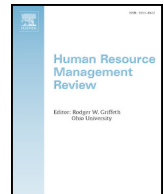




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Non-native accents and stigma: How self-fulfilling prophecies can affect career outcomes

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a framework examining the impact of non-native accents on speakers' work and career outcomes, namely, career advancement and career satisfaction. Drawing on stigma theory, we present a conceptual model to assess cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions towards non-native accents. We contend that speaking with a non-native accent is linked with (i) managers' perceptions of speakers' fluency, (ii) expectations concerning non-native speakers' performance abilities, (iii) positive regard in social interactions and (iv) supervision style towards speakers with non-native accents. Moreover, we suggest that speaking with a non-native accent may lead speakers to (i) feel excluded and devalued at work, and (ii) assume an avoidance approach at work. Together, these effects can create a self-fulfilling prophecy that negatively affects non-native speakers' work and career outcomes. We also suggest that the strength of accents' consequences depend on the presence of particular person-related (accent prestige, exposure to the non-native accent, and non-native speakers' goal orientation) and job-related factors (nature of the job and company ethnocentrism). Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN, 2013) reports that more than 232 million people live in a country different from that of their birth. Globalization, increased connection via communication technologies and migratory flows, have augmented employment overseas (50% between 1990 and 2013; UN, 2013), with further increases expected (OECD, 2009), implying increasing interaction among individuals with different linguistic backgrounds. Research from management, organizational psychology, linguistics, and marketing suggests that how people speak significantly affects workplace dynamics (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Holmqvist & Grönroos, 2012; Huang, Frideger, & Pearce, 2013; Wang, Arndt, Singh, Biernat, & Liu, 2013). More specifically, speaking with a non-native accent often results in subtle and diffused forms of unfair discrimination at work. Such unfair discrimination may be less acknowledged than traditionally studied forms of unfair discrimination towards immigrant employees (see Dietz, 2010), because objective problems in communication are evoked to justify employment-related decisions penalizing non-native-accent speakers (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Huang et al., 2013).

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The effects of linguistic diversity in industrial and organizational psychology have received very limited scholarly attention in comparison with than other forms of stigmas, like race or disability (Paetzold, Dipboye, & Elsbach, 2008; Stone, Stone, & Dipboye, 1992). Moreover, when examining language diversity, scholars have focused more on language proficiency rather than on the effects of non-native accents (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Although proficiency and accents can generate common reactions among listeners and speakers, as both low levels of language proficiency and non-native accents represent potential stigmatizing conditions for employees, linguistic researchers distinguish accent from proficiency, with accent specifically involving intonation, phonology, and pronunciation rules that people learn from their mother tongue (Giles, 1970). Thus, even speakers with good second-language proficiency can face unfair discrimination (Bent & Bradlow, 2003) because they retain the phonology and intonation of their mother tongue, making accent a distinct and overlooked discriminating factor at work.

Emergent perspectives on non-native accents have begun to explore workplace effects, and are focused largely on listeners' perspectives (e.g., Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010). Prior research has shown that even a small divergence from standard accents can yield significant negative reactions from listeners (Aune & Kikuchi, 1993; Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Walter, 2007). Listeners' reactions can influence the work and career dynamics of speakers with non-native accents (hereinafter non-native-accent speakers), for example, affecting employment-related decisions (Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2010), managerial promotions, and decisions concerning new-venture funding for non-native-speaking entrepreneurs (Huang et al., 2013). Such research can be complemented by perspectives examining non-native-accent speakers' own cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions, which significantly influence, together with listeners' reactions, their work and career outcomes.

In this article, we present a conceptual model examining the influence of non-native accents on work and career outcomes, taking into account both listeners' (i.e. managers) and speakers' reactions. More specifically, we consider the potential impact of accent on both proximal (job evaluation, task assignment) and distal outcomes (career advancement and career satisfaction), which are important indicators influencing objective (e.g. number of promotions) and subjective (e.g. perceived career satisfaction) career success (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Russo, Guo, & Baruch, 2014). Using theory on social stigma (Goffman, 1963) as an overarching framework and bridging research on *stereotype threat* (Steele & Aronson, 1995), *set-up-to-fail syndrome* (Manzoni & Barsoux, 2002), and *positive regard* (Rogers, 1959), we elucidate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions exhibited by managers and non-native-accent speakers, examining the processes through which such reactions may influence both distal and proximal outcomes.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, we contend that hearing a non-native accent may lead managers (1) to experience lower cognitive fluency when processing messages by non-native-accent speakers, leading them (2) to judge such speakers as less capable of achieving good performance, (3) to convey less positive regards in social interactions, and (4) to develop towards them a more controlling supervision style. Concurrently, speaking with a non-native accent may cause speakers (5) to feel less valued and appreciated in workplace interactions, and (6) to avoid complex tasks. These reactions can work together to generate a self-fulfilling prophecy, impacting non-native-accent speakers' work dynamics, and ultimately their career advancement and satisfaction.

Moreover, recent literature suggests ordinary conditions of non-native-accent effects on individual outcomes (e.g., Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2013; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010), acknowledging that non-native accents can, under some circumstances, elicit positive responses (Marian & Shook, 2012; Sarter, 2012). In light of these findings, we discuss person-related (prestige of the accent, goal orientation, and exposure to a non-native accent) and job-related (nature of the job and level of ethnocentrism of the

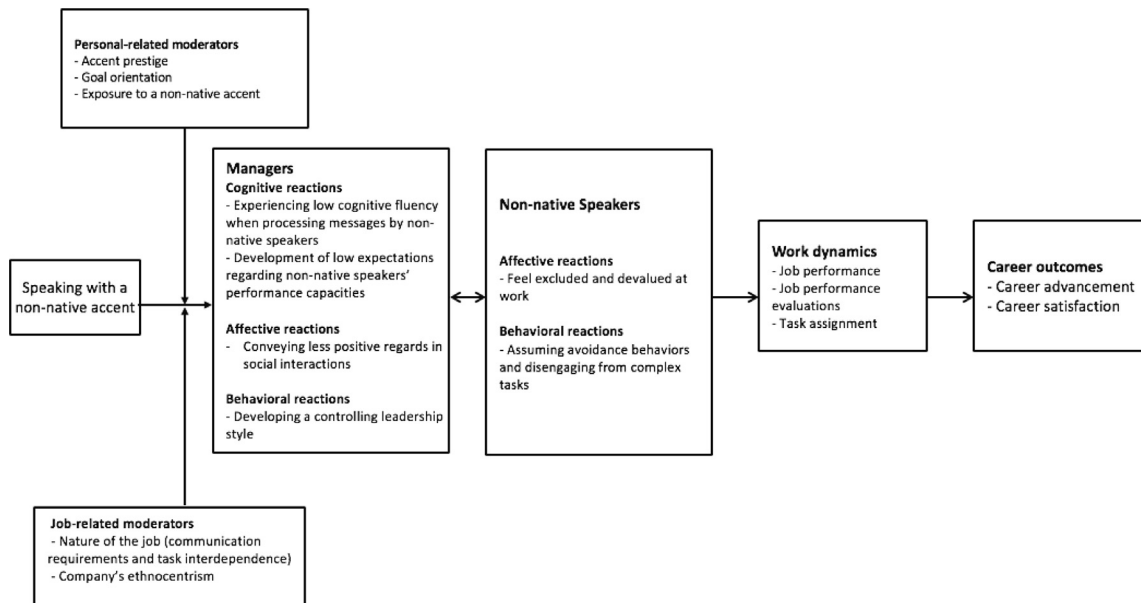


Fig. 1. A conceptual model of accent influencing non-native-accent speakers' careers.

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