

Sound Familiar? Investigating Explicit and Implicit Own-Accent Bias Amongst Liverpudlians

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Accent is a salient marker of social class in the UK, and recent research has tried to untangle the intricacies of accent bias. Sociolinguistic and neurological research emphasises own-accent bias, as favouring traits associated with in-group membership can offer social advantages (Bestelmeyer et al., 2015; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Meanwhile, empirical studies in the UK point to a stable Standard Language Ideology which often overrides own-accent bias (Cushing, 2020; Giles, 1970; Bishop et al., 2005; Sharma et al., 2019). This normative hierarchy of accent prestige places Standard Southern British English (SSBE) at the top and regional working-class accents at the bottom, often associating the latter with negative, classist stereotypes.

This study utilised both explicit and implicit measures to examine how regional origin influences accent evaluations, focusing on the evidence of own-accent bias and Standard Language Ideology. 56 participants, comprising half Liverpudlians and half non-Liverpudlians, evaluated speech samples from the iViE Corpus (Grabe, 2004) in both the SSBE and Liverpool accents in a single online session. Information on participants' exposure to Liverpudlian was collected. First, the explicit measure employed the matched-guise technique, whereby participants listened to a speech sample (an excerpt of Cinderella) in both accents and completed a self-report questionnaire capturing their explicit sentiment toward the speakers. Then, the implicit measure comprised an audio-based implicit association test, replicating McKenzie and Carrie (2018)'s Welsh study, in which participants rapidly categorised four short SSBE and Liverpool speech samples each (of items with salient Liverpudlian phonetic features, e.g. "We were in yellow") spoken by 1 male speaker per accent, along with positive and negative words. Implicit bias was inferred from faster response times when an accent was paired with positive words.

We hypothesised that Liverpudlians would show explicit preference for their own accent, while the implicit measure would reflect an internalised preference for SSBE, consistent with Standard Language Ideology. Contrary to our hypotheses, analyses showed that Liverpudlians favoured SSBE over their own accent across both measures, demonstrating no evidence of own-accent bias. Notably, explicit and implicit measures were directionally aligned but statistically uncorrelated, highlighting the limitations of relying solely on explicit or implicit measures in accent bias research. These findings underscore the importance of further research into SLI in the UK; a nuanced understanding of accent bias is essential for informing public awareness and addressing accent-based discrimination.

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