

Hidden disability: Speech intelligibility and stereotypes of the hearing-impaired

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Abstract

Although there is a large amount of literature examining the negative stereotyping of people with various kinds of disabilities, few studies have researched stereotypes associated with the hearing-impaired. Hearing-impaired individuals have often been marginalised from society and treated as “outsiders”. The hearing-impaired often display complications in producing speech with quality and clarity, eliciting speech comprehension difficulties, thus making them more susceptible to negative attitudes and stereotyping. Speech intelligibility (SI) refers to the degree of speech that can be comprehended by a listener, with low-SI linked to unfavourable perceptions. The present study aimed to examine hearing-impaired stereotypes made by hearing-persons under low SI and high SI conditions using Fiske and colleagues’ (2002) ‘Stereotype Content Model’ (SCM) dimensions of competence and warmth. The sample comprised of $N= 130$ undergraduate university students who were randomly assigned an audio interview (high or low SI condition) and then asked to complete several survey items. Competence stereotypes were found to significantly differ between SI conditions, with higher competence for the high-SI condition. Prior contact and levels were considered an important factor contributing to stereotype formation, but actually contributed towards more positive attitudes towards the deaf. Although primarily positive attitudes towards the hearing-impaired were found in the sample, no significant gender differences were uncovered. The social and interactional implications for hearing-impaired persons such as the use of hearing aids offering auditory amplification and its links with SI were discussed. Finally, limitations of the present research posed several questions for future research to address.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no materials previously published except where due reference is made.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signature

Angela Asimakopoulos

October, 2016

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