

## **Sounds in the City: Perceptions of Ethnicity in Toronto English**

Changing patterns of immigration have increased the ethnolinguistic diversity of Canada's largest cities, leading to long-term maintenance of heritage languages (HL) and the development of ethnically marked ways of speaking the majority language. Members of ethnolinguistic minority groups who grow up in 'ethnic enclaves' (neighborhoods where HLs are spoken regularly) tend to have higher degrees of orientation to their background and may be more likely to use speech features associated with it. Research on the sociolinguistic consequences of urban ethnolinguistic diversity has been conducted (e.g., Hoffman and Walker 2010) but, while anecdotes and public discourse point to awareness of ethnically marked speech, there is little systematic research on perceptions of speech of individual ethnolinguistic groups. Perceptual studies of ethnolinguistic groups outside of Canada have largely focused on "multiethnolects" (e.g., Kircher and Fox 2019), or on well-established varieties (e.g., Purnell, Idsardi and Baugh 1999).

We report results of a perceptual study of ethnically marked speech in Toronto, Canada's largest and most ethnically diverse city. Drawing on methods from previous work (e.g., Campbell-Kibler 2009, Levon 2014), we tested listener ability to identify the ethnic background of 18 native speakers of Toronto English from five of the largest ethnic groups (British/Irish, Chinese, Italian, Portuguese and Punjabi), stratified by sex and degree of ethnic orientation (EO). Listeners from Toronto heard short voice clips (~15 sec.) and were asked to identify the speaker's ethnic background from a list and judge several characteristics of the speaker: likelihood of befriending the speaker, occupation, whether the speaker was from Toronto and how well they spoke English.

Results from almost 500 participants confirm listener awareness of ethnically marked ways of speaking and greater ability to identify speakers who identify more strongly with their ethnic background. Some speakers and ethnic backgrounds are more salient than others and listeners from the same background as the speaker were *not* better judges of ethnicity (with one exception: Chinese participants better recognized Chinese speakers). The majority of participants correctly identified the High EO Chinese, Italian and Punjabi speakers but not the others.

Quality of speaking is correlated with being heard as from Toronto, and Punjabi, Italians and Chinese (of both Low and High EO) are identified as "from Toronto" more than those of British/Irish descent. People are more likely to choose as a possible friend those speakers who were identified as *not* belonging to one of the 5 specified ethnic groups, as well as speakers identified as Chinese. However, this does not match the actual identify of the speakers selected as most befrienable: the Low EO Punjabi, Chinese and Italian, and the High EO Portuguese. Our examination of perceptions of likely occupation, plotted to correspond to certain personality traits (e.g., social worker for 'sympathetic', entrepreneur for 'ambitious') did not reveal clear patterns.

These survey results will be augmented with reports from focus groups in which community members will discuss how they identify speakers of different communities. These findings deepen our understanding of the sociolinguistic consequences of ethnolinguistic diversity on social identity and group interactions.

## References

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