

A FURTHER COMMENT ON VOICE AND RACE IN CARDIFF

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I see the main point of Giles and Bourhis' papers on voice and racial categorization as reporting evidence for linguistic assimilation to local U.K. White patterns far beyond what American studies indicate. We cannot strictly compare the U.S.A. results with theirs because of racial set in the American studies, so how those would have turned out, with ethnic categorization embedded among other judgments is unknown. I do not agree with Giles and Bourhis (1982), though, that their task was particularly complex, or that anyway that would make it immune to the suggested bias, which I view not as the sole determinant of subjects' decisions but as plausible, and enough to explain the extensive miscategorization of Black speakers. The intrusion of precisely such "simple" processes into social judgment helps make it "complex".

I originally ignored the dichotomous/polychotomous character of ethnic categorization in the Giles-Bourhis experiments as irrelevant to my criticisms. Subjects judged race as "White/West Indian/other", but only frequencies of "White" and "Black" (presumably West Indian) judgments were reported. Apparently, no "other" classifications were made, so decisions were dichotomous despite the range of categories available, which confirms that the task was not effectively complex.

The essential research issue addressed by Giles and Bourhis requires comparison of *relative* Black and White identifiability. I showed that the data prove too scanty for a strong statistical test, when thus analyzed, but support the opposite conclusion to that of Giles and Bourhis, and I "estimated more data" to highlight this. They adopted for every speaker the null hypothesis that he would be equally often classified as Black or White, which I regard as inappropriate because of listeners' likely expectations. Actually, with that null hypothesis, White speakers were superfluous in the experiments anyway.

More interesting than the disagreement over three experiments is the possible research it suggests on neglected sources of error in sociolinguistic judgments. Thakerar and Giles (in press) have already observed "halo"-like distortion in speech style perception and I plan to investigate probability matching in judgments of Australian native and immigrant speech. Most psychological research is about human fallibility of one kind or another and other specialists in interdisciplinary fields can learn from us here. Linguists are possibly over-credulous about the power of the trained ear, and those who detected no Black markers in Giles and Bourhis' stimulus tapes were perhaps deceived by the speed of the tongue. It is unfortunate that I have not examined them, but no individual experts' inability to hear markers alters the evidence that panels of non-experts recognize Black speakers correctly more often than they miscategorize Whites and that only sample size stands between this difference and statistical significance.

REFERENCES

- Giles, H.; Bourhis, R. Y. 1982: A reply to a note on voice and racial categorization in Britain. *Social Behaviour and Personality*, 10: 249-51.
Thakerar, J. N.; Giles, H. 1982: They are - so they spake: noncontent speech stereotypes. *Language and Communication*: in press.