

LINGUISTIC PROFILING INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

Methodology

Linguistic profiling is the practice of identifying social characteristics that an individual possess based on auditory cues, in particular their dialect and accent. The theory was first developed by Professor John Baugh to explain discriminatory practices in the housing market. This investigation is designed to reflect Dr. Baugh's research. The outcome is to discover if people, in Genesee County, are provided less favorable information based on dialect and accent.

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2/6/2017



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Overview

Linguistic profiling is the practice of identifying social characteristics that an individual possess based on auditory cues, in particular their dialect and accent. The theory was first developed by Professor John Baugh Ph.D. to explain discriminatory practices in the housing market. Dr. Baugh, the Margaret Bush Wilson Professor and director of African and African American Studies in Arts & Science at Washington University in St. Louis, conducted research that has found many people made racist judgments based on the caller's diverse dialects.

This investigation replicated, on a smaller scale, Dr. Bough's linguistic profiling research. The goal of this project is to discover if African American individuals in Genesee County are provided less favorable information based on the sound of their voice, i.e. whether or not there would be preferential treatment towards a Caucasian caller over an African American caller based on their auditory cues when calling to inquire into possible housing opportunities.

Methodology

This investigative project included three phases: 1) pre-screening voice recognition; 2) calls to apartments; and 3) data entry, analysis, and written report. Phases one and two were conducted in October and November in 2016. The data entry and data analysis for phase three occurred in January 2017. This written report is the final process of the investigative project other than any follow up recommendations.

Phase I

The first phase of the investigation consisted of gathering auditory recordings by eight auditors, two each: white females, black females, white males, and black males. The recordings included a simple statement requesting an apartment for rent. The soundtracks were then inputted into survey format and made available through different channels of communication, such as social media. This gave the general public an opportunity to listen to the recordings and indicate the race and sex of the person recorded.

The results from the survey yielded a means to select the auditors for phase two of the linguistic profiling project. The goal was to have at least 100 responses to the survey, with a certainty of 70% positive identification for each auditor as to race and gender. Four auditors, one Caucasian female, one African American female, one African American male, and one Caucasian male with at least 70% positive identification were selected to be used as telephone testers for the linguistics project.

Phase II

The second phase of the research had each of the four testers calling the same, randomly selected, 76 apartments in Genesee County. The callers included two teams. The first team was one African American male and one Caucasian male. The second team consisted of one African American female and one Caucasian female. The sites called included 18 subsidized and 58 non-subsidized apartments in 16 of the 33 municipalities in Genesee County. The demographics in the selected municipalities ranged from 0.4% to 56.6% African American. The sites selected featured 31.5% in the City of Flint, 11% in Flint Township, and 57.5% in the outer county.

Each team, male or female, called approximately 30 to 60 minutes apart to the same site. Callers were instructed to not offer or answer any questions outside their script, such as employment, education, and credit scores. Testers were instructed to give their fictitious name and request a one or two bedroom apartment. The names used to identify the tester were designed to fit the race and sex of the tester. These names were selected via online research regarding the most common names by race and gender. The focus of the calls were to discover availability, type of information offered, friendliness, the degree of sales effort, and words of encouragement depending on the auditory cues of the individual tester.

The following are some variables to be measured from each call:

1. Did the Auditor speak to an Agent
2. Were one bedroom apartments available and the rental rate
3. Were two bedroom apartments available and the rental rate
4. Did the Agent offer his/her name
5. Were amenities offered
6. Were calls returned when messages were left
7. Friendliness
8. Sales Effort

Phase III

Phase three includes data entry and an analysis of the data to discover any difference in treatment between race and sex based on linguistic profiling.

Outcome

Although there were a total of 76 sites called by each tester the number of comparison analysis for the male telephone auditors was 42 and 54 for the female testers. This was due to: only one paired testers talked with an agent; telephone lines were

disconnected; and messages were left and only one paired tester received a returned call. Table 1 shows the results of the paired testing by the male tester team. The Caucasian male callers left eight voice messages and received eight return calls for a rate of 100%. The African American males left ten messages and were only called back five times with a rate of 50%. When comparing call backs the Caucasian males were favored at a much higher degree.

Availability revealed greater favoritism towards the African American male above the Caucasian male. For a one-bedroom 67% of the time an African American male was told that there were some available compared to 52% of the time for Caucasian male. The request for two-bedroom availability showed a similar pattern with 95% availability for African American males and 76% availability for Caucasian male callers.

Although African American males were quoted a higher availability rates of one and two-bedroom availability, the Caucasian males were more strongly encouraged to reside at the site. For example, 95% of the time Caucasian males were given words of encouragement to apply and/or to join the community; while African Americans were only encouraged .05% of the time. This equates to 18 encouraging experiences for Caucasian males and only once for the African American testers. Furthermore, three Caucasians and three African Americans callers were quoted higher rental rates than their counter part calling that same site. Therefore, six sites were not consistent in quoting prices to the test callers offering a higher rental rate to either the Caucasian and/or the African American tester.

When Agents offer their name and provide amenities to a perspective tenant it displays a positive and welcoming attitude. Caucasian male callers were offered the agent's name 88% of the time compared to 59% of the time for male testers. The Caucasian callers were again favored over African American callers 44% to 0% being offered amenities.

Table 1: Results of the Calls Made by the Caucasian and African American Male Telephone Auditors

	Male Callers					
	Caucasian			African American		
	Yes	No	Percent Yes	Yes	No	Percent Yes
Returned Calls	8	0	100	5	5	50
Offered Name	36	5	88	22	15	59
Amenities	17	22	44	0	39	0
1 Bedroom Available	22	20	52	26	13	67
2 Bedroom	31	10	76	36	2	95
Higher Price	3		50	3		50
Encouragement Words	18		95	1		.05

Table 2 shows the results of the paired testing by the female tester team. The Caucasian female callers left eight voice messages and received five return calls for a rate of 62%. The African American females left six messages and were called back three times with a rate of 50%. When comparing call backs the Caucasian females were favored above African American females at a greater degree.

Availability revealed mixed favoritism towards the African American and Caucasian females. For a one-bedroom 59% of the time Caucasian females were told that there were some available compared to 56% of the time for African American females. Not a significant difference, but slightly favoring Caucasian females over African American females. The request for two-bedroom availability showed a slight

favoritism toward the African American with 81% availability for African American females and 78% availability for Caucasian female callers.

Although mixed availability was offered to African American females and Caucasian females for one and two-bedroom apartments, Caucasian females received more words of encouragement to reside at the site. For example, 54% of the time Caucasian females were given words of encouragement to apply and/or to join the community; while African Americans were only encouraged 46% of the time. These encouragement rates are not very different; however, compared to the Caucasian male's rate of encouragement of 95% there is a big difference favoring Caucasian males over Caucasian females, African American females, and African American males.

The female testers experienced a much greater rate of inconsistency regarding higher pricing than the male testers. Males were told different pricing six times compared to 23 times for the female callers. Although the female callers experienced pricing diversity at a much greater rate than the male callers they were quoted higher prices at approximately the same percentage; Caucasians 48% and African Americans callers at 52%.

The rate of agent name offered and words of encouragement was much closer for the female testers compared to the male testers. Words of encouragement for female Caucasian testers were 54% compared to 46% for the African American female callers. The male callers percentages were 9% compared to .05% with the male Caucasian being favored. A similar pattern was revealed in regards to agent's name being offered. Caucasian female callers were offered the agent's name 79% of the time compared to

70% of the time for African American female testers. While the male Caucasian had a rate of 88% compared to African American callers of 59%.

Table 2: Results of the Calls Made by the Caucasian and African American Female Telephone Auditors

	Female Callers					
	Caucasian			African American		
	Yes	No	Percent Yes	Yes	No	Percent Yes
Returned Calls	8	5	62	6	3	50
Offered Name	42	11	79	37	16	70
Amenities	26	28	48	10	39	20
1 Bedroom Available	32	22	59	30	24	56
2 Bedroom	42	12	78	44	10	81
Higher Price	11		48	12		52
Encouragement Words	15		54	13		46

Table 3 combines all African American callers compared to all Caucasian callers. The table reveals a significant difference in treatment highly favoring Caucasians over African Americans. The Caucasian testers scored a higher percentage in: calls returned, offered agent's name, amenities, one-bedroom availability, and words of encouragement. The African American testers rated higher in two areas; two-bedroom availability and being quoted higher prices (which is a negative).

Table 3: Results of the Calls Made by the Caucasian and African American Female and Male Telephone Auditors

	Both Female and Male Callers					
	Caucasian			African American		
	Yes	No	Percent Yes	Yes	No	Percent Yes
Returned Calls	16	5	76	11	8	58
Offered Name	78	16	83	59	31	66
Amenities	43	50	46	10	78	11
1 Bedroom Available	54	22	71	56	37	60
2 Bedroom	73	22	77	80	12	87
Higher Price	14		48	15		52
Encouragement Words	33		70	14		30

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study of linguistic profiling illustrates that many Americans can guess a caller's racial background from their first few words on the telephone. Studies also demonstrate that if you are a Caucasian male you receive a more favorable response. Genesee County is no different than the results of national studies. This type of discrimination diminishes the caller's chance at the American dream of equal opportunity in the housing market. In Genesee County Caucasian males are highly favored over Caucasian females, African American males, and African American females. Caucasian females were the second most favored. Therefore, if you are an African American inquiring for an apartment in Genesee County you are less likely to receive encouragement to join the community.

When comparing statements made towards the telephone auditors there surfaced an obvious difference in some of the statements made to African Americans but not to Caucasians. The following are some examples:

- We do not give information over the phone
- There is a one to two year waiting list
- We have a waiting list
- We do not have anything until next year
- Tester was placed on hold for over two minutes

This result of the investigative project is very telling and will be very useful for the Fair Housing Center.

Recommendation 1: Sites where agents provided negative treatment and/or false information to African Americans will have on-site testing. This includes both subsidized and unsubsidized housing. Some of the testing will be for race and some will

include other protected classes. For example, sites that indicated that absolutely no pets are allow or that there are breed and/or size restrictions will be tested for service animals. An additional class to be tested is family, due to statements made regarding a preference for single people only.

Recommendation 2: More analysis should be conducted on the information gathered in the telephone audits. This would include the examination of infractions and the municipalities. With this more fair housing training can be focused in those geographical areas.

Recommendation 3: It is highly recommended to replicate this project in Genesee County again using Caucasian and Hispanic, Asian, or Middle Eastern testers. It should also be replicated in the Saginaw, Bay, and Midland County jurisdictions.