

A REPLY TO A NOTE ON VOICE AND RACIAL CATEGORIZATION IN BRITAIN

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Although we are delighted that U.K. data we reported in sociolinguistic/communication contexts are being resurrected for critical consideration in a current social psychological domain, and by a reputable scholar who is emerging justifiably as a significant entity in language studies, we cannot but be extremely disappointed at the end product. First, Ball's reanalysis, and his interpretation of it, are, to say the least, highly dubious. Given that about 20% of our Black samples were, as we have always claimed, correctly identified ethnically and that very few Caucasians were not heard as White, it is hardly surprising, if at all important, to learn now that "Black speakers are recognized as Black *significantly* more than White speakers are falsely categorized as Black" (our italics). Indeed, this in no way alters the overall picture that 80% of Blacks were misattributed as White. Moreover, when examining this statistical "significance", we find that no significant differences in actuality emerged from two of Ball's analyses anyway. Even then, when he resorts to estimating more data for further analyses, still the older group does not reach the conventional significance level.

Second, Ball's argument concerning subjective probabilities is misleading and irrelevant as it is based on an inadequate appreciation of our methods. In each study, listeners were faced *not* with a two-category choice of the speakers' ethnicity, but with a multiple set of category choices. We reported clearly how listeners had to estimate speakers' ages as well as classify them on three dimensions each of which consisted of three choices, namely, religion (protestant, catholic or other), social class (working, middle or upper) and skin color (white, colored or oriental). Thus, listeners' categorizations were not all-or-none as reported in the previous Note. Listeners had a far more complex cognitive task which involved rating each speaker on all possible permutations of religion, class and skin color. Hence, listeners could not rely on the simplistic calculations proposed to arrive at their categorizations by Ball. As Tversky and Kahneman (1974) and Nisbett and Ross (1980) have shown, such judgments are far more varied and complex. Interestingly enough, Ball's argument provides an example of one of the numerous biases in judgment documented by these researchers. Our study was not specifically designed to investigate judgment strategies under uncertainty. If we had had stimulus speakers with distinctive West Indian accents in their speech, listeners would have had no difficulty in identifying them as such. Instead, our results show that linguistic assimilation has occurred to such a degree that the task of spotting such speakers amongst West Indian working-class Cardiff residents yields results that show that 80% of our Black speakers are easily labelled as White.

Third, Ball persists in ignoring the various methodological advantages of embedding the ethnic dimension of judgments amongst others such as class, religion and age as is the case in everyday life. In each paper, we pointed out that this was done specifically so as to avoid the instructional set highlighting ethnic attributions that have plagued similar studies in the United States. Ball also fails to mention that in each study we reported rating scale results which confirmed our categorization results. Listeners were asked to rate on a 7-point scale how much of a Cardiff accent (if any) each speaker possessed. The results showed that Black and White speakers were rated as having equally broad accents (4.86 vs. 5.08, *ns*; 4.93 vs. 4.88, *ns*; 4.10 vs. 4.16, *ns*; for the White vs. Black, 10- 21- and 40-year-olds, respectively, and where a 7 rating was associated with a very strong Cardiff accent). On the assumption that West Indian accented speakers would have been perceived to have less of a Cardiff accent than their White counterparts, the rating scale results confirm that on average our two groups of speakers share a common speech style. Finally on this issue, Ball omits to reflect that we had reported originally that (a) two internationally renowned linguists listened informally to our tapes and confirmed the absence of West Indian speech features in the speech of those Blacks misattributed as Whites, and (b) when Blacks in an informal setting were played the aforementioned and forewarned that these speakers were actually Black, they attested to the lack of Black accented features and the presence of local White features. It is also interesting to note that Ball had potentially easy access to the stimulus audiotapes for a long while before, during and after writing the previous Note; had he done so we hazard the guess that we would not have needed to prepare this reply now.

Finally, Ball questions the representativeness of these findings for Blacks in other U.K. areas, claiming that this is only "partly acknowledged by the authors themselves". To the contrary, in each of our papers we stressed explicitly the localized nature of our findings as well as the need not only to investigate different generations of Black communities elsewhere but also to explore certain specified differences within any one such community (see for example, the 1975 (p. 11), 1976 (p. 114) and 1977 (p. 91-2) papers). Furthermore, Ball in his concluding section also alludes to the fact that we have somehow proffered (erroneous) statements claiming that "complete assimilation has occurred, or that the Blacks concerned are vocally identical with Whites". Nevertheless, we have again been careful to point out not only in the three papers directly concerned with the research as well as in our 1977 chapter (p. 336), but also in subsequent reviews (Giles, 1978, p. 336; 1979, p. 261; Giles & Johnson, 1981, p. 215) that speech assimilation has occurred (only) for about 80% of the Blacks we studied in Cardiff.

In sum, we feel that the previous Note detracts in no way from the findings of our three studies; our conclusions are inescapable. It is interesting, however, that Ball raises no objections to the *theoretical* stance we took concerning the processes underlying the greater speech assimilation amongst British than American Blacks during the mid-1970s. We can only hope that the present debate may at least stimulate further interest in the crucial role played by language and ethnic identity variables in determining patterns of intergroup behaviours and cross-cultural communication in multilingual societies (Bourhis, 1979; Giles & Johnson, 1981).

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