

ACCENT BIAS IS REAL: LET'S STOP JUDGING INTELLIGENCE BY PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract. This article explores the pervasive issue of accent bias—the unfair judgment of intelligence and competence based on how someone pronounces words. Drawing on interdisciplinary research from sociolinguistics, psychology, and education, it examines how accent-based discrimination affects perceptions, job opportunities, and social integration. Studies reveal that both native and non-native English speakers face prejudice due to their accents, often being viewed as less credible or capable. The article highlights the psychological toll of such bias and urges institutions, media, and individuals to embrace linguistic diversity. It concludes that accent is not a measure of intelligence but a reflection of identity, and calls for a more inclusive and equitable approach to communication.

Key Words: Accent bias, linguistic discrimination, sociolinguistics, pronunciation, intelligence perception, linguistic diversity, non-native speakers, language prejudice, inclusive communication.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola talaffuz asosida inson aql-zakovati va salohiyatiga nisbatan nohaq hukm chiqarishga sabab bo'luvchi aksent (lahja)ga nisbatan noto'g'ri qarash muammosini o'rganadi. Sosiolingvistika, psixologiya va ta'lim sohalaridagi turli ilmiy tadqiqotlarga asoslanib, maqola aksentga asoslangan kamsitish qanday qilib odamlar haqidagi tasavvurlarga, ishga joylashish imkoniyatlariga va ijtimoiy integratsiyaga salbiy ta'sir ko'rsatishini yoritadi. Tadqiqotlar shuni ko'rsatadiki, ingliz tilini ona tili yoki chet tili sifatida so'zlovchilar o'z lahjalari tufayli ko'pincha kam salohiyatli yoki ishonchsiz deb baholanadilar. Maqolada bu turdagi kamsitishning psixologik oqibatlari ta'kidlanib, ta'lim muassasalari, ommaviy axborot vositalari va jamiyatdan til xilma-xilligini qabul qilishga chaqiriq qilinadi. Xulosa sifatida, aksent aql darajasi ko'rsatkichi emas, balki insonning madaniyati va shaxsiyati ifodasidir, degan g'oya ilgari suriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Aksentga nisbatan noto'g'ri qarash, til kamsitilishi, sosiolingvistika, talaffuz, aql-zakovati haqidagi tasavvur, til xilma-xilligi, chet ellik so'zlovchilar, til stereotiplari, inklyuziv muloqot

Introduction

In a world interconnected by migration, education, and the digital landscape, English has evolved into a global language spoken with a diverse array of accents. However, accent bias—prejudice or discrimination based on the way someone pronounces words—remains a persistent social issue. Too often, people

with regional or non-native English accents are perceived as less competent, less credible, or less intelligent, regardless of their actual abilities or qualifications. These biases can subtly or overtly affect access to education, employment, and even social integration. This article explores the deep-seated roots of accent bias, its real-world implications, and the urgent need to dismantle this unfair judgment system.

Methods

This article draws upon interdisciplinary academic literature from sociolinguistics, psychology, and education to examine the roots and consequences of accent bias. Peer-reviewed studies, psychological experiments, media analysis, and institutional reports were consulted. Sources were chosen based on their academic reliability, recency, and relevance to accent discrimination. Major findings were synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Reputable sources included journal articles from *Applied Linguistics*, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, as well as studies highlighted by *The Times* and Routledge publications.

Results

Numerous studies confirm that accent bias begins early and can influence perception throughout life. A study by the University of Essex (2025) showed that British children as young as five associate certain accents with positive or negative traits. In particular, 'standard' Southern British English was seen as more intelligent, while Northern or regional accents like Yorkshire were associated with being less capable or even unfriendly (*The Times*, 2025).

This issue is not confined to British English. In the United States, speakers with African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Southern accents, or foreign accents such as Indian or Chinese English often face similar bias. Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) found that non-native speakers were systematically rated as less intelligent and competent, even when their messages were logically identical to those spoken by native speakers. Furthermore, Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) reported that people tend to doubt the credibility of information delivered with a foreign accent, even if the speaker is highly knowledgeable.

The workplace is one of the environments where accent bias has the most damaging impact. A 2023 study by Huang et al. published in *Applied Linguistics* revealed that hiring managers consistently rated candidates with standard accents more favorably than equally qualified candidates with foreign accents. The study emphasized that this bias occurred even when employers believed themselves to be fair or inclusive. This unintentional discrimination influences job opportunities, income potential, and career progression.

Psychologically, the impact on individuals is severe. Lippi-Green (2012) coined the term 'linguistic insecurity' to describe the anxiety and self-consciousness people experience due to their accent. Non-native speakers often feel pressure to change their pronunciation to gain respect or avoid ridicule, which can affect their mental well-being, identity, and confidence in public speaking.

Discussion

The research reveals that accent bias is a deeply ingrained and unjust form of discrimination. It equates pronunciation with intelligence, which is both scientifically unfounded and socially harmful. Judging intelligence based on how someone speaks, rather than what they say, limits diversity, inclusion, and meritocracy.

Combating accent bias requires proactive efforts across society. First, “education” systems must include training that raises awareness of linguistic diversity. Teachers and students alike should learn that intelligence and competence are not tied to accent. Second, “workplaces” should implement anti-bias training and structured interviews to ensure hiring decisions are based on skills and merit rather than perceived fluency. Third, “media” should normalize diverse accents by featuring broadcasters, actors, and experts with various English pronunciations.

On an individual level, listeners must consciously challenge their assumptions. Instead of letting accent shape our judgment, we should focus on the speaker’s ideas, logic, and evidence. As long as the message is clear, variation in pronunciation should not matter. Appreciating linguistic diversity not only breaks stereotypes but also reflects the multicultural reality of our global society.

Ultimately, accent is not a measure of intelligence—it is a reflection of culture, geography, and identity. Reducing bias begins with valuing the speaker over the sound. A truly inclusive world welcomes every voice, not just the ones that sound familiar.

Conclusion

Accent bias is a form of invisible discrimination that undermines equality and misjudges intelligence based on pronunciation rather than substance. As English continues to evolve into a global language, the diversity of its speakers should be seen as a strength—not a weakness. Challenging our assumptions about accents is essential to creating more inclusive classrooms, fairer workplaces, and respectful social interactions. By recognizing that accent reflects identity, culture, and experience—not cognitive ability—we can move toward a world where everyone’s voice is valued equally. True communication lies in understanding ideas, not judging the sound of speech.

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