

**Exploring Linguistic Diversity: Attitudes Towards Accents at UC Davis and  
Their Impact on Cross-Cultural Communication**

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March 13, 2024

## **Exploring Linguistic Diversity: Attitudes Towards Accents at UC Davis and Their Impact on Cross-Cultural Communication**

Accents play a significant role in shaping interpersonal and cross-cultural interactions, especially in diverse academic settings. The linguistic landscape of universities in the United States is increasingly diverse, reflecting a multitude of accents and languages. This paper aims to investigate the prevailing attitudes towards different accents among undergraduates at the University of California, Davis (UC Davis). By integrating primary survey data and secondary research, this study seeks to understand the impact of these attitudes on the experiences of non-native English speakers and to explore strategies for enhancing cross-cultural communication.

### **Research Question**

What are the prevailing attitudes at UC Davis towards different accents on campus, and how do UC Davis undergraduates affect the experiences of non-native English speakers in cross-cultural interactions?

### **Methodology**

This study primarily relies on a survey conducted at UC Davis, involving 21 undergraduate participants representing various academic years. The survey consisted of questions related to the frequency of encountering different accents, personal reactions to these accents, perceptions of the impact of accents on academic and social experiences, awareness of challenges faced by non-native English speakers, and

witnessed or experienced situations where accents influenced interactions. There are total 7 questions in the survey. The first one is demographic question, assaying the current academic year of study they are. The second question to the sixth question are gathering participant's experience on frequency of meeting accent, the level of influence from accent in their life, and their attitudes toward accent. The final question is voting the suggestion for cross-cultural interaction. The purpose of this survey is to gather firsthand information from UC Davis undergraduates about their perceptions, experiences, and suggestions related to linguistic diversity and cultural sensitivity on campus. Additionally, the paper incorporates insights from five scholarly articles focusing on language attitudes, accent perception, and their implications in higher education settings to contextualize and deepen the analysis.

### **Literature Review**

The literature on language attitudes and accent perceptions provides essential context for understanding the dynamics at UC Davis. The great academic atmosphere of UC Davis campus is developed by the diverse international exchange of students from all over the world, cross-interaction has brought benefits into our life, but also makes trouble of anxiety in interpersonal communication. The biggest root cause is accents. Accent is originally a very normal characteristic, but because the accent is different from place to place, it leads to a series of feelings of lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, and frustration in interpersonal communication. So does accent really matter affect the quality of communication between people and what are the attitudes

from UC Davis students toward different accents from the worldwide.

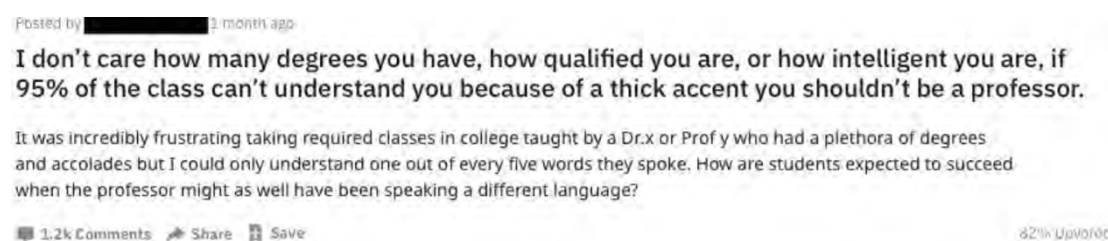
There is no exact standard form of English, different ways of speaking English are all proper for communication, language should be a chance to build relationship between people instead of using to distinguish the distance between people. Foreign accents in English should not be negatively evaluate and the people who speaks with accents should not be treated in discrimination, different accents all symbolize the characteristics and ethnicity of their countries. There are no defect exists in speaking English, the so-called “defects” in your speaking word that points from others are unique characteristics (Sivera, 2017). There is no world standard English be proved by Sivera from “Attitudes toward Accents” which she found about that different English speaker countries are consciously preserve their native linguistic identity. Accents be marked as “defects” in language, but accent is influenced by a person’s upbringing and age, there is a quote from Sivera, “The degree to which a person can substitute one accent for another is severely dependent upon the age at which the second language is learned.” She had used her personal experience to show that age of learning second language is affecting the accent because of the commitment, intelligence, and motivation, it is impossible to meet the expectation as speaking like a native English speaker. Therefore, commenting that someone’s accented English is incorrect which is an act of disrespect toward others’ culture, also it will cause the social discrimination to happen.

The study that conducted by Özer (2022) reveals a strong presence of standard language ideology, against non-native English speakers in academic settings. Özer

collect 334 comments for corpus linguistic and discourse analysis from a post (Figure 1) that was published on Reddit on January 13, 2019. This post has many negative responses to faculty accents, students blaming their academic difficulties on faculty accents, even prejudicially evaluate those classes taught by accented teachers. From the analyzed data, it is clear to see that “Promoting linguistic homogeneity and a monolingual worldview, this ideology manifested the imposition of linguistic purism by means of discouraging variation and diversity in language” (Özer, 2022, p. 43), resulting in the stigmatization of linguistic diversity. Such attitudes significantly impact the experiences of non-native English speakers, as they often face challenges in communication and are subjected to unfair judgments based on their accent.

### Figure 1

#### *The Title of the Post from Reddit*



In educational settings, negative perceptions of accentedness might lead to non-native speakers, including faculty and students, feeling marginalized and undervalued. Özer's (2022) research emphasized that greater awareness and acceptance of linguistic diversity within higher education is important task in school, in order to create a high quality of cross-communication environment. The research suggests that if we

appreciate and understand the variety of accents as a normal and important part of language, we can create a more welcoming and fairer environment in education. By establishing the friendly atmosphere for variety ways of speaking, everyone can feel more included and respected in school settings. This shift in perspective is beneficial to student to be prepared toward globalization for their future life.

A study which involved evaluating speakers of different English varieties by Torstensson (2010) from “Judging the Immigrant: Accents and Attitudes” showed that all listener nationality groups preferred the American English voices, indicating a shift away from the British English accent as the most favored variant. Those phenomena that showing the preference for a specific accent than others indicate the serious situation about ethnic prejudices and stereotypes in current society. In other words, the status of some languages varieties is higher than others, the evaluation of the status is contributed from the result of a person's experience, knowledge learning and the community she or he grew up. Additionally, an experiment that carried out by Torstensson (2010), which recorded in “Judging the Immigrant: Accents and Attitudes”, is about the evaluation of different English speakers by people who are speaking native Danish. This experiment underlined that stereotype has a significant role playing in the judgement of a person's characteristic traits, also highlighted that accents convey more content than just only transmitting linguistic message. Studies like Özer's (2022) “You’ve Gotta Change Your Accent” and Torstensson's (2010) “Judging the Immigrant” highlight the complex interplay between language ideologies and attitudes toward accented speech. These findings support that non-native English speakers’ cross-

cultural interaction experience will be significantly affected by their undergraduate academic life, which means that the attitude of accents from other undergraduates will have impacts on their experiences, reflecting the problems of societal biases and stereotypes, also revealing that the results of discriminatory practices are shaped by the tendency to view accent as the barriers in academic settings.

The evaluation of non-standard speakers will be an important part of getting deeper analysis in problems of attitude toward accent and accent's impacts. There is discovery about the attitudes and stereotypes on language varieties can be changed by some factors like intergroup relations and institutional support. By reading Acheme's (2018) article, I noticed that the increase in globalization has led to more frequent exposure and interpersonal contact with non-standard accented speakers, fostering greater familiarity and acceptance of such accents. This familiarity enhances intelligibility, which in turn draws more positive attitudes and affective responses towards these accents. The research (Acheme, 2018) from "The Evaluation of Non-standard Accented English: An Intergroup Perspective on Language Attitudes" showed that individuals with high social identity rated Indian and Nigerian accents higher in terms of status, solidarity, and dynamism than Standard American English or Nigerian speakers, a trend that diverges from the "shared identity" concept of social identity theory. The growing diversity on campus, with an increasing number of international students, may indicate institutional support for non-standard accented speakers, possibly contributing to evolving attitudes toward these accents.

Accents play a significant role in shaping individual and group identities. Native

accents, typically associated with dominant languages, often enjoy higher social status, while non-native accents, often linked to minority cultures, might face prejudice and discrimination, this is what I obtained from analyzing “Language Attitudes and Multilingualism: Perceptions of Native and Non-Native Accents in Multilingual Communities” by Mona A. Alshihry (2023). However, the dynamics can differ in multilingual settings like UC Davis. As I mentioned before, the attitudes towards accents can be influenced by factors like intergroup relations, institutional support, and the diversity of the student group. Therefore, non-native English speakers might be affected by these evolving language attitudes for their experience of cross-cultural interaction at UC Davis.

### **Findings & Discussion**

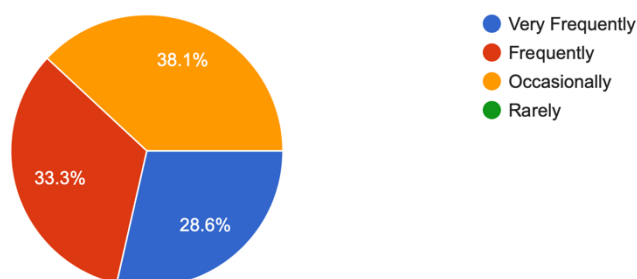
The attitudes toward accent have brought many inconvenient impacts into cross-cultural interaction that negatively affect the quality and smoothness of global communication. This survey holds evidence from UC Davis students which helps to verify that there is tendency to language variety has spread out in worldwide and non-native speakers have encounter accent problem in academic and societal environment. There are 21 undergraduate students (all are non-native English speaker) in total filled the survey, a demographic question collects their information about what academic year they currently in, which could be a way to assume how many years they have cross-cultural interaction experience: 1 Freshmen, 10 Sophomores, 8 Juniors and 2 Seniors. Diverse representation of students provides a broad perspective on the issue, the



majority is contributed from sophomores and juniors.

How frequently do you encounter different accents in your daily life at UC Davis?

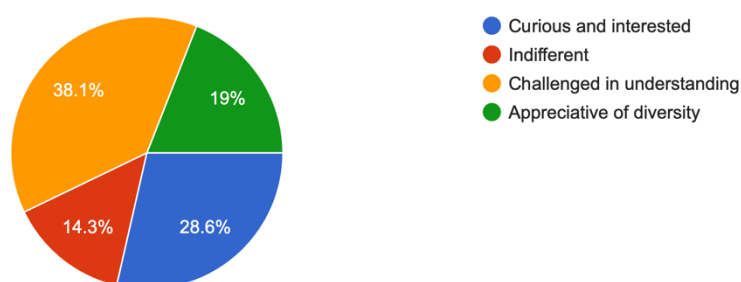
21 responses



Secondly, asking their experience with accents and their personal perceptions and attitudes towards accents. To capture a range of frequencies on encountering with different accents and aim to cover a range of potential reactions, providing a comprehensive view of the students' experiences. A significant portion about 33.3% of the participants reported they frequently encounter with different accents, indicating UC Davis has a linguistically diverse campus environment. By analyzing the varied

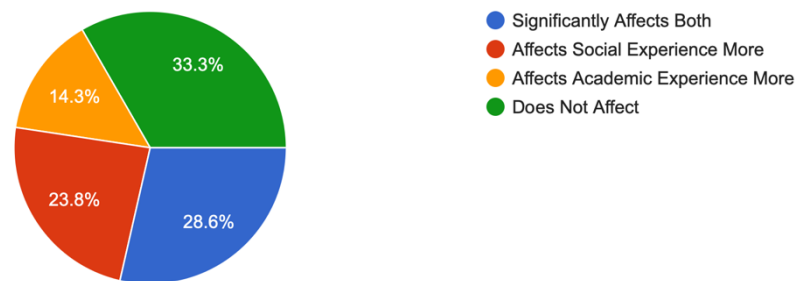
How do you feel when you hear an accent different from your own?

21 responses



reactions to different accents, I got a notable proportion about 38.1% of all participants expressed that they have challenge in understanding different accents, representing the potential communication barriers in multi-linguistic environment.

Do you think having a certain type of accent affects one's academic or social experience at UC Davis  
21 responses



To get deeper analysis into the cross-cultural communication experience of UC Davis students, there are questions asking more details about the participants' perception, which is to capture a spectrum of opinions between academic and social sphere. From the response of the survey, it shows that there are many different feelings on accent affects academic and social experience or not, I think this is because of all participants' unique experience in their academic and social situation. Depends on different things they have met in academic and social experience; they might be biased on the aspects they have more impressive in. Totally is 66.7% of 21 participants (14.3% voters reflect that accents affect academic experience more; 23.8% voters reflect that accents affect social experience more; 28.6% voters reflect that accents significantly affect both) acknowledged accents does affect both academic and social experience. This recognition which aligns with the finding of language ideologies in higher education by Özer (2022) and the study which is conducted by Acheme (2018) on language attitudes from an intergroup perspective. Also, participants are voting from a range of 4 most prevalent issues (language barrier, cultural misunderstandings, academic challenges, social inclusion) that non-native English speakers might

Are you aware of any challenges faced by non-native English speakers on campus? Select all apply.

21 responses

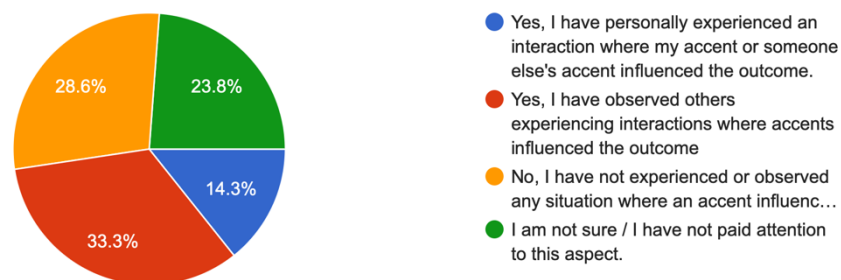


encounter on campus, to know about the aspect of cultural sensitivity and awareness. *Academic Challenge* owns the highest votes with 15 votes (71.4%) to be the most challenge one, but the number of votes for *language barrier* with 14 votes and *cultural misunderstanding* with 13 votes are close to *academic challenge*. Such data can show that the biggest source problem is came from accent, causing inconvenience in global communication to result in inefficient academic learning. These finding resonate with the Alshihry's study (2023) on multilingualism.

Lastly, gathering their specific personal experiences and observations to figure out some suggestions for solving various aspects of challenges faced by non-native English speakers based on broader information of different experiences all participants have.

Have you witnessed or experienced situations where an accent influenced a social or academic interaction?

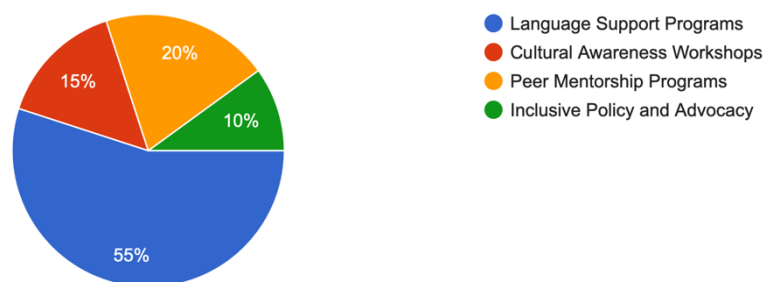
21 responses



There is a notable number of participants have either experienced or observed interactions that influenced by accents, it is totally 47.6% of all participants (33.3% have observed, 14.3% have experienced). This fact underscores that the linguistic diversity on campus would have real-world implications. The suggestions from these

How do you think UC Davis can improve the experiences of non-native English speakers in cross-cultural interactions?

20 responses



participants for improving experiences of non-native English speakers in UC Davis are critical, because they are the people who have leaning experience in UC Davis campus, so their advices are of reference value. 55% of the participants voted for language support program, which they thought this might be a most effective method to make non-native English speakers' experience better in UC Davis. These suggestion options match with the insights from Torstensson (2010) on the significance of addressing linguistic attitudes for better social integration.

The result of this survey reveals that the various attitudes toward accents from the undergraduates in UC Davis. The frequency of encountering accents means UC Davis' s diversity of student body, there is high percentages of respondents consider that accent will significantly affect academic and social experience at the polls, which reflects boarder societal attitudes toward linguistic diversity. These finding has related with the

reviewed literature that highlights the complexity of language attitudes in academic environment.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, this study reflects broader themes in language attitude research through revealing the spectrum of attitudes toward accents at UC Davis. Even though there is a good trend that shows appreciations of linguistic diversity at UC Davis, it still has accent challenges in cross-cultural communication persisted. Meaning that UC Davis should put more targeted initiatives to perfect a more friendly cross-cultural communication environment. UC Davis can use those suggestions from the respondents as effective strategies to enhance their globalized academic atmosphere. Such initiatives can foster a more inclusive and understanding environment for non-native English speakers, ultimately enriching the educational experience for all students.

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