



# Language Attitudes & Identity

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SOAS, University of London, UK

# Language Attitudes

- Introductions & definitions
- Measuring language attitudes
- Some findings on attitudes to UK Accents
- Language attitudes, use & identity
- "To be or not to be an 'Indian' ":  
Some Canadian & Bolivian data
- Concluding Notes..



# Background....



Born in Kenya with:  
Gujarati, Hindi, Swahili &  
English + others;

Studied in Kenya, UK &  
Canada: Social  
Psychologist

2016: Fritz Karsen Prof at  
Humboldt Univ

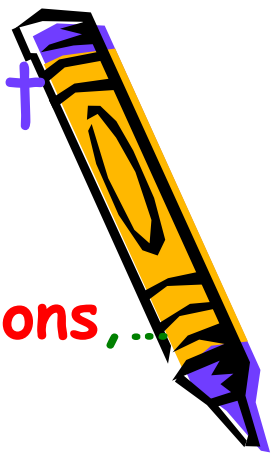
Professor Emeritus of  
Language & Communication  
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School of Oriental &  
African Studies (SOAS),  
University of London:

- 40+ languages of  
Africa, Middle East &  
Asia taught



# My areas of research interest



**Social Psychology of Language & Intergroup Relations**,...  
but like being interdisciplinary..

... minority-majority relations and language, ethnolinguistic vitality of minorities, multiculturalism & multilingualism, intercultural and cross-cultural communication, language learning...

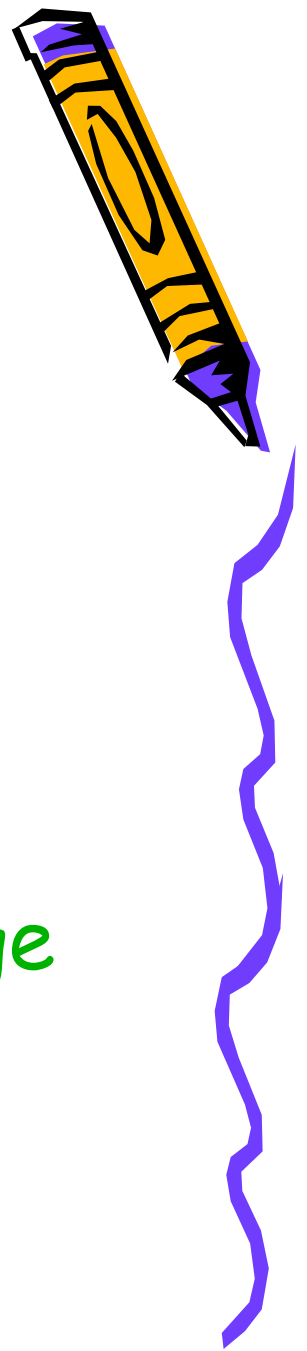
... **Attitudes, identities, beliefs, perceptions, behaviour**

Studies conducted with minorities and majorities in  
Canada, USA, Bolivia, UK, France, India, Spain,  
Tunisia, etc



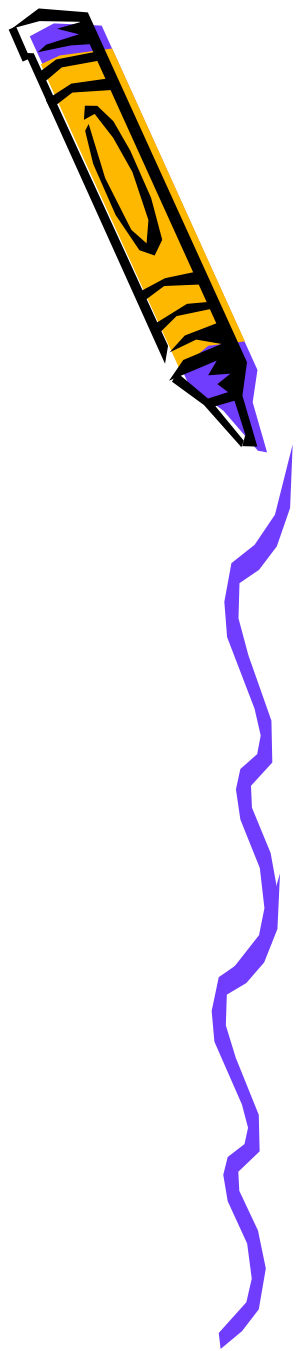
# Definition of Language Attitudes

- Much debate about definitions & operationalisations... Many many studies (see reading list for examples)
- "Any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions toward different language varieties or their speakers" (Ryan, Giles & Sebastian, 1982)



# US English...

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=4kW3K3OclnE>



# THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

4<sup>th</sup> JULY, 1999 (U.K.)

## Labour tells Asians to be like whites

BY SOPHIE GOODCHILD

ONE OF Britain's largest Asian communities has been warned by its Labour council that if it

“quali  
must dress  
white people  
The warn  
“racist and

adopting increasingly local customs and practices.”

The NUT and Asian leaders are demanding the book be withdrawn but last night the council was unapologetic.

as editorial  
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of discrimination in allocating council houses “have lacked substance”. “Distinctive communities more resistant to integration than other previous immigrant groups are 'here to stay,' as the saying goes,” he adds.

Extreme right-wing groups, including the British National Party and Combat 18 are both active in the town and last year a primary school had to be closed for a day after it was daubed with racist graffiti.

Bryan Beckingham, the local NUT secretary and equal opportunities officer, said the comments could provoke racial violence. “We already have a problem with racism and these views do not help,” he added.

“You treat racism in children with education but the council should know better, especially as its members are in a position of power. We are not saying the author should be censored but that the council should disassociate itself from his views.”

Riaz Ahmad, an Oldham councillor, said Asians were angry and upset. “No community can be expected to drop its culture,” he said. The Southall Monitoring Group, an anti-racist organisation in west London, said it was outraged.

ity of life and widen their opportunities, the Asians themselves will have to move away from some of their separateness, even intransigence, in dress, in language, in attitudes to particular occupations,

“...Asian communities..warned... members must dress and behave like white people..”

# Measuring Language Attitudes

- 3 major ways

## (i) Community Impressions

... Public treatment of Language Varieties

- Eg:
- analyses of national language policies
  - analyses of language in popular media
  - language in official places
  - language by subgroups in society ...

...no explicit requests from respondents





# Measuring attitudes cont..



## (ii) Direct Questions

... Questionnaires, interviews, etc

- Eg:
- how favourably is RP viewed?
  - which languages preferred when?
  - desirability of learning languages or particular languages
  - opinions about language use, policies ...

...general focus on beliefs,  
though affect & behavioural intention  
sometimes included...

but social desirability??



# Measuring Language Attitudes cont.



## (iii) Indirect Method

.... 'Matched-Guise Technique' - Lambert et al, 1960

### General procedure

- Same speaker creates different recordings/"guises" of varieties, languages, etc
- these are evaluated/responded to by listeners (status & solidarity scales, behaviour, etc)



- authenticity issues
- controls for voice quality and other idiosyncratic features

# Measuring Language Attitudes cont.

... Matched Guise Technique ... On Youtube..

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UgpfSp2t6k>



# Research on English Varieties in UK

Many years of research in sociolinguistics,  
social psychology of language reveals  
heirarchy:



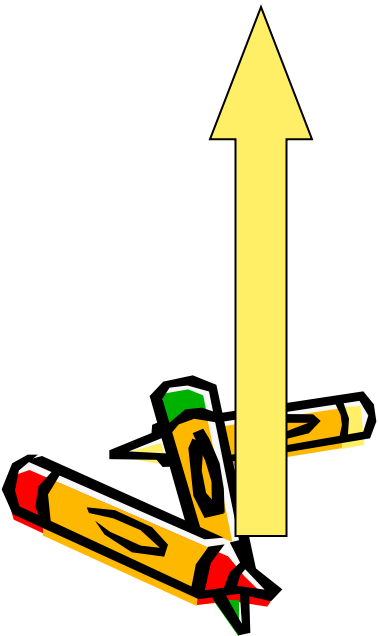
STATUS (prestige, intelligence,  
competence...)

Received Pronunciation (RP)

Regional and European Accents (eg.  
Somerset, S. Welsh,  
French, etc)

Urban Working Class (Cockney,  
Birmingham, etc)

"Visible-Minority" accents



Research on English Varieties in UK

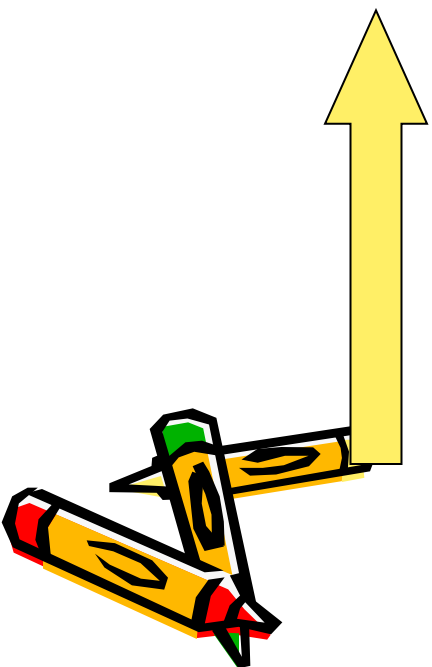
However, research also shows:

Solidarity (warm, friendly,  
trustworthy...)

Regional

Urban Working Class

Received Pronunciation



# Applied Research on English Accents

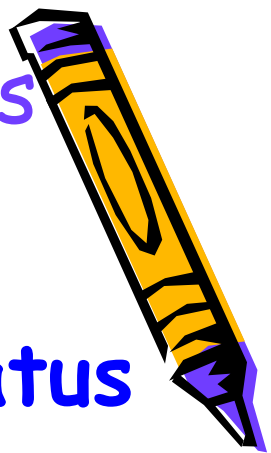
## Employment

.... RP speakers get more high status jobs than Welsh Accented speakers...

(Giles et al, 1981)

## Medical

..RP accented patients diagnosed as "psychosomatic"; regional accented ..."real physical problems"...(Fielding & Evered, 1980)



# Oral Assessment & Accent Evaluation

Sachdev, Elmufti & Collins (1998)

## Brief Background

1988: Maggie Thatcher's UK Govt introduced  
G.C.S.E....

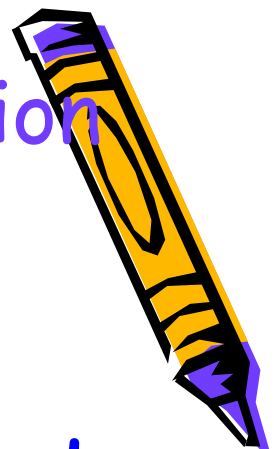
Teachers examiners.... Due to continuous assessment  
component (today?)

From "Guide to Teachers" Booklet by UK  
Examinations Council

"..care should be taken to avoid conveying  
negative attitudes toward regional or local  
accents and dialects"



How do teachers assess accents?



# Study 1



## Participants

51 Teachers of English( 28f; 23m), all white and middle class; from 9 different London Schools

## Design

'Repeated Measures' - Participants evaluated same person speaking in 4 accents (random order and pre-rated different content for each accent): RP, Cockney, Asian & Afrocaribbean

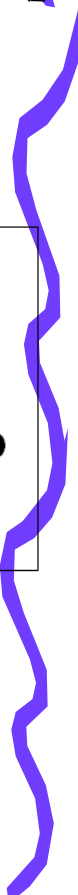
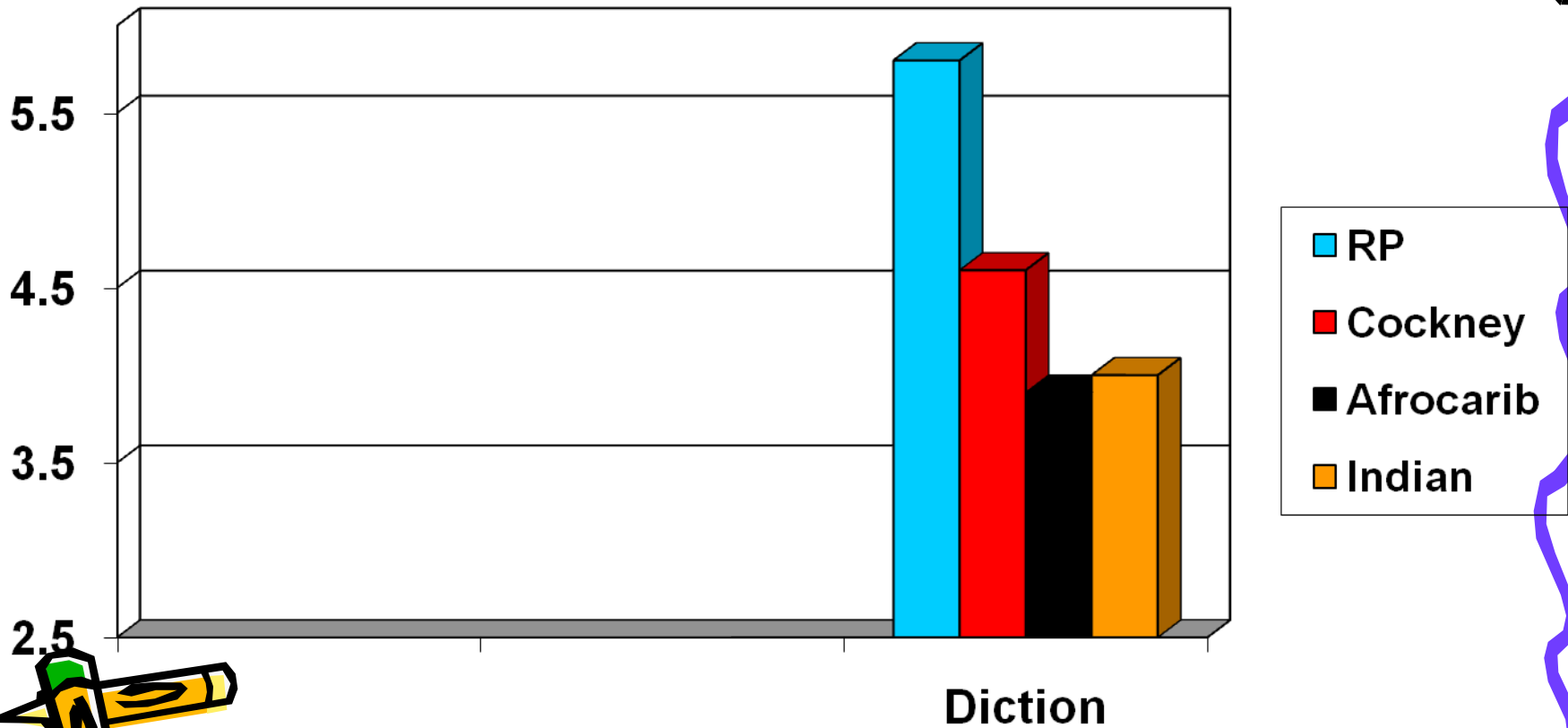
## Procedure

Evaluation of 4 accents on (i) GCSE criteria; (ii) Status and Solidarity Scales; (iii) 'own accent' & manipulation checks; (iv) what is study about? (v) other info.

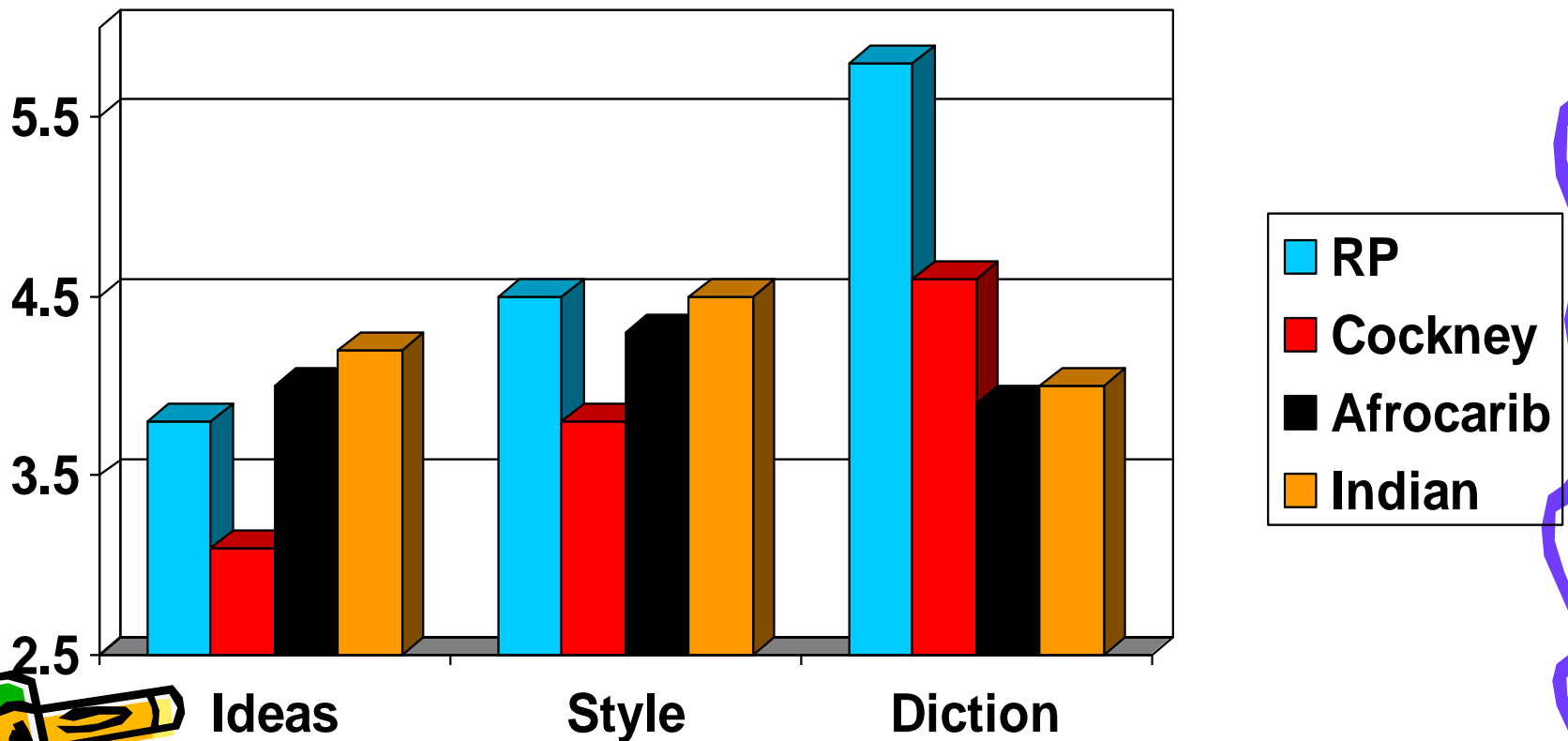




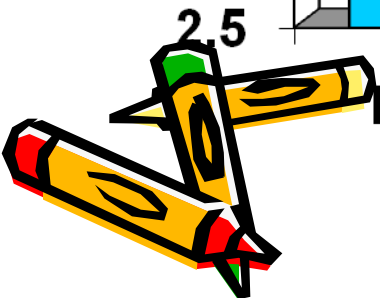
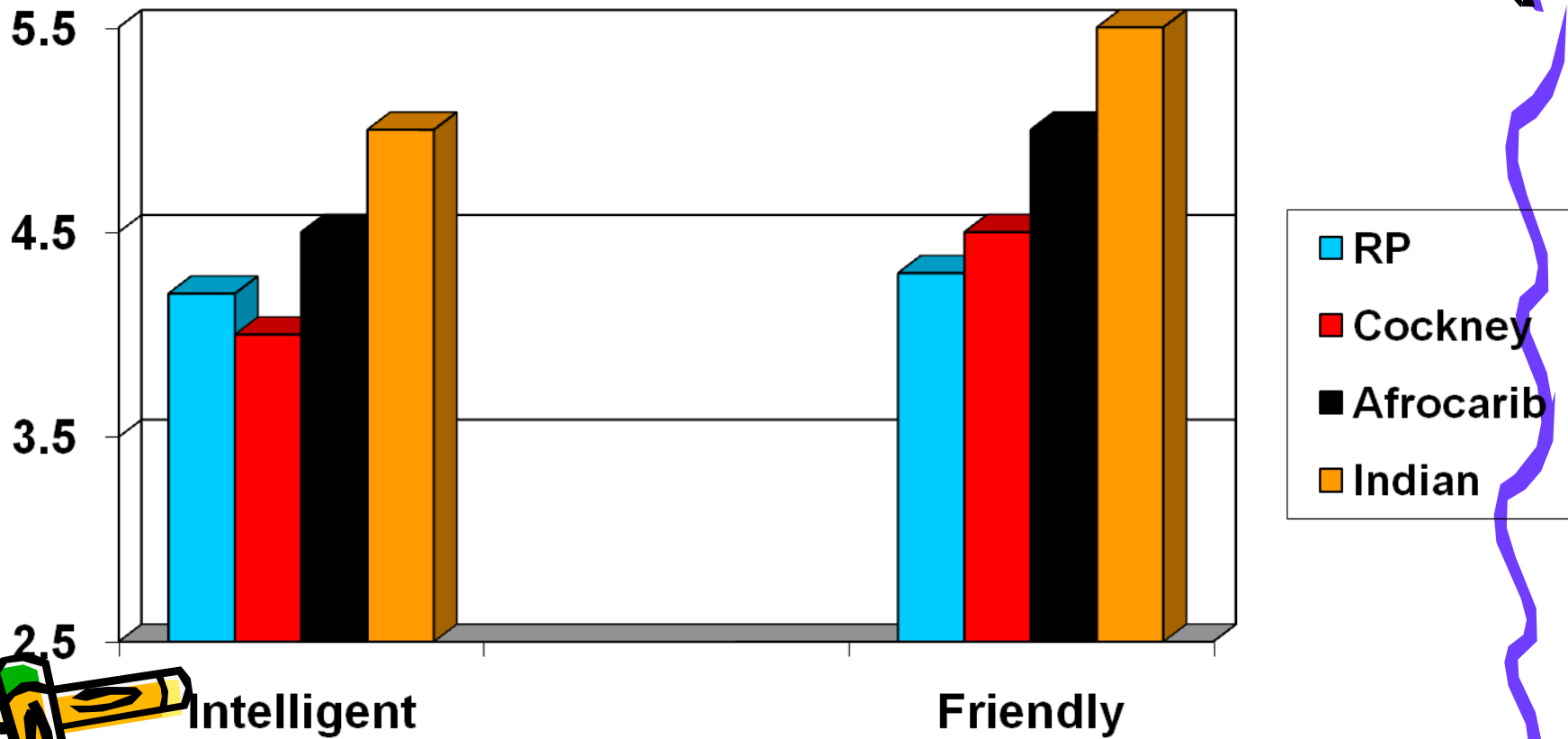
# Evaluations of Accents on GCSE Criteria



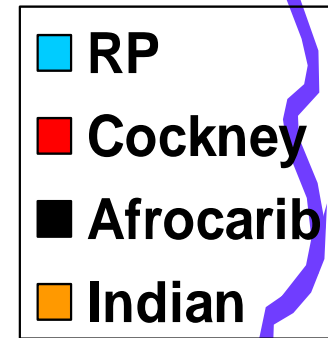
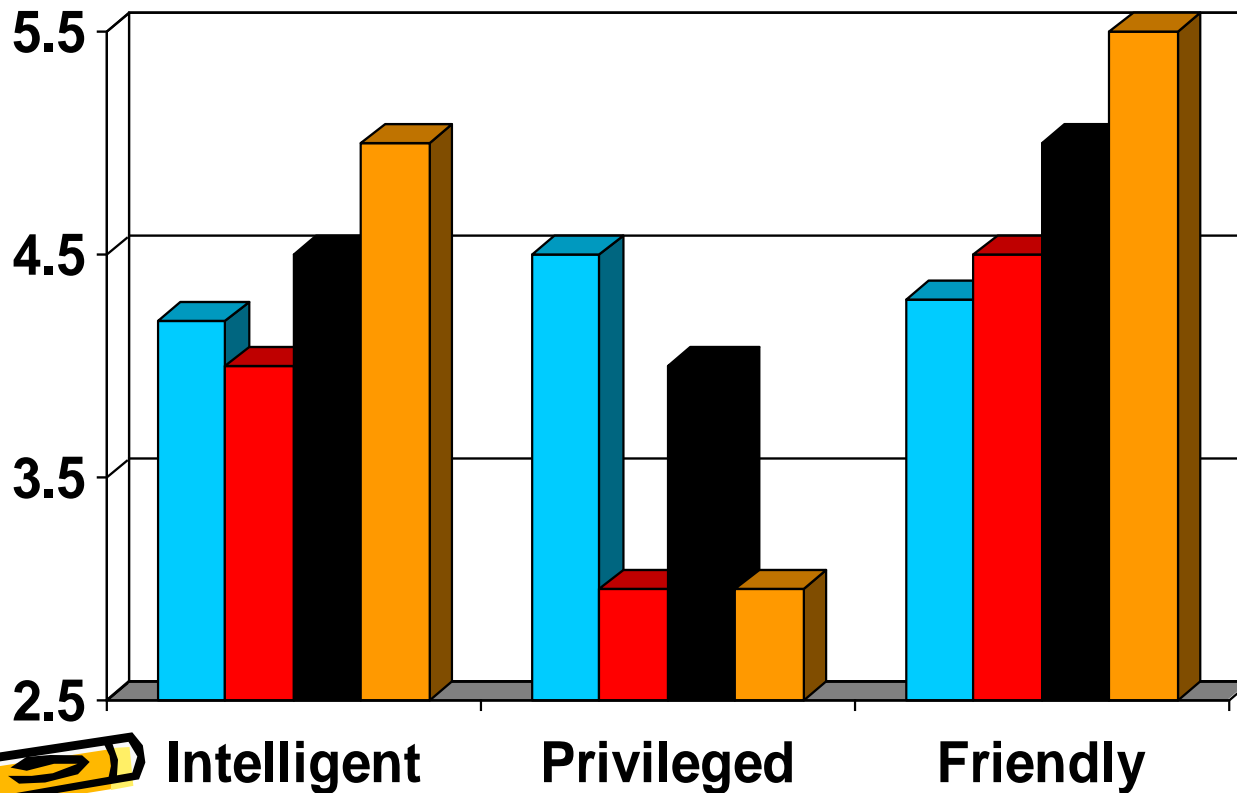
# Evaluations of Accents on GCSE Criteria



# Impressions of GCSE Accents



# Impressions of GCSE Accents



## Other results of Study 1

(i) 94% identified accents 'correctly'

(ii) 70% (+) said 'own' accent was close to RP

(iii) BUT 70% (+) said study was investigating prejudice!!!



# Study 2



## Participants

78 Teachers & Trainees: 44f; 34m; from London Schools

## Design

Completely 'Independent-Groups' Design - Participants divided into groups so that they heard ONLY ONE OF 3 accents: RP/Birmingham/Asian

## Procedure

Random assignment to accent so that each participant only heard one accent. Content Identical. Evaluation of 3 accents on (i) overall GCSE grade (out of 20); (ii) Impression formation & attributions for success; (iii) 'own accent' & manipulation checks; (iv) "what is study about?" (v) other info.



## Other results of Study 2

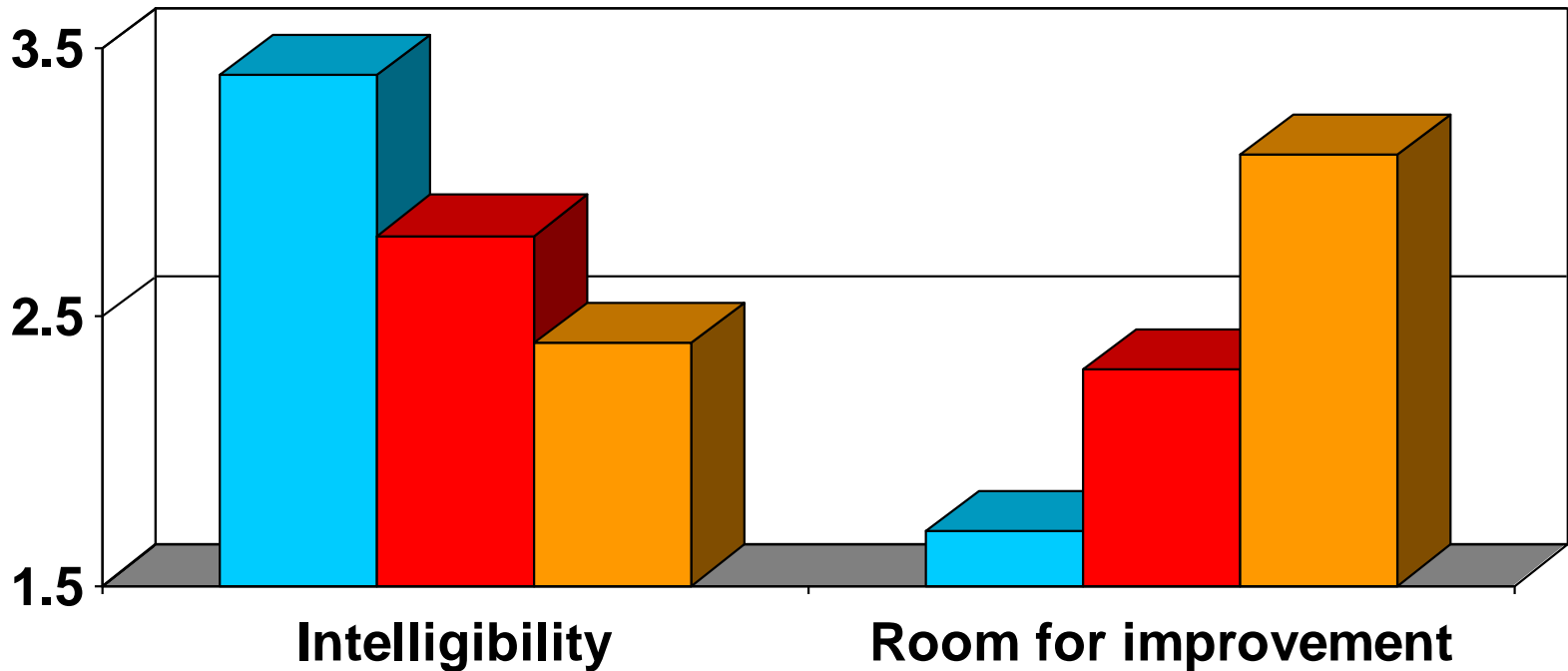
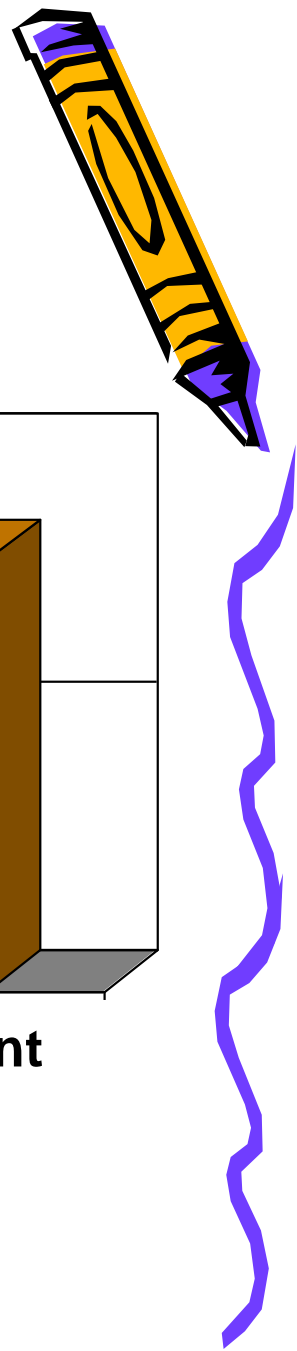
(i) 95% identified accents 'correctly'

(ii) 65% (+) said 'own' accent was close to RP

(iii) **NONE** said study was about prejudice!!!



# Ratings of GCSE accents in Study 2

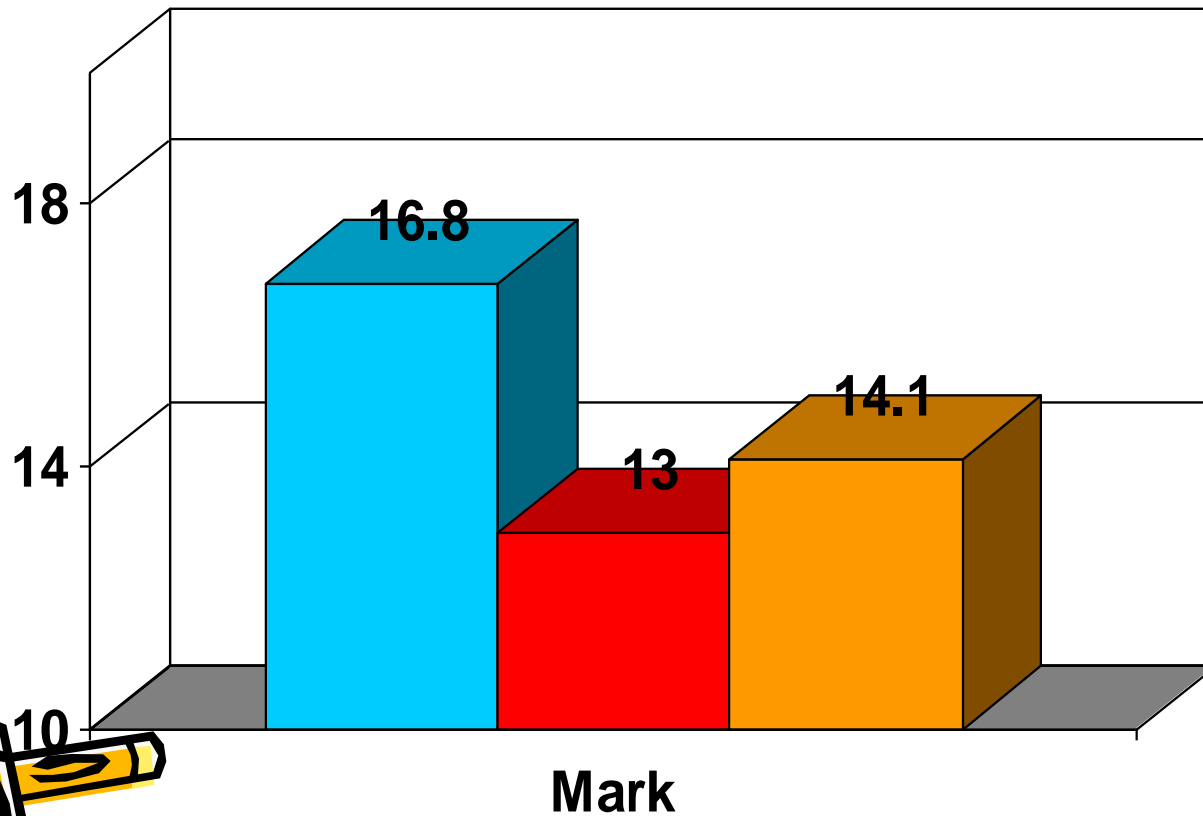


■ RP ■ Birmingham ■ Indian





# GCSE Marks out of 20



# Summary & Conclusions

- Use multi-design & multi-methodological approach
- Attitudinal Hierarchy - difficult to change..
- <http://www.itv.com/news/2013-09-25/28-of-britons-feel-discriminated-against-due-to-accent/>



# **Cor blimey! Even the Queen no longer speaks the Queen's English**

By Steve Connor, Science Editor, *The Independent*, 21 December 2000

**Givin' it large Ma'am! Her Majesty may not be so amused to find that a team of linguists has found her guilty of no longer speaking the Queen's English.**

**A group of Australian researchers analysed every Christmas message made by the Queen since 1952 and discovered that she now speaks with an intonation more Chelmsford than Windsor.**

**Subjecting the Queen's speech to intense linguistic analysis, the scientists found that Elizabeth II has dumbed down – albeit unwittingly – to fit in with the classless zeitgeist of New Labour's Britain.**

**Jonathan Harrington, Sallyanne Palethorpe and Catherine Watson, from Macquarie University in Sydney, reported yesterday in the journal *Nature* that even the Queen is not immune to the rise of the estuarine English spoken by southerners. The researchers said: "The pronunciation of all languages changes subtly over time, mainly owing to the younger members of the community. What is unknown is whether older members unwittingly adapt their accent towards community changes.**

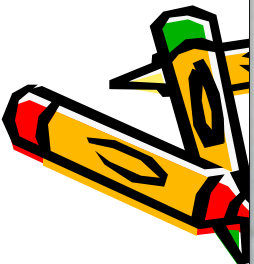
**"Our analysis reveals that the Queen's pronunciation of some vowels has been influenced by the standard southern British accent of the 1980s which is more typically associated with speakers who are younger and lower in the social hierarchy."**

**David Abercrombie, the distinguished phonetician, remarked in 1963 about the importance of accent as a mark of class. "One either speaks received pronunciation, or one does not, and if the opportunity to learn it in youth has not arisen, it is almost impossible to learn it in later life," he said.**

**Although the Queen has resisted the more vulgar aspects of cockney English, such as aitch-dropping, she has been influenced by it. For example, there is now a tendency to pronounce the "l" in "milk" as a vowel.**

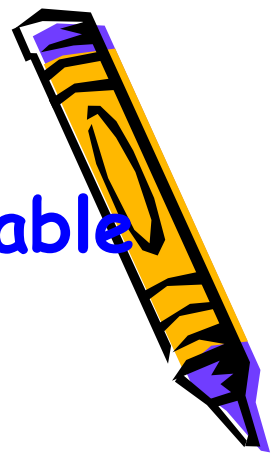
**With the permission of Buckingham Palace, and the help of the BBC's sound archive, the researchers investigated the Queen's pronunciation and found an evolution towards the southern British accent.**

**The researchers said: "We conclude that the Queen no longer speaks the Queen's English of the 1950s, although the vowels of the 1980s Christmas message are still clearly set apart from those of the standard southern British accent." A palace spokesman said: "We have been made aware of the research and we leave it for others to assess it."**



# Language and identity

- Did you consider language an indispensable element of your identity?
- Individual identity
- 'A self-understanding or self-objectification to which one is emotionally attached' (Holland 1997)
- Many psychological texts on identity scarcely mention language as a factor
- Social/Group identity:  
'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'  
(Tajfel 1981)



# Individual and social identity

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# Importance of Language to Identity



- (i) It is important to learn Gujarati to understand our culture. We have to keep Gujarati alive. By learning Gujarati we can keep our identity. *(Gujarati Interviewee of Creese et al, 2006, Language and Education).*

- (ii) "Mexican-Americans who can't speak Spanish should **CHOK** on their **CHILLI BEANS**"

- *New York subway graffiti*





To be or not to be an 'Indian':  
some identity and language data  
from Canada & Bolivia

...Focus on Indigenous Languages...

"Our languages are the cornerstone of who we  
are as a People. Without our languages our  
cultures cannot survive"

- *Assembly of First Nations, 1990*

# Indigenous Peoples & languages in Canada and Bolivia..



## (i) TODAY:

- **Canada**: Ind.: approx. 2%
- **Bolivia**: Ind.: approx. 60%

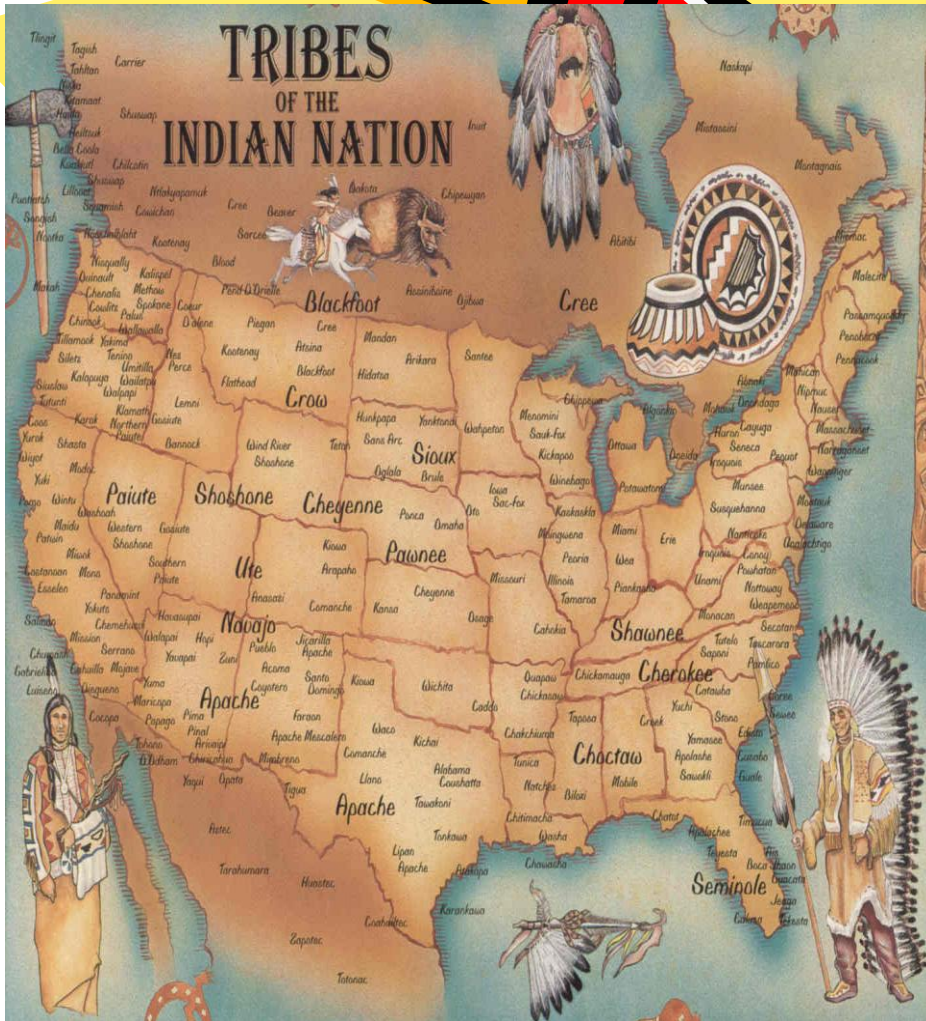
(ii) Years of concerted efforts by governments and church to eradicate "Indian" languages and cultures - these are thus either extinct or endangered or under severe threat...





To be or not  
to be an  
'Indian': some  
identity and  
language data  
from Canada &  
Bolivia

Focus on  
Indigenous  
Languages...





To be or not to be...

Am I Indian...?

Kenyan? African? Asian?

Gujarati? African Indian?

~~Indian/Asian British? British?...~~



What's in a name?... "Indian"?

Am I Gujarati? Indian? Kenyan?  
African Indian? Indian/Asian  
British? British? English?...

**Names/labelling:**

- Meaningful Identity
- Core Symbols
- Social Constructions



# Little research on Indigenous Peoples' labels...



(i) USA Webster's 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition:

**Indigenous:** 1. Native

2. **Indians** are the indigenous inhabitants of America

(ii) UK Oxford Concise (1995 Edn.):

**Indian:** 1. Native of India

2. **American Indian** (note on usage about European search for route to India)



# Little research on effects of self-labels by indigenous peoples.



How do indigenous self-labels affect language use and attitudes? (n = 150+... sociolinguistic survey, identity, etc)

## Expectations:

**"Indian/Indio"** - colonial ... thus favourable about colonial language, i.e. in Canada - English, in Bolivia - Spanish

**"Cree/Haida/Aymara"** - self-determined... thus favourable about Cree/Haida in Canada & Aymara in Bolivia



# Little research on effects of self-labels by indigenous peoples.



How do indigenous self-labels affect language use and attitudes?

Expectations:

**"Indian/Indio"** - colonial ... thus favourable about colonial language, i.e. in Canada - English, in Bolivia - Spanish: so positive correlation..

**"Cree/Haida/Aymara"** - self-determined... thus favourable about Cree/Haida in Canada & Aymara in Bolivia... so positive correlation

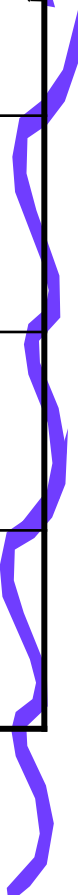




# Identity and Language Correlations

(Sachdev, Arnold & Yapita, 2006; Sachdev & Hanlon, 2000;

	Canada		Bolivia	
	'Indian'	Haida/ Cree	'Indio'	Aymara
Colonial Language	.14*	-.16*	.10	-.29*
Indigenous Language	-.16*	.32**	-.20*	.34**



# Summary of Findings

Expectations confirmed:

**"Indian/Indio"** - colonial ... thus favourable about colonial languages, i.e. English/Spanish

**"Cree/Haida/Aymara"** - self-determined... thus favourable about Cree/Haida/Aymara





# Concluding Remarks

- (i) Attitude hierarchies are difficult to change
- (ii) Adopt multi-methodological approaches
- (iii) Attitudes and Identity linked...
- (iv) Identity - Key for Language Maintenance & Revitalisation: focus on Self-Determination & Rejection of Imposed Categorizations.
- (v) Relationship between language, attitudes and group identity is not static..

*Hmmmm...Whats missing in presentation and analyses so far... ? After the break..?*

