



DO SMALL ISLANDS COUNT? A COMMENTARY ABOUT COMBATING POPULATION BIAS IN CSD RESEARCH

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Author Note

The colliding events of 2020 thus far, including coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) and the public outcry surrounding the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many other Black men and women across the country, have forced the United States and other nations to reflect upon the impact of racism in our daily lives. The field of Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) has not been spared from this reflection. The present national response is not unlike the enduring protests of the 1950s and 1960s, events that fueled a call for change at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) convention in 1968. At that convention, five Black men, criticized for inciting trouble, publicly echoed the concerns of many when they spoke up against the presence of institutional racism in ASHA, and the organization's "indifference to the social protests and constitutional changes that were sweeping the American scene" (Wiggins, 2014, p. 10). Both in 1968 and now in 2020, CSD is grappling with the stranglehold of racism.

As in 1968, the events of 2020 have spurred necessary conversations within training programs, clinical facilities, as well as local, state and national professional organizations about the impact that well-accepted practices and beliefs in our professions have on students and colleagues who identify as Black, Indigenous and/or People of Color (BIPOC). While these discussions have mainly focused on the clinical components of our field, we join colleagues in this special issue to discuss how racism in CSD also innervates the scholarship of our field. In this commentary, we question the notions within the national and international CSD research communities that dictate which languages are worthy to document. Using the languages spoken in the less populous islands of the English-speaking Caribbean region as our focus, we

will briefly discuss the need for research that focus on languages spoken in these countries and recent feedback from a journal submission that exemplifies the current barriers that researchers who study these languages face when trying to disseminate our work. We will then conclude by offering solutions and recommendations that aim to remove these barriers so that clinicians, whether in the U.S. or in the Caribbean region, are able to access the knowledge they need to provide culturally and linguistically responsive clinical services to clients who speak these languages.

Race, Topics and Research

In a 2019 paper, Hoppe et al. investigated the National Institutes of Health (NIH) R01 funding gap between Black scientists and white scientists. Noting that white scientists are roughly 1.7 times more likely to be funded than Black scientists, Hoppe and colleagues examined six variables that may contribute to this gap: the applicant's frequency of grant submission, a study section's decision to discuss a grant, reviewers' impact scores, final funding decisions, applicant resubmission, and applicant topic choice. Through a multivariate analysis, the authors determined that applicant topic choice accounted for 20% of the funding gap. More specifically, Hoppe and colleagues noted that Black scientists tended to submit grants that focused on "research at the community and population level, as opposed to more fundamental and mechanistic investigations" (p. 1) and that community/population based research had lower award rates (Hoppe et al., 2019). We ask – if the topics and populations investigated by Black researchers are undervalued in grant reviews, might such topics be undervalued in peer reviewed journals, as well?

Knowledge about Languages in the English-speaking Caribbean in CSD

Current research in CSD that describe the languages spoken in the English-speaking Caribbean region mainly focus on Jamaica (e.g., Washington, Fritz, Crowe, Kelly & Kareem, 2019) and Trinidad (e.g., Youssef, 2005), the two most populous English-speaking Caribbean nations. While there remains a general paucity of knowledge about the languages spoken in the region, there is an acute need for research that a) describe the languages spoken in smaller English-speaking Caribbean countries, including information on speech and language development in these contexts, and b) discuss the clinical impact of working with speakers of these languages. Such knowledge assists practitioners in the region to accurately identify language differences and disorders in both children and adults who live on these islands. This knowledge is also necessary for clinicians who live outside the region, such as clinicians who live in the U.S. who work with those who emigrate from these islands for various reasons (e.g., displacement due to hurricanes).

A small and growing group of researchers, many of whom can trace their lineages to these small island states, have started to create knowledge about the languages spoken in smaller English-speaking Caribbean islands. However, feedback from a recent submission sharing knowledge about Anguillian English, the variety of English spoken in Anguilla, led us to question whether studies about smaller English-speaking Caribbean islands have a place within the CSD scholarly community. Anguilla has a population of roughly 17, 422 people (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Using a sample of 20 teenage speakers of Anguillian English, the study demonstrated Anguillian-English speech variation through the administration of the Goldman Fristoe Test of Articulation, 3rd Edition (Goldman & Fristoe, 2015). This initial study is the precursor investigation to the establishment of benchmarks for adjusted scoring involving under-researched Caribbean languages, such as Anguillian English.

The sole reviewer's feedback included the following statements:

“A further point is that Anguilla has a population equal to the amount of people that live in a given square mile of some US cities. For example, the 20 speakers represent approximately 0.1% of the population of Anguilla. An equivalent sample of US speakers would have 320,000 speakers. As a result, the practical use of this specific data is somewhat

limited, other than to make the general point about dialect-specific testing, which as I mentioned previously, seems like it should be accepted by most people....I don't want to give the impression that understanding a dialect is only valuable when it has many speakers. Above, I was only referring to the probability that it would affect a substantial group of people in practice.”

As researchers, we know that revision and rejection are part of the peer-review process. However, we believe that the reviewer's focus on Anguilla's population reveals a bias that may be shared by other members of the CSD research community. Overall, the Caribbean comprises 0.56% of the total world population (Worldometer, 2020). Therefore, a bias against smaller populations could marginalize the knowledge created about the Caribbean in general, and smaller English-speaking Caribbean islands, in particular. In turn, scholars may avoid researching such communities because they are undervalued in both funding decisions (Hoppe et al., 2019) and the peer-reviewed process.

Solutions and Recommendations

To mitigate against bias that marginalizes research from countries around the world that have small populations, we propose the following three recommendations. First, manuscript reviews should involve more than one reviewer and, to the greatest extent possible, at least one reviewer should have some expertise in the language of the region in focus. Second, journals should live up to the spirit of their rubric. Journal rubrics often allude to variations in manuscript acceptance thresholds based on subject area and recent topic coverage in the journal. In relation to the English-speaking Caribbean region, we propose that CSD journals publish well-conceived studies on Caribbean populations, even when the participant pool or the island's population is relatively small. Finally, we propose that CSD journals publish special-topics issues related to understudied languages, dialect groups and populations. However, we caution that special-topics issues not be viewed as “one-and-done” repositories for research involving minority populations. Instead, special issues should be viewed as catalysts for future high-quality research that will continue to have scholarly homes within CSD journals. These proposed solutions are fundamental to meaningful change that will amplify research involving under-studied and small populations in the English-speaking Caribbean region and beyond.

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