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U wot m8?: American and British Attitudes toward Regional British Accents

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**U WOT M8?: AMERICAN AND BRITISH ATTITUDES TOWARD REGIONAL
BRITISH ACCENTS**

By

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SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE

**And The Department Of Linguistics and Cognitive Science At Pomona College In Partial
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Abstract

This research examines the relationship between British accents and their stereotypes. It looks specifically at the ratings of British and American subjects for a variety of British regional and standard accents, and examines them in contrast with observed stereotypes about these accents. The purpose of this paper is to compare the reactions of British and American participants in order to understand whether the stereotypes associated with these accents are purely socially constructed by British society, or whether qualities of each accent support these stereotypes. Results found a similar trend in the ratings of both American and British participants, though it is hypothesized that this is due to confounding variables.

U wot m8?: American and British Attitudes toward Regional British Accents

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U wot m8?: American and British Attitudes toward Regional British Accents

I. Introduction

This paper examines the attitudes of British and American subjects toward six different British accents, and compares the results to previously observed stereotypes about these accents. The aim of this research is to provide insight on accent discrimination and stereotyping across the United Kingdom, and understand the cause and social impact of these stereotypes. More specifically, it seeks to answer the question of whether the American and British participants rate each accent in a similar manner, ultimately telling us whether or not these accent stereotypes are entirely socially constructed based on British prejudices. Working under the assumption that American participants have no preconceived knowledge of the observed British accent stereotypes, the hope for this study is that their reactions will tell us whether there are actually specific qualities of these accents that lend support to these stereotypes. Throughout Great Britain and the United Kingdom, accent discrimination is widespread, and the accent with which a person speaks can have huge social implications. For example, speakers of Received Pronunciation (also known as the Queen's English or BBC English) are widely regarded as being the most prestigious, well-educated, and successful members of society. RP speakers tend to have an easier time finding jobs, and their accent is the most represented in British television and media by far. In contrast, someone from an industrial town such as Birmingham might speak in an accent that other British people tend to find unattractive, uneducated, and lazy. Speakers of a Birmingham accent are likely to face discrimination when applying for jobs due to these stereotypes, and are rarely heard in the media except for when presented in a negative light.

There is a huge variety of accents throughout the UK, and their specific stereotypes differ from region to region. To many British people, the process of stereotyping a person by their accent is subconscious and deep-rooted. The same can be said for Americans, though possibly to a lesser extent, as the United States has significantly less accent variation. By testing American subjects, a population that is unaffected by and most likely unaware of British stereotypes, we will hopefully understand whether they are socially constructed, or based on real factors of the accents, themselves.

The present study looks at six varieties of British English, three of which have been previously observed to have positive social implications (Received Pronunciation, Cardiff English, and Edinburgh English), and three of which have been observed to have negative social implications (West Country English, Birmingham English, and Liverpool English). Participants are asked to listen to each accent and rate the speaker for a variety of different personality traits. Results of the study indicate that both British and American participants show preferences among the six accents, though I propose that their reasons for doing so may vary.

The first and second sections of this paper provide a theoretical framework for the current research, addressing the concept of social identity theory, and explaining its relation to accents and accent discrimination throughout the UK. Section two also introduces the specific accents being examined in this paper. Section three is a literature review, which discusses previous research that has been done on the topic of accent variation and stereotyping, and explains their relevance to the present study. Section four outlines the purpose of the study and its expected results, followed by section five, which details the study's methodology. The remaining two sections explain the results of the present study, and a potential explanation to account for these results. Section six also outlines potential research that can still be done in this area.

II. Accentism

2.1 Social Identity Theory and Accents

Why do people judge others by their accents? Simply put, humans have a natural tendency to view people who are different from them less favorably than those who are similar. A person's social identity is their sense of self based on their membership in one or more social groups. First proposed by Henri Tajfel (1979), Social Identity Theory explains that we, as humans, derive a sense of pride and self-esteem from the groups that we belong to, whether they be our sports teams or our socioeconomic classes. This can have both positive and negative outcomes, as our high regard for ourselves and our own groups can lead to an unwarranted dislike for outsiders of these groups. "In order to increase our self-image we enhance the status of the group to which we belong...we can also increase our self-image by discriminating and holding prejudice views against the out group (the group we don't belong to)" (McLeod 2008). This is the "them vs. us" mentality, and it serves as the basis for racism and other forms of prejudice. Tajfel also proposes that people's tendency to assign stereotypes to others is based on our cognitive interest in grouping things together, and leads us to exaggerate not only the similarities of things or people in the same group, but also the differences between groups.

The propensity to categorize people into groups and compare our groups with others is natural, but overall harmful.

Once two groups identify themselves as rivals, they are forced to compete in order for the members to maintain their self-esteem. Competition and hostility between groups is thus not only a matter of competing for resources like jobs but also the result of competing identities (McLeod 2008).

In much the same ways that we do this with race, we also do it with language and accents. Accent is a strong marker for group membership, particularly in places like the United Kingdom which have such a wide range of different accents. Furthermore, a number of other features of a person's group identity can often be revealed by their accent, including their ethnic and socioeconomic background. These factors are all popular targets for the creation of stereotypes. Cognitive studies support the idea of an "own-accent bias" which has resulted from this in-group/out-group dynamic. Bestelmayer (2014) explains, "In line with social identity theory, individuals typically judge their own accent or the accent most similar to their own as more favorable". The own-accent bias can be observed in Bishop and Coupland's 2007 study, in which British subjects were asked to rate various accents in terms of both prestige and social attractiveness. They found that the two accents that were rated the highest for both of these dimensions were "a standard accent of English" and "an accent similar to my own", suggesting that participants highly regarded their own accents, even when they weren't the standard variety. Abrams and Hogg (1987) found a similar pattern of in-group favoritism for the dimensions of speaker status, likely employment, and solidarity, when testing different varieties of Scottish English. With an unconscious inclination to categorize people and assign them to different groups based on similar characteristics, it is difficult to avoid effects like the own-accent bias. This is undoubtedly a contributing factor to accent discrimination both in the United Kingdom and globally.

2.2 Accent Discrimination in the United Kingdom

Throughout the past few centuries, the United Kingdom has seen many large waves of immigration. From the Anglo-Saxons to the Normans, each new culture brings with it a new

language, contributing to the already vast range of dialects and accents that can be heard throughout the British Isles. While many believe in the importance of celebrating Britain's multiculturalism, the unfortunate truth is that prejudices can and will arise wherever there are differences among people. The accent with which you speak can play a large role in how you are viewed and treated by the people around you, and while some accents are revered, others are disdained. With its enormous number of distinct accents that vary regionally, the UK has been an incubator for accent prejudice, and individuals who speak with an "undesirable" accent are frequent targets of discrimination, both socially and professionally.

There have been numerous studies that have examined the attitudes of different accents throughout the UK in attempt to understand which accents are widely liked and disliked, and what factors of each accent lead to these opinions. Research also reveals somewhat precise stereotypes associated with these accents, both positive and negative. For instance, Hiraga (2005) concluded that British people often believed speakers of Received Pronunciation to be the highest in status measures such as wealth and intelligence, while speakers of urban accents like Birmingham English were perceived to be the lowest in these categories. Giles (1970) found that Cockney was considered to be aesthetically unpleasant to listen to, along with other town and industrial accents. Popular news media outlets have also jumped on this research trend with their own surveys about British accents. Based on a poll by the Daily Mail (2013), speakers of a Devon accent were perceived to be the friendliest, while those who have a Liverpool accent were deemed the least trustworthy and intelligent. Following the release of a 2014 YouGov poll about British accents, the Daily Mirror, the Huffington Post, and countless other news websites were quick to pronounce Birmingham English as the UK's ugliest accent, while RP and Welsh were decidedly the most attractive. Citing a study done by the University of South Wales, the Daily

Telegraph (2015) even claimed that speaking in a Birmingham accent is considered to be “worse than staying silent”.

What is more harmful than these stereotypes themselves are their practical applications. An ITV News article (2013) summarized their poll of over 6,000 British adults, which showed that “more than a quarter of Britons (28%) feel they have been discriminated against because of their regional accent”, and additionally, “according to another batch of research by the law firm Peninsular, 80% of employers admit to making discriminating decisions based on regional accents” (Marshall 2013). The author of the article addresses the problem of insufficient legislation for the issue, mentioning that “there is currently no legislation to protect someone from accent discrimination. It is discrimination which experts told me has nothing to do with the way people sound and everything to do with prejudice about the area they come from.” Regardless of its motivations, accent discrimination is commonplace and often unrestrained when it comes to employment in the UK.

While a person’s accent can play a major role in their professional and economic mobility, many continue to hold negative attitudes toward those who have become successful in spite of their nonstandard or regional accents. In an article for the Daily Telegraph (2014), Dr. Katie Edwards, a lecturer at Sheffield University, describes her experiences being ridiculed for her Mexborough accent even in professional environments. She explains, “I’ve come to expect some comments about my accent...it seems to be a hilarious novelty for some, an attempt at creating a 'gimmick' to get ahead in my career for others...and a signifier of my flawed education for yet more.” Jessica Evans also discusses her difficulty being taken seriously in the workplace, being told that her Liverpool accent was “unprofessional” and “not on brand” (Evans 2016).

These remarks are common and frequent for those who speak in negatively stereotyped varieties of British English.

Reinforcing the push towards accent standardization and the spread of negative attitudes towards regional accents is the British media.

Our TV screens are full of RP speakers: in the media, politics and the establishment which reinforce the sense that it is still the proper way to speak. We discovered elocution lessons are on the rise, with many seeking lessons doing so to ‘soften their regional twang’ which they hoped would increase their job prospects (Marshall (2013).

Those looking for a career in the entertainment industry are most likely used to the pressure to speak with a standard accent, being that standard British English is well overrepresented by British newscasters and television personalities. “BBC Breakfast's business presenter Stephanie McGovern said that people inside the BBC treated her as ‘too common for telly’ because of her accent” (Hemmings 2014). In addition to the media, the British education system is guilty of normalizing regional accent discrimination. An article for The Economist (2015) highlights the problem of accent discrimination being the “last acceptable prejudice”, as many people believe language is more freely chosen by its speaker, and as such, it is only the fault of the speaker should they choose to use an undesirable accent. Thus, “scorn for those who talk different is given a cloak of respectability. Kids who go beyond accent and use dialectal or nonstandard forms...are politely told with the best wishes that Standard English is crucial to climbing the economic ladder” (The Economist 2015). This prejudice is quietly reinforced by leaders, celebrities, and educators, who teach others not to be proud of their regional accents.

Many people have a harder time seeing this as problematic, because it involves a less obvious form of intolerance against another group of people. For example, a white man insulting

another white man for his accent is seemingly much harder to denounce than something more straightforward like racism or sexism. Richard Joseph (2016) argues,

Accent discrimination in the UK is motivated by classism and cultural connotation. That is to say, in Britain, it's not so much what you sound like – it's what's *associated* with your accent, most notably socioeconomic class and education but also concepts as nebulous as friendliness and morality.

“Accentism” is deeply ingrained in society in much the same ways as racism and sexism, though it is a little bit harder to pin down. Judging someone for their accent is often quite the same as judging someone for their socioeconomic class, but the connection is obscure enough that people feel that they can do it unabashedly. Received Pronunciation is considered the superior accent because historically its speakers have been the landowners and aristocrats, while northern cities, home to Britain's “ugliest” accents, continue to struggle economically.

For this reason, we see educators trying to teach children to lose their regional accents, and employers who think people from the north sound unprofessional. Another reaction to these attitudes has been the growth of specialized classes aimed at accent reduction for those who speak regional varieties of British English. In addition to classes that one can physically attend, there are countless YouTube tutorials and entire websites dedicated to helping people speak “clear, confident English” and produce the “correct” sounds and intonations for standard British English. These are geared toward actors who hope to improve their chances at landing a role, or even members of the general public who feel insecure about the way that they speak. It has essentially become the norm to expect people with nonstandard accents to want to get rid of them.

What exactly can be done about this? Working towards a solution to a societal issue requires first its acknowledgement and understanding. Since many do not realize that their judgement of a person's accent is most likely linked to their beliefs about that person's socioeconomic class, it is important to highlight this connection. This research seeks to prove that British accents, themselves do not possess inherent qualities that support the specific stereotypes they are given. By testing a group of Americans, who I expect are not exposed to these stereotypes, we can begin to understand whether the Birmingham accent is "unintelligent" because it has phonological or intonational qualities that are universally characterized as unintelligent, or because historical British prejudice against the residents of Birmingham have lead the country to believe that speakers of the accent are unintelligent.

2.3 Accents Tested in the Present Study

Six accents that are used in various parts of Great Britain were chosen for the present study, which I had participants evaluate for each of the five characteristics chosen. All of the speakers in my experiment were female, and between the ages of 18 and 30. At the time of recording, each of the speakers was living in the area in which her accent is spoken. All of the accents were chosen because they are commonly stereotyped by residents of the United Kingdom, and tend to have specific stereotypes associated with them. Three of the accents I have chosen are typically associated with positive characteristics, and are regarded as "desirable" accents to have. The other three are more commonly associated with negative characteristics. The "desirable" accents used are Received Pronunciation, and the accents of Cardiff and Edinburgh. The "undesirable" accents I have chosen for the study are the accents of

Birmingham, Liverpool, and Somerset. This section will provide background information on each of the six accents being tested, and the areas in which they are spoken.

The accent most closely associated with education and wealth in Great Britain is unquestionably Received Pronunciation, or RP for short. RP is not localized in any one particular region of the United Kingdom, but is considered the UK's accent of Standard English. It is mostly spoken in the south of England, and is widely considered the most prestigious variety of English. RP is often referred to as "The Queen's English" or "BBC English", and is the accent that is most likely to be heard on British television and radio (Encyclopedia Britannica 2016). Among other qualities, it is characterized by its non-rhoticity, long α : sounds in words like bath and start, and /j/ sounds in words like news and enthusiasm (Vincent 2015). Speakers of RP tend to avoid non-standard grammatical constructions and any other characteristics of regional dialects (British Library 2017). Although RP is well recognized, it is not widely spoken. According to the British Library (2017),

RP is probably the most widely studied and most frequently described variety of spoken English in the world, yet recent estimates suggest only 2% of the UK population speak it...it is the accent on which phonemic transcriptions in dictionaries are based, and it is widely used (in competition with General American) for teaching English as a foreign language.

However, the accent is being used less and less by residents of the UK over time.

The second variety of English used for this study is the Welsh accent, specifically the accent spoken by residents of Cardiff. Cardiff is the capital of Wales, as well as its largest city. It is a major international hub for various sporting events, and is the main commercial center of Wales (Encyclopedia Britannica 2016). Characteristics of Welsh English include trilling or

tapping of “r”, use of the voiceless uvular fricative /x/, distinction between /w/ and /ʍ/, and a musical-sounding prosody with evenly-stressed syllables. Many of its features are borrowed from the Welsh language, and others are modeled after RP (Katz 2013: 306).

The fact that many speakers were and are bilingual in English and Welsh, and because the two languages have existed side-by-side within the same communities for generations, means Welsh has also exerted a strong influence on the English spoken in Wales” (British Library 2017).

Many believe that Welsh English is one of the most pleasant varieties of English to listen to because of the melodic qualities it borrows from the Welsh language.

The third and final “desirable” accent this study looks at is the accent of Edinburgh, Scotland. Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland, located in the southeast. Historically, it has been a military stronghold, but it is currently recognized as a center for finance, law, tourism, education, and cultural affairs (Encyclopedia Britannica 2013). Broadly, the Scottish English accent is rhotic and “r” is often trilled or tapped. Other features of the accent include glottal stopping of “t”, monophthongization of /ei/ and /ou/, velarized /l/, and nonaspirated /p/, /t/, and /k/ (Katz 2013: 307). Like Welsh English, Scottish English (and particularly Edinburgh English) is widely viewed to be one of the United Kingdom’s most attractive accents.

Birmingham is a city located in England’s West Midlands region, and a major commercial and industrial center that is known for its prominence in manufacturing. After London, it is Britain’s largest and most populous city (Encyclopedia Britannica 2013). The accent spoken in Birmingham is commonly referred to as “Brummie”, which is thought to have a very low aesthetic value. It is often described as nasal-sounding, and is widely considered Britain’s “ugliest” accent. The Brummie accent is characterized by numerous phonological

qualities, including variable h-dropping, non-rhoticity, open diphthongs, realization of /r/ as a tap, and a sounded /g/ in ng sounds. Brummie speakers are also commonly known to pronounce the /ʊ/ vowel for STRUT. (Collins & Mees 2013: 172). Brummie is consistently rated as the least desirable accent to have by other residents of Great Britain.

Another accent that has been given the title of “Britain’s ugliest” is Scouse. This is the name for the accent spoken by residents of Liverpool, England. Located in the northern county of Lancashire, Liverpool is a metropolitan borough that acts as a center for international trade. Its prominence in distribution and shipping have played a vital role in the support of Liverpool’s economy (Encyclopedia Britannica 2013). One of the most recognizable characteristics of the Scouse accent is its spirantization and affrication of stops. Other distinct phonological features include a pronounced /g/, lenition of /t/, pronunciation of [oʊ] and [eʊ] for GOAT, and, similar to Birmingham, pronunciation of [ʊ] for STRUT (Watson 2007). Scouse is a close runner-up behind Brummie as Great Britain’s least favorite accent.

The final negatively stereotyped accent I used in my study is “West Country English”. The unofficial term “West Country” loosely refers to multiple counties in Southwest England, including Somerset, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, and the City and County of Bristol. For the purpose of this study I have chosen to use a clip of a speaker from the county of Somerset. Somerset is a rural county with a large agricultural sector, which was traditionally associated with cider production. Today, manufacturing and engineering are also prominent in Somerset’s economy (Encyclopedia Britannica 2013). The West Country accent does not have nearly as strong of a social stigma as Scouse or Brummie, but it is regularly cited as sounding uneducated and unintelligent. Some notable characteristics of the West Country accent include rhoticity,

variable h-dropping, and extensive glottalization, though there are slight variations in the accent by county (Collins & Mees 2013: 171).

III. Literature Review

Perhaps the most widely cited paper on the topic of English accent attitudes is Giles (1970), the purpose of which was to understand the ways in which people are stereotyped based on their spoken accents. It looks at British regional accents, as well as a selection of other global accents, and asks participants to rate them according to three categories: “aesthetic”, “communicative”, and “status”. Aesthetic refers to how pleasant an accent is to the ears, communicative is a measure of intelligibility, or how comfortable a speaker would be when communicating with a person who has the accent, and status refers to the prestige value of the accent. Making reference to Wilson (1965), Giles explains that Received Pronunciation is regarded as the highest in terms of status, while town and industrial accents are the lowest. This study sought to confirm or deny the claims made by Wilson about status, as well as add the two other dimensions of aesthetic and communicative, and investigate how each accent is rated in these categories.

Giles had a sample size of 177 participants for the study which were “selected according to a 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 matrix of age, sex, social class and geographical region, thereby constituting a 16-group subject sample (mean *n* of 11).” They were all also selected from comprehensive schools in southwest England and south Wales. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to look at peoples’ attitudes of different regional and foreign accents. They were then asked to perform two tasks, with the first one being completed without knowledge of what the second task would be. In the first task, tape recorded voices of 13 different accents were played.

Each accent was spoken by the same man, and the passage was the same in each clip. The speaker was consistent in rate of speaking, pitch, personality, and vocal intensity throughout the clip. After listening to the passages, participants then had to rate each one on a seven point scale, for each of the three dimensions. In the second task, participants were given randomly ordered lists of all of the accents in question, and were played clips of different speakers saying a passage in their own accents. The participants were then told to identify each accent, and rate them on a seven point scale for each dimension. Not all of the accents in task two had also been spoken in task one, due to limitations of the speaker in task 1. The accents used in the study for both tasks were: R.P., North American, French, S. Welsh, Irish, Yorkshire, Somerset, Indian, Birmingham, Cockney, Italian, and German. Accents used in the second task only were: Scottish, W. Indian, Liverpool, and “an accent identical to own”. Affected R.P. was the sole accent used only in the first task.

Overall, the results of the study showed that participants were able to correctly identify the accents from task 2. In the first task, which used vocal stimuli, the results were as follows:

Aesthetic content: R.P. rated the highest, Birmingham rated the lowest.

Communicative content: R.P. rated the highest, German rated the lowest.

Status content: R.P. rated the highest, Birmingham rated the lowest.

In the second task, which used conceptual stimuli, the results were as follows:

Aesthetic content: R.P. rated the highest, Cockney rated the lowest.

Communicative content: “accent identical to your own” rated the highest, Cockney, Indian, and Birmingham rated the lowest.

Status content: R.P. rated the highest, Birmingham rated the lowest.

For a full table of how each accent scored see Giles (1970, p. 218).

From the results of this study, Giles concluded that town and industrial accents are, in fact, considered the lowest in prestige. He also found that North American and French were both consistently rated fairly highly in prestige--above any British regional accents. However, neither came close to R.P. in the status dimension. From this study it is reasonable to claim that speakers are judged by their accents, and that having a certain accent can lead to social disadvantages.

This study contains information that is relevant and helpful to my own project. The results that he found are convincing, as they seem to align with previous research on the subject. My main critique is his decision to be regionally specific when it comes to British accents, but not accents outside of Britain. For instance, he uses the term "North American" to describe one of his speech samples. Similar to the United Kingdom, North America has a wide variety of regional accents that often have stereotypes associated with them. With only the descriptor "North American", there is no way to tell which accent he used, so I do not believe that we can draw any conclusions about American accents based on the results of this study. For this reason, I find that the study is mainly useful in determining the attitudes that British people have towards British accents. In the present study, I investigate whether these results align with the attitudes that Americans have towards British accents. In doing so, I attempt to be as specific as possible in describing each accent being tested.

Similar to Giles, the present study asks participants to rate accents on a seven point scale. Rather than asking about the three different measure Giles uses (aesthetic, communicative, and status), I ask participants to rate speakers on a variety of characteristics, such as friendliness, intelligence, and attractiveness. Unlike Giles, I only use samples of British accents, but test both American and British participants. The speech samples I have obtained are from an online database, not recorded by myself, and as such, they are each spoken by a different individual. I

do prefer Giles's method of controlling for certain lurking variables by having the same speaker record the passage in each different accent, but due to a limitation of resources I was unable to duplicate this. In order to match the conditions as closely as possible, the present study uses recordings of different speakers who are all uttering the same passage. The speakers are all the same sex, and roughly the same age.

In Part two of Giles's study, he asks participants to identify each accent from a list, and then judge them once again. In order to test whether participants have prior knowledge of regional British accents, my questionnaire does similarly ask participants to identify the specific accent if they are able to. However, unlike Giles, I do not require them to judge each accent a second time after answering this question.

A follow-up and expansion to Giles's study is Hiraga (2005), which sought to examine the ways in which British speakers evaluate six different varieties of speaking, both in Britain and the USA. According to Giles (1970), British people rate American accents more highly than other rural British accents when it comes to pleasantness and prestige. This newer investigation looked at British attitudes toward multiple varieties of American and British speech, and studied attitudes toward these accents in terms of both solidarity and status. Solidarity relates to how much the individual feels they can identify with an accent, while status refers to the accents' perceived level of prestige. While Giles (1970) examined status, this paper was the first like it to also look at the solidarity dimension.

The subjects used for the study were all from southern England, being that this is where the most "preferable" British accent is spoken, as confirmed by Inoue (1999). In order to avoid subjects showing bias toward their own accents, none of the accents tested were southern English. Overall, 22 male and 10 female subjects were selected.

The varieties of English tested in this study were split into three categories, with six varieties total, one British and one American for each category:

1. The variety considered to be “standard”: Received Pronunciation (British), and the English spoken by a radio announcer (“Network American”)
2. The urban variety: Birmingham (British) and New York City (American)
3. The rural variety: West Yorkshire (British) and rural Alabama (American).

Speech samples were obtained by the International Dialects of English Archive and Speech Archive. All speakers were in their 50s, and all were working class aside from the two speakers of the standard varieties. Four of the six speakers were male, and two were female. The topics spoken about in the speech samples were all mundane and not controversial.

The particular traits of speakers that subjects were asked to rate were “sociable”, “friendly”, “comforting”, “sincere”, and “reliable” (for the solidarity measure) and “educated”, “intelligent”, “wealthy”, “successful”, and “elegant” (for the status measure). Each participant listened to each speech sample and rated it on a scale from one to seven for each of the traits listed. Traits were randomly ordered each time.

Results were organized into two categories for solidarity and status. In the status dimension, Received Pronunciation was rated highest, followed by Network American, New York City, Alabama, West Yorkshire, and lastly Birmingham. For solidarity, Yorkshire was the highest, followed by Network American, Alabama, Received Pronunciation, Birmingham, and lastly New York City. When all traits were put together, the ranking was Received Pronunciation, followed by Network American, West Yorkshire, Alabama, New York City, and Birmingham. This was somewhat consistent with the Giles (1970) study. No difference was observed between male and female responses

Hiraga was able to draw a few conclusions from the results obtained in this study. One is that the varieties of American English were not judged as a group, but rather three individual varieties. From the results, we can also tell that these varieties can actually be categorized within three distinct groups (standard, rural, and urban). Overall, Network American was the variety that had the most consistent high ranking in status and solidarity. However, non-standard American accents were not rated as highly.

Hiraga's study is convincing and accurately reflects the results that I would expect from the experiment. Hiraga mentions that in Giles's 1970 study, only one American accent is used and it is described as "North American" with no specificity about which type of North American variety is used. This study seemed to do a good job finding comparable North American varieties to test against British varieties.

One factor that was not taken into account is participants' preconceived knowledge of the stereotypes that these accents have. It can probably be assumed that the subjects (all of whom were British) were familiar with the British accents in question, and recognized that Received Pronunciation is widely regarded as the most prestigious and Birmingham as the least. We do not, however, know whether the participants were also familiar with North American accents, and whether that played a role in how they rated each one. Due to the proliferation of American media, it seems more likely that British people would be familiar with American accents than vice versa. Additionally, all of the participants used were students at Oxford University, suggesting that they are highly educated and mostly upper-class. It would have been valuable to see whether people of different backgrounds had differing opinions about which varieties sound the most intelligent, friendly, etc. Hiraga also might have improved his study by using a broader age range of participants, and a more even distribution of males to females.

In general, the results obtained in this paper are very relevant to the question of the present study. From Hiraga's paper, I adopt the same seven point rating scale for participants to evaluate each accent. I do not use all of the same traits as Hiraga, but there is some overlap, including intelligence, friendliness, and education level. However, the present study does not include any American accents, and instead looks at six different British accents. Furthermore, unlike Hiraga, the speech samples used in the present study are all of the same passage being spoken in each accent to ensure that the subject matter of the passage does not play a role in the subjects' evaluations.

The results of this study provide insight into how British people view other British accents. This is a useful point of comparison for the present study, when looking at how Americans view these accents. Additionally, I am able to compare the responses of the British participants in my study to those of the Oxford students in this study in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of British attitudes toward British accents.

Coupland and Bishop (2007) examined the reactions of 5010 respondents across the UK towards 34 different English accents. Based on previous research, the authors found that speakers of standard UK accents are more highly regarded in terms of both prestige and social attractiveness. This study sought to confirm or deny these results, through a large online survey. In contrast to previous studies, this survey was much larger-scale, and allowed for data to be collected from a huge number of responses about a relatively large number of accent varieties. The authors argue that there is sociolinguistic significance in people's attitudes towards different speech varieties in the same ways that the presence of different speech varieties themselves are sociolinguistically significant.

The survey was conducted in collaboration with the 2004 BBC Voices project, which was an interactive online series in celebration of language and dialect diversity throughout the UK; however, it was conducted prior to the launch of the Voices project. The survey was an online questionnaire, which measured people's attitudes toward 34 different English accents, most of which were from the UK, but some of which were global English accents. Unlike other studies of this nature, the survey relied on participants' knowledge about the accents in question, and did not include clips of passages being spoken in each accent. The questionnaire asked participants to rate each of the 34 accents on a 7-point scale for the characteristics "prestige" and "pleasantness", asking the questions "how much prestige do you think is associated with this accent?", and "how pleasant do you think this accent sounds?".

All respondents hailed from different parts of the UK, were over 15 years of age, and completed the entire questionnaire. There were 5010 responses in total, 50.8% of which were female, and 49.2% of which were male. A majority of respondents were ages 25-64, but there were respondents of all ages over 15. The survey asked informants where they live, and were told to rate themselves on a 7-point scale for the statement "I like hearing a range of accents". The 34 accents used are listed in Table 2 of the paper.

The results showed that a few accents were evaluated similarly for both the prestige and social attractiveness dimension. "A standard accent of English" and "An accent similar to my own" had high ratings for both dimensions, while Birmingham English, Black Country English, and Asian-accented English were all ranked very low for both prestige and social attractiveness. Accents that were ranked high for prestige but low for social attractiveness were London English, North American-accented English, South African-accented English, and German-

accented English. In contrast, Southern Irish English, Newcastle English, and Afro-Caribbean English were ranked low for prestige and high for social attractiveness.

The survey ended with the questions, “To what extent is it important for people to speak properly?” and “To what extent are you proud of your accent?” For the first question, the average rating by respondents was 5.71, and for the second it was 4.89, both of which are well above the midpoint. However, older participants more often said that speaking properly is important, and Scottish speakers were the most proud of their accents. The results of the study were in agreement with Giles’s 1970s study, which lead the authors to conclude that the patterns revealed by this survey do, in fact, reflect broad language-ideological structures that exist in the UK.

Similar to Giles’s 1970 study, I found the authors’ lack of specificity about non-UK accents to be an issue. While the authors do identify specific regional UK accents, one of the accents tested was “North American”, which does not refer to any accent in particular. While probably less diverse than the UK, North America still has many accents that are very distinct. I do not believe the results they obtained for North American are legitimate, as they did not play a sound clip, and respondents could have been imagining any of a multitude of North American accents. Potentially a term like Standard North American English would have been more appropriate.

It also seems likely that seeing the names of each accent written out, rather than listening to them, could have skewed the results of the study. An alternative option would have been to have respondents listen to clips of each accent and then be asked to identify them to find out whether or not they were actually familiar with each one. With just the names written out it is possible that respondents would have called to mind popular and widely known biases about

these accents that they, themselves, did not actually hold. That being said, I believe the data obtained from this method is still meaningful in a different way.

One of the major similarities between this study and the present study is the use of an online questionnaire as a means of obtaining subjects. Many experiments on this topic have been executed in person, rather than online, but I have chosen to present my survey online because of its potential to gather a large number of participants from different backgrounds. A possible problem of this method is that, with an online survey, the population of respondents is self-selecting, and they may choose to take the survey because they hold certain strong opinions about the subject. However, I think that this is ultimately the best method for obtaining the most possible respondents. Since I am limited by the number of sound clips I have of various accents, the present study will be on a much smaller scale than this one, as I am only testing a six distinct accents, and they are all based in the UK. I also include participants from both North America and the UK so that I can compare the attitudes of the two groups.

Some important aspects of this study are the diversity of its participants, and the fact that it was done on such a large scale. It is different from other studies of its kind, which often use subjects from the same socioeconomic background who are the same age and from the same region. I find this study to be a better representation of the opinions of the general public, and it also allowed the authors to draw conclusions about which groups of people hold which attitudes about each different accent, which has not been done in the previous research.

Moving away from studies looking specifically at British and American English, there has been similar research done on attitudes towards non-English dialects that have strong social perceptions. Wallace et al (1965) is an exploration of attitudes towards different dialects of Hebrew (Yemenite and Ashkenazic) and Arabic. The authors hypothesized that the participants

of the study would rate each accent in a way that reflects stereotypes about each group of people whose accents were being represented. Based on previous studies in speech variation, the authors concluded that the dialect with which a person speaks can heavily impact others' social perceptions of that person. The authors chose to do this study in Israel, because they recognized it as a place where there was a particularly strong correlation between dialect and social perception. The authors claimed, "In contrast to European Jews, the Yemenites in Israel are said to be regarded as less sophisticated and possibly less cultured" (p.85).

The subjects used in the study were 40 Jewish subjects and 29 Arab subjects. The Jewish subjects were high-school students aged 15-16 from a highly regarded Tel-Aviv school. There were 28 girls and 12 boys, and all of them came from economic backgrounds that could be considered middle-class. The Arab subjects were members of a scout group aged 13-18. There were 23 boys and 6 girls. They all attended Arabic Christian schools. All Arabic subjects were bilingual in Arabic and Hebrew, and they were all either lower-middle or upper-lower class

Each subject was asked to listen to different speakers all reading a standard passage, some of which would be speaking in Hebrew and others would be speaking in Arabic. All speakers were male. Subjects were told to disregard the language differences, and try to imagine the personality of each speaker. They were to then rate each speaker for 20 different personality traits, on a 6-point rating scale. For some subjects, the traits were presented in one order, and for others they were presented in the reverse order. They were then asked to answer "yes" or "no" to the following statements: "I would befriend this person", "I would accept this person as a relative by marriage", "I would accept this person as a neighbor", and "I would help this person if he were in need". For Jewish subjects only, after rating each speaker the subjects listened to the

recordings again and were asked to identify the linguistic-ethnic group of each speaker. They were then asked specific questions about their opinions of the different groups presented.

The results of the study showed that overall, Ashkenazic Jews believed Yemenite Jews to be less intelligent, ambitious, wealthy, honest, reliable and socially acceptable, but still having a greater sense of humor. Jewish subjects rated Arabs as less humorous, friendly, honest, and desirable, but wealthier. Arab subjects considered Jewish people to be less capable, dependable, and desirable for marriage than other Arabs. Generally, the subjects held the opinion that all other groups were worse than their own for most traits.

In terms of my own research, this study is useful in illustrating the pervasiveness of accent biases throughout the world. It provides compelling evidence for why this research is important globally, and should continue to be investigated in new regions. Aside from the differences in the sample group and the accents being tested, there are a few other distinctions between this study and the present study. Part of the present study asks subjects to rate groups that they, themselves, do not belong to. While I was able to also obtain British participants, the main focus of the study is to understand the attitudes of Americans towards British accents. For this reason, most of my subjects are expected to have little to no preconceived opinions about the accents that they are asked to listen to. In contrast, this study asks participants to rate speakers that they likely have very strong feelings about already.

One problem that I found with this study was a lack of consistency in testing the different groups of subjects. Only the Jewish subjects were asked to identify the accents that they were hearing, because the authors were advised not to do so for Arab subjects. While I do not think that it is crucial for groups to be asked whether or not they can identify the accents they are listening to, I do think that there should have been consistency across all groups; if one group is

tested to find out whether they recognize the accents, then this should have also been the case for all other groups.

For the present study, I place much more importance on the diversity of the participants, and as such, made my survey available to a range of people who come from different areas around the United States and the United Kingdom, and have different socioeconomic backgrounds. I was also able to obtain a much wider age range of participants. While I do not attempt to replicate any of the methods of this study in my own research, this paper was useful in providing alternative possibilities for further research, especially in terms of the list of traits that were tested, which was much more extensive than the selections of previous studies.

IV. The Present Study

Though there has been significant research on the relationship between accent and social perceptions, there are still some areas that have not been explored. Many studies have investigated the ways in which individuals evaluate accents that are spoken by citizens of their own country, or otherwise accents that they are regularly exposed to through the media. The present study looks at the perceptions of American subjects who may have little to no knowledge of the stereotypes associated with various British accents.

The study focuses on six accents, which the participant must listen to and use to make judgements about the personality of the person speaking. It compares these results with that of British participants, who are likely to have been exposed to the biases and stereotypes associated with each of these accents. Though numerous studies have examined attitudes of British subjects towards American accents, it is probable that the extensive reach of American media may have caused participants to have already developed preconceived notions about the accents of the

United States. It was my hope that this study would provide a more accurate account of whether there are any inherent qualities of the accents in question that may have an influence on these stereotypes.

The present study asks American and British participants to listen to each of the six accents in question and rate them on a seven-point scale for five different personality traits. They are also asked to rate each accent for how easy it is to understand. The study includes participants of all ages and backgrounds, provided that they live in either the United States or Great Britain. The goal of this study is to determine whether the evaluations of American participants for each accent align with those of the British participants, and to what extent. More specifically, it seeks to draw a conclusion about whether Americans judge accents that they are unfamiliar with in the same specific ways that they are stereotyped by the British, telling us more about whether these stereotypes are purely socially constructed, or have something to do with the qualities of each particular accent.

The current literature claims that Received Pronunciation is ranked highly for its aesthetic and status content, while Birmingham English is ranked poorly in both cases by British subjects (Giles 1970). Additional research shows that Welsh English and Edinburgh English are both highly regarded by UK citizens, while West Country English and Liverpool English are widely disliked. Little research has been done to test American perceptions of British accents, so there is not currently evidence to support a specific relationship between each of these accents and how they are evaluated by Americans. Based on previous research and assumptions made about American perceptions of British accents, it is hypothesized that:

H1: American participants will rate all of the accents in question higher than British participants overall.

H2: British participants will rate Received Pronunciation, Cardiff, and Edinburgh accents higher than West Country, Birmingham, and Liverpool accents.

H3: American participants will show no noticeable preferences for any of the accents in question.

This research also seeks to answer the question of whether participants' ratings differ between characteristics associated with social attractiveness and characteristics related to status.

V. Method

5.1 Participants

Participants in the present study are 104 American and 79 British subjects from a variety of different ages and backgrounds. Of the 104 American participants, 34 identified as female, 61 identified as male, and 9 declined to self-identify. Of the 79 British participants, 29 identified as female, 45 identified as male, and 5 declined to self-identify. All participants were over 18 years of age. Among American participants, 49 were in the 18-29 age range, 47 were in the 30-49 age range, 7 were in the 50-64 age range, and 1 person was 65 years or older. Among the 79 British participants, 32 were in the 18-29 age range, 41 were in the 30-49 age range, 6 were in the 50-64 age range, and no one was 65 years or older. No questions were asked about ethnicity or current place of residence.

Recruitment for the sample was done on a voluntary response basis. All participants were members of Amazon's Mechanical Turk, a crowdsourcing website. The parameters of the survey were restricted so that only members who were over 18 years of age and were from either the

United States or Great Britain were able to respond. The aim of the study was to get an equal sample of American and British participants; however, fewer British participants that expected volunteered. This is likely due to the smaller size of British Mechanical Turk members overall, and the requirement for Mechanical Turk participants to have an American credit card. All questions were optional, and responses that left a large majority of questions blank were thrown out.

5.2 Materials

The present study utilized a questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics, an online resource with which surveys can be created and taken by other users. Participants were directed to the questionnaire through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an additional website that allows users to receive compensation for participating anonymously in research surveys. All of the clips were of the same passage, an excerpt from the children's book "Mr. Tickle". Clips of each accent were obtained from the British Library's online database of accents as part of the Evolving English VoiceBank project. The original clips were edited with the audio software Audacity so that they were each approximately 20-30 seconds, and ended at the same point in the story. The length of the entire survey was approximately 15 minutes, though each participant was allotted two hours to complete it.

All of the speakers were female, between the ages of 18 and 30, and spoke in their own native accents. The accents used were Received Pronunciation, Cardiff, Edinburgh, West Country, Birmingham, and Liverpool. All recordings were done in 2010/2011 by anonymous visitors to the British Library.

5.3 Procedure

Before taking the survey, participants were told that they would be listening to people's voices and subsequently making guesses about the person speaking. They were instructed to do so to the best of their ability, even if they believed that a person's character would be impossible to judge by their voice. They were first asked to read the consent form and click "Yes" to consent and confirm that they are at least 18 years of age. Participants were then instructed to listen to the clips and do their best to ignore features of the audio quality or background noise in their evaluation.

For each question, participants were to listen to a clip of one of the six accents, and rate how the speaker sounds on a 7-point scale, using the following statements "I think this person sounds educated", "I think this person sounds friendly", "I think this person sounds intelligent", "I think this person sounds comforting", and "I think this person sounds trustworthy". Additional filler questions were also asked but not considered in the results. The order in which the accents were presented to the participants was randomly generated for each participant. In order to ensure that participants listened to the clip, they were asked to state whether the speaker of the passage was male or female. Responses that answered this question incorrectly on more than one occasion were thrown out. To test whether participants might have any preconceived knowledge about each accent, they were asked to identify, if able, the specific region from which the speaker hailed. Please refer to the Appendix for the complete list of questions. After completing the survey, they were directed to a debriefing page, which explained the nature of the study and provided an in-depth explanation of why this research is being conducted. Upon completing the study, participants received \$1.00 compensation through Mechanical Turk for their time and consideration.

VI. Results

An independent samples *t*-test comparing the averages of all British and American responses showed a significant difference between the two groups ($t = 4.0606$, $p < .0001$, $df = 181$). Figure 1 depicts the averages and standard deviations for British and American ratings overall. On average, American participants were found to rate British accents significantly higher than British participants when averaging scores for all accents and personality traits.

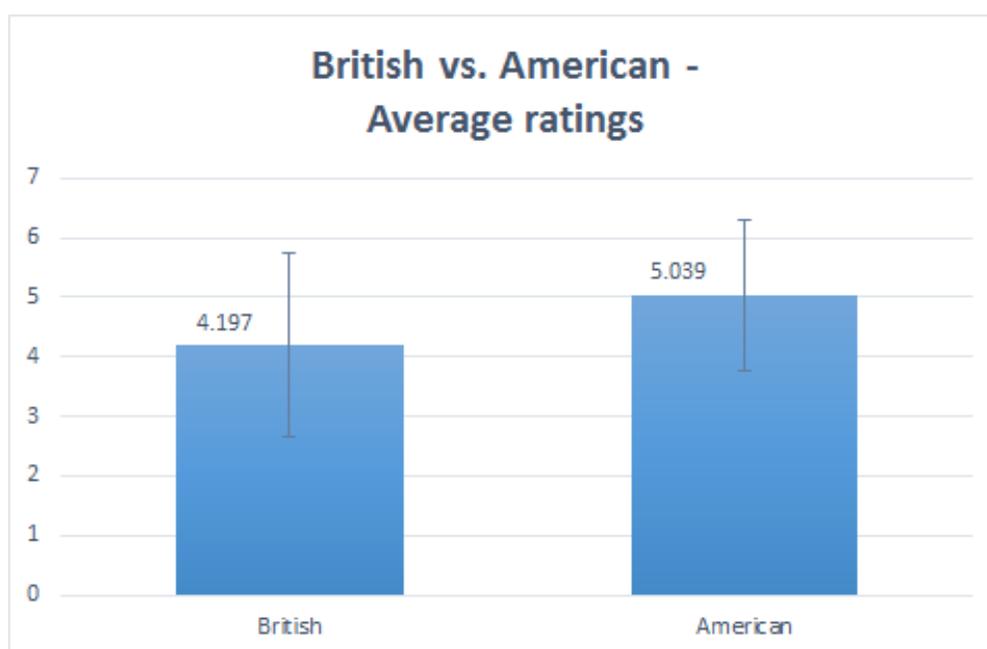


Figure 1. Averaged Scores for all Accents and Traits

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA compared the effects of each accent on their average ratings for both British [$F(5,78)=9.763$, $p<.001$], and American [$F(5,103)=31.301$, $p<.001$] participants and found significant difference in both cases. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni method indicated that for British participants, RP, Edinburgh, and Cardiff English

were all rated significantly higher than both Liverpool and West Country English when averaging their results for all personality traits. This partially supported hypothesis 2, though there was no significant difference between Birmingham English and any of the three positive-stereotyped accents (RP, Edinburgh, and Cardiff). For American participants, post hoc comparisons revealed a significant difference between Cardiff English and all three of the negative-stereotyped accents (Birmingham, Liverpool, and West Country). RP and Edinburgh English both scored significantly higher than Liverpool and West Country English, though there was no significant difference between Birmingham and either of these two accents. Figure 2 illustrates the average scores across all personality traits for each accent, comparing British and American scores. Tables 1 and 2 depict the average scores and standard deviations of each personality trait for each of the accents tested.

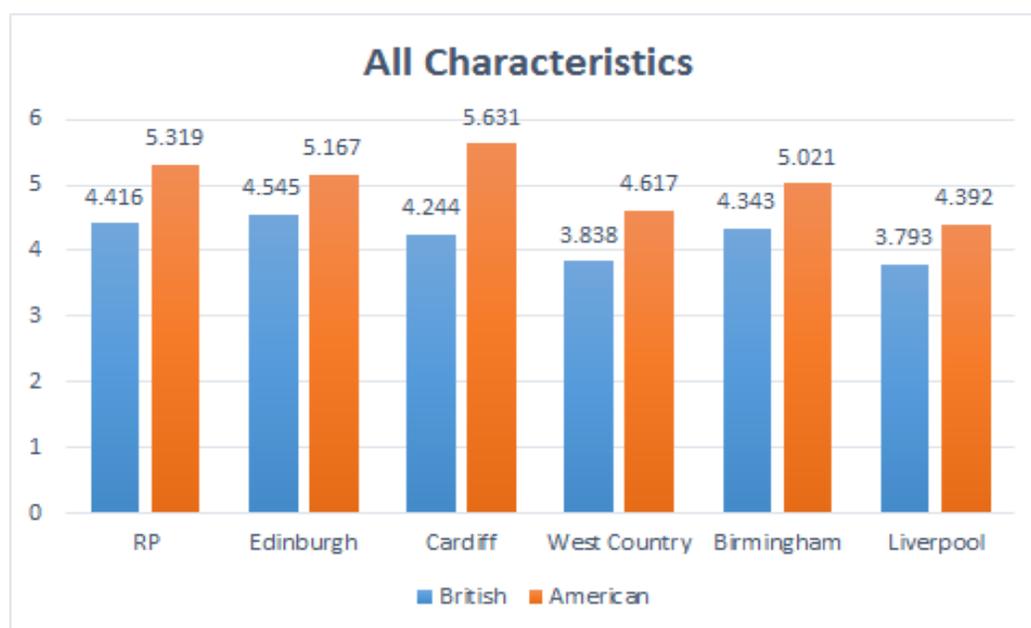


Figure 2. Average Ratings for Each Accent Combining All Characteristics

| Accent | | Educated | Friendly | Intelligent | Comforting | Trustworthy | Total |
|--------------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| RP | Mean | 4.662 | 4.519 | 4.351 | 4.211 | 4.338 | 4.416 |
| | N | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| | StDev | 1.737 | 1.492 | 1.775 | 1.552 | 1.353 | 1.582 |
| Edinburgh | Mean | 4.722 | 4.430 | 4.709 | 4.205 | 4.660 | 4.545 |
| | N | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| | StDev | 1.510 | 1.677 | 1.469 | 1.540 | 1.280 | 1.495 |
| Cardiff | Mean | 4.253 | 4.360 | 4.333 | 3.907 | 4.365 | 4.244 |
| | N | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| | StDev | 2.131 | 2.031 | 2.042 | 2.094 | 1.855 | 2.031 |
| West Country | Mean | 3.373 | 4.360 | 3.662 | 3.716 | 4.080 | 3.838 |
| | N | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| | StDev | 1.402 | 1.420 | 1.327 | 1.485 | 1.353 | 1.397 |
| Birmingham | Mean | 4.337 | 4.408 | 4.413 | 4.234 | 4.325 | 4.343 |
| | N | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| | StDev | 1.343 | 1.691 | 1.337 | 1.459 | 1.292 | 1.424 |
| Liverpool | Mean | 3.364 | 4.506 | 3.613 | 3.519 | 3.961 | 3.793 |
| | N | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| | StDev | 1.337 | 1.401 | 1.394 | 1.373 | 1.261 | 1.353 |
| Total | Mean | 4.119 | 4.431 | 4.180 | 3.965 | 4.288 | 4.197 |
| | N | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| | StDev | 1.577 | 1.619 | 1.557 | 1.584 | 1.399 | 1.547 |

Table 1. Mean, Sample Size, and Standard Deviations of Responses by British Participants

| Accent | | Educated | Friendly | Intelligent | Comforting | Trustworthy | Totals |
|--------------|-------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| RP | Mean | 5.5 | 5.346 | 5.462 | 5.135 | 5.154 | 5.319 |
| | N | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| | StDev | 1.043 | 1.268 | 1.223 | 1.449 | 1.298 | 1.256 |
| Edinburgh | Mean | 5.106 | 5.404 | 5.125 | 5.135 | 5.067 | 5.167 |
| | N | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| | StDev | 1.079 | 1.093 | 1.172 | 1.387 | 1.217 | 1.190 |
| Cardiff | Mean | 5.760 | 5.728 | 5.837 | 5.548 | 5.284 | 5.631 |
| | N | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| | StDev | 1.110 | 1.131 | 1.053 | 1.413 | 1.300 | 1.210 |
| West Country | Mean | 4.433 | 5.019 | 4.451 | 4.471 | 4.712 | 4.617 |
| | N | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| | StDev | 1.298 | 1.123 | 1.291 | 1.468 | 1.267 | 1.289 |
| Birmingham | Mean | 5.077 | 5.154 | 5.153 | 4.796 | 4.923 | 5.021 |
| | N | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| | StDev | 1.077 | 1.180 | 0.983 | 1.324 | 1.244 | 1.162 |
| Liverpool | Mean | 4.146 | 5.097 | 4.262 | 4.157 | 4.728 | 4.392 |
| | N | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| | StDev | 1.424 | 1.383 | 1.441 | 1.590 | 1.388 | 1.445 |
| Total | Mean | 5.004 | 5.291 | 5.048 | 4.874 | 4.978 | 5.039 |
| | N | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| | StDev | 1.172 | 1.196 | 1.194 | 1.439 | 1.286 | 1.257 |

Table 2 Mean, Sample Size, and Standard Deviations of Responses by American Participants

For the purpose of simplifying the results, the characteristics “intelligent” and “educated” were later grouped into the broader category of “status”, while “friendly”, “comforting”, and “trustworthy” were categorized as “social attractiveness”. A two-way ANOVA for both groups of participants tested to see whether the type of personality trait (status or social attractiveness) had an effect on participants’ ratings for each accent, and found no significant difference for either British ($p=.585$) or American ($p=.853$) participants, indicating that there is no interaction between the type of trait being measured and the accents’ ratings. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate American and British ratings by accent for both status and social attractiveness.

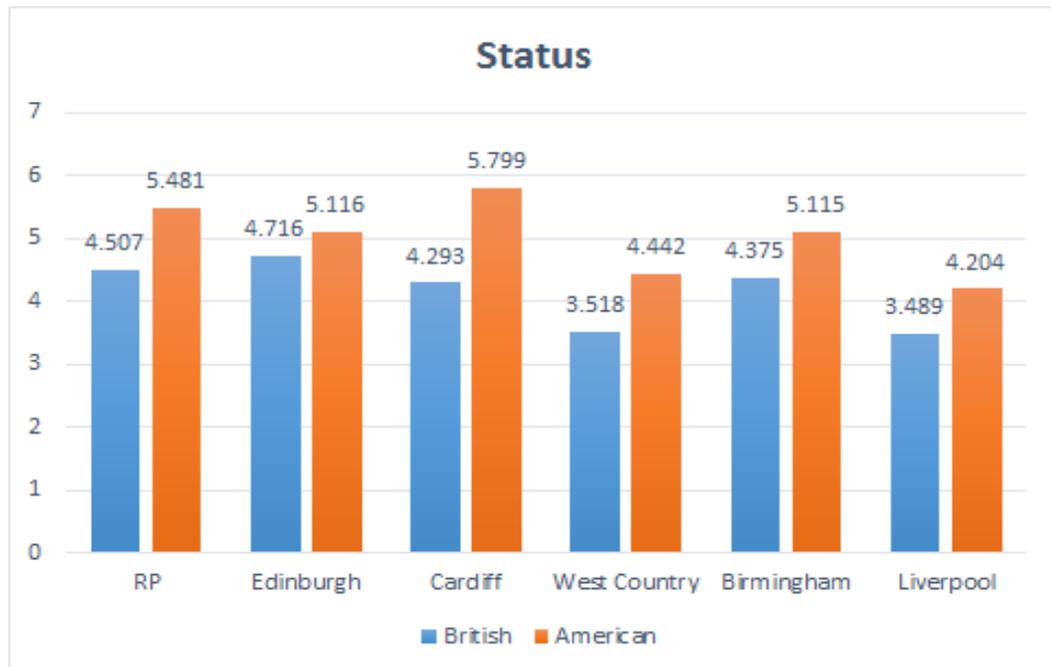


Figure 3. British and American Averages for Status Characteristics

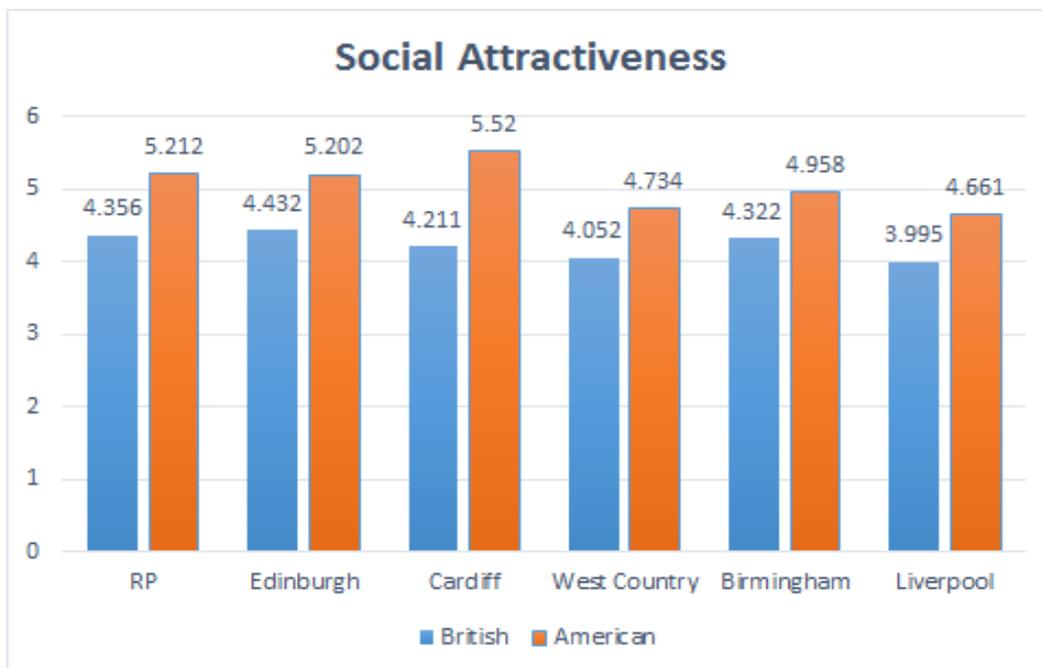


Figure 4. British and American Averages for Social Attractiveness Characteristics

VII. Discussion

The results of the study support the hypothesis that British participants rate RP, Edinburgh, and Cardiff English higher than Liverpool and West Country English, though there is no evidence to support that Birmingham English is also poorly rated. This is a surprising result, given the claims of previous research that suggest that Birmingham English is the most widely disliked accent in Great Britain. The contradictory results of the present study could be due to qualities of the particular speaker, or they may indicate a trend towards acceptance of the Birmingham accent in the UK. It is impossible to say whether ratings were influenced by the speaker's voice, reading speed, or other variables that were not controlled for. The results also indicate that American participants rate British accents higher than British participants overall, which is expected, given the general positive reputation of British accents in the United States. In

retrospect, however, it may have been more valuable to test a population in which British accents have no reputation at all.

There was no evidence to support the hypothesis that American participants would not show a preference among any of the accents. In fact, they showed nearly the exact same preferences as the British participants, with the exception of showing a stronger preference toward Cardiff English than the British participants had. These results are unexpected, but can potentially be explained by participants' exposure to British media and stereotypes, which will be discussed in the final section of this paper. In summary, one out of three of the original hypotheses was fully supported. The British ratings of Birmingham English and Cardiff English were inconsistent with what was expected, with Cardiff being rated lower and Birmingham being rated higher than what previous research has suggested. In the case of American participants, none of the results aligned with what was hypothesized, as they showed strong preferences for and against specific accents which followed nearly the exact same trend as the British participants.

VIII. Conclusion

The present study assumed that American participants would not have any preconceived notions about which accents were regarded more highly than others, though it is possible that this was an incorrect assumption. As British media becomes more and more popular in the United States through the BBC and other television and radio networks, there is increasing likelihood that Americans have become familiar with these accents, and understand their social implications. For instance, *Doctor Who*, a British science fiction series that is hugely popular in both the United Kingdom and the United States, has positively portrayed RP, Scottish, and

Welsh English. *Downton Abbey*, another British television show that is popular in the US, depicts a clear and obvious dichotomy between members of the aristocracy, who speak RP, and servants, who speak in a local Yorkshire accent. An additional influence on the ratings of both British and American participants could have been age of the speaker. The Liverpool and West Country speakers were two of the youngest speakers in the group (ages 18 and 21 respectively), which may have been a factor in the judgements of participants, particularly for the status dimension, which asks about intelligence and education. When considering all of these factors, there are many confounding variables that could be responsible for the unanticipated responses from American participants.

Contrary to the findings of Hiraga (2005), the type of personality trait (status vs. social attractiveness) did not seem to have any influence on the ratings of each accent. Hiraga observed that RP, for instance, was much higher in status than in solidarity, while town and industrial accents showed the opposite trend. The results of the present study indicated a general trend of either high or low scores across the board for each accent, without consideration for which particular trait was being asked about.

In order to more reliably test whether British accent stereotypes are based on something other than the deep-rooted classism in British society, more research needs to be done among groups that are less exposed to British media. For instance, similar studies could be conducted in countries that are less Westernized, or potentially using participants who do not speak English at all. This would tell us more about whether there are qualities of the accents themselves that somehow support the stereotypes that have been assigned to them. While the present study brings new insight to the issue of British attitudes toward various British accents, it is not clear whether the American evaluations can truly be considered uninfluenced by British attitudes, and

thus, further research on the topic is recommended. Overall, it can be concluded that, while Americans may hold the same opinions about British accents as many British speakers, there are still more questions to be answered.

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IV. Appendix

In this study, you'll be asked to listen to people's voices and try to make some guesses about the person speaking. Of course, it is impossible to judge a person's character based off of their voice, but we ask that you do the best that you can.

1. What is your gender? *Open ended*
2. What is your age? *18-29, 30-49, 50-64, 65+*
3. What is your country of residence? *Open ended*

**Possible answers to each question are italicized*

**Click here to listen to a short audio clip.*

Using the scales below, rate how the speaker sounds to you.

Do your best to ignore features of the audio quality or background noise in your evaluation.

**This question was repeated six times for each of the accents. Participants were directed to the sounds clips upon clicking the link.*

Scale of 1 to 7: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat disagree (3), Neither agree nor disagree (4), Somewhat agree (5), Agree (6), Strongly agree (7).

1. I think this person sounds attractive
2. I think this person sounds educated
3. I think this person sounds friendly
4. I think this person sounds intelligent
5. I think this person sounds comforting
6. I think this person sounds trustworthy
7. I think this person sounds athletic
8. I think this person is easy to understand

9. Can you tell where this person is from?

Be as specific as possible (i.e. Manchester, England)

Yes: open ended, no

10. Is this person male or female? *Male, Female*

11. What is your best guess of this person's age? *Open ended*

**Possible answers to each question are italicized*

