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# Attitudes Toward Ethnicity and Ethnic Languages in America

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In Roger Brown's classic 1989 textbook, *Social Psychology: The Second Edition*, he argues that since the civil rights movement there has been a profound change in the status of minority groups in America and worldwide. This may be largely a result of increased awareness of and familiarity with other cultures from the worldwide developments in communication and travel--the "shrinking world" phenomenon. Certainly these changes have affected the feelings of Americans toward bilingualism and minority linguistic groups.

In this paper, the following questions will be addressed: What percentage of the population of the United States has a language other than English as the mother tongue? What are the most common minority languages and what is their distribution across the states? Is there or has there been prejudice toward minority language groups in America? Is there self-prejudice or linguistic insecurity among these groups? How does foreign language accented speech affect the evaluations others make of these groups? Have attitudes toward linguistic minorities improved since the civil rights movement? Have these minority groups' perceptions of themselves improved? Are there residual resentments among the minorities? That is, does residual resentment remain among minorities toward their former antagonists even after the prejudice has ceased to exist?

Before addressing these questions a method will be introduced that has been often used to uncover linguistic prejudice--the matched guise technique (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum, 1960). The matched guise is a method for studying attitudes toward ethnic, national, and dialect groups by obtaining the evaluational reactions of "judges" to recordings of bilingual speakers in each of their linguistic "guises." Listeners are exposed to a series of pre-taped messages given by a number of speakers. They form an opinion of the speakers'

social status according to what they hear. After hearing the tape they are asked to evaluate the speakers with paired-opposite adjectives like educated/uneducated, wealthy/poor, friendly/unfriendly, etc. The ratings are often divided into two categories: a vertical dimension of perceived speaker status, and a horizontal dimension of solidarity or benevolence (Brown and Lambert, 1976). Any difference in the ratings of speakers would indicate covert, or less guarded, prejudice on the part of the listeners. These judgments are not based on whether or not the listener or judge can understand the speaker. An example of this in the American society is Black American speech. Most Americans can understand this dialect but at the same time judge the speaker to be less educated because of his manner of speech.

Matched guise studies have been conducted in many areas of the world. However there have been very few studies of linguistic minorities in the United States of America using this method. See Barlow, 1983, for a review of the matched guise studies from their beginning in 1960 (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum, 1960) to the early eighties. Matched guise studies that are relevant for our purposes will be reviewed in this paper, but first there will be an examination of the relative distribution of minority languages in America.

## THE RELATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNIC MOTHER TONGUES IN AMERICA

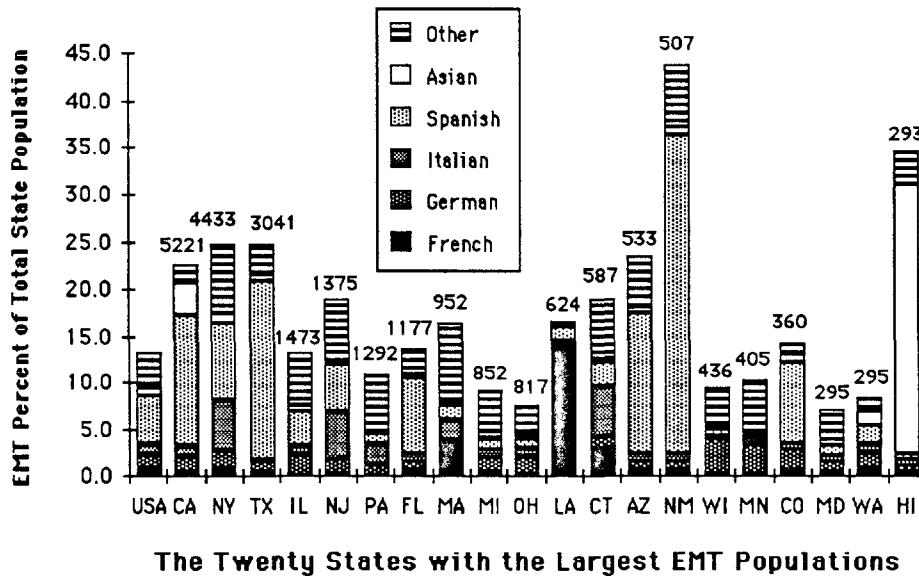
As of 1976, roughly thirteen percent of the total population of the United States had a language other than English as their mother tongue (Fishman, 1989, figures from the 1976 census). Figure 1 shows the distribution of EMT (Ethnic Mother Tongue) for the U. S., and for each of the twenty states with the largest EMT populations. Notice that

the states appear from left to right in descending order of EMT population, with California (CA), on the left, the largest, and Hawaii (HI), on the right, the smallest of those twenty. The actual EMT population count is given above each bar (in thousands) for each state. For example, California has 5,221 above its bar, meaning that there are approximately 5,221,000 persons in California who have a mother tongue other than English. New York has the next largest EMT population at 4,433,000; then Texas at 3,041,000, etc.

speaking country. New Mexico is like a small bilingual country with nearly half of the population having native language other than English. Hawaii also has a large percentage of EMT, with about a third of their population being native speakers of various Asian languages.

Figure 2 uses a recently-developed multivariate graphical method, the Multigraf<sup>1</sup> (Brown, 1991; Hendrix and Brown, 1990) to show the three major clusterings of states with respect to their relative EMT percentages. From this figure we can see that

Figure 1. Barchart Showing the Percent of EMT for Each of the Twenty States with the Largest EMT Populations, with Actual EMT Population Size (in thousands) Printed Above the Bar for Each State. (Data from Fishman, 1989)

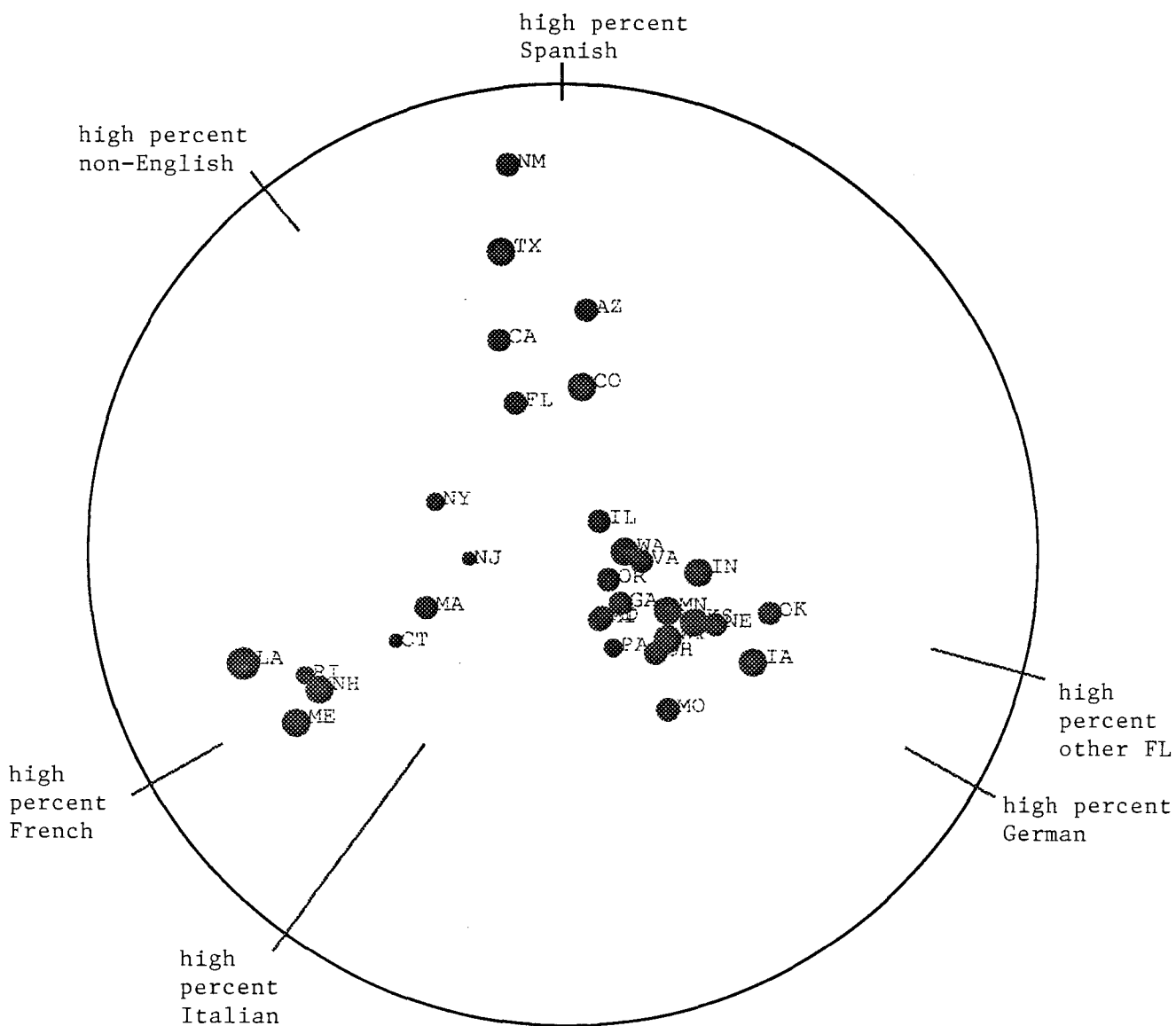


Notice that the height of the bar represents the percentage of state population that is EMT, rather than actual numbers. For example, the state shown to have the largest percentage of people with native language other than English is New Mexico, at approximately 43 percent. As can be seen from the shading, by far the majority of these EMT persons in New Mexico have Spanish as their Ethnic Mother Tongue. Even though the actual number of native Spanish speakers (and EMT persons in general) is much less than California, the percentage is very high, since New Mexico has a relatively small population.

As we can see from this figure, the United States is far from being a monolithic English-

there are three major groupings of the thirty-two states that have 100,000 or more non-English-language-background persons. The vertical cluster represents the states that have a high percentage of native Spanish speakers, and includes New Mexico, Texas, California, Arizona, Florida and Colorado. All of these but Florida are in a common geographical area. The cluster down and to the left is for those states that have a high percentage of French native speakers (Louisiana, New Hampshire, and Maine) and of Italian native speakers (Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York). The largest cluster, lower right, consists of sixteen states typified by a high percentage of German and of other foreign language.

**Figure 2.** Multigraf Showing the Three Kinds of State EMT Profiles: (1) Those That Have a High Percent of Spanish, (2) Those That Have a High Percent of French and Italian, and (3) Those That Have a High Percent of German and Other Foreign Languages.



## LINGUISTIC MEDIATORS OF PREJUDICE TOWARD EMT

McKirnan and Hamayan (1984) studied the relationship between Spanish accent and ascribed status. They examined in particular the effects of lexical patterning, phonological characteristics, and syntax on evaluative judgments of the speakers. Of these three aspects of Spanish accented speech, lexicon was found to be the most influential in the listener's perception of the speaker, as shown in Table 1. On a seven point scale, with 1 being most normal and 7 being most accented, lexical intrusions received a rating of 4.86, phonemic a rating of 3.27, and syntactic 3.24. An example of a lexical intrusion in Mexican-American speech is replacing the word 'friends' with 'amigos'. Phonological characteristics and syntax have about equal effects on the overall perception of "normativeness" (as the authors referred to it), with both having much less effect than lexical intrusions. Bradac and Wisegarver (1984) also found that "lexical diversity was an especially potent determinant of perceptions of . . . speech style" (p. 239).

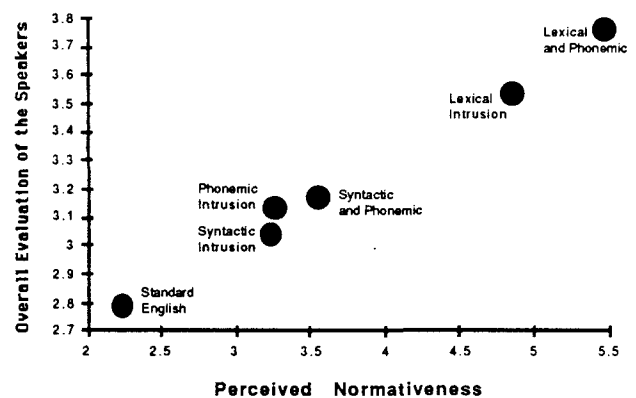
Table 1.

Mean Ratings of Perceived Normativeness and Evaluation of the Speakers for Each Intrusion Type. (Data from McKirnan and Hamayan, 1984, Table 2.)

Intrusion Type	Perceived Normativeness	Evaluation of Speaker
Standard English	2.24	2.79
Syntactic	3.24	3.04
Phonemic	3.27	3.13
Syntactic/Phonemic	3.56	3.17
Lexical	4.86	3.53
Lexical/Phonemic	5.47	3.76

Perhaps the most interesting finding of the McKirnan and Hamayan study is the very high correlation between perceived normativeness of Hispanic speech and the evaluation of the speaker. Figure 3 shows the scatterplot of this relationship. The correlation coefficient between these two sets of means (for mean normativeness and for mean overall evaluation) is .996. In plain English this means that the more accented a person's speech is, the more negative the overall perception of that person.

Figure 3. Bivariate Scatter Plot Showing the .996 Correlation Coefficient Between Perceived Normativeness and Overall Evaluation of the Speakers. (Data from McKirnan and Hamayan, 1984, Table 2.)



Unfortunately, although these authors had the speakers rated on a number of adjective dimensions, they did not report the data for the separate dimensions of rating. Rather, they combined all of them together into one overall evaluative rating. In these kinds of evaluative reactions studies, it is much better to analyze the adjective ratings separately, rather than summing them all together into an overall evaluative factor, since the adjectives do not all give the same information. Brown and Lambert (1976), have shown that these kinds of evaluative adjectives will usually factor into two major dimensions, which they refer to as "competence" and "benevolence." They found that competence or intelligence related adjective ratings are generally more "objective" in the sense that there is fairly high agreement across demographic and cultural groups in ratings on these adjectives. On the other hand, ratings of solidarity or benevolence seem to be more "subjective," in that various groups tend to rate their own group higher on these adjectives. Brown and Lambert (1975) and also Ryan (1979) have found that the primary effects of non-standard accent are on competence-related adjectives. Given these findings, it does not seem wise to lump all of the adjective ratings together into one overall evaluative sum as McKirnan and Hamayan have done.

McKirnan and Hamayan found that two factors are correlated with negative attitudes toward Hispanics. The first was high ethnocentrism scores, and the second was a lack of contact with Hispanics. An interesting question is whether these subjects were more prejudiced because they have less contact

with minorities or whether they have less contact because they are more prejudiced.

The major point of these studies is that there is a very high correlation between accented speech and negative evaluations of the speaker, and that the major marker of accented speech seems to be lexical (as opposed to phonological or syntactic). From these studies it can be inferred that there is prejudice toward minority language groups in America. The next question is whether we have evidence that these attitudes are changing, and if so, how?

**ETHNIC AWAKENING AND CHANGING ATTITUDES**

Unfortunately, there aren't many studies dealing with changes in attitudes toward minority language groups. However, there are a number of strong studies that demonstrate a major change in attitudes towards Black Americans over the past fifty years. Since Blacks have a unique dialect of English, some of these findings may also generalize to foreign language-accented minority groups.

A study by Hraba and Grant (1970) demonstrated that attitudes toward Blacks, both their own attitudes and the attitudes of others, had changed for the better since 1939. This was a follow-up study of one done in 1939, and the contrast in results is surprising. In the original study Clark and Clark (1939) asked Black children questions about both Black and White dolls relating to which doll was a nice color, which was a nice doll, which doll looked bad, and which one the children would like to play with. It was found that Black children preferred the White doll to the Black doll, as shown by the percentages in Table 2 (on the next page). In the 1969 study, as also shown in that table, their relative preferences were reversed. Figure 4 shows the overall pattern of these ratings. When a Multigraf is used to display the relationship among the four rating variables the two most different from one another are the vertical dimension (of the percent who said the doll is a nice color) and the nearly horizontal dimension (of the percent who said that overall it is a nice doll).

**Figure 4.** Multigraf Showing The Percents For Each of the Four Questions About the White Doll and the Black Doll, Comparing the Choices of Black Children in 1939 to Black Children in 1969 and to White Children in 1969. (Data from Clark and Clark, 1939, and Hraba and Grant, 1970.)

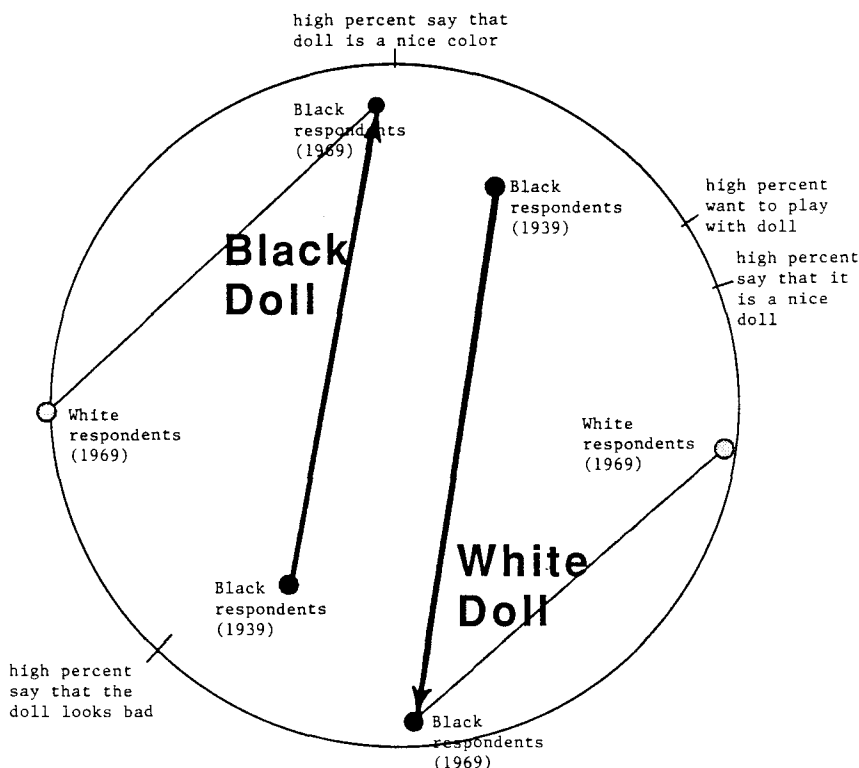
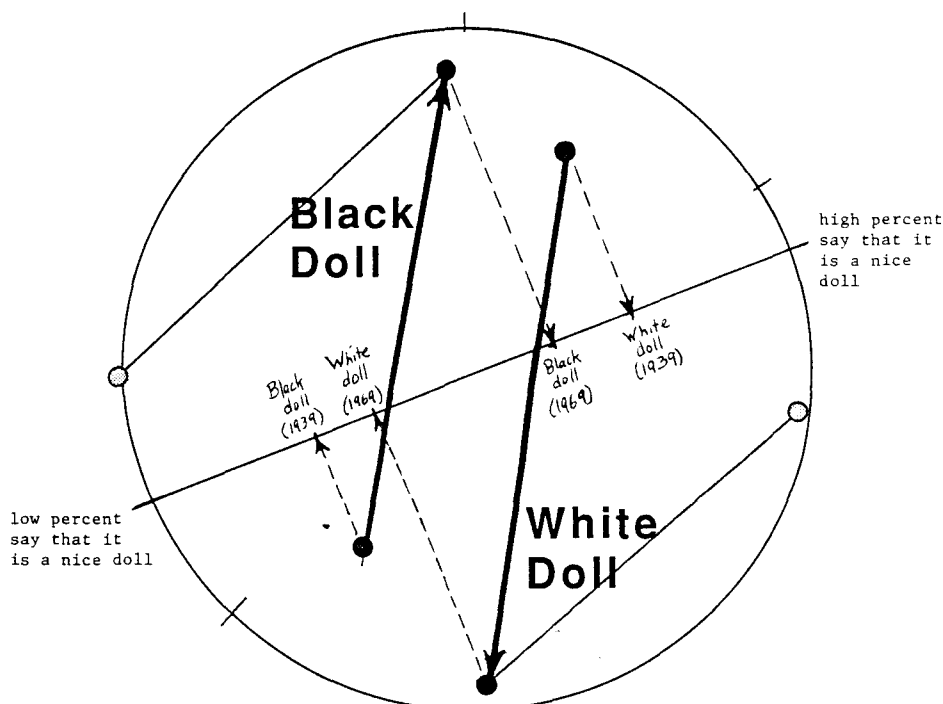


Table 2.  
A Comparison of the Hraba and Grant (1970)  
Results with Those of Clark and Clark (1939).

	Black respondents (1939)	Black respondents (1969)	White respondents (1969)
1. Give me the doll that you want to play with.			
Black doll	32%	70%	16%
White doll	67%	30%	83%
2. Give me the doll that is a nice doll.			
Black doll	38%	54%	30%
White doll	59%	56%	70%
3. Give me the doll that looks bad.			
Black doll	59%	36%	63%
White doll	17%	61%	34%
4. Give me the doll that is a nice color.			
Black doll	38%	69%	49%
White doll	60%	31%	48%

In this graphical form the greatest change is seen to be along the vertical dimension. That is, a much higher percentage of the 1969 respondents said that the Black doll was a nice color than the 1939 respondents. Conversely, a much lower percentage of the 1969 respondents say that the White doll is a nice color. In fact, the Black and White dolls have reversed positions in the preferences of Black children from 1939 to 1969, and this reversal is most pronounced for the vertical "nice color" dimension. Figure 5 shows the change in the "almost-horizontal" dimension, that is, the percentage who said that each is an overall nice doll. The perpendicular projections indicate where White doll and Black doll for 1939 and for 1969 fall on this overall nice doll dimension. The direction of change is the same as for the vertical dimension, but a much smaller effect: White dolls decreased in the preferences of Black children and Black dolls increased. The pattern in this figure indicates that Black children's attitude toward "nice color" has changed more than toward the other three questions.

Figure 5. The Same Multigraph of Figure 4, but with Perpendiculars Showing the Relative Percentages of the Choices for Black Children in 1939 and in 1969 on the "High Percent Say That It Is a Nice Doll" Variable.



Tucker and Lambert (1969) investigated how male and female Northern Whites, Southern Whites, and Southern Blacks rated a number of varieties of Black accented speech in comparison to network speech and to Southern White accented speech. The results of this study are summarized in Figures 6, 7, and 8, which are taken from Barlow's (1983) secondary analysis of these data. In all three figures, the vertical dimension represents competence (educated, intelligent, etc.), and the horizontal dimension represents solidarity or benevolence (friendly, good disposition, etc.) Figure 6 gives the results for Northern White respondents and Figure 7 for Southern White respondents.

The Southern White judges rated the educated Southern Blacks to be nearly as educated and intelligent as educated Southern Whites. They rated

them higher on this vertical competence dimension than did Northern White judges. It can be inferred from this that the Southern Whites have been affected by the civil rights movement in a positive way. (Unfortunately, we don't have comparable data from an earlier time when Southern White prejudice toward Blacks was strong.) However, Figure 8 suggests that Southern Blacks still have residual resentment from years of prejudice. Notice from Figure 8 that the ratings of Southern Black respondents vary more along the horizontal dimension than in the other two figures. In other words, they are judging primarily on solidarity or kindness, with the educated Southern White speech getting the lowest rating of all on this kindness dimension (adjectives like friendly, good disposition, good personality, considerate, etc.)

Figure 6. Multigraf of the Mean Adjective Ratings Given to Speakers of Six Black and White Dialects by Forty Male and Female Northern White Judges. (Data from Tucker and Lambert, 1969, Multigrafes from Barlow, 1983.)

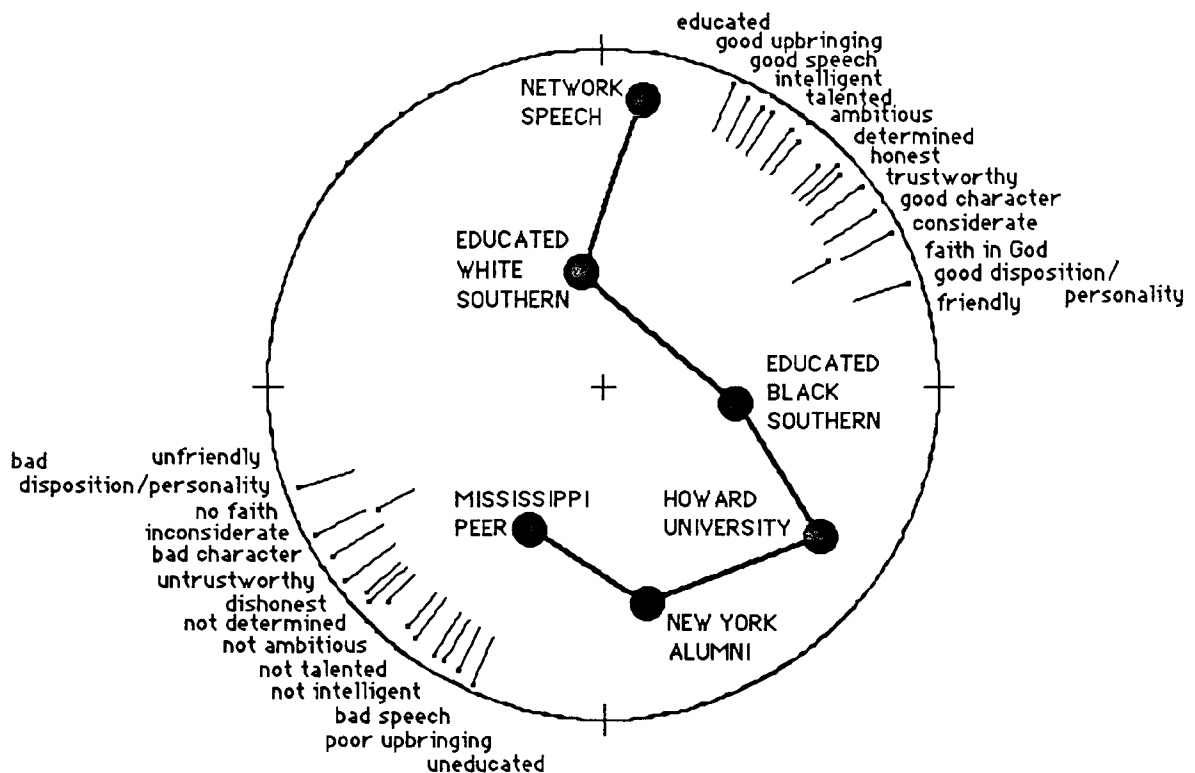




Figure 7. Multigraf of the Mean Adjective Ratings Given to Speakers of Six Black and White Dialects by Sixty-Eight Male and Female Southern White Judges. (Data from Tucker and Lambert, 1969, Multigraf from Barlow, 1983.)

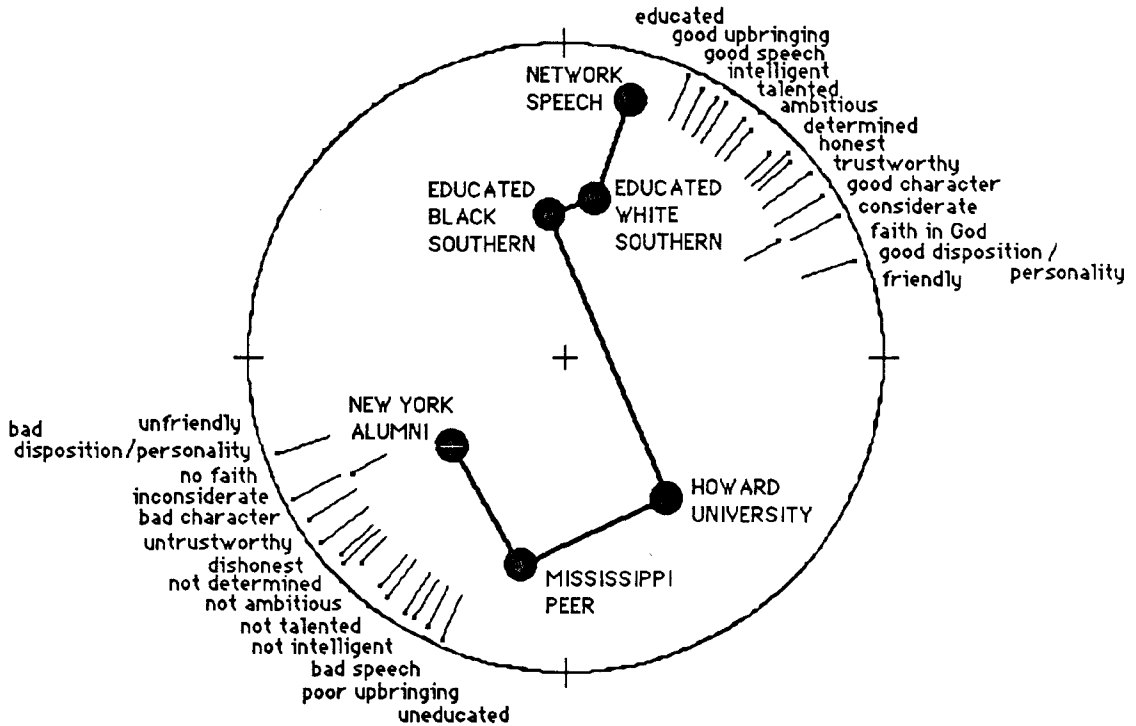
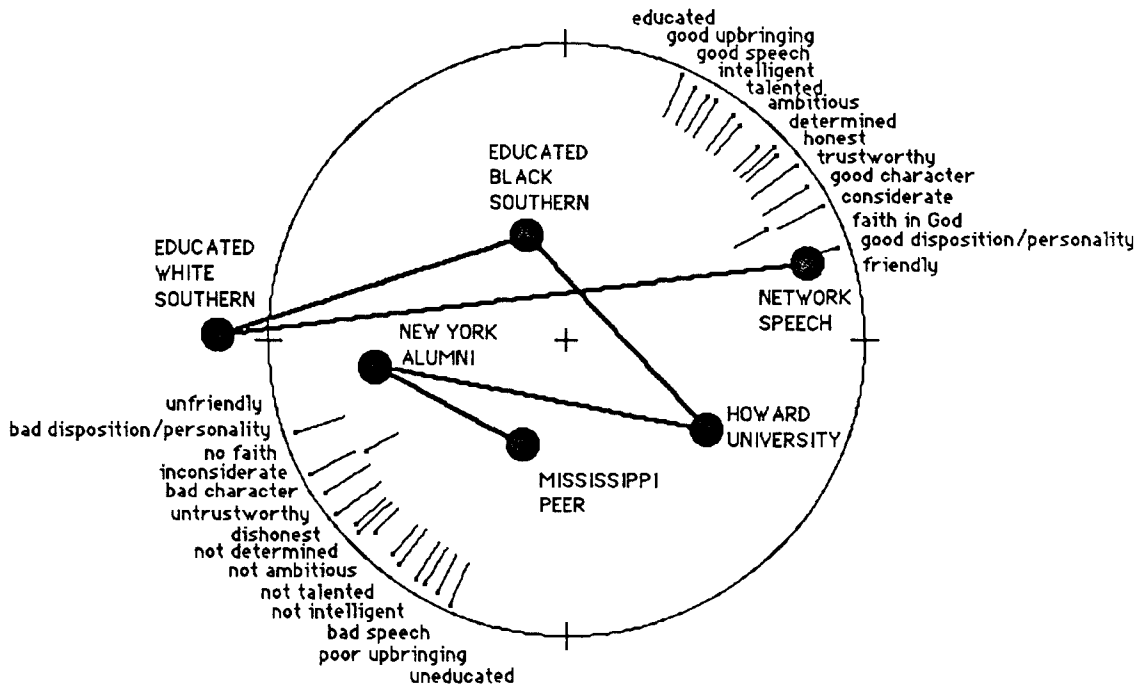


Figure 8. Multigraf of the Mean Adjective Ratings Given to Speakers of Six Black and White Dialects by One-Hundred and Fifty Male and Female Southern Black Judges. (Data from Tucker and Lambert, 1969, Multigraf from Barlow, 1983.)



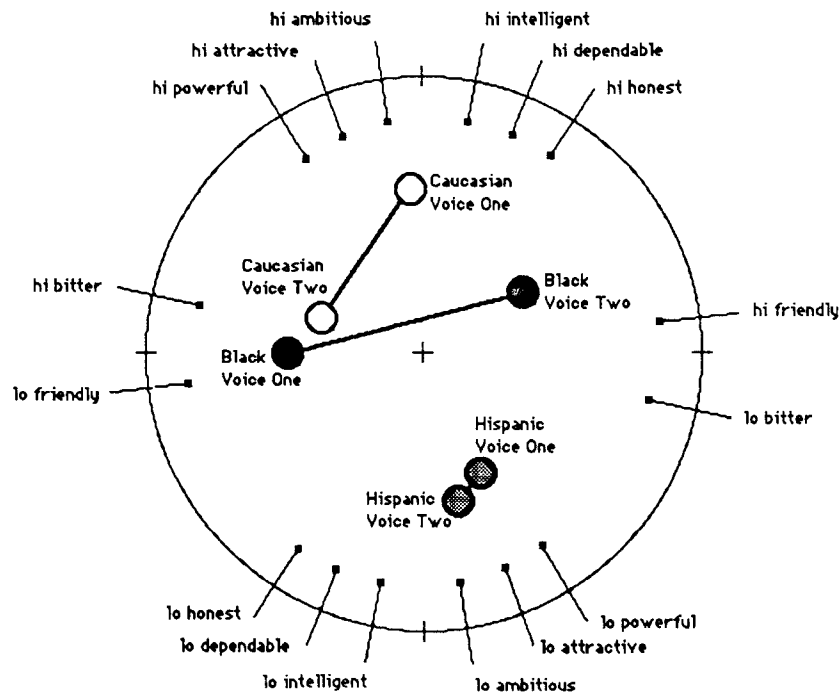
From these 1969 Tucker and Lambert data, and the 1970 Hraba and Grant data, we have found at least partial answers to two of the questions asked at the beginning of this paper. Lambert and Tucker found evidence for an improvement in the attitudes of the majority culture (Northern Whites and Southern Whites) toward Black Americans. Also, Hraba and Grant (1970) provided strong longitudinal evidence for a striking positive change in the attitudes of Blacks toward themselves. We are also given some insight into the second question, that of residual resentment among minorities after prejudice has ceased, from the Tucker and Lambert data. Although they found that Southern Whites rated "Educated Negro Southern" speech about as high on competence as "Educated White Southern" speech (evidence of a marked decrease in Southern White prejudice), they also found evidence for resentment among Southern Blacks—very low ratings of Southern Whites on adjectives related to kindness.

Unfortunately, we do not have these same kinds of cross-sectional and longitudinal data for the various Ethnic Mother Tongue groups in America.

One could argue that it seems reasonable that these same kinds of liberalizing tendencies would have an effect on attitudes toward the various minority language groups. However, at least one study suggests that at least in the Los Angeles area, there is still considerable prejudice toward Hispanic speakers. Alonzo (1988) compared athletes and non-athletes in a group of Los Angeles area high schools in their relative attitudes toward White, Black and Hispanic speech, in a modified matched guise paradigm. (Rather than having the various speech styles all produced by a single group of speakers as in the matched guise paradigm, they were all recordings of separate speakers. Cooper, 1975, has suggested that this paradigm be referred to as the "verbal guise" technique.)

Figure 9 gives a few of the results of Alonzo's study that are relevant to this paper. This figure summarizes the overall ratings of all of his respondents on eight adjectives. As usual the vertical dimension represents competence and the horizontal dimension represents solidarity. In this study ratings were made of six speakers: two of the speakers were White, two Black and two Hispanic. Notice that the

Figure 9. Multigraf of the Mean Adjective Ratings Given to Six Speakers (two Black, two White, and two Hispanic). (Data and Multigraf from Alonzo, 1988.)



two Black speakers differ somewhat from one another in solidarity ratings, and the White speakers also differ somewhat from one another. The Hispanic speakers are rated in almost the same location as one another, and their ratings are considerably lower on the competence dimension than the ratings of the other two groups. They were rated much lower than Black voices and Caucasian voices in terms of intelligence, power, attractiveness, ambitiousness, honesty, and dependability. However, the Hispanic speakers are rated quite high on the solidarity dimension (hi friendly, lo bitter). This suggests that although the prejudice toward Blacks may be waning in America, there is still prejudice toward Hispanic groups, particularly in ratings of competence, but that they may be viewed as friendly, kind, etc. Obviously much more research needs to be done.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

At the beginning of this paper it was demonstrated that there are many areas of the United States with a substantial representation of various Ethnic Mother Language groups. It is important that these minority language peoples are accepted and assimilated within mainstream American culture without having to abandon their linguistic and cultural roots. The bilingual and bicultural skills of these people will become increasingly important as the boundaries of the international community continue to become less defined. An important part of combating prejudice and ensuring equality for these people is to understand precisely the nature of that prejudice. From the data we do have concerning the improved image of Blacks in America, there is reason to suppose that other minority groups are also growing in their ethnic awareness and ethnic self-confidence. However, very little research has been done on the other groups, and data from at least one study (Alonzo, 1988) suggests that there is still much prejudice toward Hispanics in America. There is a strong need for matched guise or verbal guise studies to measure the relative evaluations or stereotypes of each of these EMT groups in the various regions of the country, and to monitor longitudinal change. It is likewise important to study and monitor the self evaluations of these groups.

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>The Multigraphs in Figures 2, 4, and 5 were constructed specifically for this paper, using a pre-release version of DataMax UNIX. We are indebted to ECHO Data, Inc. for the use of this multivariate graphical data analysis package. The other four Multigraphs in the paper, Figures 6, 7, 8, and 9 were taken from the Barlow 1983 dissertation and the Alonzo 1988 thesis.

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