

## Chapter 5

# Implicit Social Cognition and Language Attitudes Research

Andrew J. Pantos

Metropolitan State University of Denver, USA

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter argues for incorporation of concepts and methods from the domain of Implicit Social Cognition (ISC) into the field of language attitudes research. As support, this chapter reports on a quantitative study that employed both an audio Implicit Association Test and traditional self-report questionnaires to measure participants' implicit and explicit attitudes toward foreign and U.S. accented speech stimuli. The IAT revealed a pro-U.S. accent bias, while the explicit measure found a pro-foreign accent bias. These results support the argument that the distinction between implicit and explicit attitudes as separable attitude constructs resulting from distinct mental processes is an important one for language attitudes research and that both attitude constructs should be evaluated when studying language attitudes.*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the findings of a recent quantitative experimental study that provides promising support for the integration of concepts and methods from social psychology's domain of *Implicit Social Cognition* (ISC) into language attitudes research (e.g., Pantos & Perkins, 2013). The ISC's characterization of attitudes as either *implicit* (immediate) or *explicit* (thoughtful), its compatible methods for measuring these two separate attitude constructs, and its corresponding attitude processing models (e.g., the Associative-Propositional Evaluation [APE] Model; [Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006]) present a consistent

and comprehensive approach that augments existing language attitudes research. Using this quantitative research study of reactions to foreign accented speech as a foundation, this paper argues for the general application of the ISC framework to language attitudes research and at the same time cautions against mischaracterizing implicit attitudes.

### BACKGROUND

Over the past half century or more, traditional language attitudes studies have produced a rich body of literature and a variety of findings,

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establishing quantitatively—and not inconsequentially—that reactions to foreign accented speech are complex. Specifically, traditional language attitudes research have confirmed not only the existence of a general negative affect toward nonstandard accents (e.g., Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Lambert, 1967; Rubin & Smith, 1990), but also a variety of reactions to specific, identified accents, attributing this variation to a number of factors, including reaction type (e.g., *affective* and *evaluative* reactions), speaker trait (e.g., *solidarity* [kindness, friendliness, etc.] and *status* [competence, intelligence, etc.]) (Cargile & Giles, 1997; Ryan, 1982), the aggressiveness of the message (Cargile & Giles, 1997), stereotypes associated with the speaker's nationality (Frumkin, 2007; Kristiansen, 2001), and the degree of nonstandardness of the speaker's accent (Brennan & Brennan, 1981; Bresnahan, Ohashi, Nebashi, Liu, & Shearman, 2002). Interestingly, the idea of a general negative affect was never reconciled with the sometimes positive reactions revealed in these studies of reactions to specific accents.

The general bias against nonstandard language varieties has led to the conclusion that nonstandard accents are generally dispreferred (e.g., Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Lambert, 1967; Rubin & Smith, 1990). This finding seems to explain the significant negative social, political, judicial, and economic consequences potentially suffered by individuals who speak with a nonnative accent (Kinzler, Shutts, DeJesus & Spelke, 2009; Lippi-Green, 1997; Matsuda, 1991). For the underlying cause of these negative reactions, researchers have relied historically on concepts from Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986/2004) and its notions that social identity is derived from group membership, that social interaction is essentially intergroup interaction, and that the negative reactions results from relative unfavorable comparison of outgroup members (Turner & Giles, 1981). These studies demonstrated that language attributes signal group

membership status (Bresnahan & Kim, 1993; Bresnahan et al., 2002; Giles, Hewstone, Ryan & Johnson, 1987; Reid & Giles, 2005; Ryan, 1983; White & Li, 1991) and are therefore at the very core of intergroup behavior. The power of group membership was also studied in narrower focus in many traditional language attitudes studies that considered reactions to specific, identified foreign nationalities, including Mexican (Ryan, Carranza & Moffie, 1977); Malaysian (Gill, 1994); Japanese (Cargile & Giles, 1998); Chinese (Cargile, 1997); Mexican, Lebanese and German (Frumkin, 2007); and Italian, Norwegian, and Eastern European (Mulac, Hanley & Prigge, 1974).

### **Problems with the Traditional Approach**

While this body of research provides a wealth of information about a general anti-foreign bias and reactions to specific accents, it fails to provide a consistent theoretical framework that explains the characterization and formation of these reactions. That is not to say that explanations have not been posited. Several studies relied on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to conceptualize the processing of language attitudes (e.g., Frumkin, 2007; Giles, Williams, Mackie & Rosselli, 1995). The ELM, however, was never intended to describe the cognitive processing of anything other than persuasive messages, a content limitation that makes the model unsuitable as an explanation for language attitude formation, in general.

In addition to the ELM, a number of researchers—largely working independently of one another and independently of general attitudes research—have posited a variety of original processing models. Notably, Cargile and colleagues (1994) postulated a theoretical model of social processes involved in the formation of language attitudes that emphasizes the role of perceived cultural factors on listener attitudes and evaluations. Bradac and

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