

**Other People's English Accents Matter:
Challenging Standard English Accent Hegemony**

Pierre W. Orelus

Abstract

We live in a society where standard accents are highly valued. Generally, people who speak with a Standard English accent are seen through a positive lens linguistically; those whose English is accented are stigmatized. Accent discrimination affects linguistic minorities from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, including foreign-accented English speakers. This article uses a sociolinguistic framework and draws from participants' *testimonios* garnered over the course of a year to explore the ways in which linguistic minorities, across ethnicity, race, language, and nationality, experienced various forms of accent discrimination. Participants' *testimonios* suggest that these factors play a significant role in the different ways and the degree to which they were subjected to accent discrimination.

Keywords: Accent discrimination, *testimonios*, linguistic minorities, bilingual students, administrators and professors of color, standard accent, accented English.

Pierre Orelus, Ph.D. Associate Professor and Chair of the Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions at Fairfield University. He is the Chief Editor of Book Series: Anti-colonial Educational Perspectives for Transformative Change, SensePublishers. He can be reached at porelus@fairfield.edu

There are unearned privileges attached to standard accents. We live in a society where standard accents are highly valued. Generally, those who speak with a Standard English accent are seen through a positive lens linguistically; those whose English is accented are stigmatized. Accent discrimination affects linguistic minorities from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class backgrounds, including foreign-accented English speakers (Baugh, 2018; Lippi-Green, 2012; Orelus, 2014, 2016a). Depending on where one's accent originates, one may be subject to insidious forms of accent discrimination. In the United States, for example, immigrant minorities are routinely subjected to linguistic discrimination because of their non-standard English accent (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018; Orelus, 2014, 2016b).

People's age, linguistic, socio-economic, and racial backgrounds impact their accents (Baugh, 2018; Levy & Crowley, 2012). Other factors, including one's social environment also influence people's accent (Kitamura, Panneton, & Best, 2013; Labov, 2011). When individuals or groups enunciate words in ways deviating from the socially constructed standard accent, they are labeled as "speaking with an accent," often resulting in discrimination against them (Lippi-Greene, 2012).

Accent discrimination is systemic and infringes upon the inalienable linguistic rights of minority groups speaking with accents deviating from the alleged Standard English accent (Baugh, 2018). Linguists, such as Baugh (2018), examined the salient effects of accent discrimination on linguistic minorities. Specifically, Baugh's scholarly linguistic work helps understand various kinds of accent discrimination, including linguistic profiling, that African Americans and Latinx have encountered in American schools and society.

Likewise, bilingual scholars and researchers have examined accent discrimination that linguistic minorities, including emerging bilingual students and professionals, have encountered in American schools and society (Cummins & Swaim, 2014; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018; Nieto &

Bode, 2018). These scholars and researchers underscore ways in which these students use *testimonios* to resist linguist oppression in schools. Similarly, this article draws from *testimonios* of minority professors, administrators, and students from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to underscore various ways in which they have been subjected to systemic forms of accent discrimination.

More specifically, this article uses a sociolinguistic framework and draws from participants' *testimonios* garnered over the course of a year to explore various ways in which bilingual students and professors across language, ethnicity, race, and nationality experienced accent discrimination in American schools and other institutions. The following questions guided the article: (1) Have you ever personally felt discriminated against because of your accent and/or have you ever witnessed close friends, family members, classmates, or co-workers experiencing accent discrimination? (2) If so, in what ways and to what degree, might have this experience affected you?

Testimonio

Testimonio plays a major role in this article. Therefore, it is worth explaining what it entails at the outset. According to Cervantes et al. (2019), "Testimonios allow individuals to name their realities and to share specific experiences of oppression or trauma that they have endured" (p. 2). Scholars from different backgrounds and with different foci in the academy have used *testimonios* both as a methodology and a genre to challenge the dominant narrative and assert themselves in the world. Indeed, historically oppressed groups in both developing and under-developed countries have used *testimonios* as a form of resistance to systemic oppression (Cervantes, 2012).

Testimonios have been "giving voice to silences, representing the other, reclaiming authority to narrate, and disentangling questions surrounding legitimate truth" (Delgado Bernal

et al., 2012, p. 365.) *Testimonios* emerge from and reflect people's daily living and breathing realities. As such, *testimonios* of and about linguistic minority professors and students from participants' backgrounds are incorporated and analyzed herein to underscore the ways in which they were subjected to systemic forms of accent discrimination. Similar to the term *testimonio*, it is worth reviewing the literature on accent discrimination, as it is intrinsically connected to this article.

Accent Discrimination

Accent discrimination is a systemic linguistic oppression that affects the day-to-day lives of minoritized groups, including African Americans, bilingual, and multilingual speakers, whose accent does not meet the definition of Standard American English accent (Baugh, 2018; Lippi-Greene, 2012). This form of discrimination is linked to a dominant sociolinguistic mindset that favors accents socially constructed as standard over others labeled as non-standard. As a result, minoritized linguistic groups speaking with an English accent deviating from the standard American English accent are often routinely subjected to accent discrimination. They are assumed not to be as smart as those who speak Standard English, who are usually given the benefit of the doubt about their intelligence (Baugh, 2018; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Matsuda, 1991).

Accent discrimination is interlocked with one's native tongue, race, ethnicity, social class, and country of origin; these factors play a major role in the ways linguistic minoritized groups, particularly those speaking with an accent, have been treated in schools and society. For instance, although African Americans are native speakers of English, they have been discriminated against for speaking Ebonics (Baugh, 2018; Labov, 2011). Ebonics is rooted in the history of African Americans, including the Atlantic Slave Trade. Enslaved Africans came from different tribes, spoke various dialects, and intermingled with other enslaved Africans during this

trade. Through such interactions, the captured Africans were exposed to new dialects and accents influencing their native languages and accents (Baugh, 2003, 2010, 2018).

The colonial legacy has affected African Americans, including the ways in which they have been linguistically perceived and treated in society in comparison to those who speak the so-called Standard American English. The inferiority construction of African American Vernacular English must be challenged, as no scientific research has proven that certain accents or languages are better than or superior to others (Baugh, 2010, 2018; Labov, 2011). The accent discrimination against African Americans indicates that being an English native speaker does not necessarily guarantee that those from marginalized racial and socio-economic backgrounds are exempt of accent discrimination.

Underlying factors, such as race, linguistic and ethnic heritage, and social class are intrinsically linked to accent discrimination. For example, Rosa and Flores (2017) documented ways and the degree to which Latinx, born and raised in the United States, are often mistaken for immigrants and treated as second language English learners because of their ethnicity/race and social class. According to Rosa and Flores, the speech patterns of working-class Latinx are often associated with their ethnicity and assumed immigrant status.

Before Rosa and Flores's study (2017), Otheguy and Zentella (2012) conducted a study about Puerto Ricans who lived in New York. Otheguy and Zentella looked at ways in which these linguistically disenfranchised groups faced accent discrimination from individuals who did not appreciate other ethnic groups using variations of English to communicate with one another. In specific terms, these researchers examined ways in which Puerto Ricans and other Spanish immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean were routinely subjected to accent discrimination because of their English dialects and also for code-switching in Spanish and English.

Minoritized linguistic groups often feel pressured to speak Standard American English \ in schools and at work to fit in, as it is the accent most valued in these institutions (Lippi-Greene, 2012; Rosa & Flores, 2017). However, when they return home from work or school, they every so often have to switch back to speaking with the English accent familiar to their family members, friends, or neighbors—something those from dominant linguistic groups do not have to do (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Standard English accent is a social construct. Such construct has historically favored monolingual privileged groups over disfranchised linguistic minorities speaking English, for instance, with an accent (Lippi-Greene, 2012). This article demonstrates ways in which the hegemony of Standard American English accent affected (and continues to affect) disfranchised linguistic minority groups in ways that might have gone unrecognized.

Method

Testimonio

Two main venues were used to collect data, namely testimonios, for this article. Some *testimonios* were gathered from a classroom. A colleague helped me recruit students from his class. This colleague was an instructor at the same University located in Las Cruces, New Mexico where I previously taught. In a presentation I was invited to do in his class about my research on accent, I learned that a great number of his students were immigrants whose English was not their first language. I had the opportunity to interact with some of the students during and after my presentation on accent, and they shared with me that they had experienced accent discrimination in schools and other settings.

The rest of the *testimonios* stemmed from teachers, professors, administrators, and former students who participated in a workshop on accent and language diversity that I was invited to do at a middle school located in Las Cruces, New Mexico. To be exact, a former doctoral student,

who was the middle school principal, invited me to conduct a workshop on accent and language diversity for her teachers there, as she felt they could benefit from my research. Other people from the community also attended this workshop. For example, I invited colleagues and former students to attend, and some did so. Likewise, some of my colleagues invited their students to attend the workshop, and they did.

The former student who invited me to do the workshop became familiar with my research on accent, as she was taking a doctoral seminar class on language, literacy, and culture with me. She allowed me to use the workshop as a platform to ask attendees to consider participating in a study on accent that I was conducting. She informed people in advance, who registered for the workshop about my research, which was on going. At first, all attendees agreed to participate in the study, but some ended not writing their *testimonios* about their experiences with accent discrimination as they initially promised.

Selection of *Testimonios*

Data collected both from the workshop and my colleague's classroom entailed *testimonios* from students, college professors, and administrators, who had been subjected to accent discrimination and/or witnessed family members, friends, and classmates enduring this form of discrimination. At both the workshop and in the classroom, participants were given prompt questions serving as guidance as they were writing their *testimonios*. The same prompt questions guided this article. The workshop was designed for bilingual teachers, administrators, professors, parents, and whoever else was interested in accent and language issues from the community where the middle school was located.

A focus group of 12 middle school teachers, college students, university professors, and administrators, most of whom were bilingual, participated in the workshop, which lasted over two hours. Although all the workshop attendees were invited to participate in the case study,

only five agreed to do so. The rest of the participants were from my colleague's classroom. Initially, 20 people agreed to take part in this case study, including people attending the workshop. In the end, only eight followed through with the *testimonios* they agreed to write about their experiences with accent discrimination. As explained later in the study, quotations analyzed in the article are from participants' *testimonios*; they are divided into two main sections. Five quotations are from participants' *testimonios* gathered at the workshop, and the other three are from my colleagues' students.

The Workshop

The workshop attendees were primarily teachers, administrators, professors, and former students who spoke a different language from English while growing up, even though a few of them were born in the US. While some stated they personally experienced accent discrimination, others claimed that they witnessed family members, friends, classmates, and neighbors being subjected to it. I designed the workshop in a way that created space for participants to talk about their experiences with accents, including accent discrimination.

Specifically, I began the workshop by first engaging the attendees to get to know them a bit before proceeding to a brief lecture on accent and language diversity followed by a group work activity. That is, after the mini-lecture, I engaged participants in a brief group activity and encouraged them to (1) talk about their experiences with accent discrimination and (2) document such experiences through written *testimonios*. They were given about 45 minutes to write freely about their experiences with accent discrimination. They were then encouraged to share such experiences with the whole group. Most of them volunteered to do so.

After the workshop ended, I followed up with individual participants who showed interest in writing about their experiences with accent discrimination. They shared their *testimonios* with me and granted me permission to use them. Some participants wrote testimonial

accounts about accent discrimination at the workshop, while others started theirs at the workshop and expanded on them later.

Participants' Backgrounds

While some participants were US-born, others were from other parts of the world, including Germany, Colombia, Mexico, Erithia, and the Philippines. For some, English was their native tongue, while for others, English was their second or third language. They were native speakers of Spanish, German, and French, among other languages. Furthermore, while some were K-12 school administrators and teachers pursuing doctoral degrees, others were university professors. Finally, their age varied from 20s to 60s at the time of the study, and they were at different stages in their academic and professional lives.

Validity

For validity and transparency purposes, I explained to participants what the study entailed before they decided to write their *testimonios*, which are incorporated and analyzed in this article. They were given the opportunity to revisit them before the article was submitted for peer review. Specifically, I emailed participants my interpretation of their *testimonios*, drawing from my analysis of the whole data set. While some commented on such interpretation, others simply approved it. Some participants wrote about their personal experiences with accent discrimination, while others talked about classmates, friends, and family members they witnessed experiencing this form of discrimination. They expressed their opinion about these issues drawing from personal, academic, and professional experiences.

Delimitations

It also worth noting that given its scope with only eight participants involved, this article does not purport to fully document all forms of accent discrimination that linguistic minority students and professors in the United States have been facing in schools and society. This article

has its limitations. One of its drawbacks is that all the participants are middle class bilingual students, administrators, and professors. Their stories do not reflect the reality of all linguistic minorities. Therefore, more research needs to be done on accent discrimination facing linguistic minorities of all backgrounds, looking further into its insidious effects. Nonetheless, those interested in knowing various ways and the degree to which college bilingual students, administrators, and professors particularly have been subjected to accent discrimination in American schools and society at large might find the following data interpretation and analysis of their lived and professional experiences helpful.

Data Analysis

From the data set, linguistic minoritized groups were selected based on their experiences with accent discrimination. Since participants' native languages were diverse as well as their experiences with accent discrimination, I compared and contrasted such experiences. This comparative analysis was necessary to underscore various ways in which diverse English speakers might have been subjected to various degrees of accent discrimination depending on their backgrounds.

Narrative Analysis

I used narrative analysis drawing from Johnson's (2014) work in sociolinguistics to interpret and analyze the data. Narrative analysis helped me understand the social context of the participants' testimonios. Indeed, such analysis helped capture participants' various experiences with language and accent discrimination as well as their views on it. I began the data analysis process by focusing on identifying specific themes emerging from participants' narratives. Patterns, variances, resemblances, and differences in participants' accounts about accent discrimination were noted. I carefully identified and highlighted themes embedded in participants' *testimonios* to illuminate various ways in which they experienced accent

discrimination. Quotations from their *testimonios* were divided into two sections for analysis. They underscored their various experiences with accent discrimination.

Theme Analysis

The analysis of their *testimonios* entailed an examination of theme patterns emerging from their various experiences with accent discrimination. Participants' views on accents and personal experiences with accent discrimination across social class, ethnic, racial backgrounds, and nationality were analyzed. A preliminary analysis of the whole data set was performed to determine which parts were relevant to the study.

Resemblances, variances, restatements, and contradictions throughout participants' accounts were noted and analyzed. Some of the issues participants addressed in their narratives were not directly connected to the focus of case study; they, at times, talked about unrelated, yet important data that provided a broader scope of understanding of the issues at hand.

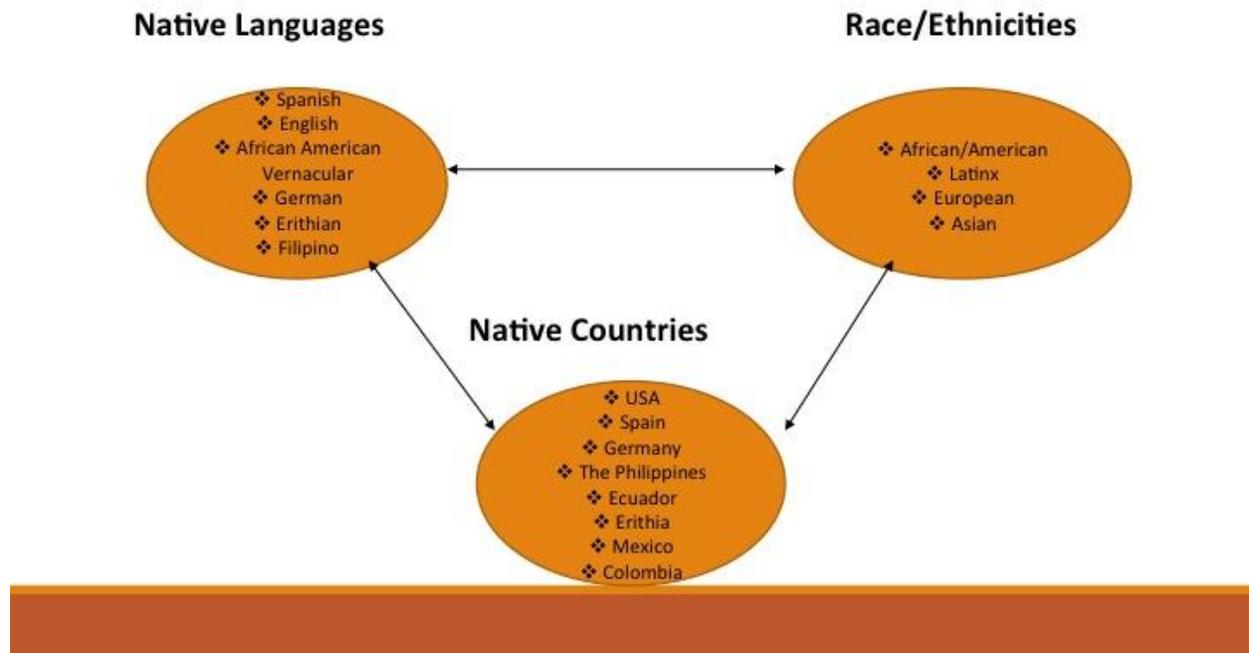
I arranged participants' narratives by themes, from which two sections of data were carefully crafted and analyzed. Relevant information about each section is provided for clarity purposes. In both sections, attention is drawn to various ways in which people's biases prejudices against linguistic minority groups in this study might have affected them, including bilingual college students and professors. Both sections highlighted various experiences of accent discrimination that linguistic minorities have experienced, including immigrant French bilingual students from African countries. The table and figure that follow encapsulate participants' age, social class, gender, social status and social class, race/ethnicities, nationality, country of origin, and native languages, respectively.

TABLE 1
Participants' Age, Gender, Social Class and Social Status

| Total 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Age | 48 | 40 | 24 | 34 | 22/36 | 61/42 |
| Gender | Female | female | female | female | Males | Male/ female |
| Social Class | Middle Class | Middle class | Middle Class | Middle Class | Middle Class | Middle Class |
| Social Status | Student/ Administrato r | Administrator | Student. | Student/ teacher | Student/ Professor | Professor/ student |



FIGURE 1
 Participants' Native Languages, Ethnicities, and Countries of Origin



Data Analysis

The data analysis was performed on both similarities and differences in themes emerging from participants' *testimonios*, as their experiences with accent discrimination varied. As such, the first section of data analysis that follows is made of *testimonios* of participants who directly experienced accent discrimination. They spoke about their own experiences with accent discrimination while taking a stance on it. By a slight contrast, the second section contains *testimonios*, for which participants indirectly experienced accent discrimination. They, for example, witnessed members of their families and peers being subject to accent discrimination in schools and public places, but they did not feel that they experienced it themselves.

Discussion of Testimonios

Section One: Linguistic Minorities Personally Experienced Accent Discrimination

Vob's case.

Vob was born in Germany and immigrated to the United States with his parents when he was 11 years old. He was in his early 20s, pursuing a master's degree at a university located in the East Coast of the United States at the time of the study. Vob often receives unpleasant treatment, including being subjected to interrogation, because of his perceived foreign English accent. Unlike his monolingual White American friends, he encounters accent discrimination while traveling.

I remember various instances wherein I felt that I was being profiled based on my accent, alone. A simple, "Hi, how is it going?" uttered by me was usually met with an agent's assertive, "Country of citizenship?" or "Where are you from?" type of request. While I am happy to comply with their requests and understand that a lot of what they do simply has to do with following procedure, which usually results in my visa/passports being inspected and questions being asked, I feel that there must be a better way to communicate with people in my situation (International Student, people visiting from other countries, etc.).

Vob finds remarks made and questions asked about his accented English to be linguistically biased and discriminatory. While his native-born, White, American friends and classmates face no accent challenges going through the checkpoint, Vob faces institutional linguistic hurdles going through the same process because of his accent.

It is hard to explain how these exchanges go to my American friends because when we travel through the checkpoint together (or when they go through it alone), the whole process usually seems to be quite pleasant, speedy, and inconsequential. I think it is the

mere idea of being recognized as someone who is different solely by the sound of my voice and consequently being communicated with differently that makes me feel quite unwelcome and isolated in those moments.

As a German, Vob is not necessarily part of ethnic minority group in the United States in recent history of this country. However, as a second language English learner, he has been subjected to similar, if not the same, unpleasant linguistic discriminatory practices that minorities and immigrants of color have faced in the United States. It seems as if all linguistic minorities have been subject to accent discrimination differently, depending on their ethnicity, nationality, and country of origin and the context in which they find themselves. Leanne's experience with accent discrimination is a case in point, in addition to Vob's.

Leanne's case.

Leanne was pursuing a doctorate degree at a state university located in the Midwest of the United States at the time of the study. She was in her 30s and was born and raised in Colombia. In addition to Spanish as her native language and English, which has become her second language, she studied French and other languages. Specifically, Leanne considers herself bilingual but has studied at least five other languages throughout her life. She has taught English as a foreign language overseas in different European and Asian countries. Because of her non-standard English accent, Leanne has had several unpleasant accent discrimination experiences, one of which occurred with her boyfriend present, who is a native speaker of Standard English.

A person from Australia invited me to have dinner at her place. [On] this occasion, I went there with my boyfriend, who is American. The next time this person from Australia met my boyfriend, she asked him if we had communication issues in our relationship. She told him, "It must be very difficult for you to be in a relationship with someone who is not a native English speaker. Her accent is very strong." She was laughing about it. As

you can imagine when my boyfriend told me, I did not find it funny at all. On the contrary, situations like that affected my personal and professional confidence.

Leanne felt offended by her boyfriend's friend's comment, which she did not find funny. Such comments seem to have psychologically impacted her, particularly her confidence. Regardless of her sociolinguistic and cognitive abilities, as a Spanish native speaker, she has taught English as a foreign language overseas in different European and Asian countries, Leanne's accent was made fun of. Leanne's non-standard accent does not seem to be appreciated in the mainstream monolingual American society. Leanne experienced other forms of accent discrimination connected to the first one.

As a native English speaker, my boyfriend had mentioned numerous times to me that in order to be taken seriously as a professional in this country, I had to do something about my accent. He reminded me about the incident with the Australian lady and recommended me to sign up for accent reduction therapy. So, for two years I went to the speech and hearing clinic to work on accent reduction. I'm not sure if the therapy helped to "reduce" my accent, but what I can say for sure is that I was always very aware of it, and I did not like to speak in front of groups of people because I was always very self-conscious about my accent.

Leanne was told that her accent did not sound like the typical American English accent that her boyfriend's friend expected to hear. As a result, she was pressured by her boyfriend to take accent reduction courses. According to Leanne's boyfriend, doing so would help her improve her communication English skills, which in turn would make people take her more seriously. This argument is yet to be substantiated because there are linguistic minorities, like African Americans, Latinx and Asians born and/or raised in the United States, who have been discriminated against because of their accents (Baugh, 2018; Lippi-Greene, 2012). Like Leanne's

narratives, other study participants' narratives, like that of Francois, suggest that factors, such as one's ethnicity, race, and nationality are connected to accent discrimination.

Abdels' case.

Abdel was born and raised in Eritrea and moved to the United States in 1969 on a government scholarship to pursue higher education and other opportunities. Specifically, he came here as a student to complete a master's degree in his field of study, which he had begun in Eritrea. Abdel spoke English before immigrating here (in addition to two other languages). He completed his undergraduate studies in English, as this was the language of instruction at the University in Ethiopia (Eritrea was under Ethiopia at that time). He was a US university professor at the time of the study. Because he spoke perfect English before moving to the United States, Abdel was shocked when people could not understand him. He attributed this to what he called "his heavy Ethiopian/Eritrean accent."

It was very frustrating when I had to repeat myself several times to be understood. I was an excellent student, and my accent did not cause me much of a problem, although I was feeling the pain when I see my professors having a hard time understand[ing] me. But I have never experienced being discriminated against because of my accent. However, I suspect that I have missed some promotion opportunities due to my accent.

Abdel seems ambivalent in his statements about accent discrimination. On one hand, he claims that he was surprised that his peers and professors did not understand him because of his accent. On the other, he stated, "I have never experienced being discriminated against because of my accent." He then contradicts himself by saying, "I suspect that I have missed some promotion opportunities due to my accent." Later in his *testimonio*, he confirmed that he has, indeed, been subjected to accent discrimination.

In class, I have some students who comment on the course evaluation saying, “He is teaching a tough course, and he is making the course more difficult by his accent.” But such comments were from few students. Despite my accent, I have won several teaching excellence awards over the years.

Like the two previous immigrant participants, Abdel proudly identified himself as a hard-working professional. Apparently, he wants to fit in the mainstream American English world but has faced systemic linguistic hurdles, namely accent discrimination. Abdel is not alone. Other immigrant minority native speakers of English face similar forms of accent discrimination in the United States by individuals from the dominant linguistic group, as Malda’s case illuminates.

Malda’s case.

Malda was born and raised in the Philippines. She immigrated to the United States after she met her husband, a US veteran, who was then stationed in the Philippines. Malda already spoke English as her dominant language before moving to the United States. She stayed home to take care of her son for years while her husband was in the military before she decided to return to school to pursue a doctorate degree, which she completed on time. Malda identifies herself as someone who believes in the ideals of the United States, which she claims she loves as the wife of a US veteran soldier. She talked about the way she has faced accent discrimination and xenophobia since she has been living here because of her English accent and ethnicity.

My experiences with accent discrimination as an educated woman who came from Southeast Asia and has lived in the United States for 27 years has been challenging. My most recent experience was at [a] Walmart counter where a cashier, upon seeing me and hearing my accent, started the conversation, “I am so impressed that your country really perfected making freeze dried food.”

Madla often has to challenge those who have ill-perceived and poorly treated her because of her non-dominant English accent. So, she did not remain silent when at the employee at Walmart made insensitive comment about her ethnicity. Malda replied asking, “Did you mean Japan?” She said, “Yes.” I replied, “But I’m not Japanese.” She said, “You know what I mean.” At that point, I turned my face and left.

As Malda’s counter-narrative indicates, she often has to correct people to get the respect that she deserves—something those who are linguistically privileged do not have to do. Malda was not alone facing this challenge. Findings of this unit suggest that all the participants were subjected to patterns of ethnic, racial, and linguistic stereotypes associated with their accents. They experienced this form of accent discrimination from American native speakers who did not appreciate the diversity of accents. The following section explores cases in which participants felt they never personally experienced accent discrimination but witnessed close relatives and peers experiencing it, and they shared how they were affected by such experience.

Discussion of Testimonios

Section Two: Participants Witnessed Families and Peers Facing Accent Discrimination

Aseya’s case.

Aseya is a 24-year-old, African American, undergraduate college student who grew up the middle class in the Southern part of the United States. Growing up, she witnessed her mother’s best friend, an immigrant woman from Egypt, being subjected to discrimination because of her “foreign” accent. Specifically, as a child, while accompanying her mother’s friend to the local supermarket to buy grocery, she witnessed people insulting her because of her accent.

When I was younger, my mother had an Egyptian friend that was having a hard time adjusting to living in America. My mother would make me go to the supermarket and

other stores with her to help out. I can recall how people would treat me, a 9-year-old, with more respect and kindness than they treated Ms. Hannah because I spoke English without an accent, and she had an accent.

Using her mother's friend as a prime example, Aseya unravels the common assumption made about people who speak English in distinct accents. Her narrative points out the extent to which people who speak in non-dominant accents are often assumed to be foreigners who are to be feared, while others are perceived as less intelligent than those who speak in Standard English accent.

My mother's friend would get treated like a low-class citizen because of her Egyptian accent. People would get frustrated because they couldn't understand her; they would yell curses and tell her to go back to her country.

Having an accent does not interfere with one's cognitive or intellectual capabilities. However, Aseya's narrative about her mother's friend seems to suggest that immigrants who speak in non-dominant English accents are looked down upon and treated as unintelligent. Based on the content of her narrative, she seems to have been affected by such experience. Akayla, another participant, witnessed minority immigrants, including bilingual students at her school, being subjected to ridicule because of their accent.

Akayla's case.

Akayla is a 48-year-old, married Mexican woman. She was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States with her family when she was a child. She identifies herself as middle class. She was a middle school principal pursuing a doctorate in education at the time of the study. Like Aseya, personally Akayla never felt discriminated against because of her accent. However, she witnessed and continues to bear witness to people, including immigrant students and classmates, being discriminated against because of their accents.

Growing up in Chicago, I found accents to be fascinating. I enjoyed listening to people speak and tried guessing their country of origin. I knew that I, too, had an accent, but I never felt discriminated against because of my accent. When I was in high school, I remember that students who were newcomers were often made fun of when they communicated in class.

Akayla first acknowledges the beauty in diverse accents and then expresses empathy about those who are subject to accent discrimination saying, “I saw how the students sank into their seats and became withdrawn. I feel bad for the students and knew that aggressors would eventually grow out of their immature behavior.” Although she admits that she, too, has an accent, personally Akayla never feels linguistically mistreated because of it.

However, she witnessed immigrant peers facing accent discrimination, which is, as Akaylas’ narrative suggests, pervasive in schools and has affected the lives of linguistic minorities, including immigrants of color. Accent discrimination is influenced by dominant ideology leading to systemic linguistic oppression of groups or individuals speaking in accents deviating from the so-called standard accent. Akayla is not the only participant who bore witness to accent discrimination occurring. Joanne, a person of color of mixed heritage also witnessed her mother, an immigrant from the Philippines, being discriminated against because of her accent.

Joanne’s case.

Joanne is a 40-year-old, Filipina-American woman, whose father is a U.S. veteran, and her mother was an immigrant from the Philippines. She was an assistant school principal when she participated in this study. Like the previous participants, Joanne believed accents are beautiful and stated that she never felt being discriminated against because of her accent.

However, she witnessed her immigrant mother being humiliated and insulted by strangers for speaking in an accent perceived and treated as “foreign.”

I have witnessed my mother experience accent-based discrimination. She was born in the Philippines and lived there until she was 21 years old. My father, who was in the U.S. Navy, brought her to the U.S. after they met and married in the Philippines. I witnessed my mother experience accent discrimination as a young child when people [would] tell her to go back to where she’s from upon hearing her speak English.

Joanne’s view about accent is that it reflects one’s identity and where one is from. Joanne personally never experienced accent discrimination. However, she witnessed her immigrant mother from the Philippine enduring this systemic oppression. Joanne’s *testimonio* suggests that those who speak in non-standard accents are routinely linguistically profiled (Baugh, 2018).

Pablo’s case.

Pablo was born and raised in Spain. He is in his 30’s and is married with three children, who are bilingual. Pablo is mixed. His mother is a Spaniard, while his father is an immigrant from Ecuador. Pablo, a former EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher, is currently an assistant professor at a university located in the West Coast of the United States. Pablo immigrated to the United States to work as a Spanish teacher.

He then pursued graduate studies after years of teaching both in his native land and in the United States. Upon finishing his doctoral studies, he pursued and secured a university faculty position. Pablo stated that in many of his encounters with people in the United States and Europe, they often make positive comments about his Spaniard accent, while looking down on that of his wife, who is from Ecuador.

People seem to celebrate more some countries over others, same as they do with races. They probably celebrate some countries over others influenced by country

variables. When some people have asked me where I'm from and when I say Spain, some of them seem to kind of celebrate. However, when they ask my wife, who is from Ecuador, I notice they don't celebrate anything.

Pablo's narrative further illustrates unequal power relations between standard Spaniard Spanish accent and Latin American Spanish accents. People who are from Spain speaking in standard Spaniard accents tend to be seen through positive linguistic lenses, whereas those from former colonized Spanish territories are often perceived and treated poorly. This linguistic disparity is connected to the persistent effects of the Spanish colonial legacy on Latin America, as linguistically diverse individuals from Latin America and the Caribbean are often ridiculed because of their marked accents.

Although some people probably celebrate because they know more about Spain than about Ecuador, it seems that some as race (people in Spain are lighter than in Ecuador, a country that is more associated to Indigenous peoples), ethnicity (the culture in Spain is considered better than the culture in Ecuador), class (a European country versus a third-world country), and language (some people tell me about the Castilian Spanish and insist that the Spanish from Spain is the correct and formal Spanish and that Spanish in Latin America is wrong, informal, and non-educated).

Spanish accents from Latin America and the Caribbean are treated as such because of European colonial legacy. They tend to be from different social class and cultural backgrounds than their White European or American counterparts, particularly White middle-class Europeans or Americans, complicating the accent matter. The colonial legacy lingers on and, consequently, places colonized subjects from Latin America in disadvantageous linguistic position.

Discussion of Overall Findings

Accent discrimination is pervasive. Depending on where one's accent originates, one may be subject to insidious forms of accent discrimination. As the case study finding suggests, in the United States, immigrant minorities are routinely subjected to linguistic discrimination because of their non-standard English accent and related factors, such as ethnicity/race and nationality, in addition to their native language. For example, immigrants, including university professors and college students involved in this study whose accents differ from the alleged standard American accent, experience accent discrimination in spite of their academic and professional achievements.

Participants spoke to various ways in which they personally and professionally experienced accent discrimination, including witnessing family members, classmates, and friends being subjected to this form of linguistic oppression; their narratives expose accent biases about non-standard English speakers. Uninformed and biased viewpoints about non-standard accents have influenced the way dominant linguistic groups perceive and treat linguistic minorities, including college bilingual students and professors of color involved in this study. Their *testimonios* also reveal ways in which they challenged accent discrimination and English language hegemony.

Participants' *testimonios* illustrate ways and the degree to which accent discrimination variously affected the lives of linguistic minorities, like Leanne, who personally experienced it. Even though some participants, including Akayla and Joanne, did not personally experience accent discrimination, they witnessed their family members and classmates experiencing it. They took a strong stance against it, claiming that all accents are beautiful. Specifically, Akayla and Joanne believe that accents reflect a great deal of linguistic diversity, from which American schools and society can benefit.

Drawing from the participants' *testimonios*, it can be argued that having an identifiable non-dominant accent adds many layers to the identity of linguistically and culturally diverse groups, including immigrant students and professionals. However, it is not speaking with the dominant accent that seems to be the issue; rather, it is people's unfavorable attitude toward noticeable non-dominant accents. Accent discrimination has affected native speakers of English, including African Americans and Latinx.

The content of participant's *testimonios* about accent discrimination suggests that one's protection from this systemic oppression depends on what type of English (dialect) one speaks. Linguistic protection is a privilege granted to those who are dominant speakers of Standard English; non-standard speakers of English are often treated unfairly. Their accents are often seen as deviants from Standard English. Abdel's accent, for example, was called "heavy"—a marker particularly associated with immigrant bilingual speakers. Accents constructed as "heavy" do not seem to be appreciated in American classrooms and society at large, even though such an accent is a linguistic asset that can and has contributed to linguistic diversity in American schools and society. Participant's *testimonios* speak to the ways in which the degree of accent discrimination variously affected their lives.

Conclusion

This article documented various ways in which accent discrimination occurred in American schools and other institutions. It highlighted how accent discrimination affects linguistic minorities across language, race, ethnicity, social class, nationality, and gender. As various linguists have documented, people who speak English "with an accent" have often been denied opportunities, including employment, housing, and job promotion (Baugh, 2010, 2018; Lippi-Green, 2012). Very limited opportunities in institutions, like higher education, have been given to those who speak English with a noticeable non-standard accent. In universities and

colleges rarely does one find administrators who English speak “with an accent” occupying key administrative positions, like provost or president.

Denying people opportunities because of their accent—something they do not have control over—is a violation of their linguistic right. Accent discrimination is a systemic linguistic oppression that needs to be taken seriously. It needs to be examined in depth and brought up to the forefront of debates focusing on linguistic and educational issues. Just as there are people who are discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and social class, there are those who are subjected to various forms of linguistic discrimination because of their accents. Linguistically marginalized individuals and groups are frequently prejudged, made fun of, and denied opportunities because of their non-standard accented English. The right to speak with and maintain one’s accent is a human right that cannot and should not be denied. This article provided insights into insidious ways in which accent discrimination might have psychologically, academically, and professionally affected linguistic minorities, namely college students, professors, and other professionals. It aimed to raise awareness about and increase interests in accent issues, particularly accent discrimination and language hegemony, and their effects on linguistic minorities, including immigrant bilingual students, professors, administrators, and other professionals.

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