

The Problem With “Linguistic Racism”

A problem that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) face is linguistic racism. It is a big problem because English might not be their first language. Therefore, they would not get treated the same way as English native speakers.

English is one of the main global languages spoken in many places. The English Language is a dominant language in a lot of places such as in business, work, science, research, school, government, and politics. The language is constantly evolving and adapting to new ways of saying different words and phrases. It's transforming in different ways because there are people who speak the language that use English in diverse ways.

However, there are still people that struggle with English. AAPIs struggle with English because it may not be their first language. They are considered non-native English speakers. Non native English speakers have this mindset that English is a higher language than their mother language. Which means that those who speak English, speak differently from what is considered “the standard way of speaking.” These speakers can find themselves being judged and even penalized for the way their English sounds.

In many countries, there are forms of English that can bring fewer benefits to a person. One example is African-American English in the United States, the language is often misunderstood and discriminated against. On an international level, certain types of speakers face judgments based on any perceptions of their nationality, rather than their communication skills with people from that area. When English is spoken by Asians, Africans, or Middle Easterners, they are viewed as challenging and unpleasant to listen to as opposed to some Europeans such as French, Germans, and Italians when they speak English.

Linguistic racism can lead to the deprivation of education, employment, and health. AAPI with certain accents get openly harassed, or excluded from specific opportunities in the workforce. For example, a Puerto Rican customer service worker was told by a customer that “his stupid accent makes me sick.” An Arabic bus driver in London had a manager who kept him out of many conference calls.

Of course, not every person is intentionally a linguistic racist. People who think that they are being inclusive are not aware of their judgements because of their ingrained biases. Yet, whatever the cause of these incidents, people are still affected. With these kinds of ongoing and unrecognized situations, workers will be side-lined and excluded.

In what way can we stop linguistic racism and have a more functional way of using the language to benefit native and nonnative speakers? The best way to combat linguistic racism is to continue to stay in school, learn about different cultures, and to be a role model to others. We all speak different languages and it is important to embrace the diversity that we have in our islands. We can also be digitally responsible and respectful in speaking to others online.