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AUTHOR Ryan, Ellen Bouchard; Carranza, Miguel A.
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ABSTRACT

Among Mexican-Americans today, not only native speakers of Spanish but also many native speakers of English speak the language with a notable influence from Spanish phonology. This paper reviews a series of studies concerning reactions of Anglos and Mexican-Americans toward accented English. The unifying goal of these investigations has been the identification of the major aspects of multidimensional attitudes toward standard and ethnic varieties of English. (Author)

ATTITUDES TOWARD ACCENTED ENGLISH[1]

Ellen Bouchard Ryan
Department of Psychology
University of Notre Dame

and

Miguel A. Carranza
Department of Sociology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Various ethnic groups have suffered from generalizations applied to them by the dominant society (e.g., 'Blacks have rhythm;' 'Jews are rich;' 'Italians belong to the Mafia;' etc.). A notable example is the stereotype of the speech spoken by the Mexican American, a la "Frito Bandito", a fictional character who speaks in a heavily accented dialect while promoting a food product. One need only to look at the mass media to see how this stereotype has been perpetuated (Martinez, 1969). Although Mexican American English has undoubtedly originated historically from Spanish interference, it has mistakenly been taken for granted that all Mexican Americans who speak with an accent do so because of Spanish interference. Among Mexican Americans today, not only native speakers of Spanish but also many native speakers of English speak the language with a notable influence from Spanish phonology.

Due to the number of speakers (even monolingual speakers), Ortego (1969) and Metcalf (1974) have argued for recognition of Mexican American English as a dialect. As Arthur, Farrar, and Bradford (1974) have stated, the variety of English spoken by Mexican Americans raised in barrio areas may not represent an unsuccessful attempt of native Spanish speakers to produce English but rather the successful attempt of native speakers to produce the dialect of English characteristic of their speech community. After investigating Mexican American language

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loyalty in Austin, Thompson (1974) concluded that a language shift was in progress among Mexican Americans in urban centers and that, consequently, the study of Mexican American English as well as Mexican American Spanish should be emphasized. As the shift progresses, he believes that the language problems of urban children will not be those of Spanish interfering with English, but of a nonstandard dialect of English conflicting with standard English. Lists of specific phonological features of Mexican American English can be found in Ornstein (1971) and Metcalf (1974).

Thirty years ago, Barker (1947) had observed that Mexican American bilinguals in Tucson manifested a feeling of inferiority with respect to their Mexican accent in speaking English. Both Barker and Krear (1971) report the common occurrence of parents with limited English ability speaking only English with their children in order that they grow up without an accent which would reduce their social and economic opportunities. According to Tovar (1973), achievement-conscious Mexican Americans have traditionally concentrated their efforts on erasing all traces of Spanish from their English, believing it necessary to speak American (i.e., English without the wrong 'accent'). In her opinion, the current influence of the Chicano movement foreshadows an improved self-image, which in turn should lead to more positive attitudes toward Chicano ways of speaking English. The reasons of camaraderie, group identification, and brotherhood mentioned by Ramirez (1974) for appreciating distinctly American styles of Spanish ought to apply as well to distinctly Mexican American styles of English.

Noting the frequent association of inferior status with accented speech as well as the apparent increase in acceptance of ethnic speech as a badge of ingroup loyalty, Ryan and her associates have been studying the nature of accented English and attitudes toward it.

In a previous investigation, Carranza and Ryan (1975) had elaborated the traditional evaluative reaction task (cf., Lambert, 1967) to allow multidimensional investigation of attitudes toward Spanish and English. The results for 64 bilingual

Anglo American and Mexican American adolescents indicated for both groups a definite preference for English in a school context and a slight preference for Spanish in the home context. In the first accentedness study, Ryan and Carranza (1975) again sought evidence for multidimensional language attitudes. Sixty-three Mexican American, Black, and Anglo female high school students in Chicago were asked to rate the personalities of male speakers of standard English and Mexican American accented English in two contexts (home and school) with two sets of rating scales (status-stressing and solidarity-stressing). Although the standard English speakers received more positive ratings in every case, the differences were significantly greater in the school context than in the home context and on status-stressing scales than on solidarity-stressing scales. Anglo students rated accented speakers significantly lower on status scales than did either Black or Mexican American students. Thus, this study indicates that student raters take into account the appropriateness of the speech style for the situation as well as differentiating between types of rating scales in their evaluations of speakers from different ethnic groups.

Given that differential stereotypes are associated with standard English and with heavily accented English, Ryan and her associates wanted to know whether reactions to varying degrees of accentedness would be categorical or gradually shifting. In a Texas dissertation concerning Black English, Baird (1969) had found that, although the number of nonstandard features included in his speech samples increased gradually, a minimum amount of nonstandardness was sufficient to elicit the complete stereotype of a black person. Apparently, the language merely served to identify the speaker's ethnic membership.

Before attempting to assess the change in attitude associated with varying degrees of accentedness, it was necessary to investigate the ability of non-linguists to detect variations in accentedness. Brennan, Ryan, and Dawson (1975) established that naive (non-linguistically trained) college students could reliably

rate the amount of accentedness in the English speech of Spanish-English bilinguals and, furthermore, that their ratings correlated significantly with the number of nonstandard pronunciation features. In a second study with the same speech samples, Ryan, Carranza, and Moffie (in press) confirmed the reliability of accentedness ratings.

The results of the Ryan et al. (in press) study also indicated that college students can make rather fine discriminations among varying degrees of accentedness in rating a speaker's personal attributes and speech characteristics. More specifically, gradual increases in perceived accentedness were associated with increasingly negative reactions to the speaker for this group of Anglo students.

Expecting greater variability in reactions to accented English among Mexican Americans, Ryan, Carranza, and Moffie (1975) asked Mexican American students from a bilingual high school in a midwestern city to rate nine Mexican American speakers (chosen to represent a range of accentedness) reading a 50-word passage. The ratings of the 38 students born in Mexico differed substantially from those of the 19 native-born students. Whereas the foreign students showed a high level of agreement on accentedness ratings, the native-born students did not. The foreign-born raters tended to view speakers more favorably as their accentedness increased. Although the attitudes scores of the native-born students are difficult to interpret because of lack of agreement concerning degree of accentedness, the trend was clearly in the opposite direction with more favorable reactions to the least accented speakers. The upgrading of accented English by the foreign-born students, while in direct contrast to most studies concerning nonstandard language varieties, is supported by Dworkin (1965) where foreign-born Mexican Americans were found to possess a positive self-image in contrast to the negative self-image held by the native-born.

In a current study, Ryan and Sebastian (in progress) are manipulating the social class associated with speakers of accented and standard English in an

attempt to minimize the downgrading of accented speakers. It is hypothesized that listeners assume speakers of standard English to be middle-class and accented speakers to be lower-class. If an accented speaker is presented as middle-class, then his accent may not lead to an unfavorable impression. Indeed, accented speech may enhance one's image in some cases (e.g., professor of Spanish literature or visiting South American dignitary).

In the last study to be described (Carranza, 1976), the multidimensional nature of language preferences and attitudes toward accentedness received continued attention. Note that some differences had already been found based on context (school vs. home) and on rating scale (status vs. solidarity). Three subgroups of Mexican American parents (native-born, foreign-born with more than 15 years U.S. residence, and more recently arrived foreign-born individuals) were interviewed concerning their views of English, Spanish, and accentedness.

The multidimensional language preference scale used items reflecting four dimensions: affective, communicative, integrative, and instrumental. Results for Spanish vs. English indicated a clear distinction among two dimensions: affective-communicative, and integrative-instrumental. Only the affective and communicative scores were related to language dominance and family language. Two significant language preference differences among the three subgroups were observed: 1) foreign-born individuals showed a strong communicative preference for Spanish while native-born individuals were more neutral; 2) despite their consistent communicative preference for Spanish, the foreign-born persons with long-term U.S. residence saw almost no instrumental value for Spanish while recently arrived persons, although strongly preferring English for instrumental reasons, were somewhat less absolute in their view.

The attitude toward accentedness measure utilized eight items reflecting four dimensions: general evaluative, integrative, instrumental, and comfort. Although the results were not as pronounced as the language preference dimensions, they do

seem to indicate a differentiation among dimensions. Factor analysis revealed that two factors, general evaluative-instrumental and integrative, best represented the accentedness items. The items which represented the comfort dimension did not seem to load highly on either of the two factors. Also, there was a tendency for the parents to have a more favorable attitude toward accentedness on the integrative dimension than on the general evaluative and instrumental dimensions.

A comparison of the dimensions of language preference and accentedness, as well as their overall measures revealed that the two measures did not coincide. This lends support to the idea that both may represent distinct and identifiable aspects of the language attitude framework. Based on these results, it would seem that the language preference measure, which represented a choice 'between' languages (English-Spanish), occupies a different position in a language attitude structure than the attitude toward accentedness measure, which represented a choice of varieties 'within' a language (standard English-Mexican American accented English).

This study seems to highlight the value of further explorations of the critical facets of language preference and accentedness. Just as there are different motivations for preferring one language over another, so also are there different motivations for having a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward accentedness.

The relevance of Mexican American accented speech has largely been ignored by educators and researchers alike. This paper has attempted to illuminate various issues pertaining to Mexican American accented speech. The importance of discovering more about this particular language variety can be seen by the fact that many Mexican American college students are faced with the choice of continuing to speak their accented English, to shift to the standard variety, or to use both, each in its appropriate context. The decision they make can have a tremendous effect on their academic success and future careers. Further research would contribute to a better understanding of the implications of these alternatives.

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