

Study shows how accents, gender of candidates affect hiring decisions, careers

April 25 2023, by Rob Rombouts



Samantha Hancock, professor in the DAN department of management & organizational studies, conducted the study. Credit: Faculty of Social Sciences Communications

Canada's workforce is made up of people from around the world, and many workers speak English as a second language. A new study shows that the success of workers in an organization is impacted by a combination of accents, gender stereotypes, and perceptions of ability.

Western researcher Samantha Hancock, professor in the DAN department of management & organizational studies, conducted the study with Ivona Hideg and Winny Shen, both from the Schulich School of Business at York University. Their journal article was recently published in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.

Their research examines how non-native accents may impact women in different ways than men. These effects, they say, could result in longer-term issues for workers and industries and can undermine gender equity.

Previous research has generally shown that people with non-native accents are seen as less competent. These studies had focused on the impact of such assumptions on men, or had not specified the gender of the person.

Hancock and her colleagues wanted to examine specifically how women are stereotyped and impacted by non-native accents during the [hiring process](#).

"The effect of people who speak with accents is not straightforward. People have multiple identities that impact how people perceive them," said Hancock.

The researchers used the stereotype content model which defines two fundamental dimensions of social perception—warmth and competence, predicted respectively by perceived competition and status. Those viewed as cooperative are considered warm, whereas competitive groups are seen as lacking in warmth. Additionally, those seen as occupying high-status roles are seen as competent, while those in low-status roles are perceived as less competent.

Women are generally stereotyped as being warm, and the researchers found this effect is amplified for women who spoke with non-native

accents. The researchers focused on people with Mandarin accents, as people of Chinese descent are one of the largest immigrant groups in Canada, but this may also apply to accents associated with other gender-traditional countries—such as India and the Philippines—due to beliefs that immigrant women from such countries are particularly likely to abide by [traditional gender roles](#).

"This has important implications, particularly in the Canadian workforce population," said Hancock.

In three studies, participants were provided information about [potential candidates](#) and asked to decide whether they would further consider the person for an open position within their organization. In the first study, for a part-time volunteer position within a business student society, the information consisted only of [audio recordings](#), in which some of the speakers had accents while others did not.

The second study, for a full-time, paid marketing coordinator position, included a resume along with the voice recordings. The final study included the marketing coordinator position, but varied the industry in which the position was situated—one in what's perceived as "feminine" industries (such as fashion or cosmetics) and the other in what's perceived as more "masculine" industries (such as oil and gas or manufacturing).

The authors found that, although warmth among women with non-native accents led to more favorable hiring recommendations for some roles, it reduced the success rate of these candidates in roles traditionally seen as male-dominated. These findings were consistent no matter the gender or ethnicity of the person making the hiring decision.

"Stereotypes seem to be commonly held across all groups," said Hancock. "They are pervasive and deep-rooted."

Although non-native accents may be seen as a positive for initial hiring in some circumstances, stereotypes associated with non-native accents could lead to women facing more challenges in acquiring higher-level jobs and advancing in their careers. Hancock said this could be applied for roles where competence is viewed as an asset, and warmth as a liability, such as higher-level leadership roles.

"What could be seen as positive— isn't actually that positive," said Hancock. "These candidates won't necessarily progress into leadership positions or won't move into roles seen as prototypically masculine."

Understanding the role of stereotypes, and how accents can impact our assumptions about people is an important first step, said Hancock.

"These higher perceptions of warmth ultimately undermine [gender equity](#), and push women into lower pay or prestige jobs or industries," she said. "There are downstream implications. If women are pigeon-holed into feminine positions and industries, gender-based occupational segregation occurs. When they do try to branch out, the stereotypes aren't congruent and people will see women as a poor fit with a wider range of roles."

More information: Ivona Hideg et al, Women With Mandarin Accent in the Canadian English-Speaking Hiring Context: Can Evaluations of Warmth Undermine Gender Equity?, *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/03616843231165475](https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843231165475)

Provided by University of Western Ontario

Citation: Study shows how accents, gender of candidates affect hiring decisions, careers (2023, April 25) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-04-accent-gender-candidates->

[affect-hiring.html](#)

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.