

Guest editorial: Linguistic profiling and implications for career development

Introduction

Current career literature examines systemic barriers that diverse individuals encounter and some of the contextual factors that enable or hinder their career progression. However, there is limited research on how the systemic barrier of linguistic profiling enables or hinders the role of the organization or individual career development (Hughes and Mamiseishvili, 2018). Linguistics is the scientific study of language and its structure. Several branches of linguistics, including sociolinguistics, dialectology and applied linguistics, among others, have been used to discriminate and profile individuals in the workplace (Anderson, 2007; Barrett *et al.*, 2022; Craft *et al.*, 2020; Hughes and Mamiseishvili, 2018), thus stymieing their careers. Baugh (2000, p. 363) defines linguistic profiling as “identify[ing] an individual . . . as belonging to a linguistic subgroup within a given speech community, including a racial subgroup.” and noted that one of the most famous occasions in which linguistic profiling took center stage was during the 1995 O. J. Simpson trial. Simpson’s attorney objected that race could be identified solely based on speech queues. Linguistic profiling is a term used to describe inferences derived from a person’s speech (Smalls, 2004) and has been shown to influence individuals’ development in many ways. When linguistic profiling describes discriminatory practices, it can be considered the auditory equivalent of racial profiling (Smalls, 2004).

Career development theory (Super and Jordaan, 1973) examines how individuals grow and develop in their careers. We are still learning ways to enhance the career progression of individuals (Hughes and Niu, 2021; Hughes *et al.*, 2019; Varma *et al.*, 2021). The influences of linguistic profiling on individuals’ lives have been both positive and negative. One aspect of linguistic profiling that has not been examined closely is individuals’ career experiences. Examples of linguistic profiling exist at all levels, including the President of the United States of America Joe Biden, whose political speeches and career capability have been scrutinized because of his stutter.

While stuttering is one example of how linguistic profiling occurs in the workplace, other examples are nowhere near as highly profiled and do not have such a positive outcome. Despite the inspiration that may be felt by some communication disabled individuals from the high achievement of overcoming linguistic profiling by the Honorable President Bide, there are cases where individuals are routinely screened out of jobs within 3–5 s due to linguistic profiling during telephone interviews (Purnell *et al.*, 1999). Rahman (2008) found that racial identity was identified by listeners in 28 s and Anderson (2007) showed racial identity was determined in only 16 s. The effects of linguistic profiling may limit exposure to diverse cultures within groups at work and create homogeneous environments that lead to groupthink and a lack of innovation (Wanous and Youtz, 1986). Linguistic profiling, when used inappropriately, prohibits the influences of diverse practices and decreases the collaborative effectiveness of individuals within an organization. Individuals may be forced



to alter their self-presentation at work (Dolezal, 2017; Goffman, 1949). There are cases where linguistic profiling can be appropriately used to find language speakers to communicate and facilitate understanding when no one is available who understands a language or accent. When linguistic profiling is used to harm individuals, it is deemed inappropriately used.

Baruch and Sullivan (2022, p. 146) suggested that scholars needed to “investigate the dark side of contemporary careers.” In response, the purpose of this special issue is premised on the notion that some diversity is already in the workplace (Hughes, 2018). Understanding the cultural, global economic and technological innovation effects on linguistic profiling as they relate to the career development of employees is limited, and there has always been a dark side to contemporary careers. This special issue adds a linguistic perspective to enrich career theory and practice. In doing so, it includes research that delved into the dark side of careers and sought to shed light on the harmful effects of linguistic profiling on career development processes and outcomes. Articles in this special issue bring forth several common themes that examine linguistic profiling’s negative impact on career development and possible solutions to alleviate the concerns.

Common themes in linguistic profiling and career development

There were several common themes including influences of linguistic profiling on facets of career development, intersectionality of linguistic profiling for marginalized groups, forced adaptive strategies by victims of linguistic profiling, institutionalized linguistic profiling and integration of linguistic profiling with career theories generated from the included articles.

Influences of linguistic profiling on facets of career development

Linguistic profiling profoundly influences various facets of career development, such as workplace inclusivity (Caldwell *et al.*; Carter and Sisco; Greer *et al.*; Park and Jeong; Ramjattan; Soomro; Stojanović and Robinson), employability (Caldwell *et al.*; Carter and Sisco; Greer *et al.*; Park and Jeong; Soomro; Stojanović and Robinson; and Ramjattan) and career progression (Carter and Sisco; Greer *et al.*; Soomro; Stojanović and Robinson; Park and Jeong; and Ramjattan). It leads to discriminatory practices and biases against individuals that can negatively impact perceptions of their professionalism, intelligence and other qualities crucial for career growth (Caldwell *et al.*; Ironsi and Chen; Carter and Sisco; Greer *et al.*; Stojanović and Robinson; Park and Jeong; and Ramjattan). Non-standard accents or dialects often result in diminished hiring and promotional prospects and lead to career stagnation and a lack of diversity within organizations (Carter and Sisco; Greer *et al.*; Ironsi and Chen; Soomro; Stojanović and Robinson; Park and Jeong; and Ramjattan). Therefore, the effect of linguistic profiling’s systematic bias influences initial employment opportunities and affects ongoing career progression and development.

Intersectionality of linguistic profiling for marginalized groups

Linguistic profiling intersects with racial, gender and national identities, which exacerbates challenges for marginalized groups (Caldwell *et al.*; Carter and Sisco; Greer *et al.*; Ironsi and Chen; Soomro; Stojanović and Robinson; Park and Jeong; and Ramjattan). Individuals from minority racial or ethnic backgrounds, or nonnative speakers, often face compounded discrimination due to the convergence of linguistic profiling with intersectionality biases. The perception of nonstandard accents and dialects is not just a linguistic issue but is deeply intertwined with racial and national stereotypes. It leads to systemic discrimination in career opportunities. Language becomes a proxy for racial or ethnic identity, which further marginalizes individuals and reinforces societal inequalities.

Forced adaptive strategies by victims of linguistic profiling

In response to linguistic profiling, individuals often adopt adaptive strategies such as code switching (Carter and Sisco) and accent modification (Ironsi and Chen; Soomro; and Ramjattan) to navigate workplace dynamics and enhance their perceived employability (Greer *et al.*). They may also rely upon technology to communicate, or in some instances, technology is being used in place of workers' natural voices (Caldwell *et al.*; Soomro; Stojanović and Robinson; and Ramjattan). These strategies involve altering speech patterns or language use based on the social context, aiming to align more closely with the standard or preferred linguistic norms in a professional setting. While these mechanisms can improve immediate employability or social acceptance, they can also perpetuate and even reinforce discrimination. When individuals feel pressured to conform to dominant linguistic norms, it not only affects their sense of authenticity but can also sustain the discriminatory status quo by implicitly endorsing the idea that certain accents or dialects are less acceptable or professional. Alternatively, discrimination can occur when individuals who have a communication disorder use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) as a primary mode of communication (Caldwell *et al.*). Those with communication disabilities who utilize required accommodations (e.g. AAC) and those who choose to retain their natural speech patterns (Ironsi and Chen; Ramjattan) should not face linguistic prejudice that can lead to further discrimination.

Institutionalized linguistic profiling

Linguistic profiling is deeply institutionalized within workplace practices and organizational dynamics (Caldwell *et al.*; Carter and Sisco; Greer *et al.*; Ironsi and Chen; Park and Jeong; Soomro; Stojanović and Robinson; Ramjattan). It manifests in recruitment, hiring and promotion processes, where standardized language varieties are often privileged and nonstandard accents or dialects are marginalized. This institutionalization of linguistic profiling perpetuates systemic discrimination, hinders diversity and inclusion efforts and creates a homogenized workforce. It reinforces the ideology of monolingualism, that certain linguistic characteristics are inherently superior or more professional than others.

Integrating linguistic profiling with career theories

The integration of career theories in addressing linguistic profiling issues, as highlighted in [Table 1](#), provides an insightful approach to career development. The theories provide a framework for understanding the complexities of language as a component of identity and influencing career paths and opportunities. By applying these theories, potential solutions are proposed that focus on inclusivity, recognition of diverse communication styles and tailored coaching strategies. While integrating linguistic profiling with career theories addresses the immediate challenges of linguistic profiling, it also provides ways for a more equitable professional environment, where linguistic diversity is understood, respected and integrated into career development practices.

Divergences and unique perspectives

While the shared theme of linguistic profiling and career development unites the articles in this special issue, each piece also brings its own unique perspective and divergent insights. These individual narratives and analyses enrich our collective understanding and offer a multifaceted view of the subject. This section discusses these distinct viewpoints by exploring the diverse ways in which linguistic profiling manifests across different contexts and how these unique experiences contribute to our broader comprehension of the topic.

Table 1.
Using career theories in
addressing linguistic
profiling issues

Linguistic profiling issues	Applied career theories and implications	Potential solutions	Implications for career development
Issues of linguistic hierarchies and discrimination through accent modification (Ramjattan) Linguistic profiling influences on career opportunities and growth in multilingual contexts (Soomro)	Social cognitive career theory (Lent <i>et al.</i> , 1994, 2002) Levinson's eras (1986 a, b) and career development theories (Baruch and Sullivan, 2022; Schmitt-Rodermund and Silbereisen, 1998; Super and Jordaan, 1973)	Rethinking intelligibility and the role of accents in professional settings Providing training programs for employees and management, changing policy to discourage linguistic discrimination and initiating to promote equal opportunities for career growth regardless of language background Tailored leadership coaching	Promoting inclusivity and re-evaluating communication and hiring practices and processes Understanding the impact of language discrimination on career progression
Use of code-switching by Black women as a response to linguistic profiling (Carter and Sisco)	Boundaryless career theory (Arthur, 1994; Arthur and Rousseau, 2001)	Tailored leadership coaching	Promoting career advancement and authenticity among Black women
Negative effects of linguistic profiling on perceived employability (Greer <i>et al.</i>)	Systems theory framework of career development (Patton and McMahon, 2006)	Organizational and employment process changes to mitigate linguistic profiling	Improving career development outcomes by addressing linguistic profiling
Impact of linguistic profiling on nonnative English-speaking teachers' career development, self-esteem and motivation. (Ironst and Chen)	Career development theory (Super and Jordaan, 1973) career growth (Breevaart <i>et al.</i> (2018, 2021)	Actively combat linguistic profiling by challenging stereotypes and advocating for themselves and their colleagues	Creating systemic changes and fostering an inclusive environment that respects and values linguistic diversity
Impact of monolingual ideology on linguistic profiling (Stojanović and Robinson)	Boundaryless Career (Arthur, 1994), Protean Career (Hall, 1976, 2004). Organizational career (Clarke, 2013) and the Kaleidoscope career (Mannero and Sullivan, 2005)	Suggests a critical conceptual framework using critical theory (Tollefson, 2006) to combat linguistic profiling issues	Addresses the gap in career development literature by proposing a critical conceptual framework that integrates language as an important element of one's career identity
Linguistic profiling challenges and biases experienced by international female faculty (Park and Jeong)	Academic career (Baruch and Hall, 2004)	Expands the perspectives and practices related to the career challenges of international female faculty due to linguistic profiling Education, training and the use of inclusive practices can reduce linguistic profiling of individuals with communication disabilities in the workplace	Helps researchers and career development practitioners by adding linguistic profiling specific diversity and inclusion perspectives to existing literature Highlights communication disability in the linguistic profiling discussion so that organizations can be more aware of the impact and the need to create supportive and inclusive workplace environments and in turn reduce discrimination and increase diversity
Support employers in avoiding linguistic profiling of individuals with communication disabilities (Caldwell <i>et al.</i>)	Implications for career counseling professionals and organizational career development practitioners and professionals	Expands the perspectives and practices related to the career challenges of international female faculty due to linguistic profiling Education, training and the use of inclusive practices can reduce linguistic profiling of individuals with communication disabilities in the workplace	Helps researchers and career development practitioners by adding linguistic profiling specific diversity and inclusion perspectives to existing literature Highlights communication disability in the linguistic profiling discussion so that organizations can be more aware of the impact and the need to create supportive and inclusive workplace environments and in turn reduce discrimination and increase diversity

Firstly, challenges faced by specific groups, such as nonnative English-speaking teachers (Ironsi and Chen), international female faculty (Park and Jeong) and individuals with communication disabilities (Caldwell *et al.*), are discussed. For instance, the detrimental impact of categorizing teachers as “native” or “non-native” propagates false hierarchies and undermines professional competence based on linguistic identity. Moreover, the exploration of monolingual ideologies in the United States of America reveals the intricate layers of discrimination faced by multilingual individuals. This is even more complicated when considering factors such as ethnicity, race and social and economic background. In addition, societal perceptions and linguistic norms can marginalize individuals whose speech patterns deviate from the so-called standard and impact their social and professional interactions. These targeted insights emphasize the need for a deeper understanding and strategic interventions to support these specific groups in their career development.

Secondly, the transformative potential of personal growth and leadership coaching, especially for marginalized groups grappling with linguistic profiling (Carter and Sisco), is examined. By integrating a critical career development framework that accounts for linguistic diversity and multilingual identity, individuals are empowered to navigate and challenge the monolingual ideologies prevalent in their professional environments. This fosters personal growth and cultivates a more inclusive leadership style that values diversity and promotes equity.

Implications for career development and linguistic profiling

To address the implications, organizations must critically examine their policies and practices, raise awareness about linguistic diversity and implement inclusive strategies to ensure linguistic profiling does not hinder the career development of talented individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In addition, career development professionals play an important role in facilitating the process and assisting individuals. Inclusive policies are essential to mitigate linguistic profiling in organizations. By implementing strategies that promote diversity and inclusivity, organizations can create environments where every individual’s linguistic background is respected and valued. Also, the organizations should foster a culture of acceptance and collaboration that enhances overall productivity and morale.

Education, training and awareness are key ways to address linguistic profiling. Informative programs and sensitivity training can enlighten individuals and management and lead to a more empathetic and inclusive workplace. Understanding the impact of language biases is the first step toward creating a supportive environment where every voice is valued. Support structures like mentorship programs and leadership coaching are vital in empowering individuals facing linguistic profiling. These resources provide guidance, build confidence and offer strategies to navigate and overcome workplace challenges by ensuring that linguistic diversity is not a barrier to professional growth.

Conclusion

This special issue invited authors to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to the topic of linguistic profiling’s influence on career development. We expected manuscripts to bring strong empirical contributions that develop and extend career theory as well as more conceptual papers that integrate, critique and expand existing career theories. We encouraged the use of appropriate methods for both the research context and related research questions. We welcomed both qualitative (Richardson *et al.*, 2022) and quantitative designs (Schreurs *et al.*, 2021). However, the state of research in this area is in its infancy; therefore, there were few quantitative studies on the topic. The richness of this issue is seen in

the foundational theoretical and conceptual ideas brought forth within the eight articles included.

This special issue will serve as a foundational work to stimulate further research. It is a transdisciplinary approach that brings together articles written by experts from the fields of career development, human resource development, workforce development and communication sciences and disorders. Continued research is crucial to deepen our understanding of linguistic profiling and its impact on career development, especially quantitative inquiry. By exploring this phenomenon from various perspectives and contexts, researchers can uncover insights that lead to more effective strategies for fostering inclusivity and respect for linguistic diversity in the professional environment. The call for future research extends to empirical researchers, especially those utilizing quantitative methods.

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