



Language Bias and Discrimination — Activities

Use this hand out to extend your understanding of Franco's article "Language Bias and Discrimination" (A-Level)

Article: [Language Bias and Discrimination](#) by Marc Franco (includes audio)

Level: Basic/intermediate (A-2 — B-1 Levels)

Other materials: An [intermediate/advanced-level](#) version of the passage is also available.

Pre-Reading Activities

Thinking about the Topic

- Is one accent better than another? Discuss.
- Are people judged or treated differently because of their accent or the way they speak?

Vocabulary

Here are a few words that will appear in the text you are about to read.

- ☐ [bias](#) (noun) - a tendency to believe that some people or ideas are better than or superior to others; this belief usually results in treating some people badly or unfairly.

Examples: [Parents have a positive bias toward their own children, but they think other children are not so great.](#)

[Some people have an irrational bias against people who are different from them.](#)

- ☐ [inarticulate](#) (adjective) - not able to express ideas clearly and effectively in speech or writing.

Example: [He is very educated, but his explanation was very inarticulate. He could not find the right words to explain the topic.](#)

- ☐ [perceive](#) (verb) - to notice or become aware of something or someone by using your senses.

Example: [Many people perceive him as friendly because he always smiles.](#)

[She perceived a change in his voice when he got nervous.](#)

- ☐ [root](#) - (noun) - the part of a plant or tree that is below the ground; the place where your grandparents and great grandparents come from.

- ☐ [stutter](#) (verb) - to have a speech problem that causes you to repeat the sounds of some words.

- ☐ [unintelligent](#) (adjective) - not intelligent.



Language Bias and Discrimination

When we think of discrimination, we immediately think of racism, sexism, or religious discrimination. We usually do not think that people are discriminated against because of how they speak or because of their accents. But that does happen because people have language and accent biases. For example, some people have a speech disorder (or problem) called stuttering. If you suffer from stuttering, you repeat the beginning of some words many times. Sometimes we stutter when we get nervous, but stutterers do it even when they are calm.

Actor Emily Blunt stuttered as a child. Although she is a smart woman and a great actor, some teachers and students perceived her as unintelligent when she stuttered. This limited her early opportunities.

Consequences of Linguistic Biases

Linguistic biases have consequences. Some people have a negative linguistic bias against others. They believe that you are stupid or sound funny because you speak differently or have an accent. When you bully or make fun of others, you cause harm to them. They have low self-esteem and feel frustrated. They are afraid to speak, so they feel isolated. They can experience stress and anxiety. This shows that linguistic biases and discrimination cause problems to people's mental and physical health.

Language Variation and Linguistic Bias

English has many language varieties, for example, American English, British English, Indian English, Australian English, and so on. Even in the same country, there are regional differences. For example, in the United States people from New York, California, or Texas have different accents and use different vocabulary. Sometimes people discriminate against each other because they use these language varieties.

Some people from California or New York perceive a Southern accent as friendly but unintelligent. People from Texas perceive someone with a strong New York accent as a "gangster." Many Americans perceive someone with a Spanish accent as friendly but unintelligent and uneducated. When you perceive someone as friendly or uneducated, it does not mean that they really are friendly or uneducated.

The language variety you speak has to do with your life circumstances (for example, where you are born or where you grow up). How you speak does not have anything to do with your intelligence or personality. However, depending on the linguistic bias people have, they sometimes discriminate against others just because they sound different.



Famous Examples

Meryl Streep is a famous actor today, but people discriminated against her early in her acting career because of her New Jersey accent. Some people told her perhaps she should change her accent, but she refused because her accent is part of her identity.

Ed Sheeran had difficulties speaking when he was a child. Today he is a world-famous singer. Marilyn Monroe had difficulties pronouncing the R-sound, especially when she was nervous and under stress.

We can find many examples of people who overcome language discrimination and are successful. However, there are many others who do not have the same experience. We just do not hear about them because they are not famous.

Reading Comprehension

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage.

1. What is one type of discrimination people do not often think is discrimination?
2. What is stuttering?
 - a. A type of accent
 - b. A speech problem where people repeat sounds
 - c. A way people speak in a specific region
3. According to the passage, stutterers are not very intelligent because they cannot speak correctly.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. Why is it discrimination when someone does not get a job because of a speech problem?
5. What are some negative effects of language discrimination? (**Choose all that are correct**)
 - a. Low self-esteem
 - b. Better job opportunities
 - c. Stress and anxiety
 - d. Feeling isolated
6. What does it mean when someone has a “linguistic bias”?



7. Some people perceive a Southern accent as unintelligent because they are biased.
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. Why did some people tell Meryl Streep to change her accent?
9. What do Ed Sheeran and Marilyn Monroe have in common?
10. What is one important message about language bias?

Vocabulary Exercise

Complete the sentences using one of the words in the vocabulary words in the passage:

bias - inarticulate - perceive - root - stutter - unintelligent

1. Some people have a negative _____ against other religions and cultures.
2. Some people _____ when they are nervous or excited, which can make it difficult to communicate.
3. Julianna has Italian _____, but she cannot speak Italian because her parents spoke to her only in English when she was a child.
4. I did not have the right vocabulary words to explain my ideas, so I was very _____ in answering the question.
5. The news article had a clear _____ in favor of one of the politicians.
6. If you do not think carefully before you speak, you may say something _____.
7. People who are colorblind _____ certain colors differently.



Answer Key

Reading Comprehension

1. Language or accent discrimination.
2. b
3. b (False) — Stuttering does not mean a person is unintelligent.
4. *(answers will vary)* It is discrimination because a person can still do their job well even if they speak differently.
5. a, c, d
6. *(answers will vary)* It means judging someone unfairly based on how they speak.
7. a (True) — Because they are biased, some people wrongly connect a Southern accent with low intelligence.
8. *(answers will vary)* Because they thought her New Jersey accent would hurt her acting career.
9. *(answers will vary)* They both had speech difficulties when they were younger.
10. *(answers will vary)* People should not be judged by the way they speak because it does not show their intelligence or personality.

Vocabulary Exercise

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. bias | 5. bias |
| 2. stutter | 6. unintelligent |
| 3. roots | 7. perceive |
| 4. inarticulate | |

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