

Social meanings of “lazy” and standard pronunciations in Cantonese

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Introduction

- ❖ Studies on linguistic variants of the same variable (Campbell-Kibler, 2009, 2010; Phrao et al., 2014) have shown that social characteristics attributed to a speaker’s linguistic choices are influenced by a range of additional information of the speaker revealed to the listeners.
- ❖ Multiple ongoing sound changes and phonetic variations in Hong Kong Cantonese (To et al., 2015; Zee, 1999), often stigmatized as “lazy” accent, e.g.:

Standard	[n-]	[ŋ-]	[ts-, ts ^h -, s-]	syllabic [ŋ]
Novel (“lazy”)	[l-]	∅	[tʃ-, tʃ ^h -, ʃ-]	syllabic [ŋ]

- more often associated with female speech (Bauer, 1983, 1986; Bourgerie, 1990)

Aims

- ❖ To examine the social meanings attributed to standard and novel pronunciations with two perception experiments

Methods

❖ Experiment 1

- Listeners: N = 76 (71F, 5M; 18-23 y.o.)
- Stimuli: 8 sentence tokens by 4 young female speakers (18-23 y.o.), taken from the *North Wind and the Sun* passage in Cantonese, balanced in accent type (standard vs. “lazy”), including two pairs of acoustically manipulated matched guises
- Listeners reported immediate impressions of the speaker and the speaker’s pronunciations and way of speaking
- 19 commonly-mentioned adjectives (e.g. *cute, calm, lively, standard*) were collected

❖ Experiment 2

- Listeners: 48 (31F, 17M; 18-23 y.o.), separate from Exp1
- Stimuli: 7 stimuli from Exp1 + 6 additional stimuli from the same speech database (similar composition as Exp1, but also contained 2 tokens from young male speakers)
- Listeners reported estimations of the speaker’s gender, age, which part of Hong Kong they were from, and then rated the 19 traits (collected from Exp1) on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “no, not at all” to 5 = “yes, very”.

Analysis of Exp2

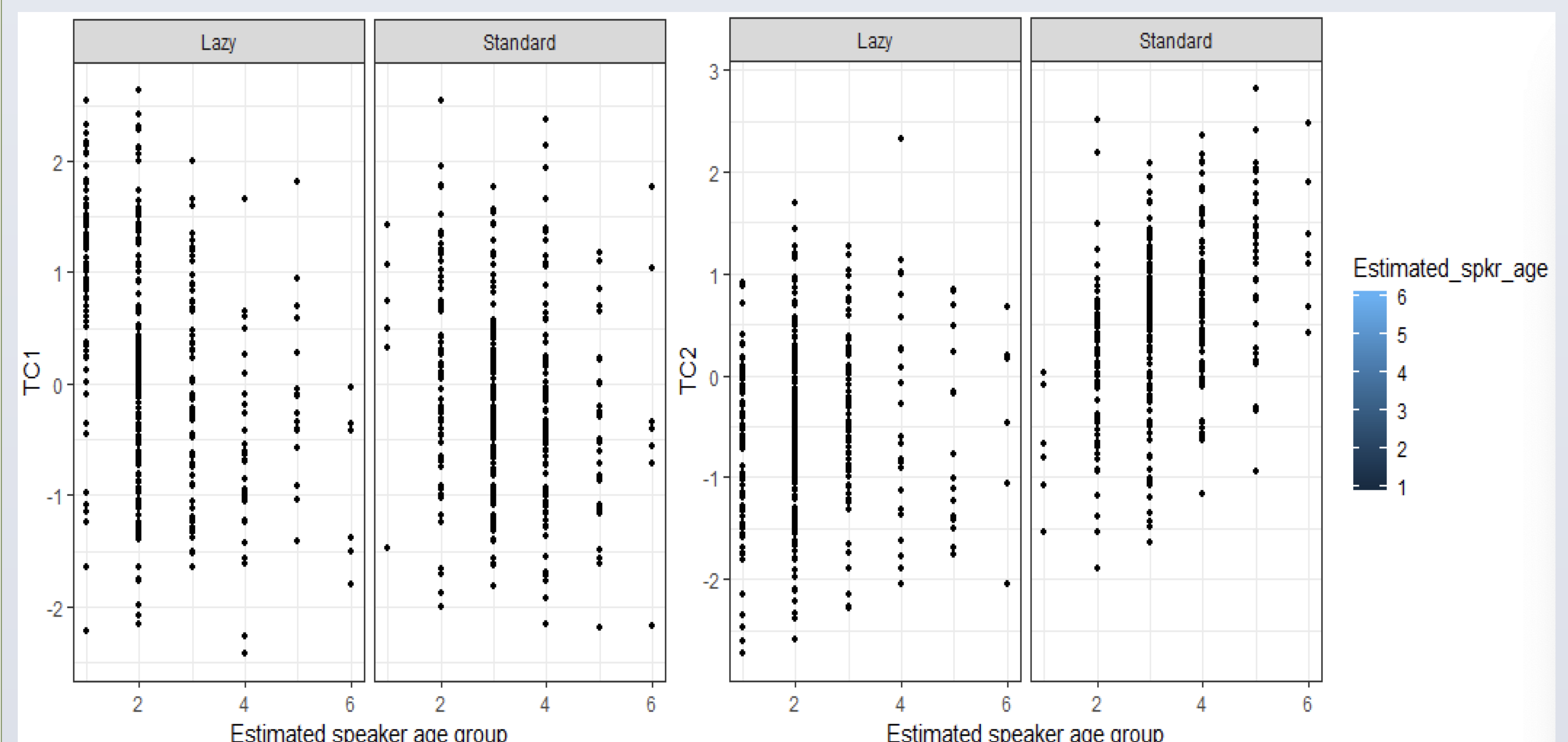
- ❖ 2 factor groups: *likeable* (TC1) and *formal* (TC2) from PCA

item	TC1	TC2	h2	u2	com	
p05_lively	15	0.82	0.68	0.32	1.0	
p02_cute	12	0.79	0.62	0.38	1.0	
s04_enthusiastic	4	0.77	0.61	0.39	1.0	
s05_flat	5	-0.76	0.57	0.43	1.0	
p08_unenergetic	18	-0.73	0.57	0.43	1.1	
p07_sweet	17	0.67	0.45	0.55	1.0	
s07_relaxed	7	0.58	0.33	0.67	1.0	
p03_gentle	13	0.57	0.36	0.64	1.2	
s02_childlike	2	0.54	-0.49	0.51	0.49	2.0
p09_unfriendly	19	-0.51	0.27	0.73	1.0	
p01_calm	11	-0.51	0.48	0.47	0.53	2.0
p04_introverted	14	-0.50	0.30	0.70	1.3	
s10_unnatural	10	-0.48	-0.32	0.34	0.66	1.7
s09_standard	9		0.81	0.70	0.30	1.1
s03_clear	3		0.79	0.69	0.31	1.1
s01_authoritative	1		0.64	0.42	0.58	1.0
p06_naive	16		-0.60	0.43	0.57	1.4
s06_native.local	6		0.59	0.38	0.62	1.1
s08_serious	8	-0.36	0.51	0.38	0.62	1.8

- ❖ Mixed-effects models on TC1 and TC2, separately, with fixed effects including accent type and estimated age.

Preliminary Results

- ❖ Standard and “lazy” accents were easily distinguishable to the listeners: stimuli with standard accent were rated as more *formal* (TC2) than those with “lazy” accent.
- ❖ Interactions of accent, estimated age, perceived personality and formality:
 - Stimuli with **standard** accent were perceived to be from **older** speakers than those with “lazy” accent, although all speakers and listeners are college-age peers.
 - Stimuli with “lazy” accent show a negative correlation between estimated age and *likeability* (TC1): speakers perceived to be younger were perceived to be more *likeable*. No such correlation in stimuli with standard accent.
 - Stimuli with standard accent show a positive correlation between estimated age and *formality* (TC2): speech from perceptually older speakers were perceived to be more *formal*. No such correlation for stimuli with “lazy accent”.



Discussion

- ❖ Current results reflect how ongoing sound changes in Hong Kong Cantonese are intertwined with listeners’ social perception
- ❖ The results suggest multi-dimensional social perception of speaker characteristics in relation to the choice of speech variant, which integrates the perception of speaker age, gender, accent, and personality.
- ❖ Further research seeks to better understand the complex speaker profile constructed by the listener, and how it informs speech perception.

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