

## **Sociolinguistics as experiential learning: Curriculum development in the teaching/learning interface**

Sali Tagliamonte (*University of Toronto*), Jingwei Chen (*University of Toronto*), Julia Chin (*University of Toronto*) and Ruth Maddeaux (*University of Toronto*)

In recent years, curriculum renewal exercises across North America have championed experiential learning as one of the core attributes of the ideal undergraduate experience. In experiential learning students partake in “live action learning” and gain understanding from direct experience (Kolb & Fry 1975 et seq). In this poster we will demonstrate how remarkably well-suited Sociolinguistics is to facilitate this type of learning. We describe *and report on the results of an experiential learning linguistics course entitled Stories: A grassroots perspective on history, culture and language (LIN398)*, which was offered as one of the offerings of an Independent Experiential Study Program at a North American university in the spring of 2011.

The course was constructed so as to encompass the core attributes of Sociolinguistics, including fieldwork in the community, data organization and processing, variation analysis, and finally a finished product that was returned to the community for its benefit and use (see Labov 1982; Rickford 1997; Wolfram 1998). Beginning with a training phase in a working Sociolinguistics Laboratory, the students learned interviewing techniques and transcription practices. Then, the professor and the students ventured 600 kilometers due north from the university in order to conduct ethnographic and sociolinguistic fieldwork in two specially selected communities, KL and NL. The group formed a bona fide research team, interacting with and interviewing as many residents as possible as well as visiting local libraries, conducting archival research and engaging in anthropological observation. In total 103 interviews were completed within a two week period. The field trip was followed by a data processing phase back at the university, where the students transcribed and edited selected portions of the recorded interviews. Finally, the students created a database of stories embodying the history, cultural and language of each community from a grass roots perspective (i.e. in the words of the people), e.g. (1-2). The stories and sentiments were compiled into a book and copies were returned to the public library, high school, museum and senior citizen residences in each community.

(1) It's a friendly and warm, community, um, I find that strangers even will look at you right in the eye, and they'll nod like "Hello", ah, or a little salute or a nod of the head and I don't even know them.

(2) The town of NL – extraordinary. It's just the best place in the world. It's God's country!

In sum, in this eight week experiential learning course, not only did each of the students achieve a 3rd year university credit with high standing, they also became proficient at conducting Sociolinguistic Interviews, writing field notes, transcribing language materials, following a transcription protocol and organizing linguistic data and metadata for analysis. Moreover, they produced a tangible product — a book of stories encapsulating the characteristic spirit of each community as manifested in its beliefs, identities and aspirations. Most important, the students came to understand what it means to be a Sociolinguist. The professor and the students will be present to discuss their experience, methods and findings.