

TITLE: Appalachian Linguistic Potpourri 3: Language, Identity, and Education

This panel will explore various aspects of Appalachian language varieties. Given that language is one of the principal components of culture, these papers engage with the impact that culture and identity have on variation across the region and across the different aspects of language. These language topics have received much recent academic attention, as demonstrated by Clark and Heyward (2013) and the forthcoming *Appalachian Englishes* volume edited by Hazen. At the same time, these topics also have much popular attention in various media sources including Twitter, YouTube, and other social media platforms as well as blogs, articles, and other journalistic sources. The papers in this panel discuss the intersection of language and identity, and also the intersection of language and education. The first paper explores how speakers' variable connection to place can affect the phonetic production of sounds. The second paper discusses how language and Appalachian identity interplay in the manner in which Appalachian speakers discuss various topics. The third paper investigates how a sense of belonging, or lack thereof, for Appalachian English speakers impacts the higher education experience. Finally, the fourth paper discusses how education about Appalachian English varieties can improve formal scholastic assessments as well as addressing other educational concerns. The goal is to show the breadth and depth of the diversity among Appalachian language varieties via the different perspectives, methodologies, and analyses of the panelists.

A constellation of sounds: Phonetic aspects of Appalachian Englishes

Paul E. Reed

What does it mean to sound Appalachian? Are there particular features that mark one as a speaker of an Appalachian variety of English? There is a growing body of literature that has demonstrated that the language varieties of this region, collapsed under the broad heading of Appalachian English (AE), have been shown to be divergent from Mainstream American English and other Southern American English varieties (Wolfram and Christian 1976, Labov et al. 2006, Montgomery 2006). Much of this literature has focused on vowels and morpho-syntax, but other linguistic aspects have not received much attention, much less how they fit into what Wolfram called the 'constellation of features' that index the region.

This presentation will present ongoing research into several features from a sociophonetic viewpoint: monophthongization, intonation, and prosodic timing. The first topic has received attention from traditional descriptive (e.g., Hall 1942) and sociolinguistic (Wolfram and Christian 1976, Thomas 2001, Thomas 2003) perspectives, while the second has only been anecdotally noted in the literature, save Greene (2006) and my own work. For the third topic, Hall (1942) made some tantalizing references to prosodic variation that he claims to be characteristic of the Appalachian region. He observed, 'the great force with which the stressed syllables are uttered results in an abnormal weakening of the unstressed syllables' (44). This observation suggests that rhythm and prosody could be sources of social variation as well.

“I always thought I was Southern?”: Stance in Appalachian Identity Negotiation
Jessica Lee Holman, University of Colorado Boulder

Like the region itself, Appalachian ways of speaking have historically been, and continue to be, some of the most recognized and most negatively viewed varieties of American English. As with other devalued, “non-standard” language varieties, there is a pervasive social pressure to take up the linguistic markers of “standard” English to be viewed in a more positive social light. In this paper, I analyze the differential ways that young Appalachian speakers position themselves and their Appalachian-ness through stances (evaluations, attitudes, and orientations) as evidenced by word choice, pronunciation, and overt discussion of attitudes toward Appalachia. The data set for this study comes from a series of sociolinguistic interviews (see Labov 1972; Briggs 1986) with students attending a University nearby, but outside of, the Appalachian region. Stance-taking plays a central role in the negotiation of identity and social meaning within interaction and can be evidenced at all levels of language (Jaffe 2009). I analyze stance-taking in this study by identifying patterns of co-occurrence between linguistic features, epistemic stances, and evaluations/assessments of Appalachia as a cultural object in the talk of speakers who have been identified by the University, and may identify themselves, as Appalachian. I argue that despite superficial similarities in demography, and despite popular views of Appalachia as linguistically and socially homogenous, these young speakers who identify with Appalachia performatively enact this identity through their language use in markedly different ways that pattern along with their personal investment in the region.

Language and belonging on the college campus

Stephany Dunstan

A substantial body of research on post-secondary education suggests that feeling a sense of belonging at a college or university is an important factor in the college transition, academic success, persistence, and graduation. Belonging is a fundamental human need, and a number of factors have been identified in the field of higher education research as influencing what makes us feel that we belong in post-secondary educational settings including gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, positive interactions with diverse peers and faculty, membership in campus communities such as housing, student organizations, and more. However, there has been little research on the role that dialect plays in shaping a student's sense of belonging in college. Students' perceptions of the campus environment and how well they fit it or belong in that environment may be shaped in part by the language they bring with them to college. Because language, culture and identity are closely intertwined, those students whose language excludes them from the standards of the academic discourse community may possibly feel a lower degree of sense of belonging. This presentation discusses a study on the role of language and sense of belonging for undergraduate students from rural Southern Appalachia who attend a college in an urban area in the South. For many of these students, coming to college was the first time they realized that their speech made them different, even to other Southerners. We discuss how dialect shaped their experiences fitting in on campus, and implications for creating inclusive campus environments.

Applying Linguistics in Appalachian Educational Contexts: Historical and Current Initiatives

Jeffrey Reaser, NC State University

Language is fundamental to all academic pursuits. Accordingly, linguistic findings have been deployed in multiple ways to help speakers of other languages navigating the demands of standard school English. However, far fewer programs exist to help student speakers of non-standardized dialects. Implicit in this dearth of programs is the incorrect assumption that dialect differences should not manifest as academic difficulty. However, early linguistic research eviscerated this assumption (e.g., Labov 1969). Later work in Appalachian communities documented how differences in Appalachian students' literacy experiences and schools' expectations of those experiences differed and how approved curricula did not meet the needs of these readers (Purcell-Gates 1995). This talk investigates early and current applications of linguistically-informed approaches and educational interventions in the Appalachian Region. Among the programs exclaimed are informal curricula on Appalachian speech and dialect-shifting techniques aimed at improving formal working assessment scores. The talk then considers the most recent language-education approaches, including Code-Meshing and Critical Language Pedagogy (Godley & Reaser 2018), might inform future approaches.

References

- Godley, A. J., & Reaser, J. (2018). *Critical language pedagogy: Interrogating language, dialects, and power in teacher education*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Labov, W. (1969). The logic of nonstandard English. In J. Alatis (Ed.), *20th Annual Round Table. Linguistics and the teaching of Standard English to speakers of other languages and dialects* (pp. 1-44). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Purcell-Gates, V. (1995). *Other people's words: The cycle of low literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.