The Sound of Silencing

Identities and Ideologies in Commercial Text-To-Speech

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Whose voices are reproduced by a promptable TTS system when no demographic information is specified?

Stimuli: 30 synthesised voices generated with ElevenLabs TTS v2, a popular commercial TTS platform using natural language prompting

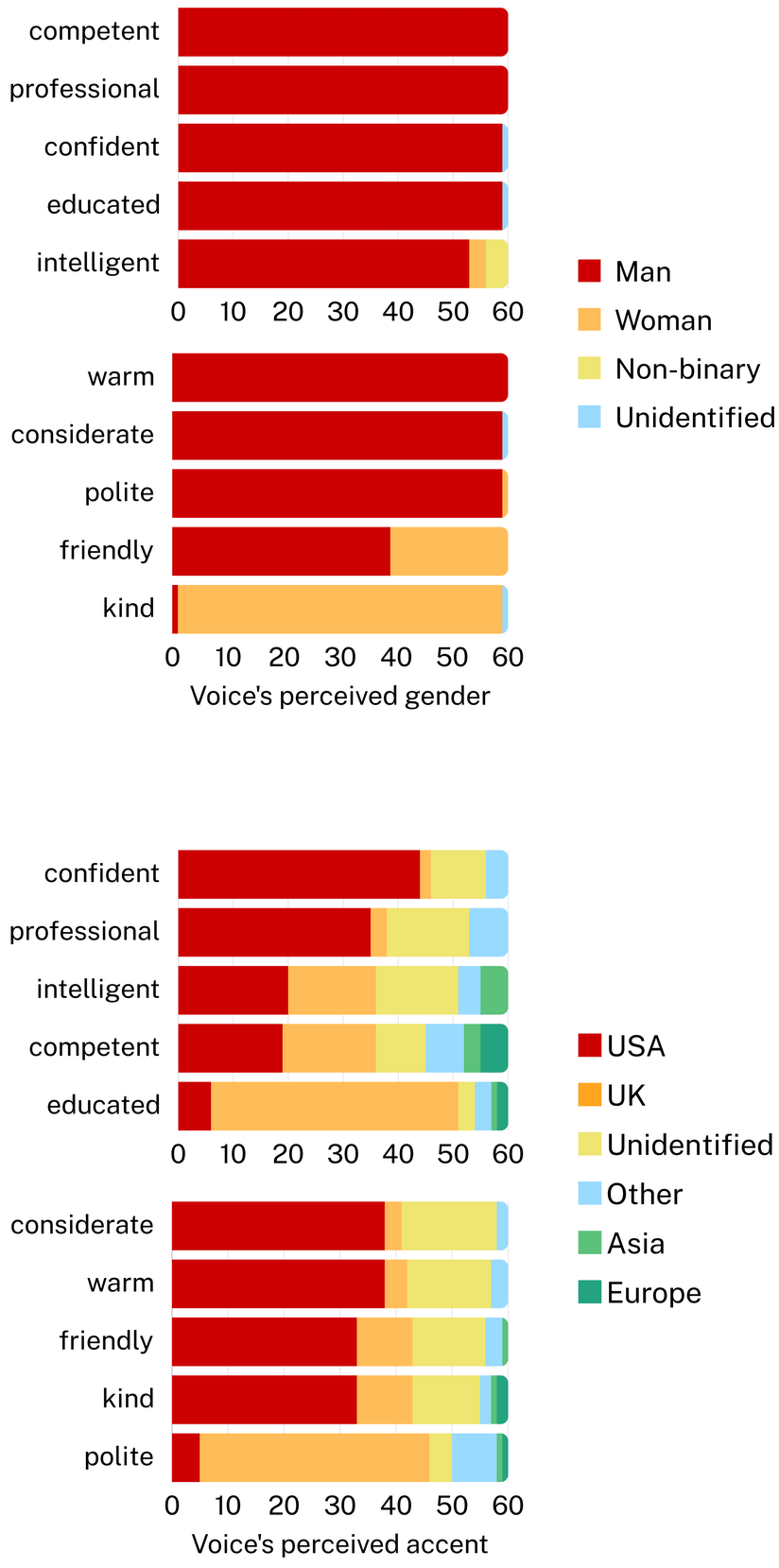
Prompt: 'a voice that sounds [adjective]' +
status: competent, confident, educated, intelligent, professional
solidarity: considerate, friendly, kind, polite, warm

Participants: 60 English-speaking Prolific users (26 men, 34 women) from US and Canada

The set of generated voices lacks diversity, regardless of the adjective used. Listeners perceived the 'speakers' as primarily:

93%	86.6%	60%
white	men	US accented

We see systematic links between some adjectives and demographic groups: *kind* is associated with (white, American and British) women; *polite* and *educated* with white British men.



overrepresentation of white, male, LI-accented speech...
or erasure of all the voices that are not reproduced?

audio samples

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