

Influence of Northern “you guys” and Southern “y’all” on Perceived Friendliness of Text Messages

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Introduction

Stereotypes pervade all of our interactions with others, whether we are conscious of them or not, and speech is no exception. Use of different words and phrases can indicate that a speaker belongs to a particular group, whether that group be a regional group, ethnic group, or socioeconomic group. Listeners tend to have implicit biases about how a member of that particular of said social group will act and general facets of their personality. Once these specific words are used, a listener is cued to activate those schemas through which they understand that social group. This means that their biases will now potentially shape the way that they perceive the speaker.

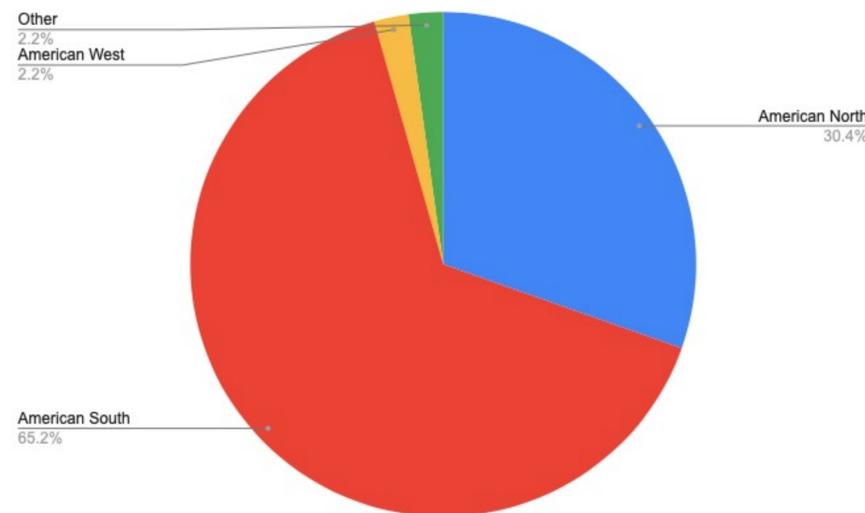
- Kinzler and DeJesus (2013) found that both Northern and Southern listeners were significantly more likely to rank the Northern accented speaker as smarter and the Southern accented speaker as nicer. This is critical because it demonstrates the people will ascribe both positive and negative stereotypes to their own social groups and the social groups of others.
- Campbell-Kibler (2008) found that linguistic variation can impact listener’s perception in varying ways from person to person, meaning that a specific linguistic cue, in this case ‘-ing’ or ‘-in’ does not always yield the same interpretation from different people even when everything else remains the same. This is especially pertinent because it shows that even beyond semi-predictable patterns of interpretations based on stereotyping can be modified by personalized experiences and moods.
- Tamminga (2016) found that ‘in’ was found to be rated as more uneducated, more casual, and less pretentious. This relates to our study as the findings show that these biases and stereotypes can be activated from read speech as well as conversational speech, which is important as our study uses text message stimuli.

We hypothesize that text messages containing the Southern word “y’all” will illicit a higher perceived friendliness ranking than texts containing the Northern phrase “you guys.”

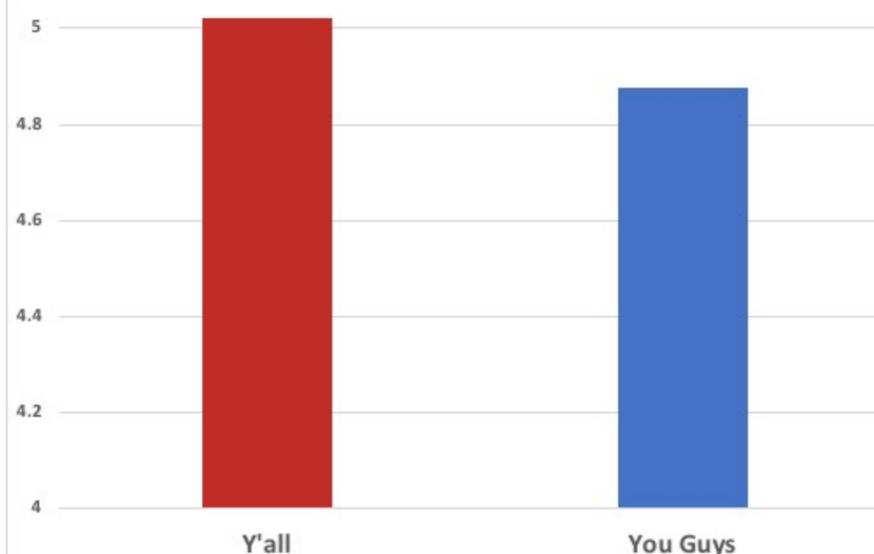
Results

Average friendliness ranking for the two conditions did not yield a significant difference.

- A Likert Scale was used for participants to rate friendliness and it was found that the “y’all” condition has a slightly higher average friendliness rating (5.02) than the “you guys” condition
- However, after analysis it was discovered that the difference between the two conditions were not significant ($p = 0.180$).



Average Friendliness Ratings of Text Messages



Discussion

Although there was a slightly higher average friendliness rating for the “y’all” condition than the “you guys” condition, there was no statistical significance. We hypothesized that we would see a meaningful difference between these two conditions and that people would implicitly associate “y’all” with friendliness more so than “you guys” when presented with text messages containing one of these conditions. We chose to focus on the words “y’all” and “you guys” since previous research only examined the larger Northern and Southern dialect as a whole. We hypothesized that the association of these two words with the dialect was strong enough to bring about the implicit stereotypes associated with the dialects.

Our non-significant results could possibly be explained by our small sample size of 46 participants or by the fact 65% were from the South. These results just indicate that further research is needed into this topic. A future direction could utilize recorded audio of sentences with the words “y’all” and “you guys” to see if auditory language changes the way people perceive friendliness when hearing these words. It would also be interesting to utilize a different method of recruitment such as Mechanical Turk to recruit people from more diverse geographical locations. There is so much more to be studied and explored in the realm of language dialect and their associated stereotypes.

References

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