

SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF SPEECH: A STUDY OF STUDENT AWARENESS OF
STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH AND ONE RURAL MISSOURI VARIANT

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ABSTRACT

The following research examines how college students perceive a non-SAE dialect. Participants (n=188) responded to eight audio-recorded SAE and non-SAE statements featuring two male native non-SAE speakers as well as eight typed SAE and non-SAE statements. Questionnaires administered to participants in introductory-level anthropology classes at three Missouri universities tested for perception of speakers' and authors' education, intelligence and environment, which indicates acceptance level of Missouri non-SAE speech. Participants' demographic information was also obtained.

Participants were more critical of spoken than written statements and were more affected by inter-dialectical variation than intra-dialectical variation. Participants' natal environment did not affect their perception of this dialect. Females perceived SAE speech as educated, but both sexes viewed non-SAE speech as uneducated. Together, these data indicate the focus non-SAE dialect is more readily accepted in spoken form than written by all demographic groups, but it is perceived as rural and uneducated by some demographic groups. Future studies in regions with greater dialectical divergence will further clarify the impact of the listener's environment on their perception of speech.