Ethnolinguistic Orientation and Language Variation:

Measuring and Archiving

Ethnolinguistic Vitality, Attitudes and Identity

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Sociolinguists and social psychologists have long been interested in how language variation is associated with social psychological variables, including people’s beliefs about and attitudes towards languages and their speakers, as well as their feelings of affiliation with their own ethnolinguistic group, and there is a growing interest in archiving such information along with sociolinguistic data for use by other researchers. With this end in mind, we suggest some brief, quantitative indices that might be appropriate and useful for documenting social psychological variables for contemporary and future purposes. The first construct considered is ethnolinguistic vitality, which refers to those characteristics that make a language group likely to behave as an active collective entity in language contact situations. The second is language attitudes, which refers to the feelings and beliefs that people hold with regards to their own and others’ languages and the associated language community/ies. The third is ethnolinguistic identity, which refers to the manner and extent to which individuals define themselves as members of an ethnolinguistic group. Although we maintain that more extensive, detailed coding should be included in sociolinguistic archives, we suggest that these three sets of indices should be minimally included in an assessment battery to assess a speaker’s ethnolinguistic orientation.
1. Introduction

For many reasons, sociolinguists, social psychologists, and other social scientists interested in language variation have become increasingly concerned about improving the accessibility and longevity of their research data. There are several good reasons for archiving social and linguistic data, including the possibility of reanalyzing and/or extending the analyses of data in published reports; replicating important findings to determine their consistency across diverse social contexts; and facilitating systematic reviews and meta-analyses of existing studies. As well, in order to examine the temporal dynamics of socio-cultural and linguistic changes, data must necessarily be archived for use in longitudinal and repeated cross-sectional studies. Perhaps in recognition of such potentially useful research purposes, there has arisen some institutional pressure to archive data, as outlined in the policies of research funding agencies, including the U.S. National Science Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. As discussed in the introduction to this issue, their guidelines stipulate that the data collected with funds from these organizations should be made available to researchers other than those who collected the data.

This paper discusses the kinds of variables that researchers might consider including if they wish to create or use corpora that are annotated for ethnolinguistic orientation, including speakers’ beliefs, attitudes and identities vis-à-vis their own and other language communities. It is a challenge to record these aspects of ethnicity in a manner that captures their varied distribution in a community and their dynamics over time. As Hall-Lew and Wong (this issue) point out, participants do not necessarily define constructs in a manner similar the researcher,
and so the researcher must clarify the participants’ meaning. Moreover, these socio-psychological phenomena are neither constant nor homogenous within a group, and every speaker may have multiple, variable beliefs, attitudes and identities which are intersecting and potentially negotiated throughout a given recording. Ideally we would use the most extensive and detailed coding possible to “justify any use of broad labels, to recognize that speakers will differ in their orientation to those labels, and to recognize that one speaker’s orientation may shift over the course of a single interaction” (Hall-Lew & Wong, this issue: 16). Tagliamonte (this issue) provides an overview of just how wide ranging the contextual information necessary for predicting language behavior could be.

We take the perspective that more information is better than less, and indeed necessary, but we still need to specify what must be minimally included in our corpora. This is important because there may be limits to the capacity of an archive, and even if not, there are likely limits to the amount of information that any given researcher can synthesize. Moreover, even with extensive coding, it is not always possible to forecast everything that might be relevant to other researchers. Thus, we must decide on some variables that are likely to be of broad interest over a long period of time, and develop “observation-level metadata, [including] standard names and definitions for a wide variety of demographic and situational factors, standardized ways of expressing the possible values for those factors and standardized formats for encoding the association of factors with values” (Simons, this issue: 5). We recognize that a minimal set of indices is necessarily reductive, but all analysis of data derived from natural speech samples requires abstracting from the original speech event, such that some information is lost in the process (Kendall, 2008). This is particularly true of quantitative data
coding, in which beliefs, attitudes, and identities are cast as a restricted set of statements or
categories with which participants agree or disagree on some numeric scale. Nonetheless, we
focus our discussion on quantitative indices of beliefs, attitudes and identities because they can
concisely document variables of interest and they lend themselves well to statistical analysis,
two qualities that might be useful in comparative studies. As Soukup (2012) points out, the
kinds of generalities that quantitative data analyses provide can be useful as long as
constructionist considerations are taken into account. We hold the optimistic assumption that
after at least 40 years of studying language variation and its link to socio-psychological
variables, scholars have established some shared understanding of what might be important
themes that will likely to continue to be of interest in the longer run. We also expect that the
information provided by these few, brief indices would be supplemented by other information,
both qualitative and quantitative (in the spirit of “maximal coding”; Hall-Lew and Wong, this
issue: 7) and by the original research reports where an extended discussion of the data can be
found. Where possible new and original research reports could be further supplemented by
discussions with the original researcher(s) to better understand the intent and context in which
the data were collected. This triangulation would help to situate analysts’ formal categories and
explanations in more specific situated practices.

Figure 1 portrays three constructs that social scientists have used to analyze the relation
between speakers’ social psychological world and language behavior. We refer to this
combination of loosely interrelated variables as a speaker’s ethnolinguistic orientation, that is,
the degree to which a speaker references, is influenced by, and actively engages in a particular
ethnolinguistic group (cf. Nagy et al, in press). Ethnolinguistic orientation includes multiple
aspects, such as beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviours, and we will focus specifically on beliefs regarding a group’s ethnolinguistic vitality, language attitudes, and ethnolinguistic identity. Each of these categories of variables has received considerable research attention over the past 4 decades because they are hypothesized to be important predictors of language behaviour.

Figure 1: The Ethnolinguistic Orientation-Language Use Triangle

2. Subjective ethnolinguistic vitality

Ethnolinguistic vitality (ELV) was developed by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) as a framework to systematically describe the socio-structural relations between language groups in contact, and to explain how this socio-structural context is related to language behavior (Johnson, Giles, & Bourhis, 1983; Harwood, Giles, and Bourhis, 1994). ELV is defined as “that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in an intergroup situation” (Giles et al., 1997, p. 308). In order for a language group to survive and actively thrive, it must have strength across three facets. First, it must have strong demographic representation, in terms of the number of speakers, the direction and rate of change in those numbers (e.g., births, migration, exogamy), and the distribution of speakers in a territory. Second, it must evidence high status, economically, historically and socio-politically, both within and outside
the territory. Third, it must have formal and informal institutionalized support, in education, government, industry, religion, mass media, and other sociocultural institutions. Reasonably objective indices of these aspects of ELV can be obtained through archival and ethnographic work (e.g., censuses, media analyses, policy reviews, etc.; see Kindell and Lewis, 2000, and McEntee-Atalianis, 2011, for in-depth discussions of ELV assessment).

Johnson, Giles and Bourhis (1983) argued that subjective perceptions of ethnolinguistic vitality (SELV) mediate the relation between objective ELV and communicative competence and language use, and ultimately language loss, maintenance and acquisition. They developed the Subjective Vitality Questionnaire (SVQ) to assess perceptions of the three components proposed by Giles et al. (1977). In general, the internal consistency of the SVQ items are high, suggesting that the items tap a common construct. Attempts to validate the distinctiveness of the status, institutional support, and demographic representation, however, indicate that subjective perceptions do not correspond neatly with the theoretical distinction between these three factors. Some have found support for one or two of these dimensions, and/or found that additional dimensions were necessary (e.g., Giles, Rosenthal, and Young, 1985; Currie and Hogg, 1994; Kraemer, Olshtain, and Badier, 1994, Allard and Landry, 1984, 1994; Clément 1986; Hogg, D’Agata, and Abrams, 1989). In an effort to provide a “definitive” study to validate the SVQ, Abrams, Barker and Giles (2009) examined Asian American, African American and Hispanic Americans’ perceptions of the vitality of Caucasians, African Americans and Hispanic Americans in the United States. They found that the hypothesized three-factor structure could not be confirmed, as many items did not define their hypothesized dimension or defined multiple dimensions. They concluded that “these SVQ items were not measuring discrete latent
variables but essentially provided a unidimensional measure of overall vitality perceptions” (p. 65).

Given that this popular measure of SVQ seems to assess speakers’ general sense of vitality, and keeping in mind the present goal of identifying a brief but valid measure for SELV beliefs, one might wonder if a smaller set of items could adequately assess SVQ. Abrams and her colleagues (2009, p. 155) report that two items “may well hold the key to obtaining an overall sense of perceptions of group vitality”. These highly intercorrelated items asked about the perceptions of group strength in the present and in the future, and correspond to items developed by Bourhis et al. (1981) for their Australian study that originally stated “How strong and active do you feel the following groups are in Melbourne” (p. 154) and “How strong and active do you feel the following groups will be 20 to 30 years from now?” (p. 155). This finding would suggest that a brief index of subjective ELV should at least include these two items (adapted to the appropriate ethnolinguistic context).

There are two additional points to keep in mind. First, the original version of the SVQ queried participants’ perceptions of a targeted ethnolinguistic group (usually the participant’s heritage group) and another relevant ethnolinguistic group (often one of higher vitality). Because participants must consider both groups together, the information gleaned from this instrument is inherently relative; it tells us the vitality of one group compared to another. It would seem that such a format would make more salient any intergroup issues between the two groups. If only the target group were assessed or if the groups were assessed separately, respondents might be less likely to reflect on the groups’ relative vitality. In other words, the comparative perspective used in the SVQ might prime intergroup concerns, such as
competitiveness or threat. It might be, then, that different assessment approaches result in
different relations between SELV and other variables. If SELV indices are recorded separately
for each group (ideally the ingroup language before other languages; see Wänke and Schwarz,
1997; Schwarz, 2014 for a discussion of order effects), then it would possible to examine each
group separately or to derive a difference or ratio score to index the vitality of one group vis-à-
vis the other group, as best suits the research purposes. However researchers decide to
proceed, they need to be clear about the how this index was presented to participants.

A second point is that the relation between ELV and language behavior are posited to be
indirect and/or supported by a number of other factors. A variety of mediators and moderators
of this relation have been forwarded, including the individual’s network of linguistic contacts
(Allard and Landry, 1994), identification (Hogg and Rigoli, 1996), dissonance or perceived threat
between groups (Ehala, 2011), motivation (Karan, 2000, 2011), and the extent to which
language choices are self-determined (Landry, Allard and Deveau, 2007), among others. In one
of the more elaborated models of the relations between ethnolinguistic vitality and language
behavior, Allard and Landry (1986, 1994) claim that objective indicators of ELV are linked to
SELV beliefs through each person’s network of linguistic contacts. One’s network is also argued
to be the most proximal predictor of language competence and use. Support for these claims
has been mixed. For example, Hogg and Rigoli (1996) found the network of linguistic contacts
did not predict language behaviour, but societal-level indices of language support (e.g.,
education, mass media) and identification did. Vincze and Harwood (2013) found that a
person’s network is an important mediator of objective and subjective ELV only in localities
where the ethnolinguistic ingroup is the local majority. They suggest that, in minority contexts,
the ingroup network is not relevant because people are well aware of the outgroup’s higher
status. In sum, although each of these variables is assumed to be important, it is not altogether
clear how they relate to each other in a broader system.

Other variables have been suggested to be important in such an analysis. Ehala (2010)
maintains that the ability of a language group to sustain itself depends not only on members’
assessments of their group’s status relative to other groups, but also on their perceptions of
discordance between groups, the openness of their social networks to people outside their
ingroup, and their commitment to the heritage language. Karan (2000, 2011) argues that
people’s language choices are affected not only by their SELV perceptions, but also by their
motives to use styles that will best serve their personal interests. In a recent revision of their
model, Landry et al. (2007, 2013) suggest that group members’ SELV combined with a strong
political consciousness and the sense that they are the agents of their language choices predict
ethnolinguistic identity. In turn, SELV, identity, and the feelings that one is autonomous,
competent and connected with members of an ethnolinguistic group predict the motivation to
use that language and linguistic competencies, and ultimately language use. If a researcher
were interested in understanding how these variables (and others) and their interrelations
develop over time, it would be necessary to assess these diverse variables. However, if the
researcher’s main objective in compiling ELV indices is the descriptive documentation of the
sociostructural context within which speech samples are taken, it might be sufficient to assess a
brief index of the participants’ SELV for all relevant groups, along with some objective ELV
indices (including census data on the distribution of a target language communities in a
particular area, etc.).
3. Language attitudes

Language attitudes refer to positive or negative evaluations of a language and/or its speaker. For over 60 years, sociolinguists and social psychologists have been trying to understand why and how people judge speech styles and speakers, and the conditions and processes by which attitudes predict language behavior. Beginning with Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum’s (1960) matched guise study, the general premise of this research has been that speech styles elicit cognitive representations of particular social groups which in turn lead to particular kinds of stereotyped judgments (Ryan, Hewstone and Giles, 1984; Giles and Billings 2004). Ryan and Giles (1982) posited that evaluations can be made along at least two dimensions, status and solidarity; these two dimensions have long been suggested to be the primary dimensions of interpersonal relations (Brown, 1965; cited in Bradac, 1990; see also Fiske, Cuddy and Glick, 2007). Status refers to characteristics such as intelligence, confidence and ambition. Solidarity refers to social attractiveness traits that include friendliness, sociability and likeability. An evaluator might perceive a group to be high (or low) on both dimensions, or high on one dimension but not the other.

There is some ambiguity about the sociostructural circumstances that predict patterns of attitudes. Generally, majority groups with high socioeconomic status and urban speech styles are regarded as having greater status by both members of the majority and minority groups. The conditions precipitating solidarity judgments are less clear. In their review, Bourhis and Maass (2005, p. 1590) claimed that “the general findings from a large number of language stereotype studies ... show that the in-group accent or language variety is evaluated more
favourably on solidarity dimensions, while the out-group speech variety is upgraded on status
traits if the out-group accent or language is used by a ruling elite or dominant majority”.
Elsewhere, Giles and Marlow (2011, p. 166) maintain that “those who speak nonstandard
varieties are upgraded on traits of social attractiveness (or benevolence) and hence viewed as
more friendly, generous, and likeable than their standard speaking counterparts”. A recent
meta-analysis of twenty studies done by Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilbert, and Giles (2012)
found that while standard-accented speakers are rated higher on solidarity than nonstandard-
accented speakers overall, a number of studies found the opposite pattern, where
nonstandard-accented speakers are rated higher in solidarity. Hence, it is would seem that
either the ingroup or the lower status group could be perceived more positively on solidarity
traits (than the outgroup or the majority group, respectively).

Clearly more work is needed to specify the conditions that lead to different attitudinal
patterns. In their early writings, Ryan, Giles and Sebastian (1982) suggested that two
sociostructural determinants underlay the development and expression of language attitudes,
including standardization (i.e. “a set of norms defining correct usage has been codified and
accepted within a speech community”; p. 3) and vitality (i.e, “the number and importance of
the functions served by the variety”; p. 4). Elsewhere, Cargile and Giles (1998) suggested that
the degree of competitiveness between groups with relatively equal status might predict
whether groups are down-graded on solidarity items. Perhaps future analysts will find some
utility in the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) proposed by Fiske, Cuddy, Glick and Xu (2002).
Similar to the dimensions of status and solidarity, the SCM differentiates between dimensions
concerning the attitude target’s competence (e.g., intelligent, competent, capable, efficient,
skillful and confident) and warmth (e.g., tolerant, warm, good natured, sincere, friendly, well-intentioned, trustworthy). They present evidence that competence is predicted by the status of the group under consideration (similar to notions of vitality), and warmth by the degree of intergroup competitiveness (similar to Cargile and Giles’ (1998) proposal and Ehala’s (2010) notion of discordance).

In sum, language attitudes are theorized to play a central role in how people interact with speakers of other language varieties. Attitudes can be assessed through questionnaire and interview survey methods, through matched or verbal guise experimental techniques, or through ethnographic and archival studies, and it would seem possible in all of these approaches to note participants’ evaluations of the competence and warmth of the target language groups. (See Garrett, 2010; Giles and Rakic, in press, for review). In addition to these two minimal assessments of attitudes towards a language group, researchers might consider including some of the sociostructural dimensions discussed with regards to SELV, including assessments of participants’ perceptions of the groups’ status (i.e., SELV) and competitiveness (i.e. the perceptions that the group does not challenge the status quo nor contribute to intergroup discordance), because these might usefully predict how warm and competent members of a language group are perceived to be.

Ethnolinguistic identity

The third point of the ethnolinguistic orientation triangle is ethnolinguistic identity, which refers to people’s thoughts and feelings about their membership in a group that is defined in terms of a shared ethnolinguistic background. In their comprehensive review of the psychological research on collective identity, Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) concluded that
identity is a multi-faceted phenomenon, including self-categorization, self- and collective evaluation, importance or centrality of the identity to the self, feelings of attachment to the identity and/or group and a sense of interdependence among group members, social embeddedness, considerations of its content and meaning, and behavioral involvement. For the purposes of the present discussion of what facets of identity might be most important to document for archival purposes, I will only focus on aspects that were developed with language and communication processes in mind. (See Noels (in press) for an extended discussion of psychological approaches to ethnolinguistic identity and possible links with language use and variation.)

The notion of identity that is the basis of many prominent social psychological theories of language behaviour, including Communication Accommodation Theory and Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (Sachdev, Giles and Pauwels, 2012; Giles and Gasiorek, in press), is based on social identity theory. Tajfel (1981, p. 255) defines social identity as “that part of the individuals’ self-concept that derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership”. This definition is reflected in social identity indices such as Cameron’s (2004) instrument, which assesses (1) the centrality or importance of the identity to one’s sense of self (e.g., “I often think about the fact that I am a member of my ethnic group”); (2) affect, or one’s sense of esteem associated with this membership (e.g., “Generally, I feel good when I think about myself as a member of my ethnic group”); and (3) ingroup ties or a sense of connectedness to the ethnic group (e.g., “I have a lot in common with other members of my ethnic group”). Most studies of the relation between ethnolinguistic identity and language behavior do not
differentiate between the components described by Cameron; many focus on identity centrality (termed “strength”, “importance”, or “salience”, etc.) or combine various aspects together (e.g., Kang and Kim, 2012). We suggest that researchers assess all three aspects separately, as they are not always strongly intercorrelated (e.g., although an identity may be salient, it may not be associated with positive esteem; see Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010; Jaspal and Sitaridou, 2013), and more importantly from a sociolinguistic perspective, the dimensions may be differentially related to language behavior. For instance, Gatbonton, Trofimovich and Segalowitz (2011; see also Gatbonton and Trofimovich, 2008) found that Québec Francophones’ sense of affiliation with their heritage ethnolinguistic group was correlated negatively with indexical aspects of English pronunciation. This finding was strongest with regards to politicized aspects of ethnic affiliation but weaker for aspects of affiliation that were operationalized in a manner similar to centrality and affect (which they termed “core ethnic affiliation”).

Although social identity theory has had a significant impact on the way in which social scientists conceptualize the relation between identity and language, there are some limitations to this perspective that become evident when one considers how other psychologists have construed identity. First, this type of measure usually focuses just on ingroup identity, that is, the thoughts and feelings pertaining (usually) to the ancestral or heritage ethnolinguistic group. But psychologists interested in acculturation, that is, the process of cultural change that takes place when two or more cultural groups come into continuous first-hand contact, emphasize that we must consider not only allegiances with the heritage group, but also with any other relevant cultural group. Thus, a person might identify with only their heritage group (termed
“separation”; Sam and Berry, 2010) or only with the other relevant group (termed “assimilation”), and we might expect that these monocultural identity profiles might be linked to relatively exclusive use of the language associated with that group. Alternatively, one might identify as a member of both groups (termed “integration”). A fourth profile, in which people disidentify with both relevant ethnic groups (termed “deculturation” or “marginalization”). These acculturation profiles have been linked to language behaviour; for instance, Montaruli and her colleagues (2011) found that people with an integrated profile were more proficient in both languages. The important point is that as several papers in this volume demonstrate) ethnolinguistic identities are not unitary, and we can identify to greater or lesser degrees with various relevant ethnolinguistic groups.

A second limitation of an identity measure such as Cameron’s (2004) is that it taps a generalized sense of ethnolinguistic identity that may not be consistent with the experience of people on a day-to-day basis. Although we can articulate an overarching sense of our affiliation with different groups, social constructionists remind us that identities are negotiated in each of our social encounters, and hence our feelings of ethnolinguistic identification can vary depending on who we are with, where we are, what we are doing, and so on. Given that social situations and identities are inherently linked, Clément and Noels (1992) proposed a situated ethnolinguistic identity model, which posits that identification with the heritage group and other relevant ethnolinguistic groups (often the majority group) varies depending upon the situation (cf. Hymes, 1974; Brown & Fraser, 1979). Accordingly, Clément and Noels maintain identities should be measured with reference to the most common situational domains that individuals encounter. Based on responses to open-ended survey questions and focus groups in
which people described their daily activities, a taxonomy of situations was developed in terms of where people were, who they were with, and what activity they were doing or talking about (Côté and Clément, 1994; Noels et al., 2014). The most commonly reported situational domains across students and non-student samples were family, friends, school/work, and community, although others were also evident (e.g., religion, leisure). These four situational domains represent two relatively personal domains and two relatively public domains. It is perhaps not surprising that the heritage language tends to be spoken in situations involving the family than in more public domains (Yip and Fuligni, 2002), given that there is usually less opportunity for interaction with members of other ethnolinguistic groups among family members that in other situations. This difference is relevant for identity because acculturative changes in identity are hypothesized to begin in situations where there is greater opportunity for intercultural interaction, and eventually penetrate more intimate settings. Moreover, some research indicates that ethnolinguistic vitality can moderate this pattern, such that acculturative shifts in identity in the private domains are more evident for lower vitality groups than higher vitality groups (Clément and Noels, 1992).

These considerations suggest that documenting ethnolinguistic identity requires assessments of general identification with the heritage ethnolinguistic group and other relevant ethnolinguistic groups. It also suggests that the researcher should index these identities across situational domains that are relevant for the people under investigation and appropriate for the analytical purposes of the researcher (perhaps corresponding with individual networks for linguistic contacts; Allard and Landry, 1994).

Conclusion
In this paper, we have considered three social psychological constructs that reflect people’s ethnolinguistic orientation, including SELV, language attitudes, and ethnolinguistic identity. We have suggested some brief indices by which these constructs might be measured and archived for use in future examinations of sociolinguistic data, whether cross-sectionally or longitudinally. There are certainly other measurement issues that merit consideration, including appropriate labelling of ethnolinguistic groups (Hall-Lew and Wong, this issue); the scaling of numeric indices (Schwarz, 2014); the influence of the ethnicity of the interviewer and the language of the questionnaire (Tagliamonte, this issue; Noels, 2013), among many other concerns. We’ve restricted this discussion to delimiting a minimal set of social psychological constructs that we anticipate will continue to be of interest in future research. We reiterate our earlier comment, that our suggestions for minimal indices of social psychological constructs would be enhanced by a more detailed encoding of social information, careful cross-referencing, and access to already-published works based on the corpus to be studied. We hope that this presentation will contribute to the larger discussion of how to make the most of archived sociolinguistic information.

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Subjective ethnolinguistic vitality

Ethnolinguistic vitality (ELV) was developed...
i An example of the difficulty in defining terms comes from a consideration of the term “ethnic”. Among many other possibilities, ethnicity could be defined in terms of ancestry, language, national origin, religion, cultural practices and traditions, and so on. Just as scholars vary in their understanding (particularly for such a topic, which is of interest to researchers across many disciplines), so to do lay people. It is thus important that scholars make clear their own definitions and the meanings of the terms for their participants. For the present purpose we use the term ethnolinguistic group to refer to a group of people who share a common cultural ancestry and language. When referring to the work of other scholars, we use the term they employ or is most commonly employed in that subdiscipline (e.g., “ethnic” or “cultural”).

ii A third dimension, dynamism, is occasionally reported (see Mulac, 1975; Zahn and Hopper, 1985). This dimension refers to the energy, activity, strength and aggressiveness of the language and/or its speakers. Because it is not assessed as consistently as the status and solidarity dimensions, it is not discussed further here.

iii A caveat is in order here: researchers should ascertain that their participants can correctly identify the speaker’s speech style. If speakers are unable to judge or misjudge the variety, they may rely on general stereotypes of the “foreigner” or stereotypes of an unintended ethnolinguistic group to make their judgments (Cargile and Giles, 1998; Lindemann, 2003; Roberts, 2013).