Kinder, Younger, and More Attractive: Turkish Students' Attitudes toward Standard vs. Kurdish-Accented Turkish

Foreign accents have been associated with discrimination across various migration contexts that feature bilingualism, and the matched-guise test has served as a common instrument to measure language attitudes in a number of these studies (Cavallaro and Ng 2009). In these studies, a great deal of focus has been placed on non-native accents that are associated with identifiable minority language-speaking migrant groups from given geographical spaces (Cf. Elwell et al. 1984 for a look into attitudes toward Indian English in England and Ryan & Carranza 1975 for insight into standard American speakers' attitudes toward Mexican accents in American English). In the case of Kurdish populations that have migrated to western Turkish cities, their accents index both their ethnic origins as well as their status as migrants from Turkey's Southeast. Polat’s (2007) findings that point to Kurdish university students’ attempts to reduce traces of their Kurdish accents while speaking Turkish suggest that Kurdish students’ perceive their Kurdish accents as stigmatized. The current study tests this finding empirically by using the matched guise test to investigate 86 (non-Kurdish-speaking) Turkish university students’ attitudes toward regional, Kurdish-accented Turkish. This investigation addresses popular discourse and more direct language attitude measures that indicate diminished levels of prejudice toward individual speakers.

Results show significantly more positive ratings for guises that use standard Istanbul Turkish than for Kurdish-accented Turkish on both solidarity (likeability, kindness, trustworthiness, height, and attractiveness) and status (ambition, and successfulness) scales. These findings are in line with such studies as Ryan and Carranza (1975). The strength of this effect varied, however, according to the specific regional origin of the Kurdish accent. In addition to this finding, age emerged as a significant variable: participants estimated the ages of non-standard Turkish guises to be significantly higher than those of their standard Turkish guises. Such results point to common migration scenarios in which the younger generation does not carry the accents of their parents. Its connection to language attrition requires further investigation and is the subject of an on-going study.
References:


