

# Americans' Reactions to Japanese-Accented English

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## INTRODUCTION

Although there has been a great deal of research conducted concerning the evaluational reactions to Spanish- or French-accented English,\* relatively little is known about the evaluational reactions to Japanese-accented English. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to investigate Americans' reactions to Japanese-accented English in order to assess implications for TESOL.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There seem to be at least four ways to prepare verbal stimuli for research on subjective reactions. Each of these methods will be discussed in turn.

The first method, originally developed by Lambert et al. (1965), is labeled the *Matched Guise Technique*.

In this procedure, a select group of subjects evaluates the personality traits of speakers' voices played to them on the tape recorder. The recording is made by a speaker who has considerable ability in producing different language or dialect varieties. The subjects are not told that the different varieties heard on tape belong to one speaker, but are simply asked to judge certain traits of the speaker (Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 70).

The second method uses different speakers. This procedure, termed "a scaled paradigm" by Bailey and Galvan (1977), requires the researcher to rank the speakers according to the degree of accentedness before the subjects' evaluations (Galvan,

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\* Those studies dealing with Spanish-accented English are: Bailey and Galvan, 1977; Galvan, Lodmer, Ochsner, Telatnik, and Walter, 1977; and Galvan, Pierce, and Underwood, 1975, 1976. The studies on French-accented English are: Brown, 1969; Lambert, Anisfeld, and Yeni-Komshian, 1965; Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum, 1960; Lambert, 1967; and Preston, 1963.

Lodmer, Ochsner, Plummer, Telatnik, and Walter 1977). The third method also requires different speakers. In this procedure, which is called "categorical distinctions" (Bailey and Galvan 1977), the distinction is made between native and nonnative speakers. A ranking scale of accentedness may or may not be used depending on the choice of the researcher. The fourth method, a modification of the Matched Guise Technique, uses videotaping of different "speakers," but the voice of a single speaker is dubbed in (Lambert et al. 1965). The studies utilizing this procedure include Williams 1970, 1973a, 1973b; Williams, Whitehead, and Miller 1971a, 1971b; and Williams, Whitehead, and Traupman 1971.

The advantage of the first method, the Matched Guise Technique, is that the researcher can neutralize control variables such as voice quality and personality. The disadvantage is that it is often difficult to find a speaker who is perfectly capable of producing different language or dialect varieties (Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 70). The second method eliminates this difficulty and further enables the subjects to react to speech differences. The researcher, however, cannot always control variables such as voice quality, personality, intonation, and speed. In addition, it requires a great number of resources to select speakers with sufficiently different degrees of accentedness. The third method will be simpler than the second method, if the researcher decides not to adopt the scale of accentedness. As in the second method, however, the problems with the control variables are unsolved. Furthermore, without the ranking scale, the degree of accentedness among nonnative speakers is undetermined. In the fourth method, the use of the videotape can produce a closer approximation of the classroom situation in which teachers judge children (Williams 1973a). However, it can be criticized on the ground that the visual cues affect the judgment of the subjects (Galvan, Pierce, and Underwood 1975).

Overall, each method seems to possess both positive and negative qualities. Despite the weaknesses of various methods, however, the evaluations of the subjects tend to show similar results in several studies on Spanish-accented English (Bailey and Galvan 1977). The third method, that of categorical distinctions, therefore, is used in this research because of its simplicity.

As far as the elicitation technique is concerned, it often seems to be difficult to devise a type of questionnaire that could quantify the subjective evaluations in an objective way. Faced with this problem, many researchers attempt to devise questionnaires based on predetermined categories. For example, the semantic differential technique,

originally developed by Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), uses descriptive opposites as predetermined categories. The typical semantic differential scale consists of seven-point bipolar antonyms:

The concept is given at the top of the sheet and the subject responds by putting a check mark in the appropriate position on the scale for each of the bipolar opposites (Wolfram and Fasold 1974: 68).

The semantic differential technique has been popular in many studies on the subjective reactions of the respondents. In Canada, for example, Lambert and his associates used this technique to investigate the subjective reactions of French-Canadian subjects toward the bilingual speakers of French and English (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum 1960; Lambert, Anisfield, and Yeni-Komshian 1965: and Lambert 1967). In the United States, Galvan and his colleagues elicited subjective evaluations through the semantic differential scale (Bailey and Galvan 1977; Galvan, Lodmer, Ochsner, Telatnik, and Walter 1977; and Galvan, Pierce, and Underwood 1975, 1976).

According to Galvan, Pierce, and Underwood (1975, 1976), the advantages of the semantic differential technique are twofold:

- 1) The results can be quantified.
- 2) The subjects are usually less hesitant to respond to semantic differential scales than to other methods of elicitation (1975: 281).

The limitations of the semantic differential technique are pointed out by Osgood et al. (1957) as cited by Galvan, Pierce, and Underwood (1975):

- 1) the possibility that there are more than three significant dimensions required to interpret the semantic space occupied by any or all concepts (Osgood 1957);
- 2) the possibility that the polar terms used do not "fall at equal distances from the origin of the semantic space" i.e., that the terms are not "true psychological opposites" (Osgood 1957);
- 3) the form of the semantic differential, which does not permit the subject to distinguish in this response between the relevance of a pair of terms to some concept (e. g., *inside-outside* to *Abe Lincoln*) and the possibility that the concept may be equally balanced with respect to that pair of terms (i.e., a given subject might consider the concept teacher as midway on the *friendly-unfriendly* scale) (Deese 1970); and
- 4) Since we are studying the relationship of language attitudes to social background

of the respondents, there is the danger of assuming that particular background characteristics which seem to vary with results on the semantic differential scale are actually sufficient conditions for those results. We must assume that a very large number of undetermined variables interact to produce the results of our semantic differential tests.

Despite these limitations, however, the semantic differential scale seems to be a useful tool for grasping the overall picture of the language attitudes of the respondents.

#### STATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS

This research was designed to address the following null hypothesis: Americans do not react differently to the voices of American and Japanese speakers of English. Stated as a research question, the study focuses on whether there are any significant evaluational differences between the voices of American and Japanese speakers of English.

#### METHODOLOGY

##### Preparation of the Stimulus

Using the categorical distinctions methods, the researcher selected three American and three Japanese women to record the stimulus tape. The order of recording was randomly arranged to prevent all the Americans from speaking in a regular sequence: A-J-A-J-J-A rather than A-A-A-J-J-J or A-J-A-J-A-J. These six female voices were mediated by a male native speaker of English.

Each speaker was first asked to read a 104-word, six sentence paragraph written in Standard English:

Buddy always pulled up a chair to watch his father wash and shave. He saw him spread the hot lather with a wet, yellow brush and then zip off the whiskers with a cheap razor that looked just like tin to him. Buddy would wait to see if the thin blade cut his father's face, yet it never did. Sometimes his father would even sing in his gravelly voice as he pulled the sharp razor across his skin. Once Buddy thought he spotted blood and was thrilled. But later he felt bad because he was sure it was a sin to have these thoughts (Galvan, Pierce, and Underwood 1975).

Second, each speaker was asked to repeat five short sentences containing difficult words for Japanese speakers to pronounce:

- \* I'll be there on April twelfth.
- \* April twelfth is Thursday.
- \* The plane leaves there at seven forty-five.
- \* She'll wear a purple shirt.
- \* She'll wear pearl earrings.

This sentence repetition task was added to elicit more spontaneous speech than could be obtained in reading the passage.

The semantic differential technique was adopted to evaluate the speech samples. Twelve pairs of adjectival antonyms were constructed and placed on the two ends of five-point bipolar scales. The central point was interpreted as *neutral*, the outmost two points as *extremely*, and two mid-points as *somewhat*.

Speaker A

- Informal: \_\_\_\_\_ : Formal  
Independent: \_\_\_\_\_ : Dependent  
Talkative: \_\_\_\_\_ : Quiet  
Open: \_\_\_\_\_ : Reserved  
Competitive: \_\_\_\_\_ : Cooperative  
Frank: \_\_\_\_\_ : Evasive  
Masculine: \_\_\_\_\_ : Feminine  
Willful: \_\_\_\_\_ : Obedient  
Cool: \_\_\_\_\_ : Warm  
Rough: \_\_\_\_\_ : Soft  
Polite: \_\_\_\_\_ : Impolite  
Extroverted: \_\_\_\_\_ : Shy

The protocol shown above was reproduced for each speaker. A total of six protocols were stapled together, along with a background information sheet, and made into a booklet of seven pages. Detailed instructions for use of the protocols were taped with the voice of a male native English speaker.

In short, the preparation of the stimulus involved three parts: 1) the taped, randomized speech samples of three American and three Japanese women reading from the same six-sentence paragraph and five short sentences; 2) separate test protocols for each speaker consisting of twelve pairs of adjectival antonyms arranged on a five-point

semantic differential scale; and 3) taped instructions for the use of the protocols with a male voice as a mediator.

#### Data Collection

The subjects were thirty-one Americans consisting of twenty males and eleven females. Their ages ranged from nineteen to sixty-five. The age of one respondent is unknown. Their mean age was 30.93, the standard deviation was 11.52, and the range was 46. The majority of the respondents were Anglos (27 respondents = 87%); the remainder of the group was composed of two Hispanics, one Black, and one Asian. The highest levels of education completed were: high school (2 = 6%), junior college (3 = 10%), college (15 = 48%), and graduate school (11 = 35%). Nineteen of the respondents (61%) were students. The rest were engaging in various occupations: one ESL coordinator, one respiratory therapist, one teacher, one farmer, one person involved in public relations, one retired person, one person involved in education, one housewife, and one without any occupation. Excluding one person from Los Angeles, all were residents of Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties.

The subjects were asked to evaluate the speech samples of the six women speaking in English. After listening to each speaker, they were given sixty seconds to rate each personality on the semantic differential scale. Upon completion, they were told to turn to the next page and to repeat the same process. At this point, the subjects were not allowed to look back to the previous page. This procedure seemed to elicit intuitive judgment by preventing them from cross-checking.

### DATA ANALYSIS

The procedure of quantification involved three steps. First, each point of the rating scale was numbered one to five starting from the utmost left. Second, regarding all the personality scales, frequencies of each number were counted for both the American and Japanese speakers. Third, chi square was used to analyze the quantified data (ANOVA was not used due to the facility limitations). The Ed-Sci Development statistical package for the Apple Computer was employed for the computation.

### RESULTS

#### Research Findings

The results of the chi square test showed highly significant differences between the ratings of American and Japanese speakers of English in all the personality scales as

shown in Table 1:

	Trait	X	Probability
(1)	formality	: 14.434	p = .006
(2)	dependence	: 31.156	p < .001
(3)	talkativeness	: 47.533	p < .001
(4)	openness	: 31.559	p < .001
(5)	competitiveness	: 51.9	p < .001
(6)	frankness	: 35.642	p < .001
(7)	femininity	: 10.422	p = .03
(8)	obedience	: 34.897	p < .001
(9)	warmth	: 22.64	p < .001
(10)	softness	: 15.048	p = .005
(11)	politeness	: 11.48	p = .02
(12)	extroversion	: 33.24	p < .001

X represents the chi square values.

df = 4 in all cases

See the appendix for graphs comparing the ratings of American and Japanese speakers.

Stated differently, the findings showed that the American subjects reacted differently to the voices of American and Japanese speakers of English. They evaluated the Japanese women as more formal, dependent, quiet, reserved, cooperative, evasive, feminine, obedient, warm, soft, polite, and shy than the American women in the study. In short, the Japanese women were judged to possess all the characteristics on the right pole of the rating scales except impoliteness. Thus, the null hypothesis can be rejected at this high level of significance.

#### Discussion of Findings

Despite these highly significant differences, certain scales showed smaller differences than others. In the case of formality and politeness, it can be interpreted that the speakers had no chance to reveal the opposite qualities in a situation such as tape-recording. Furthermore, the terms on the politeness scale were switched around on the protocol. This maneuver might have contributed to the smaller difference. As far as softness is concerned, the smaller difference could be attributed to the quality of voice. The femininity scale also indicated the same tendency. There seemed to be a confusion of terms between feminineness and femaleness. In other words, many subjects appeared to judge that since the speakers were all women, they were more feminine than masculine.

Although the research only used the speech samples, the results seem to conform to those of Barnlund (1975). In his study, Barnlund asked both American and Japanese respondents to select certain terms as descriptive of the communicative characteristics of Japanese. In the case of the American respondents, they evaluated the Japanese as "formal," "dependent," "silent," "reserved," "evasive," and "cautious." The Japanese respondents also chose similar terms such as "formal," "dependent," "silent," "reserved," and "evasive." They also judged themselves as "cautious," "serious," and "distant." Despite the slight differences, the overall picture obtained from both sets of respondents was substantially the same.

Barnlund also compiled the American cultural profile. In this study, the American respondents selected terms such as "informal," "talkative," "frank," "self-assertive," "spontaneous," and "humorous." Here again, both sets of respondents seemed to agree substantially.

Consequently, Barnlund supports the idea of a larger public self for Americans and of a more limited public self for Japanese. He further argues that the qualities attributed to the Japanese seemed to be nearly exact opposite to those attributed to the Americans. In other words,

the qualities that one society *nurtures* — reserve, formality, and silence in one case, and self-assertion, informality, and talkativeness in the other — are the same qualities the other society *discourages* (emphasis mine)  
(Barnlund 1975: 57)

With these different values, it is likely that these Japanese characteristics are sometimes viewed negatively by Americans.

Although this research used speech samples alone, the American subjects appeared to ascribe many qualities discouraged by American society to the Japanese speakers more often than to the American speakers. And despite the different control variables, the accents, which appeared only in the speech samples of the Japanese speakers, seemed to have contributed greatly to the negative evaluations by the American subjects.

Speaking of accentedness, the studies of Galvan and his associates (Bailey and Galvan 1977; Galvan, Pierce, and Underwood 1975, 1976; Galvan, Lodmer, Ochsner, Plummer, Telatnik, and Walter 1977) also indicated negative reactions by the native English-speaking respondents:

...the evaluations of accented speakers of English, though generally positive



become increasingly negative as perceived accentedness increases (Galvan, Pierce, and Underwood 1976: 16)

It can be argued, however, that the Japanese speakers were evaluated positively in terms of cooperativeness, femininity, warmth, and softness. Therefore, it is hasty to generalize that they were viewed negatively. This counter-argument brings our attention to the difficulty in interpreting value judgments. When we take into consideration the survival skills needed in American society, however, these "positive" qualities could be easily counteracted by other negatively viewed qualities such as dependence, quietness, reservedness, evasiveness, and shyness. As long as the latter qualities are discouraged in American society, the Japanese are more likely to be viewed negatively by the Americans. And it is surprising that the American subjects were able to ascertain these negative qualities solely from the speech samples of the Japanese speakers.

#### Limitations of the Research

This research used the technique of the semantic differential scale. As mentioned before (See pp.4-5), the semantic differential technique has several limitations. As an example, although the accents of the Japanese speakers seemed to play a major role in the evaluations of the American respondents, it was not possible in this research to measure either the degree of their accentedness or the influences of such deviations from native-speaker norms.

As far as the sample size is concerned, it is rather small. The majority of the subjects in the sample seemed to possess similar backgrounds including the location of their residence. This fact could have limited the scope of the generalizability of this study.

#### Implications for TESOL

It is useful to realize that people make judgments based solely on speech samples. As the studies of Galvan and his colleagues indicate, the accented speaker of English can be viewed quite negatively according to American standards.

If accented English is the major cause of negative reactions, an ESL teacher would be advised to lessen the degree of accentedness in students' speech. However, it seems difficult to acquire perfect native-like pronunciation after the critical age.\* In this case, ESL students should be trained to adjust their behavior to the American expectations.

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\* The critical age hypothesis was advocated by Penfield and Roberts (1959) and Lenneberg (1967). They believe that the ability to acquire a second language will be hindered after a certain age.

This behavior correction, however, does not mean to impose on students the American values as absolute. As in the "salad bowl" theory,\* students should be encouraged to contribute their cultural heritage to American society in a unique way. One of the major goals of TESOL, therefore, is to teach students to be bicultural. In other words, like changes in registers, students should be trained to adopt different cultural behaviors depending on the circumstances. Further research is needed to explore the reactions to Japanese-accented English from the perspective of different geographical, socio-economic, racial, sex, and educational backgrounds.

### Summary and Conclusions

In this study, reactions to the Japanese speakers were compared with reactions to the American speakers in terms of accentedness. The semantic differential scale was used and the results were quantified. The chi square figures showed highly significant differences, indicating that the American subjects reacted differently to the native speakers of English and the speakers of Japanese accented English. From these findings, therefore, it seems possible to conclude that the Americans in the study tended to evaluate the Japanese-accented English differently than English of the native speakers.

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\* The term "salad bowl" was used by Bambi Cardenas at a meeting on Chicano education held by the United States Commission on Civil Rights in San Antonio, Texas in March 1974 (Bailey and Galvan 1977).

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