

Accent stigmatization among French L2 speakers

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1. Introduction

Non-standard accents are subject to discrimination (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). In fact, an analysis of a Statistics Canada database found that accents and language are the most common reason for discrimination towards Francophones from outside of Quebec and Anglophones or Francophones from Quebec (Bourhis et al, 2007). It is apparent that accent discrimination can lead to self-stigmatization, stress as well as difficulties with psychological and social adjustment (Dragojevic et coll., 2013; Wated & Sanchez, 2006). Despite its potential repercussions, accent stigmatization, its consequences and protective factors remain little understood. The current study explores: 1) the contexts in which these experiences occur, and, 2) the stigmatized speakers' understanding of these experiences. This study uses semi-structured interviews to examine the discrimination faced by second language (L2) French speakers from Quebec and Ontario.

2. Methodology

Semi-structured interviews with questions on intergroup communication and accent stigmatization experiences were conducted among French L2 speakers from Ontario (n = 6), where Anglophones constitute a majority, and Quebec (n = 6), in which Anglophones constitute a minority. The study of both groups allowed for a comparison of stigmatization experiences based on Anglophones' relative status to Francophones. The majority of participants were recruited using University of Ottawa's integrated research participation system, an additional three participants were recruited through the researcher's acquaintances, and one participant was recruited by word of mouth from one of the previous participants. The majority of participants were students at the University of Ottawa enrolled in either an undergraduate or a graduate program.

3. Procedure

The interviews were transcribed using Express Scribe software. The transcriptions were coded and analyzed with QDA Miner using strategies established by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014). Codes were used to reduce data into analyzable units and allow the easy retrieval of information necessary to derive meaning from the transcriptions. Three types of codes were used and applied to specific segments of the transcriptions that were relevant to the research questions. Attribute codes were used to track data specific to the participant's overall experience of discrimination and stigmatization, specifically the frequency at which discrimination occurs, and the magnitude of the limitations or stigmatization they've faced in consequence. Descriptive codes were used to index solidarity, that is groups with whom discrimination does not occur. Dramaturgical codes were used to identify the actors or context in which discrimination occurs, the type of conflict experienced as discrimination, the tactics used when confronted with discrimination, and finally the attitudes, emotions and consequences that arose from the occurrence of discrimination. A journal was used to justify the use of certain codes in specific situations and encourage reflexivity to ensure the validity of the results. The number of participants reporting the described aspects of accent stigmatization were counted and are displayed in tables that allow for comparison.

4. Results

Question 1: Contexts in which accent discrimination occurs

	Actor/Setting	Solidarity	Frequency of Discrimination	Conflict
Ontario	Professional: 2 Close: 4 Social: 1 High vitality: 2 Francophones: 1 Self: 3	Ingroup: 1 Low vitality: 4	Discrim+: 2 Discrim++: 2 Discrim++++: 2	Denial: 6
Quebec	Professional: 4 Close: 1 Social: 4 High vitality: 3 Francophones: 2 Self: 3 Other: 3	Ingroup: 1 Low vitality: 1	Discrim+: 1 Discrim++: 3 Discrim++++: 2	Denial: 6 Discrimination: 2 Surprise: 1

These results indicate that there are a variety of contexts in which accent discrimination occurs. French L2 speakers from Ontario seem to experience slightly more discrimination from people close to them; while French L2 speakers from Quebec seem to experience more discrimination in professional and social contexts. Across both groups the most common type of conflict is the denial of the French L2 speaker's French identity or competence.

Question 2: How participants react in response to accent discrimination

	Tactics	Attitudes	Emotions	Consequences	Magnitude of Stigmatization
Ontario	Persist: 2 Change: 1 Withdraw: 4 Challenge: 3 Rationalize: 2 Judge other: 4	Legitimate: 3 Illegitimate: 1 Identity Incongruent : 1	Anger: 5 Amuse: 2 Shame: 3 Neutral: 3 Exhaustion: 2 Good: 1 Not enough: 5	WB-Stress: 5 Social: 3 Professional: 1 Psychosocial: 5 Other : 4	Stigma+: 2 Stigma++: 3 Stigma+++ : 1
Quebec	Persist: 1 Change: 3 Withdraw: 4 Challenge: 1 Rationalize: 4 Judge other: 4	Legitimate: 4 Illegitimate: 4 Identity Congruent : 1 Identity Incongruent : 2	Anger: 3 Amuse: 1 Shame: 3 Neutral: 1 Exhaustion: 2 Good: 3 Not enough: 3	WB-Stress: 6 Social: 3 Professional: 3 Psychosocial: 3 Other : 4	Stigma+: 1 Stigma++: 5

The results indicate that participant's responses to accent discrimination are varied. For both groups, withdrawing from attempts to speak French and judging those who discriminate are the most common ways to deal with discriminatory experiences. Perceiving the discriminatory experiences as illegitimate or not warranted is more common among L2 speakers from Quebec. Finally, among both groups, increased stress is the most common consequence of discrimination.

5. Conclusion

Results give a rich and in-depth understanding of the contexts in which accent discrimination occurs and how participants make sense of these experiences. This study is the first to offer a detailed assessment of participants' experiences with accent discrimination and its consequences. It is apparent that accent discrimination occurs regardless of Anglophones' relative language status. Furthermore, the results showcase that discrimination occurs in many settings and provoke a wide range of responses from stigmatized speakers. Self-stigmatization appears to be a reality for many, which is reflective of an internalization of the discrimination. As this internalization is most often what leads to the negative affective consequences of discrimination (ex. shame, feelings of self-inadequacy, reduced self-esteem) (Rintamiki & Brashers, 2010), this study highlights the importance of furthering our understanding of the nature of accent stigmatization and delineates important variables for its study. Future studies should investigate the relation between all aspects of the discrimination experience, to better understand the mechanisms that lead to self-stigmatization or resiliency when faced with discrimination.

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