



Covert Segregation: Dialect Discrimination in the Housing Market

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Variation in speech is useful to listeners.

Listeners use both **talker-specific** and **socially informative** phonetic information to organize newly encountered spoken variants.

(Ladefoged & Broadbend, 1957; Nygaard & Pisoni, 1998; Niedzielski, 1999; Hay and Drager 2006; Sumner, Kim, King, and McGowan, 2013; McGowan, 2015)

Speaking reveals your identity, not merely your ideas.

Listeners can make **accurate** classifications of a speaker's demographics (age, gender, sexuality, race) with limited phonetic input. Under 100 milliseconds!

(Scharinger et al. 2010; Mack & Munson, 2010; Walker & Hay, 2011; Johnson, 2005)

Is Auditory Discrimination possible?

Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh (1999)

Here, Baugh presented each of his **three native dialects** to property managers on separate calls.

Compared the number of responses he received per dialect to the demographics in the neighborhood.

The pattern is clear:

If a neighborhood, is racially imbalanced, the property manager will prefer to interact with a speaker whose voice marks them for the majority racial group in the neighborhood.

YES.

WE SEE AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING.

Results from Purnell et al. (1999)

Table 1
Confirmed Appointments to View Apartments Advertised for Rent in Different Greater San Francisco Geographic Areas (in percentages)

Dialect Guise	Geographic Area				
	East Palo Alto	Oakland	San Francisco	Palo Alto	Woodside
AAVE	79.3	72.0	63.5	48.3	28.7
ChE	61.9	58.3	53.2	31.9	21.8
SAE	57.6	68.7	71.9	63.1	70.1
Total number of calls for each locale	118	211	310	263	87

Note. AAVE = African American Vernacular English; ChE = Chicano English; SAE = Standard American English.]

Table 2
Population in Different Greater San Francisco Geographic Areas by Race and Ethnicity (in percentages)

Population	Geographic Area				
	East Palo Alto	Oakland	San Francisco	Palo Alto	Woodside
African American	42.9	43.9	10.9	2.9	0.3
Hispanic	36.4	13.9	13.9	5.0	3.8
White	31.7	32.5	53.6	84.9	94.7

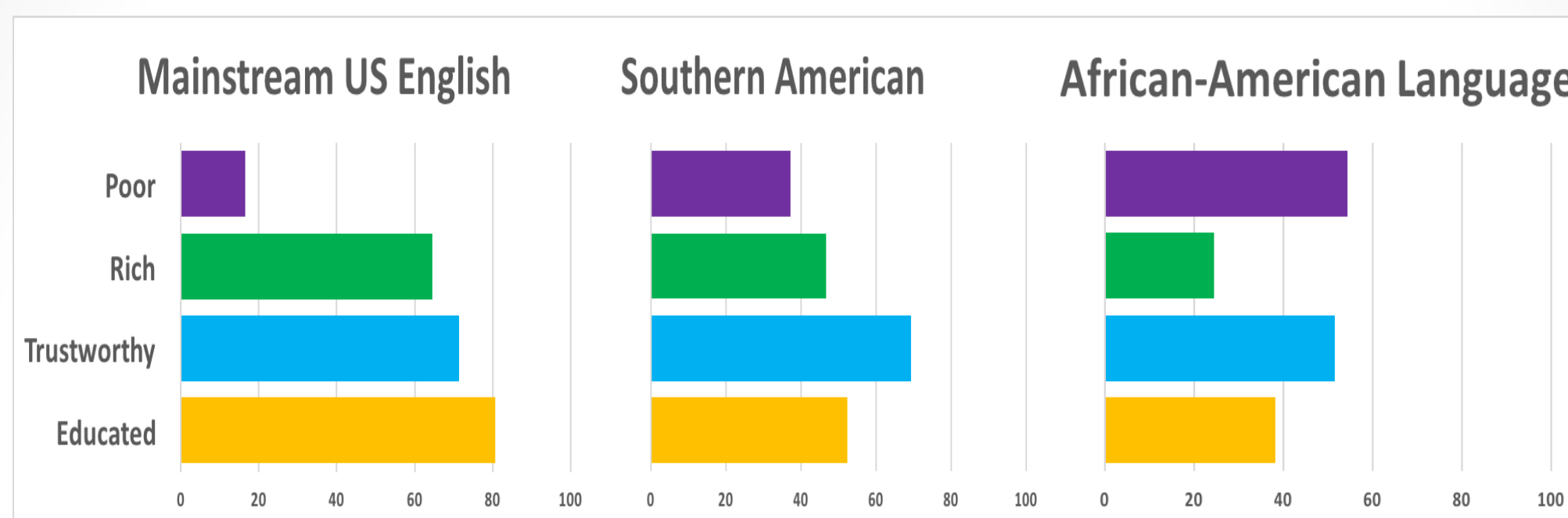
Source. U.S. Census Bureau (1990).

Speech Samples, References, and Poster available at
<https://bit.ly/2GUcabT>

Study One: Can listeners hear social class membership?

9 second samples of the first author's three native dialects were played for **35 listeners**, who were asked to rate them for **perceived race, region, and for a variety of character attributes**.

RESPONDENTS HEARD THREE DIFFERENT KELLY WRIGHTS



How many voices? 97% identified three distinct speakers.

Are these dialects recognizable?

MUSE Sample

Raced at 89% White

Region Rating

14% Northeast 17% West Coast 17% East Coast

SouAm Sample

Raced as 97% White

Region Rating

71% South 2% Alabama, Texas, Georgia, Arkansas, respectively.

AAL Sample

Raced as 89% Black

Region Rating

29% South 22% East Coast

Study Two:

What Ideologies drive rental decisions?

Conducted a national survey of rental professionals

Size of Property, **Rootedness**, Language Experience

Describe your ideal tenant

- "Appealing" isn't really part of the process. All qualified applicants are accepted if units are available."
- "The first **qualified** applicant to apply gets the apartment."
- "I don't expect people to come dressed for a **job interview**, but that is essentially the first step."
- "Be well spoken and considerate on the phone."

Study Three:

Ongoing!

Research Question

To what extent is auditory discrimination affecting parity of access in the contemporary housing market?

Matched-Guise

Phone Calls to Property Managers

Retesting

The Bay Area

New Testing

Knoxville, TN

Suburban Detroit

Zero cases of Dialect Discrimination have been tried under the Fair Housing Act.

1968 Fair Housing Act **protects** homebuyers from discrimination based on race, age, marital status, etc.

Judges **do not believe** accurate identification of protected class membership is possible from the auditory signal alone.

Develop a set of features that are reliably identified with stigmatized dialects to aid in a victim's **burden of proof**.

Dialect is more than Speech Sounds.

A **matched-guise** troubles of a single source of data to seem multisourced.

The lexical items and morphosyntactic or prosodic features used in each guise are typically identical.

The success of our guisecraft argues for using holistic dialect samples when measuring for authentic identification.

Further, the more features we hear, the more easily we can discriminate and categorize a speech signal.

From these results, we can see that our guisecraft seems to be working.

What we know now.

- ✓ **150 years** of racialized housing oppression in US
- ✓ **People** accurately **hear dialect**
- ✓ **People** make **judgments** about someone from their voice alone
- ✓ **Property owners** care about how you sound when you call
- ✓ Judgments **shape** our behavior
- ✓ Millions of Americans are **victims** of dialect discrimination

Study Four: Phonetic Segmental Analysis

- What are the phonetic cue listeners use to make such identifications?
- Develop a List of Features which reliably map to these dialects
- Establish Methodology as Empirical Linguistic Evidence for Future Experts

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