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Representing American Speech

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REGIONAL COMPLEXITIES

MISREPRESENTING THE AMERICAN SOUTH
CYNTHIA BERNSTEIN, University of Memphis

In the video American Tongues (1986), Molly Ivins offers a scathing critique of the portrayal in American movies of the slow-speaking, slow-witted Southerner. This stereotype is perpetuated in film, television, literature, and popular print media by inaccuracies in the representation of Southern dialect. Fictional Southern characters produce regionally marked features more often and in more varied contexts than do their real-life counterparts.

One example is the misrepresentation of *y'all* as occurring in singular contexts. Butters and Aycock (1987) quote an example from the 1934 movie Twentieth Century in which characters who portray actors rehearsing a play about the South make frequent use of *you-all* to refer to only one person. In mimicking a Southerner, one character says, “Good-by, sir; thank you-all for your hospitality, sir. Come down and have a julip [sic] with we-all sometime, sir.” Such mimicry creates an inaccurate sense of Southern dialect and reinforces the negative Southern stereotype.

Combinations of *all* have been attested to with plural pronouns *we* and *they*, in addition to *you*, and with interrogative pronouns *what*, *who*, and *why*. Extending usage to the first-person singular combines with other exaggerated dialect features to ridicule the speaker in this example quoted in Axley (1929, 348). Freckles, from the comic strip Freckles and His Friends, presents a beloved elephant to the zoo, saying, “I brought him all the way from Africa, and I want him to be treated nice.” The zookeeper responds, “Africa? Man! dat’s where I all come from too. Yassh.”
Although some inaccuracies reflect prejudice or ignorance on the part of the writer, it is fair to say that accuracy is constrained by the very nature of the creative process. A writer uses dialect to convey a message about character or setting in the very limited space of the text. As with physical descriptions, a few features necessarily represent the whole. In *The Outside Man*, for example, Richard North Patterson (1982) evokes the impression of Southern dialect by emphasizing just a few features. The title character and narrator, an outsider to Southern society, makes this observation:

1. I paused, wondering when Mooring had begun to speak so well. He had none of the southerner’s studied lapses—the “ain’ts” and “might coulds”—and his diction was clearly acquired. [107]

If the absence of these dialect features gives a character a cultured air, their presence has the opposite effect. The narrator in this example is trying to locate an address:

2. I approached one of the old men, whittling in overalls, wood shavings curled at his feet. “Help me find something?” I asked.

   He spat a brown stream of tobacco juice and looked up with a surprising smile that lacked several teeth. “Might could.” The words were guttural and half-swallowed. “What you looking for?” [144]

The *might could* in this man’s mouth is as effective as the tobacco juice in indicating his casual demeanor and working-class status.

In using the double modal to stereotype Southern speech, Patterson, himself an outsider to the South, on two occasions misrepresents the contexts in which double modals naturally occur.

3. “Might could be rape.” [detective speculating about murder case; 8]
4. Rayfield’s cadence eased. “Anniston’s not much more than an hour, Mr. Cantwell. Might could be easy for you to check into a motel, drive home, and then back again.” He paused and asked coolly, “Is that what happened?” [investigator trying to pry confession out of victim’s husband; 32]

In (2)–(4) *might could* appears without a subject in surface structure. However, unlike (2), in which *I* is the understood subject, (3) and (4) have existential *it* as the understood subject. In (2), the author rightly uses the double modal to convey a degree of uncertainty expressed by the character regarding his own intentions. In (3), the degree of uncertainty applies to the cause of the murder; in (4), it applies to the probability of the listener’s actions. The semantic and syntactic contexts of (3) and (4) are not those in which a native Southerner uses a double modal.

Linguists, too, sometimes misrepresent the contexts in which Southern features are likely to occur. Generalizations from atlas surveys conducted
decades ago may be made to appear as though they hold true for Southerners today. The notion, for example, that Southerners retain the /w//hw/ distinction in words such as wheelbarrow, whinny, and wharf is indicated by Kurath and McDavid (1961) and presupposed in more recent research, but recent surveys suggest that Southerners are now participating in the /w//hw/ merger. Similarly, atlas data summarized in some linguistic textbooks leave the impression that for the past tense of dive, dived is characteristic of Southern United States speech and dove is Northern, but young people in the South today more commonly say dove (Bernstein 1994).

One problem, then, with relying on linguistic atlas data is that features of an earlier era may be used to describe speech of present-day Southerners. Another problem is that atlas data tend to stereotype Southern speech in the way that Molly Ivins suggested. Atlas surveys of the United States did not draw random samples of people in the regions they covered; instead, field-workers were specifically instructed to prefer a sample of older, less-educated, more-rural, less-well-traveled informants. Although dialect geographers have generally differentiated among regional and social categories within the South, summaries of features from atlas samples necessarily leave the impression that “Southern dialect” is less cultured than the speech of the general population.

Fortunately, some linguists are helping to break down the negative Southern stereotype. First, they are demonstrating that there is no single “Southern dialect.” The more that is discovered about particular features used in regionally or socially isolated communities, the clearer it becomes that there is a great deal of linguistic diversity within the South. Second, they are using broad-based surveys to which linguistic atlas surveys can be compared; from these scientifically drawn samples, patterns emerge of differences among social groups within a region as well as among regional groups within the South. Finally, in drawing conclusions about dialect features, linguists are specifying more accurately the population that was sampled and the methods by which data were gathered. These strategies are especially important for research in an area where misrepresentation so often carries with it negative social causes and consequences.

NOTES

1. Although some linguists have found that yall is used occasionally by native Southern speakers to refer to one addressee (Bernstein 1929; Blaisdell 1931; Spencer 1975; Tillery and Bailey 1998), others maintain that it is not used regularly in that context (Axley 1929; Richardson 1984; Butters and Aycock 1987; Maynor 1996).
2. When a positive image is desired, the Southern dialect features may be underrepresented. Bernstein and Torrey’s (2000) study of Steel Magnolias shows that *yall* is underrepresented in that film: native Southerners would use *yall* far more often than the characters in the film do.

3. Native Alabamian students at Auburn University confirm the appropriateness of *might could* in (2) and its inappropriateness in (3) and (4) for the reasons I suggest here. See also Mishoe and Montgomery (1994).

4. The merger is one feature that can be followed using Labov (1999). See also Bernstein (1999).

5. Two major conferences have been devoted to language variety in the South, papers from which are published in Montgomery and Bailey (1986) and Bernstein, Nunnally, and Sabino (1997). Planning for a third conference is under way. Even within a single state, there is tremendous variety; see, for example, Wolfram (2000).

6. For articles comparing the results of broad-based and atlas surveys, see Bailey, Wikle, and Tillery (1997) and Bernstein and Bernstein (1998).

CYNTHIA BERNSTEIN, after ten years at Auburn University, recently joined the English Department at the University of Memphis, where she teaches in a new Ph.D. program in language study. She has published books and articles on language variation, survey methodology, and literary pragmatics. She is currently writing a book dispelling some myths about Southern United States English and arguing that an accurate picture depends upon recognizing the limits of one’s research methods.

SOUND CHANGE IN THE SOUTH

CRAWFORD FEAGIN, University of Zurich

The gradualness of sound change has been brought home to me personally in my work in phonological change in Alabama White English. In fact, because of the gradualness, it has sometimes been surprising to discover how much the speech in my own hometown of Anniston, Alabama, has changed over time. However, certain elements of stability have also stood out.

The most notable unchanging element in Southern states pronunciation concerns the “long i.” James Sledd referred to it as “the Confederate vowel” (1966, 25). On the one hand, the glided vowel in “long i,” the vowel of *nice, white, rice,* serves as a shibboleth for class status in the South. (This is in the environment before voiceless consonants, such as /p/, /t/, /k/, and /s/.) On the other hand, the monophthongal unglided vowel in *I* and *my*
symbolizes all Southerners’ identification with the South. Otherwise, this vowel has been changing over time from a gliding vowel—as in many other varieties of English—to a less and less glided one, to the point that some speakers have no glide at all in any environment. However, among younger middle- and upper-class speakers in Anniston, this change is reversing itself, heading in the direction of the glided vowel found elsewhere in the United States—with the exception of I and my.

Nonetheless, the rest of the vowels are moving—though gradually—into different positions, or from glided to unglided, or the reverse. For example, Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner (1972) first showed that in the South, among the front vowels, the long and short vowels—those found in beat versus bit and bait versus bet—are exchanging places in vowel space, the vowel triangle we learn in foreign-language classes. This is what he has labeled “the Southern Shift.” An earlier change (also first documented in Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner 1972) is the movement of the back vowels to the front, so that school and skill, coke and cake, sound very similar. These changes are certainly found in my data from Alabama (Feagin 1986). Actually, I had never noticed how fronted (and unrounded) my own pronunciation of school was until examining Anniston speech from tape-recorded natural conversations, though I was later amazed at the extreme fronting of cake by some younger relatives from Atlanta.

While the “long i” is in the process of ungliding, the short vowels in the front are breaking and frequently becoming two-syllable entities, as in man [ˈmæjɪn] or head [ˈhe jid].

Most speakers—including me—are not conscious of these changes, whether in other people’s speech or their own, much less of the new social distinctions developing in these pronunciations.

The consonants are not so unstable as the vowels, though the liquid /r/ has undergone a tremendous change over the last 100 years. Traditional Southern speech has been r-less, though speakers in the mountains and the marginal agricultural areas have always been r-ful. The r-ful variety seems to be the new majority form all over the South, with r-less speech seeming more and more old-fashioned as time goes by. As an r-less speaker, I had not realized this until I looked at it quantitatively in the speech of younger speakers from Anniston (Feagin 1990).

While these matters have been examined by a number of scholars, including myself (Feagin 1996), what is missing from this picture is any description of the phonology of African Americans (aside from consonant deletion) and the phonological change going on in that community. Most of the work on African American speech has been conducted outside the South in the big cities of the North and West—New York City, Detroit, Los Angeles. Little or none of that work has centered on pronunciation, much
less phonological change. It has been assumed that there is little variation across the country in the speech of the African American community, though that is probably not the case. Obviously, to understand fully language in the South, the African American community must be examined. Some interesting studies have been carried out in North Carolina, where it is clear that the African American community maintains its separateness, whether from European Americans or Native Americans, in rather subtle ways (e.g., Hazen 2000). This is the case, at least, so far as the grammar is concerned. I speculate that similar small-scale distinctions will be maintained in the phonology. One example is /r/-lessness, where that has been maintained in the African American community, though it is possibly beginning to change among younger speakers. Another area of difference which will probably be found is that the African American community does not participate in the vowel shifts and vowel changes which the White community is experiencing. (This is certainly the case in the African American Vernacular English of Philadelphia. See Graff, Labov, and Harris 1986.) Or if the African American community does participate in them, they are lagging a generation or so behind the Whites. However, this is only speculation, needing careful study of the African American community in some nonperipheral area of the South, preferably by someone who is a member of that community.

CRAWFORD FEAGIN is a native of Anniston, Alabama. Her work has been centered on the speech of the White community in her hometown, beginning with a study of the grammar. More recently she has been concentrating on the phonology of the same community, looking at change over time.

MAPPING THE OHIO VALLEY: SOUTH MIDLAND, LOWER NORTH, OR APPALACHIAN?

BEVERLY OLSON FLANIGAN, Ohio University

Although the Linguistic Atlas project is not quite as old as American Speech, both are landmarks in the study of variation in American English, and work continues apace in both. In recent years the traditional demarcation of the eastern United States dialect areas into North, North Midland, South Midland, and South has been the object of renewed analysis. Studies by Hartman (1966), Dakin (1971), Clark (1972), Hankey (1972), and Thomas (1996) of the upper Ohio River Valley; the papers in “Heartland” English (Frazer 1993); and a debate over boundaries conducted in American
Speech (Davis and Houck 1992, 1995; Frazer 1994; Johnson 1994) are only some examples of the renewed attention paid to the North Central, or “Midwestern,” part of the country. Most controversial, perhaps, has been Carver’s (1987) redrawing of the four basic regions into two, North and South, essentially divided by the Ohio River; the former North Midland was renamed the Lower North, and the South Midland became the Upper South. However, recent research suggests that the “Midland” is not merely a graded mix of North and South, nor is it simply a midway stage on a continuum from north to south (Davis and Houck 1992).

The South Midland, in particular, has received fresh scrutiny as distinctive from both North (including North Midland) and South, in large part because of its social and geographic distinctiveness. As Kurath and McDavid (1961, 18–19) acknowledged 40 years ago, it has no features “unique in themselves; all of them occur either in the North Midland or the South.” However, they added, “the configuration of features is peculiar to the South Midland,” blending Pennsylvanian and Southern features and graded from north to south. Moreover, it shares some of the features of the subregional variety called Appalachian English, a fact which led Dakin (1971) to speak of a “trans-Appalachian” region running diagonally down the mountain range and into the upland plateaus on both sides. Similarly, Johnson (1994) has described the South Midland as a transition zone with an Appalachian “core,” from which and into which forms are diffusing along the margins of the mountain plateau.

Most of Ohio extends too far west of the mountains to be given this label, except in the southern part of the state. This area shares many features—lexical, phonological, and grammatical—with western Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, and southern Indiana and Illinois, though in different degrees as one moves from east to west in the state. Over the past several years research has been done on selected sites in southern Ohio by Ohio University faculty and students, including (from west to east) Chillicothe, Portsmouth, Ironton, Gallipolis, Athens County, and Perry County, with additional data collected from counties extending north of Marietta up the eastern fringe of the state to Canton and Youngstown. A comparison of this curved area of study with a topographical map of Ohio shows that it follows almost exactly the Appalachian Plateau; in fact, 29 of the 88 counties of Ohio, all in this southern and eastern region, have been officially designated part of the Appalachian Regional Commission for purposes of social and economic assistance, and our findings on the homogeneity of the region in terms of dialect features do not seem unrelated to this geographic and sociopolitical designation.

An exhaustive list of features cannot be given here, but a few representative samples may suffice. Vocabulary terms common throughout the
upper Ohio Valley include *Beggars’ Night* ‘Trick-or-Treat’, *blinds* (on rollers), *bucket*, *crawdad*, *eaves spouts* (or *gutters*), *lightning bug*, *mango* ‘green pepper’, *sack*, *skillet*, *spigot*, and *toboggan* ‘winter cap’. The use of *mamaw* and *papaw* for grandparents (or *mawmaw* and *pawpaw*, often reserved for great-grandparents) is still common, even in young people’s speech. Using *a quarter till* for telling time and *wait on* for ‘wait for (someone)’ is standard practice.

Grammatical forms include the plural *you all* (not *y’all*) and *you’ns* and the possessive *you all’s*. Reduced phrases are common, including *want off*, *want out*, *over top of*, and *upside*, as well as *needs washed/corrected/done*, and so on. Vernacular past-tense forms are common, including *he come*, *I done it*, and *I knowed it*, as is the perfective past *I done seen him* and the regularized past be verb: *I/she was, you was, we/they was*. The subject relative pronoun is occasionally absent, as in *He’s the man stole my car*, and a personal dative pronoun may be added, as in *I’m gonna get me a new car soon*. Singular nouns of measurement may be used with plural meaning: *ten mile, five bushel, two pound*; and an *a*-prefix before a progressive verb is still used by older and rural people: *He was a-dancin’, they come a-runnin’.*

Pronunciation features include the variable merging of */æ/ and /ɔ/ commonly throughout the Midland region, though with a rounding of the merged vowel to [ə] (as in British English *pot*). This results in the rhyming of *cot* with *caught*, *Don* with *dawn*, and *collar* with *caller* (and sometimes *color*, though this last word may be pronounced with the unrounded low back vowel [a]; see Flanigan and Norris forthcoming). Three other mergers advancing throughout Appalachia and now present to some degree in southern Ohio are those of */i/ and /I/ before /l/, with the result that *steel* now sounds like *still*; of */u/ and /o/ before /l/, so that *pool* sounds like *pull*; and of */e/ and /ɛ/ before /l/, with *sale* sounding like *self*; the merger of */ʃ/ and /s/ (pen = *pin*) is less common. Vowels are fronted in *coat* and *go* and (somewhat less) in *boot* and *due*. Tensing of lax (or short) vowels is common in words like *fish*, *push*, and *special*, as is the pronouncing of *greasy* with /z/ and the use of an intrusive /r/ in *wa(r)sh*, /l/ in *draw(l)ing*, and /t/ in *across(t)*. The reduction of diphthongs in *I, fire*, and *tired* (to rhyme with *ah, far, tarred*) and the gliding of monophthongs in *dog* and *saw* (daug, saow) are heard in areas close to the Ohio River but less so farther north. Finally, stress on the first syllable in words like *insurance* and *umbrella* is common.

It appears, then, that the upper Ohio Valley, at least, is neither North nor South but is both transitional between them and distinctive from them. This suggests that there may be, as Carver (1987, 197) admits, a “unique transitional region” in the Ohio Valley, akin to Dakin’s (1971) “Ohio Valley Midland.” It is hoped that future studies of the long-neglected southern third of Ohio will contribute to a better understanding of the speech of this region.
The Midland dialects of the middle western United States originate in Pennsylvania. Features of both grammar and pronunciation set the Midland dialects apart from Northern and Southern. Midland speakers pronounce a stronger \( r \) in words like \textit{far} or \textit{thirty} than do Northerners or Southerners and may pronounce word pairs like \textit{Don} and \textit{Dawn} exactly the same. Midland speakers are also more likely to say \textit{the cat wants in} or \textit{the grass needs mowed}.

Although it may be hard to prove conclusively, the Midland distinctions which arose in Pennsylvania seem most likely due to settlement there by many Ulster Scots in the eighteenth century. In any case, some of the Midland speakers moved south into Appalachia, where their Midland dialect acquired some Southern features as well, so that words like \textit{town} sound like “TAY-oon” to a Northerner, and \textit{due} and \textit{road} sound like “DEE-oo” and “RAY-ood” (technically, we would say that certain vowels are fronted). To Northern ears, \textit{I} might sound like “ah,” which I call flattening below. Thus, because some Midland speakers entered the Midwest by way of Kentucky and Tennessee, while others simply pushed west from Pennsylvania, linguists sometimes talk about distinct North Midland (or West Midland) and South Midland dialects, as opposed to a single Midland variety.

In Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and points west, the Midland (especially South Midland) dialects have acquired a mostly rural identity (Frazer 1983). And since rural life is threatened, I wonder if the Midland dialects are equally threatened. Dialect death is being documented on the islands of the East Coast, and in the coming century I hope that linguists will watch to see whether the Midland dialects, more widespread with more speakers than the island dialects but threatened nevertheless, will survive.

Recently, Schilling-Ellis and Wolfram (1999) extended the concept of endangered languages to dialects. In examining Ocracoke, North Caro-
lina, and Smith Island, Virginia, these scholars find both dialects endangered, but under different circumstances. Ocracoke residents are losing their isolation and hence their dialect is threatened by dissipation as it acquires some of the features of mainland dialects. Smith Island, on the other hand, is sinking into Chesapeake Bay and will have to be abandoned, ending, presumably, the existence of both the Smith Island community and its dialect, which undergoes concentration as “linguistic distinctiveness is heightened or intensified among fewer speakers” (486).

My own experience of three decades’ study of rural dialects in the Midwestern United States has always included a supposition that these dialects—in particular, the Midland dialects which coexist with Inland Northern in the lower Midwest—are threatened. Rural life based on an agricultural economy has been threatened in this area for almost a century as farm populations have declined and urban populations have grown. The Inland Northern dialect, meanwhile, has become established since early settlement not only in Midwestern cities but in broadcast media and in dictionaries as well (Frazer 1983b, 1993). Are the Midland dialects approaching what Nancy Dorian (1986, 72) calls the “‘tip’” to the “dominant language”? The data for Midland dialects are confusing, especially for features traditionally called South Midland. Among residents of McDonough County, Illinois, born before and after 1890, for example, a sample of linguistic atlas surveys suggested that South Midland vocabulary was used much more frequently by residents with earlier birthdates than by those born later (Frazer 1983a). Among speakers currently living, vocabulary differences are hard to find, especially if we look for South Midland words like light bread ‘white bread’ or sookie! ‘a call to cows’, which are now kept in feedlots and therefore rarely called.

Among a sample of western Illinois residents tape-recorded during the late 1970s, however, the results were less straightforward. Phonologically, raised and fronted /au/ (as in town)—a South Midland pronunciation feature—was actually more frequent among residents born after 1930 than among those born before 1910 and was more frequently used by women, a sign of an advancing sound change. Similarly, /ow/ and /uw/ fronting (road, due) appear to have advanced as well during the twentieth century. Is the dialect advancing, or does this represent something like the concentration of dialect features in the threatened Smith Island community?

On the other hand, I have seen declines in the frequency of /ay/ flattening (usually stereotyped as a Southern feature) and especially in the raising of lax vowels before /f/ (fish becomes “feesh,” mash becomes “maysh”). I rarely hear these features anymore, suggesting something more like the dissipation process at work on Ocracoke.
Grammatical data are just as contradictory. *A*-prefixing (*I’m a-comin’!*) has gone from unmarked usage among those born before 1910 to restricted use among those born after 1930 (Frazer 1990), and I rarely hear it used today by anyone under 50. On the other hand, acceptance studies by Tom Murray and Beth Simon suggest that the use of elliptical constructions like *The grass needs mowed* and *The cows need fed* are widely acceptable (Murray, Frazer, and Simon 1996; Murray and Simon 1999). I have begun to note their regular use in McDonough County newspapers. Unpublished studies by Tom Murray and use among my students suggest that the similarly elliptical *The cat wants in* and *I want off* are actually increasing their geographic domain. These traditionally Midland features seem to be advancing into Northern territory.

Once more, do these advances, like that of /au/ fronting, indicate the kind of concentration that is found on Smith Island? If the Midland dialect is indeed dying, is the intensification of these features its death rattle? On the other hand, the movement towards Inland Northern, with the loss of *a*-prefixing and the disappearance of “feesh,” seems more like death by dissipation. Perhaps in a dialect not isolated like the island dialects, both are possible. Or perhaps the Midland dialect has found new life and is actually expanding, losing some of its features at the same time. Whatever the case, it is clear that the fate of this dialect bears watching by the next generation of linguists.

**TIMOTHY C. FRAZER** studied linguistic geography with Raven McDavid and became a field-worker for the *Dictionary of American Regional English*. He has been observing language variation in Illinois English for almost 60 years. At the age of 52, he began learning Spanish and can now converse reasonably well with patient interlocutors.

**LANGUAGE PLANNING ON THE PLAYGROUND**

**RUDOLPH C. TROIKE, University of Arizona**

One of the great mysteries of language is why it changes. We are usually able to recognize a change only after the circumstances which initiated it are lost in the mists of myriad interpersonal interactions. Occasionally the author of a lexical innovation can be identified—as in Thomas Jefferson’s famous coinage of *belittle* in 1797. But in most instances, especially in pronunciation and grammar, the locus of a change and the processes
behind its spread or rejection are beyond retrieval, and linguists can only offer after-the-fact explanations. These usually draw on the geologist’s principle of uniformitarianism—the assumption that natural processes (such as erosion or the linguistic influence of one person upon another) have operated in the past in the same way as they may be observed to operate in the present.

The initial basis for a distinctive characteristic of American English early commented on by British travelers—its relative uniformity compared to the regional diversity in England—is usually said to lie in the process of leveling, by which diverse usages brought into a community or area by immigrants from different speech areas are over time winnowed out, as children growing up in the community, in the process of interacting with one another, adopt one or another of the competing forms they hear among their elders. However, we are rarely able to capture live examples of this process in action, leaving us with only the assumption of its operation. Here I wish to document my experience as a participant in such an actual event.

The subtropical lower Rio Grande valley in the extreme south of Texas, where I grew up, was predominantly occupied by Spanish speakers until the 1920s, when irrigation and citrus cultivation were introduced, attracting English-speaking colonists primarily from the Midwest and other parts of Texas (my parents were typical: my father was from Chicago and my mother from East Texas). I was a member of the first generation growing up amidst this juxtaposition of different regional patterns of speech, out of which we assembled our own unique amalgam.

Emblematic of this process was a playground discussion I vividly remember during the third grade (1942), when one member of a group of boys in our class had taken note that some of us pronounced dew and do alike, while others said the former as /djuw/ (d + you) and the latter as /duw/ (as in doom). On the spot we constituted an impromptu language academy and, after some debate, concluded that those who distinguished the pronunciations had the weight of spelling on their side (ignoring the fact that dozens of other words spelled differently are pronounced alike), and so we voted in favor of the wisdom of maintaining the distinction, a compact I have remained true to until this day. We did not know, of course, that dew as /djuw/ was Southern, /duw/ Northern. This kind of decision making undoubtedly happens thousands of times a day throughout the nation and is quickly forgotten as we go about the important business of growing up. But it is precisely such peer decisions that ultimately lead to making the speech of each community different and influence the course of linguistic history.
Much of leveling occurs unconsciously, however, as we interact with our peers and others in our formative years and choose certain usages over others or fail to acquire distinctions constantly made in our hearing by parents and grandparents. Thus, I somehow failed to notice that my mother, like most Southerners, distinguished the vowels of *horse* and *hoarse*, and that my father, like most Northerners, distinguished the vowels of *pin* and *pen*. And, like most of my peers, I wound up with a leveled variety of speech that Raven McDavid once jokingly called a “creole.” That the product was very un-Texan later caused me some embarrassment when I taught at the University of Texas and was constantly identified by my students as a Midwesterner!

In vocabulary, this melding of different regional sources was reflected in various ways, as in the fact that I carried a *bucket* (Midland and Southern) of water to our cow, Suzy, in a *pail* (Northern). I acquired *you-all* as a plural only (South Midland and Southern) and made a wish while pulling the *pulley-bone* (Midland and Southern) from the Thanksgiving turkey (the Northern term *wishbone* was learned from books). However, I ate *corn on the cob* (Northern) rather than *roasting ears* (South Midland and Southern). Similarly, I smelled a *skunk* (North Midland and Northern) rather than a *polecat* (South Midland and Southern), but conversely referred to *corn shucks* (South Midland and Southern), never *husks* (North Midland and Northern).

Despite our location on the Mexican border and a predominantly Spanish-speaking population in the area, influence from Spanish was embarrassingly small. The pronunciation of *patio* with the vowel of *bah /a/* rather than that of *pat /œl/ is one example. The cutoff meanders of the river in the delta area are called *resacas*, a term unique in this meaning to the lower Rio Grande valley. An old beat-up car was a *cucaracha* ‘cockroach’, and Mexican foods such as *enchiladas* and *tacos* were well known long before they invaded the rest of the United States.

In more recent years, the area has gained considerable population from the Midwest and from Mexico, undoubtedly bringing changes to both the English and the Spanish spoken there.

Discovering and documenting all of the fleeting events, like the playground discussion of *dew* and *do*, which are the genesis of linguistic change or convergence, are patently impossible. There are not enough linguists in the world to keep track of the many daily microevents which contribute to or inhibit linguistic change. However, the more anecdotal evidence on these events is accumulated, the less likely it will be that linguists of the future will be unable to answer questions about the origin of usages, and why one usage spread while another disappeared.
Dialectology has always been a study of people’s lives as expressed through local linguistic norms, dialects. Dialectologists have, therefore, focused on language use in everyday situations. These situations are usually taken for granted, but in them we negotiate our identities and in these everyday moments that we actively balance our realities and experiences against our ideals and expectations. This delicate balancing is a complex phenomenon that a new branch of dialectologists, ethnodialectologists, has begun to explore to answer questions about dialect change.

Ethnodialectology is an interdisciplinary approach to studying dialects as manifestations of individuals’ and communities’ sociocultural behaviors. Traditionally, dialectology focused on the relationship of linguistic behavior to geographic boundaries. This focus guided research on static dialect descriptions and linguistic theory testing. Ethnodialectology departs from traditional dialect geography and dialectology in recognizing the fluidity of (linguistic and social) identity as located not in statically categorized individuals residing in places fixed on a physical map, but in the dynamics of interactions between individuals whose identities are reconstructed by daily experiences. These interactions create links between the individuals, the individuals’ respective communities, and the larger society that the individuals are situated in and that they align with (as “one of us”) or in comparison to (as “one of them”). When individuals come into contact and engage each other, they are involved in an immediate interaction of one
person to another, hence one identity to another, in a fixed place and time. They are, however, also involved in a more complex and unbound interaction of the various social and cultural norms that situate the interactional event and thereby contribute to defining the event, the place, the social space, the time, and the individuals themselves, both reflexively and comparatively. In this way, ethnodialectologists recognize that dialect studies are fruitful grounds for developing explanations of why communities change and how we can understand the relationship between language and social life by studying dialect change as a manifestation of identity (re-)construction.

In my research with coastal fishing communities in the North Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, the balancing act of identity (re-)construction has turned into a roller-coaster ride, testing fishing families’ willpower to sustain an industry and an identity under legislative, ideological, and economic attack. Whether or not the enacted policies are warranted is beyond the scope of the present discussion. What is relevant is that the local residents feel under attack, which has led to a decline in the population and the sustainability of the communities. These communities are now endangered. It is critical that we conduct fieldwork to collect this ethnographic and dialect data.

The comparative research I am engaged in reveals that local social constructs, which are factors in dialect change, become understandable when an emic (i.e., community-internal), sociohistorical perspective is taken. We are then able to understand why dialects change, because we understand the local and nonlocal meaning of the different face-to-face interactions that occur and in which individuals negotiate their different and changing roles inside and outside their community. The social constructs that comprise the local cultural and dialect norms and expectations provide residents with necessary cues to categorize events in locally significant ways as they engage in linguistic interactions. By including an emic description of the community, we can determine the locally meaningful sociogeographic and sociolinguistic variables used by the residents to index their changing identities. Differences in dialect patterns within and across individuals and communities can be understood from a holistic picture of the community as it is situated in the larger society. Hence, the analysis of social and dialect change can be taken from a descriptive to an explanatory level.

As we move dialectology into the future, there are a number of methodological and theoretical issues to address: (1) more sophisticated social modeling of residents’ interactions to account for sociogeographic alignments that individuals choose to operate in or in comparison to (i.e., who
are the “us” and the “them,” and how are they defined?); (2) empirical definitions of the types of social and physical spaces that impact and orient individuals’ sociocultural and linguistic norms (i.e., how do we define where people are from socially, physically, historically; how are identity constructs manifested through social behaviors like dialects?); (3) delimitations of macro- and microeconomic and ideological pressures affecting communities’ and individuals’ (re-)constructions and coconstructions of local identities (i.e., how to pinpoint and measure the local and nonlocal pressures that [re-]shape identities); (4) inclusion of the historical trajectory of variable social and dialect features that define local communities (i.e., how to incorporate the history of the dialect and the community to understand the direction of change); and (5) consideration of marketplaces and factors that continue to be revealed through comparative research (i.e., how the physical and social spaces of interactions affect sociolinguistic interactions).

In short, based on the solid foundation inherited from traditional dialectology, we can now fully engage in comparative dialect research to investigate larger social and linguistic trends across communities. But we need to incorporate economic, demographic, and sociological data as well as the long-tested anthropological (especially ethnographic) methods for qualitative social and cultural data analysis. These extralinguistic data enable contextualizations necessary for appropriate comparisons. This approach lends the existing descriptive research the explanatory power to contribute to broader understandings of language change and human social life. These understandings enable dialect research to be better heard by policy makers (economists, legislators, and school board officials, among others) whose decisions impact the very communities we spend our lives in. If dialectology can serve communities not only as an archive for cultural and linguistic norms, but also as a means for the community’s voice to be heard when policy decisions are made that change these communities, then we as social scientists will have improved more than our research.

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Let the Copula Be
Sonja L. Lanehart, University of Georgia

My fervor for language began when I was in the second grade. I believed there was only one way to speak correctly, and I was going to do that while making sure everyone else did also. I corrected people’s language, particularly my family’s, at every opportunity. I was the militant language midget. Once, when I was a teenager attending a family function, I remember asking my relatives, “Why do Black people use *be* so much?” Not surprisingly, no one gave a satisfactory answer.

I was a zealous crusader for “good” language. When I went to the University of Texas (UT), I decided I would become a speech pathologist so I could teach people to speak “right.” Family conversations about the language of a well-known former UT football player who had finished his NFL career and was now working at UT fueled my pursuit of this goal. This football icon had been notorious in my family for talking “bad.” My family’s surprise at the improvement in his language after he had completed his speech degree and become a spokesperson for UT was the final sign I needed to know that speech pathology was the way I should go. If speech pathologists could help this football icon speak “good” English, then I knew I could teach anyone to speak “good” English.

I jumped into my major eager to begin my life of public service for all those “bad” English users. However, when I took a couple of classes in English language—“History of the English Language” and “American English”—my life was forever changed. I realized then that language variation was not “bad”; it was not a pathology to be cured but a difference to be celebrated. I learned that language variation represented a history, a culture, an identity that should not and could not be eradicated. I also realized I’d spent most of my life believing everything that school and society told me: smart, successful, intelligent people speak “good” English; limited, derelict, unintelligent people speak “bad” English. As a speaker of African American English, I heard that often and with conviction. Black people used *be* in the wrong place and said *ain’t*—something everyone knew wasn’t in the dictionary and, therefore, couldn’t possibly be a word.

Several years later, I came across a passage in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982, 189) that exemplified my early prescriptive fervor:

Darlene trying to teach me how to talk. She say *us* not so hot. A dead country give-away. You say *us* where most folks say *we*, she say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white folks be amuse. What I care? I ast. I’m
happy. But she say I feel more happier talking like she talk. . . . Every time I say something the way I say it, she correct me until I say it some other way. Pretty soon it feel like I can’t think. . . . Look like to me only a fool would want you to talk in a way that feel peculiar to your mind.

I realized I had chosen something peculiar to my mind. I had chosen to believe the language of my family, my community, was bad and inferior—meaning my family and my community were inferior. The language is the people—“the language, only the language” (LeClair 1981, 29), because “language is the only homeland” (Marshall 1983, 7). I embarked on a new journey to find and reclaim my homeland. I have gone from one end of the continuum to the other, and I know it has been a change for the better. My family still expects me to correct them. I struggle with that because they believe in me more than themselves.

My mom tells me it’s easy for me to say there’s no “good” or “bad” English because I know and use “good” English. She believes I don’t know what it’s like to use only “bad” English in a society that demands that everyone use “good” English or else. It’s like when rich people tell you money doesn’t bring happiness. They can say that because they’re rich and know it from experience. I think my mom and I are both right. Because I know a language of wider communication but also understand that all languages are systematic and rule-governed, I can say it doesn’t matter if you say It bes that way sometime or That’s just the way it is. My mom and others in my family don’t have the luxury of knowing either.

Since I now research language use in the African American community, because I am on a lifelong journey of reclamation, affirmation, and celebration of the language of my family and community, I don’t ask why black people use be so much (or why they delete it); I just think, “It bes that way sometime.”

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Sociolinguists often focus on how people’s use of language reflects who they are. For example, an older white male in rural Tennessee will use language quite differently from a young African American in inner-city Detroit because of where he grew up, whom he grew up around, and the situations in which he found himself during his life. However, we have to remember that not only are people’s language patterns shaped by their surroundings, but they often use language in creative ways to help shape, and reshape, their surroundings, their personalities, their very identities. Consider, for example, the case of ethnic identity.

For the past six years, I and a team of colleagues have been investigating interethnic dialect differences in rural, triethnic Robeson County, North Carolina, populated by roughly equal numbers of Lumbee Native Americans, African Americans, and whites. Our findings show that, even though the Lumbee have not had an ancestral Native American language for centuries, they do have a unique dialect of English that helps set them apart from neighboring whites and African Americans. For example, only the Lumbee sometimes use *I’m* for ‘I’ve’, as in *I’m forgot* ‘I have forgotten’. In addition, only the Lumbee use vocabulary words like *ellick* ‘cup of coffee’ and *toten* ‘omen or portent’. The Lumbee also share some dialect features with neighboring ethnic groups but use the features in subtly different ways, another way of marking their linguistic and cultural difference from surrounding groups. For example, both Lumbees and African Americans use *be* in certain sentences indicating habitual actions (e.g., *He always be late for school*), but only in Lumbee English can the form sometimes occur with an -*s* ending (*He always bes late*). Similarly, all three county ethnic groups use the pronunciation feature of *r*-lessness—that is, the absence of *r* in certain word positions, as in *fahm* ‘farm’ or *cah* ‘car’. However, the Lumbee show intermediate usage levels for *r*-lessness compared with the low levels of county whites and the high levels of African Americans across the country. Thus, Native Americans in Robeson County use language quite differently from neighboring whites and African Americans, and in that sense we can say that their language use reflects their ethnic identity.

However, people are not automatons whose every action, word, and pronunciation are determined by preset social structures. If we take a close look at how people use language in conversational interaction, we can see
how they actively utilize the linguistic resources at their disposal to shape and reshape ethnic categories and relations between ethnic groups. For example, I recently conducted an in-depth analysis of a sociolinguistic interview between two young men, a Lumbee Native American from Robeson County and an African American from the coastal town of Wilmington, North Carolina. The two are good friends, and so the interview was more like a casual conversation than a formal question-and-answer session. If each speaker’s language use simply reflects who he is, then we might expect each to use similar language patterns throughout the interview. However, I noticed almost immediately that this was not the case. Let’s consider the case of r-lessness again. Instead of maintaining steady levels of r-lessness throughout the interview, the two showed widely varying levels. Sometimes the African American used high levels while the Lumbee used less (as we might expect), but at other times, the Lumbee used more. In addition, while the two sometimes used quite different levels of r-lessness, there were points where they sounded a lot more similar. Interestingly, the two showed the most widely divergent levels of r-lessness when they engaged in discussions of race relations—a topic that highlights ethnic separation and the fact that they are from different ethnic groups. However, when they talked about subjects that highlight the fact that they’re friends—for example, difficulties with family or funny stories about mutual friends at the university they attend—suddenly, their levels of r-lessness were much more congruent. Thus, the two used language to draw themselves closer together or to move farther apart, as well as to emphasize or deemphasize ethnic group membership and ethnic group boundaries, as they conversed. In other words, they were not bound by the ethnic categories into which society has placed them to use language in a certain way, but rather were able to use language creatively in order to position themselves within these groups and in relation to outside groups. They could even use language to break down ethnic boundaries, as in fact they did when they began speaking very much like one another when the topic shifted to mutual friends.

It is encouraging to think that in the midst of all the worry about widening rifts between ethnic communities ethnic language varieties (for example, standard English versus African American Vernacular English or Hispanic English), people engaged in everyday conversational interaction use language to bridge gaps and form friendships that cross ethnic lines—and, in effect, redraw these lines. It is just as important for sociolinguists to investigate how people actively use language resources to shape societal structures as it is for us to study how the social structures around us shape our language use.
EDGAR W. SCHNEIDER, University of Regensburg

The twentieth century experienced an interesting shift of emphasis, even paradigms, in accounting for grassroots speech patterns in America. Broadly speaking, a speaker’s regional background was originally regarded as the prime determinant of his or her speechways, while later social class membership was seen as decisive in shaping one’s linguistic behavior. This shifting of emphasis in scholarship went along with a paradigm change from dialect geography to sociolinguistics as the leading subdisciplines, respectively. However, I suggest that neither region nor social class accounts for a person’s speech behavior sufficiently; rather, a third factor, identity, has the greatest influence upon how an individual speaks. Clearly, as a research topic this has been an incipient concept, still marginal to linguistic theorizing; nevertheless, I find it significant and indicative of our increased understanding of the complexities of human language.

Perhaps it is necessary first to emphasize a point that to linguists counts as trivial but that popular audiences still find difficult to accept: all real-life speech is rule-governed, systematic and regular, good for all communicative purposes required. Language systems allow for a great deal of variability: we can express the same idea in different ways (carry water in a bucket or a pail, for instance, or drink either soda or pop), choose from alternative but functionally equivalent syntactic patterns (like he gave me a book and he gave a book to me), and utter the same word with varying pronunciations and accents (e.g., say time or tahm). Fundamentally, each of these alternative ways of saying the same thing will fully serve its communicative purpose in its appropriate context, and none is intrinsically “better” or “worse.” We need to understand which contexts, or factors of usage, cause the one or
the other alternative expression to be used, or, more generally speaking, cause an individual to speak the way he or she does.

Beginning in the 1930s, dialect geographers like Hans Kurath or Raven I. McDavid, Jr., were predominantly interested in regional differences in speech and therefore undertook large-scale regional dialect atlases. These projects yielded a wealth of data on regional speech differences, presumed to have been caused by settlement history and social or topographic patterns that affect communication density, like political boundaries, rivers, forests, mountains, and so on. It is to their credit that, unlike most of their European predecessors, they realized that in the mobile American society social class differences were also important, so they also systematically sampled speech differences between educated, common, and folk speakers from the same region. A later project like Lee Pederson’s *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (1986–92) aims at a roughly representative sociological sampling of informants and also systematically documents social differences, but essentially a traditional dialect geographer might have said something like “Show me how you speak, and I’ll tell you where you’re from!”

Since the 1960s, William Labov’s sociolinguistic approach, building upon the observation of natural, unmonitored speech, has taught us the importance of structured variability, systematic choices between alternative realizations. Having introduced quantitative tools, he found that speakers with a certain background tend to use certain variants more readily than others: females speak somewhat differently from males, the young prefer other expressions than the old, and African Americans have a dialect somewhat different from that of European Americans. While this approach has also resulted in fundamental insights into principles of language variation and change, essentially the descriptive goal of microsociolinguistic studies in that paradigm has been to document statistical correlations between speech variants, on the one hand, and extralinguistic, social parameters like class, sex, or ethnicity, on the other, with the latter having determined the choice of the former. So, a prototypical sociolinguist, while smilingly tape-recording your speech, might have explained his research goal as “Show me how you speak, and I’ll tell you who you are, and which group you belong to!”

These two factors, regional and social background, are clearly decisive in shaping our speech, and for most individuals throughout their lives there is no way of totally denying or disguising them—but still, they are not the whole story, and perhaps not even the most important part of it. There is more to language behavior than merely being determined by one’s
background and origin: we also use language to actively signal who we want to be. In other words, the psycholinguistic concept of identity appears to both encompass and override the other two factors—something that has also been suggested by sociolinguistic research (or the “sociolinguistic dialectology” suggested by J. K. Chambers). As is well known, even in his first investigation, prior to the founding of sociolinguistics proper in his 1966 study of New York City, Labov (1969) found that a centralized pronunciation of certain diphthongs is characteristic of those inhabitants of Martha’s Vineyard who hold positive feelings towards life on the island. In the 1990s, Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling-Estes (1997) documented that on Ocracoke the real “hoi toiders,” users of the traditional local pronunciation of the /ai/ diphthong, are those who are painfully aware of the disruption of traditional lifestyles on the island and wish to stick to some symbolic retention of it. In Texas and Oklahoma, Guy Bailey (1993) and Bailey, Jan Tillery, and Tom Wikle (1997) showed that features of a strong local accent correlate with other indicators of a Southern identity, like subscribing to hunting and fishing magazines, listening to country music, and buying cowboy boots. Bailey and Natalie Maynor (1989) also showed that young male urban African Americans have developed distinct speech patterns like he be playin’ meaning ‘he always plays’, thus signaling their in-group status. In all these cases, linguistic expressions serve as markers of group solidarity or desired group membership—and part of the complexity of our speechways arises from the fact that every individual associates himself or herself with several groups, thus constructing a distinct personal identity. So, the real motto for future research should be “Show me how you speak, and I’ll tell you who you want to be!”

It is clear that identity as the determining factor of speech performance is a concept more complex and scientifically more difficult to grasp than region and class, encompassing psychological, sociological, and pragmatic components which are fuzzy in themselves; but it is something we need to understand in an increasingly complex and multifarious postmodern world, an appropriate challenge for language variation study in the new millennium.

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The second voice that you heard sounded like the voice of a black man; is that correct? [Christopher Darden, *California v. Orenthal James Simpson*]

Racial identification based on speech captured public attention during the O. J. Simpson trial in 1995, when Simpson’s African American attorney, Johnnie Cochran, objected forcefully to the assertion that one can deduce racial identity from speech.

Mr. Darden: When you heard that voice, you thought that that was the voice of a young white male, didn’t you?
Mr. Cochran: Object to the form of that question, your Honor.
Judge [Lance] Ito: Overruled.
Mr. Cochran: Speculation, conclusion.
Judge Ito: Overruled.
Mr. Cochran: How can he tell if it was a white man, your Honor?
Judge Ito: Counsel, overruled.

In 1999 the Supreme Court of Kentucky enlisted linguistic profiling to convict an African American appellant who had been overheard by a white police officer. At the trial, Officer Smith testified that, as a police officer for 13 years who had spoken with black males on numerous occasions, he believed he could identify one of the voices that he had heard as that of a black male. On cross-examination, the following colloquy occurred between Smith and defense counsel:

Defense counsel: Okay. Well, how does a black man sound?
Smith: Uh, some male blacks have a, a different sound of, of their voice. Just as if I have a different sound of my voice as Detective Birkenhauer does. I sound different than you.
Defense counsel: Okay, can you demonstrate that for the jury?
Smith: I don’t think that would be a fair and accurate description of the, you know, of the way the man sounds.
Defense counsel: So not all male blacks sound alike?
Smith: That’s correct, yes.
Defense counsel: Okay. In fact, some of them sound like whites, don’t they?
Smith: Yes.
Defense counsel: Do all whites sound alike?
Smith: No sir.
Defense counsel: Okay. Do some white people sound like blacks when they’re talking?
Smith: Possibly, yes. [*Clifford v. Kentucky*, 7 SW3d 371 (Ky 1999)]
In his ruling opinion, Justice William S. Cooper of the Supreme Court of Kentucky noted that “an opinion that an overheard voice was that of a particular nationality or race has never before been addressed in this jurisdiction.” Citing People v. Sanchez (492 NYS2d 683 [NY Sup Ct 1985]), Cooper noted that “a lay eyewitness to a fatal shooting was permitted to testify that immediately prior to the shooting, he overheard the victim and the killer arguing in Spanish, and that the killer was speaking with a Dominican, rather than a Puerto Rican, accent.”

Returning to the Kentucky case in question, Cooper observed that “no one suggests that it was improper for Officer Smith to identify one of the voices he heard as being that of a female. We perceive no reason why a witness could not likewise identify a voice as being that of a particular race or nationality, so long as the witness is personally familiar with the general characteristics, accents, or speech patterns of the race or nationality in question, i.e., so long as the opinion is ‘rationally’ based on the perception of the witness.” Thus far, Clifford v. Kentucky affirms the legality of racial identification based on speech by a lay witness.

Whereas racial profiling is based on visual cues that result in the confirmation of or in speculation concerning the racial background of an individual or individuals, linguistic profiling is based upon auditory cues that may be used to identify an individual or individuals as belonging to a linguistic subgroup within a given speech community, including a racial subgroup. Hearers frequently practice linguistic profiling, including drawing racial inferences from small amounts of speech (Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh 1999). Cooper asserts that laypeople can indeed confirm the race or nationality of an individual based on his or her speech, whereas Simpson’s attorney protested that basing racial identification on speech is overtly racist and should not be permitted in a court of law. Although Cooper accepted that many laypeople draw racial inferences from speech, many defendants in housing discrimination or insurance redlining cases deny that they can make any determination of the race or ethnicity of prospective home buyers or tenants based on speech during, say, telephone conversations.

Linguistic profiling has been accepted as legal in some instances and illegally discriminatory in others. The U.S. Supreme Court has yet to rule on linguistic profiling per se.

I have intentionally focused on the United States in this discussion, but there is abundant evidence that linguistic profiling is both global and ancient. Based on our keen auditory skills as a species, I believe that linguistic profiling will exist as long as human language exists. The challenge is to have the wisdom and patience to tolerate others whose linguistic backgrounds differ substantially from our own—to accentuate the benefits
of preferential linguistic profiling while discarding the tradition of discriminatory linguistic profiling that fans the embers of racial discord, to the detriment of fairness.

NOTE

This essay, demonstrating the potential legal implications of identifying a speaker’s race on the basis of speech, is part of a larger research project with collaborators Thomas Purnell and William Idsardi. I am also grateful to Shanna Smith and Robyn Webb-Williams of the National Fair Housing Alliance for their encouragement and enduring faith. Research on this and related topics has been supported by funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the United States Department of State, the Austrian Academy of Science, and the Center for Applied Language Studies and Services in Africa at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

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THE CAPITALIZATION OF BLACK AND NATIVE AMERICAN

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I am extremely surprised at the hyphenated entry African-American in the new edition of the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual (1998). The term should not be hyphenated. The case for not using a hyphen was eloquently made in articles in American Speech by John Baugh (1991) and Geneva Smitherman (1991), two prominent Black linguists. Surely people’s wishes as to how their own ethnic group is labeled should be the only consideration.

According to Baugh, Black is the term preferred by most Black Americans. As a proper noun, like Negro (Spanish for ‘black’) or African American, it should be capitalized. The claim that black is a color word requiring lowercase makes meaning the major criterion for determining upper versus lower case. However, capitalization is determined by whether a term is a proper noun or not. Surely Black is synonymous with Negro, just as White is
synonymous with Caucasian. Either they are all proper nouns or none of them is. Like White, Black is not a color term. If it were, such locutions as light-skinned Black person and dark-skinned White person would make no sense. Furthermore, when black is a color term and part of a proper name, as in Black Angus, it is nonetheless capitalized. And one would not think of using the color-word argument to downcase Mr. Black or Ms. White. The failure to capitalize Black when it is synonymous with African American is a matter of unintended racism, to put the best possible face on it.

A similar case arises with the racial term Native American. The previous edition of The Chicago Manual of Style (1982) insisted not only on downcasing black on the grounds that it was a color word, but also on downcasing the first word of native American. Several stylebook editors and at least one prominent language lack the mother wit to understand that native American refers to anyone born in the United States regardless of racial stock, and that Native American refers to an American Indian wherever that person was born. Happily, this distinction is now acknowledged in the current edition of The Chicago Manual of Style (1993) and some current dictionaries.

Consider this a “call to the colors.” Let us please capitalize the names of races as a matter of courtesy, logic, and accuracy.

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PROSPECTS IN PHONOLOGY

STUDYING THE RHYTHM OF SPOKEN DISCOURSE

WŁADYSŁAW CICHOCKI, University of New Brunswick

The utterances that speakers produce and listeners hear have characteristics that are different from their written counterparts. Among these differences are features such as intonation patterns, rhythm, and variations in the pronunciation of vowels and consonants. As our knowledge of spoken discourse grows and as applications in areas such as language acquisition,
automatic speech recognition, and speech synthesis become more numerous, the need to understand these differences becomes increasingly apparent. This essay focuses on one aspect of spoken discourse—its rhythm—and outlines the interplay of various factors that are relevant to its study.

The perception of beats or prominences in speech that we call rhythm is due to the patterning of stressed and unstressed syllables. The patterns of beats are fairly regular, and one of the challenges in the analysis of spoken discourse is to capture these regularities (as well as any irregularities). One way to describe rhythm is in terms of the physical durations of syllables in utterances; that is, we look for patterns of durationally long and durationally short syllables. Statistical modeling of these patterns provides the foundation for a formal description of rhythm and gives us a chance to test in a rigorous way specific hypotheses about which factors are at play in rhythm.

A simple model might predict syllable durations from the number of segments—vowels and consonants—in a syllable. For example, a syllable with a small number of segments, say one or two, is predicted to be shorter than a syllable with a larger number of segments, say three or four. This prediction can be tested experimentally: we can record a speaker reading a list of words and sentences in which there are controlled numbers of syllables of predetermined lengths. Using appropriate acoustic phonetic equipment, we can then measure to an accuracy of a few milliseconds the physical durations of the syllables. Finally, the application of a statistical technique such as regression analysis allows us to verify how good our prediction is.

Empirical research has shown that this simple model does a fairly good job of predicting syllable durations. Indeed, over the past few decades researchers have added other factors to the study of the rhythm of speech. One such factor is the nature of the segments in the syllable. For example, certain vowels are longer than others. Try saying the following sequences of words out loud: bid-bed-bad and bad-bed-bid. In many dialects of English, the vowel in bad is longer than the one in bed, which is longer than the vowel in bid. Consonants also have different lengths: the initial consonant in mid is shorter than the initial consonant in Sid.

Other factors go beyond the syllable itself and take into account the intuition that spoken utterances have structure; that is, they are divided into constituents like words and phrases. Certain patterns of duration are associated with the boundary between words. For example, /tun/ is longer and /kwair/ is shorter in tune#acquire than in tuna#choir. Syllables which are at the end of a phrase are relatively longer than those in the middle.

The interplay of these and other factors in predicting syllable duration has been described using fairly complex models (called multivariate mod-
els), which make much better predictions about speech rhythm than the simple one-factor model described above. Not insignificant is the fact that the model-building enterprise has been informed by work carried out by a wide variety of researchers: phonologists, speech engineers, experimental phoneticians, computer scientists, and statisticians. This combination of specializations has contributed to the current state of knowledge in a number of areas. In the case of applications to speech technology, the results have significantly improved the performance of those machines that can interpret what people say and of other machines that sound human-like (more or less) when they “speak.”

Yet far more work is required before we can claim that we really understand how rhythm works. Perhaps some of the greatest challenges lie in our lack of knowledge about the natural spontaneous speech used in real language situations. It is here that language variation studies can make a significant contribution by providing approaches and methodologies which inform us about relevant issues such as selection of subjects, dialect differences, choice of style or situation, and techniques for eliciting data.

Let’s look briefly at one of these factors, situations of language use. Experimental studies of speech rhythm need to go beyond the controlled setting of the laboratory, where only words and sentences are read. Reading tasks might also include texts of prose, news reports, and poetry. More importantly, studies need to examine spontaneous speech of the kind found in conversations or in the formal and casual speaking styles elicited in sociolinguistic interviews. Among the noteworthy rhythmic features of these settings is speech rate or tempo: speakers accelerate and slow down, so that syllables are shorter or longer. Also of note is the use of these rhythmic changes to signal, for example, how we take turns in conversations or how we show that we are involved in or emotional about our topic.

In sum, while our knowledge of rhythm has seen technical and theoretical advances over the past few years, it is still at an early stage. Including factors based in language variation studies will bring to the fore models which can take into account differences among individual speakers, dialects, and styles. In the coming years, and with some luck, we may well see important discoveries about what these factors bring to rhythm and its role in speech.

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Since Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner (1972) introduced acoustic analysis to dialectal variation a generation ago, sociolinguists have increasingly utilized instrumental techniques. While the number of studies involving acoustic analysis has grown steadily, nearly all of them have been concentrated on one narrow area: variation and change in the production of $F_1$ and $F_2$ (the first and second formants) of vowels. Studies in that area have revealed a great deal about sound change. However, more instrumental research is needed on variation in other aspects of vowels, such as duration, phonation, and $F_3$ (third-formant) variation; on variation of consonants and prosody; and, most of all, on speech perception. Sound change should not be the sole focus of phonetic research on variation, either. It could be applied more often to studies of identity, and it could allow variationists to say more about the mental organization of sounds than they have recently.

The contributions of instrumental analysis to the understanding of sound change are substantial. Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner (1972) and subsequent studies described two shifting patterns found in English. One is the Northern Cities Shift, found in the Great Lakes region of the United States, which they related to developments in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The other is the Southern Shift, found in the southern United States and southern England and in Southern Hemisphere English. By comparing these patterns to historically attested vowel shifts in other languages, they identified four general shifting patterns. They proposed that vowels located on the periphery of the vowel envelope behave differently from those located on the inside, and from this conjecture they posited several principles of vowel shifting—for example, tense (or peripheral) vowels rise and low nonperipheral vowels become peripheral. Further testing of these principles is needed, and the reasons for them remain unclear. Nevertheless, numerous other researchers have utilized these findings as a basis for sociolinguistic studies of dialects influenced by either the Northern Cities Shift or the Southern Shift. In fact, there has been a veritable blossoming of instrumental studies of the $F_1/F_2$ patterns of vowels in those and other dialects.

In contrast, phonetic variation studies have largely passed over other features. There are only a few studies of duration or phonation of vowels. Other vocalic traits, such as intrinsic pitch and steady-state structure, have received even less attention. Consonantal variation remains in the domain
of impressionistic studies. Intonation and other aspects of prosody have largely been ignored. Part of the reason is that measurement of some of these factors, such as phonation and intonation, is complicated. Nevertheless, language variationists need to begin investigating them.

Likewise, perception has not received the attention it deserves. Although the number of studies of variation in perception has grown, it is far outstripped by the number of production studies. This imbalance is serious because perception is as important cognitively as production. Numerous types of perception experiments involving various tasks, such as identification, discrimination, or judgment of stimuli, are possible. For some, natural stimuli are appropriate, while for others, filtering or other synthetic modification is more appropriate. They can be used to investigate such issues as stereotypes about dialects or particular variants, cues used for ethnic identifications, dialectal differences in perceptual boundaries between phonemes, different cues used by different dialects for the same contrast, and whether speakers recognize contrasts. Sociolinguists certainly need to investigate perception more intensively.

Most of the previous instrumental work on linguistic variation has been directed at the question of how sound change occurs. Many of these studies also touch on issues of ethnic, gender, generational, social group, or other identity. For the most part, these instrumental studies have variation and change of the sounds themselves as their main focus. Sociolinguistic studies focusing primarily on identity still rely largely on impressionistic transcription. However, studies of identity could employ instrumental techniques profitably. Such methods might uncover important but hitherto unnoticed variables or refine the understanding of known variables.

Acoustic and other phonetic techniques would also be useful to sociolinguists in investigations of the mental representations of sounds. Phoneticians have discovered various aspects of sounds that do not fit the traditional definition of phonology both because they are not contrastive and because they are learned—not automatic phonetic—processes. Examples of such factors are differences in the perceptual cues used for the same contrast, in the relative phasing of articulatory gestures, and in the effects that shortening of duration has on the production of sounds. Cross-linguistic and stylistic differences have been important in establishing that these “phonetic rules” are part of speakers’ phonetic knowledge. Sociolinguists could contribute to the corpus of knowledge of these processes by focusing on them in dialectal and stylistic studies.

It should be obvious, then, that sociolinguists could use instrumental phonetic methods far more widely than they have previously. Applying such methods to the $F_1/F_2$ patterns of vowel production has yielded consider-
able insights into the mechanisms of sound change over the past generation. Studies of that sort have represented a good start for variationists, but it is time to move on. Other components of sounds ought to be studied as well, perception needs more attention, and issues besides sound change can be addressed. Sociolinguistics would benefit greatly by embracing these subjects fully during the next generation.

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PROSPECTS IN LEXICOGRAPHY

REFLECTIONS IN LEXICOGRAPHY

DAVID K. BARNHART, Lexik House

The first vivid recollection I have of lexicography is as a youngster standing at my father’s elbow next to a Linotype machine as my name was readied for stamping on my very own copy of The American College Dictionary in 1947. That memory is followed by one of sitting with several speckled four-by-six-inch boxes containing quotation slips among which I interfiled new quotations. I recall the horribly sick feeling in my stomach when several of these boxes fell, spilling their contents down a flight of stairs. That was in the 1950s, a time I also recall hand-cranking a Ditto machine and collating sheets of manuscript for editors to work over.

In 1966 I went to work for Clarence L. Barnhart, Inc., as an editor-in-training on the Thordike-Barnhart dictionaries. My first assignments were proofreading (it never seemed to end). In other early assignments I compared source material with current editions of manuscript by underlining in different colors the differences in wording. I remember colored pencils and pens being used to designate new material from a particular source. However, purple was reserved for Clarence Barnhart. Anyone changing purple manuscript had to have a good reason and be prepared to defend it.
In the late 1960s my first sorties into new words began with reading magazines and newspapers for new words for the annual updating of *The World Book Encyclopedia Dictionary* (1966). Shortly after that, work began on *The Barnhart Dictionary of New English since 1963* (1973). That was my first experience working with a blank page. The focus of this work was the reporting of new words and meanings not recorded in dictionaries. This marked the beginning of a mad scramble that led to *The Second Barnhart Dictionary of New English* (1980).

Not long thereafter I started my own company—Lexik House. About a year later, while sitting on the verandah at my father’s house, he asked me what my next project would be. I said it was to sell as many copies as I could of the *Dictionary of Bahamian English* (Holm and Schilling 1982) I had just published. “After that?” he asked. I didn’t have a firm idea. He said, “What about the new words newsletter?” He had floated that idea 20 years earlier, but it didn’t go anywhere. My reaction was, “You write it and I’ll publish it.” Thus was born *The Barnhart Dictionary Companion* (Barnhart 1982–), a quarterly devoted to new words, new meanings, and changes in usage.

Since 1982, I have feverishly pursued new words, new meanings, and changes in usage that have not been recorded in general dictionaries. When Lexik House began this project, lexicographical procedure was very much as it had been for a century, the improvements in typewriters notwithstanding. Researchers read magazines and newspapers for candidate entries. Quotation slips were prepared and assembled in alphabetical order. In 1983 that approach was dramatically changed. It was then that we subscribed, not without anxiety, to Nexis—a large data bank of full-text newspaper and magazine articles. This computerized resource allowed us to follow hunches. Before the advent of computers, the following of unsubstantiated speculations was more often than not prohibitively time-consuming. The new resource allowed us to double again and yet again the number of lexical items we could report on in the *Dictionary Companion*. Anyone’s speculations, ramblings, or commentary in the press or elsewhere could be tested for validity.

In the mid-1980s Thomas L. Clark, in searching for a publisher for his dictionary project—*The Dictionary of Gambling and Gaming* (1987)—was directed to Lexik House. He and I had talked about that project whenever our paths crossed at meetings of the American Dialect Society or the Modern Language Association or the National Council of Teachers of English. Clark’s project was also testing the new world of electronic research, for he had been laboriously recording data on his Kaypro since the inception of the project.
When e-mail and the Web became commonplace in the 1990s, another component of research was greatly advanced. In the twinkling of an eye, instant (or near-instant) communication with colleagues was possible and access to their work was dramatically changed. With the advancement of electronic resources, the accumulated evidence for new words and meanings was no longer a case of paucity but one, in many instances, of surfeit. Editors who use such resources have had to develop strategies for efficiently and reliably evaluating large quantities of information. My first encounter with these problems came when Allan Metcalf and I started work on *America in So Many Words* (1997), a project that examined the development of the American language from the sixteenth century to the present.

What the future holds for advancement in research and publishing in monitoring the development of English is uncertain. Several possibilities on a lexicographer’s wish list might include these:

1. A list on the desk each morning of the word forms that do not appear in the largest dictionaries but do appear in that morning’s paper. This might be available sooner rather than later in the twenty-first century. Such a resource would greatly facilitate the reporting of new words (not meanings, probably). The greatest obstacle to this would be the great number of proper nouns that would pervade such a list.

2. Greater literary source material in the form similar to Nexis. Currently, most of the data banks of great size document newspaper and popular magazine articles. Literary periodicals, such as the *New Yorker*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, and *Poetry Journal*, all in one comprehensive data bank, will make research for lexicographers much easier, more efficient, and more balanced in writing style.

3. Comprehensive files of written material from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to further the understanding of our linguistic past.

Over the last third of the twentieth century we have witnessed a sea change in the practice of dictionary making. A larger range and scope of resource material, however, is not going to improve the product if strategies for evaluating the validity of information in these resources are not forthcoming and earnestly pursued.

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A colleague told me that he had recently encountered the word *slackard*, which looked odd to him but not totally aberrant. I confessed that I myself might well have written *slackard* and then wondered why WordPerfect balked at the spelling. No dictionary records *slackard* for ‘a person who slacks (off)—that is, a *slacker*.

A handful of words were formed, in Middle English and Early Modern English, by adding -ard or -art to an adjective, verb, or noun. The resulting noun signified a person (or other creature) associated with the action or quality that the root word designates, often with the sense of ‘excess’ in that association, hence ‘offensiveness or contemptibility’. The suffix derives from Old French -ard/-art, related to Germanic -hard/-hart ‘bold, hardy’. Examples are *bastard*, *braggart*, *dastard*, *dotard*, *drunkard*, *dullard*, *pollard*, *sluggard*, *wizard*. Other such coinages did not survive the Middle Ages, like *ballard* ‘bald guy’, *fabelard* ‘fabler, liar’, *failard* ‘failure’, and *losard* ‘loser’.

My colleague Jonathan Evans, the one who mentioned *slackard*, pointed to the analogous *Dunkard* and its synonym *Dunker* or *Tunker*. Those words are all Americanisms dating from the mid-eighteenth century (from German *tunken* ‘dip, immerse, dunk’), nicknames for a member of the Church of the Brethren, an Anabaptist sect founded in the Rhineland in 1708, most of whose membership had migrated to Pennsylvania by 1730, where the words were coined. Both *Dunkard* and *Dunker* are often considered derogatory; Evans remembers being derided with the epithet *Dunkard* on the school bus in Indiana about 1966 (his father was a pastor of another “baptizing” denomination). Nonetheless, in 1926 an offshoot sect in Indiana officially designated itself “Dunkard Brethren.”

I recall having heard, and used, the jocular construction *scholard* among fellow graduate students at the University of Texas during the late 1960s. At its entry for the word *scholar*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED2 1989) records five literary uses of *scholard* or *schollard* (a1590, 1644, 1677, 1678, and 1853), all of them intended comically and all but the first labeled an “illiterate use, . . . vulgar or dial.” Hidden within other OED2 entries, four additional instances (all of them likewise in comical renditions of outlandish dialects) can be discovered by an electronic search of the online version of the dictionary: in the illustrative quotations for *paroxysm*, 1654; *covey*, 1821; *mark*, 1881; and *womanthroe*, 1902.
The fact that “vulgar” speakers have represented scholar as scholard, and that North Midlanders use Dunkard and Dunker as interchangeable insults, suggests the phonological closeness between -ard and the common agentive suffix -er or -ar. (Apparently, some individuals fail to hear the -d at the end of niggard, a word that may or may not belong to the category being discussed here.) Especially, however, for words whose root is transparently a verb, we might expect the confusion to work mainly in the direction of -d “loss,” the more familiar and productive suffix displacing the less common, archaic one.

In some instances, more or less synonymous -ard and -er words with the same base have coexisted for centuries. Estimating from the earliest attestations in OED2, bragger (1360) antedates braggart (1577), as lubber (1362) does lubbard (1586); but doter (1552) follows dotard (1586), as blinker (1636) does blinkard (1510). Drunkard (1530) and the obsolete drunker (1539) are about the same age, as are stinkard (1600) and stinker (1607). Lagger dates from 1523, while laggard is a “new” coinage, first attested (as a noun) by OED2 in 1808 (the adjectival use is older). By use of the computer-searchable Chadwyck-Healey LION (“Literature-on-Line”) database, I can nudge back the noun’s terminus ante quem a whole century; I have verified the quotations:

1789. . . . leave reflection and remorse far off, / The laggards of our journey.
    [Henry Brooke, The Imposter: A Tragedy 4.3]
1733. Blushing I look upon my poor Resolves, / A Laggard in the Race
    [William Havard, Scanderbeg: A Tragedy 2.4]
1705. “Think not, my Lord, that I am unprepar’d, / A trifling laggard in the Glorious Race” [Mary Pix, The Conquest of Spain: A Tragedy 1.1]

The semantic affinity between lagger/laggard and slacker/slackard, as well as the apparent belatedness in the creation of both -ard forms, might be noteworthy.

the word appears in no way marked as nonstandard or as limited to any particular region or social group.

Two reputable modern poets have also used the word. The persona in Stephen Dunn’s (1991, 20) “Update” addresses Melville’s character Bartleby, the scrivener:

Here is the book
in which you live
and here’s what you’ve spawned:
drop-outs, slackards . . .

Ted Kooser (1994, 38) uses the word in “The Gilbert Stuart Portrait of Washington”:

Celebrity irked him. He had little time
for the likes of Gilbert Stuart, that son
of a snuff-grinding Tory, that slackard
who sat out the war with the English.

I do not know the actual frequency or distribution of slackard or of analogous unrecorded constructions from recent decades. Even if they are rare, however, their existence suggests that, in some residual way, the formative -ard remains productive in Late Modern English.

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BOBBASHEELY

JOAN HOUSTON HALL, Dictionary of American Regional English

As a chronicler of the American vernacular, I am often asked whether I have any favorites among the thousands of interesting words I meet. Like a good parent, I suppose I ought not to admit to favoritism. But I do have a special fondness for some words. One in particular stands out, both because I met it early in my career as a lexicographer and because it was something of a puzzle. The word is bobbasheely.
In the questionnaire used in the fieldwork for the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (*DARE* 1985–), one query asks for “expressions to say that people are very friendly toward each other; ‘They’re ———.’” We collected such phrases as *thick as thieves* (or *thick as fleas*, or *thick as hair on a dog*), or *like two peas in a pod*, or *bosom friends*, or *palsy-walsy*, or *they drink through the same quill*. But one informant in Brookeland, Texas, said, “They’re big Bobby Sheelies.” This spelling by the field-worker suggested that there might be an Irish connection. So we checked all our Irish sources, as well as Scots and English dialect sources, to no avail. Further investigation turned up an article about speech in northwestern Arkansas (Carr 1906, 127), where the word *bobashillies* was defined as ‘chums’. Clearly, these were the same word, but where could they have come from?

Serendipitously, we came across the following passage in William Faulkner’s short novel *The Reivers* (1962, 77):

“Maybe what you and Miss Corrie better do is go on back to town now and be ready to meet the others when the train comes.” . . . “How’s that for a idea? Huh, Sugar Boy? You and Sweet Thing bobbasheely on back to the hotel now, and me and Uncle Remus and Lord Fauntleroy will mosey along any time up to midnight.”

*Bobbasheely on back to the hotel?* Here was our word, no longer a noun but a verb! It seemed to have the sense ‘saunter, or move in a friendly fashion’, so it certainly could be related, but which came first? Shortly thereafter I came across the following quotation from a novel set in Alabama, T. S. Stribling’s *The Store* (1932, 16):

“Yes, but I wouldn’t do that,” stammered the merchant. “It cuts a man off from the society of decent men and women. It’s social suicide even to vote the Republican ticket here in Florence, much less bobbashiely with niggers!”

Again it was a verb, and again it had to do with associating in a friendly manner. At this point we had citations from Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama—clearly a regional distribution. But it was not until we happened on a glossary of Mississippi speech (Shands 1893, 19) that we had a clue as to the origin of the forms: in this source the headword *barbashela* was said to have been borrowed from Choctaw and to signify ‘friend’.

Fortunately, the libraries at the University of Wisconsin–Madison have an amazingly diverse collection of materials, including a glossary of Choctaw. So what was left was to search through this source for anything that looked possible as an etymon. Nothing in the Bs was a likely candidate. By luck, my eye ultimately hit on the form *itibapishili*, which was glossed as ‘my brother, with whom I was suckled’. Here it was! The source of all of our *bobbasheely*
forms. So we were able with some confidence to enter bobbasheely as a noun, defined as ‘a very close friend’, and bobbasheely as a verb, defined as ‘to saunter, sashay, move in a friendly fashion; to associate with socially’.

But that’s not the end. Very shortly before volume 1 of DARE was to be sent to press, chief editor Fred Cassidy had a phone call from a Chicago woman who was doing some genealogical research. She was the great-great-great-great-granddaughter of a Scotsman who had founded Londonderry, New Hampshire. He, in turn, had a great-grandson who, after graduating from Dartmouth College, was appointed by Thomas Jefferson as agent to the Choctaws in Mississippi Territory, for the period 1802 through 1813. He and two other exiled easterners became very good friends and determined to write a book about Choctaw culture. Those plans went awry when one of the three became involved in the trial of Aaron Burr, who had been captured in Choctaw territory. The three men remained friends, however, and the Chicago woman was reading their correspondence some 170 years later. She noticed that in one letter the writer signed off with “Yours sincerely.” The next letter was signed “An affectionate friend.” But the third ended with “Bobashela.” And that’s why the Chicago researcher was calling Fred Cassidy: “What on earth does bobashela mean?”

Fortunately for her, we at DARE could tell her. Equally fortunate for us, she provided us with a copy of the letter, which gave us a citation that was 64 years earlier than our previous earliest. We were able to insert the quotation at the last minute, and DARE is the only dictionary I know of that even includes this word. A puzzle solved and a word preserved.

Joan Houston Hall has been with the Dictionary of American Regional English since 1975, becoming associate editor in 1979 and assuming the responsibilities of chief editor following the death of Frederic G. Cassidy in 2000. She has written numerous articles about the progress and processes of DARE and its relationship to other projects of linguistic geography.

WHERE IS “DOWN EAST”?

Bruce Southard, East Carolina University

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of the study of American English is that one never knows when a new usage will be encountered. In 1989, shortly after I moved to North Carolina, while walking near a
construction site near my new home, I was astonished to see a Down East Rent-A-Toilet. I immediately questioned the Yankee business acumen that would lead someone to ship a toilet so far from home, for I had always associated *down east* with New England. Soon, though, I began to encounter *down east* everywhere—from a Down East Cook-Off advertised in our daily newspaper to nightly *down east* weather forecasts on local television stations.

I soon discovered that North Carolina regional writers frequently make use of *down east*. Sonny Williamson, for example, published *The Cousin Shamus Dictionary of Down East Words and Sayings* (1986), though *down east* is not included as one of the dictionary’s entries. The term also occurs frequently in his *Jumpin’ Mullets and Collard Greens* (1989). A locally published history, *Judgment Land: The Story of Salter Path* (Stephens 1984), is replete with references to *down east*: in describing fishing during the 1880s, Alice Gutherie Smith wrote that “in the fall, October or November, a large boat from down east would come up to Salter Path loaded with sweet potatoes and corn” (43). Another person stated that prior to 1918, “Elijah would go down east and buy them big old skiffs. . . . They got them down east at Atlantic [N.C.], I think” (94). From these statements, it is clear that *down east* is not being used in reference to any portion of New England. Furthermore, from Smith’s comments one may infer that the Carolinian *down east* may have had currency at least as early as the 1880s, though the 1984 publication date of *Judgment Land* clearly allows for the possibility that she is using a current term rather than one that might have been used in the 1880s.

How, then, did the term come to North Carolina? Was it borrowed from New England fishermen, or did it arise spontaneously in both New England and North Carolina? In trying to establish when the term *down east* was first used in North Carolina, my research assistants and I have examined state newspapers dating back to the late 1700s, have read numerous collections of family papers from the mid-1800s, have communicated with various historical societies in coastal North Carolina counties, and are now beginning to examine diaries and journals of those associated with fishing and other maritime activities. To date, however, we are unable to document a written occurrence of the term prior to the 1940s. Indeed, we even have difficulty documenting exactly what is meant by *down east*, for within North Carolina the geographic boundaries of *down east* are ill-defined. Writing in the *State Magazine*, Claiborne S. Young (1984, 8) states that “the mainland banks of Core Sound are host to the so-called ‘down east’ communities. I have never been able to discover how the area acquired this particular designation, but those in the know will tell you that this is the one and only place that deserves the title.” Others contend that *down east* refers to the
eastern portion of Carteret County, although the language associated with the “down Easters” is frequently viewed as similar to that of the “hoi toider” dialect found in Ocracoke and other of North Carolina’s Outer Banks. The *North Carolina Business Directory* for 1991–92, however, provides evidence that *down east* is a term claimed by companies throughout the eastern portion of the state, for it occurs in the names of 52 businesses, located in 25 different communities, the westernmost being Raleigh.

With one exception, dictionaries give no hint that this North Carolinian *down east* even exists, for they identify *down east* (also spelled *down East*, *down-east*, and *Down East*) as being located in northeastern New England. Some note that the term applies especially to Maine, and a few include parts of the Maritime Provinces of Canada. The two major historical dictionaries of American English provide instances of the most common treatment of *down east*. *A Dictionary of American English* (1938–44) labels the term a colloquialism and cites usages dating back to the mid-1820s. *A Dictionary of Americanisms* (1951) gives a comparable history of the term but defines it by reference to a 1945 citation as “a general term for Maine and the Maritime Provinces of Canada. People from these parts ‘go up’ to Boston and return ‘down home.’ A ‘down-easter’ may be either a person or a vessel hailing from that region.”

Of the 30 or so dictionaries that I have examined, only one cites the term in reference to North Carolina—the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (*DARE* 1985–). Yet the geographic association of *down east* with New England is apparently so strong as to influence the definition of the term in *DARE*. As a noun, *DARE* defines *down East* solely in terms of New England and the Canadian Maritime Provinces. As an adverbial phrase, however, *DARE* gives the definition of ‘in or to the east’, providing the following 1966 citation from the *Carteret County (N.C.) News-Times*: “Electric service down east will be interrupted.” Clearly, this is a reference to a geographic area, and not simply a direction. *Down Easter* is also defined by *DARE* as ‘someone who lives east of the speaker’s town of residence’, a definition based upon a response to the *DARE* questionnaire from a female informant living in Beaufort, North Carolina, who was describing those living in eastern Carteret County.

My chance encounter with the Down East Rent-A-Toilet eventually led me not only to increase my knowledge of the history of eastern North Carolina but also to examine fascinating material concerning boat-building practices and associated maritime activities. I now strongly suspect linkages, including common dialect features, among various seaboard communities extending from New England to the Carolinas. This is an area for further research. My investigation into the history of *down east* has also
convinced me that, even in this day of computer databases that allow near-instantaneous analyses of millions of words, nothing can yet replace the time-consuming manual search of those numerous historical documents that contain our earliest records of language.

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**WIDENING THE LENS OF OBSERVATION**

**THE FORMATION OF AMERICAN ENGLISH**

MICHAEL B. MONTGOMERY, University of South Carolina

The American colonial period remains the crucial frontier in the study of American English. Despite recent interest in text-based sociohistorical linguistics and despite the fact that the period represents an important testing ground for many issues in language contact, little more is understood today about the character or formation of eighteenth-century American English than 40 years ago. Virtually no work has appeared in this or any other professional journal on the subject in recent decades.

This situation has come about, more than anything else, because preoccupation with recorded speech has led to neglect of written texts and to inexperience in interpreting them. As long ago as the 1920s, Hans Kurath, director of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, posited that interviews with older, less-traveled speakers in the Atlantic states would serve as the best basis for approximating American English of the formative period. More recent quantitative research has exploited the tape recorder to sample older speakers in conservative communities, especially to examine morphological features. Using such methodologies, however, internal reconstruction can proceed only so far, certainly no farther back than the mid-nineteenth century. For earlier periods, researchers of
any variety of American English must utilize written material such as commentary from travelers, grammarians, and lexicographers; representations of speech in plays and fiction; and especially manuscripts of various kinds, such as private letters (see Montgomery forthcoming for details).

Among the most important research needs is to document varieties brought by English, Scottish, and Irish emigrants to American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The extent to which these input varieties contributed to social and regional American English is not well understood. The only serious proposals have been made by Kurath (1928, 1949), who posited that settlement and migration patterns can in part account for the form and distribution of modern-day regional American English, and J. L. Dillard (1992), who believed that input varieties were almost entirely leveled in the eighteenth century to a koine and that no significant influence took place. Both formulations are in need of much testing and exploration. To detect and track later developments, the language of the emigration period first must be established from written materials. Few documents lack the standardization of language to merit the scrutiny of linguists, but among those that exhibit vernacular language are the following.

Emigrant letters, written to family or friends in the old country, are especially useful for establishing a baseline to which linguistic atlas data and other data gathered in the twentieth century can be compared. Such personal letters tend to be archived in the British Isles and are not easy to find for the eighteenth century, but their usefulness for linguistic analysis has been amply demonstrated (Montgomery 1995; Giner and Montgomery 1997). Semiliterate business letters from commoners very often turn out to be from emigrants as well. Among Indian traders who corresponded frequently with government officials were the Dubliner George Croghan, who worked on the Pennsylvania frontier from the 1740s through the 1770s, and the Ulsterman George Galphin, who pursued the trade on the South Carolina–Georgia frontier during the same period (Montgomery 1997).

Other documents of interest include (1) journals and accounts produced by scouts, military officers, and other travelers (the most famous and one of the earliest items of this kind is William Byrd’s History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina, 1728–29); (2) municipal and court records, which date for New England from the 1630s and for Virginia from the 1670s (such records were usually produced by a clerk having facility and practice with the written word and perhaps also models to direct him, but in the early period one finds lapses indicating that a clerk is spelling by ear); and (3) church minutes, especially from Baptist churches. For Ten-
nessee these date from as early as 1789. Although minutes also took a standard rhetorical form in reporting the business of a local congregation, in locations where the task fell to a man whose rudimentary literacy was only somewhat superior to that of his fellow congregants, many reflections of speech patterns are to be found.

Manuscripts from the colonial period are useful primarily for researching phonological and morphological features. Their analysis must be supported by reconstruction of colonial speech communities, which were normally quite complex, and by studies detailing the language and dialect contacts in these very fluid communities.

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EPHEMERAL LANGUAGE

MICHAEL ADAMS, Albright College

I grew up in a family ruled by an English professor who expected us to speak and write with impeccable grammar and elevated vocabulary. Our models were the literature that I went on to study in graduate school and that I teach today; if we had any questions, we could turn to a dozen dictionaries, including the Oxford English Dictionary. Whenever we lapsed, we were reminded that standard English comprised more words than we were likely to use and that recourse to low language betrayed an unbecoming emptiness of mind. Experience and study, though, have taught me not only to accept but to admire ephemeral and other supposedly low forms of English.

I do not mean to depreciate the language of Chaucer and DuBois, of Shakespeare and Wheatley; I spend most of my time thinking about it, and I am not above mouthing a medieval roundelay as I drive to work. But however one thinks of learned language, of its aesthetic gloss or Latinate precision, one must admit that most people speak most of the time, and in most venues, language unapproved by teachers and books, and one must admit, too, that they have done so throughout history. The language used
among family and friends has represented a sort of freedom to serf and
slave, has allowed millennia of adolescents to rebel against constituted
authority, and has enabled one lover to groom another with terms of
endearment.

More people use a nonstandard construction like Jealous much? adopted
from the television show Buffy the Vampire Slayer, than have ever used some
terms one finds in dictionaries (concatenate, neonate, utulate). More enjoy
Ned Flanders’s verbal antics on The Simpsons (okelly dokelly, absotively posi
tutely) than appreciate the time-honored majesty of multifarious. Ephemeral
English is the living language, whether or not scholars and teachers ap
prove, the language in which folks construct their everyday lives, the
language of emotion, of work and play. By contrast, much of the standard
vocabulary, rather than living, merely survives.

To prefer whimsy over majesty is a personal and legitimate choice.
Speakers of American English make choices that reflect their language
preferences every day. They have a right to such choices. They better grasp
what they intend to say and the audience to whom they will say it than any
language maven or reference book. Standard American English, a sort of
lingua franca, has its uses, and those who hope to achieve certain social and
economic ends must use it well; but they need not use it on all or even most
occasions. Living American English, with its ephemeral vocabulary and
populist grammar, is more democratic, in terms of both access and effects,
than most American institutions, though some who champion Standard
American English are uncomfortable with that fact.

Most American culture is wonderfully superfluous, and the language
that expresses our experience of it is often wildly creative and relatively
short-lived. In the past few years I have studied restaurant jargon (e.g.,
blender tender ‘server who makes frozen drinks with a blender’ and in the
weeds ‘swamped with work’); terms introduced by Buffy the Vampire Slayer or
associated with it (e.g., Buffyatric ‘an older fan of the show’, diddy ‘sex’, 007
‘debonair, in a stereotypically British manner’, wiggins ‘episode of fear,
overexcitement, anxiety’); and infixing, or the practice of inserting an affix
into a word, as opposed to prefixing or suffixing (e.g., absoschmuckinglylutey,
US-fucking-A Today). I am continually amazed, entertained, and edified by
what I discover in what, for many but not for all, are peripheral regions of
American vocabulary.

Some words introduced in these categories of the American experi
ence may last for centuries, though we cannot predict which ones; others
last only as long as the cultural phenomena that generate them. But they
are all colorful, inventive responses to those phenomena, no less important
because they are the linguistic products of living in a particular place, at a
particular time, doing particular things, the various threads from which our individual, not to mention our cultural, experience is mostly woven. To travel among ephemeral American English and the conversational grammar that accompanies it is simply to participate broadly and deeply in American culture, here and now. The words and linguistic habits one picks up along the way are souvenirs of any one person’s American journey.

Scholars must record and study ephemeral language, because no comprehensive history of American English is possible without accounting for it. We have lost most ephemeral and “low” language of earlier periods in the history of English; still, we write about Middle English, for instance, as though we know the linguistic context sufficiently to explain the language, yet we know neither how most people of the period spoke nor how their speech affected the literate language we study. Today, the boundaries between literate language and ephemeral language are more fluid; the influence is more likely. Even if one or another scholar prefers the language of standard dictionaries to the language of everyday American living, it takes a certain arrogance to assume that studying what one prefers leads finally to the truth about American English, or any other language. The study of ephemeral American English takes an open mind, patience, and wide-ranging interests: one must explore traditional sources of words and grammatical patterns, like books and magazines; but one must look at out-of-the-way magazines, not *Time* or *Newsweek*, as well as television, movies, Web sites, chat rooms and posting boards, and signs—American English wherever it occurs.

My father’s rules for American English reflected the still common attitude that one must prefer either standard American English or ephemeral and “low” American English, when we really should admire (perhaps even use) both the standard and the ephemeral aspects of our language and through language revel democratically in American culture’s inevitable pluralism. We could take ourselves seriously and enjoy ourselves, as though they were the same thing.

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Enthusiasm for the idea of a “standard” language was never entirely discarded in the last century, so descriptions of English were often hampered by the difficulty in identifying just whose language counted as standard English and how that variety differed from the “dialects.” Even observers who should have known better allowed the powerful to appropriate for themselves the idea that even the conventions of written English were their special property. The young and the rude “dropped” letters kept by the old and the cultivated, and they used “slang” or “jargon” far more often than their betters.

In the new millennium, we are getting beyond such nonsense. It now seems obvious that there is far more diversity in the languages of North America than was ever acknowledged in the days when “General American” was everything left over after New England and the Old Confederacy had been subtracted. Two of the great figures in the history of the American Dialect Society—Hans Kurath and Raven I. McDavid, Jr.—made precisely this point in pointing out that “oddities and inconsistencies” are everywhere apparent in language: “This is a simple matter of observation and should surprise no one who is unwilling to forget that all natural languages are historical products developed in the give-and-take between individuals and social groups of a speech community and between speech communities” (1961, 3).

Individuals change their languages throughout their lifetimes; adjusting to differing audiences makes our language different nearly every day from childhood to old age.

Human genius expresses itself in adaptation to new circumstances, and the mostly immigrant population of North America has been (and continues to be) linguistically agile. In the last century, we looked at traffic flows along the early migration routes: the Lincoln Highway, for instance, or the Oregon Trail. The migrants moved mostly from east to west, and we expected the linguistic boundaries to flow parallel to them. But the twentieth century made much more complicated patterns of traffic (and communication) as the upwardly mobile flitted from one suburb to the distant next, and the barriers of race and ethnicity compacted communities that might otherwise have been far less easily discerned.

A population in relentless motion produces patterns of likes and differences that challenge cartography. We can no longer draw lines that make sense on the map of the continent. Most North Americans do not stay
put for long, and they often seek people like themselves at a distance. The vowel of *boil* is heard the same in parts of Queens and in Miami; for Mexican Americans, Albion, Michigan, is a dialect neighbor of Brownsville, Texas.

The language scene is a constant process of becoming, and, fortunately, we have the bandwidth to express it. But first we have to discern it. A good place to begin looking will be the edge cities, the new sites for work and the place where security-guarded buildings become hothouses for innovation and language community. Schools, too, are rich domains for nuanced linguistic adjustment, particularly with the huge numbers of immigrants adding to the mosaic of languages on the land. Malls are the souks of North America, as polyglot as Samarkand in the days of the caravans. Linguistic inquiry should begin in such places.

Desktops also open possibilities for investigating language variety. Speech-recognition software will soon trace the details of diphthongs that flow through cyberspace and telephone circuits. Huge collections of old documents can be ransacked at one’s leisure. Images of manuscripts enhanced from spectra of invisible light make what was mysterious plain. A century ago George Hempl looked at the distribution of familiar linguistic variables—the sibilant consonant in *greasy* and the vowel in *creek*, for instance (see Bailey 1992). Nearly everything about his methodology was wrong, but his results were confirmed by more “scientific” methods later on.

Perhaps we should not be too optimistic—however refined our techniques—about finding something never before imagined. But we should begin by looking. And the place to begin is not in the stolid center but at the vibrant edges of language—among the bilingual, the flouters of convention, the daring, the young—not at the middle of the road, where all the traffic flows, but on the verge, where boundaries form and shift. What a wonderful time to care about language!

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**Dialect Development in Mobile Urban Culture**

Anne Marie Hamilton, *University of Georgia*

Common notions about language and dialect may draw our attention to new phenomena. The notion I hear most regularly is that dialects are
disappearing, the culprit being television. I answer this myth with the argument that we pick up isolated words and phrases from television and little more, because we don’t talk back to the television. But the laymen who have advanced the television theory to me are highly educated. They have observed phenomena and reasoned a cause. These educated speakers move in a mobile urban culture where nonstandard differences are smoothed out. Nonstandard dialect features are not actually disappearing, as research among working-class and lower-middle-class speakers continues to show, but participation by educated speakers in mobile urban culture makes it look to them like dialects are receding.

Nowhere is this phenomenon more noticeable than in El Paso, Texas. Newcomers expect to hear speech features identifying El Pasoans as Texans. Instead, they are struck by the “lack of accent” in El Paso, which has from its beginnings been a mobile urban culture, augmented by rapid expansion following World War II. El Paso gained residents from all over the United States: most were attracted to the warm, dry desert climate for health reasons; a few came to farm and ranch; many were assigned to Fort Bliss Army Base; some who worked for the railroad also settled in El Paso. Each war infused El Paso with new residents. Now corporations attracted by eased trade and manufacturing agreements with Mexico also contribute new residents. El Paso’s educated middle class continues to lack roots in the region. It is difficult to find individuals who have never lived outside the city for a period of years.

This is not to say that educated middle-class El Pasoans do not exhibit regional speech features, just that those features are not so apparent to the casual observer. One such feature is you all. The contracted form representative of East Texas, y’all, is heard less often and is more modern in El Paso among the educated middle class; that is to say, more kids than adults say y’all. Still, you all is a regional form. By studying the educated middle-class speech of El Pasoans, we might predict adoption or loss of speech features among the educated middle class in other more recently mobilized urban regions, such as Atlanta, Georgia, which has been deluged with immigrants from other regions since the 1970s.

As mobile urban culture continues to expand, we will need continually to reexamine what “standard English” consists of. The realization that no one speaks without an accent, not even educated participants in mobile urban culture, will be needed to promote cultural acceptance of speakers from different social classes and immigrant groups.

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**CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON DATA: INTERVIEWS AS SITUATED SPEECH**

**JANET M. FULLER, Southern Illinois University**

Much of the work done today in sociolinguistics and dialectology is based on tape recordings of spoken language. Other branches of linguistics which rely on linguists’ intuitions about how they themselves use language, on written documents, or on responses to questionnaires about language use. Although some researchers have come up with innovative ways of collecting recordings of “natural” language use, much of the data in the field come from interviews. Appropriately, the social identity of the interviewer, relative to the social group of the research participant, has often been incorporated into the analysis of the interview data. However, the speech and discourse patterns of interviewers have only recently been included in the analysis of interview data. It is the perspective of interviews as situated speech that interests me and that I see as a growing factor in research in the field.

We often hear people say, “So-and-so has some really good data!” We all know what they mean: the data illustrate interesting features of the variety being studied and/or include colorful characters who have interesting insights about their own language and community. Similarly, many of us have had the experience of coming away from an interview feeling that we have just collected some really “good”—or really “bad”—data; our data are “good” when our research participants speak to us as we imagine they speak when we’re not around.

Clearly, many researchers in the field are very good at collecting casual, unselfconscious speech; tapes and transcripts from data presented as examples often indicate that the interviewer has developed great rapport with the research participants. In my own research, people have told me personal stories, used their native dialects with me, and invited me to come back next week to talk some more. I used to take this to mean that I was getting data that was the “real stuff,” the in-group speech. But one day,
while transcribing an interview and listening to myself backchannel politely and never once interrupt, it occurred to me that since I don’t talk the way I do with my friends when I’m doing an interview, why should I assume that the research participants do? That doesn’t mean that the data aren’t “good,” but it does mean that the interviews were just that, interviews, with each participant playing an assigned role. For example, when I was collecting data to study Pennsylvania German, I considered an interview successful if the participant did not switch back to English frequently but answered my questions and told stories in Pennsylvania German. However, in my observations of interactions among community members, it became obvious that switching to English was often the norm for in-group conversations. Thus, while my data suit my purposes, they do not necessarily reflect the everyday speech of the research participants.

Over the years, what started out in my mind as two different research questions to ask when looking at data (what are the features of this variety and what is interesting about this discourse?) have become one question: How does the nature of the discourse relate to the features I find in this variety? For me, the interview has changed from method to research topic. As a speech event, the sociolinguistic interview has been underanalyzed, and one of the most exciting developments in the field of late has been the greater attention paid to interview data as situated speech.

What do we have to gain from looking at data in this way? Researchers are already conscious of the impact of their social identity (e.g., their ethnicity, gender, native dialect, and familiarity with the speakers) on their research participants; expanding this awareness to include an assessment of the nature of, and norms for, the interaction can only deepen our understanding of how the research participants speak. A more in-depth examination of interviewer behavior in the data can also shed light on the performance of the research participants.

Currently, I am comparing interview data with tape recordings made by the same research participants in interviews and in conversations with family or friends. I have found that discourse markers (words and phrases such as well, oh, I mean, or y’know) are used at different rates in these two speech settings. For example, y’know is used at a higher rate in the interviews, despite the more formal setting of the interview and the informal connotation of the feature. I believe the frequent use of y’know is brought about by the relationship between the interviewer and the research participant. The interaction is one between strangers, in which the interviewer introduces the topics and the research participants make heavy use of y’know to negotiate common ground. That is, y’know is used to make sure the interviewer understands where the interviewee is “coming from,” as in
(1), where the speaker is trying to characterize the way he talks. In unstructured conversations with close friends or family members, these same speakers seem to assume more shared knowledge and use this discourse marker less frequently.

1. I don’t totally speak in total standard. I do the lazy Midwestern mouth half closed . . . y’know your words get garbled sometimes. [C7a]

In both contexts, research participants use discourse markers (and other features of speech) to create an identity for themselves. This identity relies on the speakers’ perception of their membership in various social groups (e.g., ethnic group, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, etc.) and may be expressed in different ways with different interlocutors. However, intertwined with acting-out aspects of social identity is a speaker’s use of language to convey a perceived role in a speech event. Our job, as analysts of these interactions, is to link the use of specific linguistic features not only to the social identity of speakers but also to the roles they play as conversational interaction unfolds.

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REPRESENTING AMERICAN SPEECH

Barbara Johnstone, Carnegie Mellon University

Sam McCool’s New Pittburghese: How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher (McCool 1982) contains a mishmash of semiphonetic respellings, jokey definitions, and references to Pittsburgh places and products. The entries represent pronunciations that are characteristic of southwestern Pennsylvania (aht ‘out’), pronunciations heard in Pittsburgh but in fact much wider in distribution (arn ‘iron’), pronunciations which are widespread in casual American speech everywhere (at’s ‘that’s’), and pronunciations which are completely standard (bahks ‘box’). The same spelling sometimes represents various sounds (a sounds three different ways in arn, at’s, and Ahia). Of the two grammatical features that are represented in the pages for A and B,
one, positive anymore, is regionally variable among whites in the United States, and the other, ahz ‘I am’, sounds more like rural Southern African American speech than like anything particularly characteristic of Pittsburgh. Some entries appear to make claims about Pittsburghers’ interactional style rather than their pronunciation or grammar (alright is defined as a local reply to How are you?), and others seem to be about local history and taste rather than strictly local vocabulary (babushka, boilermaker). In short, How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher exemplifies a genre of popular dialectology which American Speech has always tried to counteract through reports of objective, nonevaluative dialect research.

Popular representations of dialect are not, however, irrelevant to dialectology. On the contrary, exploring them may be increasingly important. Nonscholarly representations of speech have always, in fact, entered into dialect research. From the beginning, dialectologists have asked their informants questions like “What do you call this?” or “What do people say around here?” The answer to a question like “What do people say around here?” is not an unselfconscious use of local speech but rather a claim about it, which, like all claims, has a strategic purpose. Sam McCool’s choices about what to include in his booklet portray a stereotypical Pittsburgher (white, working-class, probably male, poorly educated but expert about local places and activities). Likewise, the choices dialectologists’ informants make about how to represent the speech of people in their community constitute a claim about what a typical local speaker is like.

Parodies of dialect have also served as data for dialect study. An attempt to contrast the representations in the McCool booklet with the facts about speech in southwestern Pennsylvania was frustrated when we discovered that the McCool booklet was one of the sources for the authoritative accounts of the facts. How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher is cited as evidence in a number of western Pennsylvania entries in the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE 1985–) and is among the sources for a list of local features in one of the few scholarly articles about Pittsburgh speech (McElhinny 1999). (DARE never uses McCool as its only source for an entry, and McElhinny’s list serves as background information, not as the basis for the claims she tests.)

Representations of local speech may enter into sociolinguistic work in more covert ways, too, as researchers decide what to study in the first place. There are, to be sure, systematic ways of eliciting many aspects of a variety, including the dialect atlas questionnaires and the interview techniques pioneered by Labov (1984). But it is impossible to study every detail. The list of features on which we decide to focus is more likely to consist of things
we notice in everyday interactions with the variety than to be the result of comparisons of each sound and each atom of meaning in that variety with those in others. Sociolinguists do not study only features parodied in popular pamphlets. But it is probably not coincidental that the features most often studied (the laxing of /i/ that makes Steelers sound like Stillers in Pittsburgh, for example, or the pronunciation of /ay/ as [a] in the South) are those that appear most frequently in popular representations of the variety. Scholarly descriptions of language, like scholarly descriptions of any other aspect of culture (Van Maanen 1995), are themselves selective representations.

Popular representations of dialect may now be important in new ways, as culture and economy become more global and individuals more mobile. As fewer and fewer people can be said to talk the way they do simply because they grew up in a certain location, how people make strategic choices among identities and ways of sounding is receiving increased attention. To a certain extent, the leveling forces of increased dialect contact, which encourage people to sound more like people elsewhere, may be counteracted by attempts to cling to local identity by preserving at least one or two features that sound local. Representations of local speech are a key part of this process, because parodies, performances, and other representations are the mechanisms by which people tell each other what sounds local. On Ocracoke Island, North Carolina, for example (Schilling-Estes 1998), people exaggerate the local pronunciation of high tide when they talk to tourists and sociolinguists about their speech, and this feature appears to be preserved even among people who no longer use other local features. Pittsburghers tell each other over and over, in jokebooks and editorial cartoons and on T-shirts and “Pittsburghese” refrigerator magnets, that real Pittsburghers say [a] for /aw/ (e.g., dahntahn ‘downtown’), and it would not be surprising to find that the use of this feature is more strongly linked to a person’s local affiliation than to variables such as occupation or education. Thus, books like How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher may actually be part of the process of linguistic evolution which has for so many years been a concern of American Speech.

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A theme that has run through my research from the start is reflected in the title of my first book, *Conversational Style* (1984). I use this phrase to refer to the many linguistic aspects of how speakers say what they mean, including pacing and pausing, indirectness, tone of voice, intonation, syntactic patterns, genre (tell a story? make a joke? ask a question?), and so on. One feature of conversational style that continues to fascinate me (and, from what they tell me, audiences at my lectures) is pacing and pausing—a seemingly minor element with major consequences.

When two people have different assumptions about how long a pause is “natural” between one speaker’s turn and another’s, conversations between them become unbalanced. The one who is waiting for a longer pause finds it harder to get a turn, because before that length of pause occurs, the other person begins to perceive an uncomfortable silence and rushes to fill it, to save the conversation. The result (especially if the speakers are romantically or maritally involved) can be hurtful and unfair: the one who waits for and never gets the longer pause accuses: “You’re interrupting me,” “You’re self-centered—you only want to hear yourself talk.” The shorter pauser accuses: “You’re withholding,” “You’re hostile,” “You never tell me what’s on your mind,” or even “You have nothing on your mind!” In other words, characteristics of speaking style are interpreted as evidence of character and intentions.

But this is only the tip of the iceberg. Conversational styles are learned growing up, as one learns to talk. So our styles are influenced by the social groupings that determine whom we hear and talk to growing up—all the ethnic, regional, and class distinctions that have so many reverberations in society. So we end up not only accusing, “You interrupt me,” but also generalizing, “Jews (or blacks or Northerners or Anglos or city people) are pushy, loud, and self-centered,” or “Christians (or whites or Midwesterners or Indians or country people) are dull,” or “You can’t tell where they stand.” In countries all over the world, there are speakers from some geographic regions who speak more slowly than those from others. And in every one of those countries that I know about, people from the slower-speaking regions are stereotyped as stupid, and those from the faster-speaking regions are stereotyped as too aggressive.
Differences in conversational style are always relative, not absolute. It’s not a matter of some people being fast talkers and others being slow, but of how relatively fast or slow a speaker is in relation to the others in the same conversation. The same person can be an apparent victim in one conversation and an apparent perpetrator in another.

My colleague Ron Scollon, who has written about these phenomena too (1982), grew up in Detroit; I grew up in Brooklyn, New York. When I talk to Ron, I have to be careful to give him what seems to me extra time to respond; otherwise, I inadvertently interrupt him. Ron’s wife, Suzie, is Hawaiian of Chinese descent, and she expects longer pauses than he does. So she accuses him of interrupting, of not giving her a chance to answer his question before he asks another. Ron and Suzie worked among Athabaskan Indians in Alaska (Scollon and Scollon 1981). When Suzie talked to Athabaskans, she became the conversational steamroller, as Athabaskans are comfortable with longer silences than she could tolerate.

But the story doesn’t end there. The Scollons invited me to a workshop in Alaska, after which they sent me on a bush flight to an Athabaskan village, Fort Yukon, just inside the Arctic Circle. They were curious how someone who thinks friendly verbosity is next to godliness would fare as a stranger in a setting where no one talks to people they don’t know. Ron later assigned my book Conversational Style (1984) to students at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and asked them on a midterm exam, “Deborah Tannen spent a day in Fort Yukon. What do you think she experienced there?” Most students answered correctly that I was unnerved when no one would talk to me. (After several hours of failed attempts to spark conversations, I broke down and called the local American missionaries.) But a student who came from the northernmost village in the Arctic Circle wrote, “People in Fort Yukon talk so fast, she probably fit right in.”

In books, articles, and lectures, I have tried to show that negative impressions often result from differences in conversational style—differences among women and men; Easterners, Southerners, and Northerners; people of different ethnicity, class, and age. But again and again I come up against some people’s resistance to the idea that there are different ways of doing things that are equally valid. A friend, for example, tried to explain to a European that when Americans ask personal questions of new acquaintances, they are trying to show interest and establish rapport. The European thought he knew what was really going on and kept repeating, “The point is, Americans are rude.” Similarly, I had a student from Texas who sent her mother a tape of an interview in which I explained about conversational style. Her mother didn’t like it at all; she wrote to her daughter, “The one thing that was never brought out [was that] not speaking out or interrupting is not so much culture as it is manners.”
Years ago I was invited to talk about New York City conversational style on a Voice of America radio show hosted by Arlene Francis. I explained that people who have what I call a “high-involvement” style often talk along with others, not to interrupt but to show enthusiastic listenership. If an interruption results, it is created by the speaker who stopped instead of keeping right on talking. But Francis could not give up the idea that interruption is one person’s doing, and it’s wrong. She said, “It’s just not polite. There are no manners considered here, are there?” In attempting to explain that “politeness” is culturally relative, I began, “You may not think it’s polite . . .” She interrupted to say, “I don’t. I absolutely don’t,” and tried to get me to talk about New York accents. When the show ended, Francis warned her millions of listeners, “If you talk like that, I’ll be very angry!”

Nonetheless I remain convinced that understanding conversational style is crucial not only for linguists who want to know how meaning is created and communicated in conversation but also for the wider reading public, to help engender the respect for diversity that is one of the greatest challenges we face as a society.

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DIALECTS ARE EQUALLY VALID

MICHAEL D. LINN, University of Minnesota, Duluth

Two corollaries are related to the central proposition that all dialects are equally valid. The first corollary is that every dialect carries some type of prestige for its speakers and that its speakers consider it prestigious. The second corollary is that dialects themselves do not cause educational problems; other, more important factors are involved.

Among most teachers, as among college-educated people in general, there is a tendency to value the speech of the college-educated and to devalue the speech of the less well-educated. Much of this tendency is the result of thinking that everyone shares our set of values. In reality, we like being professors and construction workers like being construction work-
ers, so we talk like professors and construction workers talk like construction workers. Thus, if we want to evaluate attitudes toward dialects, we need to find out what the speakers themselves feel and not just select a set of features that are of interest to us. In examining the different attitudes of white and black, adolescent and preadolescent, males and females toward white male middle-class speech and inner-city black male speech, my collaborators and I found that white middle-class speech is judged the educated speech, the speech of the affluent, “good English.” This is to be expected in a school setting. However, the inner-city speech also had prestige. It was viewed as positive by both male and female, adolescent and preadolescent, whites and blacks, in that it was viewed as the speech of the athlete, the brave, and the “good fighter.” These roles are all highly valued by both white and African American adolescent and preadolescent males and females. In addition, African Americans considered inner-city speech the speech appropriate for social interaction among friends. This attitude certainly reflects the general attitude in society that male athletes are brave and tough but are not good students. It is even reflected on Sunday afternoon after football games. Generally, the quarterback, who is viewed as the team leader, speaks a standard or more nearly standard English than the interior linemen, who are viewed as the rough-and-tough fighters who need the courage “to stick it to the opponents.” In addition, high-school athletes speak a variety of nonstandard dialect to show their masculine prowess, while the bright male student with standard English is often treated as and considered less masculine and brave. While all of this might seem self-evident to the dialectologist, if we are to work toward a more tolerant society, we need to make the public more conscious that all dialects have prestige and value for the speakers who use them.

The second issue is the misconception that nonstandard dialects are the cause of school problems and thus have to be eliminated. Certainly, the dialect research on the Iron Range of Minnesota disproves this idea.

The Iron Range has a noticeable nonstandard variety of English in both phonology and syntax and, in addition, has its own special vocabulary. It has been consistently viewed as a highly stigmatized dialect by the rest of Minnesota, with teachers ruthlessly, but unsuccessfully, trying to eradicate it. Until the mid-1970s, students from the Iron Range had to pass a speech clinician’s test or take speech correction before they could become certified as teachers. Yet the region has consistently led the state of Minnesota in academic achievement. Not only has the Iron Range produced high test scores, but students from there have achieved economically successful careers. The town where I have done most of my research has never had more than 200 students in its high school, but it has had a medical doctor
in every class since 1912. In addition, graduates have included several
professors and lawyers and a great many business leaders, including a vice
president of Pepsi-Cola.

The development of the dialect on the Iron Range had much in
common with that of other nonstandard dialects. At the time of its origin,
large numbers of non-English-speaking immigrants were imported from
Europe to work in the mines, but unlike most of the United States, the
Range had no base of English-speaking Americans at the time. Immigrants
were housed in segregated locations around the mines and had little
contact with native English speakers, who were salaried, white-collar work-
ers and were housed in nicer locations. Most miners married within their
own language group and used their native language at home. Yet the
miners had to learn an English as a common language for work or for
conducting business in common. But it was not native American English,
because there was little contact with native English speakers.

Because most adults spoke their native language at home, the children
learned it first, but they needed to create a common language. The process
had much in common with creolization in that children taught each other.
As one college-educated Finnish informant said with a heavy Range accent,
“I learned my English from the Swedish kids three blocks over.” This
original dialect has modified little over time. It is still the dominant dialect
used on the Range and is still often unintelligible to outsiders.

Yet, speaking this dialect, the Rangers have had outstanding school
success. What accounts for this success? While it cannot be definitely
determined, at least two factors distinguish the Iron Range of Minnesota
from many other nonstandard dialect areas. From the beginning, the
children on the Iron Range had high aspirations for upward mobility and
the possibility of achieving their dreams of success. Very soon they had
models of success that had come from their community, so they believed
they too could achieve their goals. Second, from the beginning the Iron
Range had excellent schools which had tremendous financial support from
the mines. The first union contracts included clauses that forced the mines
to contribute money to the schools. Teachers were admired and looked up
to by the community, as they were the educated elite.

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dialect of the Iron Range of northern Minnesota.
The belief that some varieties of a language are not as good as others runs so deep that one might say it is the major preoccupation of Americans with their language. It is a belief nearly universally attached to minorities, rural people, and the less well-educated, and it extends even to well-educated speakers of some regional varieties. Evidence for this belief comes from what real people, not professional linguists, believe about language variety. Consider what one Michigan speaker has to say about the South:

[mimics Southern speech] As y’all know, I came up from Texas when I was about twenty-one. And I talked like this. Probably not so bad, but I talked like this; you know I said thiyus ['this'] and thayut ['that'] and all those things. And I had to learn reeeeal [elongated vowel] fast how to talk like a Northerner. 'Cause if I talked like this people’d think I’m the dumbest shit around.

Next, consider New York City, which fares no better, even in self-evaluation, as shown in one example collected by William Labov in the mid-1960s:

Bill’s college alumni group—we have a party once a month in Philadelphia. Well, now I know them about two years and every time we’re there—at a wedding, at a party, a shower—they say, if someone new is in the group: “Listen to Jo Ann talk!” I sit there and I babble on, and they say “Doesn’t she have a ridiculous accent!” and “It’s so New Yorkerish and all!”

I have bolstered these informal assessments with quantitative studies. In one, nearly 150 people from southeastern Michigan (of European American ethnicity, of both sexes, and of all ages and social classes) rated (on a scale of 1 to 10) the degree of “correctness” of English spoken in the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and New York City. Figure 1 shows the average scores of this task.

These responses immediately confirm what every American knows—the least correct English is spoken in the South and New York City (and nearby New Jersey). Michiganders give their home state a ranking in the 8 range, the only area so rewarded. They believe that they do not speak a dialect at all. Another task asks the same Michiganders to draw on a blank map of the United States where they think the various dialect areas of the United States are and label them.
From such hand-drawn maps is derived the generalized map in figure 2. This map shows not only where Michigan respondents draw lines for the dialect areas of the United States but also how many respondents drew a boundary around each one. Note the percentage of Michigan respondents who drew a South—94% (138/147). Even the home area is registered as a separate speech region by only 61% (90/147). The third most frequently drawn area is, not surprisingly, the area which contains New York City (54%, 80/147).

These Michiganders seem, therefore, to hear dialect differences on the basis of their evaluation of the correctness of areas. The linguistic South, the area perceived most consistently as incorrect, quite simply exists as a linguistic area for these respondents more than any other area.

Michiganders are not unique; in other areas where this work has been done, a South is always drawn by the highest percentage of respondents—South Carolina 94%, New York City 92%, western New York 100%, southern Indiana 86%, Oregon 92%, and Hawaii 94%. Also important to these respondents is the other place where they believe bad English is spoken. A Northeast (a small area with a focus in New York City) or New York City itself figures very high in the percentages—South Carolina 46%, New York
City itself 64%, western New York 45%, southern Indiana 51%, Oregon 75%, and Hawaii 57%, nearly all of these second-place scores (after the South).

What about a quantitative analysis of Southerners’ views of the correctness issue? In ratings by 36 Auburn University students (principally from Alabama with a few from Georgia and South Carolina), New York City fares even worse than in the Michigan ratings; it is the only area to fall in the 3 range. Other ratings for correctness, however, show none of the strength and certainty of the Michigan opinions. Michigan respondents consider their speech the best and steadily assign lower ratings the farther south a state is. Southerners pretty clearly suffer from what linguists would call linguistic insecurity. They do not rate themselves at the top of the heap, as Michiganders do, and they appear to associate “correct English” with some official or national status (Washington, D.C.).
If Southerners don’t find their own speech correct, can they find anything redeeming about it? Just as Michiganders found their variety “most correct” (i.e., 8), these principally Alabama students find theirs “most pleasant” (also 8). As one moves north, a steady disapproval of the “friendly” aspects of speech (its “solidarity” aspects) emerges, leaving Michigan part of a pretty inhospitable northern area, itself a 4. There is one thing, however, that Michiganders and Alabamians agree on. New York City (and New Jersey) are at the bottom of the scale for both “correctness” and “pleasantness.”

In summary, respondents from all over the United States agree that some regions speak better English than others, and they do not hesitate to indicate that New York City and the South are on the bottom of that pile, but prejudiced-against groups themselves seem to rate their varieties high on solidarity factors.

I believe these studies of perception have contributed not only to a better understanding of our linguistic attitudes but also to the cognitive maps real people have of linguistic facts. Coupled with other perceptual tests (ordinary speakers’ abilities to identify and imitate other varieties and their awareness of different specific aspects of linguistic differentiation), linguistic folk belief is also a big player in our general understanding of linguistic variation and change in America and is likely to become more important as globalization makes the drawing of both geographic and cognitive maps more challenging.

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RICHLY QUALITATIVE AND RIGOROUSLY QUANTITATIVE

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In 1996, with Tim Frazer, we published an article in which we mapped the geographic boundaries of need + V-en (The car needs washed, The shirts need ironed; see Frazer, Murray, and Simon 1996) in American English. At the
time, we conceived of our investigation as a contribution to the ongoing
discussion concerning the existence of a distinct Midland dialect in the
United States. In the process of data collection, we ended up with provoc-
tive material on two related constructions, want + V-en (The baby wants picked
up, The cat wants fed) and like + V-en (The dog likes petted, Babies like cuddled)
and decided our investigation must include these (Murray and Simon
1999, 2000). During this same period, we also looked at the regional
variation in the lexicalized pronunciation of suite ‘set of furniture’, /swit/
versus /sut/ (Simon and Murray 1999).

We did not realize that what had begun as a set of more or less
conventional studies in regional dialectology would have far-reaching im-
plications for dialectological and sociolinguistic methodology, for approaches
to the study of American English, and for general linguistic theory. Because
of the ways we collected and analyzed our data, we found ourselves calling
into question established wisdom regarding regional and social dialect
study—questions regarding the significance and use of infrequently occurring forms, regarding contextual and qualitative data, regarding dialect
boundaries, and regarding the intersection of syntax, semantics, and prag-
matics.

By relying on approaches drawn from several subfields of linguistics—
interactional sociolinguistics, sociohistorical linguistics, and formal linguis-
tic analysis—as well as conventional dialectology, we have been able to
collect different kinds of relevant data, and we have been able to take full
account of those kinds of data. For instance, we examined sources for
historical background in conjunction with corpus analysis for those historical periods. We conducted written survey questionnaires and telephone
surveys along with posting open-ended questions to targeted listservs and
bulletin boards. We applied formal and functional linguistic analyses and
then used them to cast light on respondents’ own understandings of the
item. And we took respondents’ expressed perceptions and attitudes about
language use as a central point of use. We found that this interdisciplinary
approach to collection and analysis is both richly qualitative and rigorously
quantitative. And we found that by accounting for all the information
collected, we were coherently and systematically addressing important,
broad theoretical issues in dialectology, sociolinguistics, and general lin-
guistics.

We have discussed elsewhere at some length how to investigate dialect
using combined methodologies (Simon and Murray 1999). Here we want
to say that our work has shown how useful it can be to have complementary
sets of data, which, besides validating one another, often produce a far
more complex regional and social picture of the feature being studied than
could be obtained through any one of the sets of data alone. Conventional sorts of dialect surveys and questionnaires certainly have their place in the collection of brief, on-task answers. What we are sure of, though, is that they are not enough and that they are not necessarily the heart of the matter. Locating language study within the specific contexts of language use is crucial to adequate and accurate description and to useful theorizing.

Conventional dialectology and sociolinguistics are wary of phenomena that are not quantitatively significant, but perhaps frequency of occurrence is, at least partly, a false problem. Why not reconceive existing paradigms to accommodate data on variables not quantifiable in the traditional way? It seems clear to us that if most, if not quite all, differences in form are referentially meaningful, the nature of sociolinguistic investigation should be modified. Collecting and analyzing extended interviews, ethnographic participant observation, oral histories, and the like will open dialect study to more types of linguistic phenomena and the specific contexts in which they occur, which is critical to teasing out the implications of specific studies beyond simple description.

In our work, for example, electronic contacts were used as a deliberate and systematic way to collect contextualized patterns of language use. We posted open-ended questions on targeted listservs and bulletin boards, thus reaching a large number of people with specific interests and training and the ability to view language qua language. Free of the highly structured frames of a written or telephone survey, our respondents, should they choose to do so, were able to use e-mail ethnographically, and, without prompting, almost all of them did. They filled the blank screen with descriptions of settings and personal relations and motivations; they identified attitudes and fears and secret hopes. We hadn’t counted on e-mail itself changing the shape of our investigation, but it did. As a communicative form, e-mail encouraged both immediacy and expansiveness. The informality and immediacy of e-mail catalyzed respondents to move beyond the short, on-task answers. Respondents talked to us, offering insights into the complicated relationship between social values and social identity, on the one hand, and grammatical constructions that are variously perceived as marked (sometimes even stigmatized) or unmarked (sometimes even transparent), on the other. The format allowed or encouraged respondents to converse, to construct monologues, and to embed a yes or no in autobiographical sketches and memoiristic narratives that locate the occurrence of an item in its social milieu.

As researchers, we respected each response as a whole, as complex, situated discourse, and it was in the fullness of the response that we saw how language user, language use, and language form intersect in specific ways.
By accepting each entire response of a self-aware, language-focused audience, we more accurately problematized what would otherwise be treated as surface variation dependent on region or social variable. For instance, in the following responses about variation in the pronunciation of *suite* ‘set of furniture’, the language users construct class out of linguistic materials and superimpose the definition within specific, localized contexts. In the first example, the respondent distinguishes both socioeconomic benchmarks and covert prestige; in the second, a Boston native documents the hegemonic function of linguistic derision.

Bedroom suite was a /sut/ in our family language. I vaguely recall some discussion of the two pronunciations when we acquired a hand-me-down bedroom suite from some neighbors who could afford new furniture. . . . I think it was our neighbors, who had more money, who said /swit/, so I assumed that there was a socioeconomic factor involved, but that the high-falutin pronunciation was a hypercorrection.

I . . . remember hearing this [/sut/] in the Fifties in Boston but when a person used it people laughed derisively. Saying “suit” rather than “suite” meant that the person was stupid and ill-educated. It was the kind of thing Art Carney playing Norton to Jackie Gleason’s Ralph Cramden would say. The response would be, “It’s not ‘suit,’ stupid. A ‘suit’ is something you wear. It’s ‘suite.’”

For our studies, we also drew from sociohistorical linguistics in a way that allowed using purely synchronic data to hypothesize about the earliest history of English dialects that had significant effects on the development of American English. Regarding the vitality of *need + V-en*, *want + V-en*, and *like + V-en*, for instance, we established that the constructions are well rooted in the regions in which they are used and that their frequently being perceived as unmarked and, often, even standardized constructions has lent not just endurance but vigor to their lives in American English. By interleaving contemporary narratives with historical, we were able to theorize about markedness and transparency and the processes of standardization. The wealth and complexity of our information also allowed exploration of the contrast between linguistic forms and perceived social valuations. *Need + V-en*, *want + V-en*, and *like + V-en* are all used by speakers of every socioeconomic class and in a wide variety of spoken and written styles. A broad cross section of those speakers (including many who are aware of that use) perceive the constructions not as standard but as regional, nonstandard, provincial, or even grammatically wrong. The resulting discussion led to our being able to raise theoretical questions regarding social processes for which current sociolinguistic theory seems to have no answer.
We have also concluded that the scope of dialect study should include the important and often subtle intersection between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics—intersections revealing specifics regarding contexts of use. The various syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic parameters of the linguistic focus need to be worked out in great detail, and here again, perhaps the method for the most thorough and complete collection is both to use survey questionnaires and to provide a format that explicitly allows narrative ethnographic contribution. Indeed, we are unsure how one can accurately account for the intersection of social meaning and social function without knowing the specific contexts of use. A full and accurate dialect description requires the integration of this type of linguistic analysis.

Recently, scholars from a variety of related disciplines have called for greater use of research, theory, and methodologies from related fields. The results of our approach combining dialectology, sociolinguistics, and discourse studies have highlighted the complex relations between marked linguistic items, social contexts of use, and interactional patterns, and thus they allow dialect studies to have applications beyond the field itself.

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ENGLISH . . . AND THEM! FORM AND FUNCTION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Linguists and dialectologists often study unusual linguistic features found in one community or another. But because such forms are typically studied in isolation, they do not always provide unambiguous evidence for deciding
whether the forms are the result of innovation or retention, and in the latter case where the forms might have come from.

Consider the use of *dem* (or *them*) after a noun:

1. Da’s where Viola dem live. [Rickford 1986, 46]

Rickford (1986, 46) suggests that this construction denotes “a specific entity (usually a person) which is referred to in association with unspecified others”—hence his term “associative” plural.

To date, however, it has been reported only in Gullah, a variety of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) spoken on the Sea Islands, off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. Rickford (1986, 47) argues that it represents the residue of a system that speakers of other ethnic backgrounds in the United States did not participate in, since, as he points out, there were no reports of its use among “white Southerners.” Indeed, Rickford (1986, 47) suggests that the form has “clear creole roots,” and Mufwene (1998, 73) reports that the associative plural is a feature which AAVE “shares with creoles rather than other varieties of English.”

However, examination of Feagin’s (1979, 331) data from White Alabama English, reveals:

2. An’ my mother and ’em had done got to the house.

This suggests that the associative plural is not entirely restricted to AAVE. However, the associative plural may still be an innovation in AAVE, because it may be a construction through which AAVE has influenced Southern speech (see G. Bailey, pers. com.; cited in Mufwene 1998, 73 n. 10).

One of the most important tasks in disentangling form, function, and origin is to compare the same feature in related varieties, a method well known in historical linguistics. This essay illustrates the value of such methodology by providing a cross-variety comparison of the associative plural in a number of varieties of English. Three are in North America: Gullah (GUL), the variety where the associative plural has been attested,¹ and North Preston (NPR) and Guysborough Enclave (GYE) in Nova Scotia (see Poplack and Tagliamonte forthcoming). The other three varieties are in Britain: York (YRK), a city in northeastern England (Tagliamonte 1998); Wheatley Hill (WHL), a northern mining village; and Buckie (BCK), a fishing town on the northeastern coast of Scotland (Smith and Tagliamonte 1998).

All six varieties use the associative plural *an’ them*, as in (3). Figure 1 displays the distribution of type by community.
3. a. My father an’ them, they were just deck hands. [BCK]
   b. I thought it was Ernie an’ them there. [WHL]
   c. Art-Jackson an’ them went to see the cops. [GYE]
   d. Cassie an’ them eats too much cheese. [NPR]
   e. Jean used to be over here with Florence an’ dem. [GUL]

In some of the varieties an’ them occurs with all:

4. a. Peter an’ all them, they did na bother. [BCK]
   b. Remember Aunt-Maggie and Stella an’ all them. [GYE]
   c. Vera an’ all them was in the choir. [NPR]
   d. There was Cliff-Richard an’ all them. [YRK]

However, Gullah is the only variety that shows a large portion of dem without an’, although a very small proportion of them alone is found in North Preston, too.

5. a. Esther them used to travel with them girls. [NPR]
   b. I bin a work down deh with Tommy dem. [GUL]
      ‘I have been working down there with Tommy and them.’

In comparisons of linguistic form across varieties, its form and frequency provide only one perspective. Linguistic distribution and condi-
tioning contribute crucial information about function. For example, the associative plural is restricted to human subjects (Mufwene 1998, 79). Further, its “distinctive character” is revealed in “decreolized” varieties, where it shows up with proper names (Rickford 1986, 46).

The vast majority, if not the entire cohort of forms, in all six of the varieties considered here occur either with proper nouns, as in (6), or with nouns denoting family members, as in (7):

6. a. Catherine an’ them come through. [BCK]
   b. Bernice an’ them used to play the violin. [GYE]
   c. The likes of Ross Conley an’ them. [WHL]
7. a. My mam an’ them have waited for thirty-one years. [BCK]
   b. Like my mother-in-law dem say deh were like de first. [GUL]
   c. Papa an’ them were in town on a Saturday. [NPR]

In sum, these results demonstrate that the form an’ dem is not restricted to Gullah or AAVE or even creoles. It is also found in five additional North American and British varieties and undoubtedly in others. Moreover, the distributional patterns reported for the associative plural an’ dem in the literature appear to constrain its use: (1) all the varieties use the variant with all, and (2) an’ dem is systematically constrained by the nature of the head NP, where it is virtually restricted for use with proper human names. Such parallelism suggests that an’ dem follows the same basic system across the board. However, Gullah and, to a lesser extent, North Preston are distinctive in having the form with dem alone, suggesting (partial) restructuring away from the rest.

The contribution of the comparative method is to reveal not only the similarities between varieties but also the differences. Moreover, it provides the evidence for determining which is which. In this instance, the comparative method establishes a plausible British source for a feature, the associative plural, that has until now been associated with creoles and/or creolization.

NOTE

1. These data, collected by Salikoko Mufwene, come from John’s Island, Georgia. I would like to express my appreciation for the use of these materials.

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PLUS ÇA CHANGE: THE STATE OF STUDIES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH

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It has been said that we know more about African American Vernacular English (AAVE) than about any other dialect of English. The volume of literature that has appeared on this variety over the last four decades has been quite substantial. Yet even a cursory examination of this voluminous research reveals a continuing focus on the same issues, as well as some alarming gaps and omissions. Moreover, despite the repeated examination of the same questions, there continues to be disagreement among scholars.

The vast majority of the literature on AAVE is concerned with issues that are primarily linguistic in character—issues concerning its sources and genesis and those concerning its contemporary relationship to other dialects of English. As far as history is concerned, we have examined ad nauseam the question of the creole versus English dialectal origin of the dialect. It is now some 75 years since Krapp first expressed the view that AAVE was purely English-dialectal in character, denying any contribution on the part of Africans to the shaping of this variety. Since then, other scholars have defended the view that AAVE descended from an earlier creole, similar to Gullah, that was created by Africans and widely used in the plantation South. Others have adopted various compromises between the two views. But the reconciliation that seemed to have been reached between the two camps in the early 1980s has apparently dissipated. The pendulum has recently swung in favor of the dialectologist position, but there is still strong disagreement over the part that Africans played in the development of the variety. No one can reasonably deny that AAVE is an English dialect, with its roots firmly in (British) English dialectal sources—the same sources that yielded Southern White Vernacular English in its various forms.

Yet it is clear that we are dealing with multiple sources whose effects varied according to differences in the nature of the contact settings, their demographics, and the types of social interaction among the groups in-
volved. It should also be clear that for many AAVE features, we are dealing with the effects of multiple causation, involving externally and internally motivated change, leveling, and processes of simplification and restructuring. An understanding of these can come only from a thorough investigation of the sociohistorical contexts of the emergence and development of AAVE. However, this aspect of the genesis of AAVE in all its forms remains relatively unexplored. This is unfortunate because, as every student of language history knows, the sociolinguistic history of a community, and not linguistic factors, is the primary influence on how languages originate, change, and develop. There is clearly need for further exploration of the sociohistorical background of AAVE within the framework of contact linguistics so as to offset the traditional reliance on purely linguistic argumentation in debates over issues of origin.

With regard to the contemporary character and status of AAVE, we have learned a great deal about variation in the speech of African Americans, thanks to a wealth of variationist sociolinguistic studies. These in turn have shed light on several aspects of AAVE grammar and its relationship to other dialects of American English. But here again the focus has been on a rather narrow range of phenomena, including forms of the verb *to be*, negation, tense marking, and so on—generally the same features that figure in the debate over AAVE origins. Many components of AAVE grammar, such as habitual *be*, perfect *done*, and remote perfect *BEEN*, not to mention most features of sentence structure, remain relatively untouched by variationist analysis. Moreover, with the exception of the work of scholars like Lisa Green (1993), there have been few attempts to apply current models of syntax to the formal description of AAVE. Curiously, these two strands of research, the quantitative and the formal descriptive, remain quite independent of each other, and one senses a certain friction between scholars in the two areas.

Just as unfortunate, there are serious gaps in our understanding of the social and cultural correlates of variation in African American speech. While variationist studies have explored the correlations between specific linguistic features and social categories such as class, gender, and age, it comes as a shock to find that there has been no comprehensive sociolinguistic study of any African American speech community since Wolfram’s (1969) sampling of Detroit residents more than 30 years ago. Even this study focused on class differentiation of language use, to the total exclusion of stylistic variation. In general, narrowness of focus has resulted in a poor understanding of how choices of language within the African American community function both as markers of group identity and group values.
and as communicative strategies to be manipulated for transactional ends in conversation. With good reason, Morgan (1994, 121) criticizes correlational studies of African American speech for failing to reveal the norms and values that underlie choices within the community. She is particularly hard on these approaches for assuming that the standard variety always has privileged status as the norm against which vernacular usage must be judged. Far from being a mere reflection of poverty and lack of privilege, AAVE signals community membership and solidarity across class lines and functions as a badge of resistance to assimilation to the mainstream culture. The theme of covert prestige attached to vernaculars as symbols of community loyalty is explored for far-flung communities all over the world. Unfortunately, there has been little exploration of the covert prestige of the vernacular in African American communities.

But by far the greatest gap in our knowledge of African American speech involves everyday interactions. It is regrettable that the term *sociolinguistics*, when applied to AAVE, has become almost synonymous with variationist studies, to the near exclusion of situated language use, conversational norms, communicative strategies, genres of talk, and the like. There has, of course, been some work in this direction, notably by Geneva Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (1972), Thomas Kochman (1981), Smitherman (1986), and Marcyliena Morgan (1994). But on the whole, our understanding of actual language in use remains impoverished. It is to be hoped that more attention will be paid to all of these neglected areas of African American English studies in the future. But for the moment, we must acknowledge that, in AAVE studies over the last several decades, the more the field has changed, *plus c’est la même chose*.

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In recent years, the study of American dialects has increasingly drawn the interest of sociolinguists, especially those working in the Labovian paradigm. As one of these sociolinguists, I hope it is not too presumptuous to suggest that this trend has rejuvenated American dialectology by attracting new scholars to the field and, more importantly, by expanding the range of issues studied and the methods used to explore them. One significant consequence of this development has been a shift in focus from studying the preservation of older linguistic features (e.g., regional vocabulary items like \textit{mosquito hawk} and \textit{darning needle} as words for ‘dragonfly’) to studying the spread of innovative features (e.g., sound changes like the “\textit{cot}/\textit{caught} merger”). This emphasis on “language change in progress” has opened new avenues of research that have increased our understanding of the structure and use of American English as well as of language more generally. By discussing my own experience studying a well-known change in progress, I hope to illustrate some of the opportunities to be found along these new avenues of research.

Much of my research has investigated a series of sound changes known as the Northern Cities Shift (NCS). The NCS involves the movement of six vowels (/I, E, √, O, A, ã/) and is heard across the Northern dialect region from western New England to the Dakotas (for details see Gordon 2000, forthcoming). The NCS has been made familiar to most students of American English through the work of William Labov. The first detailed discussion of the NCS appeared in Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner (1972), and Labov’s research has continued to examine these changes (see, e.g., Labov 1994). When I first became interested in studying the NCS, just five years ago, I had some doubts about its viability as a topic of long-term research. Given that the NCS had been studied for over 25 years by eminent scholars like Labov, I assumed that the important work had already been done and that I would have little of interest to contribute. As I examined the literature on the NCS, however, I came to realize how mistaken my assumptions had been. While Labov and others had conducted excellent research and had examined many key issues pertaining to the NCS, there were significant
gaps. These gaps included fairly straightforward questions, such as which phonological environments tend to promote the changes, as well as more challenging questions, such as whether the changes are causally linked in a chain shift (see Gordon forthcoming).

That such questions remained open after decades of research is a testament to the complexity of the NCS. After all, the NCS involves changes to six vowels and affects millions of speakers across a broad geographic region; it raises issues of interest to phonologists, sociolinguists, and historical linguists, as well as dialectologists. I suspect that the NCS is not altogether exceptional in this regard, that there are many other such complex phenomena active in American English today. The general lesson I hope researchers, especially students, will draw here is that we should not assume that a long line of research into a subject by leading scholars means that all significant issues related to that subject have been resolved. A more particular lesson, again especially for students, is that there remain many unresolved questions related to the NCS and many opportunities for contributions.

As an illustration, let me briefly consider the two questions that I am asked most often about the NCS, and to which I wish I had better answers: What started these changes and what is going to happen in the future? With regard to the former question, the internal mechanics of the NCS are complicated, and there is debate about which of the vowels shifted first. More surprisingly, even the geographic picture is unclear; we do not know where the NCS began. This origin question is a prime example of an area where the union of dialectology and sociolinguistics can be most fruitful. Careful consideration of real-time evidence from earlier dialectological studies, combined with apparent-time data from more recent sociolinguistic studies of older speakers, will, I believe, shine light on these matters.

The question of future outcomes is one with which linguists tend to be less concerned, but it is no less important. Because the region where the NCS operates has, in popular perception, traditionally been considered “accentless,” there is interest in whether the NCS pronunciations will become standard in American speech. While this possibility cannot be denied, an argument can also be made that the NCS will remain regionally restricted or even that the changes will be reversed. Relevant here is the fact that many of the vowels affected by the NCS have historically been subject to similar movements that had little lasting impact on the varieties involved. To make meaningful predictions about the future of the NCS, we must consider the history of this shift as well as the history of the language in general. Equally important, however, is an understanding of its current status in both the linguistic and social systems of which it is part. On this
issue too, then, the increasing collaboration between dialectology and sociolinguistics promises to offer insight.

As the essays collected here convey, it is a very exciting time to be involved in the study of American dialects. New approaches are emerging as a greater diversity of scholars is drawn to the field, and to keep us busy the American people have generously continued to develop interesting patterns of variation.

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FAST WORDS, SLOW WORDS

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*Mood. Good. Blood.* Why is it that the vowels of these words are all spelled the same but pronounced differently? Historically, all go back to the same vowel in Renaissance English, namely, /u:/, which *mood* retains. But the other two words have changed into /gʊd/ and /blʌd/, respectively. Often such sound changes travel different routes in different varieties of a language, whether regional or social. And some *-oo-* words do vary in that way: *roof,* for instance, has regional variants, /rʊf/ and /rʌf/. And we would probably make social judgments about a person who said *I tuck it* for ‘I took it’. Even within the same variety, however, some words may be affected sooner than others. For instance, often the neighboring sounds play a role, so words that end in a /θ/ sound—*tooth, (for)sooth*—are more likely to have kept the older /u/ (Ogura 1987). Yet another factor, however, in determining which words change first is the frequency with which a word is used. The theory that tries to explain why some words “hurry ahead” while others “drag behind” (as Schuchardt noted in 1885) has become known as the theory of lexical diffusion (Wang 1969).

Some variation in modern American English is due to changes affecting the least frequent words first. Hooper (1976, 99–100), for instance, found that more frequent verbs like *kept, left,* and *slept* resist being reshaped with an *-ed* suffix, whereas less frequent verbs like *crept, leapt,* and *wept* have developed the new forms *creeped, leaped,* and *weeped.* Phillips (1984) found that noun/verb pairs which retain the same stress pattern for both (e.g., *expréss*) tend to be used more frequently than pairs which have developed
different stress patterns to indicate noun versus verb (e.g., exploit n vs. exploit v). And Phillips (1981) uncovered the same pattern when the language realigns which consonants may occur next to each other. For example, the word nude, in most American dialects, is now pronounced /nud/, having lost the y-glide still extant in British Received Pronunciation and Southern American English: /njud/. In the latter variety, infrequent words such as tuber, duly, and nude are more likely to have lost the glide; more frequent words such as tube, during, and new are more likely to have retained it.

Many sound changes evince the opposite pattern, however, with the most frequent words changing first, as in the foot-boot example. These tend to be changes influenced by surrounding sounds, that is, assimilations. The shift in -oo- words, for instance, started in the words blood and flood probably because /l/s are produced with a tongue shape that lowers and centralizes the vowel, and following /d/s have similar effects (Ohala 1974, 265; Ladefoged and Maddieson 1996, 184, 303). Other changes affecting the most frequent words first are those that reduce vowels in unstressed syllables, as in mistake, where the first syllable is often pronounced with a vowel more like that of but than of miss, versus mistake, where the first syllable still sounds like miss (Fidelholz 1975). Even stress shifts, however, can affect the most frequent words first, if they involve ignoring the part of speech label rather than accessing it. The verb frustrate, therefore, is being pronounced frustrate more and more often in both British and American English, as are many other verbs ending in -ate—a pronunciation which follows the stress patterns of other English words. Less frequent verbs such as lactate, however, are less likely to alter their stress (Phillips 1998).

Phillips’s (forthcoming) explanation for the connection between word frequency and lexical diffusion emphasizes the degree of attention or lexical analysis required of the speaker. That is, if the features of individual segments are blurred (as in assimilations) or ignored (as in certain stress shifts or segment reductions), the most frequent words are affected first. If speakers have to access specific information about a word, however, in order to implement a change, then the least frequent words are affected first. Thus, the study of current variation in English and other languages serves a deeper theoretical purpose, namely, to reveal how words are represented and accessed in the human mind, which constitutes part of our linguistic competence. Over 30 years ago, Kiparsky (1968, 174) wrote about the difficulty of finding evidence that reflected that competence accurately. He concluded, “What we really need is a window on the form of linguistic competence... In linguistic change we have precisely such a window.” Patterns of lexical diffusion open that window a little wider.
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**BATTLE OF THE PRONOUNS: Y’ALL VERSUS YOU-GUYS**

**Natalie Maynor, Mississippi State University**

Exactly why English lost its distinction between second-person singular and plural during the late Renaissance is debatable. Because the plural forms (*ye*, *you*, *your*) were used as polite singular, it is possible that the singular forms (*thou*, *thee*, *thy*) fell out of use as the growing middle class in England tried to emulate what it perceived to be the speech of the higher classes. In any case, by the eighteenth century most English speakers were using the formerly plural *you* in all contexts for both singular and plural.

Standard written English has managed to get along these past several hundred years with the all-purpose *you*. Second-person contexts, however, are much more likely to arise in conversation, and it is clear that speakers have been trying for a long time to fill the gap left by the merging of the singular and plural pronouns. Instead of replacing the lost singular forms, speakers seem to have accepted singular *you* and are deriving various plural forms from it, some using rules of English morphology (*yous*), some periphrastic (*you-uns*, *you-all*, *you-guys*), and one (*y’all*) that is perhaps a contraction, perhaps a single lexeme (Montgomery 1992; Lipski 1993; Tillery, Wikle, and Bailey forthcoming). An interesting question is whether a consensus will be reached among English speakers during the coming years, either worldwide or with national variation, on which form is the “standard” and, if so, which form or forms will win the plural slots in grammar books and dictionaries.

Of the contenders in American English, two seem to be the front-runners: *y’all* and *you-guys*. My research on usage of *you-all* suggests that it is being replaced by *y’all* among younger speakers (Maynor 1996), something also found by Jan Tillery, Tom Wikle, and Guy Bailey (forthcoming) in their analysis of data from the 1996 Southern Focus Poll. Although Tillery, Wikle, and Bailey noted more use of *you-all* than *y’all* outside the South, they found that age was a key factor, that almost all of the use of *you-all* was
by older speakers. Suggesting that the use of *you-all* by older non-Southerners probably indicates its earlier spread to other regions, they point out that in recent years *y'all* rather than *you-all* has been spreading.

Meanwhile, just as *y'all* seems to be spreading outside the South, *you-guys* is moving into the South, especially among younger speakers. In a survey of university students in Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, and South Carolina,\(^1\) I found a surprisingly large number of respondents who said that they might use *you-guys* (Maynor 1999). Although *y'all* dominated as their second-person plural pronoun of choice, many added that they also used *you-guys* on occasion. Some of their comments indicated an age consciousness in their choice of form. For example, a nontraditional student in North Carolina, 55 years old, said that though she normally used *y'all*, she sometimes used *you-guys* when speaking to her middle-school students. Another North Carolinian, 21 years old, said, “I work at a day care, and I will say ‘you-guys’ to my kids.” In addition to surveying these groups of university students, I surveyed a small group of elderly Mississippians (ages 44–97, median age 67). While 46% of the students surveyed said that they might use *you-guys* on occasion, none of the elderly group did. Change seems to be afoot. Just as many younger speakers in other parts of the country are using *y'all*, many younger speakers in the South are using *you-guys*, at least occasionally.

So what will the new millennium bring? Will one of these two forms move into the textbook paradigm in the United States? If so, which one? In discussing the spread of *y'all*, Tillery, Wikle, and Bailey (forthcoming) point out that it has the advantage of being a single lexeme rather than a periphrastic form. That is perhaps a significant point in this battle of the pronouns. But *y'all* also suffers from being associated with Southern dialect, a dialect that has been stigmatized in the media for years. *You-guys*, on the other hand, has the disadvantage of being sexist.\(^2\)

Perhaps neither of these forms will prevail. My prediction for the new millennium, however, is that a singular-plural distinction among second-person pronouns will enter the textbook paradigms throughout much of the English-speaking world, with *y'all* and *you-guys* the most likely contenders in American English.

NOTES

1. Thanks to Cynthia Bernstein, Jeutonne Brewer, Boyd Davis, Connie Eble, Nancy Ellis, Greta Little, and Bonnie Novak for their help in administering the surveys.
2. At least to some of us older Southerners, the word "guys" designates males. I have been intrigued for years by the fact that many people who eschew generic "he" or "man" seem to have no problem with generic "guy", at least in its plural form.

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LANGUAGE CHANGE AND GENDER

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I remember the first linguistics course I took rather clearly. Although I was taught many new and interesting "facts" about language, what I recall most clearly was the particular class devoted to the topic of linguistic change and evolution. During this session, the instructor told us that language change was natural, inevitable, and usually quite slow and that speakers of the language were very often unaware that it was happening. Since taking this course, I have been keenly interested in observing the language changing around me. And one change has always struck me as remarkable: the rapid pace with which changing roles in gender in American culture have affected the English language.

In the early 1980s, I recall walking by a restaurant that had a job advertisement posted on its window: "Wanted: Waitperson." I remember my shock at seeing the expression "waitperson" and thinking to myself that it was so awkward that it would never catch on. But almost two decades later not only is this expression a part of the English language but we now have "waitrom" and "server" to go with it. Moreover, formerly common expressions, such as "waitress" and "waiter", are on their way out and now have a faintly archaic ring to them.

Expressions such as "server" are responses to social changes in American culture that began in the 1970s, changes that have sought to eliminate gender distinctions in the English language and that by the normal standards of language change have been rapid. We see these changes particularly in the professions where women have taken jobs that had in the past been held mainly by men. We have "flight attendants", not "stewardesses"; "mail carriers", not "mailmen"; "police officers", not "policemen"; "chairpersons", not "chairmen".
Style guides for books, journals, and other periodicals have written into their guidelines prohibitions against the use of so-called gender-biased language. The navy now forbids any reference to ships by feminine pronouns such as she or her. Occasionally, we witness conflicts between traditional and contemporary usages, as when the sportscaster on a local news show a few years ago referred to the women’s basketball team at the University of Massachusetts as the “Lady Minutemen.” But overall the transition to a gender-neutral language has taken place rather peacefully, despite the complaints from some that such usages are merely motivated by “political correctness,” not by the need to make all speakers of the language comfortable with the language that they use.

Of all the changes in this area, probably the most remarkable change has been in our pronoun system, where the need for a third-person gender-neutral singular pronoun has proven a thorny, but ultimately solvable, problem. When I taught the issue of gender and language in linguistics classes in the 1980s, I knew I could always provoke an engaging discussion by giving students a simple sentence such as Everybody is trying ——— hardest and asking them to supply the appropriate pronoun in parentheses. Is it his? Or her? Or their? If someone chose their, I replied: “Well, their is plural, but the verb following everybody is singular. Isn’t it inconsistent to choose their?” This then led to a discussion of whether it’s better to be “polite” but “grammatically wrong” or whether correctness takes precedence over everything else. We’d also discuss the his/her possibility, noting the awkwardness of this construction if it has to be used repeatedly. And we discussed novel forms that people had proposed, such as ter, forms that added to the inventory of pronouns a new member that was singular and gender-neutral. But this form, and the problem in general, I noted, was rooted in the fact that languages resist adding new members to “closed” classes such as pronouns.

I knew, however, that this problem would soon be resolved when I received a memo from the president of the university where I was teaching. I don’t remember the exact wording, but it went something like “It is imperative that everyone on campus work to insure that their teaching is up to date with developments in their field.” The easiest and simplest solution, of course, is to use a form, they/them/their, that we already have in the language. Ironically, my wife tells me, there are ardent feminists who object to forms of they used with singular antecedents, refusing to accept the alleged inconsistency in agreement and opting instead for the awkward he/she. But if current usage trends continue, we will all soon be using singular they and not thinking anything about it.
Whenever I discuss the issue of language and gender in my current classes, I am struck by the difference in tone between now and 15 years ago. In the past, I usually had to contend with a group of angry students vigorously debating an issue about which many had impassioned points of view. Now when I discuss the topic, I often hear a few “So whats” and notice some yawns instead. Just more evidence that language is constantly changing and that what strikes one generation’s ears as new and revolutionary, a subsequent generation finds ordinary and of little interest.

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LEXICAL CHANGE, LANGUAGE CHANGE

LUANNE VON SCHNEIDEMESSETER, Dictionary of American Regional English

In the course of my work at the Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE), I have come across evidence of many linguistic phenomena, such as rhotacism, hypercorrection, metanalysis, assimilation, and, yes, the creation and extinction of terms from active vocabulary. Our language, including our lexical usage, is constantly changing.

We have often heard the opinion that language differences are becoming minimized due to the influence of mass media and the ease of global communication. Television is homogenizing us, people cry. I began to wonder how great these influences were, especially on the many words and expressions not commonly heard in the media. How many times do you hear snap beans or bell peppers discussed by the media? Bill Clinton and I are still saying, “I don’t know him from Adam’s off-ox”; his saying it got it into the media. Have others thus picked up the expression since then? More people have at least become aware of it, but I doubt they use it because of this occurrence.

I suppose in a sitcom a character could talk about hooking school or skipping, or one partner could tell the other to put the trash out on the terrace or parking for the weekly pickup. It could happen on television. And of course mass marketing and commerce do affect us: the interviews DARE carried out between 1965 and 1970 show terms such as enchilada and taco to
be regional, used mostly in the Southwest. But since the popularity of Mexican food in the United States developed, and “Mexican” restaurants and such chains as Taco Bell have spread across the country, you can buy enchiladas in every state, even in Italian restaurants. By 1991, when DARE’s second volume came out, enchilada was no longer regional; we labeled it “orig SW, CA but now widely recognized.” And today you might hear or read the phrase the big enchilada anywhere; do a search with any Web search engine and you’ll get dozens of hits. Rather rapid language change. Or is it cultural change?

When my children were younger, I heard them using terms when playing games that they had not learned from us parents, nor were they the terms which, according to DARE, should be said in Wisconsin. They used, for example, homebase, not the Wisconsin goal, for the place where the player who is “it” has to wait and count while others hide in the game hide-and-seek. I had theorized that while lexical change could be rapid, as enchilada showed, terms for established children’s games should not show this since these terms were not bandied about in the media, either print or video. One child learns from another child, probably from an older sibling or neighbor, I thought. To test my theory, I carried out a survey in 1994–95 with the help of friends and colleagues, using DARE questions about children’s games (von Schneidemesser 1996). I grew up in Kansas saying king’s ex when I wanted to rest during a game of tag. My children thought that was hilarious. They and their friends at that time said T’s or time out or times. DARE showed king’s ex to be the common term used in the late 1960s throughout the Mississippi and Ohio valleys and everywhere west of the Mississippi River. Yet of a total of almost 300 informants aged 16 to 35 in 1994–95, only 2 (from Arizona and Texas) responded with king’s ex. My informants said time out, which DARE shows chiefly east of the Mississippi River, and to a lesser extent time. And my children and their friends, at the time at least ten years younger than my informants, in saying T’s, may well have been picking up on the actions of football referees, who make a T symbol with their hands to call a time-out. Aha, media influence.

Of course language is changing. It always changes. And yes, media do play a role, can play a large role, but they are only one influence on our language. How big is their role? I don’t know. What are the other factors influencing change?

Linguists don’t have all the answers. We do have lots of questions. And we search for answers. Which bring up other questions:

Will our language become homogenized? It might tend to move in that direction, but the short answer is no. Will you give up saying soda for pop or teeter-totter for seesaw? Will our vocabulary become static? Never. My son has
gone through awesome, rad, the bomb, the shit, and many other terms meaning, well, you know, but he’s now saying cool. Will this change continue? Indeed. Or to use a term more common today: for sure.

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