



Linguistic Profiling

Identifying Race from Speech

Baugh

Can you tell what race a person is by their voice?
Does it make a difference?

Recent research by Baugh has confirmed that we frequently identify race from speech. This pattern of linguistic profiling may be as common and insidious as racial profiling. We've all heard stories about the pervasiveness of Driving While Black (or Brown)...being stopped by the police for fitting a profile. Linguistic profiling uses aural cues rather than skin color.

Some authorities call the problem "Talking While Black." We form opinions while listening to someone over the telephone. Now, you can tell on the telephone with me that I'm probably a female from the South, so what's the problem with linguistic profiling?

There's only a problem if you deny the person access to a job interview or a business transaction or in any way limit access to services and goods. For example, you might decide (based on my voice) that you don't want to rent an apartment to me.

What's the solution? Should I hire a speech coach to eliminate my southern accent? Should Hispanics ask someone else to make their phone calls? Or...should linguistic profiling be illegal?

Who are the offenders—those speaking naturally or those who hear some voices as "wrong" and others as more valued?

What are your reactions? Are you guilty of linguistic profiling?
Have you been profiled?