



Abstract

This study explores how code-switching affects perceptions of speakers in U.S. courtrooms, focusing on the experiences of bilingual and bidialectal defendants. It examines how shifting between language varieties, such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Spanglish, or regional dialects, can influence judgments related to credibility, professionalism, and trustworthiness during legal proceedings. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research includes courtroom observations, linguistic analysis of recorded testimonies, and interviews with legal professionals and jury members. Early findings suggest that code-switching, while often unintentional, is frequently misunderstood or negatively received by those in positions of authority. These reactions may contribute to subtle but significant biases in trial outcomes. The study highlights the need for greater awareness of linguistic diversity in legal settings and calls for policies that recognize how language intersects with access to justice.