

LISTENERS' REACTIONS TO FOUR FRENCH ACCENTS: A STUDY OF GENDER AS A VARIABLE IN LINGUISTIC ATTITUDES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines two aspects of the role of gender in linguistic attitudes. First, it studies the issue of the dimensions which underlie linguistic attitudes, in particular whether features of masculinity and femininity play a role in speech evaluation. Second, it looks at differences among individual listeners from the point of view of how female and male listeners are similar and different in their evaluations. The study is based on a survey in which a group of university students evaluated four French accents found in schools in the province of New Brunswick, Canada: Acadian French, European French, Québec French, and French spoken by an anglophone, which we will refer to as anglophone French.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ryan, Giles & Sebastian (1982) have proposed a two-factor model to explain linguistic attitudes. They claim that a person evaluates a language or accent along two sets of criteria or dimensions: social status and solidarity with the group. The social status dimension refers to the standard/non-standard character of a language variety and to the social prestige attributed to its speakers. Speakers of the standard language are often perceived as more intelligent, more competent and more ambitious (traits which relate to social status) than speakers of the non-standard variety. The solidarity attributed to a language variety reflects feelings of attraction, appreciation and belongingness. A person identifies with her or his maternal language because it evokes feelings of belonging and fidelity. Language or dialect solidarity may also depend on the language variety's functional character in the linguistic community to which a person belongs, in other words, on the number of people who speak the language and on its utility in daily interactions. In an evaluational situation, the language which evokes feelings of solidarity is perceived as more favorable in terms of social attraction, sympathy, friendliness and kindness.

The two-factor attitudinal model proposed by Ryan *et al.* (1982) has become a standard model for research on linguistic attitudes. In this paper,

we argue that a person draws upon another set of criteria when forming a judgment about a language variety or accent, namely gender. More precisely, we propose that listeners perceive one language variety as being more masculine or more feminine than another; that is, an accent evokes in the listener not only stereotypes associated with status and solidarity but also those associated with male-type and female-type behaviour.

One of the first studies to examine gender-like traits of speech is by Elyan, Smith, Giles & Bourhis (1978) who examined the reactions of university students to two female voices, each one speaking two different dialects of English—'Received Pronunciation' (RP) and Lancashire (Northern). The questionnaire consisted of six different groups of adjectives, among which were stereotypical male and stereotypical female traits. The authors found that the RP speaker received more positive evaluations than the Northern speaker in terms of both the male and the female traits. Thus, varieties can have male-like and female-like traits.

Numerous studies have investigated the appropriate behaviours or personality traits that people expect from males and females. Research on gender-role stereotypes has demonstrated that people perceive numerous differences when asked to describe the behaviour or personality traits of males and females (Rozenkrantz, Bee, Vogel, Broverman & Broverman 1968; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson & Rosenkrantz 1972; Kramer 1977; Ruble 1983). For example, men are often characterized as being aggressive, analytical and independent, while women are often characterized as being understanding, affectionate and soft-spoken (Bem 1974). Even though gender-role stereotypes may not be borne out in the actual behaviour of women and men, they influence expectations and interpretations of female and male behaviour (Maccoby & Jacklin 1974). In this study, we are primarily interested in examining how these gender stereotypes fit the two-factor attitudinal model. On the basis of work by researchers on sex stereotyping and in line with the six traits used in Elyan *et al.* (1978), traits representing male and female stereotypes were adopted as evaluative dimensions.

The second objective of this paper is to compare males and females with respect to their evaluations of speech. In the few empirical studies which have examined this question, researchers have noted that men and women differ in their linguistic attitudes in a relatively small number of cases.

In the Elyan *et al.* (1978) study mentioned above, the authors noted significant differences between male and female evaluators on only six of the 25 scales studied: intelligence, independence, egotism, having a job, occupational status, occupational salary. In general, women evaluators

were more positive than male evaluators towards the RP accent, and more negative than the men towards the Northern accent. In the case of only one scale, 'fluency', did women give a more positive evaluation than the men for both accents. It should be noted that the scales in which male and female listeners did differ were those which are linked to status.

A matched-guise study by Lambert (1967) examined the reactions of judges towards male and female speakers, both speaking two varieties—English and French. Differences between male and female evaluators were found on only six of the 17 scales. Both female and male evaluators upgraded the female speakers when they were using their French guise for the status scales: intelligent, self-confidence and ambition. Furthermore, the female judges were less positive in their evaluations than the males on these scales. However, the male judges rated the female speakers in their French guise as more courageous, more sincere and more dependable (traits related to personal integrity) than in their English guise—an impression that the female judges did not share. Finally, the female evaluators were more positive than the male evaluators towards all the speakers in their French guise.

Paltridge & Giles (1984) investigated the linguistic attitudes of judges towards four accents of French spoken in France and found a significant gender of listener-by-accent interaction for only two of the five factors identified. In the case of 'professional appeal' (status dimension), male judges were less positive than the females towards the Brittany-accented speakers; however, in the case of 'social appeal', the women judges were more positive than the male judges in their evaluations of the Parisian accent.

In her study of reactions of listeners to recordings of five dialects of Newfoundland English, Clarke (1980) reported no significant differences between female and male listeners. However, when a direct questioning technique was used, significant gender differences were found for certain themes related to job status, solidarity and the status of standard vs. non-standard dialect types. Female judges were more positive and more sensitive than male judges. Furthermore, the gender effects showed interactions with other factors such as age, occupation and level of education.

Following the results of these studies, we hypothesized that the evaluations of male and female judges towards the four target accents in our study would be the same for the most part, although they may differ in terms of certain evaluative scales, in particular those related to status. Furthermore, female evaluators may be more positive more often than male evaluators.

The third point of interest of this study is whether a hierarchy based on attitudes would emerge among the four target accents. While New Brunswick is Canada's only officially bilingual province, not all citizens are functional in both English and French. The regional variety, Acadian French, is spoken by the majority of the francophone population. While the anglophone population has some contact with this variety of spoken French, it also has contact with other varieties. Schools in anglophone areas often claim to teach a standard or European French. Québec French, which is geographically close to New Brunswick and prominent in the Canadian context, is also found in the school system. Anglophones often speak a variety which is recognizable as anglophone French because of its phonetic, lexical and syntactic traits. No studies have examined attitudes towards the four varieties of French found in New Brunswick.

A number of studies are suggestive of the kinds of attitudes one might expect to find in such a situation. Studies (Ryan *et al.* 1982) have consistently found that judges upgrade the standard-accented speakers across status traits, while they downgrade the non-standard or regionally-accented speakers across these same scales. In turn, the non-standard accented speaker is typically upgraded in terms of traits relating to solidarity such as likeable, friendly and trustworthy. For example, Paltridge & Giles (1984) found that students in France accorded more status to the standard French accent than to the Brittany, Alsace and Provence accents. In Lambert (1967), Québec students accorded more status to the Québec speaker when she spoke in her Standard French guise than when she spoke in her Québec guise. In accordance with these studies, we predicted that in our study the European accent would receive more positive evaluations in terms of the status scales.

Recent studies (Bourhis 1982; Bourhis & Lepicq 1993) have noted that the Québec accent is being accorded increasing prestige in Québec and, one might suggest, in the Canadian context. This was one of the results of a recent study by Hume, Lepicq & Bourhis (1993) with anglophone subjects in Ontario. Consequently, we predicted that among our New Brunswick students the Québec accent would follow the European accent in the hierarchy.

It has already been noted that the accent which evokes feelings of solidarity is the one that is closest to the maternal language of the listeners (Ryan *et al.* 1982). In terms of our study, the accent which is most similar to the listeners is the anglophone accent, considering all of the judges are anglophone. As a result, we predicted that the anglophone accent would be upgraded in terms of the solidarity dimension when compared to the other

target accents. Ryan *et al.* (1982) also claim that some individuals may display greater solidarity with members of a more prestigious outgroup rather than with their own ingroup. This claim leads to the prediction that some judges will upgrade the most prestigious accent—the European accent as discussed above—in terms of the solidarity dimension.

This paper, then, has two main foci with respect to the role of gender in attitudinal stereotyping: its role as a factor in speech evaluation and as a factor in listening. A third goal of the paper is to study relations among the four target accents, an area where there has been no previous research.

2. METHOD

2.1 Listeners

A total of 132 students participated in the study—90 females and 42 males. All the subjects were between 18 and 24 years of age and were taking a first-year level French course at the University of New Brunswick. The mean number of years of study of French was 10.49 (st. dev. = 3.42). All subjects were native English speakers and most grew up in New Brunswick. Subjects were grouped by degree of contact with French outside school in their home region: some contact with French vs. no contact with French (based on demolinguistic data in Roy 1993). Most students (111 of the 132) were from a no-contact area. Subjects were also grouped by schooling (core French and early or late French immersion). Practical concerns dominated the choice of sample. For example, while it would have been ideal to have more equal numbers of female and male participants, the relative proportion of males in French language classes is small.

2.2 Stimulus tape

The stimulus tape was constructed using a modified version of the matched-guise technique introduced by Lambert to study listeners' reactions to language varieties (Lambert 1967). The matched-guise methodology consists of having subjects evaluate a tape-recorded speaker's personality after hearing her/him read the same passage in each of two or more accents. The fact that the speaker is the same person for all the accents is not revealed to the listeners, whose ratings are then considered to be reflections of her/his stereotyped reaction only to the accent concerned and not to the voice quality such as pitch or tone. However, it is impossible to find a speaker who is capable of imitating convincingly all four accents used in this study. Therefore, this study employed four separate speakers,

each one representing one of the four accents: Acadian French (ACF), European French (EURF), Québec French (QUF) and French spoken with a Canadian English accent (ANGF). As mentioned above, these four accents are those most commonly found in New Brunswick schools.

All four speakers were female, from a middle class background, and between 30 and 40 years of age. All were French language teachers. Selection of speakers took into account pitch, tone and timbre in order to minimize the effect of voice quality on the listeners' reactions. The choice to represent only the female voice was justified by the fact that for the majority of the judges their contact with the French language is limited to the classroom where the majority of the teachers are female. Practical considerations limited the study to one, and not more, speakers of each variety.

In order to minimize the influence of the content of the recordings on listeners' evaluations, all four speakers read the same text. The text was adopted from a study by Hume (1988) and Hume, Lepicq & Bourhis (1993). Special attention was given to ensure that the text was simple in terms of grammar and vocabulary and that the content was emotionally neutral. (A copy is given in the Appendix.)

The stimulus tape consisted of two sections. The first included a sample (the first two sentences of the text) of the four accents arranged in the following order: QUF, ANGF, EURF, ACF. The aim of this section was to familiarize the listeners with all four stimuli voices. The second section presented each of the four recordings of the text in its entirety. The stimuli voices were presented in the following order: ACF, EURF, QUF, ANGF. Each recorded voice was repeated twice in order to ensure that the students had enough time to complete the questionnaire while listening to the stimulus voice.

2.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire included three sections: (1) personal data (age, sex, mother tongue, degree of contact with French and background in French studies); (2) twelve scales pertaining to the status/solidarity dimensions and the masculine/feminine features; (3) four scales of linguistic features.

The twelve scales/adjectives that aimed at eliciting the listeners' perceptions of the speaker's personality included the following groups: social status ('intelligent, competent, self-confident'), solidarity ('sincere, friendly, trustworthy'), femininity ('sensitive, emotional, flexible'), and masculinity ('aggressive, competitive, assertive'). These adjectives were presented in random order. The six traits included in the status and soli-

clarity scales correspond to the principal evaluative dimensions proposed by Ryan *et al.* (1982) for eliciting attitudes towards a variety and, by consequence, the attitudes towards the speakers of that variety. As for the six traits included in the masculine and feminine scales, these were chosen among the research which examines perceived stereotypes of male and female behaviour (Ruble 1983; Kramer 1977; Rozenkrantz *et al.* 1968). One of the status factors, 'self-confident' is also associated with male-like behaviour (Broverman *et al.* 1972).

The four scales of linguistic evaluation included the items 'proper grammar', 'prestigious accent' and 'correct pronunciation'. These items examined whether an accent influenced the linguistic competence that listeners attribute to the speaker. We note that 'proper grammar' and 'correct pronunciation' have also been associated with female-like behaviour (Broverman *et al.* 1972; Kramer 1977). Finally, the item 'Does the speaker have a high status job?' was included and examined the social status inferred about each speaker.

Pretesting of the questionnaire was done to assure that listeners were familiar with the adjectives in the questionnaire and that these are adjectives used by the listeners. The judges made their evaluations on seven-point scales, which had the poles from 'not at all' to 'very'. In order to minimize problems of comprehension and since all of the judges were native English speakers, the questionnaire was prepared in English.

2.4 Procedure

The experiment was carried out in regular first-year level French language classes. Students were told that the study was an attempt to examine whether they were able to draw conclusions about a person's personality merely on the basis of listening to a tape-recording of their voice.

In the first part of the evaluation procedure, the students listened to a sample of the four voices. They were asked to look over the questionnaire and to identify any words they did not understand. The researchers explained what was meant by each item on the scale. Next, the students listened to the first tape-recorded voice, and began answering the questionnaire during the second playing of this voice. This procedure was repeated for the other three stimuli voices.

The procedure of having the students first listen to a sample of all four stimuli voices and then listen to each tape-recorded voice twice aimed at minimizing any order effects. It also allowed the students to become familiar with the voices and therefore to evaluate each voice with the same

vigor. All instructions were given in English in order to ensure that the students understood.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Factor Analysis

The student evaluations on the 16 rating scales were submitted to factor analysis. This is a multivariate statistical technique which identifies groupings of rating scales (adjectives) which measure the same or common traits. These groupings, called factors or dimensions, are based on correlations among the scales; highly intercorrelated sets of scales are identified and the trait common to a grouping is the interpretation that is given to the factor. Analyses were carried out for each of the four target accents and for the four target accents taken together. The common factors were identical in all analyses; we report the treatment found in the overall analysis. The analysis yielded a three-factor solution. The resulting factor matrix after varimax rotation is given in Table 1.

Table 1
Loadings of adjectives on the three Factors
identified by Factor Analysis after varimax rotation.

ADJECTIVES	Factor 1 (45.1%) status	Factor 2 (31.4%) solidarity/ femininity	Factor 3 (23.5%) masculinity
intelligent	.752 *	.502 *	.042
self-confident	.673 *	.225	.438
competent	.733 *	.215	.338
sincere	.288	.741 *	-.005
friendly	.123	.822 *	-.089
trustworthy	.296	.585 *	.063
flexible	.337	.502 *	.042
emotional	-.071	.710 *	.255
sensitive	.038	.818 *	-.022
assertive	.318	.136	.735 *
competitive	.234	.075	.822 *
aggressive	.100	-.107	.838 *
proper grammar	.782 *	.135	.019
prestigious accent	.788 *	.117	.221
correct pronunciation	.884 *	.077	.083
high status job	.765 *	.184	.216

Loadings above .5 (marked by an asterisk) are generally considered to be significant.

Factor 1 is associated with status-oriented scales. The items 'intelligent', 'self-confident', 'competent', and 'high status job' are linked to the personal capacity attributed to a speaker and are generally associated with a speaker's social standing. The items 'proper grammar', 'prestigious accent' and 'correct pronunciation' are linked to the linguistic capacity attributed to a speaker and are also linked to a person's social standing. Factor 1 illustrates that personal capacity and linguistic capacity are closely correlated.

This factor also illustrates the existence of a gender split with respect to status. The scales 'self-confident' and 'competent' tend to be stereotyped as masculine while several of the scales associated with linguistic status—'proper grammar' and 'correct pronunciation'—are stereotypically associated with female behaviour (Broverman *et al* 1972; Kramer 1977). Thus there is a strong link between status and both femininity and masculinity.

Factor 2 identifies two types of adjectives. The first type, which we label 'solidarity', includes the items 'sincere', 'friendly' and 'trustworthy' and elicits the cultural attachment listeners attribute to one accent or another. The second type, which we label 'femininity', consists of the items 'emotional', 'sensitive' and 'flexible', all traits which are associated with female behaviour or personality. The interesting result here is the strong correlation between these two groups of traits, which suggests that feminine traits are linked to the non-threatening or personable nature of belonging to a group.

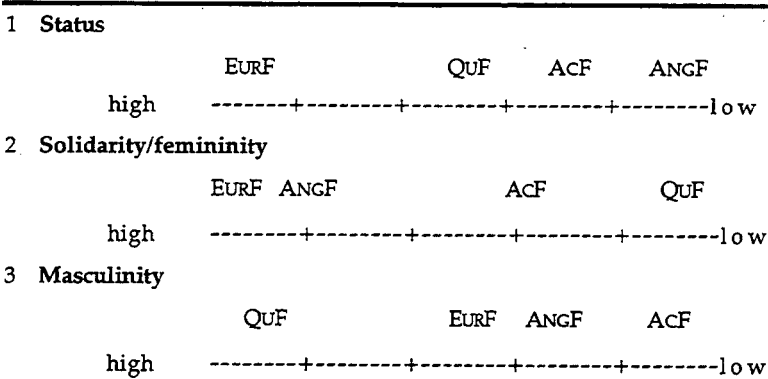
An unexpected result is the significant loading on Factor 2 of 'intelligent', which is also significantly associated with Factor 1 (which is the expected result). While this may be a spurious result, it may also be the case that certain semantic features of intelligence are associated with solidarity/femininity as opposed to status. Such features may be used by listeners who identify not with their ingroup but with the dominant or prestigious outgroup.

The items which load heavily on Factor 3 represent 'masculinity': 'aggressive', 'competitive', and 'assertive'. These traits are associated with the male dominated power structure and have been identified by researchers as being stereotypically associated with male behaviour.

The factor analysis shows that the evaluative data are consistent with the two-factor Ryan *et al.* (1982) attitudinal model. The groupings of traits found on Factors 1 and 2 concur with the dimensions of status and solidarity generally recognized as underlying attitudinal judgments towards various language varieties or accents. However the statistical analysis also shows that status is split with respect to femininity and masculinity

second language display this dual loyalty appears to depend on the social circumstances of the schools in which the learners find themselves, as we note in section 3.3.

Figure 1
Comparisons among four target accents on the three factors.



Plots of the relative positions of the four target accents on each of the three factors identified by factor analysis. (ACF=Acadian French, ANGF=anglophone French, EURF=European French, QUF=Québec French)

In terms of Factor 3, the masculinity dimension, our findings suggest that the Québec accent is perceived as the most aggressive, competitive and assertive, while the Acadian accent is perceived as the least. Are students aware of the current political situation in Québec, and is this awareness reflected in their perception of the Québec accent? Similarly, is the status of French as an official language in New Brunswick related to the students' perception of the Acadian accent as the least aggressive or assertive accent? These questions are meaningful given that informal observation showed that almost half of the student listeners were able to discriminate among the accents under study. Future studies should investigate this perception of the Québec and Acadian accents. While we are not able to come to any conclusions concerning these questions, the data are suggestive that there is an aggressive or masculinity component which underlies the evaluation of accents.

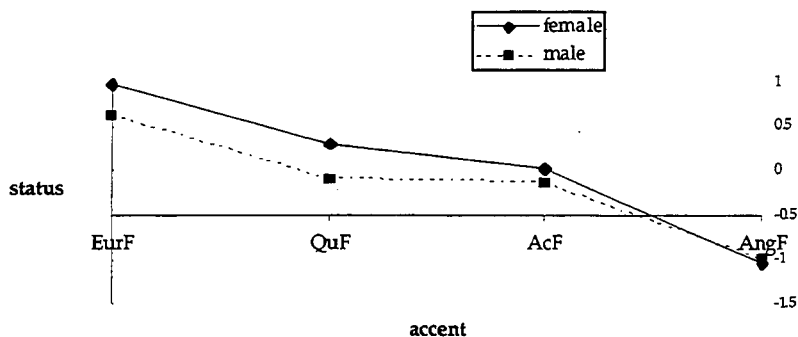
3.3 DIFFERENCES AMONG GROUPS OF LISTENERS

In addition to differences among the accents, the statistical analyses (ANOVAs) of the individual listeners' factor scores also showed a number

of significant patterns with respect to gender and degree of contact with French.

On Factor 1, the status-oriented dimension, significant effects were found for gender ($F(1,130)=5.563$, $p<.0198$) and for the gender-by-accent interaction ($F(3,390)=3.029$, $p<.0294$). Figure 2 reveals that in general our female listeners were more positive than were our male listeners in their evaluations of the Acadian, European, and Québec accents. However, the male listeners were more positive than the female listeners towards the anglophone accent.

Figure 2
Status: gender-by-accent interaction



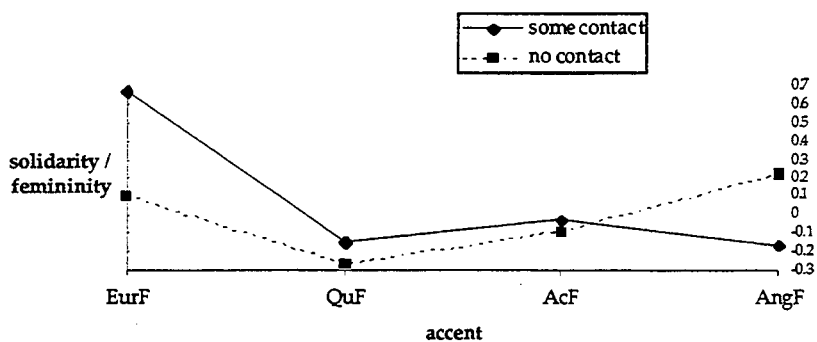
Plot of the degree-of-contact-by-accent interaction on the solidarity/femininity dimension. Positive scores on the vertical axis indicate a higher or greater degree of solidarity/femininity.

This finding that the evaluations of male and female listeners differ in terms of these status-related scales replicates the results of past studies (Elyan *et al.* 1978; Paltridge & Ryan 1984). That females consistently gave significantly higher evaluations than the males for the most statusful French accents, in particular the European accent, appears to confirm early work by Trudgill (1972) in which he speculates that women are more status-conscious than men due to double standards and more limited opportunities. The overall result on Factor 1 points to a link between gender and statusful accents.

An interesting question that arises is why the female listeners are 'harder' on the anglophone speaker than are the male listeners; that is, they perceive this accent as less statusful than do the men. We propose that because all the female judges are anglophones learning French as a second

language, they identify with the anglophone accent; both are anglophones who are attempting to master the French language. A study by Lenney (1981) found that women judge themselves more harshly in situations where they are comparing themselves to others. As a result, we believe it is possible that the evaluations made by the females represent in fact their evaluations of themselves. Consequently, their evaluations of the English accent are more negative. In turn, men would be less harsh simply because they do not identify as closely with the women speakers.

Figure 3
Solidarity / femininity: contact-by-accent interaction



Plot of the degree-of-contact-by-accent interaction on the solidarity/femininity dimension. Positive scores on the vertical axis indicate a higher or greater degree of solidarity/femininity.

On Factor 2, the solidarity/femininity dimension, a significant degree-of-contact-by-accent interaction was found ($F(3,381)=2.688$, $p<.0462$). Figure 3 reveals that subjects from an area where there was greater contact with French were more positive than subjects from an area where there was little or no contact with French in their evaluations of the European, Québec, and Acadian accents. In turn, subjects from an area where there was little or no contact with French were more positive than subjects from an area where there was greater contact with French in their evaluations of the anglophone accent. In terms of the traits related to solidarity and to femininity, it appears that the amount of contact with French affects the listener's evaluations of the target accents in an obvious and expected way. Listeners from a French-contact area feel more solidarity towards all three French accents while listeners from a non-French contact area feel more solidarity towards the anglophone.

Women gave slightly higher solidarity ratings to accents than did men. However, this difference did not show a significant trend ($p < .3527$).

On Factor 3, the masculinity dimension, we noted no significant effects, only a tendency for degree of contact ($F(1,127) = 2.929$, $p < .0894$). Subjects from an area where there is greater contact with French tended to find accents more male-like, that is, more aggressive, assertive and competitive, than those from an area where there was little or no contact with French. It would be premature to propose an explanation because the result is only suggestive that the degree of contact with French is a possible significant effect. Further research is needed to assess its role on attitudes.

Male listeners gave slightly higher masculinity ratings to the accents than did female listeners. This difference was not significant ($p < .7436$).

In concluding this section, it is important to note one limitation of the experimental design of this study: in order to accommodate all four accents and given the academic context in which the listening task was carried out, all four stimuli used in the study were female voices. Had we used both male and female voice stimuli, we might have observed other significant differences among male and female listeners. Of course, including both female and male voices with the four accents would have meant a significantly longer session for the listeners, with possible tiring effects which affect the results.

4. CONCLUSION

This study showed that the two-factor model proposed by Ryan *et al.* (1982) is oversimplified and that gender-based factors exist in the realm of evaluative dimensions. Gender emerged as a significant feature which underlies linguistic attitudes in a complex way: the masculinity factor is one of the three independent factors identified, and masculinity and femininity traits interact with status and solidarity scales. At this point, we are unable to explain the exact mechanism involved. Future research is needed to confirm our results as well as to examine the observed split in masculinity traits.

In terms of differences among listeners, this study replicated the results of past studies in which male and female judges gave differing evaluations in terms of status related traits only. It appears that women and men accord status to an accent along differing points of view.

In terms of differences among accents, the results reported here are tentative. As expected, the European accent was perceived as the most statusful, however it was also accorded, along with the anglophone ac-

cent, a high score on the solidarity/femininity dimension. The Québec accent received the highest evaluations on the masculinity factor and was at the opposite end of this scale from the Acadian accent. These patterns or hierarchies among the four accents should be replicated in future work.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix: text used on the stimulus tape.

Ce texte présente un aperçu de la vie de Monsieur Dubois qui travaille à la poste.

Monsieur Dubois travaille au bureau de poste. D'habitude, il se réveille vers les 6 heures, parce que, de bon matin, il n'y a pas beaucoup de monde dans les autobus, et les rues de la ville sont presque vides. Dès qu'il est debout, il s'habille en quelques minutes. Avant de sortir, il vérifie toujours la température. Même au printemps, il fait attention de se couvrir la tête, car il a peur des rhumes. Il ne part jamais sans avoir préparé la nourriture pour son chat aux poils bruns.

En général, il prend l'autobus numéro treize. S'il n'y a pas de neige, il roule très vite, et le chauffeur est très gentil. À 8 heures, Monsieur Dubois descend à l'arrêt en face du bureau de poste. Il va toute de suite à son bureau, où l'attendent des paquets de lettres. Il les lit, et ensuite il attend l'heure de midi pour aller prendre une soupe avec la secrétaire, qui porte toujours une jupe noire et un collier en or.

Le lendemain, ça recommence jusqu'à midi. C'est ça la vie.

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