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Accent discrimination, linguistic capital and the evaluation of strategic opportunities

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Abstract

This research reports on the role of linguistic capital in the evaluation of strategic opportunities for an organisation. Linguistic capital can function as a signal of human and social capital. Using Experimental Vignette Methodology (EVM), 152 respondents were exposed to one of three scenario treatments in which they viewed a Voice-over-PowerPoint video presentation of a corporate entrepreneurship expansion opportunity. The treatments differed only in the accent of the presenters, namely a White, Black and Crossover accent. Respondents evaluated the presentation, the presenter and the opportunity. No difference was found in the respondents' evaluation of the three presenters, contrary to the hypothesised expectations. While these results suggest that economically active South Africans are free of discriminatory bias with respect to accent, the prevalence of accent discrimination globally, and workplace discrimination generally, suggests that this form of discrimination warrants further investigation.

Keywords: accent discrimination; linguistic capital; workplace discrimination; strategic opportunities.

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Name & Surname Signature

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List of Abbreviations

BSAE	Black South African English
EVM	Experimental vignette methodology
IB	International Business
MNC	Multinational corporation
OE	Opportunity Evaluation
SAE	South African English
SC	Source credibility
VOPP	Voice-over-PowerPoint
WSAE	White South African English

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Chapter 1 | Problem definition and purpose of the research

1.1. Background

Accent discrimination is a well-researched and well documented reality, and the potential effect on individuals in various workplace contexts is significant. This is demonstrated in a quote from venture capitalist Paul Graham, who funded companies like Dropbox and Airbnb. In an interview for a magazine, Graham responded to a question about what he looks for when assessing applicants seeking funding for their companies (Lapowsky, 2013):

> One quality that's a really bad indication is a CEO with a strong foreign accent. I'm not sure why. It could be that there are a bunch of subtle things entrepreneurs have to communicate and can't if you have a strong accent. Or, it could be that anyone with half a brain would realize you're going to be more successful if you speak idiomatic English, so they must just be clueless if they haven't gotten rid of their strong accent. I just know it's a strong pattern we've seen.

In the case of entrepreneurs pitching for venture capital funding, there are of course many alternative explanations which may contribute to the failure of their endeavours. The view that a non-native accent is something of a risk factor betrays a clear accent prejudice, or 'accentism', which is when people subconsciously group others or make assumptions about others based on their accent (Agarwal, 2018). In this section, some of Graham's assumptions are unpacked in line with literature on accents, and the workplace implications will be discussed in the following section.

There are two primary assumptions in Graham's quote. First is that subtle messaging cannot be communicated by people with a strong accent. This is related to the comment about speaking 'idiomatic English'. The idea that foreigners who speak with non-native accents lack communicative competence (e.g. they cannot speak idiomatic English) is not based on fact. Multinational corporations (MNCs) invest heavily in improving employees' linguistic competence when the organisation operates across multilingual territories (Karhunen, Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen, & Piekkari, 2018), but speaking with native accents is not needed in order to achieve such competence.

The second assumption is that it is possible to 'get rid of' an accent. It infers that some people speak with accents and others do not. In fact, everyone has an accent (Agudo, 2018). The perception that some varieties of a language are unaccented lies in the ethnocentric notion that the variety of English spoken by members of the dominant population group is the 'correct'

way to speak. Indeed, certain varieties are more prestigious by virtue of the social positioning of their speakers, and infer certain power to these speakers. This point is central to the theoretical argument put forward in this thesis.

Accent prejudice is present in many organisational settings worldwide, and has emerged as a prominent form of racism and classism. A UK minister of employment explicitly requested employers not to make judgements about applicants based on accent in the mid 2010s (Schmid, Cole, & Jeffries, 2020), signalling that this was a problem of some significance in that country. Discrimination based on accent was also reported by students at various universities in the United Kingdom (Parveen, 2020), with suggestions that the way the students spoke led to their academic competence being questioned.

Lippi-Green (2012) provides evidence of language discrimination in the United States, always against minority population groups such as African-Americans, Hispanics and various Asian subgroups. This phenomenon is not unique to English: in November 2020, the French government passed a bill to prevent accent discrimination in the workplace and in public life generally (Samuel, 2020).

Linguistic profiling and discrimination lead to undesirable consequences, for example, causing inequitable assignment of urban housing, bias in assessments on performance evaluations (Agudo, 2018), judgements of salesperson credibility (Tsalikis, Deshields, & Latour, 1991), or discrimination in job interviews (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Wulff & Villadsen, 2020).

In short, all accents are linguistically equivalent, although it is recognised that some accents carry negative connotations and others carry positive connotations. People whose accents carry negative connotations are potentially subject to accent discrimination, and those whose accents carry positive connotations can be argued to hold what has been termed linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). In other words, the way they sound is a resource. Those with the 'right' accent are argued to have more power in communicative interaction. The way accent plays out in the workplace could therefore have important implications for achieving the strategic objectives of an organisation.

In the following section, accent is problematised in terms of its implications for business. Thereafter is an explanation of the purpose and objectives of the research. The scope of the project is delineated and the benefits of the study discussed in the final section.

1.2. Problem statement

One of the foundational strategic tasks in business is to identify opportunities for companies,

and people to pursue these opportunities – “strategy represents a fundamental fit between external opportunity and internal capability” (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998, p. 45). Identifying strategic direction is the lifeblood of an organisation, and is important to identifying how firms can achieve sustained competitive advantage (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). The credibility of those proposing strategic directions should rightfully be questioned by those ultimately making the decisions – the success of the organisation could depend on their insight/recommendations. Such decisions should clearly be made on the strength of the business case and should be made rationally on the basis of due consideration of the best available options. However, there is ample evidence that in reality, rational decisions may be affected by (often implicit) biases against employees (e.g. Hekman et al., 2010), which can result in their proposals or recommendations not being taken seriously.

Workplace discrimination can be on the basis of various personal characteristics, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation, and also on the basis of accent, as the opening quote demonstrates. “Understanding the impact of accents in the workplace is important because accents can be salient in the same way as ethnicity, age, gender, and skin color and may be a source of employment discrimination” (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010, p. 417). Accent is an informative and prominent social cue (Hansen, 2020; Hansen, Rakić, & Steffens, 2014). Moreover, it is one of the first and most salient markers of ‘otherness’ (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010b; Roessel, Schoel, & Stahlberg, 2018), whether country or region, or ethnicity.

Accent often serves as a marker that one is a non-native speaker of a language that can feed a popular negative inference about one’s fluency or language competence and lead to a range of negative consequences, including psychological and economic (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010b). This is also clearly demonstrated in the opening quote by Graham. The effect in the instance of venture capital funding would be for entrepreneurs with foreign accents to be excluded from securing funding.

This shows that depending on the accent with which one speaks, one’s ‘voice’ in the workplace can be amplified or silenced. So it is not only the content of one’s message that matters in the context of strategic decision-making, but also whether the message is heard. The process is arguably less rational than may be hoped or expected. This is problematic both for individuals who may suffer discrimination in the workplace and for organisations which may fail to unlock the full potential value of employees, and the ideas or proposals they put forward, because of implicit accent prejudice.

Much of the management literature on accent discrimination has focused on its effects at the end of the value chain, e.g. customer bias in call centre interactions (Wang, Arndt, Singh,

Biernat, & Liu, 2013). There seems to be an oversight in the field in that accent discrimination can equally affect senior decision makers in the organisation too. Little consideration appears to have been given to the effect of accent discrimination on strategic processes, which is the focus of this study.

This research problem was selected in the context of the current global movement to address inequality, discrimination and prejudice against racial and other minorities worldwide (The Economist, 2020). Workplace inequality is a reality in many settings and for many subgroups within the general population. Inequality is not only race-based: gender inequality affects women adversely (Carnahan & Greenwood, 2018; Padavic, Ely, & Reid, 2020); LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) groups also experience prejudice in organisational settings (Cech & Rothwell, 2020); and inequality may affect particular religious groups (Rauf & Prasad, 2020). Such inequality adversely affects these groups in terms of recruitment, promotion, and compensation inter alia, contributing to normalisation and reinforcement of economic inequality (Bapuji, Patel, Ertug, & Allen, 2020). For the organisation, this has the effect of not realising the full potential of those who are victims of such prejudice, which in turn has implications in terms of unrealised potential within the organisation.

Reflecting on how the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and highlighted inequality in all corners of the globe, Bapuji et al. (2020) call for organisations to "take this crisis as a moment to hit the pause button, reflect on the consequences of organizational practices for societal inequality, and redesign their organizations to create more equal societies" (p. 2). This should be done, they argue, through management research which focuses on how organisational practices contribute to societal inequality. Tihanyi (2020) similarly calls for scholars to produce research that is important, not merely interesting; studies that would contribute to moving societies forward in some way.

The proposed research aims to address these calls for important research, not at the societal level, but rather to shed light on ways in which implicit prejudice with respect to accent plays out at the strategic level in the workplace. It will do so by assessing the extent to which (negative) accent discrimination or (positive) linguistic capital is a factor in determining whether or not decision makers are willing to support proposals made by employees participating in a corporate entrepreneurship drive.

1.3. Purpose statement

The purpose of this research is to understand whether (negative) accent discrimination or (positive) linguistic capital is at play in strategic decision-making in the South African workplaces. The research aims to discover whether decision-makers evaluate presenters of a proposal more favourably when the presenter speaks with a Black, White or Crossover accent. Furthermore, the research investigates whether strategic opportunities are evaluated differently by decision-makers when speakers with different accents present the opportunities.

1.4. Research objectives

The objectives of this research are to discover the extent to which a male presenter's accent affects the likelihood of him being judged as able to successfully initiate a corporate venture. That overall judgement is broken into the following elements:

a) a decision-maker's evaluation of the quality of the presentation;
b) a decision-maker's evaluation of the preparedness of the presenter;
c) a decision-maker's assessment of how much help or support a presenter requires in improving a presentation about an opportunity;
d) a decision-maker's assessment of the credibility of the presenter;
e) a decision-maker's assessment of the quality of the opportunity.

1.5. Research question

Based on the objectives stated above, the study aims to answer the following research question:

How do accent discrimination and linguistic capital affect decision-makers' perceptions of a presenter's strategic initiative proposal?

1.6. Scope

The scope of the study is limited to the effect of how a person sounds (accent) on strategic decision-making. Empirically, the study reports on respondents' evaluation of a proposal put forward during a corporate entrepreneurship drive by speakers with different accents. Corporate entrepreneurship is one way of operationalising strategy and identifying opportunities for sustainable organisational growth.

The theoretical lens for this study will be the notion of the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991). The market is analogous to an economic market in which goods have value and are

exchanged. In the linguistic market, speech and its related communicative acts carry differential value, imbuing speakers with varying amounts of power when engaging in communicative interaction. In principle, people can possess linguistic capital and benefit in that 'market', or lack it. Such lack, however, can have either a neutral effect (how one sounds does not matter) or a negative effect. The literature on accent discrimination shows that the 'wrong' accent can be a cost in that market. The Bourdieusian approach is used to theorise the differential ascription of linguistic capital to people who speak English with different accents.

The setting for the study will be South African firms. Although accent prejudice and discrimination are not limited to South Africa, the country's history and diverse population make it an appropriate setting for this work. Given the historical context of apartheid South Africa, the variety of English spoken by White South Africans is likely to advantage speakers so that they hold more linguistic capital. This variety carries most overt prestige and is regarded as the standard for how speakers 'should' produce English (in South Africa).

Speakers of Black SAE for the purpose of the proposed research are theorised to be subject to linguistic discrimination because of the persistent patterns of historical discrimination against Black South Africans. A small minority of Black South Africans do not speak with a traditional BSAE accent; they are referred to as Crossover speakers. They are argued to hold more linguistic capital than even WSAE speakers because their accent signals familiarity with both Black and White speakers. This point is further explained in Chapter 2. The research assesses the extent to which linguistic capital determines successful outcomes in strategic decision-making processes.

1.7. Importance and benefits of the study

The research contributes by introducing the notion of linguistic capital to the research agenda in the field of general management and focuses on the effect of discrimination in strategic processes. This is a response to the call by prominent scholars such as Vahlne and Johanson (2020) to address cognitive processes (such as prejudice and discrimination) in management research as a means of deepening our understanding of firms' strategic processes.

The research also contributes to the very topical discussion of increasing workplace equality, answering calls for management research to address important issues (Tihanyi, 2020). It is important to investigate whether how one sounds is a source of positive or negative discrimination for employees, and how the cognitive processes of prejudice and discrimination operate with respect to accent. It is known that "[a]ccent-based discrimination exists around

the world, and social norms against language-based discrimination seem to be weaker than against racial or gender discrimination, making nonstandard-accent bias more acceptable and less noticed than other types of discrimination" (Hansen et al., 2014, p. 69). Understanding the extent to which accent discrimination operates in South African workplaces allows for corrective action where necessary and raises awareness of less obvious and well-known biases.

1.8. Summary

In this chapter, accent discrimination is identified as a problem that is less salient than other forms of discrimination, but equally harmful in workplace settings both to the individuals concerned and to the organisation.

The purpose of the research is to investigate whether accent discrimination affects decision-makers' evaluation of strategic opportunities presented, and the research objectives provide clarity and detail on the elements that will be investigated. The benefit of the study lies in recognising and identifying the extent to which a less obvious form of prejudice is present in South African workplaces.

The next chapter is a survey of the literature related to language in South Africa, accent discrimination in the workplace and the role of linguistic capital in determining the power relations in corporate communication about strategic opportunities.

Chapter 2 | Literature review

This chapter focuses on developing a theoretically based argument to unpack the concept of linguistic capital with respect to the presentation of a strategic opportunity. It begins with an overview of the literature related to language in management, followed by a description of the linguistic landscape of South Africa, insofar as it is relevant to this study. Next, accent discrimination is explained as a precursor to the discussion of accent as a signifier of various forms of capital. Linguistic capital is then developed as a theoretical construct, and positioned in relation to the other aspects of the presentation of the strategic opportunity, which is the setting for the communicative interaction.

2.1. Language in management

Language is recognised as an important construct within management studies, including the domain of strategy, because of its salience in all business activities (Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 2014). Given its primacy in every facet of life, the study of language has received the attention of business and management scholars. The greatest advances in the study of language in business are situated in the field of international business (IB). Because of IB's emphasis on cross-border engagement, "[l]anguage lies at the heart of IB activities" (Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2014, p. 495).

The focus on strategic micro-foundations (Felin, Foss, & Ployhart, 2015; Foss & Lindenberg, 2013) has brought to the fore consideration of the people who take decisions on behalf of a firm (compared with the view that 'the firm' makes decisions). This research focuses on one micro-foundational element, and one aspect of language, namely accent. This section provides a brief overview of how language has been studied in management contexts, demonstrating that despite its recognised importance, it is conceptually reasonably underdeveloped. This leaves significant scope for focused research on various micro-foundational elements related to language.

Two reviews of the extant literature on language in international management and business (Karhunen et al., 2018; Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing, 2017) provide useful overviews of the field. The first review by Tenzer et al. (2017) found that the study of language in international business is most often analysed at an individual level of analysis, with varied focuses including bilingualism, language ability in relation to market opportunities, accented English of second language speakers and its effect in the hiring and promotion process, and lack of understanding as a result of foreign languages in the workplace. Prior research has thus explored several critical factors pertaining to the role of language within the workplace.

Tenzer et al. (2017) conclude that while language-focused research in international business has broadened and deepened in scope in recent years, the field would benefit from deeper interdisciplinary input from language-based disciplines, including the applied linguistic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic sub-disciplines of linguistics. This sentiment is echoed by Angouri and Piekkari (2018), who suggest that the field of IB (particularly studies concerning language) has developed in parallel to the discipline of linguistics, and that it is time "to connect these parallel worlds" (p. 10).

The second review (Karhunen et al., 2018) sought to discover how literature on language in MNCs conceptualise, or 'talk about' language, identifying that three views of language predominate the research in this area. The first is the structural view, which holds quite a rudimentary conceptualisation of language in that it concerns itself only with bounded and distinct national languages e.g. French or English. MNCs must adopt a language, and must solve problems resulting from the adoption of one or another. The second conceptualisation of language, the functional view, sees language as an individual characteristic which has an effect on all communication within a firm. The third view, which the authors advocate as a productive one for future research on language in the international firm, considers language to be a social practice which exists and evolves through user interaction. The social practice view of language allows for a conceptualisation of the multinational corporation context as dynamic and fluid, constantly co-created through communicative interaction, and takes into account the nuances of language in context. Language is recognised to be, and researched as, a social phenomenon.

Papers published in this field post 2015 were not included in either of these reviews. More recent studies include a paper by Neeley and Dumas (2016) in which they explore how English-speaking employees enjoy unearned status gain due to the implementation of an English language mandate in a Japanese firm. In a paper investigating the role of language in social identity formation, Wöcke, Grosse, Stacey and Brits (2018) find that in a Spanish MNC with 42 subsidiaries in other countries, Spanish-speaking employees are advantaged in terms of access to resources compared with non-Spanish speaking employees. These studies demonstrate how language has the potential to cause tension within in a firm, both within and across national settings.

These papers share important insights on the critical role of language in different business contexts. As suggested by Karhunen et al. (2018), research in management disciplines can benefit from connecting parallel academic worlds, and delving into more micro-foundational aspects pertaining to language, and their effect in the workplace. This study sought to respond

to this call, adopting the social practice view that language is a social phenomenon. The study of accents follows from this perspective, as accent is a strong and prominent social signal of identity, ethnicity, region or nationality amongst other things (Hansen, 2020; Hansen et al., 2014).

In 2019, 272 million people lived and worked in a country other than their country of birth (United Nations, 2019). As a result, people from different countries, regions and continents interact constantly, so exchanges in non-native varieties of a given lingua franca – often English – have become commonplace in and integral to communication in globalised societies (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Roessel, Schoel, & Stahlberg, 2020). Such communication is indispensable in achieving organisational goals, perhaps especially for multinational enterprises that operate across different geographic locations, but also for companies that rely on global supply chains or have any dealings with international stakeholders.

The same principle applies in the domestic context. South African workplaces, the setting for this research, are characteristically racial, cultural, and linguistic mixing pots. English is the lingua franca in most workplaces in which speakers of different languages come together, certainly in corporate South Africa. This means that people with different local accents interact constantly in their daily working life. Accent-based discrimination can have important consequences in determining outcomes of these interactions. If judgements of people's ideas or proposals are clouded by the way the speaker sounds, the ramifications are potentially undesirable for both the employee and the company. For the company, this means that the potential value of those employees remains unrealised, and potentially profitable opportunities for the firm may be overlooked.

Wöcke et al. (2018) state that "language is influential in access to power and resources in an MNC" (p. 10), a view that provides a perfect segue to the theoretical anchor upon which this research rests: the conceptual role of linguistic capital in workplace situations (section 2.5). In this study, the focus is on intra-country accent difference (and discrimination) rather differences between (national) languages. Linguistic capital is argued to be an accessible indicator of one's human and social capital in the absence of other cues, as one's accent communicates a significant amount of social information in as little as a few words (Freynet & Clément, 2019). Speakers are theorised to hold differing amounts of linguistic capital, signalled strongly by accent, as is explained following a discussion of South Africa's language landscape.

2.2. Language landscape in South Africa

One of the most salient cues about one's background is accent. In the absence of visual cues, it immediately gives an interlocutor a sense of one's gender, age, race, where they are from and their social status (Freynet & Clément, 2019). Additionally, in a complex language landscape such as in South Africa, it gives further cues as to one's social class.

White South Africans enjoyed most privilege historically, and it is against this group which the social progress of other groups is measured. Black South Africans, the demographic majority at 79,2 percent (Stats SA, 2012), suffered oppression and structural prejudice for centuries. Some Black Africans have achieved middle-class status, often through investment in education. In this study, the contention is that people are imbued with differing amounts of linguistic capital by virtue of the way they use and produce language. This argument is unpacked further following a brief historical description of the linguistic landscape of South Africa.

In South Africa, there are eleven official languages, as enacted in 1994: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho (Pedi), South Sotho (Sotho), Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu. At the time of the last population census in 2011, 9,6 percent of the national population spoke English as a first language (Stats SA, 2012): 2,9 percent of the Black population and 35,9 percent of the White population. It is very common as a second, third or even fourth language, and is the dominant language of public life, including in education, government and business (Kamper, Mukanya, & Niesler, 2012; van Rooy, 2017).

Dutch and English were introduced to the region by colonial powers from the mid-1600s and late 1700s respectively. Racial discrimination characterised South African life during the colonial period, and was legislated by the apartheid government which assumed power in 1948. South Africans were racially categorised into four primary race groups (Population Registration Act of 1950): Black (also referred to as Black African), Coloured, Indian and White. Coloured and Indians combined make up 11,4% of the population (Stats SA, 2012), each group uses a distinct variety of SAE, but these were not considered in this study.

During apartheid, various legislations served to segregate people of different race groups. The linguistic effect of these legislations was to ensure the persistence of the racially-aligned dialects (also called ethnolects) of English that had developed in the different population groups. White South African English (WSAE) is an ethnolect spoken by English mother-tongue White South Africans. Black South African English (BSAE) is an ethnolect spoken by people whose native languages are from the Bantu language family. Nine of the 11 official languages

of South Africa fall into this language family.

Lects are different varieties of a given language. Different varieties of English worldwide often exist on a lectal continuum from ‘standard’ to ‘vernacular’ (what is referred to in this thesis as ‘traditional’). Standard lects are typically spoken by the educated and enjoy normative, non-stigmatised social value. Vernacular lects enjoy less prestige as they are spoken by members of the population with lower levels of education; these lects are consequently more stigmatised (Lass, 2002).

In South Africa, there is a continuum between vernacular BSAE and standard WSAE. People who have been in contact with speakers of both varieties usually develop an accent somewhere along the continuum, depending on the amount of contact with each variety.

Younger Black speakers who attended schools that were, during apartheid, designated for Whites only tend to accommodate to the norms of the historically most prestigious variety of SAE (Mesthrie, Chevalier, & McLachlan, 2015), namely WSAE. Black children who are exposed only or predominantly to BSAE speakers during childhood when they learn English, acquire English as a second language with a traditional BSAE accent. Similarly, children of WSAE speakers are generally exposed predominantly to other speakers of WSAE, so develop WSAE accents.

If such children attend schools with a significant number of peers and teachers who speak with a WSAE accent, they are more likely to develop a WSAE accent too, or fall closer to the WSAE end of the continuum. Mesthrie et al. (2015) demonstrate that lectal crossing-over is evident amongst some young South Africans who attended deracialised schools. Using perception tests, they show that some Black South African students were indistinguishable (by accent) from WSAE speakers i.e. they were perceived to be WSAE speakers. In other cases, speakers were still identifiable as Black, but it was clear from how they spoke that they had extensive engagement with WSAE speakers.

So in the South African language landscape, a range of accents exists, and while these are largely racially aligned, there are instances of ‘crossover’ accents where Black speakers do not speak with traditional BSAE accents. For the remainder of this study, these speakers are referred to as Crossover speakers.

In the following section, accent discrimination is discussed.

2.3 Accent discrimination

Prejudice against people with particular accents, most notably accents of minority groups in various societal contexts worldwide, may negatively affect employees. For example, employees who speak with these accents may not achieve favourable outcomes from decision makers to proposals they put forward. Different varieties of English are spoken by different people within a given population, and these groupings are most often aligned with region, race and class. An example is the United States of America, where Black Americans (or African Americans) commonly speak a variety referred to as African American Vernacular English (Lippi-Green, 2012), and the variety spoken by many White Americans is called Standard American English (Bailey, 2017). In addition, a regional sub-group of White Americans who live in the southern states, derogatorily referred to as hillbillies, speak with a Southern accent (Lippi-Green, 2012).

South Africa's population speaks in various dialects that are readily associable with different racial groups, labelled with terms less laden than their American counterparts: Black South African English (BSAE) and White SAE (WSAE).

Accent discrimination does not only occur in English: Paladino & Mazzurega (2020) found evidence of prejudice against people with non-native accents of Italian. In France, the problem has led to legislation against this form of discrimination.

Accents are developed contextually for each individual, referring solely to "manner of pronunciation" (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010b, p. 215). Experiments show that people hold negative stereotypical views of people who speak with particular accents (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010a), and people are more likely to be biased against those with accents different to their own (Hiraga, 2005). In socio-political environments in which prejudice and discrimination are commonplace, like South Africa (April & Syed, 2020), accent becomes a potential 'target' for discriminatory practice. This has implications for individuals and for organisations.

Accent discrimination at senior levels in organisations does not seem to have received much attention as a research agenda, perhaps because senior levels in organisations have tended to be quite homogenous (Georgakakis, Greve, & Ruigrok, 2018). But that is changing (Park & Westphal, 2013) and the possibility of accent discrimination at the most senior levels in an organisation cannot be ignored.

In the management literature, there are examples of accent discrimination against lower level employees, for example, call centre employees (Wang et al., 2013), in consumer evaluations

(Morales, Scott, & Yorkston, 2012), or its effect on the credibility ratings of salespeople (Tsalikis et al., 1991). One study focuses on the effect of non-native accent on more strategically aligned business priorities: managerial hiring and investment decisions (Huang, Frideger, & Pearce, 2013).

This study contributes to understanding whether accent discrimination plays out with respect to decisions about the strategic direction of a company. The other side of the coin is that accents that signal diverse networks may indeed provide speakers with additional capital. Thus this study seeks to investigate the effect of accent in the process of making strategic decisions for an organisation. The effect is potentially large because accent variation is not uncommon in many workplaces globally.

On the basis of historical patterns of discrimination, and the prevalence of accent discrimination globally, BSAE speakers are hypothesised to suffer most from accent discrimination, such that their presentations are evaluated less favourably than WSAE speakers. Crossover speakers are expected to experience least discrimination on the basis of accent. Indeed, in an increasingly integrated business world, they may well be judged as having more capital than either White or Black counterparts, because their accent suggests proximity to both those worlds.

2.4 Accent as a signal of capital

Various forms of capital are discussed in the management literature, for example human capital (e.g. Chung, Park, Lee, & Kim, 2015; Kim, Pathak, & Werner, 2015; Symeonidou & Nicolaou, 2018); social capital (Fainshmidt, Judge, Aguilera, & Smith, 2018); psychological capital (Avolio & Gardner, 2005); and career capital (Gander, 2019).

While accent is nothing more than one's manner of speaking, it is developed in a social context and therefore conveys significant social information. This includes where people were born and raised, where they were educated, who their peers were in these educational settings and parental level of education (Lass, 2002; Mesthrie et al., 2015). Accents are therefore a function of the factors that dictate one's human and social capital resources. There is an argument that judging competence on the basis of accent is the linguistic equivalent of appearance-based judgement (Agudo, 2018), but there is perhaps a counter argument that accent, to a limited extent, is a useful and accessible signal of their human and social capital resources.

WSAE speakers are the embodiment of privilege and the historical inertia of apartheid has resulted in the persistence of (perceived) White privilege (Griffiths, 2019; Roberts, Cooper,

Swartz, & Juan, 2021). WSAE accents signal quality education and valuable social networks. In contrast, BSAE speakers are typically associated with poverty and fall at the negative end of the spectrum of inequality (Pittaway, 2019). The BSAE accent therefore typically signals low levels of human and social capital. Crossover speakers have accents that signal their links to both White and Black communities, and that they had the benefit of being educated in well-resourced schools.

People who have managed to achieve high status within a company typically have done so through demonstration of their knowledge, abilities and skills i.e. human capital resources (Raffiee & Byun, 2020). By virtue of this merit-based journey to those high-status positions, this form of capital is legitimised. Social capital resources are based on one's social networks, and refers to the "competitive advantage that is created based on the way an individual is connected to others" (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016, p. 22). The benefits or advantages that one accrues through relationships with others in the network legitimise this form of capital by virtue of the fact that these networks indeed have the potential to provide benefit, both to the individual and the firm (Kim et al., 2015). As such, it is expected that signals of quality education (human capital) and extensive social networks (social capital) will result in people being seen as beneficial to an organisation.

So it is argued that strategic decision-makers are more likely to evaluate proposals made by Crossover speakers more favourably than those made by either WSAE or BSAE speakers. As such, Crossover speakers can be argued to hold more power to persuade decision-makers evaluating proposals put forward, i.e. to have greater linguistic capital. Given that accent has been argued to be such a strong signal of human and social capital resources, the potential value that is immediately assigned to a speaker on the basis of accent is referred to as linguistic capital. This is explained in detail in the following section.

2.5 Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital has enjoyed conceptual attention in fields that are relevant and related to management studies, such as education and sociology, most commonly using a Bourdieusian theoretical framework (see e.g. Blackmore & Rahimi, 2019; Gerhards, 2014; Lee, 2019; Li, Xu, & Chen, 2021; Zorčič, 2019). As discussed in the previous section, concepts such as human and social capital are familiar in the management literature; the introduction of the concept of linguistic capital recognises the centrality of language and its role in facilitating power relationships in the workplace. The purpose of this section is to unpack this conceptually in the context of this study.

Bourdieu (1977, 1986) distinguished various types of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Economic capital can be converted into money; whereas cultural and social capital can in certain circumstances be converted into economic capital. Of these types, linguistic capital is a sub-type of symbolic capital, which is the power held through status and prestige (Vaara & Faÿ, 2011). South African accents have been demonstrated to hold varying degrees of prestige, with WSAE invoking more positive attitudes compared with speakers of Afrikaans-accented English (Álvarez-Mosquera & Marín-Gutiérrez, 2018). Similar patterns in terms of status and prestige are likely to be at play with other varieties of English too.

Linguistic capital is more than competence, which is the ability of the speaker to produce grammatically accurate speech. It involves situational knowledge i.e. “mastery of the conditions for adequate use” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 646) of language. The concept of linguistic capital is operationalised in slightly different ways in the literature. Gerhards (2014) discusses two forms of transnational linguistic capital. The first is a simplistic view in which the more languages one speaks, the more capital one has. In multilingual contexts, including multinational corporations operating across different geographies, being a speaker of multiple different languages is valuable because one would have the ability to communicate with more people than a monolingual speaker. A more nuanced view considers transnational linguistic capital as a resource for communication, therefore the amount of capital any speaker holds is determined by how many people can be reached through a foreign language i.e. how many speakers of that language. The latter view seems more aligned with the Bourdieusian concept that forms the basis of this section.

Consistent across all forms of capital is that more capital gives individuals more power in a relationship, interaction or exchange. Bourdieu (1977) argues that the power relationship between speakers determines the structure of the communication, and that language is an instrument of power, not merely communication. Following this, more linguistic capital should provide one with more power in a context of interaction. In the organisational context, such power can allow leaders to lead, or corporate entrepreneurs to get support for their ideas (Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Joullié, Gould, Spillane, & Luc, 2021).

In this study, it is suggested that Crossover speakers hold most linguistic capital, followed by WSAE speakers. Whites still tend to have economic power (Beresford, 2020; Bowman, 2019) and therefore easier access to opportunities. But Black Africans hold more political power (Ndletyana, Makhalemele, & Mathekga, 2019). White accents therefore signify a certain type of power, and Black accents for the most part signify an absence of such power. The political

power held by Black South Africans does not easily or directly translate into economic opportunities, except for a minority of Black Elites (Bowman, 2019).

Many members of that minority can be argued to be Crossover speakers. A Crossover speaker presents a special case as it signals connectedness to both the White group who holds economic power, and to the Black group who holds political power. Crossover speakers are therefore argued to hold more power, and their accents signal that they have significant human capital resources (i.e. they attended well-resourced schools) and more social capital resources than either White or traditional BSAE speakers, because their networks extend across both White and Black communities. Thus Crossover accents carry the greatest linguistic capital.

"Capital, which … takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). The sociohistorical structure of the world determines the distribution of the various forms of capital. In the South African context, historical patterns of race-based discrimination persist (April & Syed, 2020), affecting the ability of different groups of South Africans to accumulate capital. Black Africans have least opportunity to accumulate capital due to the persistent reproduction of the sociohistorical context of discrimination; Whites benefit most in this context; and Crossover speakers hold a unique position in the social milieu which allows them to transcend the sociohistorical boundaries, and therefore to accumulate capital more rapidly than other Black Africans.

Accrued capital holds value only in a given context. To describe the context, Bourdieu (1977) draws metaphorically on the economic concept of a market, in which commodities have value and can be exchanged between producers and consumers. The value is determined within the context of the market in what Bourdieu calls the symbolic economy. The context in which speech is produced determines the value ascribed to the speech, which is the product in the market. As in any market, some products hold more value than others, and production of the most valuable product leads such producers to hold capital, which is exchangeable for economic capital.

The context for interaction in this study is a business presentation in which a presenter describes an opportunity to an audience. The speech produced in this context is the product of value, differentiated by accent. It is argued that Crossover speakers have most linguistic capital because of their extensive human and social capital resources; and therefore the proposal will be viewed most favourably when presented by a Crossover speaker. This is because in the symbolic economy, linguistic exchange – communication between a sender

and receiver – is considered to be “an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market), and which is capable of procuring a certain material of symbolic profit” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 66).

Language functions as more than simply a means to communicate; its production combines communication with pursuit of symbolic profit. By presenting an opportunity, the speakers are participating in an exchange, with the hope of securing buy-in from the exchange partner, which represents the symbolic profit in this instance. Crossover speakers, because they hold most capital, are suggested to be most successful in acquiring this symbolic profit. While value can be negotiated within the market, “the capacity to manipulate is greater the more capital one possesses” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 71). One’s linguistic capital therefore affords differential power to speakers within the symbolic economy.

WSAE speakers are argued to hold some linguistic capital because of the economic capital that they hold, but to a lesser extent than the Crossover speaker. This is because WSAE speakers would be perceived to have similar human capital resources to Crossover speakers, but less social capital resources because their social networks tend to be based predominantly in the White community.

Traditional BSAE speakers are theorised to be subject to linguistic discrimination. That is to say that their accent does not provide them with any linguistic capital; moreover, that they are subject to negative discrimination on the basis of accent. This is because they sound like they hold less human capital resources (i.e. they were not educated in well-resourced schools that typically produce the best academic results). They also sound as though their social networks are limited in that they consist predominantly of people in the Black community, whose political power has not translated into socioeconomic transformation and progress (Beresford, 2020) i.e. the networks do not provide them with any significant economic opportunities. Theoretically, forms of capital should be transferrable into economic capital to create tangible value for capital holders.

The historical context of discrimination affects the ability to accumulate capital, as discussed in this section, and also the behaviour of people participating in the exchange, which is discussed in the following section.

2.6 Habitus

People’s behaviours and reactions within a particular interaction are deeply entrenched,

forming part of what Bourdieu (1977) calls the ‘habitus’. Habitus is developed through socialisation during one’s childhood and education. It is “a cognitive construct of both the personal and the social that generates thoughts and behaviors” (Shimoni, 2017, p. 258), or “an internalized system of schemes for perceiving, thinking, feeling, and acting within a given field and its structures” (Vaara & Faÿ, 2011, p. 30). Race-based discrimination unfortunately remains deeply entrenched in the South African psyche, and the patterns of discrimination follow historical lines in which people of colour suffer the burden of discrimination.

Due to the inertia of historical patterns of discrimination against Black South Africans, it can be expected that many people still hold prejudiced views and beliefs, which leads to the manipulation of behaviour when interacting (April & Syed, 2020). Differential power determines the behaviour of actors in a given context, and the outcome of the interaction. Discrimination in South Africa, including in the workplace, persists even 27 years into democracy (April & Syed, 2020). By virtue of speaking with an accent that signals that one is Black African, speakers may suffer from discrimination in workplace contexts. As a result, traditional BSAE speakers are expected to get less support for their proposal compared with WSAE speakers.

Herein lies a theoretical contribution in this study. One of the underlying theoretical assumptions is that interlocutors hold differing amounts of linguistic capital, and therefore a power differential exists between the speakers. However, the theory does not account for those who may be bereft of capital entirely, and are in fact subject to negative discrimination, as a result of speaker habitus. By combining the evidence on accent discrimination with the work on linguistic capital, this study provides theoretical evidence that accent can function positively, in a neutral way or indeed negatively.

The study sought to explain whether the decision-makers perceive the value of different accents, and therefore evaluate presenters’ proposals differently based on the amount of linguistic capital (or lack thereof) held by the speaker. The communicative context under investigation was the presentation of strategic opportunity using Voice-over-PowerPoint (VOPP), as part of a corporate entrepreneurship drive within an organisation. As such, the effect of linguistic capital (as a latent variable; operationalised through accent as the observed independent variable) on decision-makers’ evaluation of the presentation and the strategic opportunity are the outcomes of interest in the study. Methodological details are provided in Chapter 4.

2.7 Perceived ability of the presenter

Prejudice against any social group leads to discrimination against group members (Hansen et al., 2014). This study hypothesises that people can suffer discrimination on the basis of accent, which is a strong signifier of race, because race-based discrimination persists in South Africa (April & Syed, 2020).

In the context of this study, this prejudice is likely to lead to less favourable perceptions of a presenter belonging to a social group that is historically subject to discrimination. BSAE speakers, identifiable as Black Africans by their accent, are therefore expected to receive the lowest ratings in terms of their ability as presenters on each of the following characteristics: presentation rating; presenter preparedness; need for further support and source credibility.

WSAE speakers are expected to receive higher ratings than BSAE speakers, as the accent signals membership to a group that was not historically discriminated against. Crossover speaker, by virtue of their human, social and therefore linguistic capital resources, are predicted to get the highest ratings on each of the same characteristics. Each characteristic is explained in further detail as the hypotheses are developed in the next chapter.

2.8 Perceived quality of the opportunity

The characteristics of the opportunity are not intrinsically part of the presenter's individual characteristics, but bias or prejudice against individuals can be extended to factors external to the individual when low-status individuals are involved (Hekman et al., 2010). For this reason, it is predicted that the opportunity will be evaluated to be lower quality when presented by a BSAE speaker compared with a WSAE speaker. Following the argument that Crossover speakers have higher capital resources, these speakers are expected to receive the highest ratings in terms of the quality of the opportunity.

2.9 Summary

This study responds to a call in the management literature to bring together parallel academic worlds, one in which nuanced studies have developed comprehensive understanding of language as a social phenomenon (i.e. linguistics) and the other in which language is an important micro-foundational concept affecting several organisational outcomes (i.e. management).

A variety of accents exist in the South African language landscape, and accent is a signifier of one's human and social capital resources. Persistent sociohistorical norms in South Africa

privilege speakers with WSAE accents over those with BSAE accents. A group of speakers whose social realities have traversed both White and Black communities, leading them to develop a Crossover accent, is uniquely positioned in the social milieu in South Africa.

Linguistic capital operates similarly to human and social capital, and serves as a signifier of these other forms of capital. To those required to make a decision based on a proposal presented, their decision may be affected by the perceived value that the presenter holds within the social ecosystem. If the presenter is perceived to have high human capital resources, i.e. relevant skills, knowledge and other characteristics which drive confidence in strategic decision-makers, these decision-makers would be more likely to support the presenter and enable further development of the proposed idea. Similarly, if the presenter is perceived to have high social capital resources, i.e. social networks and relationships that make the proposal seem viable, decision-makers would be more likely to support the proposal, as these networks could be leveraged by the presenter to realise the project.

In the following chapter, the relationships between constructs described in this chapter are expressed as testable hypotheses.

Chapter 3 | Hypotheses and conceptual model

Based on the literature presented in the previous chapter, the following arguments are put forward as the basis for the hypotheses that were tested in this study. To recap, the study sought to show whether accent discrimination affected the judgement of a presentation audience in evaluating a presenter and the strategic opportunity presented by the presenter. In South Africa, a history of race-based discrimination disadvantages BSAE speakers and privileges WSAE speakers.

In the absence of other information that signals a person's social and human capital resources, linguistic capital is a salient signifier of these characteristics. One's accent is a function of where one was born, and by whom one was raised and where one was educated. People can therefore *sound* like they have skills, knowledge, opportunities and networks that can be leveraged for success in strategic ventures. Crossover speakers, those whose accents signal group membership which straddles both Black and White communities, are theorised to hold most linguistic capital, and therefore hypothesised to be evaluated more favourably than both BSAE and WSAE speakers.

The hypotheses are stated in the following section.

3.1 Hypothesis development

In this study, the context for interaction is a virtual presentation wherein a speaker presents an opportunity as part of a corporate entrepreneurship drive. The first four sets of hypotheses (a and b) concern the perceived ability of the entrepreneur. The final set concerns the perceived quality of the opportunity.

First, the 'audience' is required to assess the quality of the presentation. Given the dynamics presented in Chapter 2, and summarised immediately above, it is hypothesised that even though the presentation is identical for all speakers, individuals will evaluate the presentation to be lower quality for WSAE speakers compared with Crossover speakers, and even lower for BSAE speakers. Hypothesis 1 is therefore stated as follows:

> H1a: Individuals report lower quality judgments of a presentation when the presenter has a traditional BSAE accent compared to a WSAE accent.
>
> H1b: Individuals report lower quality judgments of a presentation when the presenter has a WSAE accent compared to a crossover BSAE accent.

Similarly, individuals are expected to evaluate the extent to which the presenter was prepared more harshly for WSAE speakers compared with Crossover speakers, and even lower for BSAE speakers. Hypothesis 2 is stated thus:

> H2a: Individuals report lower judgments of presenter preparedness when the presenter has a traditional BSAE accent compared to a WSAE accent.
>
> H2b: Individuals report lower judgments of presenter preparedness when the presenter has a WSAE accent compared to a crossover BSAE accent.

When presenters are judged to require further support in developing an idea, it is expected that BSAE speakers will be judged to require more support than WSAE speakers, who in turn, will be judged to require more support than Crossover speakers. Hypothesis 3 reflects this:

> H3a: Individuals report need for greater support in developing a proposal when the presenter has a traditional BSAE accent compared to a WSAE accent.
>
> H3b: Individuals report need for greater support in developing a proposal when the presenter has a WSAE accent compared to a crossover BSAE accent.

With respect to the credibility of the presenter, which is a judgement of their trustworthiness and expertise, hypothesis 4 follows the same pattern as the first three:

> H4a: A presenter with a traditional BSAE accent will receive lower judgements of credibility compared to a WSAE accent.
>
> H4b: A presenter with a WSAE accent will receive lower judgements of credibility compared to a crossover BSAE accent.

Finally, when evaluating an opportunity, it will be judged to be more risky when presented by a BSAE speaker compared with a WSAE speaker. An opportunity is hypothesised to be perceived as least risky when presented by a Crossover speaker. Hypothesis 5 is stated as follows:

> H5a: Individuals report higher risk for an opportunity when the presenter has a traditional BSAE accent compared to a WSAE accent.
>
> H5b: Individuals report higher risk for an opportunity when the presenter has a WSAE accent compared to a crossover BSAE accent.

All five hypotheses predict that speakers with traditional BSAE accents will be judged more

harshly than WSAE speakers, and that Crossover speakers will be judged most favourably as a result of their social and human capital resources, which is signalled immediately through their linguistic capital resources. Presenters with BSAE accents suffer ongoing accent discrimination, with the expected effect that opportunities they present are less likely to be favourably assessed than when the proposals are made by presenters with WSAE accents and Crossover accents.

3.2 Conceptual model

The hypotheses can be depicted in a conceptual model, as shown in Figure 3.1. The theoretical construct of linguistic capital is tested in the model by the independent variable 'accent', as all other facets of discourse have been controlled for in the experimental design.

The amount of linguistic capital is determined by the accent a speaker uses. It is hypothesised that Crossover speakers hold most linguistic capital and therefore most persuasive power in a context of interaction. WSAE speakers are predicted to have lesser amounts of linguistic capital. BSAE speakers, on the other end of the spectrum, are predicted to be the subject of linguistic discrimination, and therefore be evaluated most harshly both in terms of perceived ability and the perceived quality of the opportunity.

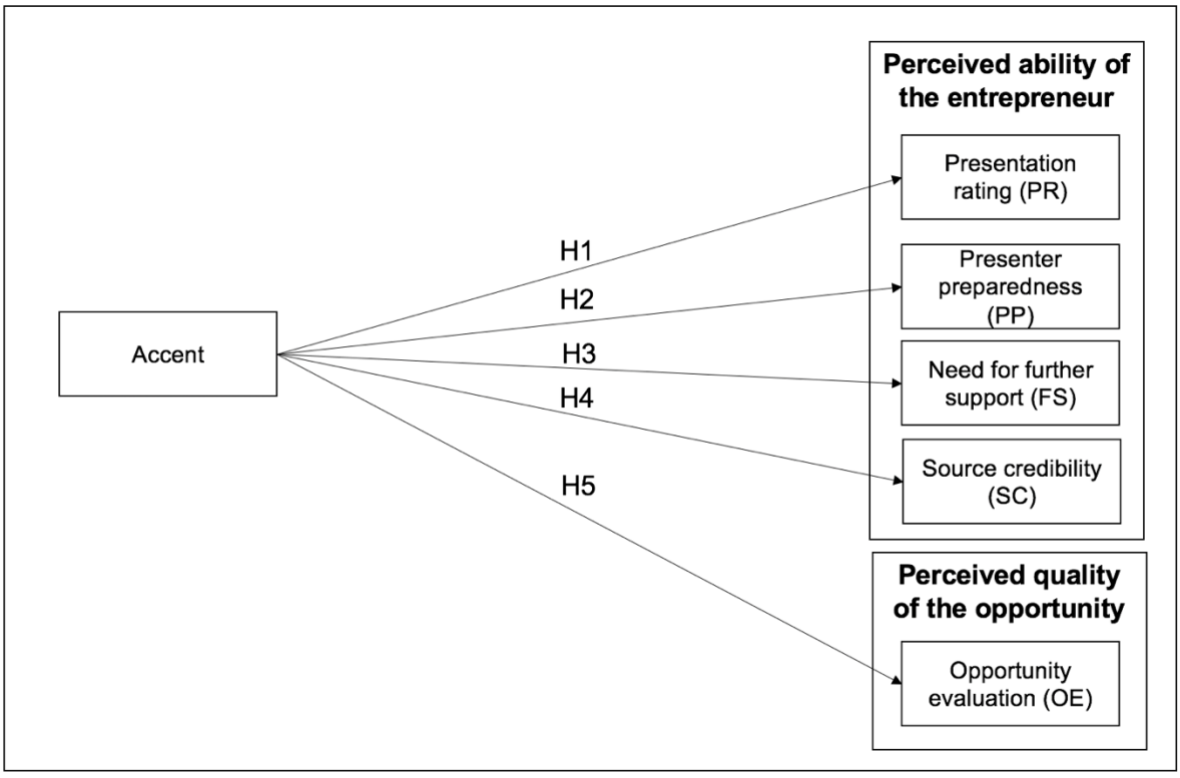

Figure 3.1 Conceptual model of the effect of accent on perceived ability of the presenter and perceived quality of the opportunity.

The model shows that the relationship between accent and each of the dependent variables is tested as a direct effect. The proposed study seeks to answer the following research question: How does accent affect the perception of a corporate entrepreneur's proposal on strategic initiatives?

To answer this question and to collect data to test the hypotheses, a scenario-based experiment was designed. The methodological details are described and justified in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 | Research Methodology and Design

In this chapter, the design of the research is detailed and explained. The aim of this study was to understand whether accent discrimination affects the perception of a corporate entrepreneur's proposal on strategic initiatives. An experiment was designed to determine whether linguistic capital (with accent as an observed variable) influences the perceptions of the respondents regarding the ability of the presenter and the quality of the opportunity.

The methodological approach is justified, and the research methods explained in the first section of this chapter. It begins with an outline of the appropriacy of a critical realist philosophical approach, and a quantitative methodological approach for addressing the research problem described above. An experimental design was most suitable to allow for the generation of data to answer the research question. This is followed by a description of the instrument that was designed to collect data, a discussion of the population and sample selection, and then the data gathering and analytic processes. Measures for ensuring reliability and validity are explained and a discussion of the limitations of the design conclude this chapter.

4.1 Research philosophy

The study was designed from the philosophical standpoint of critical realism. This stance requires social scientists (including management scholars) to be critical of the phenomena they describe and explain, providing guidance or prescriptions about what should be, rather than simply describing what is (Sousa, 2010).

Critical realism is similar to positivism in its ontological assumption that the world exists independent of one's knowledge of it, but realism differs in its stance that unobservable objects can be the subject of inquiry (Sousa, 2010). Positivists privilege observable entities and events in their studies (Sousa, 2010). The theoretical frame of this study concerns predominantly unobservable entities and events – tacit relationships of power between speakers with different accents, different histories. They meet in a given market, or context, and these factors come into play in ways that produce tangible effects. This is the nature of linguistic capital as a source of power in the symbolic economy.

Critical realists believe that events that happen in the real world are a result of the convergence of innumerable, interconnected factors which interplay in complex causal configurations (Sousa, 2010). Epistemologically, realists' knowledge of the social world in which these events occur is partially a social production, making use of discourses that facilitate understanding.

Realists' knowledge of the world is therefore dependent on concepts that are drawn on to explain and critique them.

This research sought to unpack workplace prejudice with respect to accent using the scientific discourse of linguistic markets and capital. In doing so, the study investigated the causal relationship between the amount of linguistic capital held by employees and their ability to garner support for a proposal from decision-makers. Methodologically, a quantitative design is the most suitable approach for conducting the proposed research because quantitative research allows for the study of relationships between theoretical constructs.

4.2 Design and procedure

The study was a single-factor between-subject experiment with three levels designed to examine the effects of accent on a presenter's ability to garner support for a proposal in a corporate entrepreneurship drive. Because "experiments are the gold standard for investigating causal relationships" (Wulff & Villadsen, 2020, p. 347), an experimental design was the most appropriate means for testing whether different accents – the independent variable with three levels – caused participants to respond differently to a corporate entrepreneurship proposal.

Experimental design allows for theoretical constructs to be tested while controlling for all other factors that may influence the outcome; indeed the aim of an experiment is to determine the influence of a specific treatment on the outcome variable (Charness, Gneezy, & Kuhn, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, experiments limit concerns about endogeneity (when a variable that is not included in a model is related to a variable that is included in the model) which is a concern for survey-based quantitative studies (Crane, Henriques, & Husted, 2018). Experimental designs also allow for definitive indication of causality (Kim et al., 2015), which is the aim of the proposed research i.e. does one's accent lead to differential levels of support for corporate proposals from respondents.

The experiment is based methodologically on the matched guise technique designed by Lambert and colleagues about 60 years ago (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960). The design involved recordings of the same passage read by the same speaker in different languages (French and English). Listeners were required to rate the speaker's personality and other traits. The primary drawback of this method was that respondents might recognise that the speaker was the same in all recordings. Later versions of the method used different speakers to record the same message (Cooper, 1975; Tsalikis et al., 1991). The matched guise technique cannot control for speaker differences such as speed and intonation,

but has been preferred as an experimental method by prominent language researchers (Tsalikis et al., 1991). The method is still in productive use in studies seeking to research attitudes towards accents or dialect (Dixon, Mahoney, & Cocks, 2002; Goatley-Soan & Baldwin, 2018; Loureiro-Rodriguez, Boggess, & Goldsmith, 2013; Nejjari, Gerritsen, van Hout, & Planken, 2019; Villarreal, 2018).

One weakness of experimental design is the trade-off between external validity and internal validity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). In this research study, this trade-off was addressed by employing Experimental Vignette Methodology (EVM). This methodology presents realistic scenarios to respondents, enhancing experimental realism and increasing the external validity of the findings. EVM combines the advantages of laboratory and field experiments. The former is high in internal validity, while the latter allows for greater external validity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Jahn, Eichhorn, & Brühl, 2020).

By creating as realistic a laboratory experiment as possible, EVM offers both internal and external validity. In this study, this was achieved by using a VOPP presentation, which simulated a presentation on a web-based video conferencing platform. This format of presentation has grown in prominence since the Covid-19 pandemic forced companies to close their offices and for employees to work from home. This situation persists in 2021 as several countries worldwide have re-entered lockdown conditions with restrictions ranging in severity. A global work-from-home survey found that 88 percent of employees regularly worked from home during the pandemic, compared with just 31 percent prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, and 76 percent expect to work from home at least one day per week for the foreseeable future (Kamouri & Lister, 2020). Workplace communication takes place via web-based collaboration and video conferencing platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. As such, the video vignette presents a very realistic experimental environment – more so than a written vignette or scenario which is commonly used in EVM designs.

The EVM study was designed following recognised guidelines for the method (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Hannah, Thompson, & Herbst, 2020). EVM is a suitable approach when control over independent variables must be exercised in order to ascertain causation, particularly the nature and direction of causal relationships (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Given the aim of the study, which was to test whether a presenter's accent affects the decision-maker's likelihood of favourably evaluating the proposal made by the presenter, this approach is appropriate as it requires manipulation of accent as the independent variable. By manipulating accent, the only differing antecedent to the decision-making process, it was possible to test the effect it had on the outcome variables (i.e. an evaluation of the ability of the presenter and the quality

of the opportunity). In the remainder of this section, the aspects of the EVM design will be explained and the research design choices justified. It begins with a description of the experiment.

A survey link to the experiment was distributed to respondents. In the instructions, respondents were told that they were judging an entry in a corporate entrepreneurship drive. The company had asked employees to pitch ideas for growth of the company. The respondents were told that they were part of a 'crowd-sourcing' initiative and that they were judging the first round of the competition in which the corporate entrepreneur was pitching an opportunity for the first time.

The pitch was about an opportunity for an international expansion to Brazil, South America. This international opportunity was selected to minimise the extent to which the proposal characteristics may influence respondents e.g. a BSAE accent may be deemed better suited if the project targeted the base of the pyramid. The location for the proposed expansion was Brazil, a setting with people from many different racial groups. This further helped ensure that decisions about whether or not to expand were less influenced by considerations of racial matching between the home and host country.

Respondents were asked to watch the pitch (via VOPP) and then assess the opportunity, and decide whether the corporate entrepreneur should progress to the second round of the competition. The items in the measurement instrument are discussed in the next section.

The presentation was designed by the researcher in PowerPoint, and the script was written outlining the details of the opportunity. The fictional company was an IT sector firm servicing the mining industry. The details of the case were based on an actual company that sells and provides support for devices that are installed in mining vehicles, allowing the productivity of the vehicle to be tracked. It was developed with the participation of the entrepreneurs of this small firm who had developed the relevant technology. The technology enables mining sites to run more efficiently, improving profitability. The proposal contained little technical information, but the case presented was both plausible and not widely known. The presenter's proposal laid out plans for an international expansion to Brazil. In it, the presenter gave three expansion options and included financial projections for each one. The experiment included three treatments, and the presentation and script were identical across the three treatment conditions.

The difference was the person who recorded the voice-over for each treatment – this part of the design makes use of the modified version of the matched guise technique (Lambert et al.,

1960). Three presenters, each with a different accent of SAE, recorded the script. The recordings were overlayed into the presentation and uploaded as three separate YouTube videos. Links to all three YouTube videos are provided in Appendix B. Each respondent was randomly assigned to one of the treatments when they clicked on the survey link, so they only heard one presenter pitching the proposal. The experiment type was therefore a true experiment rather than quasi-experiment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) due to the random assignment of participants into three groups. Accent was the only independent variable being manipulated in the experiment.

4.3 Actor demographics and details

Three actors recorded the voice-overs. The first speaker was a Black South African with a traditional BSAE accent; the second was a White South African with a General WSAE accent; and the final speaker was a Black South African with a crossover accent (Mesthrie et al., 2015) which displays phonetic features of WSAE, but is still (largely) identifiable as BSAE. All three actors were students pursuing a Master's qualification at a leading South African business school. By virtue of the selection criteria for the Master's programme, they all had significant work experience in senior positions and had met the minimum academic criteria for acceptance. Educational background is a large determinant of accent in South Africa (as explained in section 2.2 above). Table 4.1 summarises the details of the three actors.

Race	**Accent**	**Primary and secondary school context**	**Gender**	**Age (1 January 2020)**
Black	BSAE	Township school	Male	43
White	WSAE	Private school	Male	43
Black	Crossover BSAE	Model C school	Male	37

Table 4.1 Actors' demographics

The traditional BSAE speaker attended a township school, with exclusively Black teachers and peers. The WSAE speaker attended a private school. Private schools at the time were attended almost exclusively by White children, and employed White teaching staff. The crossover BSAE speaker attended a Model C school. His primary schooling coincided with the legislative change in 1991 which allowed children of colour to attend schools that were formerly White-only schools. He would therefore have been among the first Black children to attend a Model C school, and given that the demographics of such schools changed slowly, the majority of children were White. For both the WSAE and crossover BSAE speaker, they would have heard predominantly WSAE accents at school. At home, the crossover speaker would have heard traditional BSAE (when English was spoken). The BSAE speaker would

have been exposed only to BSAE both at home and at school.

In order to preclude possible gender bias from affecting the findings, all actors were male. Prior research has demonstrated a gender bias such that males are considered to be more competent than females, have a higher appetite for risk, and more likely to be associated with more capital-intensive businesses (Cortina, 2008; Gupta, Mortal, Silveri, Sun, & Turban, 2020; Hekman et al., 2010; Kanze, Huang, & Conley, 2018). Using only male speakers excluded the possibility that respondents responded to the pitch negatively as a result of a gender bias.

EVM studies differ in type. The primary types are paper people studies and policy capturing and conjoint analysis studies (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). The former type – paper people – require participants to make an explicit decision or choice, while the latter type tests for implicit processes or outcomes (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). Respondents in this study were explicitly asked to decide whether the proposal presented in the scenario deserves further consideration or support, and given options as to the nature of the support. This study therefore made use of a paper people design.

The paper people design was so named because it typically involved respondents reading a given scenario (i.e. giving paper to people to read). However, the level of immersion is increased with the use of video and audio, which increases the realism of the setting and therefore the generalisability of the findings. Wulff and Villadsen (2020) caution that best practices, including highly realistic level of immersion, must be implemented in EVM designs, or face the risk of erroneous findings. This warning was heeded in designing this study. As explained above, the company in the vignette is fictional, but the scenario is based closely on an actual company's plans and financial projections for international expansion, increasing the realism of the vignette. In the current context in which people are working from home significantly more than before, it is completely realistic for anyone to be watching a video presentation by an unseen presenter sharing their screen. The level of realism in the study was therefore very high.

EVM, like other experimental designs, can be either a within-subject design, which exposes each respondent to two or more treatments being tested, or a between-subject design, which exposes respondents to only one of the treatments (Charness et al., 2012). Charness et al. (2012) found that both within and between designs have advantages and drawbacks, and that the research context should determine which design is most appropriate given the problem being investigated. In this study, a between-subject design was employed to ensure that differences in the outcome of the evaluation process was determined by accent. Between-person designs are relatively rare in EVM studies because when participants are only

presented with a single vignette, they do not have the opportunity for comparison and contextual grounding of their responses (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). In the case of this study, allowing respondents to compare different scenarios by different speakers would have introduced noise into the design, and not allowed clear claims of causality between accent and decision-making. Respondents were therefore exposed to only one vignette – all other elements of the presentation besides accent were identical, thereby controlled for.

The opportunity detailed in the vignette carried an element of risk, as is the nature of international expansion. The opportunity was deliberately chosen to describe a technology that not many people would be familiar with (barring some in the mining industry). The scenario was designed so that the situation was complex and nuanced, therefore the decision about whether or not to support the presenter in taking the proposal forward was based not solely on the opportunity. Supporting the opportunity was not an easy or obvious decision to make, so the role of the presenter in persuading the decision-maker was key.

Using EVM, the number and levels of manipulated factors must be carefully considered. In this study, only one independent variable was manipulated i.e. accent, with three different accents in order to assess whether differences in linguistic capital affect the outcome of the strategic decision-making process.

4.4 Pilot study

The survey was piloted by 15 participants who provided feedback on the design before the instrument was finalised. Based on the feedback from pilot participants, the most substantial change to the design is detailed in Table 4.2. In addition, several smaller changes were made to the items in the survey, such as amending the boundaries of the age categories and adding more options in the selection of industry.

Pilot instrument	Final instrument	Rationale for the change
Participants were asked to decide whether to invest in the proposed opportunity for international expansion.	Participants were asked to decide whether the presenter should proceed to a second round of a corporate entrepreneurship drive.	Pilot participants felt that they did not have sufficient information about the venture to make a such an important decision on behalf of a company.

Table 4.2 Change from pilot survey instrument to the final survey instrument

4.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Gordon Institute of Business Science Research Ethics Committee. As per university regulations, respondents were informed of the purpose of

the research, their rights as respondents, given an estimate of the time commitment involved and provided with the contact details of the primary researcher and the research supervisor. The informed consent statement formed part of the survey. No incentive was offered for participation in the study. In accordance with the University of Pretoria's ethical guidelines for research, respondents were not required to provide their name or any other information that would render them personally identifiable.

Respondents were not informed about the aspect of the research that dealt with accent, as this knowledge might have affected the outcome of their evaluative process. This means that the purpose of the research was only partially disclosed to respondents. Upon completion of the survey, participants were told that there was an undisclosed element to the research project and invited to contact the researcher via email if they wished to be debriefed. Participants who requested a debrief were sent a link to a YouTube video which explains the design and findings. In the video, the researcher disclosed that the study is about the effect of accent on the decision-making process. Given that there is no deception involved in this project, only non-disclosure, this method of debrief was deemed most appropriate. Data will be stored safely for a period of 10 years following completion of the study, as per university regulations.

4.6 Measurement instrument

The purpose of this research project was to assess the extent to which accents affects the ability of corporate entrepreneurs to successfully convince strategic decision-makers of the value of their proposals. In line with EVM, an instrument was designed using a scenario, and respondents were asked to evaluate the situation and provide responses as prompted.

The vignette was presented to participants as described in section 4.2 above. The instrument is attached as Appendix A. After listening to the presentation, participants proceeded to respond to the questionnaire. In writing the items of the questionnaire, care was taken to ensure that the questions conformed to conventional guidelines in terms of clarity, length, lack of ambiguity (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). A six-point Likert format was used for scoring the scale items (discussed below).

First, respondents were asked whether they wanted further information about the opportunity. If they responded affirmatively, they were asked whether they would prefer a 2-page executive summary or a 30-page detailed report. Respondents were then asked whether or not the presenter should be shortlisted for the second round of the corporate entrepreneurship drive. Three options were available: 1. No; 2. Yes, with some mentorship to further flesh out the idea;

3. Yes, the corporate entrepreneur can work independently on developing the proposal further. These items allowed for hypothesis 3 to be tested.

Following these items, respondents were required to respond to items from two amended scales. The first scale measured opportunity evaluation (OE) (Scheaf, Loignon, Webb, Heggestad, & Wood, 2020), which allowed for the testing of hypothesis 5. The opportunity evaluation scale developed and validated by Scheaf et al. (2020) measures three aspects of the opportunity, viz. gain estimation, perceived feasibility and loss estimation. The scale was developed and tested from the perspective of an individual entrepreneur (e.g. "I see large potential gains for myself in pursuing the opportunity"). To fit the purpose of measuring an opportunity within a corporate entrepreneurship setting, the scale items were amended to that they evaluated the opportunity from the perspective of the firm (i.e. "I see large potential gains for the organisation in pursuing the opportunity"), and the perceived feasibility items were omitted as they were not relevant for the present study. The scale anchors were 1= 'strongly agree' and 6= 'strongly disagree'. Details of the changes to the scale items are provided in Table 4.3.

Construct	**Item code**	**Original scale item**	**Amended scale item**
Gain estimation	OE1.1	I see large potential gains for myself in pursuing the [O]	I see large potential gains for the organisation in pursuing this opportunity
Gain estimation	OE1.2	The potential upside in pursuing [O] is large for me	The potential upside in pursuing the opportunity is large for the organisation
Gain estimation	OE1.3	Pursuing [O] would result in big profits for me	Pursuing the opportunity would result in big profits
Gain estimation	OE1.4	I want to learn more about pursuing [O]	I want to learn more about pursuing the opportunity
Gain estimation	OE1.5	I would love working on making [O] a reality	I think the corporate entrepreneur presenting the idea would make the opportunity a reality
Gain estimation	OE1.6	Pursuing [O] would be enjoyable for me	Pursuing the opportunity would be satisfying for the corporate entrepreneur
Perceived feasibility		I have what it takes to create [O]	-
Perceived feasibility		I am well equipped to pursue the [O]	-
Perceived feasibility		At this point in my life, it would be easy for me to go after [O]	-
Perceived feasibility		At this point in my life, I have no barriers preventing me from	-

		pursuing [O]	
Loss estimation	OE2.1	For me, the potential for loss in pursuing the [O] is high	The potential for loss in pursuing the opportunity is high
Loss estimation	OE2.2	The overall riskiness of pursuing [O] is high for me	The overall riskiness of pursuing the opportunity is high
Loss estimation	OE2.3	The size of the potential loss in pursuing [O] is large for me	The size of the potential loss in pursuing the opportunity is large
Loss estimation	OE2.4	For me, the exposure to loss in pursuing [O] is sizeable	The exposure to loss in pursuing the opportunity is sizeable

Table 4.3 Original and amended items on Scheaf et al.'s (2020) Opportunity Evaluation Scale. [O]=opportunity

The second scale that was employed in the instrument was an amended source credibility (SC) scale (Ohanian, 1990). Source credibility refers to "a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of a message" (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). The scale was developed to measure the perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of celebrity endorsers. The scale has been validated extensively in several studies since its introduction (e.g. Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

For the purpose of this study, attractiveness was not relevant as the presenters were not seen by respondents – only their voice was heard over the presentation. The five items related to attractiveness were therefore omitted from the survey instrument for this study. Respondents were asked to evaluate the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness. The scale anchors for the included items were 1= 'strongly agree' and 6= 'strongly disagree'.

Respondents were asked to provide demographic information: their age, gender, race, nationality, employment status, position and industry. In addition, respondents were asked whether or not they had any entrepreneurial experience (either within a firm or independently) to control for alternative explanations. All results are presented in Chapter 5.

4.7 Population and Sample

The population for the research included economically active South Africans working in the South African landscape, whether employed in an organisation or self-employed. The instructions to participants stated that respondents were judges in a corporate entrepreneurship drive. It is feasible that judges could be made up of people external to the company, such as consultants, for an objective perspective on the opportunity, as well as people at various managerial and executive levels within the organisation. Qualifying

questions were used to screen respondents. Any respondent whose employment status was unemployed, student, or retired was excluded from the analysis. The exclusion of people who are not currently economically active (either those who were too young to have entered the workforce yet, or those who had retired) ensured that the responses gathered are from currently employed South Africans in the present-day South African workplace.

Responses of respondents who are foreign nationals were also excluded from the analysis. The delimitation on nationality was necessary due to the nuances of accent and language variety: foreign nationals are reasonably expected to be less attuned to the nuances of accent in the dialectal spectrum of SAE.

There is no sample frame for this population. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), was used to source appropriate respondents. The link to the experiment was distributed via LinkedIn, and private messages were sent via LinkedIn and private email to several people within the researcher's network inviting responses. This constitutes a convenience and snowball sampling technique. Given that accent is heard by and judged by the wider population, this technique was appropriate as accent discrimination is not limited to particular corporate or workplace settings; indeed its effect is potentially relevant in any social interaction.

Given that there is a single EVM factor with three levels, a minimum of 120 responses was required for adequate statistical analysis. Given the analysis procedure (described in section 4.9), this is adequate to cover the minimum required number of responses (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2018). Table 4.4 shows the factor levels for EVM.

Factor	**Factor levels**	**Values**
Accent	3 levels	BSAE Crossover BSAE WSAE

Table 4.4: EVM factor: 3 levels x 40 respondents = 120 respondents

4.8 Data gathering

The experiment was administered through an online platform, Qualtrics, which allowed for a YouTube video to be embedded within the survey. Respondents were able to access the survey on a computer, smartphone or tablet. The link was distributed via email, WhatsApp and the social media platform, LinkedIn, in order to reach suitable respondents. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three videos of the presentation as described in section 4.2 above.

4.9 Level and unit of analysis

The level of analysis in this project was the individual, as individuals within the sample were compared to ascertain whether consistent patterns were evident in their responses. In particular, the unit of analysis was the individual – either employees or others (such as consultants) who may reasonably have been included in a panel of judges on a corporate entrepreneurship drive. Crane et al. (2018) claim that the individual level of analysis is not as prevalent in business and society research as organisational, industry and country levels of analysis. The opposite appears to be the case in research on language in international business (Tenzer et al., 2017): the individual level has been explored through various aspects of language. The proposed research offers a different lens into cognitive processes happening at the individual level of analysis which affects strategic decision-making in the organisation.

4.10 Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. In Chapter 5, the sample is described demographically using descriptive statistics. Interval and categorical data were generated through the survey instrument, with only one independent variable involved (accent). The data were analysed using the statistical software package SPSS. Based on the data gathered, two tests were appropriate to test the hypotheses. First, for hypotheses that involved categorical dependent variables, a chi-square test for independence was used as this allows for comparison between two categorical variables (Pallant, 2016). For hypotheses testing for differences in the mean scores between the three treatment groups (the independent variable), where the dependent variables were continuous variables, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were used (Pallant, 2016).

4.11 Reliability and validity

Reliability refers to the extent to which there is internal consistency within the items making up a scale i.e. do the items measure the same underlying construct (Pallant, 2016). The items in the scales were tested for reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha.

Internal validity is the extent to which the research questions are adequately addressed through the research design and instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) i.e. whether warranted inference can be made with respect to research questions based on the findings. The scales were tested for construct validity (Pallant, 2016); and content validity was ensured through adequate sampling technique.

External validity refers to the extent to which inferences from the sample data can be

generalised to other contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Experimental research has a high capacity for generalisation, provided it is well designed and well executed (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). The findings for this study can be generalised to management contexts within a South African setting. Variance in language varieties and the social context in which accents are produced and used means that the findings will be situated within the South African context, but the principles by which linguistic discrimination operates for executives seeking favourable outcomes from strategic decision makers would hold in many contexts worldwide. Reliability and validity results are reported in the next chapter.

4.12 Summary

This chapter begins with a justification of the critical realist approach to the research and its quantitative design using EVM. It explains the details of the single factor between subject experiment, which had three levels, and how it was designed to test whether a presenters' accent affects their ability to persuade corporate decision makers to evaluate their presentation more or less favourably.

Three actors recorded VOPPs for the immersive experiment and were speakers of traditional BSAE, WSAE and Crossover BSAE. Small changes were made to the design following a piloting process, and ethical clearance for the study was obtained as per regulation. The measurement instrument was designed to allow for all the hypotheses to be tested, and the population identified as economically active South Africans. The sample was drawn from the population using convenience and snowball sampling techniques. Methods of data analysis were outlined and details of how the data would be checked for reliability and validity were described.

In the following chapter, the outcome of these processes is presented.

Chapter 5 | Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the data collection and analysis process. It begins with a summary of the demographics of respondents in terms of gender, race, age, level of education and management level. This is followed by details of the checks done to ascertain the normality of the data. Details of how the scale items were checked for reliability and validity are presented, and results of the hypothesis testing are presented in the final section.

5.1. Respondent demographics

In total, 244 people started the survey. Of those, 75 did not complete (see Table 5.1). Incomplete responses were excluded from the analysis. Nationals of countries other than South Africa were excluded and those who were not working (either full-time students or those who selected 'other') were also excluded. No respondents indicated that they were unemployed or retired.

	Reason for exclusion	**Responses (n=)**
Total cases before exclusion		**245**
	Did not complete the survey	76
	Non-South African	12
	Not currently working	6
Total cases analysed		**152***

Table 5.1: Cases excluded from the analysis

*The numbers in the table cumulatively result in 151 cases, but there was one case of overlap in which one respondent was excluded based on nationality and employment status.

Of the cases analysed, the demographics of the respondents overall are broken down in Table 5.2. The final sample was slightly skewed in terms of gender, with just over 53 percent of male respondents. The racial mix of respondents included people from all four primary race groups in South Africa, while the split is not representative of the general population with 36,8 percent of Black Africans and just under 29 percent were White. The age category 30-39 captured 46 percent of respondents, followed by almost 39 percent in the category 40-49.

In terms of level of education, 137 of the 152 respondents (90 percent) held postgraduate degrees. Including those with bachelor's degrees, the total of respondents which were university educated increases to 96 percent. This is not surprising given the targeted population from which the sample was drawn.

Demographic category		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	71	46,7
	Male	81	53,3
	Total	**152**	**100**
Race	Black African	56	36,8
	Coloured	16	10,5
	Indian	30	19,7
	White	44	28,9
	Did not answer	6	3,9
	Total	**152**	**100***
Age	20-29	1	0,7
	30-39	70	46,1
	40-49	59	38,8
	50-59	19	12,5
	60+	3	2
	Total	**152**	**100***
Level of education	High school	2	1,3
	Vocational training	2	1,3
	Bachelor's degree	9	5,9
	Postgraduate or Honour's degree	57	37,5
	Master's degree	74	48,7
	Doctoral degree	6	3,9
	Did not specify	2	1,3
	Total	**152**	**100***

Table 5.2: Respondent demographics by gender, race, age and level of education

*The total does not add up to 100% due to rounding of decimal numbers, but in fact presents 100% of cases.

Table 5.3 presents a breakdown of the respondents per treatment group i.e. those who heard the presentation by the BSAE, WSAE and Crossover speakers. As mentioned, respondents were randomly assigned to the treatment groups. The total number of respondents with completed surveys for each of the groups was 53, 47 and 52 for BSAE, WSAE and Crossover respectively.

The slightly unequal final numbers for the three groups are a result of some respondents not completing the questionnaire. Overall, each of the groups had fair representation of respondents in terms of gender, race, age and level of education. None of the groups contained gross under- or overrepresentation with respect to the demographic characteristics of the samples.

Demographic category		Treatment group			Total
		BSAE	WSAE	Crossover	
Gender	Female	24	25	22	**71**
	Male	29	22	30	**81**
	Total	**53**	**47**	**52**	**152**
Race	Black African	17	22	17	**56**
	Coloured	4	5	7	**16**
	Indian	10	12	8	**30**
	White	20	6	18	**44**
	Did not answer	2	2	2	**6**
	Total	**53**	**47**	**52**	**152**
Age	20-29	1	0	0	**1**
	30-39	26	22	22	**70**
	40-49	17	19	23	**59**
	50-59	8	5	6	**19**
	60+	1	1	1	**3**
	Total	**53**	**47**	**52**	**152**
Level of education	High school	2	0	0	**2**
	Vocational training	1	1	0	**2**
	Bachelor's degree	3	1	5	**9**
	Postgraduate or Honour's degree	19	17	21	**57**
	Master's degree	26	25	23	**74**
	Doctoral degree	2	2	2	**6**
	Did not specify	0	1	1	**2**
	Total	**53**	**47**	**52**	**152**

Table 5.3: Respondent demographics for each treatment group by gender, race, age and level of education. Totals correspond to the total numbers in Table 5.2.

The respondents represent a wide variety of industries. The largest group was from the financial services and insurance industry (22,4 percent), followed by professional services, such as consultants (16,4 percent) and the information and communications technology (ICT) sector (11,8 percent).

Industry	Frequency	Percent
Accommodation and Hospitality	1	0,7
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3	2,0
Construction	1	0,7

Education	10	6,6
Electricity, Gas and Water	5	3,3
Financial services and Insurance	34	22,4
Government and Non-Profit	8	5,3
Health	6	3,9
ICT	18	11,8
Media and Communication	16	10,5
Mining	5	3,3
Manufacturing	7	4,6
Transport and Logistics	2	1,3
Wholesale and Retail	5	3,3
Other	6	3,9
Professional services	25	16,4
Total	**152**	**100**

Table 5.4: Respondents by industry.

In terms of level of management (Table 5.5), a combined total of 77 percent were in senior or executive management roles, so a large majority of the respondents held senior positions, which by definition means that they hold decision-making power in their organisations. A further 17,1 percent were in middle management roles.

Level of Management	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Junior Management	3	2
Middle Management	26	17,1
Senior Management	58	38,2
Executive Management	59	38,8
Other	6	3,9
Total	**152**	**100**

Table 5.5: Respondents by level of management.

5.2. Distribution of the data

The distribution of continuous variables was checked for skewness and kurtosis. The assumptions of the parametric statistical test employed, the ANOVA, requires normally distributed data (Pallant, 2016). Skewness and kurtosis values lower than ±1,96 are acceptable for the distribution to be considered normal (Hair et al., 2018). Items presented in

Table 5.6 are those that formed part of the final analysis. For details of excluded items, see section 5.3.

Item code	Description	Skewness	Kurtosis	Normal or non-normal
PR	Presentation rating	.137	-.751	Normal
PP	Presenter preparedness	-.002	-.040	Normal
SC1.1	Source credibility	.084	-.616	Normal
SC1.2	Source credibility	.452	-.046	Normal
SC1.3	Source credibility	.369	-.383	Normal
SC1.4	Source credibility	.554	.257	Normal
SC1.5	Source credibility	.413	.620	Normal
SC2.1	Source credibility	.587	.710	Normal
SC2.2	Source credibility	.504	.447	Normal
SC2.3	Source credibility	.701	.854	Normal
SC2.4	Source credibility	.470	.397	Normal
SC2.5	Source credibility	.272	1.296	Normal
OE1.1	Opportunity evaluation	.541	.190	Normal
OE1.2	Opportunity evaluation	.548	-.152	Normal
OE1.3	Opportunity evaluation	.269	-.206	Normal
OE1.5	Opportunity evaluation	.258	-.189	Normal

Table 5.6: Normality test results.

5.3. Measures of reliability and validity

The source credibility (SC) and opportunity evaluation (OE) scales were tested for reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Table 5.7). The Cronbach alpha for the SC scale was .936, which is well above the .7 threshold for internal consistency (Pallant, 2016). The alpha coefficient for the OE scale was .576, which is below the acceptable threshold. Three items were removed from the scale to raise the alpha coefficient to above the acceptable threshold, as indicated in Table 5.8 (column 3).

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Source credibility (SC)	.936	10
Opportunity evaluation (OE)	.576	10

Table 5.7: Reliability statistics before item exclusion.

Item code	Opportunity evaluation scale items	Item retained or deleted for reliability	Item retained or deleted for construct validity
OE1.1	I see large potential gains for the organisation	Retained	Retained
OE1.2	The potential upside in pursuing the opportunity is large for the organisation	Retained	Retained
OE1.3	Pursuing the opportunity would result in big profits	Retained	Retained
OE1.4	I want to learn more about pursuing the opportunity	Retained	Deleted
OE1.5	I think the corporate entrepreneur presenting the idea would make the opportunity a reality	Retained	Retained
OE1.6	Pursuing the opportunity would be satisfying for the corporate entrepreneur	Retained	Deleted
OE2.1	The potential for loss in pursuing the opportunity is high	Deleted	Deleted
OE2.2	The overall riskiness of pursuing the opportunity is high	Deleted	Deleted
OE2.3	The size of the potential loss in pursuing the opportunity is large	Deleted	Deleted
OE2.4	The exposure to loss in pursuing the opportunity is sizeable	Retained	Deleted

Table 5.8: Opportunity evaluation scale items retained and deleted.

Table 5.9 shows the alpha coefficients after removal of the three items in the OE scale. In order to achieve discriminant validity, it was necessary to remove a further three items from the OE scale, also indicated in Table 5.8 above (column 4). Construct validity is achieved when the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds 0,5 (Hair et al., 2018). Table 5.10 shows that construct validity was not achieved for the OE scale when items OE1.4, OE1.6 and OE2.4 were included in the analysis. Once these items were removed, construct validity was achieved (Table 5.11).

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Source credibility (SC)	.936	10
Opportunity evaluation (OE)	.723	7

Table 5.9: Reliability statistics after item exclusion.

Scale	Item code	Factor loadings	AVE	Construct validity
Source credibility	SC1.1	.746	.560	Achieved
	SC1.2	.755		
	SC1.3	.796		
	SC1.4	.765		
	SC1.5	.771		
	SC2.1	.782		
	SC2.2	.723		
	SC2.3	.795		
	SC2.4	.613		
	SC2.5	.719		
Opportunity evaluation	OE1.1	.65	.408	Not achieved
	OE1.2	.701		
	OE1.3	.661		
	OE1.4	.461		
	OE1.5	.676		
	OE1.6	.417		
	OE2.4	-.286		

Table 5.10: Construct validity statistics for SC and OE scales before item exclusion.

Scale	Item code	Factor loadings	AVE	Construct validity
Opportunity evaluation	OE1.1	.744	.533	Achieved
	OE1.2	.779		
	OE1.3	.716		
	OE1.5	.678		

Table 5.11: Construct validity statistics for OE scale after item exclusion.

5.4. Hypothesis testing

Once the reliability and validity of the scales were ensured, the remaining items could be combined to form the latent variables OE and SC in SPSS, and the hypotheses could be tested. Based on the type of data tested for each hypothesis, either an ANOVA or chi-square test was performed. In all cases, the independent variable was the treatment groups, BSAE speaker, WSAE speaker or Crossover speaker – a categorical variable. The findings of the hypothesis testing are summarised in Table 5.12.

For all hypotheses, a p-value of .05 or smaller indicates a significant finding, allowing the null hypothesis to be rejected. Hypothesis 1 concerned the reporting of the quality judgements of the presentation. As the dependent variable was a continuous variable, an ANOVA test was performed. The finding was non-significant (p= .165). The p-value is reported for H1 overall

(not 1a and 1b) as the ANOVA runs the analysis to compare groups first. The p-value is lower than .05 when there is a significant difference between any of the three groups. In this case, there was not. There appears to be no significant difference in the judgement of the presentation quality between the three treatment groups.

To test hypothesis 2, a Chi-square test was done because the dependent variable, presenter preparedness, is categorical. As an analysis tool that relies on cross-tabulation, one assumption regards minimum cell frequency: 80 percent of cells should have frequencies of five or more cases (Pallant, 2016). For hypothesis 2, all cells met the minimum cell frequency requirement. The p-value was .874, therefore highly non-significant. There appears to be no difference in the judgement of preparedness of the presenter between the three treatment groups.

Hypothesis 3 was also tested using the Chi-square test. Unfortunately, for hypothesis 3, three cells (33.3 percent) have fewer than 5 cases, so the result is not fully reliable as it does meet the requirement of minimum cell frequency (Pallant, 2016). The p-value for hypothesis 3 was .330. The non-significant value indicates that there is no difference in individuals' assessment of the presenter's need for further support in developing the proposal between the three groups.

Hypothesis 4 was tested using an ANOVA test because the dependent variable, Source Credibility, is continuous. With a p-value of .820, the result was highly non-significant, indicating that there was no significant difference in the credibility ratings between the three groups.

Hypothesis 5 was also tested using an ANOVA because the dependent variable, Opportunity Evaluation, was continuous. The hypothesis is not supported as the p-value is .794.

Code	Hypothesis	Test	p-value	Conclusion
H1a	Individuals report lower quality judgments of a presentation when the presenter has a traditional BSAE accent compared to a WSAE accent.	ANOVA	.165	Not supported
H1b	Individuals report lower quality judgments a presentation when the presenter has a WSAE accent compared to a crossover BSAE accent.			Not supported
H2a	Individuals report lower judgments of presenter preparedness when the presenter has a traditional BSAE accent compared to a	Chi-square	.874	Not supported

	WSAE accent.			
H2b	Individuals report lower judgments of presenter preparedness when the presenter has a WSAE accent compared to a crossover BSAE accent.			Not supported
H3a	Individuals report need for greater support in developing a proposal when the presenter has a traditional BSAE accent compared to a WSAE accent.	Chi-square	.330	Not supported
H3b	Individuals report need for greater support in developing a proposal when the presenter has a WSAE accent compared to a crossover BSAE accent.			Not supported
H4a	A presenter with a traditional BSAE accent will receive lower judgements of credibility compared to a WSAE accent.	ANOVA	.820	Not supported
H4b	A presenter with a WSAE accent will receive lower judgements of credibility compared to a crossover WSAE accent.			Not supported
H5a	Individuals report higher risk for an opportunity when the presenter has a traditional BSAE accent compared to a WSAE accent.	ANOVA	.794	Not supported
H5b	Individuals report higher risk for an opportunity when the presenter has a WSAE accent compared to a crossover BSAE accent.			Not supported

Table 5.12: Results of hypothesis testing.

The key findings are therefore not in line with expectations that the presenters were judged more or less harshly based on their accents. Indeed, there were hardly any hypotheses where the results even started approaching significance. The null hypothesis, that accent does not affect decision makers' judgement of a presenter on a given opportunity, therefore cannot be rejected.

5.5. Summary

Data from a sample of the designated population were collected to enable the hypotheses to be tested. The demographic breakdown of the respondents (whose responses qualified for analysis) was slightly skewed in terms of gender – more males made up the final sample than females. Respondents from various race groups made up the sample in varying proportions, and the majority of them held postgraduate degrees and senior positions in their organisations.

The scale items were checked for normality and internal consistency. The procedures followed

to ensure this consistency are reported. The hypothesis tests indicate non-significant findings for all five hypotheses, contrary to expectations. The possible reasons and implications of this surprising finding are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 | Discussion of results

This chapter offers an interpretation and discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 5. Contrary to expectation, there was no support for the five hypotheses put forward in the study. This suggests that accent does not influence decision-makers' evaluation of a presenter or a presented opportunity. These findings are unpacked and evaluated in light of the theoretical argument made regarding linguistic capital and linguistic discrimination.

6.1. Perceived ability of the presenter

It was argued that a power differential exists between speakers with different accents. Crossover speakers were argued to hold more linguistic capital than WSAE speakers; while BSAE speakers were thought to be subject to linguistic discrimination i.e. hold no capital and be subject to linguistic discrimination.

The prediction was that on all metrics, presentation quality, presenter preparedness, need for further support and source credibility, decision-makers would evaluate the Crossover speaker most favourably, followed by the WSAE speaker, and have the weakest evaluation of BSAE speaker. This finding was not supported statistically. The presentation quality was identical in each of the VOPPs, and the preparedness of the speaker would have been identical too.

Respondents appear to have been objective in their evaluation of the quality of the presentation, evaluating it similarly regardless of the presenter's accent. The only suggestion that there was any bias was in the first hypothesis, that the quality judgments of the presentation would be affected by the accent of the speaker. But with a p-value of .165, even this was not significant. This suggests a lack of accent-based prejudice in the sample.

6.2. Perceived quality of the opportunity

Like the measurements of the ability of the presenter, a similar expectation was that in evaluating the opportunity, the decision-maker might be unconsciously persuaded by the presenter's accent. This represents an even more stringent test of accent discrimination, as what is judged is not simply the speaker, but what the speaker is talking about. Consistent with the previous results, this was not found. Respondents evaluated the opportunity consistently regardless of which presenter they heard talking about the opportunity. This again points to a lack of accent-based discrimination amongst the respondents in the sample.

6.3. (Some) South Africans have moved on from race-based judgements of one another

Workplace discrimination negatively affects both individuals and organisations. Discrimination along gender lines is well documented (e.g. Kanze et al., 2018), and also race (Hekman et al., 2010); sexual orientation (Cech & Rothwell, 2020) amongst many other characteristics. There is inherent organisational risk when discriminatory practices are at play within a firm: the potential of employees remains unrealised, which hinders the ability of the firm to achieve its strategic objectives.

Much work has been done in organisations and at a societal level to reduce discrimination and move towards more equitable societies and workplaces worldwide (e.g. Koburtay, Syed, & Haloub, 2020; Murray & Southey, 2020; Patel & Feng, 2021), and certainly also in South Africa (Banks, Patel, & Moola, 2012; Steyn, Burnett, & Ndzwayiba, 2018).

Accent is a strong indicator of race in the absence of visual cues (for example, in online meetings without video). More than signalling race, however, in a South African landscape, accent provides immediate cues about one's human and social capital resources, as argued in Chapter 2. Based on the results of the hypothesis testing in this study, there was no evidence of accent discrimination in the respondents' evaluations of the speakers. In fact, their evaluation on all metrics was agnostic of speaker accent.

This paints a hopeful picture that measures to reduce or eliminate discrimination are working, and that South Africans have progressed to the point where their judgements of presenters and opportunities presented are not informed by implicit biases with respect to race (signalled by accent).

But accent discrimination is a well-documented phenomenon (e.g. Agarwal, 2018; Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Hansen et al., 2014; Roessel et al., 2020). Moreover, it is evident also that South Africans still face prejudice and discrimination in the workplace (April & Syed, 2020). It therefore seems somewhat utopian that no accent-based biases were evident in the results in this study given the strong literature that points to accent-based discrimination and the reality of persistent discrimination in relation to South African accents (Álvarez-Mosquera & Marín-Gutiérrez, 2018; Goatley-Soan & Baldwin, 2018).

So while these findings are welcome and indicate positive movement towards a desirable future that is free of discrimination, they should perhaps be viewed with some caution. If a decision were to be taken that a well-documented societal issue is no longer a concern, then

the empirical evidence has to be watertight. At the moment, it seems that these (welcome but unexpected) findings could perhaps be explained by methodological design issues.

In the following section, possible alternative explanations are explored to account for the non-significant findings. Two plausible explanations are explored, the first concerns the design of the project and the second concerns the sample.

6.4. Project design: The risk of cognitive overload

In terms of the design, it is possible that using a (deliberately) complex scenario for the EVM might have left respondents somewhat overwhelmed and cognitively overloaded. The challenge presented in the vignette was simplified in response to feedback received after the pilot: Rather than being asked whether they would invest in the proposal or not, the respondent had the (less challenging) task of deciding whether the proposal should proceed to a second round. But although the task was substantially simplified, the conceptual complexity was only slightly reduced (e.g. key facts were written on the slides and said in writing, rather than just said in writing).

Azar (2014) indicates that in the process of strategic decision-making, decision makers may follow the default option in the absence of additional information, or time to obtain additional information. Similarly, it may be that respondents applied the 'default heuristic' (Azar, 2014) or the 'status quo heuristic', which is a tendency of respondents to select the same response irrespective of the question (Weathers, Sharma, & Niedrich, 2005).

A different design may uncover biases that are not visible in the current design. In particular, what seems at play is the tension in balancing internal and external validity. Realistically, respondents would have had more than the four minutes (the time it took to listen to the vignette) to reflect on an opportunity. Thus simplifying the task and the materials may have allowed greater insight into how accent played out in the decision-making process.

Finding a balance between internal and external validity in the research design seems to be an important question to resolve in order to be confident in the findings (whatever they may prove to be). It also seems important to design the intervention to be able to identify to what extent respondents had based their decision on an assessment of the accent and the presentation, rather than on shared heuristics.

6.5 Sample selection: The 'enlightenment perspective'

It is also possible that the sample might have been 'too educated' to produce a significant

result. The respondents were mainly senior executives who had extensive formal education. The 'enlightenment perspective' suggests that people with high cognitive ability typically display greater racial tolerance and commitment to equality than those with lower cognitive abilities (Wodtke, 2016). Of the 152 respondents, 96 percent were university educated; 90 percent with postgraduate degrees. Even if they were not inherently non-racist, given the continued blight of racism in the workplace, they are likely to have been aware of the risk of race-based decisions, for example through workplace training.

It is plausible that a different sample might display different patterns of evaluation of the presenter and the opportunity presented in the scenario. This possibility opens up important avenues for future research. One of the contributions of this work is to examine the functioning of accent among corporate entrepreneurs. Accent discrimination has previously been studied at lower levels of the organisation (Morales et al., 2012; Tsalikis et al., 1991; Wang et al., 2013). It may be relevant both who speaks, and also who judges. Future research is necessary to determine to what extent and in which ways senior executives judge language.

For example, accent discrimination is only one dimension of language discrimination. People can also suffer discrimination on the basis of other elements of language, such as their use of non-standard grammar. Second language varieties of English tend to import grammatical features from the mother tongue e.g. non-gendered pronouns in African languages leads to gender confusion in BSAE (de Klerk, 2006). This leads to non-standard constructions like *The man, she went out*. It is possible that South Africans have become more used to varieties of accents, but that judgements will be made about non-standard grammatical constructions.

6.6 Summary

The results from the hypothesis testing are unclear. Either senior South African decision-makers in the current workplace do not discriminate on the basis of accent, or they do, and the research design failed to identify how.

Should it be the case that South Africans in the workplace do not discriminate on the basis of accent, these findings are welcome. They would indicate that progress has been made in eliminating discrimination in the workplace. However, given the strong evidence that workplace discrimination is still prevalent in various forms, the findings should perhaps be viewed cautiously.

It may be that the design of the instrument led to cognitive overload for the respondents, leading perhaps to the application of decision-based heuristics in making selections when

responding to the questionnaire. It is also possible that the highly educated sample is less susceptible to bias on the basis of accent. Thus this study should be seen as the first in potentially a sequence of studies in which these methodological concerns will need to be addressed. In the concluding chapter, the study is drawn to a close.

Chapter 7 | Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, following a summary of the study, the research objectives are recapped. This is followed by a brief summary of the principal findings. The implications of the findings for business are discussed and the contribution of the study is explained. A section on limitations and another on directions for future research close out the chapter.

To summarise, accent discrimination was identified as a prevalent problem, affecting people in various everyday contexts and also in the workplace. The effects include, but are not limited to, the ability of entrepreneurs to secure venture capital funding, biased assessment in performance evaluations, and discrimination in job interview processes. This phenomenon is fairly well documented at lower levels within organisations, but there was a dearth of research that addressed this form of discrimination at more senior levels. The present study therefore proposed to investigate the effect of accent discrimination, theorised to result in differential allotments of linguistic capital, on the evaluation of strategic opportunities for the firm.

To test this, an experiment was designed using EVM. The scenario-based experiment assessed whether accent discrimination affected respondents' evaluation of the presenter of a strategic growth opportunity, and their evaluation of the opportunity itself. A sample was drawn from a population of economically active South Africans, using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling techniques. Given that this phenomenon is agnostic to industry and organisation size, this method of sampling was suitable in that any working South African professional could participate. The sample was comprised mainly of highly educated senior managers and executives.

Crossover speakers were theorised to be holders of more linguistic capital than WSAE speakers. It was predicted that as a presenter, a Crossover speaker would be evaluated most favourably by decision-makers. WSAE speakers were theorised to hold some linguistic capital, but less than the Crossover speakers. It was argued that by virtue of their accent, those with greater amounts of linguistic capital held more persuasive power in the interaction i.e. more power to persuade respondents that their proposal was worthy of further attention from strategic decision-makers.

In contrast, BSAE speakers were theorised to be subject to linguistic discrimination and hold no linguistic capital because of the persistent effects of race-based bias and discrimination in South Africa. As a result, they were thought to have least power to persuade decision makers to favourably evaluate their presentation and proposed opportunity.

The hypotheses were tested using Chi-square test for independence and ANOVA statistical analyses (as appropriate). There were no significant findings for any of the five sets of hypotheses. At face value, this suggests that accent discrimination does not operate in South African workplaces. However, given how prevalent this phenomenon is, and the reality of persistent workplace discrimination in South Africa, further research on language-based discrimination in the workplace should be conducted as a follow up to this study to check the veracity of the findings.

7.1 Recap of the research objectives

In this study, the objectives were to discover the extent to which a presenter's accent affected the following:

a) a decision-maker's evaluation of the quality of the presentation;
b) a decision-maker's evaluation of the preparedness of the presenter;
c) a decision-maker's assessment of how much help or support a presenter requires in improving a presentation about an opportunity;
d) a decision-maker's assessment of the credibility of the presenter;
e) a decision-maker's assessment of the quality of the opportunity.

Reviewing the list above, it is clear that the objectives of the study have been achieved.

7.2 Principal findings

The results of the statistical analysis of the data collect showed no significant difference in respondents' evaluation of the opportunity for the three presenters. This suggests that there was no accent bias or discrimination in sample and that the presenters and the opportunity were assessed without discrimination.

This appears to be good news. A lack of accent discrimination suggests that South Africa has made progress towards eliminating discrimination – one of the markers of equality and a desirable social goal. On the other hand, the prevalence of other forms of workplace discrimination casts some doubt as to the reliability of the findings.

7.3 Implications for business

There is plenty of evidence that accent discrimination is a reality, affecting people at work and in other contexts (e.g. Agarwal, 2018; Parveen, 2020; Samuel, 2020). This is form of prejudice that is less salient than other forms of discrimination, such as race or gender-based discrimination (Hansen et al., 2014). While the findings in the current study find no evidence

of accent discrimination in this sample, the study still highlights that bias on the basis of the way someone speaks is a possible form of prejudice that can play out in workplaces.

Decision makers are subject to bias (Aharoni, Tihanyi, & Connelly, 2011; Ford, Price, Hofmeyr, & Chiba, 2018), and such bias can have implications for the success of the business for which they are making decisions. On one hand, in the context of the evaluation of strategic opportunities, it might mean that proposals made by certain people are not 'heard', or evaluated less favourably regardless of merit, leaving the full potential of the employee unrealised. Discrimination on the basis of any language-related factor should be understood and rooted out where necessary, as with all forms of prejudice that might adversely affect the professionals' careers. On the other hand, language-based discrimination could also have a negative effect on the organisation. Potentially worthwhile and profitable proposals, made by speakers with low linguistic capital resources, may be rejected. The evaluation of strategic opportunities should be based on rational factors and not affected by biases of any kind.

Awareness of various forms of bias and discrimination, outside of the most common forms (viz. race, gender, sexual orientation), is useful as it adds to an arsenal of information that can be used to root out workplace inequality when it occurs, or help to proactively prevent it from occurring.

7.4 Contributions

Language is a facilitator of organisational power dynamics (Hinds, Neeley, & Cramton, 2014), and its effects should be given due attention to facilitate better understanding of its role. In acknowledgement of this, the present study has drawn on theoretically on the concepts of the linguistic market and linguistic capital, introducing these as latent constructs into the domain of management. Given the salience of language in business activities (Piekkari et al., 2014), linguistic capital is a valuable contribution as it demonstrates that language is not simply about the way people speak or what they say, but that there is inherent power that speakers have that has an effect on the interaction, and the outcome of the interaction.

Empirically, the study contributes to the understanding of the operation and effect of one micro-foundational factor, accent-based discrimination, in the context of decision-makers evaluating strategic opportunities. Based on the findings, it appears that accent discrimination is not at play at the executive level in the South African workplace. The focus on senior management and executives is a useful contribution as studies of accent discrimination have been focused on lower levels in the organisation. The evidence of ongoing workplace discrimination (Dhanani, Beus, & Joseph, 2018) suggests that this focus is an important one

at senior levels too.

The research was designed to respond to several calls for further research, for example, to connect the language-based IB research with the language subject speciality, linguistics. Given that the study addresses implicit bias with respect to accent, which is closely aligned with traditional race categories, it also answers the call for management research to address issues that are important and can potentially benefit people (Tihanyi, 2020). In this case, it raises a flag that people can suffer discrimination on the basis of accent.

7.5 Limitations of the research

As with any research project, there are limitations to this study. Given the novelty of the question, many of the choices made in the research design could not be based on proximate research. Methodologically, the fact that the items in the OE scale could not be used in the final analysis was a minor limitation in that the full validated scale developed by Scheaf et al. (2020) did not produce reliable results in the current study. The recent development of the scale means that it has not been validated by other researchers and was unfortunately not fully validated in this study.

The present study also required the use of the between-subject experimental design. Designing a project that makes use of a within-subject design (Charness et al., 2012) may also yield insight into this phenomenon, as this would expose participants to all treatment groups, not only one. Additionally, the design limits the investigation of the effect to accent.

It also appears as though the design of the scenario in the EVM might have led to cognitive overload amongst respondents, possibly resulting in non-significant results. This could be tested using a different design.

The experiment is dependent upon the notion of linguistic capital as a signifier of human and social capital. This view is likely to be valid only so long as the first impressions of a speaker hold within the mind of fellow employees. It is probable that once people get used to an accent, and through interaction are provided with other evidence as to a speaker's human and social capital resources, the potential liability of the accent is lessened.

7.6 Directions for future research

As a general direction for further research, reliable findings in relation to language-based discrimination are worthy of pursuit. Accent discrimination is prevalent across regions and across languages, and language is an important window in the emotional and cognitive

processes that are so critical to organisational processes and evolution (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020). Where different varieties of a language are used in interaction, there exists the potential for accent discrimination. This is because accent is a strong signal of the factors that determine the power dynamics within any given interaction, such as race, class, gender, and level of education (in addition to visual cues, which provide information about some of these characteristics).

This study did not produce significant findings that demonstrate the existence of accent discrimination in the workplace, but it seems likely that some variant of the phenomenon is indeed at play in South African working environments. As a direction for future research, it may be worth testing similar hypotheses with respect to accent discrimination using a different design. It is important to know what different forms of discrimination workers may face – this would be the first step to reducing or eliminating such discrimination where it occurs.

The argument holds that accent signals linguistic capital, which is a type of currency that provides its speakers with value, or power, within a communicative interaction. Innumerable such interactions occur in workplaces on a daily basis, and in a (post-)Covid-19 environment, most of these interactions happen virtually. Conceptually, the idea of linguistic capital and its relationship to power could open various avenues of research, given that language is fundamental to the operation of any business. The concept could be applied more broadly to focus not only on language, but on strategic or organisational communication which is also key to organisational success.

7.7 Concluding remarks

Language, as “an instrument of action and power” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37), can be used both to facilitate inequitable practices in the workplace, intentionally or not, and also to facilitate the prevention of such practice through strategic communication (Logemann, Piekkari, & Cornelissen, 2019). The value of language-based studies in management cannot be underestimated, and provides an avenue for substantial further investigation. This project sought to contribute in a small way to the existing conversation.

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Appendix A: Survey questionnaire

Is this a worthwhile opportunity for the company to explore? Please watch the video below, and then answer the questions that follow. Ensure that your sound is on.

1. In your opinion, how enthusiastic is the presenter about this opportunity?
    - Extremely enthusiastic
    - Somewhat enthusiastic
    - Neither enthusiastic nor unenthusiastic
    - Somewhat unenthusiastic
    - Extremely unenthusiastic
2. The presenter offered to provide more information. Would you want to be sent more information?
    - Yes
    - No [skip logic applied if no is selected]
3. In what format would you like to receive more information?
    - A 2 page executive summary of key elements
    - A 30 page report with detailed calculations
4. Based on what you have heard so far, should this corporate entrepreneur be shortlisted for Round 2 of the corporate entrepreneurship drive?
    - No
    - Yes, with some mentorship to further flesh out the idea
    - Yes, the corporate entrepreneur can work independently on developing the proposal further

Consider the presentation you watched.

5. What is your opinion of the quality of the presentation produced by the presenter?
    - Excellent
    - Good
    - Average
    - Poor
    - Terrible

6. In your opinion, is the presenter well prepared for the presentation?
    - Extremely well prepared
    - Well prepared
    - Not well prepared

We want to know your sense ("gut feel") about this opportunity, knowing that you may modify your response with more information.

Please provide a score to the opportunity on the each of the following dimensions:

7. I see large potential gains for the organisation in pursuing this opportunity
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
8. The potential upside in pursuing the opportunity is large for the organisation
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
9. Pursuing the opportunity would result in big profits
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
10. I want to learn more about pursuing the opportunity
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
11. I think the corporate entrepreneur presenting the idea would make the opportunity a reality
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
12. Pursuing the opportunity would be satisfying for the corporate entrepreneur
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree

- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. The potential for loss in pursuing the opportunity is high

    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

14. The overall riskiness of pursuing the opportunity is high

    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

15. The size of the potential loss in pursuing the opportunity is large

    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

16. The exposure to loss in pursuing the opportunity is sizeable

    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

17. Please rate your sense of the corporate entrepreneur's expertise on the opportunity being presented.

    The corporate entrepreneur is an expert on this opportunity

    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

18. The corporate entrepreneur is experienced

    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree

- Strongly disagree

19. The corporate entrepreneur is knowledgeable on this opportunity
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
20. The corporate entrepreneur is well qualified
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
21. The corporate entrepreneur is highly skilled
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

Please rate your sense of the corporate entrepreneur on each of the dimensions below.

22. The corporate entrepreneur is dependable
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
23. The corporate entrepreneur is honest
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
24. The corporate entrepreneur is reliable
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
25. The corporate entrepreneur is sincere
    - Strongly agree

- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

26. The corporate entrepreneur is trustworthy

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

In this section, provide your estimate of the following:

27. The corporate entrepreneur’s gender

- Female
- Male
- Other
- I don't know

28. The corporate entrepreneur’s race or ethnicity

- Black African
- White
- Coloured
- Indian
- Other, please specify
- I don't know

29. The corporate entrepreneur’s age

- Under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65+
- I don't know

In this final section, please provide some information about yourself.

30. Have you played an entrepreneurial role in your career?

- Yes
- No [Skip logic applied if no is selected]

31. Was the entrepreneurial venture your own or within an organisation?

- Own entrepreneurial venture
- Within an organisation

32. How successful was the enterprise?

- It lost some money
- It broke even
- It made a fair amount of money
- It did very well

33. How do you currently describe your gender identity?
    - Male
    - Female
    - Other
    - I prefer not to answer
34. Indicate your age (in years)
35. What is your nationality?
    - South African
    - Other, please specify
36. Which category best describes you?
    - Black African
    - Coloured
    - Indian
    - White
    - Other, please specify
    - I prefer not to answer
37. Which category best describes your level of education?
    - Some high school
    - High school
    - Vocational training
    - Bachelor's degree
    - Postgraduate or Honours degree
    - Master's degree
    - Doctorate
    - Other, please specify
38. What is your employment status?
    - Employed full time
    - Employed part time
    - Self employed
    - Unemployed
    - Retired
    - Student (full-time)
    - Other, please specify
39. Which industry do you work in?
40. What level of management are you in?
    - Junior Management
    - Middle Management
    - Senior Management
    - Executive Management
    - Other, please specify
41. How would you describe the size of your organisation?
    - Startup or new initiative: 1-9 employees
    - Small and micro enterprise (SME): 10-49 employees
    - Medium sized enterprise: 50-249 employees
    - Large enterprise: 250+ employees

Appendix B: Links to YouTube videos

BSAE speaker: https://youtu.be/8hEJQKTw-Bo

WSAE speaker: https://youtu.be/IMOglkmG7mo

Crossover speaker: https://youtu.be/Ms5PDayA-mI