Project 3
Final Draft
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Success versus Translingualism
Do we need to Choose?

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Questions:

Does "translingualism" always have positive impacts on society?

Introduction:

A colleague of mine, Jonathan Park, in my multi-lingualism expository writing course has recently explored a topic about experiencing disconnects within languages and how they relate back to what is called "translingualism"[1], meaning that individuals could mesh between multiple languages without making a distinction between them.

Park closely follows the narrative of a break-dancer, Oku, who visits New York to experience the dancing culture there. During Oku's trip, he wrestles with the idea of the "right" break-dancing language that differs from his supposed mentor, Nemesis.[2] Canagarajah, an avid author on linguistic complications, offers the idea that "Languages are not necessarily at war with eachother"[3], but this particular scenario paints a picture where one language or dialect seems to hinder and challenge others within the same circle. Although Park had concluded in his paper that as people of different cultures mesh more, our society would become more translingual, there is research and evidence that may show otherwise. There are certain social drawbacks that may not be worth the "translingual experience".[4] In order to follow Oku's struggle very closely and respect Park's analysis, it should be noted that the real difference between Nemesis and Oku's language seems to stem

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[1] Canagarajah, 7
[2] Oku, 3
[3] Canagarajah, 6
[4] Park, 6

from how they utilize their dance; therefore, in terms of linguistics, the distinction between them is closest to those of accents and dialects. For my research, I focused on this "trans-accentism" and found out the negative impacts of the process from each of my sources.

Simple Introduction - Overview of Sources:

From my research, it seems that "trans-accentism" may be hard to accomplish in a society that seems to value one accent more than another. Many young people seem hesitant to try or use certain accents for greater success in employment, better reputation, or to avoid humiliation. On the other hand, it should be brought up that "translingualism" does have its benefits. It helps students learn languages quicker, it brings more appreciation for different cultures, and individuals will open up to different perspectives. These positive effects in language, however, do not seem to be happening for accents. The sources give their own individual reasons and speculations behind this phenomenon.

Source #1 – Some Regional Accents Spell Social Death by Paul Goggle

In the *The (London) Times* from August 1995, Paul Goggle, a senior lecturer at the University of Kent, writes an article titled "*Some Regional Accents Spell Social Death*". As its title suggests, it mentions how cosmopolitan accents are becoming more centralized as the basis of intellectual communication while rural accents are looked down upon because they are "'harsh', 'ugly', or 'common'".[5] In America, rural accents can be anything from southern accents to New Yorker accents. Although these accents should mean nothing more than "eye colour or shoe size", the intrinsic ugliness of certain accents can take away opportunities from people.[6] Goggle focuses on the fact that the young generation of London is trying harder to fit

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[5] Goggle, 1
[6] Goggle, 3

into accents that are "turn-ons" for others while also maintaining accents that will help them in the job market.[7]

Although this article has been written roughly 18 years ago outside the United States, the implications mentioned are still very relavent today and pertains to Park's thoughts. Park cites Oku who says, "Who was on the right side? Who was really a part of the culture? . . . Nemesis probably had a very different perspective about what it means to spread "culture". There is no right or wrong in understanding a culture until we think about the community associated with them."[8] Park affirms Oku's thoughts by claiming that there is no right or wrong in each language and that Nemesis's language may help him in the long run. But such translingualism is hard to see in terms of accents in the United States.

American media suggest that there is a "right" accent or language that people should know. As one surfs different channels on their televisions, it is hard to come across individuals with heavy rural accents unless if they are trying to produce some comedic effect. This can be seen on news channels, classy TV shows, commercials, etc. Let's take the example of an iconic news anchor Piers Morgan from CNN. Some say that Piers Morgan has the perfect accent for news reporting in the United States because of his sharpness, his affirming voice, and his intelligence.[9] An American Journalist, David Carr, even jokes in the New York Times that "the English (people) know what the audiences want and how to deliver it"[10]. Maybe this idea could be true, but looking through my own personal experiences with British accents in the United States, there seems to be more going on than simple technique. I would have to agree with Goggle that having certain urban accents could really change the way one is perceived. There was one personal experience, where a group of friends including myself got onto a taxi where the driver spoke with a strong Tanzanian

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[7] Goggle, 5
[8] Oku, 4

[9] Young, Web.
[10] Carr, Web.

accent. There was an immediate negative stigma that got triggered, but we later found ourselves commending the driver for his fantastic tour.

As Goggle suggests, maybe translingualism isn't the best way for individuals to go about a route of success? Sticking to the "right" language could lead one to greater things. It would be interesting to do further research on pay rates versus different accents.

Source #2 – Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance by Shilpa Dave

In the book *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance* by Shilpa Dave, the author goes onto talking about certain characters represented in American media and how their roles fit into the American persona. Dave focuses on one character in particular named *Apu* from the TV show "The Simpsons". Apu is an Indian immigrant with a heavy accent who constantly fights through his status of being an American. At one point, Apu changes his accent into what a common (average) American would speak and reverses the expectations that both the television viewers and Homer Simpson had on him. Usually, his role as an Indian immigrant is used to bring racial humour into the mix of the show, but when he counter-acts his common role, it brings a different wave of humour.

Dave makes a sharp point that, "When he changes his accent, he changes his racialized position as a foreigner and noncitizen to a (differently racialized) citizen… His Indian accent may allow him to live in the United States, but it does not reward him the privelages of American Identity that include belonging to or being associated with American culture."[11] In such ways, simply having an American accent doesn't immediately put an individual into the same category as an "American".

The thought of not being a "true American" while speaking the "right language" is an idea that could draw people away from translingualism or trans-accentism beacuase there would be no point. Park mentions in his paper that, "What

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[11] Dave, 2

people do not realize, however, is that diversification, too, is a form of individualizing."[12] And in this case, accents can also be seen as a type of "individualizing". Although Park continues to say that Oku has "become translingual in the language of break-dancing"[13], Dave seems to suggest that such differences in the same language can be as different as separate monolingual languages. With Dave's explanation of Apu, the term translingual or transaccentism may not be the best way to describe what Oku may have experienced through break dancing. Nevertheless, Oku is fighting to understand what it means to speak another language while keeping an open mind to Nemesis. This may be all that is needed to be Canagarajah's definition of "translingual" but for me, this stage of thought is still very much premature.

Dave says that when Apu "fixes" his accent, he only becomes another racialized figure and nothing close to a true American. So if this is the case, can a naturally non-U.S. citizen ever be an American? This thought that Dave brings up could be taken to an extreme. If there will always be an identity attached to an accent, then how could a free standing accent be objectively looked upon as beneficial?

Such questions lead me to wonder how accents may disappear in the long run in order to promote a stream lined "correct" accent. It would be interesting to find further research effects of accent based segregation in society today.

Source #3 – Evaluation of Applicants During an Employment Interview: The Development of a Path Model By Anne-Sophie Deprez-Sims

There was a research study done titled *The Effect of Non-Native Accents on the Evaluation of Applicants During an Employment Interview: The Development of a Path Model* by Anne-Sophie Deprez-Sims at the Illinois Institute of Technology that shows how accents can affect employment in the work force. Looking through the Discussion section of the lab report, the general results suggested that employers have a strong bias against non-native English speakers. However, the researchers examining further reasoning behind this behavior, they found that people tended to

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[12] Park, 5
[13] Park, 6

choose those of the same racial or ethnic group. The employers seem to assume a lot about "fit" and "attractions" towards one another and evaluate individuals based upon the similarity in accent.[14] Although, there were certain limitations in the study such as the low number of Mexican and French participants, the results still speak to some degree on the general population's view on accents.[15]

The results of these studies were overall disappointing but expected, especially after reading Shilpa Dave's book. The idea that different accents can create a barrier in communication has been around for a while. When it comes to very human decisions such as employment, it is clear that people will cluster around those that are more alike and steer away from those who are different. This idea can be seen in Oku's original paper where all of his dance classmates who have the same philosophy create a closer kinship because they have the same "accents".[16] Such ideas could be seen that promoting monolingualism may be better for individuals to succeed in society. At this moment, there isn't much evidence that counters this point.

It is hard to find a scenario, where people would voluntarily go into a new or different group and stay there comfortably. I could only imagine a scenario where the individual is forced into a situation. It may be interesting to research and find a source or a narrative that describes the experience of an individual who has comfortably developed while speaking in a completely different accent from everybody else. It should give strong evidence to the other side of the argument that the lab report is suggesting.

In further research I would like to see the results of individuals who have accomplished success in their field of business using their accent as strengths without demeaning themselves in any way. From my second source (Dave), humour seems to be the only positive way to use a rural accent in a positive manner, but this requires one to lower themselves in the process. Is there any better way to accomplish a positive feedback cycle for accents?

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[14] Deprez-Sims, 74
[15] Deprez-Sims, 78
[16] Oku, 2

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Reflection Harris Final Bullet Point pg123

Over the last week, I have mainly focused on conveying my main thesis better to my audience in the first introductory paragraphs. I made sure that what I wanted to say about my pieces of work were really bleeding out to the audience. After reading Jonathan's comments about my forwarding and countering techniques I was more comfortable with where my paper was in terms of assessing other people's texts so I tried my best to streamline the arguments that I attempted to make in each section. I mainly only counter Jonathan's work, and supplement the forwarding techniques by using the other authors. Overall, trimming the introduction was and still is the hardest part of editing this essay.