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# THE MATCHED GUISE TECHNIQUE

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## 1. The Experimental Procedure

The matched guise technique was originally developed to investigate people's attitudes toward social, geographical or ethnic language varieties and to the different languages spoken in bilingual communities (e.g. Lambert 1960). If you simply ask people about these attitudes, there is a high likelihood that their answers will reflect conscious stereotypes prevalent in their community rather than their actual attitudes.

The matched guise technique circumvents conscious introspection by confronting subjects with examples of the languages or varieties in question in the form of recorded text passages. The speakers are then asked to evaluate the speakers that have heard in terms of character traits such as *body height, good looks, leadership, sense of humor, intelligence, religiousness, self-confidence, dependability, entertainingness, kindness, ambition, sociability, character,* and *likability*.

What the subjects do not know is that among the passages they are listening to, there are spoken by the same speaker, who takes on two different guise (the two languages or varieties). By comparing the evaluations that people give to these two samples, the researcher can then see whether some of the traits are more strongly associated with one or the other of the two varieties. Crucially, the two samples are identical in every respect except for the language/variety, and thus language/variety is the only possible factor that can influence people's evaluations. This is why both samples must be spoken by the same speaker, and why they must have exactly the same wording.

There are two ways in which the samples can be presented to the subjects (referred to as judges). One possibility is that each judge hears both passages (in which case you must make sure that there are enough 'filler' passages that distract the judge from the fact that s/he is judging the same passage twice. The other possibility is to split up your judges into two randomized groups, and each group gets to hear one of the two samples. In this case, it is a good idea to include a number of filler items that are identical in the two groups, so that you can check whether the two groups evaluate these identical stimuli in the same way (i.e., that the groups are generally comparable in their evaluations). The second design is useful in cases where it is likely that judges would notice if they were presented with two guises produced by the same speaker.

Figure 1. *Two kinds of Matched Guise design*

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### I. Single Group of Judges

All judges listen to: *Filler – Guise A – Filler – Filler – Filler – Guise B*  
↑————— COMPARISON —————↑

### II. Two Groups of Judges (Randomized Design)

Group One listens to: *Filler – Filler – Guise A – Filler*

↑  
COMPARISON  
↓

Group Two listens to: *Filler – Filler – Guise B – Filler*

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## 2. Statistical Evaluation

A simple way of evaluating the results statistically and presenting them to the reader is the following, inspired by that used by Lambert and colleagues in the original studies on language attitudes:

1. Calculate the average judgment for each combination of trait and guise.
2. Subtract the average of Guise B from Guise A in each case. A positive number means that Guise A was rated more favorably, a negative number means that Guise B was rated more favorably; the size of the difference is directly reflected by the size of the number.
3. Finally, you check whether the judgments for Guise A and Guise B actually differ significantly using a test for the comparison of group means known as *t*-test. This can be done with a spreadsheet package, such as OpenOffice Calc or MS Excel by using the following command:

```
=TTEST(RANGE_OF_JUDGMENTS_FOR_GUISE_A;RANGE_FOR_GUISE_B;2;1)
```

(depending on the settings of your spread sheet application, you may have to use commas instead of semicolons). This command will give you the *p*-value of the difference. A *p*-value of less than 0.05 means that the difference is significant (symbolized by one \*), a *p*-value of less than 0.01 means that the difference is very significant (symbolized by two \*\*'s), and a *p*-value of less than 0.001 means that the difference is highly significant (symbolized by three \*\*\*'s). See the example spread sheet *matchedguise.sxc* (or *matchedguise.xls*), sheet 1.

- 3'. The procedure in 3 assumes that the two guises were judged by different subjects (according to the 'randomized' design described above). In the literature, you will also find designs where each judge judges both guises. In this case, you should use a paired *t*-test, which can be calculated using the following command:

```
=TTEST(RANGE_OF_JUDGMENTS_FOR_GUISE_A;RANGE_FOR_GUISE_B;2;2)
```

In order for this command to work correctly, the judgments by each judge must be entered in adjacent cells. See example spreadsheet *matchedguise.sxc*, sheet 2. If you are familiar with spreadsheets (including functions like Calc's *DataPilot* or Excel's *Pivot Tables*), there are better ways of organizing your data, but these will not change your results.

## 3. Extensions of the Matched Guise Technique

The matched guise technique has mostly been used to investigate attitudes towards regional or social varieties or foreign accents. However, with a little bit of imagination, it can be used to investigate attitudes to many other things. For example, I once had a group of students who wanted to investigate whether English loanwords have an implicit prestige in Germany (explicitly, most Germans are highly critical of these loanwords). The 'matched guises' they used consisted of fictive postcards between friends describing their vacations (note that 'guises' do not logically have to consist of spoken language). One version of each postcard contained English loanwords, the other contained the German translation equivalents (the group chose only word pairs where both the English loan and the German word are widely used). These post cards were then shown to subjects who were asked to judge the writers on the dimensions discussed above.

### Reference

Lambert, W.E., R.C. Hodgson, R.C. Gardner, and S. Fillenbaum. 1960. Evaluational reactions to spoken language. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 60.1: 44-51.