



**The University of the West Indies**  
**St. Augustine Campus**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Education**  
**Caribbean Studies Project**  
**HUMN 3099**

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Title of Thesis:

Language Discrimination: An investigation into emerging attitudes towards non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent.

Word count: 8216

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I thank Jehovah God for helping me make it to the end of this project and my time at the UWI physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually safe and secure. I express my gratitude to my parents and sister whose support has not gone unnoticed. Finally, much thanks go out to my supervisor who has expressed her belief in my ability to achieve great things and who has helped me along the way.

## ABSTRACT

The current socio-political context of Trinidad has informed the language attitudes of native speakers of Trinidad English Creole and Trinidad Standard English, thereby resulting in language discrimination against non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent. Language discrimination is a social issue that can impede the communication efforts and integration of non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent in Trinidadian society. Thus, this thesis explores language discrimination against non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent and its findings will offer insight into the roots and consequences of societal biases and prejudices founded on linguistic differences. Interviews were conducted with fourteen native English speakers from Trinidad who have had prior contact with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent. The qualitative data was analysed and presented narratively and has thus revealed that native speakers of English use one's accent to profile a non-native speaker and formulate assumptions about a speaker's level of education, personality and physical features. Also, the research showed that English language fluency is the main hindrance to communication, rather than the mere presence of an accent. The present study analysed the impact of phonological differences on emerging language attitudes and paves the way for further research into the inclusionary and exclusionary nature of language and its impact on the integration of linguistic minorities.

**Keywords:** Trinidad, language discrimination, accent, profiling, Spanish, English, non-native, native, speech patterns, social categories, communication, linguistic prejudice, migrants

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## INTRODUCTION

The colonial period brought foreign rule, peoples and cultures to the isle of Trinidad, which has culminated in its rich and diverse sociolinguistic profile. Furthermore, the historical past of Trinidad has seen the birth and loss of numerous European, African, Amerindian and Indian languages. Nevertheless, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the official national language, English, is spoken along with numerous heritage languages including that of the pre emancipation era, Spanish and French Creole and the post emancipation era, Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language (Ferreira).

As of 2023, 7.7 million migrants were forced to flee Venezuela due to a decade- long humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by socio-political unrest and economic turmoil (“Refugee and Migrant Needs” 14). As a result, Trinidad, due to its location along the Southern Caribbean, and its shared borders with Venezuelan, has been a host to some 40,000 Venezuelan migrants (Teff 4). However, despite Trinidad’s unique and diverse linguistic profile, individuals map certain understandings of linguistic varieties onto its speakers. As a result, migrants who have acquired proficiency in the English language and yet retain phonological aspects of their native tongue, encounter difficulty in integrating into society as their accents indicate membership to a stigmatised group (Gluszek and Dovidio 224).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that regardless of language and national or social origin, all have the right to an education, health, employment and the right to live in an environment free of discrimination (“Universal Declaration of Human Rights”). Nonetheless, migrants in Trinidad face unique challenges in satisfying these rights as they are often withheld due to language barriers. Language barriers, specifically, linguistic differentiation, is rooted in the

politics of a given social context (Irvine and Gal 35). Consequently, linguistic prejudices are a common plight faced by migrants who are non-native speakers of the English language.

An accent is identified as the principal linguistic feature that provides critical information about one's country of origin, first language, and social class and therefore acts as a marker for exclusion and inclusion (Creese 297, 298). Migrants in particular are differentiated from the total population because of phonological differences of speech (Souza et al. 618). Linguistic differences within a speech community are compounded by language ideologies, that is, the ideas or beliefs about a language or language variety, shaped by the political and moral issues permeating a given society. These ideologies capitalize on linguistic differences, particularly a speaker's accent, to typify social groups, identities and activities of speakers (Irvine and Gal 35, 37).

## **RATIONALE**

This study is of great importance as it aims to investigate a pressing social issue, that of language discrimination against non-native speakers of English in Trinidadian society. The findings of the present study will offer insight into the roots of societal biases and prejudices founded on linguistic differences and its eventual effect on the socio-communicative relationship between native and non-native speakers of English. Despite Trinidad's rich and diverse linguistic profile, English has been designated the official language as it is the language of education, health, justice, and is used in other official domains. With an average population of 1.4 million citizens, the majority of whom speak Trinidadian Standard English (TSE) or Trinidadian English Creole (TrinEC), non-native speakers of English encounter unique communication barriers and are often marginalized ("Trinidad and Tobago"). In the Trinidadian context, one can posit that native speakers of English possess a negative attitude toward non-native accents, as non-native speakers of English with a

Spanish accent are stereotyped on the basis of their accent by native speakers of English, which in turn creates a communication barrier between both groups.

## **PARAMETERS**

Trinidad's sociolinguistic profile has been enriched by the arrival of individuals from Spanish speaking countries of Latin America and the Caribbean who demonstrate proficiency in the English language. Thus, due to the increasing population of non-native English speakers with a Spanish accent in the Trinidadian context, the investigation would be confined to Trinidad so as to effectively investigate the response of native English speakers to this linguistic minority. Although time and geographical constraints limit the study to Trinidad, the findings of the present study can be applied to other Caribbean islands which share a similar sociolinguistic profile. Furthermore, language attitudes develop and change overtime and are shaped by intergroup contact among different individuals within a speech community, which in turn can have a positive or negative influence on language attitudes. Hence, interviews were conducted with 14 individuals who have had limited to regular contact with non-native speakers of English. This is of importance as it would assist in making an effective and accurate analysis of the role of interaction or the lack thereof on the formulation of biases and stereotypes against non-native speakers of English.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The study aims to identify individuals' attitudes toward non-native accents and determine its impact on English-speaking Trinidadians' perception of non-native speakers. Accordingly, the results would present a comprehensive understanding of emerging language attitudes in Trinidad. Furthermore, the study seeks to analyse and assess how Trinidadian English speakers use speech patterns to assign social categories to non-native English speakers with a Spanish accent, as such behaviour establishes the basis for language discrimination. Consequently, the study would outline and examine the assigned social categories, which include the presumptions made about a non-native speaker's level of education, personality and physical appearance. Finally, the researcher would evaluate the extent to which language discrimination acts as a barrier to communication with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent. Thus, the study would fill the gap in the literature, as it would allow the researcher to examine a growing social issue in the Trinidadian context.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The objectives of the study would be met by answering the following research questions:

What attitudes exist towards non-native accents and what impact does it have on English-speaking Trinidadians' perception of non-native speakers ?

How do Trinidadian English speakers use speech patterns to assign social categories to non-native English speakers?

To what extent does language discrimination act as a barrier to communication and integration of non-native English speakers?

## **METHODOLOGY**

Firstly, purposive sampling was employed to gather qualitative data from the respective respondents about language discrimination in Trinidad. This method of data collection was used to select specific individuals from within the general population, chosen solely on the basis of their experience with non-native speakers, that is individuals who have or have not interacted with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent, while in the position to do so. The 14 respondents were chosen as the contexts in which they frequent present them with ample opportunity to interact with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent if they choose to do so, that is, in the work place, at school and in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, as the frequency and quality of the sample's interaction with non-native speakers vary, the researcher was able to gather in depth and diverse data to determine whether language discrimination played a role in the interactions and decipher whether such interactions or the lack thereof dispelled or supported prejudiced views against non-native speakers.

Semi structured interviews were conducted so as to garner insight into the language attitudes of the sample population (See Appendix A). Interviewees were first invited to share whether they have or have not interacted with a non-native speaker of English with a Spanish accent and whether the phonological aspects of their speech undermined their English language competency or the listener's understanding. Interviewees were encouraged to narrate their personal experiences with non-native speakers of English.

Consequently, participants were invited to express the deductions made solely from the speakers' accent, that is the speakers' possible country of origin, personality and level of education. Based on these deductions, the researcher was able to identify the biases or, the lack thereof, possessed by the sample population. Then, the respondents were allowed to express whether such biases hinder communication with non-native speakers of English. As participants were invited to recount

their stories and experiences, a narrative form of data collection was employed, so as to ascertain the attitudes, ideologies and perceptions of each individual towards speakers of English with a non-native accent.

For the purpose of this social study, the qualitative approach of data collection allowed the researcher to compare and analyse the data that was gathered, which was presented narratively, so as to categorise the statements made for further analysis. The semi-structured interviews, consisting largely of open ended questions, proved effective in holistically examining the causes and effects of language discrimination against non-native speakers of English in Trinidad.

This study consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 presents a review of the literature produced by scholars so as to explore existing scholarship on the topic of language discrimination. Chapter 2 is a narrative presentation of the data collected through interviews, which were conducted so as to ascertain the presence of language discrimination in the Trinidadian context. Finally, Chapter 3 proffers a detailed discussion, that is a comparison and contrast, of the data collected from the present study with the scholarly works discussed in Chapter 2.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

The literature review presents an extensive overview of the existing research surrounding language discrimination. For the purpose of this study, five articles were critically examined on the basis of biasness, generalizability and new insights into the causes and effects of language discrimination, particularly on migrants. The chapter enlightens readers as to the gaps that exist in the literature as regards language discrimination and presents a comprehensive outlook on the social role of language as an inclusionary and exclusionary tool. Furthermore, the role of positive and negative interactions within a speech community, solidarity, power and distance in fostering language discrimination are discussed, together with its impact on one's sense of belonging and integration within a given society.

### **LANGUAGE AND INTEGRATION**

Language acts as a significant barrier to many migrants in the integration process. Özmete et al. assert that poor language proficiency of migrants can hinder the formation of social bonds and lead to exclusion (96). This sentiment is supported by the article, "You can't have a good integration when you don't have a good communication: English-language Learning Among Resettled Refugees in England" by Morrice et al. The literature shows that language proficiency is required for access into all domains of integration and is essential to a sense of belonging (Şimşek 548). Olsen posits that language can be perceived as a marker of social and political affiliation and belonging (197).

However, despite acquiring the language of the host country many migrants still face exclusion and discrimination on the part of natives. This finding adds fresh insight into refugee studies as

most researchers assert that language learning is key to successful integration. Nonetheless, the study of Pozzo proves this to be the contrary, as feelings of insecurity, exclusion and non-belonging were compounded by unequal treatment, due to the negative stigma attached to migrants (Pozzo 358, Mohamed and Bastug 223).

The literature agrees that acquiring the native tongue of the host country assists in migrants' integration into the labour market and education system (Pozzo 359). However, these are the two main contexts where language discrimination takes place (Creese 304, Ramjattan 89, Lorenz et al. 77). Evidently, Pozzo supports the integration paradox theory which identifies language as both an inclusionary and exclusionary aspect of integration and presents a greater appreciation for the disenchantment experienced by refugees, who although obligated to acquire the native tongue, still suffer from discrimination and exclusion (350, 359). The current literature has revealed that failure to acquire native-like competency in the second language increases the migrant's vulnerability to language discrimination. Thus, it is worth exploring the pressures faced by migrants to gain a level of competency in the language that guarantees some level of integration in the new society.

## **LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION**

The work of O'Neill and Massini-Cagliari, "Linguistic Prejudice and Discrimination in Brazilian Portuguese and beyond: Suggestions and Recommendations" defines language discrimination as the negative, distinct and unjust treatment of individuals on the basis of one's language or language variety. Evidently, language discrimination is the outward manifestation of preconceived notions, prejudices and ingrained assumptions toward a particular group of people, who on the basis of language, are marginalised and denied socioeconomic opportunities (O'Neill and Massini-Cagliari). Mazzoli et al. further defines language discrimination as acts of stigmatisation resulting from a speaker's use of a non-standard variety or a minority language, thereby resulting in social

exclusion (128). O'Neill and Massini-Cagliari's detailed exploration of language discrimination fortifies existing scholarship by highlighting the lack of protection afforded to speakers of non-standard varieties of a language.<sup>1</sup> By exposing the extent to which prejudices and biases are rooted in Brazilian society and its negative impact on linguistic minorities, the authors reinforce the gravity of language discrimination and its negative impact on societal development.

Creese goes further by highlighting the socio-historical bases for language discrimination by identifying language as a tool for power and domination. In the research, "Erasing English Language Competency: African Migrants in Vancouver, Canada", the author suggests that the linguistic capital afforded to English during the colonial period contributes to the undermining and marginalisation of non-native speakers of the language (296). Evidently, the promulgation of the linguistic domination of English throughout history and the hierarchisation of linguistic practices, has cemented the belief that not all forms of English are the same, and variation, due to one's accent, acts as a key indicator of social differentiation (Creese 297, Mazzoli et al. 134). Hence, one's way of speaking English, whether with a standard or non-standard accent, can lead to discrimination or acceptance.

The author's work diversifies existing scholarship due to its focus on language discrimination against competent English speakers who were of colour. Despite demonstrating proficiency in the

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<sup>1</sup> O'Neill and Massini-Cagliari go further by exposing the tendency of individuals to associate the use of non-standard varieties and its speakers with social success and wealth, or the lack thereof. Therefore, prejudiced individuals opt to associate speakers of non-standard varieties of a language with stereotypical qualities based on the linguistic varieties employed.

English language, African immigrants' linguistic capital was undermined and was made to seem inferior, as the African-English accent revealed their status as African, black and immigrant (Creese 303, 305). This study effectively identifies the vulnerability of minority groups in society, that is, people of colour and migrants, to language discrimination. This is emphasised by Baumgarten and DuBois who postulate that migration has resulted in heterogeneous speech communities whereby social groups are objectified and marginalised based on pre-existing attitudes (89). Such groups are profiled on the basis of ingrained stereotypes and biases instilled into society during the colonial era and promoted and practiced in modern times.

### **LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICE**

Human language, each shaped by unique sociohistorical and political contexts, is inherently diverse and variable. Creese posits that an individual's linguistic authority, shaped by sociohistorical factors, can be undermined by the intonations of speech, that is, one's accent (305). Such subversion of language is attributed to ingrained prejudices present within a given society (O'Neill and Massini-Cagliari). The authors are supported by Souza et al. in the article, "The legitimizing role of accent on discrimination against immigrants". Souza et al. present a comprehensive overview of the critical role of accent on language discrimination and the forming of biases against certain groups in society. Although one's accent acts as a key marker of social identity, Souza et al. postulate that negative responses and biases towards a particular social group are founded, not solely on linguistic differences, but on prejudices (609). Hence, the authors hypothesise that prejudiced individuals possess the belief that non-standard accents legitimise discrimination against non-native speakers.

On this premise, Souza et al. refine existing scholarship by identifying the prominent role of prejudice on language discrimination. The authors' conclusion that an accent and the social

categories associated with it is more pronounced or obvious to biased individuals is an effective basis for determining the causes of language discrimination against minority groups, particularly, migrants (Souza et al. 615, Lev-Ari and Keysar 1). Souza et al.'s article, though limited in scope, presents an effective foundation for the exploration of the impact of negative attitudes and prejudices on language discrimination.

Furthermore, due to the fact that migrants represent a vulnerable and stereotyped group in numerous societies, the article's focus on prejudices emphasises the need for further research into its impact on immigrants. Nonetheless, although Souza et al. identify prejudices as the cause of discriminatory behaviour towards minority groups, the authors fail to identify the basis and solution for such prejudices and in turn language discrimination.

## **LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION AND NON-STANDARD ACCENTS**

A key aspect of variation that acts as a stimulus for language discrimination is one's accent. Thus, central to the issue of language discrimination are the conflicting views and attitudes that individuals have towards standard and non-standard accents and its speakers. Fuertes et al. in the study, "A meta-analysis of the effects of speakers' accents on interpersonal evaluations" identify an accent as variation in the pronunciation of the same language. One variation, that is the standard accent, may be spoken by the majority of the population and carries a higher socioeconomic status and power. Whereas, the variation that is considered to be foreign and associated with lower socioeconomic groups, is referred to as a non-standard accent (Fuertes et al. 121). Evidently, due to the socioeconomic factors associated with both varieties, standard and nonstandard accents are often weighed on the basis of status, solidarity and dynamism. Thus, Baumgarten and Du Bois assert that language is used to infer the social categories of individuals, and in turn, acts as a proxy for various forms of discrimination (86).

Fuertes et al. affirm listeners' preference for standard accents over non-standard accents by suggesting that standard speakers are likely to make positive first impressions and receive a positive evaluation from listeners, by a single greeting (128). That is because language is used as a tool by listeners to connect speakers to various non-linguistic social categories such as gender, education, socio-economic status and personality traits. In this way, the quality of the communication and integration of such speakers are shaped by the non-linguistic social categories to which they are assigned (Baumgarten and DuBois 86,87). Enhanced feelings of solidarity are associated with speakers of standard accents as such speakers are deemed to be trustworthy, even attractive. This finding is supported by Lev-ari and Keysar who suggests that the credibility of non-native speakers of a language is diminished by one's accent (1). Consequently, non-native speakers are viewed as less truthful, as accented speech is deemed difficult to understand.

In accordance with the findings of Souza et al., non-standard accents are immediate markers and triggers for listeners to instigate and reinforce negative evaluations already associated with minority groups (Fuertes et al. 128). As such, the authors aptly identify language, particularly the phonological differences that exist between standard and non-standard varieties, as a catalyst for discrimination against minority groups in a society (Fuertes et al. 128, Baumgarten and DuBois 86). Certainly, Fuertes et al.'s identification of the issues faced by minority groups who speak with an accent, demonstrate that language discrimination is a sociolinguistic issue that merits further investigation. The authors effectively establish the basis for such scholarship by highlighting the esteem and value afforded to standard accents over non-standard accents and the purported rewards and demerits afforded to speakers with standard and non-standard accents.

## LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION AND COMMUNICATION

Research has shown that both positive and negative contact or interactions between majority and minority groups have the potential to foster prejudicial attitudes towards linguistic minorities in society. Hence, the study, “The effects of recalling positive and negative contacts on linguistic discrimination towards migrant people” by Prati et al. fittingly seeks to investigate whether the quality and the quantity of interactions between majority and minority groups result in intergroup acceptance or rejection.

Thus, Prati et al. identifies the cognitive and relational elements required to recall both positive and negative experiences with minority groups or non-standard speakers of a language, as a key factor in linguistic discrimination (9). As a result, the study affirms that individuals who have had limited interactions, whether positive, negative or both with minority groups, are less likely to discriminate against such speakers. The authors contrast that finding with speakers who have ample opportunity to interact with minority groups by stating that prior interaction has a limited impact on language discrimination against minority speakers (Prati et al. 9, Gluszek and Dovidio 225). Furthermore, Gluszek and Dovidio state that positive interactions increase the likelihood of future positive communicative interactions (225). Evidently, by highlighting the role of the quantity as well as the quality of intergroup interaction, whether positive or negative, the authors skilfully demonstrate the import of language as a tool, not only for communication but discrimination.

Although Prati et al. identify the quality and the quantity of intergroup interactions as a key factor in language discrimination, the authors fail to consider the subjectivity of a positive or negative interaction. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised to a larger population, as intergroup

interactions vary across societies and are affected by numerous social variables and socio-political aspects present within a speech community. Hence, further research is required so as to measure the degree to which prior interaction has an impact on negative attitudes or positive attitudes toward non-standard speakers of a language.

Language discrimination negatively impacts the well-being and self-esteem of an individual. A speaker's accent, deep seated prejudices and positive or negative interactions with non-native speakers of English act as stimuli for language discrimination. Consequently, minority groups, particularly migrants, are prematurely classed into various social categories on the basis of their accent, which can hinder their socioeconomic growth in society. Since language is identified both as a tool of inclusion and exclusion into host societies, further research is needed to investigate the policies designed to combat language discrimination against migrants in the Caribbean context. Hence, the following chapter aims to present the qualitative data collected through interviews, as regards language discrimination in the Trinidadian context, to determine the causes and effects of this social issue.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

Qualitative data was collected from 14 participants who have had limited to regular contact with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent. Eight open ended questions were used by the interviewer to ascertain the perceptions formed when hearing a Spanish accent, the level of difficulty in understanding English spoken with a Spanish accent and the propensity of native English speakers to form perceptions about a non-native speaker's personality, physical image and level of education. The interviewer also aimed to decipher the impact of communication barriers on native speakers' desire to communicate with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent. The present chapter is a narrative presentation of the data collected from each participant.

### **PERCEPTION OF AN ACCENT**

Interviewees believe that people who speak with an accent, are foreign, speak a foreign language, or speak a different variety of their own language. Thus, interviewees explained that an accent is “anything that sounds different than your language”, “the way someone speaks, who does not speak English the way I speak English”, “the way someone speaks who is from a foreign country or land” and “a particular way of speaking, of person from a particular area or district”. Thus all participants perceive an accent to be a distinguishing feature of a language which makes its speakers stand out as different, foreign or as someone who speaks English as a second language.

### **PERCEPTION OF A SPANISH ACCENT**

The respondents of the study identify a Spanish accent most frequently with someone who is a Venezuelan citizen. Numerous references were made to “Venezuela” “Venezuelan” and “foreign”

or “foreigner”. Also, mention of the terms “illegal” and “immigrant” were made, as interviewees perceive a Spanish accent as an indicator of the legal status of the speaker (See Figure 1).

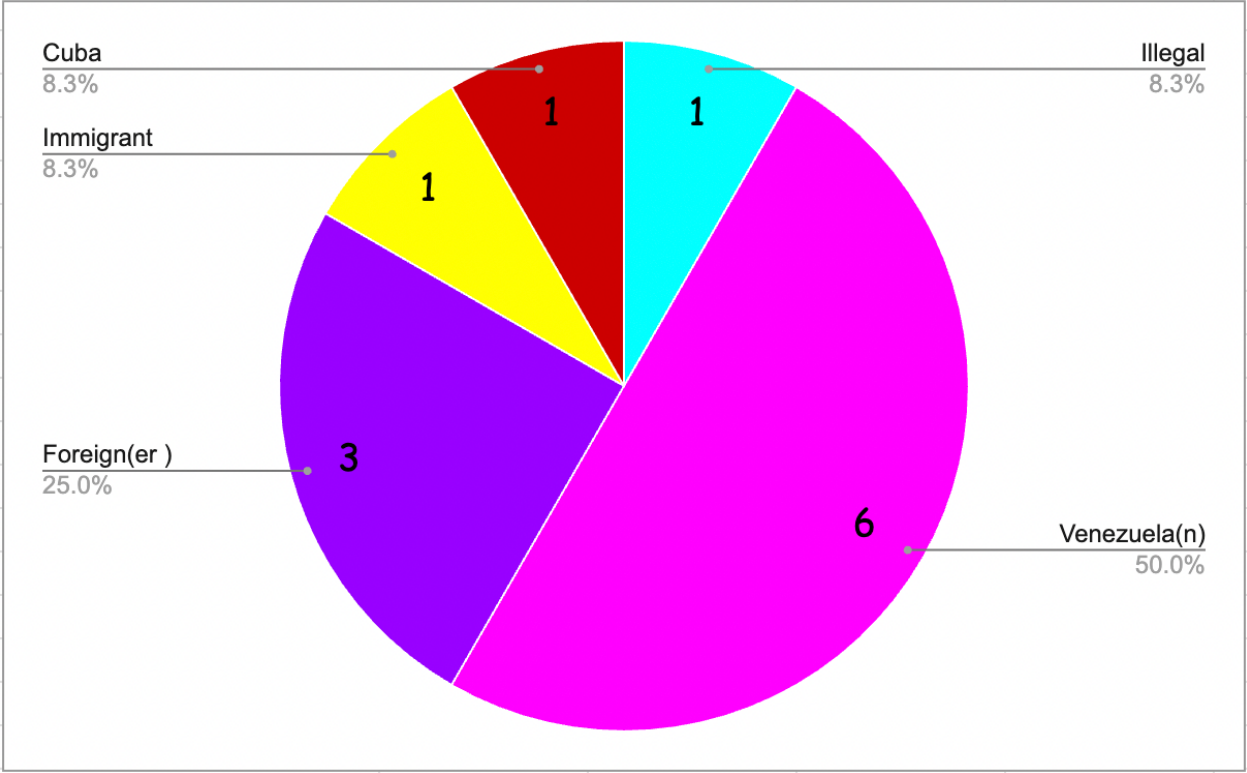


Figure 1: A pie chart showing the frequency of select terms mentioned by participants.

## **LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH SPOKEN WITH A SPANISH ACCENT**

Few interviewees encounter difficulty in understanding English spoken with a Spanish accent and thus said that the Spanish accent is “hard to understand”. However, the aforementioned participants have had limited interactions with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent as their interactions were confined to “church”, “the neighbourhood” and “school”. Nonetheless, three respondents stated that their level of comprehension was dependent on the strength of the speaker’s accent and the amount of time the speaker may have spent living in Trinidad. Thus they stated, “It depends, the longer they are here the easier it is to understand the accent”, “ It may depend on how long they have been in Trinidad and their immersion in the English language” and “ it depends on the level of education the person has.” On the contrary, three respondents who have frequent contact with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent in the workplace expressed no difficulty in understanding the speakers’ English. One respondent in particular stated, “ I have experience with a Venezuelan and Cuban accent in the work place. Spanish from the patients and Cuban from the nurses”. Thus the respondent was able to profess, “ The accents are not difficult to understand, as I have grown accustomed to them. I rarely encounter problems understanding”.

## **ENGLISH COMPETENCY OF NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS**

Interviewees expressed that it would be difficult or near impossible for native speakers of Spanish to speak English well. Respondents frankly stated that “ It’s not in their nature, they will always have an accent and will not be able to speak English well” and “ One can always tell that English is their second language.” However, such sentiments were confined to a few respondents as the majority of the participants expressed that English can be acquired by non-native speakers with time, immersion and proper teaching. Generally, the interviewees shared the sentiments of the respondents who stated, “ If they are taught well, they can speak English well, if they immerse themselves in the language and get proper direction, they can speak it well” and “People who speak Spanish can learn English well, and the accent does not act as a barrier to communication.”

## **ACCENTS AND PERCEPTION OF A SPEAKER’S LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

The interviewees shared the perceptions formed of non-native speakers on the basis of their accents. As regards the perceptions formed about one’s level of education, four respondents expressed that the accent, especially a strong accent, gives the impression that the speakers are not ‘well-educated’ and stated, “ after mass migration, some were doctors, lawyers, but I would not be able to tell their social class or education. But, based on their accent I would assume those things were limited.” Consequently, interviewees associated a non-native Spanish accent with “low paying jobs”. However, interviewees base their perception of the speakers’ level of education on the context in which the speaker is found. One respondent summarised this by explaining “ whether in stores, food places, I would think they work for minimum wage whereas in the hospital, they may be a nurse or surgeon and I would believe they are learned persons. The fact that they still speak with an accent does not mean that they are not well educated”. Likewise, respondents evaluate a speakers English speaking skills to determine their level of education and thus stated, “

One who speaks English better than another is more well-educated” , “If they can speak English formally, I’d assume that they have some level of schooling at the high school or university level in their mother country” and “Generally speaking, the way they speak English or communicate via translation means, I’d be able to tell when someone is not as well educated as another.” On the contrary, five respondents expressed that an accent gives no indication of a speaker’s level of education. Two respondents stated that no perception is formed because “ their accent for me just indicates that they are from another country” and “ Accents are just like looks, they can be deceiving. Some people may speak ‘broken’ but they may be highly intelligent”.

### **ACCENTS AND PERCEPTION OF SPEAKER’S PERSONALITY**

Few respondents associate a Spanish accent with negative personality traits and stated, “ Based on their accent, they are unfriendly, aggressive, standoffish” and “ The accent makes them appear slow, aggressive, hasty at times”. Nevertheless, speakers who have had interactions with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent gave a positive analysis and reported on the friendly somewhat energetic nature of the accent. Interviewees cited qualities such as “friendly”, “amiable” “hardworking”, “energetic”, “outgoing”, “humble” as the perceptions that were formed on a speaker’s personality based on their accent. However, one respondent expounded and admitted, “ Generally, a timid, reserved somewhat fearful reaction or aura from non-native speakers with a Spanish accent because of an expected negative or antagonistic response from native Trinidadian speakers”. On the contrary, two respondents expressed that an accent gives little to no indication of one’s personality traits.

## **ACCENTS AND PERCEPTION OF A SPEAKER'S PHYSICAL IMAGE**

Generally, eight respondents denied the idea that an accent summons a physical image of a speaker. Thus, the respondents stated that “ their accent does not give an indication of how they look” and “No image comes to mind”. One respondent expressed, “ I do not look for a specific phenotype. There are also Arabic and Syrian people here, they may appear to be Spanish, so I try not to judge based on how they look.” However, several respondents divulged that a Spanish accent is associated with particular physical features and that they associated a Spanish accent with someone who is “fair”, “light skinned”, “has a red complexion” “has straight hair” and “an East Indian finish”.

## **ACCENT AND COMMUNICATION WITH NONNATIVE SPEAKERS**

Ten participants expressed that an accent does not act as a barrier to communication, but instead acts as a stimulus for increased interaction with non-native speakers. Respondents expressed, “I am always encouraged to speak to them, despite the communication barriers”, “The accent excites me because I realise that I am speaking with a foreigner and they may not know much about my country so If I’m in a position to help them, I’d be more inclined to speak with someone with an accent” and “I am encouraged to speak to them because I am aware of the general reaction of Trinidadians to non-native speakers of English, I try to be the person that is helpful to them and that would go to the extra mile to help them because I know that the response is generally not nice.” However, four respondents perceive an individual’s accent as a hindrance to communication due to the efforts involved in communicating despite the language barriers. Thus, the interviewees identified “the difficulties and time-consuming nature of communication”, and “the lack of understanding” as barriers to successful communication.

The present chapter succinctly outlined the data collected from each participant. This method of data presentation allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the responses of the participants so as to ascertain the extent to which a foreign accent triggers language discrimination, the role of interaction on the development of prejudices and the impact of language discrimination on communication and integration. The following chapter will present a detailed analysis and comparison of the present findings with that of other researchers so as to explore the unique situation of language discrimination in Trinidad.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

Language discrimination and by extension, linguisticism and glottophobia are manifested by acts of stigmatisation, leading to the exclusion of a linguistic minority (Mazzoli et al. 128). Though not manifested outwardly, the research demonstrates that Trinidadians are prone to developing and supporting preconceived notions about speakers on the basis of their accent. Hence, it is pertinent to discuss the general findings of the present study to determine its contribution to existing scholarship. Thus, in order to explore the attitudes that exist towards non-native accents, to identify how speech patterns are used to assign social categories and to ascertain the extent to which language discrimination acts as a barrier to communication in the Trinidadian context, the present chapter compares and contrasts the findings of this study with that of previous works. This would assist the researcher and future investigators in garnering greater insight into this social issue.

### **ATTITUDES TOWARDS NON-NATIVE ACCENTS**

The findings reveal that native speakers of English automatically profile non-native speakers with a Spanish accent as ‘foreigners’ or ‘outsiders’ solely on the basis of the speaker’s accent. Thus, respondents demonstrated a negative, somewhat unwelcoming attitude toward non-native speakers, as accents were ostracized and associated with ‘otherness’. Evidently, the presence of an accent leads to an automatic categorisation of a non-native speaker as an outgroup member, as an accent is a clear indication to native speakers that a person does not belong in a given sociolinguistic space. This finding contributes to the literature, as the present study also found that a speaker’s non-native accent is a significant cue that leads to the outgroup classification of non-native speakers with a foreign accent (Glusek and Dovidio 215).

Therefore, the concept of outgroup classification is further enhanced by the respondents' classification of all non-native speakers with a Spanish accent as 'migrants', 'Venezuelans' or 'illegal settlers'. Evidently the socio-political context of Trinidad and the neighbouring Venezuela has informed the language ideologies adopted by native-speakers of English, thereby moving Trinidadians to associate a Spanish accent with an asylum seeker or a migrant. The use of the aforementioned labels for non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent demonstrates the exclusionary attitude possessed by native speakers, which is triggered upon a hearing a non-native accent. The negative attitude possessed by native speakers and the general tendency to affiliate the presence of an accent with 'non-belongingness' accounts for the propensity of speakers to stereotypically classify all Spanish accents as belonging to a Venezuelan native or a Venezuelan migrant.

Thus, the findings show that one does not need to accurately identify the origin of a speaker's accent, as a foreign accent was enough for listeners to form a negative view of its speakers. Evidently, the present research sustains the findings of Gluszek and Dovidio as it also came to the conclusion that a foreign accent is a sufficient trigger for language discrimination, despite its origin (218). Thus, the respondents' premature assignment of non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent to a particular geographical space is a striking example of language discrimination. However, it should be noted that respondents who have professed to having increased interactions with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent, manifested a greater awareness of and receptiveness towards the presence of a Spanish accent. Evidently, the present study aligns with prior research as the results show that the context in which communication occurs, whereby individuals have increased opportunity to interact with non-native speakers of English and in turn

establish and recall positive intergroup contact, inhibits outgroup bias and in turn reduces discrimination (Prati et al. 8).

Furthermore, the results imply that the majority of the respondents have a measure of difficulty in understanding the accented speech of Spanish natives when speaking English. While the salience of a Spanish accent may vary according to the frequency of the listener's exposure to accented speech, and the non-native speakers' level of immersion and exposure to the English language, disfluency or accented speech does account for difficulty in comprehension and interaction between interlocutors. The present results confirm that a speaker's fluency and a listener's comprehension, can result in a positive or negative evaluation of the speaker, which in turn would impact the possibility and quality of future interactions between both groups (Lick and Johnson 337). However, though they encountered difficulty in understanding accented speech, respondents still expressed a desire to communicate with non-native speakers and to overcome the barriers to communication.

Perhaps, the accented speech of non-natives indicates to native listeners that the speaker is yet to fully acquire the native tongue, but still desires and makes the effort to communicate in the majority language. This is evident as numerous respondents acknowledged the mistreatment faced by non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent and expressed an appreciation for the efforts made by such ones to speak in the English language. However, although it can be inferred that most respondents possessed a negative attitude toward non-native accents, particularly a Spanish accent, the majority expressed a desire to communicate with such ones, citing that they sympathised with non-native speakers. Evidently, although individuals use an accent as a basis for outgroup discrimination, respondents still demonstrate an awareness of the challenges and the difficulties

associated with being an outgroup member in a given sociocultural context. As the present study did not look deep into this issue, this theory presents a basis for further study.

## **SPEECH PATTERNS AND SOCIAL CATEGORIES**

The present study shows that competence in the native language of a country is used by native speakers to determine an individual's level of education. Evidently, although one's level of English proficiency may vary<sup>2</sup>, respondents admitted to evaluating a non-native speaker's level of education on the basis of their fluency in the English language. Consequently, individuals stereotypically attribute low language competence to non-native speakers of English, as the salience of a foreign accent is used to determine the extent to which one has acquired the target language. Thus, the current investigation corroborates the findings of Lorenz et al., as respondents admitted to classifying non-native speakers who speak with an accent as having a limited educational background (77,78).

Evidently, despite acknowledging that non-native speakers may have an ample educational background, certain respondents still cited the strength of the accent and difficulties with communication as the principal indicators of a lack of education amongst non-native English speakers. Consequently, individuals who speak with a non-standard English accent are deemed to be less educated than those who have acquired native-like proficiency in the target language. Thus, individuals who speak with an accent close to the standard variety are deemed more educated than those with a strong Spanish or foreign accent.

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<sup>2</sup> Morrice et al. posits that a migrant's ability to learn a language may be impeded by the trauma of forced separation, foreign living conditions, and limited support networks (684).

The tendency to view an individual as intellectually inferior on the basis of language is a clear form of language discrimination. As such, individuals use language, that is one's accent, to form categories or profile individuals, which in turn acts as a trigger or legitimizing tool for discrimination. Evidently, this finding presents a clearer understanding of the psychological evaluation carried out by listeners on the quality of a speaker's accent and the subsequent justification of the discrimination or stereotyping of a social group (Souza et al. 618).

Contrary to Fuerte et al. who found that standard speakers of a language are more likely to make a positive impression on listeners and deemed as more attractive, kind and trustworthy, the current study found that the majority of the respondents perceived that the Spanish accent of non-native speakers gave an impression of a pleasant, friendly, humble and even at times timid personality (42). It should be mentioned that most participants who gave a positive evaluation on the speakers' personality had prior, positive interactions with non-native speakers. Furthermore, such respondents expressed sympathy for non-native speakers who find it difficult to communicate in English. Nonetheless, though few respondents negatively evaluated the non-native speakers' personality on the basis of their accent, most expressed a desire to communicate with them in English, and if within their means, in Spanish.

The majority of the respondents admitted that a Spanish accent does not elicit a physical image of the speaker, whereas few respondents associated an individual who is fair and has straight hair with a Spanish accent. However, one can postulate that such a response is prompted, not solely on the basis of language, or phonological differences, but instead results from brief, prior intergroup exposure. Thus, individuals presume that all individuals who speak with a Spanish accent, possess a particular phenotype, after having limited to no interaction with such speakers. One can assume that the tendency of the respondents to associate a Spanish accent with someone of Venezuelan

descent, explains the inclination of the group under investigation, to presumptuously assign typified physical traits of a Venezuelan native to all speakers of English with a Spanish accent.

Lick and Johnson posit that exposure, albeit brief, modifies an individual's perception and leads one to categorise individuals into particular social groups, which in turn contributes to intergroup biases (336). The findings support this theory as respondents who had limited interactions with non-native speakers with a Spanish accent presented a stereotypical image of a Venezuelan native, whereas, individuals who had regular interactions with such ones admit that the physical image may vary.

## **LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION AND COMMUNICATION**

Despite the biases and stereotypes associated with a non-native accent, the majority of individuals demonstrate an awareness of the social significance of an accent in Trinidad's socio-linguistic context. Although the respondents appear to possess stereotypical and exclusionary beliefs about Spanish accents, most admitted that the cognizance of the difficulties faced by individuals who possess such an accent, propels them to overcome communicative barriers and interact with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent. Clearly, an accent acts, not only as a trigger for discrimination, but as an indication of the socio-communicative challenges faced by a linguistic minority. However, numerous individuals who expressed a desire to communicate with non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent stated that they preferred to do so in the mother tongue of the non-native speaker, which would lead to improved intergroup relations<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, one can assume that the communicative barriers presented by accented speech does act as an obstacle to effective communication, as respondents, that is those who have knowledge of the

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<sup>3</sup> Language learning leads to the formation of social bridges as learners are presented with the opportunity to share common experiences, gain support and extend social networks (Ager and Strang 177, Morrice et al. 688)

language, opt to speak in Spanish for ease of communication. Furthermore, communication in English with non-native speakers was deemed to be time-consuming and elicited reluctance on the part of native speakers to communicate with non-native speakers. Thus, one can posit that accented speech does lead to a disconnect between interlocutors as it hinders the flow of thoughts, ideas and expressions and requires effort on the part of both parties for the effective transmission of messages.

Therefore, non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent are stereotyped on the basis of their accent, in terms of their level of education, personality and physical appearance. Thus, the present study shows that language discrimination is an issue in the present sociolinguistic context, as individuals stereotype non-native speakers of English on the basis of their accent and this in turn has significant implications on the frequency and quality of interactions amongst natives and non-natives. The following chapter presents a summary of the study and details the limitations of the present study as well as suggestions and recommendations for future research.

## CONCLUSION

Language is a significant tool that is used by individuals to formulate perceptions and attitudes towards various groups in society. Trinidad's sociolinguistic profile has been expanded by the introduction of Spanish speakers who are acquiring or have acquired the majority language, English. The present study aimed to investigate the impact of language discrimination on the perceptions formed about non-native speakers and intergroup communication.

Thus, upon investigating language discrimination and emerging language attitudes amongst a select group of individuals, the present study found that an accent is used by native speakers to determine a speaker's belongingness in a given society. Evidently, a non-native accent is associated with 'foreignness'. Furthermore, upon hearing a Spanish accent, individuals prematurely deem an individual with a Spanish accent as being a Venezuelan native, a migrant or an illegal resident. These findings aptly demonstrate the social meaning conveyed by an accent to native speakers, as an accent established the basis for native speakers to presuppose on a speaker's nativeness and nationality.

Moreover, as a result of an accent's ability to indicate out-group membership, most individuals possess a negative attitude towards speakers of English with a Spanish accent. Nonetheless, this negative attitude toward the accent has a minimal impact on native-speakers desire to communicate with non-native speakers. Instead, the difficulties of understanding a Spanish accent acts as a greater hindrance to communication, as the time consuming nature of communication and the lack of comprehension deters native speakers from future interactions. Nevertheless, the sample expressed a desire to communicate with non-native speakers, but in their native language, Spanish.

Thus, it is worth investigating the policies and efforts that are in place to assist Trinidadians in acquiring Spanish as a second language.

Although one's competency in the majority language is used as a tool for measuring a non-native speaker's level of education, one's accent is not a successful indication of an individual's academic background. This practice may overshadow the academic accomplishments of non-native speakers of English, as the salience of an individual's accent may lead to the presumption that an individual is not well educated, while the absence of such may lead to an overestimation of the educational accomplishments of a non-native speaker. Thus, one cannot make an accurate assessment of an individual's educational level solely on the basis of their accent. Furthermore, a Spanish accent elicits a positive evaluation from native listeners, as non-native speakers with a Spanish accent are deemed friendly and outgoing. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that such an evaluation may stem from prior, brief intergroup contact with non-native speakers. Likewise, a Spanish accent evokes stereotypical physical features of a Venezuelan native, as the assessment of an individual's physical image and personality, is often informed by prior contact with members of a given social group.

The researcher was able to ascertain the ideologies and emerging attitudes possessed by a group of Trinidadians towards non-native speakers of English with a Spanish accent. However, due to time constraints, the data collected was limited and cannot be generalized to the entire population. Nevertheless, the present research establishes a solid foundation for further investigation into the language attitudes and ideologies possessed in the general context of Trinidad, so as to ascertain on a psychological level, the emotive and cognitive response to hearing a Spanish accent and its impact on intergroup relationships.

Although the study informs the attitudes of Trinidadian speakers, and reveals the common prejudiced and stereotypical ideas that exist in Trinidadian society, it can be expanded by analysing

the linguistic factors which impedes the understanding and comprehension of a non-native speaker. Nonetheless, the investigation has found that an accent plays a significant role in intergroup relations, that is the communicative interactions amongst minority and majority groups in Trinidadian society. Moreover, it has revealed that communication barriers created by an accent has a more significant role to play in intergroup communication, than the negative attitudes towards an accent.

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## APPENDIX A

1. In your perspective, what is an accent?
2. What is the first thing that comes to your mind, when you hear an accent?
3. What is your perspective on a Spanish accent?
4. Have you ever spoken with someone with a Spanish accent? Why or why not?- What has your experience been like? Can you remember a specific interaction that stand out to you?
5. Do you understand those who speak English with a Spanish accent ?
6. Can individuals who speak Spanish, speak English well? Why or why not?
7. What does a Spanish accent reveal about: an individual's educational level?
8. What does a Spanish accent reveal about: an individual's personality?
9. What does a Spanish accent reveal about: an individual's physical image?
10. What impact does hearing a Spanish accent have on your desire to communicate with its speaker? Explain.

Appendix A: A sample of the questions used by the researcher to conduct interviews.

