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### Sociolinguistic lab 3: Media representation

The media representation that I have chosen is a commercial for Calgon Water Softener from 1970: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djMjYgqFrrQ>. The presentation of Asian Americans in this commercial demonstrates multiple problematic stereotypes, including linguistic minstrelsy (“Mock Asian”), an assumption of financial status/employment based on race, and a portrayal of “typical” behavior or personality traits.

The linguistic minstrelsy is embodied by the man working at the laundry cleaners, as he tells the female customer that his success is due to “ancient Chinese secret”. His accent, as well as his use of a few words rather than an entire sentence in Standard American English, presents a portrayal of so-called “Mock Asian”. The linguistic minstrelsy here relates to Bucholtz and Lopez’s description of performing blackness and linguistic minstrelsy in relation to African American vernacular English. The same idea applies: members of another race are “othered” by their use of language. Additionally, his evasive answer of “ancient Chinese secret” implicates the stereotype that Asians (and/or immigrants in general) are deceptive and trick American consumers in order to make money. Particular to Asians, a few more stereotypes arise in this line. Firstly, the assumption that all Asians must be Chinese. Secondly, the idea that Asians are preoccupied with mysterious religions and/or household practices.

In striking contrast, the wife speaks Standard American English when describing the product, conveying her Americanized status by having her advertise an American product. Her seemingly flawless English contrasts the husband’s inability to do so, and further implies his use of language to deceive a White, American customer. Hiramoto and Pua, in examining the James Bond films, mark the same use of an accent among Asian characters, even when the actors themselves are able to speak without an accent. The grammar structure and pronunciation specifically calls attention to the “otherness” of the man, while his wife’s language and behavior shows her integration into American society: the “correct” way of behaving.

Additionally, the fact that an Asian couple would be running a laundry cleaners at all perpetuates a stereotype. The job is one that a White American would expect an immigrant to have. The implication here is that immigrants would be of lower social and financial status than the typical White American, leaving them to have such a job. The man’s attempt to deceive the customer again shows how an immigrant making a low income would try and trick a gullible consumer in order to make more money. These are all harmful stereotypes that add to the perception of immigrants and minorities, even 50 years later.