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Language Attitudes and the Learning Environment: The Effects of Regional Dialect on Perceptions of Teacher Credibility

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Language Attitudes and the Learning Environment:

The Effects of Regional Dialect on Perceptions of Teacher Credibility

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate how differences in regional dialect affect students' perceptions of teacher credibility. In a broader sense, the research aimed to improve teacher-student interactions by identifying communication barriers created through cultural differences. 109 students at the University of Southern Mississippi who identified as natives to the American South participated in the study. 52 of the participants listened to a lecture given by a Standard American English speaker, and the other 57 participants listened to the same lecture delivered in American Southern English. Both groups completed a survey with twelve seven-point semantic differential scales, measuring participants' perceptions of four dimensions of speaker credibility: competence, trustworthiness, caring, and dynamism. Results showed that a significant difference existed between groups only for the dynamism dimension of credibility. Students who heard the Standard American English recording evaluated the speaker as significantly more energetic, and therefore more dynamic, than those who heard the American Southern English recording. Interestingly, students in both groups evaluated the speaker as exhibiting highly positive credibility traits. Therefore, it is evident that lecture content and other voice elements likely affected credibility attributions.

Key words: accent, regional dialect, teacher credibility, language attitudes, Social Identity Theory, American Southern English, Standard American English

Dedication

To all the wonderful people in the sweet city of Hattiesburg:

Thank you for inspiring me to write this thesis and to pursue a career in higher education.

You will forever hold a special place in my heart.

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Chapter One – Introduction (1)

In the United States today, the clearest distinction of a southerner is the way he or she speaks. People raised in the American South are often identified by their unique word pronunciations and the characteristic "southern drawl." Conversely, southerners can identify nonnatives to the South by their use of Standard American English or another form of dialect. Because of our ability to identify a person's geographic origin by his or her use of dialect, regional stereotyping happens frequently without our conscious knowledge. This occurrence can lead to communication barriers in any context. Politics, healthcare, business, law, and education are just a few of the environments in which regional stereotyping based on dialect can have a detrimental impact. Particularly in the educational context, this issue often goes unnoticed.

In effort to mitigate the harmful implications of regional stereotyping, numerous researchers have conducted studies that investigate the effects of regional dialect on audience perceptions of speakers. Past studies have explored different characteristics including intelligence, niceness, patience, and sincerity as dependent variables. Additionally, regional dialect has been studied as a determinant of speaker likeability and perceived speaker similarity. Two studies in particular provide models for this research. One of these studies aimed to determine Southerners' opinions of regional dialects based on several perceived personality traits (Alford & Strother, 1992). The other discussed the effect of nonnative accents on students' perceptions of teachers (Gill, 1994).

Similarly to Alford and Strother's study, the current research explores Southerners' perceptions of different regional dialect speakers, and like Gill's study, this research investigates the role of dialect differences among students and teachers. Unlike past studies, however, the present study examines four dimensions of credibility as outcome variables. The researcher

utilizes language attitudes research as a framework for understanding regional stereotyping and also employs Tajfel's Social Identity Theory to explain how students' own use of regional dialect affects their perceptions of teachers.

The problem investigated in this study is whether the use of different regional dialects by college professors teaching in the South affects students' perceptions of their credibility. Two American dialects are tested: American Southern English and Standard American English. Each is characterized by pronunciations of vowel sounds and rate of speech. While credibility is defined as the believability of a speaker, past research shows that the concept consists of three specific dimensions: trustworthiness, or the teacher's perceived honesty; competence, or the teacher's perceived level of expertise; and caring, or the teacher's perceived intention to act in the best interest of his or her students. Each of these dimensions is examined separately in this study.

In addition to the three dimensions of teacher credibility, dynamism is studied as a dependent variable. Dynamism refers to an individual's charisma, or their display of energy and enthusiasm in speech delivery. While dynamism has never been studied as a dimension of teacher credibility, it is one of the main components of speaker credibility. Therefore, employing this factor allows for results to be applied beyond the context of teacher-student interactions. By testing southern college students' perceptions of trustworthiness, competence, caring, and dynamism based on two distinct American dialects, this study can achieve its purpose of determining how teachers' use of regional dialect that is similar versus dissimilar to their students' speech patterns affects students' perceptions of teacher credibility.

The current study aims to contribute new knowledge to the area of regional dialect research by evaluating students' perceptions of teacher credibility, a concept that has never

before been studied in this context. More importantly, its goal is to ignite research that helps mitigate the disconnect that exists between teachers and students as a result of dialect differences and improve the classroom experience for both groups. Perceptions of teacher credibility play a critical role not only in student-teacher communication but also in students' abilities to learn from their teachers. By identifying specific dimensions of credibility that are affected by dialect, this study provides a starting point by which college professors and teachers of all grade levels can rectify student misperceptions about their character. In a larger context, this study aims to remove social barriers caused by regional-dialect stereotypes and to improve cross-cultural communication in all settings.

Using quantitative methods, the researcher collected data from a large number of college students at a medium-sized southeastern university who were self-identified as natives to the South. Participants were divided into two groups. One group heard a short lecture given by a speaker using American Southern English dialect. The other heard an identical lecture given by the same speaker using Standard American English dialect. After listening to the lecture, each participant completed a questionnaire about his or her perceptions of the speaker's trustworthiness, competence, caring, and dynamism. Statistical analyses were performed to determine correlations between dialect type and perceptions of teacher credibility.

Chapter Two – Literature Review (2)

Language Attitudes

Research on language attitudes, defined as "the social evaluation of speech styles," explains that people make assumptions about others based on the way they speak (Dragojevic & Giles, 2013, p. 91). Therefore, the use of languages, accents, and even regional dialect plays a major role in determining others' beliefs about an individual. According to Dragojevic and Giles (2013), two related cognitive processes come together to create language attitudes: identification and stereotyping. First, listeners use voice cues to categorize the speaker as a member of a specific social group. Then, they attribute qualities to the speaker that they believe members of the identified group are likely to possess. Language attitudes formed by identification and stereotyping can be organized along two dimensions: status and solidarity. Status refers to the level of intelligence, education, and success attributed to a speaker while solidarity refers to the level of friendliness, niceness, and sincerity attributed to a speaker.

According to Giles and Rakic (2014), children as young as five years old have the ability to distinguish between native and nonnative accents. In addition to being easily identified, people who use nonstandard language varieties often face unfavorable stereotypes. As a result, they experience less access to opportunities than those who use the standard form of a particular language. Meanwhile, native speakers are generally identified as members of the dominant social group and are attributed with a high level of status (Dragojevic & Giles, 2013). While nonstandard language varieties are often accompanied by negative language attitudes, it is important to note that some nonnative accents are perceived as indicating positive traits (Giles & Rakic, 2014). Additionally, Dragojevic and Giles (2013) provided evidence in their study that language attitudes are based on reference frame. Results of the research show that Standard

American English speakers feel a greater connection to American Southern English speakers when their accents are heard in comparison with international accents than when heard in comparison with other regional dialects.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding language attitudes research. The theory posits that individuals favor members of the group in which they identify themselves, called the "in-group," over members of the groups in which they do not identify themselves, called "out-groups" (Bestelmeyer, Belin, & Ladd (2014). According to Bestelmeyer, Belin, and Ladd (2014), this bias can occur without conscious recognition, and categorization is often based on arbitrary indications of group identity. People use accent, for example, to identify an individual as an in-group or out-group member and then make assumptions about their personality, socio-economic status, and other characteristics based on their language variety. "Social Identity Theory further suggests that individuals generally strive to enhance their self-image by strengthening the prestige of their in-group and its members. Therefore, communicators who are members of the in-group are evaluated more positively" (Mai, 2011, p. 464). Based on this principle, it is evident that in-group favoritism plays an integral role in the formation of language attitudes, specifically during the unconscious shift from identification to stereotyping.

Defining Regional Dialect

An accent can be defined as a manner of pronunciation that differs from the standard form of a particular language. According to Gluszek and Dovidio (2010), the phonology of

language, or the system of sounds that creates accents, is learned during infancy. A study by Jacewicz, Fox, and Salmons (2011) provided evidence that children learn to produce dialect-specific speech features, particularly in the formation of vowel systems, by the age of eight. Once a child begins speaking with one phonology, it is nearly impossible for him or her to produce sounds that are not used in their native language. "Thus, people who are fluent in a second language often speak with a nonnative accent, even after many years in a host country, because they retain the phonology (including intonation) of their native language" (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010, p. 215).

As one would expect, regional dialect, or the use of a sound system that differs from the standard phonology but is still native to a particular language, is less likely to affect message comprehension than the use of nonnative accents. Conversely, language attitudes are clearly impacted by regional dialect. Specific impressions created by regional dialect differences will be discussed later (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). In the current study, perceptions of American Southern English dialect are examined in comparison with perceptions of Standard American English. It is important to note that geographic boundaries associated with American Southern English vary from study to study, and sub-dialects certainly exist within the South. As previously discussed, Social Identity Theory plays a critical role in determining language attitudes. Therefore, participants' regional backgrounds are expected to affect the results of the study.

Historical Development of American Southern English

From a historical perspective, the development of regional dialect in the United States can be studied through immigration patterns. Distinctions in regional dialect began to form in North America during seventeenth-century colonization. In addition, it is clear that Americans

today speak an old-fashioned version of English, as the language of Great Britain has changed significantly since the 1600s. The American South is the most old-fashioned in its pronunciations, because it was one of the first regions in North America to be settled. In accordance with this, other early settlement areas such as Massachusetts share some dialect similarities with the South. For example, both regions drop the "r" when it occurs at the end of a word or before a consonant (Shuy, 1967).

Despite similarities to other settlement areas, the American South exhibits distinct dialect features that are not shared with any other region. This discrepancy is a result of the extreme regional dialect variations that existed in England in the seventeenth century (Shuy, 1967). Researchers believe that the earliest settlers of the American South originated in the southeastern corner of England, including the areas of Kent and Sussex. The characteristic American Southern drawl can be found in the dialect of southeastern England, which provides evidence for this theory. Other English regions including London and Essex may have played a role in the development of American Southern English as well (Brooks, 1985).

Factors Influencing Perceptions of Regional Dialect

Before reviewing past studies on perceptions of American Southern English, the underlying factors that influence listeners' perceptions of regional dialect call for discussion. Bestelmeyer, Belin, and Ladd (2014) provide an explanation of the biological occurrences that contribute to biased perceptions about regional dialect. The researchers conducted a study in which the brain activity of participants was monitored as they listened to speakers who used different dialects. Results indicated that repetition of one's own dialect elicits an enhanced neural

response, while repetition of another group's dialect results in reduced brain response. This event may contribute to the in-group favoritism explained by the Social Identity Theory.

A study by Mai (2011) also provided evidence that in-group enhancement affects dialect perceptions. However, the researcher concluded that three other factors play a role in development of language attitudes as well. Mai's study, which focused on how regional dialect influences the successfulness of a salesperson, indicated that speech quality, dialect euphony, and dialect prestige contribute to audience perceptions of the speaker. Speech quality refers to the audience's ability to understand the speaker clearly while dialect euphony refers to perceptions of the speaker's personality based on the sound of their voice. Dialect prestige can be defined as the attribution of stereotypes to the speaker based on their word pronunciations.

Past Studies on Perceptions of Regional Dialect

In addition to research conducted on the factors influencing language attitudes, numerous studies examined the specific attributes given to standard versus nonstandard dialect speakers. One study (Alford & Strother, 1992) investigated the ways in which southerners attribute different personality traits to speakers with southern, northern, and midwestern accents. The researchers found that participants attributed positive characteristics such as intelligence, ambition, and self-confidence to both midwesterners and northerners, as these two groups were seen as representing Standard American English speech. However, participants attributed other positive characteristics, such as trustworthiness, sincerity, and friendliness to both midwesterners and southerners as midwesterners resembled participants' own speech patterns more closely than northerners.

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Another study by Gill (1994) investigated college students' perceptions and comprehension of nonnative-accent teachers versus native-accent teachers. Results showed that participants favored the native-accent teacher over two teachers with different nonnative accents and also showed higher comprehension of material presented by the native-accent teacher. The researcher concluded from the study that individuals develop perceptions based on general categories of accents rather than specific speech attributes. In other words, people evaluate dialect based on similarity or difference to their own speech patterns rather than by unique speech qualities.

A third study by Heaton and Nygaard (2011) examined the effect of message content on perceptions of southern dialect. Results showed that participants rated southern-accent speakers higher in personality traits related to solidarity and lower in personality traits related to status than standard-accent speakers, regardless of the message they conveyed. However, standard-accent speakers who delivered messages about stereotypically southern topics (hunting and cooking) were rated higher for solidarity than those who delivered non-southern content messages. Findings indicated that people hold preconceived notions about the characteristics of southern-dialect speakers. Meanwhile, Standard American English speakers are judged not based on dialect but rather on the content of the message they deliver.

A fourth study related to perceptions of regional dialect is of particular interest. Kinzler and DeJesus (2013) examined child development of language attitudes with specific regard to Southern dialect. The researchers asked children of various ages from Illinois and Tennessee to answer questions related to friendship preferences, sociolinguistic evaluations, and expectations about geographic origin based on recordings of a southern-dialect speaker and Standard American English speaker. Results indicated that 5-year-old children from Tennessee did not

answer questions differently based on the speaker's dialect while Illinois children did. At age 9, children from both geographic areas evaluated Standard American English speakers as smarter and "more in charge" than Southern-accent speakers and Southern-accent speaker as nicer than Standard American English speakers. These findings make evident that by the age of 9, children of various geographic backgrounds develop language attitudes based on regional dialect.

While Alford and Strother (1992) and Gill (1994) examined nonnative-accent and regional-dialect perceptions through a Social Identity Theory lens, Heaton and Nygaard (2011) and Kinzler and DeJesus (2013) investigated the role of content in the formation of language attitudes. Taking a slightly different perspective on perceptions of voice patterns, Neulip and Speten-Hansen (2013) argued that impressions of nonnative accents are related to ethnocentrism, or the quality of judging another's cultural practices solely based on the standards of one's own culture. Results of their study provided evidence that as an individual's degree of ethnocentrism increases, evaluations of nonnative-accent speakers decrease in positivity. While Neulip and Speten-Hansen examined only nonnative accents in their study, their findings may apply to regional dialect differences as well. Social Identity Theory, similarly to ethnocentrism, indicates that people judge others based on their own cultural values. Therefore, cultural differences that exist among different regions of the United States are likely to affect speaker evaluations in a similar way to how differences in nationality affected Neulip and Speten-Hansen's results.

Past studies indicate that regional dialect plays an important role in the formation of language attitudes. While some researchers emphasize the effect of Social Identity Theory on perceptions of regional dialect, others point to speech quality, dialect euphony, and perceptions of dialect prestige as predictors of audience perceptions. Despite these differences, scholars have continued to investigate the effect of regional dialect on perceptions of character traits related to

status and solidarity. Intelligence, trustworthiness, sincerity, ambition, and self-confidence have been studied extensively as speaker attributes. However, no study has synthesized these variables to draw conclusions about audience perceptions of speaker credibility based on regional dialect.

The current study addresses this issue from the perspective of student-teacher interactions while employing Social Identity Theory. Credibility perceptions are of particular importance in this context, because educational experience is largely affected by students' perceptions of their teachers. In fact, research shows teacher credibility has an impact on not only learning outcomes (Beatty & Zahn, 1990) but also academic performance in the classroom (Teven & McCroskey, 1997).

Defining Teacher Credibility Concepts

Source credibility is considered to be one of the most important factors in the art of persuasion. The concept is derived from Aristotle's ethos – a term that encompasses a speaker's intelligence, character, and goodwill. McCroskey (1992) adjusted the concept of goodwill to apply specifically to teacher-student interactions by using the term caring. According to McCroskey, it is essential that teachers make students believe that they care about them, even if they do not. Teven and McCroskey (1997) further established the importance of perceived teacher caring in credibility evaluations when they found that this particular quality is strongly associated with student affective learning and student perceptions of cognitive learning. Additionally, scholars now conceptualize intelligence in terms of competence, or the perceived level of expertise in the subject area, and character in terms of trustworthiness, or perceived honesty (Zhang & Sharp, 2013).

Based on these scholars' discoveries about the various dimensions of teacher credibility, the current study examines the effect of regional dialect on trustworthiness, competence, and caring independently. In addition, dynamism is investigated as a fourth variable influencing teacher credibility. Dynamism refers to the extent to which a speaker exhibits charisma, or shows enthusiasm for the subject area. While dynamism is not usually considered in regard to teacher credibility, researchers believe the concept to be an important component of *source* credibility (Whitehead, 1968). Including dynamism as one of the determining factors in teacher credibility provides for expansion of the current study's findings beyond the educational context.

Past Studies on Teacher Credibility

As previously discussed, numerous researchers have explored the role of dialect in determining audience perceptions of speakers. Conversely, scholars have investigated credibility as a determinant of audience reactions. In relation to the current study, several past research studies examined how perceived teacher credibility affects students' responses to teacher requests. Others delve into the factors that influence student perceptions of teacher credibility. While Laupa (1991) did not explore teacher credibility specifically, the researcher conducted a study investigating children's perceptions of three related authority attributes: adult status (age), knowledge, and social position. Through a series of interviews with children ages 6 to 12, the researcher determined that across age groups, compliance with requests made by authority figures is greatly influenced by the speaker's social position and the child's perception of their knowledge in the subject area. Adult status played a smaller role in determining children's obedience to teachers or other authority figures.

Zhang and Sharp (2013) also conducted a study related to requests made by authority figures. This study, however, focused on request politeness, request legitimacy, perceived credibility, and relationship distance as independent variables. After administering questionnaires to college students, the researchers examined the role of each variable in determining student compliance with teacher requests. Results showed that legitimate requests and positive violations of legitimate requests (the request is perceived as better than what is expected) reduced psychological reactance, or motivation to reestablish a freedom that has been threatened. Additionally, requests made by teachers with perceived credibility produced lower reactance than those made by teachers without perceived credibility.

In another study based on student-teacher interactions, Henning (2010) explored how three dimensions of socio-communicative style (assertiveness, responsiveness, and cognitive flexibility) affect two dimensions of teacher credibility: competence and character. The second dimension employed by Henning combines the previously defined concepts of trustworthiness and caring. Based on questionnaire results, the researcher concluded that teacher assertiveness and flexibility play the greatest role in determining students' perceptions of a teacher's competence. However, responsiveness and flexibility have the largest impact on students' perceptions of a teacher's character.

A fourth study by Banfield, Richmond, and McCroskey (2007) in the area of teacher credibility research focused on the effect of three dimensions of teacher misbehaviors (incompetence, indolence, and offensiveness) on credibility perceptions and affect for the teacher. After performing an experiment with college students, the researchers concluded that perceptions of teacher competence were most impacted by misbehaviors related to teacher

incompetence while perceptions of caring and trustworthiness were most influenced by misbehaviors related to offensiveness.

In summary, the first two studies mentioned in this section provide evidence that perceptions of teachers play a significant role in determining students' behaviors in the classroom, especially in regard to compliance with teacher requests. Conversely, the latter two studies make clear the impact of teacher behaviors on attributions of credibility. While socio-communicative style and teacher misbehaviors have been studied as factors influencing teacher credibility perceptions, speech qualities such as dialect variation have received less attention in this area of research.

Regional Dialect and Teacher Credibility

Social Identity Theory, in combination with language attitudes research, provides a framework for understanding audience perceptions of regional dialect. While SIT explains listeners' tendencies to attribute more positive qualities to in-group members, language attitudes research confirms that individuals use speech elements as a method of determining group membership and assigning labels to speakers. Past studies on regional dialect provide evidence that American Southern English speakers are often perceived as possessing a specific set of attributes, while Standard American English speakers are believed to exhibit a separate set of characteristics. Still, however, research indicates that listeners evaluate speakers who use the same dialect as themselves more positively than speakers who use a different dialect. Meanwhile, past studies on student-teacher interactions have concluded that students' learning experiences are heavily influenced by teacher credibility, which can be established through a variety of teacher behaviors.

Several hypotheses can be made for the current study based on regional dialect and teacher credibility research. As the results of Heaton and Nygaard's (2011) study illustrated, southern-dialect speakers are almost always evaluated more positively than Standard American English speakers along the solidarity, or sociality, dimension of language attitudes. Further, Alford and Strother's (1992) research indicated that southerners attribute other southerners with higher rating than both northerners and midwesterners for the following qualities: good family training, trustworthiness, sincerity, friendliness, patience, and gentleness. In addition, results of Kinzler and DeJesus's (2013) study showed that by the age of 9, children from various geographic backgrounds tend to evaluate southern-dialect speakers as "nicer" than Standard American English speakers. These research findings allow us to relate American Southern English to perceptions of two dimensions of teacher credibility: trustworthiness and caring. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formed:

> H1: The American Southern English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for qualities associated with **trustworthiness** than the Standard American English speaker.

> H2: The American Southern English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for qualities associated with **caring** than the Standard American English speaker.

Heaton and Nygaard's (2011) study also indicated that Standard American English speakers receive higher ratings in status, or competence, than American Southern English speakers. Additionally, results of Alford and Strother's (1992) study showed that midwesterners and northerners receive higher ratings than southerners for intelligence, education, ambition, self-confidence, and professionalism. Finally, Kinzler and DeJesus's (2013) study indicated that by age 9, children evaluate Standard American English speakers as "smarter" and "more in charge" than American Southern English speakers. While the competence dimension of teacher credibility is explicitly mentioned in this research, dynamism has not been explored in past

regional dialect studies. However, perceptions of dynamism can be linked with Standard

American English based on evidence for related variables, such as ambition and self-confidence.

As a result, the following hypotheses were formed:

H3: The Standard American English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for qualities associated with **competence** than the American Southern English speaker.

H4: The Standard American English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for qualities associated with **dynamism** than the American Southern English speaker.

While perceptions of competence and dynamism play a significant role in determining

teacher credibility, research surrounding the Social Identity Theory is the most predictive of

results for the current study. Mai (2011) related SIT to regional dialect by explaining that

speakers whose speech patterns allow listeners to categorize them as in-group members receive

higher overall evaluations than perceived out-group members. Neulip and Speten-Hansen's

(2013) research on ethnocentrism can also be applied to the current study. The researchers stated

that as a listener's degree of ethnocentrism increases, favorability of out-group speakers will

decrease. In addition, Bestelmeyer, Belin, and Ladd's (2014) study provided evidence for

biological occurrences that underlie SIT. Specifically, repetition of one's own dialect elicits an

enhanced neural response, while repetition of another group's dialect results in reduced brain

activity. These research findings indicate that despite positive qualities attributed to Standard

American English speakers, southerners will evaluate speakers who use their own regional

dialect most favorably. Therefore, the final hypothesis is suggested:

H5: The American Southern English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for **perceived credibility** than the Standard American English speaker.

Chapter Three – Methods (3)

The population of interest in the current study is college students who are from the American South. Data was collected from 109 students at The University of Southern Mississippi who spent the majority of their childhood in the southeast region of the United States. 14.7 percent of participants were seventeen to eighteen years old, 65.1 percent were nineteen to twenty years old, 18.3 percent were twenty-one to twenty-two years old, and 1.8 percent were above twenty-two years old. 67.9 percent of participants were female, and 31.2 percent of participants were male. These students were identified from a survey distributed to six Introduction to Public Speaking classes at USM, which asked students to participate in a research study. The students selected represent the population of study, because they self-identified as members of a group that holds American Southern English as the standard dialect of their region. Students who completed the survey but were not members of the population of study were not included in participant statistics or results. The sample frame provided for participation from students who came from a variety of majors, grade levels, socio-economic situations, and family backgrounds.

This quantitative study utilized a post-test only control group quasi-experimental design. Participants received a consent form at the beginning of the study that asked for their permission to use their responses for research in the field of communication studies. After students completed consent forms, an audio recording was played aloud in the classroom. In the recording, the speaker, who identified herself as psychology professor at USM, delivered a three-minute lecture introducing topics of a basic psychology course. Three classes heard the speaker deliver the lecture using Standard American English, while the other three classes heard the speaker deliver the lecture using American Southern English. This structure resulted in 52

students in the first experimental condition (Standard American English) and 57 students in the second experimental condition (American Southern English). A matched-guise technique was utilized in the study to ensure that voice elements other than dialect remained consistent between the two experimental conditions.

After listening to the lecture recording, participants were instructed to immediately complete a paper survey that was distributed to them along with the consent form. The survey contained twelve semantic differential scale items from previous research studies that were used to measure the participant's perception of the various dimensions of the speaker's credibility. To measure their perceptions of competence, participants were asked to evaluate the speaker on seven-point semantic differential scales from intelligent to unintelligent, informed to uninformed, and competent to incompetent. Trustworthiness scales included honorable to dishonorable, trustworthy to untrustworthy, and genuine to phony. Caring scales included not self-centered to self-centered, understanding to not understanding, and "cares about me" to "doesn't care about me." Finally, dynamism scales included energetic to unenergetic, decisive to indecisive, and proud to humble.

Additionally, participants were asked to identify the region of the country they believed the speaker in the audio recording was from and the region of the country in which they themselves spent the largest part of their childhood. Participants who did not identify as spending the largest part of their childhood in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Texas, North Carolina, or South Carolina were removed from the sample. As previously discussed, regional dialect was measured as the independent variable and trustworthiness, caring, competence, and dynamism were measured as the dependent variables in the study.

Questionnaire responses were analyzed using various statistical tests. The goal of data analysis was to determine whether a relationship existed between the speaker's dialect type and participants' perceptions of each of the four credibility concepts. Content validity, or the measurement of the full range of the dependent variable, was ensured by investigating the four different credibility concepts individually. Criterion validity was, for the most part, established by collecting data using existing teacher credibility scale items. Finally, internal reliability of each scale was tested using Cronbach's alpha.

Chapter Four – Results (4)

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

When a Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was conducted, the competence scale items (intelligent vs. unintelligent, competent vs. incompetent, and informed vs. uninformed) were found to be very reliable (.86). The trustworthiness scale items (honorable vs. dishonorable, trustworthy vs. untrustworthy, and phony vs. genuine) were also found reliable (.72). However, the caring scale items (self-centered vs. not self-centered, understanding vs. not understanding, and cares about me vs. doesn't care about me) were shown to be only somewhat reliable (.48). While these items were found reliable in other studies, statistics from this particular test indicate that one or more of these qualities are not associated with caring in all cases. Additionally, a Cronbach's Alpha test showed the dynamism scale items (energetic vs. unenergetic, decisive vs. indecisive, and proud vs. humble) to be unreliable (.19). Two of the scale items (proud vs. humble and decisive vs. indecisive) were found to be unreliable in determining dynamism in other studies as well. As a result, only the energetic scale item could be used to evaluate perceptions of dynamism.

Multivariate Analysis of Variance

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) tests were performed to determine whether differences in responses existed between the participants who heard the lecture delivered in Standard American English and the participants who heard the lecture delivered in American Southern English. The tests revealed a statistically significant difference between the two conditions ($p < .05$). The Multivariate Analysis of Variance test results are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Results of the Multivariate Analysis of Variance:

Value	.250
F	2.670
Hypothesis df	12.000
Error df	96.000
Sig.	.004

Analysis of Variance

Based on the MANOVA results, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were examined to determine which survey items yielded significant differences between the two conditions. The tests showed that a significant difference between groups (p<.05) existed only for the energetic to unenergetic seven-point scale. The Analysis of Variance test results for all survey items are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Analysis of Variance:

Item	df	F	Sig.
Intelligent vs. unintelligent	1, 107	1.873	.174
Honorable vs. dishonorable	1, 107	.574	.450
Energetic vs. unenergetic	1, 107	12.516	.001
Not self-centered vs. self-centered	1, 107	.591	.444
Trustworthy vs. untrustworthy	1, 107	.055	.816

Informed vs. uninformed	1, 107	.266	.607
Decisive vs. indecisive	1, 107	.155	.695
Cares about me vs. doesn't care about me	1, 107	.162	.688
Genuine vs. phony	1, 107	1.642	.203
Understanding vs. not understanding	1, 107	.562	.455
Competent vs. incompetent	1, 107	1.799	.183
Proud vs. humble	1, 107	.001	.970

Estimated Marginal Means

For the energetic to unenergetic seven-point scale, the average score given to the

Standard American English speaker was 2.904 while the average score given to the American

Southern English speaker was 4.070. Because adjectives associated with credibility (i.e.

energetic) were listed at the lower end of the scale, a score of 1 is the most closely linked with

the given positive trait. Therefore, the Standard American English speaker was perceived as

significantly more energetic than the American Southern English speaker. All results of the

Estimated Marginal Means test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Estimated Marginal Means for each Dependent Variable

Dependent Variable	Condition	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Intelligent vs. unintelligent	Standard Southern	1.712 2.035	.171 .163	1.373 1.711	2.050 2.359

Honorable vs. dishonorable	Standard	2.308	.176	1.958	2.657
	Southern	2.123	.169	1.789	2.457
Energetic vs. unenergetic	Standard	2.904	.238	2.431	3.376
	Southern	4.070	.228	3.619	4.522
Not self-centered vs. self-centered	Standard	2.712	.207	2.301	3.122
	Southern	2.491	.198	2.099	2.884
Trustworthy vs. untrustworthy	Standard	2.327	.197	1.936	2.718
	Southern	2.263	.188	1.890	2.637
Informed vs. uninformed	Standard	1.808	.220	1.371	2.244
	Southern	1.965	.210	1.548	2.382
Decisive vs. indecisive	Standard	2.269	.214	1.844	2.694
	Southern	2.386	.205	1.980	2.792
Cares about me vs. doesn't care about me	Standard	3.654	.212	3.234	4.074
	Southern	3.772	.202	3.371	4.173
Genuine vs. phony	Standard	2.038	.176	1.689	2.388
	Southern	2.351	.168	2.017	2.685
Understanding vs. not understanding	Standard	2.250	.199	1.856	2.644
	Southern	2.456	.190	2.080	2.833
Competent vs. incompetent	Standard	1.769	.181	1.410	2.128
	Southern	2.105	.173	1.762	2.448
Proud vs. humble	Standard	4.346	.244	3.863	4.829
	Southern	4.333	.233	3.872	4.795

Chapter Five – Discussion (5)

The hypotheses tested in this study were formed based on language attitudes research and past studies on perceptions of various dialects. Research by Mai (2011) revealed that language attitudes are formed through perceptions of in-group membership, speech quality, dialect euphony, and speech prestige. Additionally, results of a study by Alford and Strother (1992) showed that stereotypes associated with regional identity affect language attitudes. Qualities like intelligence, self-confidence, and ambition are typically attributed to Standard American English speakers while qualities like trustworthiness, sincerity, and friendliness are attributed to American Southern English speakers. Based on these research findings, the following hypotheses about the four dimensions of speaker credibility were made:

H1: The American Southern English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for qualities associated with **trustworthiness** than the Standard American English speaker.

H2: The American Southern English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for qualities associated with **caring** than the Standard American English speaker.

H3: The Standard American English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for qualities associated with **competence** than the American Southern English speaker.

H4: The Standard American English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for qualities associated with **dynamism** than the American Southern English speaker.

H5: The American Southern English speaker will receive more positive evaluations for **perceived credibility** than the Standard American English speaker.

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were not supported by the results of the study. No significant differences were shown between the Standard American English condition and the American Southern English condition along trustworthiness, caring, or competence dimensions of credibility. Hypothesis 5, formed based on the premise that Social Identity Theory would have a large effect on participants' responses, was not supported either. The lack of differences in trustworthiness, caring, and competence perceived by the two groups provide evidence that no significant difference in credibility was detected. Hypothesis 4 was supported by the data, as

participants perceived a significant difference in the energy level, and therefore dynamism, of the Standard American English speaker and the American Southern English speaker.

The Standard American English speaker may have been perceived as more energetic than the American Southern English speaker based on some of the general principles of language attitudes research. Dialect euphony and speech quality, specifically, may have affected listeners' perceptions of this dimension of teacher credibility. Perhaps the dialect used in the Standard American English recording was more pleasing to the ear for many listeners, while the American Southern English recording was more jarring. While this reasoning seems contrary to Social Identity Theory principles, perhaps the speaker in the American Southern English recording used a version of southern dialect than the participants, although natives of the South, were not accustomed to hearing.

In relation to speech quality, it is likely that participants could easily understand the lecture in the Standard American English recording, which may have caused them to think of the speaker as energetic. The American Southern English recording may have been more difficult to understand, which participants could have associated with a lack of energy. Finally, the rate of speech in the Standard American English recording was slightly faster than the rate of speech in the American Southern English recording. While the southern-dialect recording lasted for three minutes and twenty-seven seconds, the same content was delivered in three minutes and twelve seconds in the Standard American English recording. This discrepancy in speech rate may have affected perceptions of the speaker's energy level.

Lack of differences between the Standard American English and American Southern English groups for competence, trustworthiness, and caring items may have been caused by misperceptions about the Standard American English speaker. Twenty-four of the 52 participants

who heard the Standard American English recording identified the speaker as a native of the South. This statistic indicates that many participants did not identify the Standard American English speaker as part of the out-group. Therefore, Social Identity Theory may not have played a large role in the study, as the hypotheses proposed. Stereotypes about southerners and northerners may not be shown in the results, because the Standard American English speaker was perceived as a southerner by many participants.

Interestingly, the results indicated that participants gave low scores (between 1 and 3) to the speaker in both recordings for most scale items. Based on this evidence, it is clear that participants viewed the speaker as highly credible in both the Standard American English recording and the American Southern English recording. One possible explanation for this is that other voice elements, aside from dialect, enhanced the credibility of the speaker in both recordings. For example, the articulation, tone, or pitch used in each recording may have led participants to give the speaker positive evaluations. Additionally, the content of the lecture itself may have affected perceptions of teacher credibility, especially in regard to competence. In the lecture, the teacher identified herself as Dr. Davis, indicating that she had obtained the highest level of education in her area of study. She also mentioned her own research in the lecture, showing further expertise in psychology. These factors – voice elements and lecture content – likely contributed to both the low average scores shown in the results and the lack of differences seen between group responses.

One limitation of the study is the low reliability of the survey items related to caring and dynamism. Caring items, while still used in the data analysis, may have caused results to be different than if more reliable adjectives related to perceptions of teacher caring had been

chosen. Additionally, the fact that only one scale item for dynamism (energetic vs. unenergetic) could be used reduced the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation of the study is the limited applicability of an audio-recording scenario. While delivering the lectures without video imagery ensured that visual elements did not affect participants' responses, this approach also limited the realistic nature of the study. In real classroom settings, visual elements like physical appearance and body movement do affect students' perceptions of teacher credibility. Removing these factors reduces the authenticity of the study. In addition, the sample frame used to select participants was a limiting factor in the study. Students who attend the University of Southern Mississippi and identify as southerners may not be representative of the population of study: college students from the American South. Students who choose to attend USM may share certain characteristics, like religious background, socio-economic status, or family structure, disproportionately from other university student populations. Therefore, the results of the current study may not accurately portray the potential responses of all college students from the American South.

The results of this research provide a starting point for future investigation of the barriers in teacher-student communication related to dialectical differences. More specifically, the discovery that teachers who use Standard American English may be perceived as more energetic than teachers who use American Southern English could serve to advance our knowledge of students' perceptions of their teachers' interest in a subject area. By making a conscious effort to show energy in their teaching, teachers who have southern accents may be able to reduce negative connotations associated with their native dialect.

To enhance these research findings, future studies could test qualities related to trustworthiness, competence, caring, and dynamism other than the items used here. Additionally,

students from another region of the country could serve as participants in a similar study to expand findings beyond those of the current study. More than two regional dialects could also be explored to broaden results. For example, a condition with a speaker from the Midwest or the New England region could be added to the study. Finally, to increase the richness of research in this area, a qualitative study could be conducted in the form of interviews with students and teachers to determine more precisely how dialect affects perceptions of teacher credibility and other classroom issues.

Chapter Six – Conclusion (6)

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of regional dialect in college students' determinations of teacher credibility. In a broader sense, the research aimed to improve our understanding of social barriers that exist between teachers and students with different regional origins. Four hypotheses were formed and tested based on language attitudes research and the principles of Social Identity Theory. To gather data, 109 students at the University of Southern Mississippi who self-identified as natives of the American South were divided into two groups. One group heard a recording of a lecture by a speaker delivered in Standard American English, while the other heard a recording of the same lecture given by the same speaker delivered in American Southern English. Participants then answered semantic differential questions that evaluated their perceptions of four dimensions of speaker credibility: trustworthiness, competence, caring, and dynamism.

Results showed a significant difference between conditions for responses related to dynamism. Participants who heard the Standard American English recording evaluated the speaker as significantly more energetic than those who heard the American Southern English recording. According to language attitudes research, this difference could be due to participants' perceptions of the speaker's speech quality, dialect euphony, and rate of speech. Similarities between groups in responses related to trustworthiness, competence, and caring indicate that lecture content and speech characteristics other than dialect played a more significant role in credibility attributions than dialectical differences. Nonetheless, findings related to dynamism provide evidence that perceptions of teacher credibility are in fact affected by the speaker's use of regional dialect.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire

1. Please indicate your impression of the speaker in the audio recording by choosing the appropriate number between each pair of adjectives below. The closer the number you choose is to an adjective, the more certain you are of your evaluation.

   a. Intelligent   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Unintelligent

   b. Honorable   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Dishonorable

   c. Energetic   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Unenergetic

   d. Not self-centered 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Self-centered

   e. Trustworthy   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Untrustworthy

   f. Informed   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Uninformed

   g. Decisive   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Indecisive

   h. Cares about me 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Doesn't care about me

   i. Genuine   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Phony

   j. Understanding 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Not understanding

   k. Competent   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Incompetent

   l. Proud   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Humble

2. In which region of the country to you believe the speaker in the audio recording lives?

   a. South

   b. Midwest

   c. Northeast

   d. West

3. In which state did you spend the largest part of your childhood?

4. What is your gender?

    a. Male

    b. Female

7. What is your age?

    c. 17-18 years old

    d. 19-20 years old

    e. 21-22 years old

    f. Above 22 years old

Appendix B – Audio Recording Script

This script is a modified version of a lecture found on floatinguniversity.com.

Instructions: Please listen to the following introductory lecture as if you were entering an 8-week psychology course at The University of Southern Mississippi.

Recording:

Hello, I'm Dr. Davis and I will be teaching this course over the next eight weeks. What I want to do today is present a brief introduction to psychology, which is the science of the human mind.

Now, I'm admittedly biased, but I think psychology is the most interesting of all scientific fields. It's the most interesting because it's about us. It's about the most important and intimate aspects of our lives. So psychologists study everything from language, perception, and memory to motivation, dreams, love, and hate. We study the development of a child. We study mental illnesses like schizophrenia and psychopathy; we study morality; we study happiness.

Now, psychology is such a huge field that it breaks up into different subfields. Some psychologists study neuroscience, which is the study of how the brain gives rise to mental life. Others, like me, are Developmental Psychologists. We study what happens to make a baby turn into a child and a child turn into an adult. We ask questions like, how does a baby think about the world? What do we start off knowing? What do we have to learn?

Other psychologists are Social Psychologists. They study human interaction, asking questions like what is the nature of prejudice? How do we persuade one another?

Some Psychologists are Cognitive Psychologists. What that means is that they study the mind as a computational device looking particularly at areas like language, perception, memory, and decision-making. Some Psychologists are Evolutionary Psychologists, which means they're interested in the biological origin of the human mind.

Finally, there's clinical psychology. For many, this is what psychology means, and in fact, it's a very important aspect of the field. Clinical psychologists are interested in the diagnoses, the causes, and the treatments of mental disorders – disorders like schizophrenia, depression, and anxiety disorders. It would be impossible for me to provide a full spectrum introduction to all of these subfields of psychology in the 8 weeks I have with you.

So what I'm going to do instead is focus on three case studies. One related to compassion, one related to racism, and one related to sex. Now I've chosen these case studies for two reasons. First, each of them is particularly interesting in its own light. Each raises questions we're interested in as people, and as scientists, but also in our every day lives. And I want to try to persuade you that psychologists have some interesting things to say about them.

Second, together they illustrate the range of approaches that psychologists use. The sorts of

theories that we construct, the sorts of methods we use when approaching a domain. I want to try to give you a feeling for what psychology looks like when we actually carry it out.

Now before we finish for today, let me just give a short preview of our first case study, which will be about compassion. What I mean by compassion is concern for other people. Now this topic is particularly interesting to me, because it's actually what I study in my own laboratory here at Southern Miss. My colleagues and I look at the emergence of morality in babies and young children. And we particularly focus on the emergence of compassion. We explore questions like at what point in development do babies care about others? At what point do feelings of empathy and sympathy, sometimes anger, guilt, and other moral emotions arise? How do they arise? To what extent are they built in? To what extent do they have to be learned?

Now that's all the time we have for today, but I hope you'll ponder these questions after we leave here and come back for our first official class period ready to uncover the psychological underpinnings of compassion.

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NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

□ The risks to subjects are minimized.
□ The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
□ The selection of subjects is equitable.
□ Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
□ Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
□ Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
□ Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
□ Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must   be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported   to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
□ If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.   Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 16070701   PROJECT TITLE: Language Attitudes and The Learning Environment: The Effects of Regional Dialect on Perceptions of Teacher Quality
PROJECT TYPE: New Project   RESEARCHER(S): Marissa McGillis
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts and Letters
DEPARTMENT: Communication Studies
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 07/19/2016 to 07/18/2017
Jennifer Downey, MA
Institutional Review Board