The effects of Accent, Age and Ethnicity on the perception of Eyewitness testimony

Intern: Henry Akaluka (u1020540)
Supervisors: Dr Anna Stone & Dr Lara Frumkin

INTRODUCTION
Several studies have been carried out on the influence of accent on several social situations e.g. employability (Carlson, K.H. & McHenry, M.A., 2006) attribution of guilt (Dixon, A.D., Mahoney, B. & Cocks, R. ,2002), Housing (Purnell, Iddari & Baugh ,1999), credibility of interviewee/witness (Lev-Ari, S. & Keysar, B., 2010), etc. Many of these studies seem to support the assumption that people who do not have the mainstream accent of any particular location are perceived less acceptable, thereby rated as less favourable than those who have. This is in line with the the accent prestige theory (Anderson et al., 2007), suggests that speakers whose accents are of the dominant group in a society (standard accent) are likely to be rated as more favourable than those with non-standard accents. This study is relevant in the criminal justice system.

PARTICIPANTS
Recruitment of participants was through friends, family and work colleagues of the researchers. The study was also advertised in social network media (Facebook and twitter). Though data collection is still ongoing, this presentation is based on preliminary results drawn from inputs from 61 participants. This sample is made up of 28 males and 33 females whose ages range from 18 to 51 years and with mean and standard deviation as 27.72 and 9.129 respectively.

DESIGN
A 2 (race of witness; black versus white) x 2 (age of witness; young adult versus older adult) x 2 (accent of witness; cockney versus RP) split plot design was used, with between-subjects on ethnicity and within-subjects on age and accent. The young adult eyewitnesses had an age range of 20 – 25 years. This age bracket was selected because the participants were old enough to legally testify in court cases and at the same time, not minors. While the older adults whose ages range from 50 – 55 were considered to be mature yet still active. The same four testimonies were read and recorded by all participants on age and accent. The young adult eyewitnesses had an age range of 20 – 25 years. This age bracket was selected because the participants were old enough to legally testify in court cases and at the same time, not minors. While the older adults whose ages range from 50 – 55 were considered to be mature yet still active. The same four testimonies were read and recorded by all witnesses with only name and age changed for each witness. Participants heard all four testimonies from one of the 8 combinations. After each testimony, participants were asked to complete questionnaires which were used in measuring their favourability of the eyewitness based only on the testimony they heard prior.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY?
- This research hypothesizes that speakers with RP would be rated higher in terms of the status dimension but not necessarily on the solidarity dimension.
- The second hypothesis is that older eyewitnesses will be rated more favourably than younger ones.
- Hypothesis three is that the white eyewitness will be more favourably rated than the black.
- Finally, there will be an interaction (H4) such that anyone with RP will be rated higher than eyewitnesses who do not speak RP, irrespective of their age and ethnicit.

DISCUSSION
Based on the data collected from the study, the witness perceived as most favourable is the younger black RP (mean= 6.667) while the least favourable is the older black cockney witness.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS
As data collection is still on-going, the results presented in this presentation are preliminary. The result for the main effect of Ethnicity is given as: \(F(1,61) = 0.19, p=0.66\). Also, the main effect of Accent is represented as: \(F(1,61) = 0.1367, p < 0.01\). The main effect of age is given as \(F(1,61) = 0.08, p=0.783\). These results show that there is a significant main effect of accent. There is also a 4-way interaction involving age, accent and ethnicity.

Since there is a significant interaction in the analysis, Further statistical/inferential analysis is required to pinpoint the exact factors that instigate this interaction.

REFERENCES
Munro, J.M. (2003), a primer on accent discrimination in the Canadian context. TESL CANADA JOURNAL/REVUE TESL DU CANADA. Vol. 20 (2), pgs. 38 – 51