

Perceived Masculinity, Androgyny and Accented Speech

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ABSTRACT

A recent empirical study in Britain showed that standard accented (RP) women speakers were evaluated on tapes as more masculine in their attributed sex traits (both positive and negative) and yet higher on the dimension of femininity relative to their non-standard accented (Lancashire) counterparts. The present investigation was designed in part as an attempt to replicate this finding. Using the matched-guise technique, it was found that RP speakers, irrespective of their sex, were rated as more competent, liberated and masculine in their sex traits than South Welsh speakers by English listeners of both sexes. The results of this (and the previous) study bring further into question the notion prevalent in the literature that non-prestige is associated with masculinity. The data are interpreted as suggesting that the female RP accent may be a voice of perceived androgyny.

In many cultures, research has shown that the more prestigious the dialect you possess the more favorably you will be perceived on certain dimensions (Lambert 1967; Giles & Powesland 1975; Williams 1976; Ryan & Carranza 1977). This is particularly true in Britain where standard (Received Pronunciation, hereafter RP) speakers are viewed as far more intelligent, self-confident, industrious and determined than regional accented speakers, even by the latter themselves (Strongman & Woolsley 1967; Cheyne 1970; Giles 1971; Giles & Bourhis 1976a). In addition, what one has to say will often be considered more persuasive and of a better quality (Giles 1973; Powesland & Giles 1975) and also more likely to gain the cooperation of certain others than had it been voiced in a less standardized accent (Giles, Baker & Fielding 1975; Bourhis & Giles 1976).

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Apart from one British investigation (Cheyne 1970), the findings outlined above are based on male data. In an attempt to overcome this androcentric bias, Elyan, Smith, Giles and Bourhis (1978) conducted a study using the 'matched-guise' technique (Lambert 1967) to determine evaluative reactions to RP versus Northern regional (Lancashire) accented female speech. The investigation included not only scales used in the traditional (male) matched-guise research, but also those independently found to be related to masculine and feminine sex trait stereotypes (Williams, Giles, Edwards, Best & Daws 1977). It was found that RP women were upgraded in terms of competence and communicative skills but downgraded in terms of social attractiveness and personal integrity relative to regional accented females. Such data corroborated the stereotypes associated with British male speakers mentioned above and suggest they possess cross-sex generality. In addition, the Elyan *et al.* study found that RP women were expected to bear fewer children, to create a more egalitarian relationship with their husbands and were seen to be more masculine in their attributed sex traits, both positive (adventurous and independent) and negative (aggressive and egotistic). At the same time, however, RP women were rated significantly higher on the scale femininity (but not on the feminine sex traits; weak, complaining, gentle and sensitive). A stereotyped picture emerged which reflected RP women as "highly competent, articulate, lacking in warmth, masculine in certain ways and yet feminine and espousing egalitarian ideals between the sexes" (1978:129)

At first sight, these data may seem contradictory in the sense that RP women were seen as both highly masculine on certain traits and yet definitely high on the femininity scale as well. The authors suggested the following speculation, given that a number of workers (e.g., Constantionople 1973) have measured masculinity and femininity as two *independent* dimensions allowing the expression of both characteristics in individuals of either sex. Those people who represent themselves as being strongly masculine in certain respects and strongly feminine in others have been termed "psychologically androgynous" (Bem 1974; Bem, Martyna & Watson 1976). It is likely that people may be able to perceive masculine and feminine traits in others' behavior, and Elyan *et al.* labelled the female RP accent as "the voice of perceived androgyny-

ny" (1978:130). It is important to point out that the attribution of androgyny to this voice was based on its association with a variety of male sex traits and *one* female sex trait. However, it is possible that the particular female sex traits chosen were of low salience for the population under study and had others been used they may have been more clearly associated with RP, thereby bolstering an androgyny interpretation. Therefore, the authors cautiously admitted that "further research needs to be conducted to determine whether the same evaluative trends would emerge when RP accented females were contrasted with other regional accented female speakers" (1978:131). The experiment to be reported in the present paper was designed in part to this end. The investigation was concerned with answering the following questions: Are female RP speakers still perceived androgynously when contrasted with female *Welsh* accented speakers? Is the male RP accent also perceived androgynously? The study, using the matched-guise technique, involved a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design with the factors, sex of speaker, accent of voice and sex of listener.

METHOD

Listener-judges

Twenty-five students of each sex attending Bristol University in a variety of faculties served as judges for the experiment. The mean age of the listening sample was 19 years 10 months and they derived from different parts of England. Although they were heterogeneous in their regional origins, most were RP speakers.

Stimulus voices

The stimulus voices were prepared by four bidialectal middle class speakers from South Wales¹, two male and two female, who were able to read realistically the same passage of prose in RP and South Welsh accents. The stimulus passage was that adopted in the Elyan *et al.* study. The four speakers read the same 1½ minute passage in both guises attempting to maintain the same speech rate, paralinguistic fea-

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tures, and impression of personality throughout their recordings. Moreover, an independent sample of fifteen students validated the authenticity of the RP and South Welsh accented guises. These students were asked to listen to the stimulus voices very carefully and describe their characteristics. They were described in a manner consistent with our own social and geographical categorizations, and no person attributed a voice as a mimicked guise. Three other speakers were recorded in order to provide filler voices to disguise the fact that some of the speakers were recorded twice. The order of speaker presentation on the stimulus tape was as follows:—

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Filler voice (RP female) | 7. Filler voice (Bristol male) |
| 2. Speaker A (Welsh male) | 8. Speaker C (Welsh male) |
| 3. Filler voice (Bristol male) | 9. Speaker B (RP female) |
| 4. Speaker B (Welsh female) | 10. Speaker D (Welsh female) |
| 5. Speaker C (RP male) | 11. Speaker A (RP male) |
| 6. Speaker D (RP female) | |

Materials

Questionnaire booklets were prepared which required listeners to judge each of the six speakers heard on 17 rating scales. On the basis of previous rating instruments using the matched-guise technique (Giles & Powesland 1975), and in line with Elyan *et al.*, four traits were chosen representing two different dimensions. These were: intelligent and self-confident (**competence traits**); trustworthy and sincere (**social attractiveness traits**). On the basis of work by Williams *et al.* (1977) on sex stereotyping in England, and again in line with Eylan *et al.*, eight traits were adopted representing favorable and unfavorable, male and female sex stereotypes. These were: assertive and independent (**positive male traits**); supportive and understanding (**positive female traits**); aggressive and egotistic (**negative male traits**); weak and highly strung (**negative female traits**).³ The final five scales were those of masculinity and femininity, and the extent to which the speakers were likely: to be profeminist, to have a high status job; and to have an egalitarian idea of sex roles. The above traits appeared on the questionnaire form

in a random order for each voice, and listeners were instructed to rate the extent to which each adjective definitely did, or definitely did not, suit each speaker on 7-point rating scales.

Procedure

A female investigator in her early twenties with an RP accent conducted the study in group administered sessions of between five and twelve subjects each. The task was introduced in what has become a standard fashion: listeners were led to believe that they were being tested on their ability to infer personality characteristics of speakers using speech cues alone. No reference was made to the investigator's interest in reactions to regional accents or to the sex of speakers. When the task had been introduced to listeners, they were then instructed on the use of the rating scales. Each voice was listened to and rated separately, and after this procedure the investigator debriefed the informants on the purpose of the study and invited their comments in a general discussion.

RESULTS

A series of three-way ANOVAs with repeated measures on two factors were performed on the responses to each of the 17 rating scales. The raw data for these analyses consisted of the average rating of the two RP male, two RP female, two South Welsh male, and two South Welsh female speakers for each listener on each of the rating scales. The independent variables were accent of speaker, sex of speaker, and sex of listener. The statistically significant findings for each of the scales appear in Table 1 with their associated F values.

From Table 1, it can be seen that on seven scales a significant main effect emerged for sex of speaker. It was found that male speakers were rated as more masculine, independent, self-confident, intelligent and as having a higher status occupation, while female speakers were rated as more feminine and profeminist. More interestingly, RP speakers (irrespective of sex) were rated as more intelligent, self-confident, profeminist, independent, egotistic, and as having a higher status job

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Table 1

Significant F Values for the 17 Scales

SCALES	Speaker Accent (SA)	Speaker Sex (SS)	Listener Sex (LS)	Inter- actions (SA x SS)	
INTELLIGENT	+90.09	15.44A		8.58	
SELF-CONFIDENT	+7.93	17.12A			
TRUSTWORTHY					
SINCERE					
ASSERTIVE					
INDEPENDENT	+20.68	7.88A			
SUPPORTIVE					
UNDERSTANDING					
AGGRESSIVE					
EGOTISTIC	+12.01				
WEAK					
HIGHLY-STRUNG					
MASCULINE		62.18A			
FEMININE		56.98B			
PROFEMINIST	+20.52	99.01B			
JOB STATUS	+127.47	33.55A			25.40
EGALITARIAN IDEALS	+12.01				

NOTES: A +ve sign indicates higher ratings for RP speakers; an A sign indicates higher ratings for male speakers whereas a B sign indicates higher rating for females.
 $P < .01$, $df = 1,48$.

and more of an egalitarian view of sex roles than South Welsh speakers. The only interaction effects obtained were two speaker accent x speaker sex effects on the scales of intelligence and job status. From Table 2, it can be seen that while RP speakers were rated as more intelligent and

Table 2

Mean Ratings for the Two Significant Speaker Accent x
Speaker Sex Interactions

SCALES	Accent of Stimulus Speaker			
	Male	RP Female	South Welsh Male	Female
INTELLIGENT	22.3	29.2	35.8	38.0
JOB STATUS	21.4	33.6	41.8	42.9

NOTE: The lower the ratings the more intelligent, higher job status the speaker was believed to possess.

having a higher occupational status than Welsh speakers, greater advantages on these dimensions accrue to male representatives of the former than the latter.

DISCUSSION

This study has shown that RP speakers, irrespective of their sex, were rated as more competent, liberated and masculine in their sex traits than South Welsh speakers by English listeners of both sexes. These findings conflict with previous work on three counts.

First, unlike the findings of Elyan *et al.*, the female RP accent was not upgraded on the femininity trait when contrasted with the female South Welsh accent. Whether this was due to the different connotations of Northern English and South Welsh accents relative to RP, or to the fact that male and female speakers were being explicitly compared in this study, is a matter for further research.

Second, the results of Elyan *et al.*, and those reported here, bring into question Trudgill's (1974a) view that nonprestige speech is associated with masculinity which he claims facilitates its greater attraction (and hence use) for male speakers. Although the former two

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studies were not investigating working class speech *per se* and did not call attention to traits relating to toughness (cf. Labov *et al.* 1968; d'Anglejan & Tucker 1973), masculine traits, as well as the scales of masculinity itself, have not been found associated with two non-prestige regional varieties, the Lancashire and South Welsh accents.

Third, regional accented speakers were not upgraded on traits of social attractiveness relative to RP speakers as has been found in earlier matched-guise studies. This may have been a reflection of a negative reaction on the part of English people residing near the border with Wales (that is, in Bristol) to the recent resurgence of pride in Welsh cultural identity (Bourhis, Giles & Tajfel 1973; Bourhis & Giles 1976a, 1977) and to the growing militancy concerning Welsh political and linguistic affairs (Thomas 1973; Hearne 1975). The present results underline the fact that linguistic attitudes are the product of a particular sociohistorical context (Plon 1974) and are susceptible to subtle changes at other non-linguistic levels, including the social, political and ideological. Therefore, the generality of matched-guise findings over time should be treated with caution, if not subject to regular empirical replications.

Despite the fact that female sex traits were not associated more with prestige-sounding women than with regional accented women, a viable case can still be made for the female RP accent as "the perceived voice of androgyny." Not surprisingly, the results showed that female speakers were viewed as more feminine than their male counterparts. The study also showed that the use of RP by women did not detract from, or dilute, this effect but rather resulted in their being perceived highly on some male sex traits. In other words, their already-established femininity was being complemented by an increase in perceived masculinity; that is, the attribution of androgyny. It can be proposed that the magnitude of this attribution to female RP speakers depends on the language varieties with which they are contrasted. Taking both the present findings and those of Eylan *et al.* into account, it would seem that a Lancashire woman shifting into RP would accrue higher ratings of perceived androgyny than a South Welsh woman adopting a similar strategy.

A perceived androgyny perspective may help explain why females

adopt prestige speech more readily than male speakers in the United States and Britain.⁴ Given that androgynous women self-report better mental health (Williams, in press) and have a wider behavioral repertoire at their disposal than sex-typed women (Ben 1975), it is possible that the attribution of androgyny to an individual is linked with perceived favorability along these dimensions. The adoption of RP by a woman then allows her the opportunity of not only being evaluated more positively on valued male attributes but also more favorably in terms of psychological stability and social adaptability. From the present results, the adoption of RP by a man can only be seen to increase his perceived masculinity and not induce a perception of androgyny. Thus, as Fylan *et al.* stated, "females are more likely to adopt prestige speech patterns because they may be perceived more favorably on a greater variety of evaluative dimensions than males who adopt a similar speech strategy" (1983:131). Obviously, the present authors would not consider speakers' prestige accents to be the only, or even the most important, linguistic determinants of listeners' subjective impressions of perceived androgyny. It would be interesting to determine what speech modifications a man would have to encode which would allow him to be perceived androgynously too, and to assess objectively the linguistic characteristics of actual androgynous and non-androgynous women (Smith, forthcoming).

The data suggest that RP speakers of both sexes are seen to be more egalitarian in their ideas about sex roles and more profeminist when contrasted with regional speakers. Such an attributed ideology may be associated *stereotypically* with high levels of education and socio-economic status which would account for the above evaluative differences. However, these findings do not parallel the subjective impressions associated with *actual* profeminist female speakers. In a recent study, Giles *et al.* (in press) found that edited versions of feminist (female) students' speech — both spontaneous and reading style — were judged to be less standard accented than those from students with less feminist ideals. Moreover, the more actively committed these women were to the Women's Movement, the less RP-sounding their speech was judged to be. At the same time, however, the feminists' speech was considered to be lower in pitch and more "masculine-

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sounding." Although this study used standard accent as a dependent measure while the present one adopted it as an independent variable — the defining properties of each could therefore be quite distinct — the dynamics of this variance between listeners' inference rules and actual accent-ideology relationships deserves further empirical and theoretical explorations. It seems feasible that while many feminists traditionally have emanated from higher socioeconomic strata than non-feminists, once committing themselves to this ideology adopt strategies of women's liberation (such as attempting to acquire a more positive collective female identity) which require appropriate modifications in their speech (Williams & Giles 1978; Kramer, in press). As Giles *et al.* argue, "feminist students may be assimilating towards, or assuming, certain aspects of the speech of the dominant group in society, perhaps in an attempt to share in its social power." Those feminists who then adopt such reformist or assimilationist strategies may attain "masculine-sounding" speech either by directly invoking a working class male speech model, or indirectly by assuming normatively-male paralinguistic features (e.g., higher vocal intensity and lower fundamental frequency) which could involve concomitant shifts at other levels resulting in more nonstandard accent features. It is interesting to note in this vein that the adoption of an RP accent by women does not in any case (as can be seen from Table 2) result in the attribution of equal competence with prestige-sounding men.

Let us finally return to the questions posed at the outset. Evidence is now accruing which suggests that the use of a prestige speech style by males and females does increase their perceived masculinity with regard to certain sex traits. It has been argued that the use of RP by females may result in their being considered more androgynous than regional accented speakers. However, although this has now been proposed with regard to two British accent communities, its more universalistic appeal depends on cross-cultural work and the adoption of more precise measuring instruments for the perception of androgyny in others. No evidence has been found for the association of perceived androgyny with the male RP accent. Although recent developments in the matched-guise technique (Giles & Bourhis, 1976b) have shown that attitudes expressed towards speakers on tape in the laboratory

are directly comparable to behaviors manifest towards them in the field (Giles, Baker & Fielding 1975; Bourhis & Giles, 1976; Farrar & Giles n.d.), the present study obviously requires translation into real life settings where situational factors can be brought into account and a richer array of attitudes and behaviors tapped interactively. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this paper will lead workers in the field of language and sex roles to take notions of accented speech and perceived androgyny more into account when exploring male-female relations in social interaction.

NOTES:

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1. The procedure involves judges listening to a series of apparently different speakers reading the same neutral passage of prose and then being required to evaluate the speakers on various rating scales. Together with a number of filler voices, the speakers are in actual fact one and the same person using different realistic guises of the particular dialects under study. The main advantage of this technique is that it goes some way towards eliminating the effects of the more idiosyncratic features of speech as rate, loudness, timbre, pitch, etc. According to Lambert (1967), this method reveals more about listeners' feelings about speakers than can be found by direct attitude questionnaires.
2. The authors would like to express their gratitude to the following for their excellent voice recordings: Jennifer Williams, Keith Kimber and Cher Cotter.
3. Given the insensitivity of three of the female sex traits to differentiate RP and regional speakers in the Elyan *et al.* study, they were replaced by three others in the present one.
4. The finding that females adopt more prestige-sounding variants than males has recently been brought into question by Smith (in press).

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