

HIROSHIMA UNIVERSITY広島大学

Reflection Sheet: Class 3

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND COMMUNICATION II

外国語習得とコミュニケーション II

**Submission Information**

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1. Introduction

The session focused on exploring native speakers' attitudes towards L2 (second language) English users, particularly in terms of accent and the resulting dynamics in communication, such as discrimination in workplaces, call centers, and law enforcement practices. Key case studies, such as those of Manuel Fragante and James Kahakua, illustrated how accents can impact social perceptions and professional opportunities. The discussion began by examining a documented case from Dallas, where drivers were cited for not speaking English.

## Identity in Communication

The instructor introduced the concept of communication as a social activity, emphasizing how our interactions often reflect societal norms and biases. We explored how L2 speakers are "positioned" within conversations, their accents and fluency are often used as markers of competence or worth. Feedback, both verbal and non-verbal, plays a crucial role in ensuring understanding and refining communication, especially in overcoming barriers like noise or interference. In addition, communication is not just linguistic but deeply influenced by cultural values, social norms, and attitudes, which shape how messages are framed, interpreted, and responded to.

1. Behavior & Accent Barrier

## Behavior of Customers in Call Centers

The session highlighted examples from Mexican call center agents, where customers frequently judged agents’ competence based on their accents or national origin. Phrases like, “I want to speak to someone in the United States,” demonstrated the discrimination that non-native speakers, regardless of fluency, face in professional interactions.

The issue wasn’t just about communication breakdowns, but it was about the racist assumptions that L2 speakers are "less capable" or "unfit" for certain roles or responsibilities.

## Dallas’ Case

The Dallas case amplified this discussion. Drivers, such as Ernestina Mondragon, were cited and unfairly penalized for “not speaking English,” despite there being no legitimate basis for such citations in local law. This revealed a systemic misuse of power, where linguistic ability became a tool for discrimination. Much like the call center customers, these officers reflected a tendency to associate English proficiency with broader competence.

## “Different” Accents

Accents were defined as variations in pronunciation influenced by regional or social factors. The distinction between "native" and "non-native" accents was explored, with emphasis on how accents are judged based on internalized native speaker norms.

Case studies such as Manuel Fragante and James Kahakua further illustrate how accents, even when paired with perfect grammar, can be perceived as markers of incompetence. These perceptions aren't based on linguistic ability but rather on societal biases against non-native accents.

Despite linguistic proficiency, Manuel Fragante’s Filipino accent led to professional discrimination. Similarly, James Kahakua’s Hawaiian Creole accent became a barrier in securing a position, showcasing systemic bias against non-standard accents.  
These cases illustrated societal challenges faced by L2 speakers, even when their language use aligns with grammatical correctness.

# Conclusion

From this session, it is clear that L2 speakers often face unjust treatment rooted in cultural prejudices rather than actual communicative ability. Recognizing and addressing these biases is essential to fostering equality and inclusiveness.