

## **Native English Speaking SLPs' Perceptions of Nonnative Speakers**

Susanna E. Meyer, AuD., Maura R. Dunajski, B.S., Michelle B. Menz, B.S.  
Worcester State College

### Introduction:

- Native English speakers unconsciously make judgments based on the accent of the speaker in the areas of social abilities, intelligence, and language knowledge.
- Prejudgments may be made on a culture or an ethnic group that is not well understood.
- The development of stereotypes occurs subconsciously through life experiences and beliefs
- Research indicated that
  - Even if the speaker remained the same, listeners' evaluations differed based on the accent used.
  - Judgments were made solely on the accent.
  - Stereotypes about a race or culture were triggered when the accent was heard (Robinson, 1996).
  - Familiar accents were rated more positively than unfamiliar accents.
  - Familiar accents were rated as more intelligent, competent, and fluent than unfamiliar accents.
  - Unfamiliar accents were also labeled as having a lower socioeconomic status than those with familiar accents (Dixon & Mahoney, 2004).
  - Individuals had negative reactions towards accents or speech characteristics that differed from their own (Derwing, 2003).
- Speech-language pathologists need to provide ethical treatment and understand the cultures of their clients.
- Do SLP students hold biases regarding accented speech and if so, do these biases differ depending on the accent?

### Method

#### *Participants*

- 18 SLP graduate students
- Monolingual (American English) speakers.

#### *Accented Speech Samples*

- Male speakers between the ages of 20 and 40.
- The same passage was spoken by each accented speaker.
- Unfamiliar accents were Chinese and Russian
- Familiar accents were Spanish and British.
- An American accent was included to contrast with foreign accents.

#### *Questionnaire*

- A questionnaire was used to record the responses of participants.
- Questions covered topics including: perceptions of the speakers' attitudes, linguistic skills, social skills, intelligence, socioeconomic status and personality traits.

#### *Procedures*

- The participants listened to audio clips of accented speakers and were instructed to complete the questionnaire after each speaker.

## Results

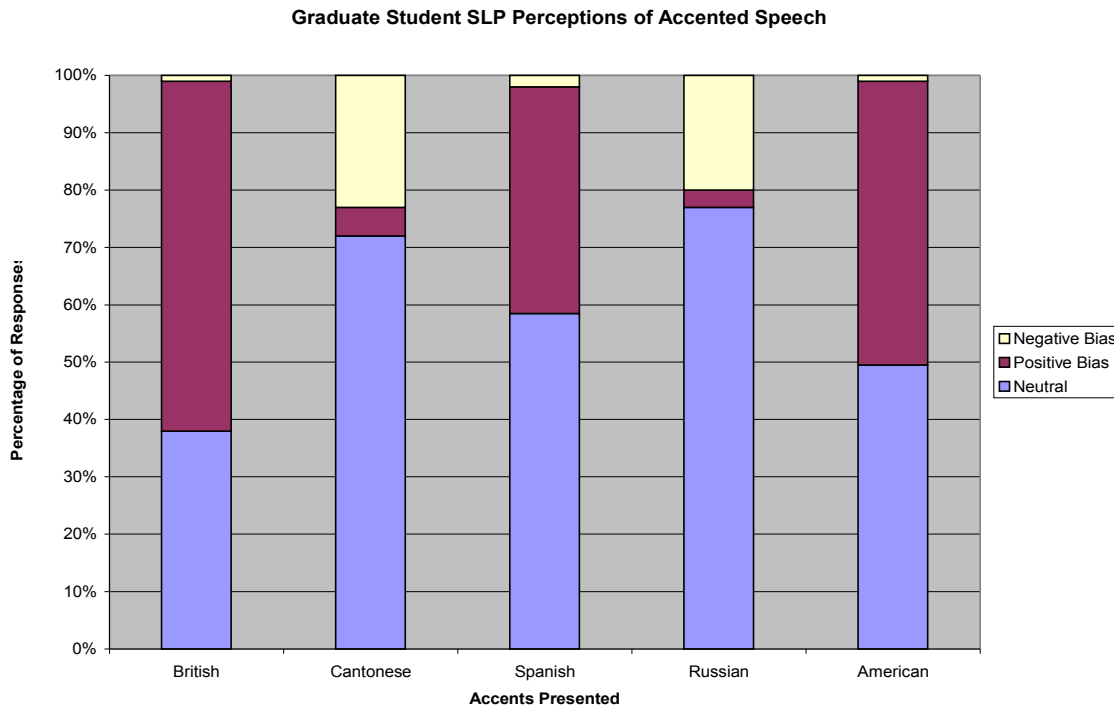


Figure 1 displays the percentage of neutral, positive and negative judgments by SLP graduate students in reference to British, Cantonese, Spanish, Russian and American accented speakers.

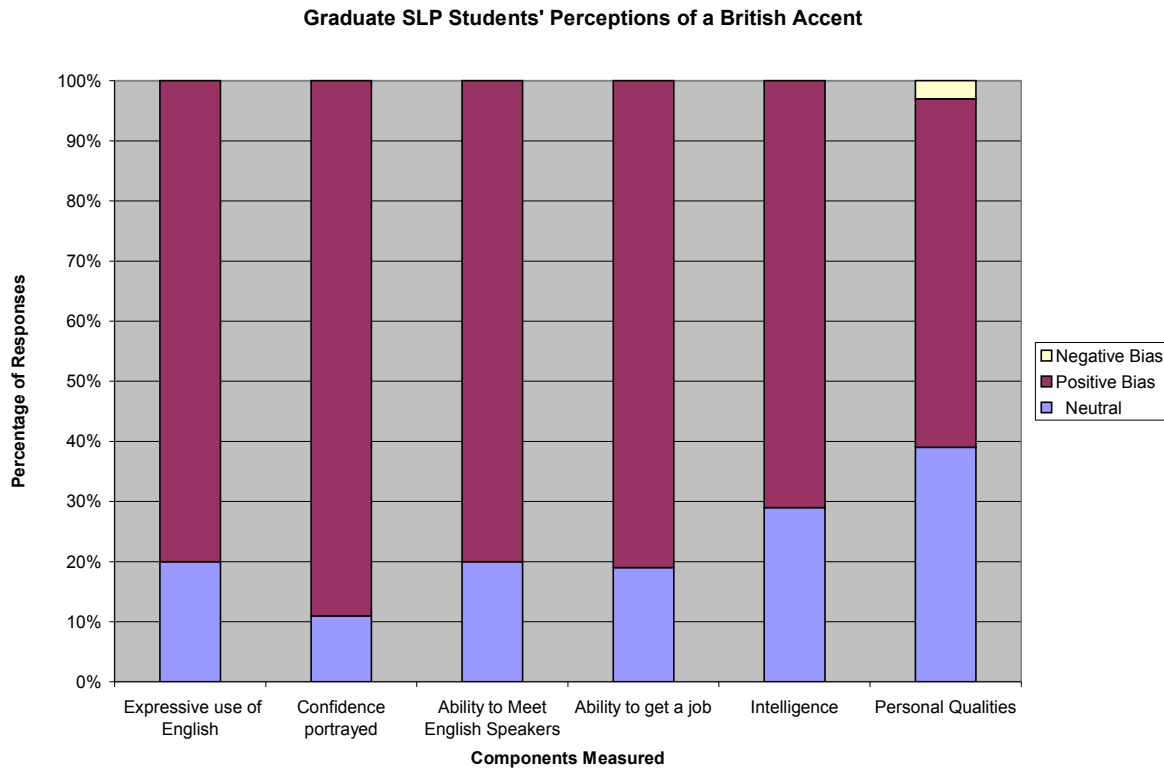


Figure 2 displays the percentage of neutral, positive and negative judgments by SLP graduate students in reference to a British accented speaker in 6 categories.

### Graduate SLP Students' Perceptions of Russian Accent

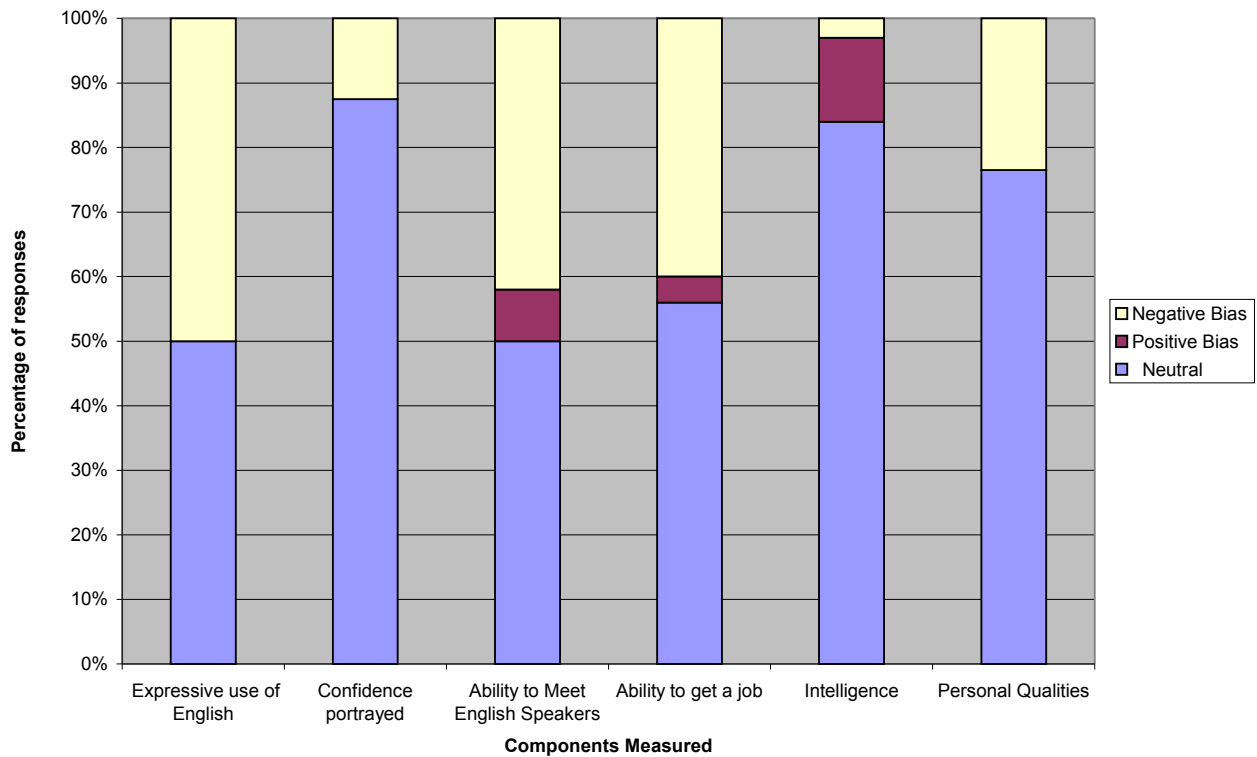


Figure 3 displays the percentage of neutral, positive and negative judgments by SLP graduate students in reference to a Russian accented speaker in 6 categories.

### Discussion

- Did native English SLP students' perceptions vary depending on the speaker's accent?
  - Yes, some accents were perceived more negatively than others.
- Did the familiarity of the accents influence the native English SLP students' perceptions?
  - Yes, familiar accents were rated with more positive bias.
  - Less familiar were rated with neutral and negative bias.
- Did specific accents evoke more positive responses from native English SLP students?
  - Yes, American, British, and Spanish accents were perceived more positively than Cantonese and Russian accents.
- The findings support the research by Lindemann (2003) that familiar accents are perceived more positively than less familiar accents.
  - Spanish and British accents are more common in the northeast area of the United States, and were rated more positively.
  - Russian and Chinese accents are less common and were rated more negatively

### *Theoretical Implication*

- Familiarity with a culture will decrease negative perceptions towards those accented speakers.

### *Practical Implication*

- Eliminating cultural biases must continue to be the focus of speech-language pathology graduate programs.
  - SLP students need to identify their biases, and work to eliminate them.
  - SLP students must receive guidance through classroom lectures.
  - SLP students must be exposed to various cultures through
    - culturally diverse faculty
    - culturally diverse practicum placements
    - culturally diverse patients and supervisors
  - Exposure to various cultures in SLP graduate programs will help students decrease negative biases towards unfamiliar cultures and accents.
- Eliminating cultural biases is imperative to provide ethical speech-language pathology services.

### References

- Derwing, T. M. (2003). What do ESL students say about their accents? *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 59, 546-566.
- Dixon, J. A. & Mahoney, B. (2004). The effect of accent evaluation and evidence on a suspect's perceived guilt and criminality. *Journal of Psychology*, 144 (1), 63-73.
- Lindemann, S. (2003). Koreans, Chinese or Indians? Attitudes and ideologies about non-native English speakers in the United States. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7(3), 348-364.
- Robinson, J. A. (1996). The relationship between personal characteristics and attitudes toward black and white speakers of informal non-standard English. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 20(4), 211-218.