

Acadiana-Area Speech-Language Pathology Students' Perceptions of Cajun English Speakers

Tobias A. Kroll

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, Lubbock

Zaneta Mok

Australian Catholic University, Melbourne

Louise Keegan

Appalachian State University, Boone, NC

Ioannis Papakyritsis

Western Illinois University, Macomb

Jack S. Damico

University of Louisiana at Lafayette

It is increasingly recognized that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) do not simply treat language and communication

disorders; rather, SLPs treat persons who present with such a disorder (Crystal & Varley, 1998). A focus on the client as a whole and on the clinical relationship

ABSTRACT: Purpose: Accents may have an impact on how a speaker's personality is perceived, and such dynamics may impact the therapeutic relationship. This study examined how speech-language pathology students in the Acadiana (Cajun) area of Louisiana perceive speakers of Cajun English (CE), Standard American English (SAE), and Standard Southern English (SE) on 2 dimensions of personality perception: solidarity (social closeness) and competence (education and intelligence).

Method: An online survey was completed by 73 of the 285 undergraduate and master's students at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Participants were presented with a standardized reading sample in each of the target accents. Target accents were not disclosed to participants. Students were asked to rate the speakers on a 6-point Likert scale for each of the 5 items in either dimension.

Results: The CE speaker was rated higher than the

SAE and SE speakers on 4 out of 5 measures of solidarity (Sociable, Likable, Friendly, and Kind), whereas the SAE speaker was rated higher than the CE or SE speakers on 2 out of 5 measures of competence (Educated and Intelligent). These results are in line with previous findings regarding the perception of personality traits in speakers of standard versus nonstandard, in-group accents.

Conclusion: Despite the fact that training in linguistics is part of their curriculum, speech-language pathology students in the Acadiana area showed stereotypical patterns of accent perception. It is suggested that speech-language pathology education might benefit from targeting students' preconceptions in order to help students appreciate the uniqueness of each client.

KEY WORDS: dialect, accent perception, speech-language pathology education, Cajun English, survey

(Duchan & Kovarsky, 2011) entails that the clinician needs interpersonal skills in addition to technical knowledge. Prominent among these skills are a non-judgmental, positive attitude toward clients and sensitivity for intercultural differences (Holland, 2007). However, individual and cultural preconceptions can interfere with an open-minded attitude.

One of the factors that trigger such preconceptions is a person's speech. Social dialects and, specifically, accents (speech-sound productions that deviate from standard phonetics in accord with the speaker's native language or dialect) are known to induce stereotypical perceptions of a person and, as a consequence, hamper their social and professional advancement (Sikorski, 2005). In the area of education, Cazden (1988), among others, suggested that teacher biases toward a student's dialect may create a self-fulfilling prophecy, with underestimations of the student's abilities leading to actual underachievement. Similar processes may impact the course of treatment if an SLP adopts an unfavorable attitude toward a client based on the client's dialect or accent.

Officially, the field of speech-language pathology rejects any notion of discrimination based on cultural or linguistic differences (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 1983, 2010; Sikorski, 2005). However, whether or not individual SLPs are indeed free of preconceptions regarding dialectal or accent differences has not widely been studied. Specifically, no data exist on SLPs' attitudes toward speakers of regional varieties of American English.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of speech-language pathology students in Louisiana's Acadiana (Cajun) region toward speakers of Cajun English (CE), Standard American English (SAE), and Southern American English (SE). Because the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (UL Lafayette) is located in the center of the Cajun community, and most students are from the area, we expected to find significant differences in students' perception of CE in relation to the other two.

Attitudes Toward Dialects and Accents

Biases toward regional and social speech differences, especially minority dialects and accents, are well documented. Lambert (1967) compared the attitudes of Canadians toward speakers of Canadian English versus Canadian French and found that Canadian French speakers were consistently rated lower on a variety of traits pertaining to social status and attractiveness, even by French Canadian speakers themselves. In Irwin (1977), the vocal quality, speech fluency, and confidence of speakers of SAE were rated significantly higher than the same traits in speakers of African

American English (AAE). The listeners in Yost (1977) found SAE to be more comprehensible and credible than AAE. In Riney (1990), 71% of participants rated speakers of SAE as more intelligent than average, whereas only 18% rated a speaker of AAE the same way. Carlson and McHenry (2006) found that for speakers with a strong accent, AAE speakers were rated least employable, followed by speakers with Spanish accents, who were rated more employable. Speakers with an Asian accent were rated as the most employable.

However, biases do not always have negative polarity: Nonstandard dialects can trigger positive perceptions as well. AAE was rated highest in believability and communication in Grinstead, Krzystan, Van Deusen, and Scott (1987), whereas Northeastern-accented White speech was rated highest in professionalism and education. Luhman (1990) had students in Kentucky, who were mostly from the area themselves, rate SAE and Appalachian dialects on status and solidarity (social closeness) dimensions. Standard American dialects were consistently rated higher in status; Appalachian dialects were consistently rated higher in solidarity.

An important finding of extant studies is that in some cases, biases against a minority's speech are entertained even by members of the respective minority group. Also, not all biases are created alike: Different stereotypes may be applied to different groups. When the raters' and speakers' regional or ethnic background is similar, speakers are rated higher on measures related to personal and interpersonal characteristics (Grinstead et al., 1987; Luhman, 1990).

Dialectal and accent differences trigger preconceptions even in professionals in education and intervention who interact with great numbers of people from various backgrounds on a daily basis. In a study of dialect perception that was conducted among preservice teachers (i.e., teachers who had not yet held their first teaching position), Cross, DeVaney, and Jones (2001) found that speakers of northeastern dialects and Standard White English were rated significantly higher on personal attributes such as intelligence and education and friendliness and trustworthiness than were speakers of SE or AAE. Also, participants rated speakers with the same ethnic background as their own higher than they rated speakers with a different ethnic background (Cross et al., 2001).

Teachers do not necessarily receive training in linguistics during their education. The same is not true for SLPs, whose professional training includes basic linguistic concepts (ASHA, 2008), which could be expected to reduce one's biases toward speech differences. However, preliminary evidence suggests that

even seasoned SLPs may be prone to harbor such biases. Schmidt and Sullivan (2003) surveyed aspects of clinical training of foreign accent modification in graduate programs in speech-language pathology; in their answers, approximately 25% of the respondents (program directors or clinical supervisors) labeled foreign accents as *impaired* or *disordered* speech. A related phenomenon was reported by Robinson and Stockman (2009), who had school-based SLPs with little exposure to AAE rate the comprehensibility of utterances that included AAE features. Their participants consistently rated utterances that contained such features as less comprehensible than utterances that did not contain such features, even when utterances contained just a single feature.

Regarding the impact of such biases, there is evidence, again from the field of education, that teacher preconceptions may hamper a child's academic success. Williams, Whitehead, and Miller (1972) investigated teachers' views about dialect and found that their participants expected student speakers of a nonstandard dialect to achieve at lower levels than student speakers of the standard variety. Taylor (1983) had a group of preservice teachers rate reading samples of Black and White second-grade students. Respondents who held negative attitudes toward AAE rated the samples of the Black students lower than did those of their counterparts who held positive attitudes toward AAE.

Although it is difficult to investigate the impact of such attitudes on students' views of themselves and the academic enterprise (Cross et al., 2001), bias against Black students' dialect or against African Americans in general can be directly linked to misplacement of these students in speech-language treatment or special education (Baugh, 1995; Vallas, 2009). In light of these arguments, it is warranted to assume that similar processes may impact speech treatment for speakers with a regional accent.

History and Characteristics of CE

CE is the vernacular variety of White South Louisianans of French (Acadian, later shortened to *Cajun*) descent. In 1604, their ancestors founded the colony of Acadia in the region that was to become the Atlantic provinces of Canada. These people were expelled in 1755 for refusing to pledge allegiance to the British crown. Settling eventually in what is now the Acadiana region of South Louisiana, they formed a distinct rural culture that was set apart from other French-speaking groups in the area. This culture and its language were brought to the brink of extinction with the advent of industrialization and compulsory education in the late 19th and early 20th century;

state legislation in 1921 effectively outlawed Cajun French by establishing English as the only official language in Louisiana (Cox, 1992; Dubois & Melançon, 1997; Morris, 2009).

CE retains a variety of French lexical items such as *sha* or *cher* (a term of endearment), *lagniappe* (an extra), or *parrain* (godfather). It also displays some unique syntactic properties, including copula deletion (*He so drunk he tink he me*) and the use of *yes* and *no* tags for emphasis (*I don't care, no*). As for CE's phonological and prosodic properties, the following are most commonly given: stopping of interdental fricatives, nonrhoticity, simplification of consonant clusters, voicing of unvoiced alveolar fricatives, occasional final consonant deletion, monophthongization of diphthongs, lowering of lax mid-front vowels, reduced difference in duration between stressed and unstressed syllables (or even deletion of unstressed syllables), and stress on the last word or word group of a phrase (Cheremie, 1998; Cox, 1992). The term *flat talk*, which is used by some CE speakers to refer to their own speech, appears to capture many of these properties. Impressionistically, CE has been described as more musical than surrounding varieties of English, but also having a clipped, staccato sound (Cheremie, 1998).

Perceptions of CE

Well into the 20th century, most Cajun people were farmers or fishermen. Due to this economic situation and their "exotic," rural catholic culture, Cajuns were stereotyped as being poor, illiterate, simple minded, uneducated, and generally socially inferior. However, after its near extinction, Cajun culture has been experiencing a revival since the late 1960s to the point of being "trendy." Today, Cajun culture plays a positive, core role in the identity of Acadiana's denizens, including those generations whose first language is English (Dubois & Melançon, 1997; Morris, 2009).

However, this trendiness has not always translated into a positive perception of CE. Cheremie (1998) offered an extensive overview on pertinent research, including publications that are no longer accessible. She mentioned a study from 1972 in which native Louisiana students rated an AAE speaker higher than a CE speaker on several measures of authoritative and character. In another study from the mid-1980s, teachers cited CE as a reason for Cajun children's poor performance on grammar drills and blamed language deficits on parental speech habits. In a 1992 study, denizens of Acadiana judged a speaker of SAE and a speaker of Cajun-accented SAE to be more prosperous and learned than a speaker with a full-blown Cajun dialect and a speaker of Cajun French.

However, the Cajun dialect and French speakers received high ratings of friendliness, honesty, and desirability for friendly relations.

More recently, Guidry, Thibodeaux, Barnes, Lafleur, and Bettagere (2010) surveyed the perceptions of CE by international students who were enrolled in Southern Louisiana universities with native languages other than English. Participants were asked to listen to four phonetically balanced speech samples (readings of *The Rainbow Passage*; Fairbanks, 1960), two in SAE and two in CE, with a male and a female speaker for each accent. Participants then completed a Likert-type questionnaire regarding their perception of speakers' likability and intelligibility and answered multiple-choice questions on their presumptions about the speakers' educational attainment, income, and employment status. More than 75% of the participants reported being able to *definitely* or *somewhat* understand all of the speakers, and more than 70% indicated that they definitely or somewhat agreed that the speakers had a likable personality (Guidry et al., 2010). Participants also considered the SAE speakers to have attained higher educational levels than the CE speakers, to have a higher income, and to be more likely to work in a full-time or part-time position. Unfortunately, the result patterns show gender differences that were not taken into account by the authors, and because no statistical analyses were performed, it is not possible to determine significance levels for the results or to assume that accent was the crucial variable. It is noteworthy, however, that the male SAE speaker was consistently rated highest in all categories, suggesting a mixed gender-accent bias on the part of the listeners (Guidry et al., 2010).

In sum, although some negative stereotypes seem to prevail, CE speakers are perceived positively as regards social and personal attributes, much as other speakers of minority dialects in the studies discussed earlier. Regarding the attitudes of Cajuns toward their own dialect, Cheramie (1998) pointed out that the dialect, much like the culture, has gone through a process of positive reappraisal in the Acadiana area and has even become a marker of Cajun identity.

Because there is evidence that even professionals in speech-language pathology, despite their educational background, are prone to judge persons based on their dialect or accents, with possible consequences for the therapeutic relationship and course of treatment, we were interested to determine how deeply, if at all, this mixed history of perceptions of CE is reflected in the attitudes of speech-language pathology students in the Cajun region. Previous research found differences in attitudes toward SAE, SE, and ethnic minority dialects such as AAE. Similar patterns may hold for CE as well. The purpose of this survey,

therefore, was to investigate if there were differences in Acadiana-area speech-language pathology students' ratings of personal traits in speakers of CE, SAE, and SE. Our main interest was to examine the differences between SAE and CE, as the latter is our participants' in-group dialect and the most prevalent variety in the region. SE was added in order to represent an out-group, nonstandard variety.

METHOD

Stimuli

Three speakers were selected as native representative speakers of the three distinct accents: CE, SAE, and SE. The authenticity of the accents was verified by two independent experts in accent variation who were blind to the targeted accents. All of the speakers were male, between 22 and 27 years old, and were either undergraduate or graduate students at UL Lafayette. *The Rainbow Passage* (Fairbanks, 1960) was chosen as a standardized speech sample instead of eliciting a spontaneous sample in order to ensure that any differences in ratings would be attributable to differences in accent rather than differences in semantics or syntax. Speakers were instructed to read the passage using their native accent; their performances were recorded using a Sony ICD-UX 200 digital audio recorder.

Because of difficulties with speaker recruitment, this study used a guise instead of a matched-guise technique. That is, target accents were not disclosed to participants (guise technique), and they were recorded from different speakers, not from the same speaker, as is commonly done in matched-guise designs. To ensure criterion validity, speakers of the target accents (SAE and CE, respectively) were therefore chosen for perceptual similarity of voice quality in order to exclude the latter as a confounding factor. Overall quality was fuller, warmer, and more expressive in both speakers as compared to the SE speaker. Instrumental measurements of jitter, shimmer, harmonic-to-noise ratio (HNR), F_0 , and intensity were carried out on the second through 11th sentence read by all speakers. The CE and SAE speaker were found to be more similar to each other than to the SE speaker on measures of jitter, HNR, and lower limit for F_0 , but not on other measures of F_0 or on measures of shimmer and intensity. HNR measurements tend to correlate with perceptual ratings of breathiness (de Krom, 1995); the measurements may thus indicate higher perceived breathiness in the SE speaker's voice. Also, the SE speaker had a lower standard deviation of mean F_0 , possibly suggesting

less varied and expressive intonation. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the instrumental measures of voice parameters in the three speakers.

Procedure

Convergent evidence from existing studies indicates that biases toward speech variations tend to play themselves out along two lines that have previously been termed competence (Lambert, 1967) and solidarity (Luhman, 1990). The *competence* dimension pertains to the purported level of education, professional success, and so on of the speaker; the *solidarity* dimension pertains to the likability, sociability, and so on of the speaker. Based on this established pattern, participants in this study were asked to rate the three speakers on these two dimensions using five items per dimension. To ensure validity of the items, a focus group (Morgan, 1996; Wilkinson, 1998) was run before the actual study. Two undergraduate speech-language pathology majors were presented with a list of solidarity and competence attributes drawn from the literature (Cross et al., 2001; Lambert, 1967; Luhman, 1990) and were asked which five items of each dimension they would be most comfortable using if they had to judge someone's personality based on their perception of the individual's speech. Table 3 shows the items picked by the focus group participants.

Participants for the survey were recruited from the 285 undergraduate and master's students who were enrolled in UL Lafayette's speech-language

Table 1. Measures of perturbation and harmonic-to-noise ratio (HNR) for the speakers of Standard American English (SAE), Cajun English (CE), and Southern American English (SE).

Parameter	Speaker		
	SAE	CE	SE
Jitter (%)			
Mean	2.961	3.181	2.0390
SD	0.485	0.390	0.3020
Jitter (ms)			
Mean	0.302	0.273	0.1790
SD	0.049	0.041	0.0260
Shimmer (%)			
Mean	10.829	10.038	9.8030
SD	1.452	1.250	1.2710
Shimmer (dB)			
Mean	1.045	0.972	0.9360
SD	0.129	0.106	0.1296
HNR (dB)			
Mean	12.600	12.195	13.3550
SD	0.895	0.823	1.0782

Table 2. Measures of F_0 and intensity for the guise speakers.

Parameter	Speaker		
	SAE	CE	SE
F_0 (Hz)			
Mean	98.350	117.063	113.715
SD	5.304	5.426	2.523
F_0 SD (Hz)			
Mean	15.0710	21.765	9.654
SD	4.2572	1.993	1.330
F_0 min (Hz)			
Mean	74.846	76.293	87.707
SD	1.736	2.489	3.754
F_0 max (Hz)			
Mean	152.114	182.869	161.323
SD	12.110	17.472	12.936
F_0 range (Hz)			
Mean	77.267	106.575	73.616
SD	12.276	17.774	12.728
Intensity (dB)			
Mean	78.008	83.560	75.777
SD	0.824	0.646	1.389

Table 3. Attributes of solidarity and competence used in this study.

Solidarity attributes	Competence attributes
Sympathetic	Educated
Sociable	Intelligent
Likable	Ambitious
Friendly	Confident
Kind	Leader

pathology program at the time of the study. Personal communication by faculty and mass e-mails were used to contact the students. Incentives offered for participating in the survey included class credit and the chance to win one of five \$25 gift cards that would be raffled off among the participants. A gift card from a local coffee shop served as a reward for the focus group participants.

An online self-administered survey hosted by the SurveyGizmo website was used for administering the audio samples and collecting the responses. On the first webpage, which also served as the informed consent page, students were asked to listen and respond independently; it could not be verified if they adhered to this. During the survey, each participant was presented with an individual speech sample and was then presented, for each of the 10 attributes, with the statement: *This speaker is [attribute]*. Participants

were then asked to indicate the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with the attribute statement using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *definitely disagree* (1) to *definitely agree* (6). This process was repeated until all three guise samples were presented. After taking the survey, participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, academic level, hometown region, and heritage background, as well as whether they, their friends, or their family speak with CE accents.

Seventy-three completed surveys were returned, which amounts to a response rate of 25.6%. Table 4 shows the participant demographics. Of note, 65 out of 73 participants (89%) reported having a Cajun accent and/or use of a Cajun accent in their social environment, indicating that CE was indeed the in-group variety for most respondents in the sample.

RESULTS

Responses on the Likert scale were submitted to a Friedman's test, with an alpha level of 0.05. Significant global differences were found for all 10 attribute

Table 4. Participant demographics.

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Number of answers</i>
Gender	
Female	71
Male	2
Academic level	
Master's 1st year	9
Master's 2nd year	0
Undergraduate 1st year	5
Undergraduate 2nd year	20
Undergraduate 3rd year	27
Undergraduate 4th year	17
Hometown region	
Acadiana	73
Heritage background	
Black/African American	7
Cajun	21
Caucasian other than Cajun	40
Decline to respond	1
Hispanic	3
Other/Multiracial	1
Use of Cajun accent	
Participant, friends, family	18
Friends and family	27
Participant and friends	2
Participant and family	0
Participant only	0
Friends only	15
Family only	3
None of the above	8

items. Statistics for the Friedman's test are reported in Table 5.

In order to determine the relative standing for each target speaker on the individual items, we converted the median ratings into ranks, which are reported in Table 6. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the information. Note that the CE speaker ranked highest on all of the solidarity attributes. In the competence category, results were mixed: The SAE speaker ranked highest on the Educated and Intelligent attributes, whereas the CE speaker had a slight advantage on the Confident and Leader attributes. Both speakers tied on the Ambitious attribute. The SE speaker ranked lowest on all attributes.

To determine whether the differences in the ratings of the speakers on individual attributes were statistically significant, we performed post hoc analyses of interspeaker comparisons using the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test with a Bonferroni correction applied, which resulted in a significance level set at $p < 0.017$. A summary of the statistical scores is presented in Table 7. Significant scores were then tested for effect sizes by calculating PSdep values (probability of superiority for dependent groups). The results of this test are presented in Table 8.

The analysis indicated three significant patterns. First, the CE speaker was rated significantly higher than the other two speakers on all solidarity ratings except Sympathetic, on which he was rated significantly higher than the SE speaker but not the SAE speaker. Effect sizes ranged from 0.62 to 0.85 (rounded), again with the exception of Sympathetic, where the effect size for the comparison with the SE speaker was 0.58 (rounded). Following Grissom (1994), the former values translate to medium to large effect sizes in the sense of Cohen (1988), whereas the value for Sympathetic indicates a small effect.

Table 5. Significant global differences in the solidarity and competence attributes.

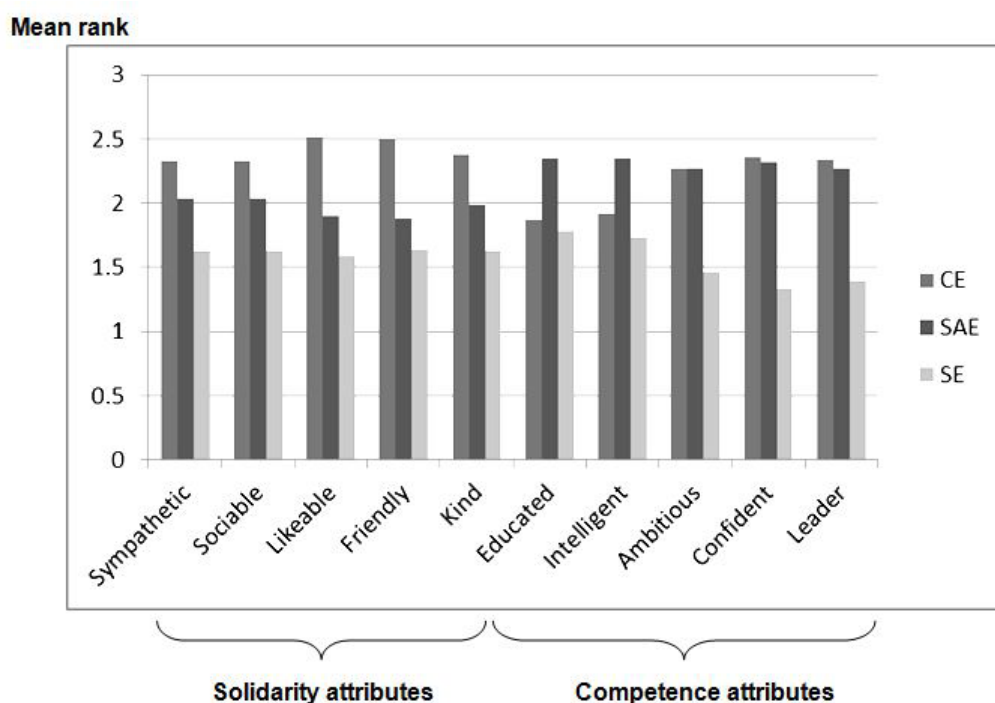
<i>Solidarity attribute</i>	χ^2 level (p level)	<i>Competence attribute</i>	χ^2 level (p level)
Sympathetic	22.084 (0.000)	Educated	19.539 (0.000)
Sociable	55.092 (0.000)	Intelligent	21.610 (0.000)
Likable	39.455 (0.000)	Ambitious	42.555 (0.000)
Friendly	35.539 (0.000)	Confident	57.466 (0.000)
Kind	26.766 (0.000)	Leader	48.661 (0.000)

Note. $df = 2$.

Table 6. Median ratings and mean ranks of each guise speaker per the 10 attributes.

<i>CE</i>			<i>SAE</i>			<i>SE</i>		
<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Median rating</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>	<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Median rating</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>	<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Median rating</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>
Sympathetic	3	2.33	Sympathetic	4	2.04	Sympathetic	4	1.63
Sociable	3	2.33	Sociable	5	2.04	Sociable	4	1.63
Likable	4	2.51	Likable	5	1.90	Likable	4	1.59
Friendly	4	2.49	Friendly	5	1.88	Friendly	4	1.64
Kind	4	2.38	Kind	5	1.99	Kind	4	1.63
Educated	4	1.87	Educated	4	2.35	Educated	5	1.78
Intelligent	4	1.92	Intelligent	4	2.35	Intelligent	5	1.73
Ambitious	3	2.27	Ambitious	4	2.27	Ambitious	4	1.46
Confident	3	2.36	Confident	5	2.32	Confident	5	1.33
Leader	3	2.34	Leader	5	2.27	Leader	4	1.39

Figure 1. Speaker rankings per attribute.



Second, the SAE speaker was rated significantly higher than the SE and CE speakers on the ratings for Educated and Intelligent in the competence category, with effect sizes in the range of 0.64 to 0.71 (rounded), indicating medium to large effects. Specifically, medium effects were found in comparison with the CE speaker and large effects in comparison with the SE speaker. The CE and SE speakers did not significantly differ on these ratings.

Third, the SE speaker was rated significantly lower than the other speakers on all of the measures except for Friendly and Kind, on which he did not significantly differ from the SAE speaker, and on Educated and Intelligent, on which he did not significantly differ from the CE speaker. Effect sizes for the superiority of the SAE and CE speakers ranged from 0.58 to 0.85 (rounded). Thirteen out of 16 values were in the medium to large range.

Table 7. Significant differences between the speakers per attribute.

<i>Solidarity attribute</i>	<i>SAE – SE</i>	<i>SAE – CE</i>	<i>SE – CE</i>	<i>Competence attribute</i>	<i>SAE –SE</i>	<i>SAE –CE</i>	<i>SE – CE</i>
Sympathetic				Educated			
<i>z-score</i>	3.042	1.583	4.57		4.399	4.199	0.417
<i>(p level)</i>	(0.002)*	(0.113)	(0.000)*		(0.000)*	(0.000)*	(0.677)
Sociable				Intelligent			
<i>z-score</i>	2.878	4.573	6.159		4.651	3.946	1.616
<i>(p level)</i>	(0.004)*	(0.000)*	(0.000)*		(0.000)*	(0.000)*	(0.106)
Likable				Ambitious			
<i>z-score</i>	2.467	3.634	5.029		5.022	2.32	5.015
<i>(p level)</i>	(0.014)*	(0.000)*	(0.000)*		(0.000)*	(0.816)	(0.000)*
Friendly				Confident			
<i>z-score</i>	1.839	3.465	5.092		6.104	1.504	6.417
<i>(p level)</i>	(0.066)	(0.001)*	(0.000)*		(0.000)*	(0.133)	(0.000)*
Kind				Leader			
<i>z-score</i>	2.066	2.720	4.546		5.785	0.004	5.890
<i>(p level)</i>	(0.039)	(0.007)*	(0.000)*		(0.000)*	(0.997)	(0.000)*

Note. *df* = 2

*Indicates a statistically significant difference at alpha level $p = 0.017$ (calculated for Bonferroni correction).

Table 8. Effect sizes (probability of superiority for dependent groups with half tie).

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>CE > SAE</i>	<i>CE > SE</i>	<i>SAE > SE</i>
Sympathetic	n.s.	0.575342000	0.616438000
Sociable	0.767123288	0.849325068	0.650684932
Likable	0.705479452	0.801369863	0.609589041
Friendly	0.698630137	0.787671233	n.s.
Kind	0.623287671	0.753424658	n.s.
Educated	0.356164384	n.s.	0.705479452
Intelligent	0.363013699	n.s.	0.712328767
Ambitious	n.s.	0.760273973	0.753424658
Confident	n.s.	0.849315068	0.821917808
Leader	n.s.	0.808219178	0.801369863

Note. n.s. = not significant.

DISCUSSION

General Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if Acadiana-area speech-language pathology students would rate speakers with different accents differentially on the personal attributes of competence and solidarity. The results showed that this was the case: Significant differences were found between the ratings of speakers of CE, SAE, and SE. Specifically, the CE speaker was rated significantly higher than both the SAE and SE speaker on four out of five solidarity attributes (Sociable, Likable, Friendly, and Kind). He was also rated significantly higher than the SE speaker on Sympathetic. By contrast, the SAE speaker was rated

significantly higher than both the CE and SE speaker on two out of five competence attributes (Educated and Intelligent). The SE speaker was rated lower than the other two speakers on all of the measures for which significant differences were found.

These results are consistent with previous findings that have been reported in the literature on accent perception and also with the history of attitudes toward CE speakers. Recall that CE has traditionally been associated with stereotypical characterizations of Cajuns as uneducated (Dubois & Melançon, 1997). This preconception is reflected in the results of the current study insofar as the CE speaker was rated lower than the SAE speaker on the Educated and Intelligent attributes from the competence category. It is noteworthy that stereotypes of this kind are

entertained not only by outsiders, as shown by Guidry et al. (2010), but also by members or affiliates of the group in question. All of the participants in our study indicated Acadiana as their home region, and all but eight of the participants (i.e., 89% of the sample) reported use of a Cajun accent in themselves, friends, and/or family. Thus, despite their affiliation with CE, the participants showed biases against CE speakers in regard to intelligence and educational attainment. It is illustrative to note that no significant differences between the CE speaker and the otherwise consistently lagging SE speaker were found on the respective attributes.

Although minority accents commonly fare worse with regard to the perceived educational level or professionalism of the speaker, extant literature documents the opposite trend with perceived social and interpersonal attributes of within-group speakers. In this regard, our findings mirror those of Luhman (1990): In our sample of Acadiana students, many of whom speak CE or have a social environment in which CE is prevalent, the CE speaker was ranked highest on solidarity attributes. This suggests that the participants identified with this accent, had a positive attitude toward speakers of this accent regarding social interaction, or at least found it familiar in a positive way.

Clinical Implications

Acadiana-area speech-language pathology students' varied perceptions of speakers with different accents may influence how they will interact with their clients as student clinicians and later as professionals. Evidence from studies examining teacher attitudes suggests that such dynamics do take place in classrooms. The current study did not investigate actual clinical interactions; thus, any suggestions in this regard are purely speculative. Even so, there are potential consequences that differing attitudes may have at the clinical level. For example, because our participants viewed CE speakers as sociable, likable, and so forth, it may be easy for them to build rapport with such a client and to make therapeutic interaction engaging, which in turn may positively impact treatment (Duchan, 2009; Simmons-Mackie & Kovarsky, 2009a, 2009b). It may not be as easy for our participants to relate to an SAE or SE speaker, whom they perceive to be less sociable, likable, and so forth. This may hamper engagement, hence treatment.

By contrast, assuming low educational level or even lower intelligence on the part of the CE speaker may lead the SLP to "patronize" the client, failing to acknowledge the client's own expertise with regard to his or her condition (cf. Holland, 2007). In this

regard, an SAE speaker may be more likely to be treated as an equal, which would allow him or her to raise concerns and ask questions about treatment, making valuable contributions to the therapeutic process. Again, these deliberations are speculative. Qualitative analyses of actual therapeutic interactions are warranted to establish if attitudes that are elicited in a listening task indeed translate into differences in interpersonal encounters.

Limitations

This study suffers from several limitations. First, due to participant attrition, the focus group that determined the rating items was much smaller ($n = 2$) than is usually acceptable in focus group methodology ($n =$ a minimum of 6) (cf. Morgan, 1996; Wilkinson, 1998). Second, a guise instead of a matched-guise technique was used. Third, thickness of accent was not controlled for (cf. Robinson & Stockman, 2009).

The first limitation appears to be less severe than the others, as the attributes chosen by the two focus group participants align well with the existing literature. By contrast, the second and third limitations raise concern regarding criterion validity: It is not entirely clear whether this study measured speech-language pathology students' perception of accents, as intended, or their perception either of voice qualities or of thickness of accents. However, the potential impact of this issue is deemed to be limited for two reasons. First, the voice qualities of the target accent speakers were perceptually similar. Thus, although results regarding the SE speaker may have been confounded by voice quality, there is no reason to assume that voice quality was a major confound for the comparison between the SAE and CE speaker. Second, the role of accent thickness in the perception of traits is unclear. Robinson and Stockman (2009) found that the frequency of dialect features in AAE samples correlated negatively with ratings of comprehensibility; however, this finding does not directly translate to the relation of feature frequency and perceived personality traits. A study reported in Chermie (1998) did find that thickness of accent correlated with ratings of personality traits: An SAE speaker was rated higher on all items (i.e., knowledge, reliability, honesty, friendliness, attractiveness, and desirability as a friend) than a speaker of Cajun-accented SAE, who in turn was rated higher than a speaker with a full-blown CE dialect. Thus, the authors did find a difference in perceived traits related to accent thickness; however, they found a similar difference between SAE and Cajun-accented SAE. It is difficult to directly compare those findings to the present study, as Chermie did not report the

exact results. Even so, the fact that the differences in trait ratings correlated directly with accent thickness suggests that varying thickness in this study might have resulted in different effect sizes but not in different findings overall. Future studies should seek to untangle these possible confounds by using matched-guise designs and systematically varying the degree of the accent.

Conclusion

This study investigated how speech-language pathology students in the Acadiana area of Louisiana perceived speakers of different accents, notably CE, SAE, and SE. Despite the fact that the professional preparation of future SLPs has a linguistics component, participants were prone to preconceptions of accents, just as participants were in previous studies on accent perception who did not have such training: They rated the speaker of their own (Cajun) accent high on measures of interpersonal rapport but deemed the speaker of the standard variety to be superior in terms of educational and intellectual attainment.

Whether or not such engrained notions may hamper—or facilitate—treatment we cannot know, but research on classroom instruction has found deleterious effects of accent-based preconceptions on relationships between teachers and students. Recent publications in the field of communication disorders have highlighted the importance of the therapeutic relationship and have argued that more awareness is needed regarding the impact of clinicians' interactional styles (Duchan & Kovarsky, 2011; Fourie, 2009; Fourie & Murphy, 2011; Simmons-Mackie & Damico, 2011). Of course, regional accents are but one of many personal characteristics that may trigger one's preconceptions and impact his or her interactions. Another such characteristic—voice quality—may have played a role in our results as well. It would be easy to conjure up a list of relevant attributes beyond speech: from complexion or build to caps touting a particular sports team—not to mention race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Some of these may counteract accent-based preconceptions; others may reinforce them. Such effects can be expected to vary from clinician to clinician.

Thus, although our findings are interesting from a sociolinguistic standpoint, the main conclusion regarding clinical practice is a rather general one: Because preconceptions based on accents persist despite linguistic training, speech-language pathology training might benefit from placing more importance on educating future clinicians to the uniqueness of every individual client and to identify and move beyond any preconceptions they might harbor.

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Contact author: Tobias A. Kroll, Department of Speech-Language & Hearing Sciences, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center, 3601 4th Street, STOP 6073, Lubbock, TX 79430-6073. E-mail: tobias.kroll@ttuhsc.edu