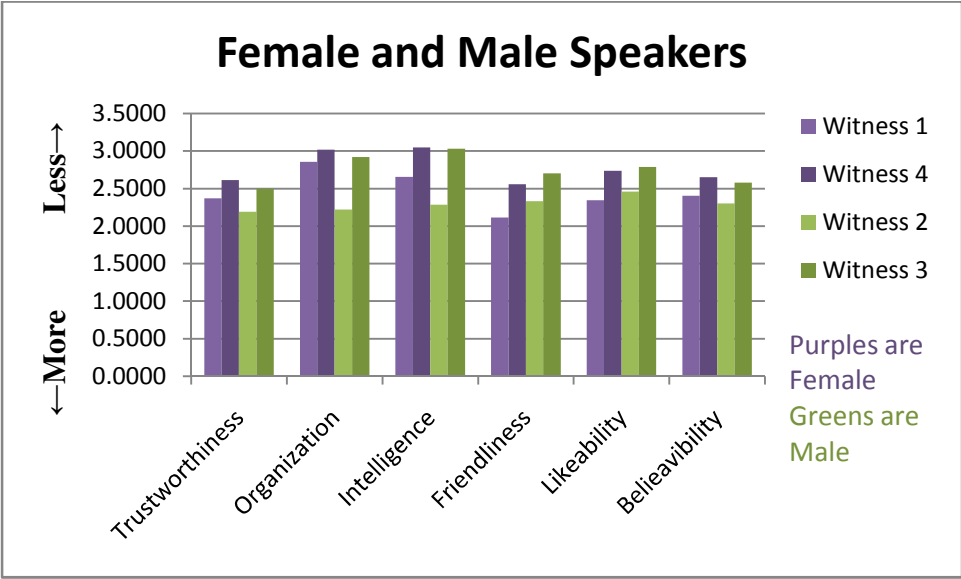
**Overall Trends.** For all of the questions asked, the standard version was *always* judged the most positively. Additionally, in all cases it was rated much more positive than the least positive version. For four of the six personality characteristics, the least positive account was the typo version, and in the other two cases the least positive account was the allegro version.

**Impressions of upper class speakers compared to lower class.** Interestingly,

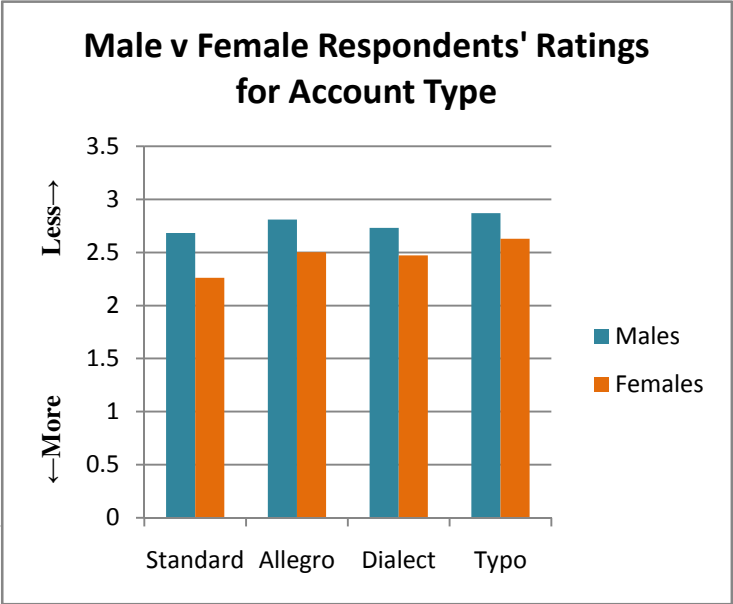
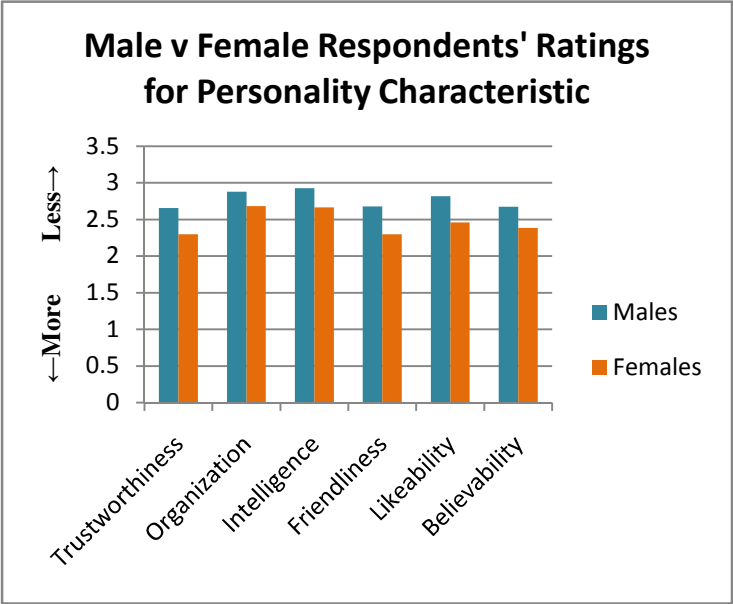
respondents rated speakers that were members of the upper class differently than speakers that were members of the lower class.. Although the class of each of the speakers was implied and not explicitly stated, the speakers who were members of the lower class were rated significantly less positively for all characteristics than members of the upper class. The following charts show the values for each question for all witnesses in the first chart and the averages of these values by class in the second.



**Impressions of male speakers compared to female speakers.** Unlike differing perceptions for members from different classes, there does not seem to be a trend when comparing the male speakers to the female speakers. In some cases, the female speakers were ranked more positively, and in some the males were.



**Male respondents compared to female respondents.** When looking at ratings given for both personality characteristics (trustworthiness, etc) and for each version type (standard, etc), female participants consistently gave much more positive ratings in all cases.



## DISCUSSION

**Standard Versions.** This study found that participants rated accounts written with standard writing conventions much more positively than accounts possessing non-standard features. Although the participants were instructed to treat the accounts as exact versions of spoken testimonies, they still rated the version written with standard conventions the most positively, although when read aloud, this version tends to sound somewhat stiff and formal (as seen in the phrase “he is an oncologist”). This tends to suggest that, although standard conventions sound stiff when spoken aloud, people prefer this standardization when reading a written work, regardless if that work represents speech or not. The open-ended questions after each account support this. Respondents replied with statements like “Her response was very detailed and eloquently spoken” or “The language he used was mature” or “Witness told her tale in a controlled narrative, using good English!” All of these respondents seem to believe that “good” or well-written English is a positive trait.

**Typo Versions.** Participants also tended to rate the speakers of versions with typos less positively than other versions, although the typo versions do not get the most negative reviews for all categories. Following the guise of spoken-accounts-transcribed-by-someone-else, we might expect that respondents would forgive a few typing errors; however, this was not the case. Participants said: “Spelling and grammar were horrid,” “I’m not sure what to make of the misspellings,” and “There are a lot of misspellings in this account, which I realize is the fault of the transcriber, but it still makes me unhappy.” All of these statements suggest that participants prefer correctly-spelled English when presented with a written account, even when these



spellings should have no bearing on the speaker himself. The last statement recognizes this, but it is still affected her judgment negatively.

**Class Judgments.** This study found that judgments of a speaker can be based on socioeconomic class. Speakers from the lower class were ranked less positively than speakers from the upper class, showing that class of the speaker can make a difference on our opinions of him or her. Respondents made statements like “Based on the...job this person has, I would think they are less intelligent” and “The way she describes her job and the incident is phrased well and free of grammatical errors which makes me think she is intelligent but I feel like she is of ‘2’ intelligence because of the job she holds.” This last statement is particularly interesting because it shows that participants’ perceptions can be affected based solely on the occupation of the speaker; even though the version that this respondent is referring to was written in standard English (which has been shown to be ranked more positively), the respondent purposefully ranks the speaker more negatively *based solely on the job she has* in the account. One respondent even replied, “I did not like the way she sounded because she reminds me of all the idiot rednecks in my animal science classes. I’m glad she has a boring job. She deserves nothing better.” Of course, he didn’t elaborate *why* he thought she sounded like “an idiot redneck,” but he still recognized her lower status and disliked her for it.

**Gender Judgments.** The lack of judgments based on gender is interesting especially since we found that judgments can be made based on socioeconomic class; although participants judged the lower class less positively than the upper class, they did not do the same for male speakers compared to female speakers. However, although there are often noticeably varied linguistic features present according to class, the same is not always true for differing genders. It

is probably from this that we didn't see differing perceptions of the speakers based on gender; although men and women do often have different speech styles, these are often not (if ever) indicative of the characteristics we asked about in this study.

**Differences between male and female respondents.** The differing responses between male and female participants are not surprising; women are often described as “nicer” or “more sensitive” than men, and so it is only expected that women would provide more positive responses for the speakers.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study are as follows:

1. respondents ranked speakers' accounts that were presented with standard writing conventions more positively than accounts that included non-standard features, even though these accounts are supposed to represent spoken speech;
2. respondents ranked speakers from a lower class less positively than speakers from a higher class;
3. gender did not have an effect on respondent's perceptions of the speaker

## FUTURE STUDIES

It would be very interesting to do a continuation of this study by carrying this idea over to spoken as opposed to written accounts. Although respondents preferred standard conventions for written accounts, would they prefer it if those accounts were spoken aloud?

## APPENDIX A

*Accounts are organized by version type. Linguistic features of interest in each account are marked in color.*

### Standard Versions

#### Witness Report 1

My husband, Stephen, and I were meeting for coffee. There is a Starbucks down the street from the hospital where he practices – he is an oncologist. Anyway, I had just texted Stephen to let him know I was running late because my Pilates class ran over. Suddenly I heard a loud screech and looked up. There at the intersection of South and Oak, I saw a tiny green car that pulled into traffic to make a left turn onto South Street. That car was hit from the other direction – the far side from me – by a white Escalade. The Escalade would have to have been travelling pretty fast because it pushed the green car approximately 50 feet and did a good deal of damage. Right then my husband called, and I said, “Get here quickly! Someone might need a doctor,” but happily there were no serious injuries.

#### Witness Report 2

I am a wildlife biologist and had been taking research samples from the creek in Juniper Park. I was headed back to my lab on campus but I was going to stop for some iced tea on the way. I was proceeding westbound on Oak and noticed a white SUV following too closely. I tend to obey the speed limits, and sometimes I feel as if I am the only one who does. I found an empty parking space into which I pulled to allow the SUV to pass. Approximately 30 seconds later as I approached the intersection with South I saw that SUV collide with a green car that was attempting to turn in front of us. I got out of my car and ran to the scene, shouting “Call 911!” I was relieved to hear that nobody was seriously injured, but I feel awful since I might have prevented the accident if I had not let the SUV pass me.

#### Witness Report 3

Some friends and I were on our way to O’Rourke’s, the bar next to the old State theatre on Waters. So many of us construction guys hang out there we call it “the union hall.” Anyway, we were travelling eastbound on Oak; my co-worker Jim rides a Harley too and we were kind of pretend-racing. We pulled up behind this small vehicle that was not going anywhere even though the light was green. I could see that the driver had a cellphone on which she was texting. I shouted, “Come on!” The driver must have heard me since she took off. We decided not to follow too closely and it was good that we did not because approximately 3 blocks later we saw that car pull out to make a left turn. That is when it was hit by the Escalade coming from the other way.

#### Witness Report 4

I work at Bob’s, the convenience store at the corner of South and Oak. It is not the most glamorous job, I know, but I prefer it to being a waitress, which I was for approximately 4 years. It was slow that day, and I was on the phone with my boyfriend. I remember that he was cancelling our date for that night because he and some friends wanted to go fishing up at the creek in Juniper Park. I said, “I do not think so!” Just then I heard a loud crash. When I peered out the store’s window, I saw an enormous white SUV pushing a small green car across the intersection. It appeared as though the SUV had done a lot of damage so I hung up on my boyfriend and called 911.

## Spoken/Allegro/informal Versions

### Witness Report 1

My husband, Stephen, and I were meeting for coffee. **There's** a Starbucks down the street from the hospital where he practices – **he's** an oncologist. Anyway, I had just texted Stephen to let him know I was **runnin'** late 'cause my Pilates class ran over. Suddenly I heard a loud screech and looked up. There at the intersection of South and Oak, I **see** a tiny green car **pull** into traffic to make a left turn onto South Street. That car **got** hit from the other direction – the far side from me – by a white Escalade. The Escalade would **hafta** have been **goin'** pretty fast because it pushed the green car **about** 50 feet and did a good deal of damage. Right then my husband **calls** and I **go**, “Get here quickly! Someone might need a doctor,” but **luckily** there **weren't** any serious injuries.

### Witness Report 2

**I'm** a wildlife biologist and had been taking research samples from the creek in Juniper Park. I was headed back to my lab on campus but I was **gonna** stop for some **ice** tea on the way. I was **drivin' west** on Oak and noticed a white SUV following too closely. I tend to obey the speed limits, and sometimes I feel **like I'm** the only one **that** does. I found an empty parking space which I pulled **into** to **let** the SUV to pass. **About** 30 seconds later as I **came to** the intersection with South I saw that SUV **smash into** a green car that was **tryin'** to turn in front of us. I got out of my car and ran to the scene, **going** “Call 911! I was **glad** to hear that nobody was seriously injured, but I feel awful since I might have prevented the accident if I had not let the SUV pass me.

### Witness Report 3

Some friends and I were on our way to O'Rourke's, the bar next to the old State **theater** on Waters. So many of us construction guys hang out there we call it “the union hall.” Anyway, **we're goin' east** on Oak; my **buddy** Jim rides a Harley too and we **are kinda** pretend-racing. We **pull** up behind this small **car** that **wasn't going anywhere** even though the light was green. I could see that the driver had a cellphone which she was texting **on**. I **went**, “Come on!” The driver **musta** heard me since she took off. We decided not to follow too closely and it was good that we **didn't** because **about** 3 blocks later we saw that car pull out to make a left turn. **That's** when it **got** hit by the Escalade **comin'** from the other way.

### Witness Report 4

I work at Bob's, the convenience store at the corner of South and Oak. **It's** not the most glamorous job, I know, but I **like it better than** being a waitress, which I was for **about** 4 years. It was slow that day, and I was on the phone with my boyfriend. I remember that he was **cancellin'** our date for that night because he and some friends wanted to go **fishin'** up at the creek in Juniper Park. I **went**, “I **don't** think so!” Just then I **hear** a loud crash. When I **look** out the store's window, I **see** a **huge** white SUV pushing a small green car across the intersection. It **seemed like** the SUV had done a lot of damage so I hung up on my boyfriend and called 911.

## Socially marked/dialect Versions

### Witness Report 1

Me and my husband, Stephen, were meeting for coffee. There's a Starbucks down the street from the hospital where he practices – he's an oncologist. Anyways, I had just texted Stephen to let him know I was runnin' late 'cause my Pilates class ran over. Suddenly I heard a loud screech and looked up. There at the intersection of South and Oak, I seen a tiny green car pull into traffic to make a left turn onto South Street. That car got hit from the other direction – the far side from me – by a white Escalade. The Escalade would hafta have been goin' pretty fast because it pushed the green car like 50 feet and did a good deal of damage. Right then my husband calls and I'm like, "Get here quick! Someone might need a doctor," but luckily there weren't no serious injuries.

### Witness Report 2

I'm a wildlife biologist and had been taking research samples from the crick in Juniper Park. I was headed back to my lab on campus but I was gonna stop for some ice tea on the way. I was drivin' west on Oak and noticed a white SUV following too close. I tend to obey the speed limits, and sometimes I feel like I'm the only one that does. I found an empty parking space which I pulled into to let the SUV to pass. Like 30 seconds later as I came to the intersection with South I saw that SUV smash into a green car that was tryin' to turn in front of us. I got out of my car, run to the scene, and was like "Call 911! I was glad to hear that nobody was seriously injured, but I feel awful since I might have prevented the accident if I had not let the SUV pass me.

### Witness Report 3

Me and some friends were on our way to O'Rourke's, the bar next to the old State theater on Waters. So many of us construction guys hang out there we call it "the union hall." Anyways, we're goin' east on Oak; my buddy Jim rides a Harley too and we are kinda pretend-racing. We pull up behind this small car that wasn't going nowhere even though the light was green. I could see that the driver had a cellphone which she was texting on. I was like, "Come on!" The driver musta heard me since she took off. We decided not to follow too close and it was good that we didn't because like 3 blocks later we seen that car pull out to make a left turn. That's when it got hit by the Escalade comin' from the other way.

### Witness Report 4

I work at Bob's, the convenience store at the corner of South and Oak. It's not the most glamorous job, I know, but I like it better than being a waitress, which I was for like 4 years. Things was slow that day, and I was on the phone with my boyfriend. I remember that he was cancellin' our date for that night because he and some friends wanted to go fishin' up at the crick in Juniper Park. I was like, "I don't think so!" Just then I hear a loud crash. When I look out the store's window, I see a huge white SUV pushing a small green car across the intersection. It seemed like the SUV done a lot of damage so I hung up on my boyfriend and called 911.

## Typo Versions

2 “understandables,” 1 random, 1 homophone (1 apostrophe, 1 capitalization)

### Witness Report 1

My husband, Stephen, and I were meeting for coffee. There is a Starbucks down the street from the hospital where he practices – he is an **oncologist**. Anyway, I had just texted Stephen to let him know I was running late because my Pilates class ran over. Suddenly I heard a loud screech and looked up. There at the intersection of South and Oak, **i** saw a tiny green car that pulled into traffic **too** make a left turn onto South Street. That car was hit from the other direction – the far side from me – by a white Escalade. The Escalade would have to have been travelling pretty fast because it pushed the green car approximately 50 feet and did a good deal of **dammage**. Right then my husband called and I said, “Get here quickly! **Somrone** might need a doctor,” but happily there were no serious **injury’s**.

### Witness Report 2

I am a wildlife **biologist** and had been taking research samples from the creek in Juniper Park. I was headed back to my lab on campus but I was going to stop for some iced tea on the way. I was proceeding westbound on Oak and noticed a white SUV following **to** closely. I tend to obey the speed limits, and sometimes I feel as if I am the only one who does. I found an empty parking space into which I pulled to allow the SUV to pass. Approximately 30 seconds later as I **approched** the intersection with South I saw that SUV collide with a green car that was attempting to turn in front of us. I got out of my car and ran to the scene, shouting “Call 911!” I was relieved to hear that nobody was **serioudly** injured, but I feel awful since I might have prevented the accident if I had not let the SUV pass me.

### Witness Report 3

Some friends and I were on our way to O’Rourke’s, the bar next to the old State theatre on Waters. So many of us construction guys hang out there we call it “the union **haul**.” Anyway, we were travelling eastbound on Oak; my co-worker Jim rides a Harley too and we were kind of pretend-racing. We **puled** up behind this small vehicle that was not going anywhere even though the light was green. **i** could see that the driver had a cellphone on which she was texting. I shouted, “Come on!” The driver must have heard me since she took off. We decided not to follow too **closly** and it was good that we did not **becauwe** approximately 3 **block’s** later we saw that car pull out to make a left turn. That is when it was hit by the Escalade coming from the other way.

### Witness Report 4

I work at Bob’s, the **convienence** store at the corner of South and Oak. It is not the most glamorous job, I know, but I prefer it to being a waitress, which I was for approximately 4 years. It was slow that day, and I was on the phone with my boyfriend. I remember that he was cancelling our date **four** that night because he and some friends wanted to go fishing up at the creek in Juniper Park. I said, “I do not think so!” Just then I heard a loud crash. When I peered out the store’s **winsow**, I saw an enormous white SUV pushing a small green car across the intersection. It appeared as though the SUV had done a lot of **dammage** so I hung up on my boyfriend and called 911.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Biber, D. (1988). *Variation across speech and writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cargile, A. C. (1997). Attitudes toward Chinese-accent speech: An investigation in two contexts. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 16*(4), 434-443.
- Charrow, V. R., & Charrow, R. P. (1979). Characteristics of the language of jury instructions. In J. E. Alatis, & G. R. Tucker (Eds.), *Language in public life* (pp. 163-185). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Coates, L. (1997). Casual attributions in sexual assault trial judgements. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 16*(3), 278-296.
- Dixon, J. A., Mahoney, B., & Cocks, R. (2002). Accents of guilt? Effects of regional accent, race, and crime type on attributions of guilt. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 21*(2), 162-168.
- Dixon, J. A., Tredoux, C. G., Durrheim, K., & Foster, D. H. (1994). The role of speech accommodation and crime type in attribution of guilt. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 134*(4), 465-473.
- Edwards, J. R. (1979). *Language and disadvantage*. New York: Elsevier.
- Giles, H., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1976). Methodological issues in dialect perception: Some social psychological perspectives. *Anthropological Linguistics, 18*(7), 294-304.
- Giles, H., & Powesland, P. F. (1975). *Speech style and social evaluation*. New York: Academic Press.

- Giles, H., Hewstone, M., Ryan, E., & Johnson, P. (1987). Research on language attitudes. In H. Ammon, N. Dittmar, & K. Matthew (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: An international handbook of the science of language and society* (pp. 585-597). New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Jaffe, A., & Walton, S. (2000). The voices people read: Prthography and the representation of non-standard speech. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 4(4), 561-587.
- Kalin, R. (1982). The social significance of speech in medical, legal, and occupational settings. In E. B. Ryan, & H. Giles (Eds.), *Attitudes towards language variation: Social and applied contexts* (pp. 148-163). London: Edward Arnold Ltd.
- Kalin, R., & Rayko, D. S. (1978). Discromination in evaluative judgments against foreign-accented job candidates. *Psychological Reports*, 43, 1203-1209.
- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent*. New York: Routledge.
- Mazzella, R., & Feingold, A. (1994). The effects of physical attractiveness, race, socioeconomic status and gender of defendants and victims on judgments of mock jurors: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24(15), 1315-1344.
- Milroy, J., & Milroy, L. (1985). *Authority in language: Investigating standard English* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Preson, D. R. (1985). The Li'l Abner Syndrome: Written representations of speech. *American Speech*, 60(4), 328-336.
- Preston, D. R. (1982). 'Ritin' fowklower daun 'rong: Folklorists' failures in phonology. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 95(377), 304-326.



- Preston, D. R. (2002). Language with an attitude. In J. Chambers, P. Trudgill, & N. Schilling-Estes (Eds.), *The handbook of language variation and change* (pp. 40-66). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Preston, D. R., & Albanyan, A. (1998). What is standard American English. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: International Review of English Studies*, 33, 29-47.
- Scherer, K. R. (1979). Voice and speech correlates of perceived social influence in stimulated juries. In H. Giles, & R. N. St Clair (Eds.), *Language and social psychology* (pp. 88-120). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Seggie, I. (1983). Attribution of guilt as a function of ethnic accent and type of crime. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 4(2), 197-206.
- Walker, A. G. (1985). The two faces of silence: The effect of witness hesitancy on lawyers' impressions. In D. Tannen, & M. Saville-Troike (Eds.), *Perspectives on silence* (pp. 55-89). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Zahn, C. J., & Hopper, R. (1985). Measuring language attitudes: The Speech Evaluation Instrument. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 4(2), 113-123.