The effect of English accents on hiring recommendation:
Is “ABC” accent more preferred in Hong Kong?

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1. Acknowledgements

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Thus, we would like to take this opportunity to thank them. We were so thankful for their encouragements and suggestions during the process of our study. Thank you, all.
2. Abstract

**Purpose:** Interview has long been the most common tool to assess candidates. We know that English accent can draw attention during the interview and it may act as an implicit source of employment discrimination. Thus, this study aims at examining the effect of the English accents (Native accent and Hong Kong accent) of a hypothetical entry level position on employment related judgments.

**Methodology:** 60 participants were recruited and divided into 2 groups. They were asked to make employment decision of a hypothetical entry level position after listening to the interview audiotapes. Participants in group A listened to the applicant speaking with native English accent while group B listened to Hong Kong accent.

**Results:** Results was consistent with our hypothesis and indicated that the applicant with native English accent was at advantage when comparing to the applicant with Hong Kong accent during the interview.

**Management Implications:** Inaccurate recruitment due to accent-based employment discrimination can be costly to company. Thus, company should take measures to avoid from it. Examples of measures are (1) using structured interviews (2) using multiple interviewers or experiential interviewers (3) providing with training to the hiring managers.

**Keywords:** Accent, Native English Accent, Hong Kong Local Accent, Bias, Employment Interview, Hiring Recommendation
3. Introduction

Whenever we meet a person, we usually make judgments about that person. Some factors such as his or her appearance, clothing, posture, and cleanliness give us signs about the person’s background and state of mind. Spoken language can provide us another wealth of information. After combining all the cues, we can judge a person to be friendly or unfriendly, aggressive or passive and sane or insane. Because language is a major factor in those judgments, it is important for us to study and understand which aspects of spoken language have the greatest effect on our reactions to each other.

In terms of employment, face to face interview continues to be the most frequently used approach to assess applicants for employment although many studies have found that interviews are having low reliability and validity when comparing to other structural and systemic devices (Macan, 2009). Aligned with the researches, in Hong Kong, interview is the prevalent tool for recruitment and selection.

One survey reported that English is used in over 66% of communication in the workplace in Hong Kong (Blomfield and Pieron 1987, quoted in Jane, Wong & Chan, 2010). English or only English as interview language is also common in Hong Kong even for entry levels openings. Apart from many early found biases in hiring decisions, like gender (e.g., Drazin & Auster, 1987; Riger & Galligan, 1980), attractiveness, (e.g., Feingold, 1992; Umberson & Hughes, 1987) and impression management tactics (e.g., Caker & Franke, 2011; Schleker, 1980), English accent can also draw attention in workplace. Therefore, the impact of accent in interview is worth studying because accent can act as an implicit source of employment discrimination.

Different kinds of social cues (gender, ethnicity, age) have been identified as sources of bias in employment decision in many current studies. However, there were little researches on accent in the context of employment decision. Examples were Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Nguyen (2012) on Hispanic accent on employment decision and Huang, Frideger, & Pearce (2013) study on the effects of nonnative accent on managerial hiring. The current studies used a simulated interview setting to examine the impact of accent on hiring recommendations and to explore the mechanisms through which accents influence employment decisions. However, among those studies, no relevant study was found on Hong Kong accented English versus foreign accented English during the interview. Moreover, according to Hong Kong Education Bureau, the trend of students studying overseas is growing (from average 5% of to 7% in 2012). This indicated that more new joined workforce will
speak with accents different from our local one. Adding that, Hong Kong is a special city that embraced with unique culture and historical factors, the perception on different English accent may be different. In other words, the previous studies convey little or no significant implications and insights to our Hong Kong workplace.

On the other hand, the results of previous studies (usually carried out in America) shown that the foreign accented applicants tend to be the disadvantaged group when compare to the local accented one (Huang, Frideger, & Pearce, 2013). However, in the Hong Kong society which influenced by the phenomenon of Xenophilia, people may tend to feel that western objects, people or even the accents are inferior (Chen, 2008). Therefore, this study is completely different from the early studies in term of the hypothesis and the setting of society and workplace.

Thus, to address this research deficiency, this study aims at studying the effects of the accents (native accented English and Hong Kong accented English) of a hypothetical entry level position on employment related judgments.
4. Literature Review

1.1 What is an accent?
By the term “accent”, it means a pattern of pronunciation used by a speaker for whom English is the native language or, more generally, by the community or social grouping to which people belongs (Kibler, 2007). From the language and linguistic litterateurs, accents refer to the use of particular vowel or consonant sounds and particular rhythmic and other prosodic feature. One of the most obvious things we notice about a person’s speech is that it tells us something about where he comes from: where he grew up and, in some cases, where he lives now. Accents are the prevailing indicators of geographic identity (Wells, 1982).

1.2 Hong Kong accented English
According to Setter, Wong & Chan, (2010), Hong Kong accented English is defined to have the following characteristics:
1. the maintenance of voicing contrast in initial plosives and affricates
2. the loss voicing contrast in final plosives and affricates
3. the loss of voicing contrasts in fricatives wherever they occur
People who possess this English accent usually are educated individuals who have not spent much time outside of Hong Kong and their accents is clearly influenced by the features of Cantonese phonology (Peng & Setter, 2000; quoted in to Setter, Wong & Chan, 2010).

1.3 Native accented English (Foreign accented English)
One of the factors that drive our research was the newly discussed workforces – young-adult returnees in Hong Kong. (Also known as “ABC”, “Overseas Chinese” or “Zuk Sing”) (Chan, 2008). In our study, this new workforce refers to the Hongkongers who have lived and studied in English-speaking countries such as Britain, the United States and Australia (Chan, 2008). Often, they may be the children of parents who were so keen for them to have good English skills that they sent them overseas to school and university. The accents that they possess are often not significantly affected by Cantonese phonology. According to Chan (2008), the International school students and graduates can also speak with the accent like those returnees even they are living in Hong Kong.
1.4 Accent as a basis for judgment

According to the Accent Prestige Theory (Giles, 1970, 1973; Fuertes, Potere & Ramirez, 2002), people will use the speaker’s accent as a cue to come up with certain judgments and perceptions about the speaker’s characteristics, such as intelligence, physical attractiveness and reliability. Besides, speakers’ accents can let us know more about somebody ethnicity, national origin, education level and status.

According to Tsalikis (1991), accent also is a factor that may affect credibility in international communication. Besides, Foon (1986, p.521) also pointed out that speech style (including accent) have a powerful impact on the judgments of speakers over a wide range of qualities attributed to the person perceived.

1.5 Xenophilia

According to Antweiler (2009), xenophilia refers to an attraction to foreign cultures, people, or customs that establishes itself in curiosity and hospitality toward foreigners and benevolent cross-cultural exploration. In a similar way, Stürmer, S., and Siem, B. described xenophilia in a psychological sense. It can be theorized as a favorable attitude toward exploratory contact with individuals from other groups that are perceived as culturally different and unfamiliar on the basis of their ethnicity, language, customs or habits.

In the setting of Hong Kong, after the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, in 1997, which Hong Kong’s sovereignty was set to be returned to China, many Hong Kong people decided to migrate to the West for a more stable social and political environment at that time (This was called as “brain drain”) Hong Kong people tends to recognize western objects are more superior. It is found that people with “Westernized” mannerisms and language are perceived or observed to be distinctive from the locals in many ways, including body-gestures, dress styles, friendship networks, and favorite social gathering places. (Chen, 2008)
1.6 **Social Perception**

Social perception is a term in social psychology that defines an individual’s ability to create an impression or judgment on other individuals or social groups. This is formed through observation and understanding existing information about an individual and drawing out conclusions from the information (Zebrowitz, 1944). Different biases can be made by the people because of their wrong perception on others (Fiske, 1993). In this study, hypothesis will be explained by the concept of social perception. It is believed that the interviewers would make biases towards the applicants’ accents.

Research on the labour market experiences of migrants and, in particular those workers identified as linguistically different to the majority population, has demonstrated that accent is equally an issue that can impact employment outcomes (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). Employers routinely form initial impression of job applicants on the basis of their linguistic presentation, using accent to make inferences about social group membership and level of competence. In these content, accent feature and speech style serve as signifier of status and credibility (Bourdieu, 1977). However, the situation in Hong Kong could be reversed. The applicant speaking with native like accent (or so-called “ABC” accent) could stand out from the majority population and show prestigious status from others. Hence, the uniqueness of this research will not only contribute to human resources perspective but also in social science perspective.

1.7 **Social Categorization (Also known as Classism/Social Class)**

Social Categorization is the differential treatment based on social class or perceived social class. Social classes are based on family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community (Miller, 1924).

According to Campbell-Kibler (2007) who is studying listener perceptions of two divergent American accents stated that accent is difference between the way people or group of people speak. Therefore, people speak in different accent present an opportunity for receivers to ascribe certain characteristics to them and most of time stereotypes are shorthand for categorizing people.

According to social cognitive theories, Fiske and Neuberg (1990) stated that it is the process of forming an impression begins with an act of categorization. After that, it can provide a wealth of
information associated with the category. Most importantly, accents can be remarkable information detected very quickly in a social interaction and thus it may serve as a trigger for social categorization (Massey & Lundy, 2001; Purnell, Idsardi, & Baugh, 1999). For example, Hopper and Williams (1973) found that in a high-status executive job, if the job candidate can speak standard US English, he/she was rated as more employable than another job candidate is speaking Black English, Spanish-influenced English or Southern White English.

In our study, it is believed that the candidates with foreign accented English have the experiences living overseas and studying abroad or in International education institutions for a period of times, those candidates are more likely to have better financial ability and background (Higher social class). Therefore, the interviewers may commit the social class bias and evaluate the native accented applicants as more competent to and distinctive form the local accented applicants.

1.8 The Perception of Accent in the Workplace

Findings from a number of studies conducted in the US, Canada, Australia and Germany suggested that linguistic presentation, like accent shapes the initial impression of employers in the job interview. What many of these studies indicate is that because accent signals group membership, hearing a “foreign” or non-mainstream accent commonly activates stereotypes on the basis of ethnicity or regional identity. This in turn may evoke prejudicial attitudes towards the speakers (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Deprez-Sims&Morris, 2010).

Accent-related discrimination has been identified as a significant factor that can disadvantage those ascribed the status of non-native speakers in the job market (Holliday, 2008; Lippi-Green, 2012; Matsuda. 1991; Munro, 2003; Piller,, 2011). Several studies also indicated that the perception of accent-related discrimination is a concern for both professional employees and small business owners (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Collin & Low, 2010).
1.9 Accent in Employment Interview

Verbal interaction always essential to the speaker and that provides an excellent vehicle for discrimination based on the speaker’s accent is an employment interview. During the employment interview, the applicant attempts, through verbal performance to express competence and confidence. The goal for the applicant is to be offered the job position. On the other hand, the goal of the interviewer is to select the best employee who will be successful and productive in the organization. The interviewer tries to compare the candidate’s background, working experience, education level, and qualifications to those of other job candidates with objectivity. However, according to Kinicki & Lockwood (1985), other factors influence the hiring decision and those factors may be merely subjective and may be dangerously discriminatory. One of those factors is the accent with which the job applicant speaks English.
5. Hypothesis

As supported by the theoretical framework of the above literature review, like, social perception, social categorization and xenophilia phenomenon in Hong Kong, we believe that the interviewers would commit bias due the accents of applicants. The bias would be that applicant speaking native English accent would be evaluated as superior than the one with Hong Kong accents. Thus, we construct the below hypothesis in the setting of Hong Kong:

H1 (a): Applicant speaking with native English accent will be evaluated to have higher scores on “Job Suitability” than the applicant speaking with Hong Kong accent.

H1 (b): Applicant speaking with native English accent will be evaluated to have higher scores on “Perceived Competency” than the applicant speaking with Hong Kong accent.

H1 (c): Applicant speaking with native English accent will be evaluated to have higher scores on “Hiring Recommendation” than the applicant speaking with Hong Kong accent.

H2: Applicant with native English accent is more likely to be employed in the job interview than the applicant with Hong Kong accent.
6. Methodology

The whole rundown of our experiment could basically divide into three stages:

1) Preparation of materials
2) The pilot test
3) Execution of the experiment / collecting data

6.1. Preparation of materials

a. Audiotapes for the simulated interview

Two identical scripted audiotapes were prepared. The content of the audiotapes was a simulated interview: one HR manager was asking 6 questions to one applicant. The applicant answered them one by one. The applicant was applying for a junior accounting clerk. For audiotapes A, the voice actress of this applicant was a female returnee of Hong Kong who studied abroad in United States for high school and degree programme. On the other hand, the applicant in audiotapes B was speaking in local Hong Kong accent. The voice actress of this applicant was locally educated and had no experience of exchange study. *(Appendix 1: Script of the audiotapes)*

In this experiment, audiotape of simulated interview was chosen instead of video because audiotape could remove the concern of appearance discrimination committed by the participants. Also, two voice actresses were with similar pitch of voice and speed of sound. Last but not least, those two audiotapes were controlled to last for similar lengths. (Audiotape A lasted for 3:54 minutes and Audiotape B lasted for 3:58 minutes)

b. Job description of the position

A job description of junior accounting clerk was prepared for giving the participants to review before they listened to the audiotapes. This job description aimed at providing participants with basic understanding of the job duties and the KSAs required for junior accounting clerk. *(Appendix 2: Job description)*

In our study, junior accounting clerk was chosen as the opening position. The reason was that this position was normally no need to communicate with clients or make presentation as frequent as other position like sales representative. Therefore, this would not evoke the respondents’ consciousness that speaking with sound English is a must for this position.
c. **The brief description of the candidates/ CV of the candidates**

Two identical CVs were prepared with the same names, age, gender, education institution, working experiences and GPA. (*Appendix 3: CV of the candidates*)

All in all, the materials (CV of applicants, job description and 2 audiotapes in different accents) which exposed to the participants were made to be identical by our best effort in order to ensure the quality of manipulations in the experiment.

### 6.2 Pilot Test

Before the execution of the experiment, a simple pilot test was carried out to ensure the context in audiotapes is clear and understandable. Most importantly, we want to ensure that audiences would perceive the only difference between the audiotapes were accent and other factors like cleanness, volume and understandability were more or less the same. Therefore, in the pilot test, we asked the participants to rate on those factors in a scale (1= Extremely Bad, 7= Extremely Good) (*Appendix 4: Pilot test*). Each audiotape was listened and rated by 5 respondents. Analysis of variance was used to test whether there was significant difference of two audiotapes in term of cleanness, volume and understandability. Results showed that those factors were rated high and there were significant differences between them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cleanness</th>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Understandability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native accent tape</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK accent tape</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>p</em>-value from ANOVA</td>
<td><em>p</em>&gt;0.05</td>
<td><em>p</em>&gt;0.05</td>
<td><em>p</em>&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.486)</td>
<td>(0.242)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that, those 10 participants would not invite again to participate in our final experiment.
6.3. Execution of the experiment / collecting data

6.3.1. Participants

The sample involved 60 participants, 43% of the participants were males and 57% of the participants were females. The age of the participants was range from 17 to 24 years. Up to 83% of the participants were recruited from Hong Kong Baptist University. 83% of the participant’s education level was Undergraduate (Bachelor Degree), 15% percent was Tertiary (Associate degree, High Diploma) and finally 2% was come from Secondary School.

6.3.2 Procedure

1. Briefed the participants that they were having the responsibility for hiring someone for an entry- level job, junior accounting clerk. They were also told to imagine they were representing the HR manager.
2. CV of the applicants and the job description were then given to the participants to review and to get familiar with the position.
3. Participants will then randomly assigned to listen either the audiotapes with Native English accent or Local accent (30 of them listen Native English accent + 30 of them listen Local accent = 60 participants). Adding that, the audiotapes only played once.
4. The participants were finally asked to fill in the evaluation form and make employment recommendation according to the audiotapes they heard. (Appendix 5: Applicant Evaluation Form)
7. Measures

7.1 Job Suitability
The measurement of job suitability is adopted from a similar experiment of Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Nguyen (2012). (α = 0.87) Three questions on a seven-point scale were asked to the participants. Questions were: “Do you feel that she is suited for the job?”, “Do you feel that she has the necessary skills and abilities to perform the job?”, “Do you believe that she is qualified for the job?” Participants responded to these items along seven-point Likert-type scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree). The higher score on the measure means the greater the perceived suitability of the applicant.

7.2 Perceived Competence
Same as job suitability, the measurement of perceived competence is also adopted from Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Nguyen (2012). To measure the perceived competence, seven points semantic differential scale was used. There were six dimensions for perceived competence, namely, “educated - uneducated”, “upper class - lower class”, “intelligent- unintelligent”, “advantaged - disadvantaged”, “confident- in-confident” and “competent - incompetent”. (α = 0.85) The higher the score means the more positive in those dimensions.

7.3 Hiring Recommendation
This study adopts the same measurement with Deprez-Sims A.S & Morris S.B. (2010). The candidates were required to rate on seven items on a seven-point scale. (α = 0.89) Score 1 means strongly disagree and score 7 means strongly agree. The items were as follows:

(1) Satisfaction if the applicant is hired (7 points scale)
(2) Feel favorable toward applicant (7 points scale)
(3) Desire to collaborate with the applicant (7 points scale)
(4) Applicant would be an advantage to the company (7 points scale)
(5) Likelihood or willingness to hire (7 points scale)
(6) Relationship with subordinates (7 points scale)
(7) Ability to manage. (7 points scale)
7.4 Hiring Decision

Same as the experiment of Huang Frideger & Pearce (2013), the participants had to respond to the final question: “What is your recommendation regarding this applicant?” Participants were required to provide with a “Yes” or “No” answer.

7.5 Statistical Tests

The test of ANCOVA (Analysis of Covariance) was used to test the hypothesis because this study was a factorial between-group experimental design. Also, this statistical test allowed us to see whether the control variables, like gender, age and educational level of participants would exert influence to the experiment or not.
8. Result

ANCOVA (Analysis of Covariance) was used as statistical tests for testing hypothesis in this between-group experiment: “Job Suitability”, “Perceived Competency”, “Hiring Recommendation” and “Hiring Decision” were the dependent variables. Respondents’ gender, age and education level were regarded as control variable because those demographic attributes are the characteristics of individuals which would affect their judgments. All results from ANCOVA showed there were significant differences on the effect of accents even taking into accounts of the control variables. Thus, we are confident to claim that those differences between-group was indeed only contributed by the accent of the applicants.

8.1 Test of hypothesis H1a - Job Suitability

It was hypothesized (H1a) that the applicant with native English accent would be rated as more suitable for the position than the Hong Kong accent. There was a statistical significant difference between the mean scores of job suitability for these two accents: $F (1, 58) = 5.960$, $p < 0.05$. The applicant with native English accent ($N=30, M = 5.611, SD = 0.743$) was rated higher than the Hong Kong accent one ($N=30, M = 5.133, SD = 0.878$). Mean difference was 0.478.

![Estimated Marginal Means of Job Suitability](image_url)

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Gender = 1.57, Age = 2.25, EducationLevel = 3.82
8.2 Test of hypothesis H1b – Perceived Competency

In the hypothesis H1b, we assumed that the applicant with native accent would be perceived as possessing higher competency in term of perceived education level, class, intelligence, advantages, confidence and competence. The result was satisfied with this hypothesis.

The test of ANCOVA indicated that the scores of perceived competency were statistically significant different between these two applicants: $F (1, 58) = 46.977, p < 0.05$. The applicant with native English accent ($N=30, M = 5.767, SD = 0.734$) scored higher than the one with Hong Kong accent ($N=30, M = 4.472, SD = 0.877$). The mean difference was 1.295.
To be more specific to each dimension of the perceived competency, it was found that:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Intelligence</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Confidence</th>
<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native Accent</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.867</td>
<td>5.767</td>
<td>5.533</td>
<td>6.000</td>
<td>5.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.088)</td>
<td>(1.008)</td>
<td>(0.935)</td>
<td>(1.074)</td>
<td>(1.017)</td>
<td>(0.691)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK Accent</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.433</td>
<td>4.433</td>
<td>4.133</td>
<td>4.800</td>
<td>4.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.144)</td>
<td>(1.165)</td>
<td>(1.073)</td>
<td>(1.252)</td>
<td>(1.472)</td>
<td>(1.25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) **Perceived education**: the scores for native English accent: \(N=30, M = 5.7, SD = 1.088\) and Hong Kong accent is \(N=30, M = 5, SD = 1.144\). The mean difference was 0.7.

(2) **Perceived class**: the scores for native English accent: \(N=30, M = 5.867, SD = 1.008\) and Hong Kong accent is \(N=30, M = 4.433, SD = 1.165\). The mean difference was 1.533.

(3) **Perceived intelligence**, the scores for native English accent: \(N=30, M = 5.767, SD = 0.935\) and Hong Kong accent is \(N=30, M = 4.433, SD = 1.073\). The mean difference was 1.333.

(4) **Perceived advantages**, the scores for native English accent: \(N=30, M = 5.533, SD = 1.074\) and Hong Kong accent is \(N=30, M = 4.133, SD = 1.252\). The mean difference was 1.4.

(5) **Perceived confidence**, the scores for native English accent: \(N=30, M = 6.000, SD = 1.017\) and Hong Kong accent is \(N=30, M = 4.800, SD = 1.472\). The mean difference was 1.2.

(6) **Perceived competence**, the scores for native English accent: \(N=30, M = 5.733, SD = 0.691\) and Hong Kong accent is \(N=30, M = 4.033, SD =1.25\). The mean difference was largest among the dimensions which was 1.700.

To sum up, the applicant with native accent scored higher than the local accent on in each dimension of perceived competency.
8.3 Test of hypothesis H1c – Hiring Recommendation

It was hypothesized (H1c) that the applicant with native like speaking would score higher in “Hiring Recommendation”. The result of ANCOVA also supported this hypothesis that showed the p-value < 0.05.

Same as previous results have just mentioned, the applicant with native accent still got higher score than the local accent one in hiring recommendation. The mean scores of applicant with native English accent in hiring recommendation: N=30, M = 5.686, SD = 0.793 and Hong Kong accent applicant was: N=30, M = 4.605, SD = 0.854. The mean difference was 1.081.

In the test of ANCOVA, it was found that: $F (1, 58) = 25.522, \ p<0.05$. Thus, it has sufficient evidence to support that the population means of the “Hiring Recommendation” of the applicants who possess native accent and Hong Kong accent were different.
8.4 Test of hypothesis H2 – Hiring Decision

In the last hypothesis, we assumed that the native English speaking applicants would have a higher chance to be employed when comparing to the Hong Kong accent one. Among the respondents who evaluated the applicants with native accent, 96.7% \((n=29)\) of them would choose to hire. Only 3.3% \((n=1)\) would choose not to hire.

On the other hand, in the group of respondents listened to the applicant with Hong Kong accent, 63.3% \((n=19)\) would choose to hire and 36.7% \((n=11)\) would decide not to hire.

The result of ANCOVA also showed that the hiring decisions of two applicants with different accents were statistically different from each other: \(F(1, 58) = 12.106, p < 0.05\).
The below table summarizes the statistical results between two accents on the impacts of four dependent variables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accent</th>
<th>Job Suitability</th>
<th>Perceived Competence</th>
<th>Hiring Recommendation</th>
<th>Hiring Decision (% would hire)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>5.611 (0.743)</td>
<td>5.767 (0.734)</td>
<td>5.686 (0.793)</td>
<td>Hire: 96.7% Not hire: 3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK Accent</td>
<td>5.133 (0.878)</td>
<td>4.472 (0.877)</td>
<td>4.605 (0.854)</td>
<td>Hire: 63.3% Not hire: 36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>p &lt;0.05 (0.018)</td>
<td>p &lt;0.01 (0.000)</td>
<td>p &lt;0.01 (0.000)</td>
<td>p &lt;0.05 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Discussion

As we know that, many studies have already looked at the biases related to gender, age or physical attractiveness in the workplace. However, there are very few studies have examined the effects of accents in workplace. From the above results, we can find that accents can impact on the perception of an interviewee’s suitability for a job, perceived competency, the hiring recommendation and final hiring decision.

Our first hypothesis was that the applicant speaking with native English accent would be evaluated to have higher scores on “Job Suitability” than the applicant speaking with Hong Kong accent. The study’s result showed that there was a statistically significant difference at the p value < 0.05 level in the scores of job suitability for these two accents. The result found that, when compared with the applicant using the Hong Kong accent, the applicant with the native English accent was rated more positively and with higher scores. Comparing to the Hong Kong local accent, the native English applicant represented an advantage in the job suitability. In other words, the Hong Kong local accent was much less likely to make positive impressions when compared with the Native English accent speakers. In contrast to our results, past research has found the foreign accented applicants tend to be the disadvantaged group when compared to the local-accented one (Huang, Frideger, & Pearce, 2013). However, the situation in Hong Kong was reversed. The native English accent in Hong Kong could stand out from the majority population and gain more positive impression or prestigious status. Therefore, we can conclude that the applicant with the Native English accent was evaluated more favorably regarding suitability for the job.

In our second hypothesis, we assumed that the applicant speaking with native English accent would be rated to have higher scores on “Perceived Competency” than the applicant speaking with Hong Kong accent. This finding was consistent with our hypothesis and some of the literature that we stated before. For example, according to the Accent Prestige Theory (Giles, 1970, 1973; Fuertes, Potere & Ramirez, 2002), people would use the speaker’s accent as a cue to come up with certain judgments and perceptions about the speaker’s characteristics, such as intelligence, physical attractiveness and reliability. Moreover, speakers’ accents can let us know more about somebody ethnicity, national origin, education level and status. Bourdieu (1977) also claimed that people usually use accent to make inferences about social group member and level of competence. Besides, Foon (1986, p.521) also pointed out that speech style (including accent) have a powerful impact on
the judgments of speakers over a wide range of qualities attributed to the people perceived. Therefore, the result of our study was constant with their viewpoints. Thus, we conclude the hypothesis was established that job applicant with native English accent could be perceived to be more competent, in terms of perceived education level, class, intelligence, advantage, confidence and competence.

Third, we expected that the applicant speaking with native English accent would be graded to get higher scores on “Hiring Recommendation” than the applicant speaking with Hong Kong accent. The result of ANCOVA also supported this hypothesis as previous hypothesis by showing p-value <0.05 significance level. Same as prior results have just mentioned, this hypothesis was built. The result was similar with Hopper and Williams (1973): the job candidate possessing with standard US English accent, he or she was rated as more employable than another job candidate possessing with other accents like, Black English, Spanish-influenced English or Southern White English.

Finally, our last hypothesis examined the evaluation of applicants’ final hiring decision. We presumed that the applicant with native English accent would have higher probability to be employed that the one speaking with Hong Kong accent. The result of ANCOVA presented that the hiring decisions of two applicants with different accents were statistically different from each other: \( F(1, 58) = 12.106, p < 0.05 \). The result demonstrated that accent is equally an issue that can impact employment outcomes (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Deprez-Sims&Morris, 2010). Apart from this, the result in our study also could show the equivalent view with Chen (2008) that there was a phenomenon of Xenophilia in the Hong Kong society, thus, and people may tend to feel that western objects, people or even the accents are inferior.
10. Management Implications

From the perspective of human resources management, it always says that, “Employees are the most valuable resources of any business” Therefore it is important for organizations to have an effective recruitment and selection process as to ensure that the best possible applicant is recruited to the position. If the recruiters hire the wrong applicant due to any reasons, like what we have pinpointed in our study, committing the bias towards the applicants’ accents, the cost of such inaccurate decision would be enormous to the company. The costs would be the potential negative impact to company’s reputation, productivity and morale, etc. Results showed that interviewers are vulnerable to make biased judgments towards applicants’ accent. There are several potential solutions to reduce interviewers’ biases:

Firstly, company should use structured interviews to reduce the chances of accent-related biases that would affect the evaluations of applicants. According to Campion and Huffcutt (1997, 2001), it would be better for company to use structured interview because structured interview are more job-related, more valid and result in considerably lower adverse impact. It is crucial for interviewers make sure to conduct structured interviews based on job-related hiring criteria. When job interviews are more standardized and objective thus they could become more relevant to the job analysis and the criteria central to the job.

Secondly, Purkiss et al. (2006) also pointed out the importance of training interviewers, using multiple interviewers and selecting effective interviewers. In addition, interviewers’ characteristics also need to be considered. Interviewers should be selected who do not view foreign accents negatively. If possible, company should utilize those interviewers who have international experience and have neutral views towards foreign accents. In addition, some recruiters indeed do not aware themselves holding biases against different accents which affect their hiring decisions. Consequently, it is imperative to provide some training programs for hiring managers on accent-bias awareness and make sure the hiring manager will not screen out the potential job applicants simply for the way they talk.
11. Limitations and Improvements

Although our research has achieved its purpose, there were still some limitations due to the constraints of time and resources:

First, because of the limited time, this research was only conducted on a small sample size. In certain extent, this would affect the generalizability and the value of study of this research. Therefore, to generalize the results for larger groups, this study would have better to invite more respondents as to enlarge the sample size.

The second limitation is the qualifications and professionalism of the respondents. In our study, all of the respondents were undergraduates or with even lower education level. They were the people who were lacking of interview experiences and rating techniques. Understandably, they were more easily to commit bias in the experiment. Gordon et al. (1986) argued that students were unacceptable substitutes for actual decision makers in organizations. It is because many of the interviewers who actually make employment decisions in organization are usually well trained and with rich interview experiences. They may be more aware of the impact of accent during the interviews. Therefore, this limitation affects the degree of generalizability to the real workplace setting. To improve this study, it would be better to invite HR practitioners to participate in this research in the future.

The third limitation is the voice differences of the audiotapes. In addition, listeners seemed to enjoy the experiment and they also discuss about prejudice arose afterwards. However, there are some problems or uncontrolled variables in the design of the experiment. In the process of the audiotapes production, we spent our greatest effort to find 2 voice actresses with similar tone and voice. Also, we tried our best to control their speed and fluency when we were recording their voices, as a way that to make 2 audiotapes only differ in accents. Even though careful consideration was taken when recording the speakers, it was not done in a fully controlled environment. The speakers were free to read the script as they wanted to and this might have revealed too much of their personality and therefore affected the listeners evaluations. For example, some minor differences like voice’s tone and pitch do exist as the audiotapes indeed are made up by 2 different people. In case there were some respondents with very sensitive ears, they may make judgements on the tone and pitch of the applicants. Although the differences have just mentioned were not obvious, this limitation does exist
that made our study cannot be perfect. Hence, if possible, the audiotapes have been more perfect if they would be recorded by the same person who can speak in 2 accents.

Fourth is the choice of job position. In our study, we chose junior accounting clerk in the experiment. The choice of this particular job description may have affected the results if participants perceived that this job was associated with a certain degree of status. Kalin and Rayko (1978) claimed that varying effects could be due to different degrees of job status. Specifically, they found that foreign accented applicants were given lower evaluations for high status jobs and higher evaluations for those low status jobs. Thus, future study can be extended to more job positions if there would be possible time and resources.

12. Future Study

The problem of discrimination against Mainland Chinese has become more serious after recent social issues happened in Hong Kong, like, parallel traders in Sheung Shui, abuse of maternity services by mainland mothers, Individual Visit Scheme, etc. Some Hong Kong people may perceive those Mainland Chinese who are generally poorer and less educated. (Stewart, Liu & Lam, 2014)

When it comes to job interview conducted in Cantonese, those Mainland Chinese may speak with non-native Cantonese which may expose their identity. Thus, they may then become the discriminated and disadvantaged groups when they apply for jobs in Hong Kong. So, here, we recommend similar research can be carried out to compare the interview evaluation between the applicants speaking with native Cantonese and non-native Cantonese.
13. References

- Fuertes JN1, Potere JC, Ramirez KY. (2002). Effects of speech accents on interpersonal evaluations: implications for counseling practice and research


Markley, E. D. & University of North Texas. (2000). *Regional accent discrimination in the hiring process: A language attitude study*


Appendix 1: Script for the audiotapes

| Interview: | Good morning. I am Miss Chan, the HR manager of our company. Welcome to attend this interview. First of all, would you please introduce yourself? |
| Crystal: | Good morning Miss Chan, I am Crystal. In July this year, I will be graduating from Hong Kong Baptist University with BBA accounting. I am interested in accounting so I joined accounting internships in different companies in previous summer. I got the practical accounting experiences during the internship, such as book keeping, issuing cheque, performing bank reconciliation account and providing support for external audit. Apart from these, I also actively take part in different outdoor activities like hiking, cycling and swimming, and I also participate in volunteer work in PlayRight Children’s Play Association |
| Interview: | It sounds like you have many interests. But would you tell more about your volunteer experiences in the organization that you have mentioned? |
| Crystal: | Sure, I have worked as a volunteer in PlayRight Children’s Play Association for 2 years. I am mainly responsible for designing and organizing games and activities for primary students. And sometimes I need to assist in introducing the goals and mission of PlayRight to interested companies. |
| Interview: | What is your strengths and weakness? |
| Crystal: | My biggest strength is the sense of responsibility, punctuality and the ability to work under pressure to meet deadlines. I am a very trustworthy person with the ability to work as a team player or as an individual that helps me to survive under different kinds of environments. ……And my weakness is that I cannot speak Putonghua fluently and I think I need to put more effort to practice more and overcome it |
| Interview: | Why did you decide to specialize in Accounting? |
| Crystal: | I want to work in the accounting industry because ever since I took my accounting management course in University, I have felt very passionate toward the industry. Accounting is a business discipline that allows companies to record, analyze and retrieve critical financial information that can be used to determine a company’s financial status and provide reports and insights needed to make sound financial decisions. I am interested in expanding my professional horizons by seeking new challenges in the area of accounting and I feel I am capable of handling |
| Interview: | What do you see yourself doing in 10 years? |
| Crystal: | Ten years from now I see myself as a successful accountant for a world-class company like yours. I want to develop a wonderful bond with my employer. And most importantly, I will try my best effort to contribute to my company |
| Interview: | How would you describe yourself in terms of your ability to work as a member of a team |
| **Crystal:** | My experience as a business proposal competition helped me to learn the role of “team player”. I am the group leader and I need to ensure that everyone in the group had equal opportunity to contribute, and integrate and coordinate their energies toward reaching our team’s goal. |
Appendix 2: Job description for Junior Accounting Clerk

Junior Accounting Clerk

Job Description
The Junior Accounting Clerk contributes to the effective and efficient workings of the finance department by performing daily tasks with a strong attention to detail. This role will utilize strong accounting knowledge, time management skills and actual problem solving to ensure success.

Duties and Responsibilities
- Accounts Payable, includes processing invoices, following up with vendors and resolving discrepancies in a timely manner. Vendor maintenance in SAP.
- Accounts Receivable, including processing payments, producing statement of accounts, collections on overdue accounts and account reconciliation when required. Customer maintenance in SAP.
- Processing Employee expense reports, verifying expenses are within the company guidelines, correcting errors, questioning abnormal expenses and entering into the finance system.
- Invoice creation and distribution when required.
- Filing and records retention
- Reception and Administrative support

Qualifications
- Bachelor’s Degree (Preferably in Finance / Accounting)
- Post-Secondary degree in accounting (or equivalent work experience)
- 1-3 years accounting experience
- SAP experience is a definite asset
- Detail oriented, ability to show initiative and take responsibility
- Strong MS Office skills
- Effective problem solving skills
Appendix 3: CV for candidates

Crystal, Chow Ka Man
E-mail: chimianchow@hotmail.com
Availability: immediate

**Personal Summary:**
A dedicated and motivated fresh graduate with high proficiency in accounting and financing from HKUST. Possessing effective learning ability and patience to overcome new challenges, and being able to maintain good work under high pressure.

**Education:**
- **2012-2015** Bachelor of Business Administration (Hons.) in Accounting, Hong Kong Baptist University
  CGPA: 3.31
- **2010-2011** HKALE, ABC College
  HKALE Level: Accounting (C), Economics (D)
  HKASLE Level: Chinese Language and Culture (D), Usage of English (E)
- **2005-2010** HKCEE, ABC College
  Chinese Language(4), English Language(3), Mathematics(3), Principle of Account(3), Economics (3), Word Processing(3), Biology (E)

**Working Experiences:**
- **May – Aug 2014** Summer Trainee (Accounting Dept.), DEF Enterprise.
  • Performed bookkeeping.
  • Managed relationships with vendors and suppliers regarding open purchase order and invoices.
  • Collected key information and required documentation from clients, Internal Revenue Service, the Franchise Tax Board.

  • Recorded monthly activities in a bookkeeping role for corporations and provided clients with consulting advisement, business analysis and strategic recommendations.
  • Researched tax issues and documented findings.

  • Assisted the business of textbooks retailing.
  • Communicated with the publishers, schools and students.
Extra-Curricular Activities:
2013-Present
- Basketball team player in the ACCT Society in HKBU
- Volunteer of PlayRight Children’s Play Association

Skills and Abilities:
- Good presentation skill and communication skill
  - had the experiences of being the MC and trained in the Effective Presentation Programme.
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)

Personal Interests:
- Playing sports
  - Hiking, volleyball, basketball
Appendix 4: Pilot Test

**How do you feel about the recording?**

*Circle the number that best represents your opinion on a scale from 1 (extremely bad) to 7 (extremely good)*

*Audiotape A / B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely Bad</th>
<th>Extremely Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volume</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understandability</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>
Appendix 5: Applicant Evaluation Form

**Personal Demographic Data:** (Please circle the answer)

**Gender:** Male / Female  
**Age:** 16 years or below / 17-24 years old / 25-32 years old / 33-40 years old / 41 or above  
**Education Level:** Primary / Secondary / Tertiary (Associate degree, High Diploma) / Undergraduate (Bachelor Degree) / Postgraduate (Master Degree, Doctorate Degree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicant Evaluation Form</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that she is suited for the job.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that she has the necessary skills and abilities to perform the job.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that he is qualified for the job.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Perceived competence**

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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Uneducated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lower class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>unintelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Not confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Competent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Hiring Recommendation**

(A) In the following part, please comment on the applicant according to the interview content of the audio tape. 1 represents strongly disagrees; 7 represents strongly agrees. Please circle the answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) Satisfaction if the applicant is hired</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2) Feel favourable toward applicant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Desire to work with the applicant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Applicant would be an asset to the company</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Likelihood or willingness to hire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Relationship with subordinates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Ability to manage.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(B) “What is your recommendation regarding this applicant?”  
| YES/NO | please circle the answer |