**Language with an Attitude**

**Language and People**

It is perhaps the least surprising thing imaginable to find that attitudes towards languages and their varieties seem to be tied to attitudes towards groups of people. Some groups are believed to be decent, hard-working, and intelligent (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be laid-back, romantic, and devil may-care (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be lazy, insolent, and procrastinating (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be hard-nosed, aloof, and unsympathetic (and so is their language or variety), and so on. For the folk mind, such correlations are obvious, reaching down even into the linguistic details of the language and so on. For the folk mind, such correlations are obvious, reaching down even into the linguistic details of the language or variety itself. Germans are harsh; just listen to their harsh, guttural consonants.

US southerners are laid-back and lazy; just listen to their lazy, drawled vowels. Lower-status speakers are unintelligent; they don ’ t even understand that two

negatives make a positive, and so on. For many social psychologists, these correlations carry considerable weight; as Edwards puts it, “People ’ s reactions to language varieties reveal much of their perception of the speakers of these varieties”

(1982: 20).

**The Linguists’ Views**

Linguists, by contrast, find the structure of language everywhere complex and

fully articulated, reflecting, as most present-day scholars in the field would have

it, the universal and species-specifc human capacity for language. Where conso

nants are made, how vowel length is distributed, and what morphological, lexical,

syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic strategies are employed are all reflexes of the

complex interaction of the underlying components of the organizing system which

lies behind human language. Nevertheless, understanding the relationship

between group stereotypes and linguistic facts, no matter how scientifically

suspect at the linguistic end, appears to be particularly important in accounting

for the social identities we infer and respond to.

**The Social Psychologists’ Views**

Social psychologists were greatly concerned with establishing language-and people connections. Questionnaires, interviews, and scaling techniques asked people directly about their feelings, including racist, sexist, classist, regionalist, or other prejudicial attitudes. The results were suspect because they allowed respondents to disguise their feelings, either to project a different self-image and/or to give responses they thought the interviewer might approve of. An early method used to circumvent respondent manipulation was the “matched-guise” technique.

**The Matched Guise Technique**

The Canadian social psychologist Wallace Lambert and his colleagues played recordings to their subjects in French and English to determine attitudinal responses to these two languages in French-speaking Canada ( Lambert *et al* . 1960 ). Though the subjects did not know it, the speaker was the same person in two “guises” (to avoid voice quality interference in judgments). Subjects judged the voices on scales of paired opposites such as “fast–slow,” heavy–light,” and so on. Their responses did not appear to directly assess language characteristics, but instead revealed underlying stereotypes based on their language attitudes.

The success of the method set off a frenzy of such studies, most fully developed

in the work of Howard Giles and his various associates, and provided both examples and theoretical foundations in Giles and Powesland ( 1975 ). Lambert *et al* .

( 1960 ), for example, found that native English-speaking Canadians considered the

English guises of the male voices used in the experiment to be better looking,

taller, more intelligent, more dependable, kinder, more ambitious, and having

more character than the same voices in their French guise. Surprisingly, native

French-speaking Canadians showed nearly the same bias, rating the French guises

more favorably only for the two traits of kindness and religiousness; moreover,

the native French judges evaluated the French guises even more harshly than the

native English judges did, leading to the understanding that the evaluation was widespread, even at the expense of downgrading their own linguistic behavior.

**Further Works of Language Attitudes**

Further work in this format provided a lasting template for attitude studies – the “three factor groups.” Analyses of large amounts of data regularly grouped together various paired opposites which pointed to the constructs of *competence* , *personal integrity* and *social attractiveness* in the evaluation <!!of speaker voices (summarized in Lambert 1967 ). Subsequent research has confifi rmed that these constructs are very often at work, and, more interestingly, that standard or “admired accent” speakers are most often judged highest on the *competence* dimension while nonstandard and regionally and/or ethnically distinct speakers are often rated higher for the *integrity* and *attractiveness* dimensions. More recent work has often conflated the two latter categories into one, usually referred to as *solidarity.*