

# Social stereotypes or attitudes reflected in language form



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Stereotypes can be defined as publicly held views or beliefs about a group of people or specific type of individuals. Stereotypes can be both true and false, it is not necessary that stereotypes are derived from objective truths they may also be derived from subjective truths and most often they are derived from subjective truths (Nelson, 2009).

Stereotypes form the basis of judgment passed regarding a particular group of individuals. The individuals who belong to that particular group are associated with the qualities of the group even though they might be totally different from their respective group. There are some stereotypes attached with the language. These stereotypes can be associated to both spoken and written language.

Basically, I will focus and talk about the spoken language. Spoken language can help one identify where the speaker is from or to which group speaker belongs. Speaker's style of speaking or accent can cause listener to develop same perceptions, about the speaker, which listener has for speaker's ethnic or cultural group. Listener may assume that speaker would have the same traits as his or her group.

This stereotyping may affect speaker both positively and negatively. Positively in a way that listener may assume speaker's group to be hard working, honest and loyal so listener will also assume the fact that speaker would also have the traits of his or her group. Similarly, this stereotyping can also go against the speaker. If the listener has negative views about the speaker's ethnic or cultural group or circle then he or she will also associate those negative traits with the speaker. Even though the speaker may be

totally different from the group he or she will be perceived likewise his or her group (Schneider, 2005).

Let's take example about perceptions regarding Arabs. The media has built such an image about Arabs that we think that all Arabs are dishonest, thieves, charlatans, murderers or terrorists. This stereotype is not true at all, may be some Arabs are like that but not all of them. Anyone who has this negative perception about Arabs will most probably associate these traits to the speaker who is of Arabic accent. The Arabic accent will make the biased listener feel that he or she is talking to an evil person who has all negative traits within him or herself. The listener will even feel unsafe around that speaker, and will best try to avoid him or her.

This is what language stereotyping is doing with students that are going to foreign countries for their studies. Whenever they interact with people, they are instantly recognized because of their distinct accent and hence they are treated as if they are criminals of some sort. Because of this stereotyped treatment they face a lot injustice and unfair treatment in foreign countries. Difference in language and accent generally tends to attract unfavorable reactions from the listeners whereas similar accents are likely to receive positive treatments.

The people with standard or acquainted accent generally receive more favoritism and support in all aspects of life like studies and workplace etc as compare to those who have foreign or somewhat different accent. This favoritism is not justified at all but this is what it is happening everywhere in the world. A number of studies have been done on social stereotyping or

attitudes reflected in language form which highlights different facts about people's perceptions about foreign and standard accents. In one of the studies conducted by Sen it was mentioned that, people with different accents are generally referred as socially unappealing, unattractive, not understandable, poor in their use of grammar, contextually unsuitable and undesirable, and inept and ineffective linguistically. However, when rated on personal traits the people with foreign accent were found out to be humorous, sociable, likeable, self confident and dependable.

This study shows us the fact that even though the speaker is good personally it is the language and accent that mainly builds image of the person. No matter how good one is as a person, it is the accent that will determine his or her position in listener's mind (Sen, n. d. ). I would like to conclude by saying that every person regardless of their age, gender, origin, race and language etc deserves respect and praise. Judging people on the basis of their language and accent is not at all fair and justified (Banks, 1999).

Their accent and language might give one impression that they are socially unacceptable but without knowing them personally passing this judgment would be pretty much harsh and cruel on them. People with foreign or unfamiliar accent must be given a chance to prove themselves, their skills, their behaviors, their morals and values etc. If they turn out to be right in these decisive factors then they must be given the same respect, importance, status, love and care that the native accent and language people get. Foreign accent people are not out of this world they are also human just brought up in different environment and culture; they drink the same water, eat the same food and breathe in the same air.

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