

NWAV40
Celebrating 40 years of analyzing variation... but who's counting?
October 27-30, 2011
Georgetown University

The Future of NWAV

Walt Wolfram
NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NWAV 40
October 29, 2011



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Professional Variation and Change: The NWAV Lifespan



1971 fieldwork



1985 American Tongues



2011 Distinguished



The Future ??

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The Public State of Linguistics

For a number of reasons, linguistics may be an endangered discipline. It would not be difficult for it to quietly vanish as an autonomous discipline in the academy. If linguists firmly believe that understanding the nature of language is a central theme in understanding human cognition and behavior, then we owe it to the profession to demonstrate our vitality within the academy—**and to have more of a presence in public life**. Unfortunately, most lay people still don't know what linguistics is and what linguists do for a living.

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Variation Studies and NWAV: Surviving and Thriving

Language variation studies pique a natural curiosity about language as behavior (and code), and hold the potential to connect with other disciplines in authentic interdisciplinarity. Variation studies also hold the potential to connect with the public in providing critical information about the impact of language differences on social and educational issues. Variation studies can lead the way in connecting linguistics to the public.

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The Future: Taking Variationism beyond Itself

- Data of interest to (socio)linguists are becoming more widely available
 - Through a variety of efforts
 - 50 years of work explicitly in the rubric of sociolinguistics
 - the development of linguistic corpora
 - e.g., Penn's LDC, SLAAP, Edinburgh's CSTR
 - Through the availability of others' collections
 - Internet resources
 - Allied disciplines (sociology, oral histories, SLP)
 - Libraries
 - Text: e.g., Digital Libr. of GA
 - Audio: e.g., UNC's DocSouth, Behind the Veil, etc.

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Issues for Data

- How do data collected from outside sociolinguistics compare to data collected by sociolinguists?
- How do data collected in the past (even in sociolinguistics) compare to data collected in the present or the future?
- How do we reconsider current linguistic conceptions of the nature of speech data, its representations, and the kinds of questions that can be asked about it?
- What sorts of theoretical and practical issues are attendant to defining and using data collected for "other" purposes?

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The Longitudinal Database

- Initiated in 1990 by Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (Chapel Hill, NC) as speech pathology study, not a sociolinguistic study
- 88 African American children from 6-12 months (mean 8.1 months); 71% below poverty level; from primary study, 67 continue in study through 2010. Supplemental peer sample added in Grade 6 forward; 61 peers remain in study; the subject retention rate is truly exceptional; more than 50 interviewed in first post-secondary interviews (summer 2011)
- Caretaker (mother) interviews conducted at Grades 1 and 4; interviews with peers for Grade 6, 8, 10
- Batteries of standardized and nonstandardized tests, including progressively collected language samples annually or bi-annually; all school records
- Systematic data collected for more than 120 demographic, social, psychological, and educational variables, more than 2500 cds full of data; language samples being uploaded on the Sociolinguistic Archive and Analysis website (SLAAP)

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Challenging Canonical Variation in AAE

- The description of AAE can only be undertaken through the analysis of particular variable structures; alternative analyses (e.g. token- and/or type-based descriptions) of AAE variants cannot capture the authentic variety
- It is impossible to reduce the use of AAE to a unitary measure in any meaningful way for descriptive and/or analytical purposes
- Sociolinguists and variationists can dismiss the adaptations of AAE inventories for scalar indices by allied professionals (speech pathologists, educators, sociologists, psychologists) in analyzing the correlation of AAE use with an array of social and psychological factors

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Complementary Measures

- **The Dialect Density Measure**
Token-based calculation in terms of dialect features per communication unit or word; based on an inventory of canonical vernacular AAE features (Craig and Washington 2006; Renn 2007)
- **Type-based profiles** in terms of inventory of features
- **Listener-based judgment**—expert vs. naïve listeners
- **Frequency-based variation analysis** in terms of potential and actual occurrence of variants
- **Acoustic analysis** of vowel subsystems

Research on different approaches to assessment (Oetting and McDonald 2002) indicates reliability of type-token-listener judgment samples and high correlation coefficients of different DDM measures and subset measures (Renn 2007, 2010)

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Results of Comparative Methods for Assessing AAE Use

- High Correlation between different Dialect Density Measures (Craig & Washington 2006; Oetting & McDonald 2002; Renn 2007)
E.g. Comparison of Craig and Washington (2006) and revised, more linguistically faithful version of DDS by Wolfram and Terry (2007) show .99 correlation coefficient
- High correlation between (between .86 to .92) between full measures and subset measure of six features (cop abs., 3rd sg. abs., neg. concord, *ain't*, aux. abs. nasal fronting) (Renn 2007, Oetting & McDonald 2002)
- Correlation with token-based and type based indices (Oetting & McDonald 2002; Van Hofwegen & Wolfram 2010)
"When type- and/or type token methods were used to characterize participants' dialect type and rate, the number of patterns could be substantially reduced without significantly affecting the validity of the outcomes" (Oetting & McDonald 2002:505)
- Differences between individual variables and overall indices indicate that both need to be considered in providing an authentic profile of AAE use in the early lifespan (Wolfram, Van Hofwegen, Renn & Kohn)

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Descriptive, Methodological and Theoretical

Conclusions : AAE in the Early Lifespan

- Prominent trajectories of AAE do not match the traditional assumptions and conventional wisdom; there is not a unilateral pattern, though there are predominant patterns
- The application of complementary methods for the assessment of AAE (token-based, type-based, frequency-based, acoustic) **IS ESSENTIAL** in assessing how AAE authentically develops and changes over the early lifespan
- Selected features of AAE use may show considerable variation based on internal linguistic-structural and external I variables
- Scalar indices provide a convenient, operational heuristic for the analysis of AAE use in relation to a multiplex array of social, psychological, and educational variables
- An authentic dialect profile includes a view of the sociolinguistic forest **AND** the variable trees

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Connecting Variation Studies with the Public

- From the outset, consider how linguistic research might have a strategic public outreach dimension. Consider engaged research (e.g., Reaser 2006; Sweetland 2006)
- Be proactive with institutional programs in disseminating information
- Be visionary and entrepreneurial
- Brand your program
- Utilize complementary technical and creative skills of professional associates (e.g. designers, videographers) and students. Engage in professional interdisciplinarity
- Invest in long-term, sustainable projects
- Develop curricular materials for K-12 education



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Venues of Informal and Formal Education

DOCUMENTARY FILM				Latest films
<i>The Ocracoke Brogue</i> VHS 1997	<i>Indian by Birth</i> VHS 2002	<i>Hyde Talk</i> VHS 2002	<i>Mountain Talk</i> DVD, VHS 2004	
<i>Celebrating Muzel Bryant</i> VHS 2005	<i>Voices of North Carolina</i> DVD, VHS 2005	<i>The Queen's Family</i> DVD 2006	<i>This Side of the River</i> DVD 2006	
TEXT		AUDIO CD		
<i>HV Trade on the Outer Banks</i> Book 1997	<i>Fine in the World</i> Book 2001	<i>Ocracoke Stories</i> Audio CD, Booklet 1997	<i>An Unbounded Clay</i> CD 2004	<i>The Queen Family</i> CD 2008

Venues of Public Education

Museum Exhibits

- *The Ocracoke Brogue*, 1997-present
Museum of the Ocracoke Preservation Society, Ocracoke, NC
- *Lumbee Language and Life*, 2001-present
Museum of the Native American Resource Center, Pembroke, NC
- *Freedom's Voice: Celebrating the Black Experience on the Outer Banks*, 2006-2007
Outer Banks History Center, Manteo, NC
- *Celebrating Muzel Bryant*, 2008-present
Museum of the Ocracoke Preservation Society, Ocracoke, NC
- *The North Carolina State Fair*
Raleigh, NC October 14-24, 2010, October 13-23, 2011

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North Carolina State Fair, Oct. 13-23, 2011



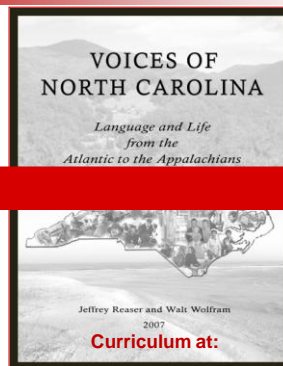
North Carolina State Fair

Dialect Quiz



North Carolina State Fair

Souvenir Buttons-State Fair



http://ncsu.edu/linguistics/research_dialecteducation.php

Current Curricula

- *Voices of North Carolina* dialect curriculum, 8th grade social studies (4th grade version in the works)
- High school Language Arts curriculum on dialect and literature
- 11th grade Language Arts curriculum on pragmatics
- 12th grade Language Arts curriculum on history of English
- Fourth grade curriculum on bilingualism and language differences


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Connecting Variation Studies to the Public

Variationists have a responsibility to share their knowledge professionally and publicly. Working collaboratively with journalists, designers, artists, producers, educators, and, of course, students and community partners, we can connect linguistics to the public. Sharing our reverence and respect for language variation publicly is one of the most rewarding career experiences imaginable—and that hasn't changed in 40 years of NNAV

(from Wolfram, forthcoming. Connecting with the Public. *Journal of English Linguistics*)


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Supported by

National Science Foundation Grant

BCS-0544744
BCS-0542139
ESI-0652343
ESI-0354711
BCS-9910224
SBR-9616331
SBR-9319577



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Celebrate Language Variation!

