

## Sociolinguistic Project Draft

### Background

For my research question, I have chosen Native African people who don't speak English as a native language to research as a speech community. I have chosen this speech community and research question because they both relate directly to *The Thing Around Your Neck*. This question correlates to Adichie's novel, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, by researching how treatment of African people living in America can change based on their ability to speak English. A heavy theme in this novel is racism to Africans from white Americans, which is the result, in part, of Americans' views changing based on Africans' ability to speak English. The answer to this research question could give insight and context to the experience of the main characters in *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Along with that, I believe I am more familiar with this topic than others I have considered choosing. Another reason for choosing this topic and speech community is because I am aware of how important it is to learn and understand the experiences of people that are different from us.

### Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question for this study is: How do white, native English speaking Americans' views on Africans living in America change based on Africans' assimilation with the English language as non-native speakers?

Based on background knowledge of my own, and experience with people in America, I expect to find that African people who have moved to America face greater amounts of discrimination if they are less capable of speaking English. With that, African people who are more fluent in English will face less discrimination than those who outwardly struggle with the English language.

### Methodology

#### *First Interview Group*

In order to answer the research question, I will conduct interviews with African people who have immigrated to the United States. Ideally, the interviewees would be African people who initially struggled with the English language, and have since overcome that boundary. Potential participants will be informed that the study's purpose is to learn more about the discrimination African, non-English speaking people living in the United States face before they learn English, compared to after they have become fluent. Potential participants will also be made aware of the amount of time the interview will take, which would be less than an hour.

Along with this, they will be asked if they will allow us to record audio of the interview. It is important to inform this group of participants of the contents of the interview beforehand because of the contents and questions in the interview. Questions such as the ones in the interview could possibly bring about negative emotions in participants. It is very important to consider the comfort of participants in order to complete this study ethically.

During the interview, the initial questions will be to build a connection with the participant, to make them feel comfortable. After this, questions will resemble things like: “When you first moved to the United States, how were you treated by strangers you interacted with? People such as store cashiers, or servers.” After asking questions regarding the participants' experience in America when they struggled to speak the language, I will begin asking about how they are treated now that they speak English fluently. Questions could look like: “Now that you are able to speak English fluently, how are you treated by acquaintances, or random people you meet on the street?”. It is important for the accuracy of the study to turn away participants who have first moved to America more than a decade ago, as the change in attitude could also be attributed to the changing of times, not their skillfulness in English. I will take note of the interviewees' answers to questions regarding how they're treated now that they speak English fluently, as opposed to how they were treated when they could not. This approach is appropriate because of the sensitive nature of the topic. There are many ways one could study this subject to the detriment of Africans living in America, and to avoid that is to avoid asking them to be in uncomfortable or unsafe situations. This leads me to believe that interviewing them about their experiences with the English language and Americans is the best way to carry out research for this study.

For this portion of the study, around 50-100 people would be interviewed, as this process is likely to take longer and have less reliable results. After the interviews the participants will be informed that their answers will help researchers learn more about discrimination based on language fluency, specifically regarding African people living in the United States.

### *Second Interview Group*

Along with interviewing African people who have moved to America, I believe it would also be beneficial to interview white Americans. This process would involve around 250-500 people, as it would be a more straightforward process and is likely to have more people willing to participate, simply because of the number of white Americans in America.

Before signing up, potential participants will be informed that they will be taking part in a study where they will be given a few voice clips to listen to, and then asked questions about how they feel about each of the speakers. Participants will also be informed of the length of the study, which would be approximately 30 minutes. Interviewees will be asked for their permission to be recorded, by both audio and video, during the duration of their interview. These interviews will use audio and video recording in order to allow us to obtain the most accurate and authentic answers.

The next portion would consist of an interview where I briefly acquaint myself with the participant, then leave and have them listen to several different clips of African people speaking English at varying levels of fluency. Afterwards, the participants will be asked a series of questions about their perceptions on the specific voice clips they listened to. Questions such as “Does this person sound kind and polite to you?”, “Would you trust this person to give you directions in a city you are unfamiliar with?”. These would help assess the participants' attitudes towards different levels of fluency.

In order to collect usable data, the voice clips shown to the participants should have around the same tone of voice, and should be the same gender, in order to eliminate chances of gender bias tampering with results of the study. In order to recruit participants for this portion of the study, I would use the same method as in the prior portion. After the interview, the participants would be informed that the study they participated in will help researchers learn more about discrimination based on language fluency, specifically regarding African people living in the United States.

### Data collection and protocol

For data collection I would ask for consent to record the interviews, for both the African people living in America, and for the white Americans. To remember important information outside of what is recorded, I will use a notepad and make notes of any thoughts I may have afterwards. To recruit participants, I would ask people I personally know, and I would post flyers around campus with information about it, along with contact information. Along with this, I would post about the study on social media, and inform the university and ask them to help disperse information about it.

#### *First Interview Group*

1. When did you first move to America?
2. When first moving to America, how were you treated when interacting with English speaking customer service employees, waiters, etc.?
3. Are there any specific instances you would like to share?
4. Do you notice a difference in the way you are treated now compared to how you were treated when you knew less English?
5. Are there any other factors that you think could have caused a change in treatment, other than your ability to speak English?

After collecting data from this group, I will sort common words to describe each experience: that of Africans living in America who weren't fluent in English, and then their experience once they were. These words will help determine general attitudes noticed first hand by African people, though these conclusions are not objective facts, and should not be seen as such. Along with this process, I will also compile direct, anonymous, quotes given by

interviewees during the study. These will be insightful when combined with data from the second interview group.

### *Second Interview Group Clips*

For this portion of the study, there will be 15 clips played, the clips are split into groups of 5. Meaning there are 3 different types of clips (listed below), and they will be shuffled and the questions listed at the end will be asked between each clip. For example, Clip one would play, then the series of Second Interview Group questions would be given to the participant to answer. This cycle is repeated until the participant has gone through all 15 clips and answered the questions after each one.

- 5 different 1:00 minute long audio-only clips of conversations between a person who is fluent in English, and an African person who has not yet learned English fully. Clips would contain average conversation, such as small talk about the weather or career opportunities. There would be no obvious mention of the language barrier within the clips.
- 5 different 1:00 minute long audio-only clips of conversations between a person who is fluent in English, and an African person who has not yet learned English fully, but has more than enough of an English vocabulary to hold complex conversation. Clips would contain similar talk throughout, although each clip's conversation will have different topics. There would never be obvious mention of the language barrier within the clips.
- 5 different 1:00 minute long audio-only clips of conversations between a person who is fluent in English, and an African person who has become fluent in English. Clips would contain similar conversation to the clips prior: talk of weather, jobs, kids, food etc. There will be no discernible language barrier in these clips.

### *Notes for Second Interview Group Questions*

The English speaking person that is a common variable in all 15 clips is the same person, speaking with the same tone and enthusiasm. The only real difference between the clips should be the level of fluency of the person speaking with the native English speaker. For the second interview group test, the same clips would have to be used if the test was ever replicated in order to ensure accurate results. I have no clips set to use, as they would have to be created for the purpose of this study.

### *Second Interview Group Questions*

1. In your opinion, do the people in this clip seem to be friendly towards each other?
2. Would you have a conversation with either one of these people?
3. How would you describe the two different people in this clip?

4. What are your first impressions of the different people in this clip?
5. Is there anything else you would like to say about this clip?

### Implications and Impact

If this study were to be carried out, I would expect to find that there is some sort of difference in the way African people are treated in America based on their ability to speak English. I would expect this difference to be detrimental to African peoples' experience in America, and for white, American, native English speakers to think more poorly of people who are less capable of speaking English.

The results of this study would overall help to make others aware of biases they may have against African people who have not yet fully learned English. This is important because these biases against African people, or anyone living in America who doesn't speak English fluently, go to create a larger problem of discrimination and stereotyping for African people living in America. By being forced to think about these biases, people are forced to confront them, in turn bettering themselves and the world around them. There is still much egalitarian work to be done, and further studies involving larger test groups, with different ethnicities of people would help narrow down results. Hopefully, the continuation of research in discrimination based on fluency will create a healthier atmosphere for the people living in America, or in other nations.