

Theoretical models of tag-based cooperation in humans have frequently proposed accent as a viable tag that could guide the assortment of cooperators within a population (Cohen, 2012). This is because accent represents a discriminable hard-to-fake / hard-to-hide trait which honestly signals an individual's social identity. Despite numerous theoretical models supporting this proposal, empirical studies on the underlying psychological mechanisms remain absent. This is extremely important given that it is mechanisms not behaviours that are selected for. My research aims to redress this by investigating whether accent modulates empathy – a well-known motivator of prosocial behaviour in humans. More specifically, I plan to investigate whether empathy for pain will be enhanced when observing the suffering of native-accent speakers compared to foreign-accent speakers. To test this, I will combine the empathy for pain paradigm from social neuroscience and the matched-guise technique from sociolinguistics. This will involve showing participants footage of different accent speakers (between-subjects IV) experiencing painful and neutral stimulation (within-subjects IV) while measuring electrodermal activity to gauge their empathic reactivity (DV). This is important as enhanced empathic responding frequently motivates targeted helping behaviour (Hein, Silani, Preuschoff, Batson & Singer, 2010). Investigating whether native-accent speakers evoke greater empathy would therefore provide a strong mechanistic test of the theoretical accounts outlined above. In accordance with an Open Science framework, I will also pre-register all hypotheses/analyses, and all data, code and materials will be deposited in open science repositories.