NWAV 45
Special Session
Language Regard: Methods, Variation, and Change: Celebrating the Work of Dennis Preston

Language regard refers to various methods and data types focused on non-linguists' beliefs and attitudes, conscious or unconscious, about language. In this special session, six scholars or groups of scholars present their original research on language regard and celebrate the influential work of Dennis Preston.

Under various guises, research on language regard has flourished since the 1960s (for reviews, Cargile and Bradac 2001; Garrett 2010; McKenzie and Osthus 2011), and the label language regard (Preston 2013, 2015) has the advantage of encompassing a range of phenomena including language attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and ideologies as well as a range of methodologies under one concept. The importance of language regard to the inquiry of language variation and change in the field of sociolinguistics is increasingly being recognized as a crucial component of the linguistic description and analysis of language variation and change. According to Niedzielski & Preston, "Overt folk notions of geographical variation, based on neither production nor responses to forms, provide a helpful corollary to both production and attitude studies" (2003: 41). That is, language regard data can help the researcher identify which variants are socially salient through the investigation of which linguistic variants speakers overtly mention. In addition, if speakers make affective (i.e. involving feelings, emotion, or mood) judgments about a variant, that data can also provide insight on what the social meaning of a particular variant might be (Labov 1966). As Jaworski and Coupland (2004:11) note, "The distribution of linguistic forms is underpinned by patterns of social evaluation". Thus, in order to fully understand patterns of language differences and language change, the affective dimensions of those linguistic varieties and features are an important part of that description. Language regard can also help us better understand the internal structure of communities of speakers and how communities position themselves in relation to each other (or how individuals position themselves with respect to surrounding communities of speakers), all of which are relevant to production studies of variation and change. Nevertheless, misunderstandings about language regard research continue to exist. This special session aims to present state-of-the-art perspectives on language regard particularly in the context of language variation and language change. Most importantly, the session focuses on the intersections of language/dialect contact, social hierarchies and migration reflected in perceptions of particular social groups that are revealed in expressions of regard, relating directly to the theme of NWAV 45 to "highlight the ways in which communities and individuals shape their identities through language variation and change".

Abstracts of presentations

1. Regional identity and listener perception
Valerie Fridland, University of Nevada, Reno
Tyler Kendall, University of Oregon

This presentation maps the geographic distribution of perceptual data from over 550 participants from around the U.S. in an experiment testing the categorical perception of vowel continua across several word pairs (e.g. bet~bait, sad~sod). We assess the extent to which isoglosses in perception align with those in production using dialectometric techniques typically utilized with production data. We apply two geospatial analysis techniques (Moran's I and Getis-Ord Gi*) to cross-over point data measuring vowel category thresholds. Our results suggest that perceptual similarity isn't clearly constrained by traditional regional divisions – there are a number of intra-regional and pan-regional perceptual clusters.

In addition, some studies (e.g., Ladefoged and Broadbent 1957, Niedzielski 1999, Strand 1999) have suggested that the introduction of social information about a talker can actually alter vowel or consonant categorization. While the perception study just discussed provided no speaker contextualization (e.g. region), we ran the same vowel identification study with the addition of a photo of a middle-age adult male wearing a t-shirt from a relevant local college and a prose description providing a hometown in the North, South or West. Here, for the first time, we will examine how the addition of this contextualization affected how listeners identified vowel categories in an attempt to understand how social stereotypes and "local" identity alter listeners' identification of category boundaries.

2. Language regard and cultural practice - Variation, evaluation, and change in the German regional languages
Christoph Purschke, Université du Luxembourg

Over the last years variationist linguistics in Germany has evolved from traditional dialectology to a new way of analyzing language variation and change (cf. Schmidt/Herrgen 2011, Kehrein 2012) that essentially builds on theories and methodology from sociolinguistics, psychology, and computer science. In this context [Author's name redacted for submission] (2011) proposes a perceptual variationist linguistics focusing on listeners' perceptions and attitudes in order to explain the structure and dynamics of the modern regional languages in Germany. In doing so, the approach emphasizes the fundamental role of listeners' judgments about language for both linguistic dynamics and the comprehensive scientific survey thereof.

This paper pursues two goals: First, the theoretical foundations of a perceptual variationist linguistics shall be discussed, bringing together [Author's name redacted for submission] (2011)

listener judgment theory with the REACT theoretical framework for (language) attitudes (cf. [Author's name redacted for submission] 2014, 2015; in press). Thus, a culture theoretic outline of a theory of (evaluative) cultural practice shall be proposed. Second, evidence is presented from several empirical studies on listeners' attitudes and perceptions toward regional varieties of German in Germany and Austria to provide insight into the sociocultural pertinence systems speakers make use of in language-driven interactions to structure their world.

3. Language regard and migration: Attitudes of founding immigrants and newcomers
   Gabriela Alfaraz, Michigan State University

This paper investigates the perceptions of founding immigrants of the Miami-Cuban diaspora and newcomers from Cuba to examine whether the two groups share evaluations of linguistic features of their variety of Spanish. These members of the Cuban speech community have been geographically separated and largely isolated from one another for over fifty years. Perceptual dialectology studies of Cubans in Miami have documented a robust perceptual distinction, based on spatial and temporal parameters, between the Spanish of Miami-Cuban founders and Cubans. These studies have shown that the Miami-Cuban founders have very positive perceptions of their Spanish, but very negative perceptions of the Spanish in Cuba. While for newcomers to Miami, the diaspora variety is perceived as similarly positive, their negative perception of the home variety is linked to length of residence in Miami. The influence of linguistic and social information on language regard was explored in a matched-guise study that tested the influence of nonstandard phonetic variants. To record judgments, one group of participants plot evaluations on a map and another group uses solidarity and status scales. Findings from Miami-Cuban founders and newcomers to Miami for the map task and scales are reported.

The results show that Spanish with nonstandard variants was strongly associated with Cuba and less strongly with lower socioeconomic status. An effect of speaker residence in Cuba or the US showed that when participants believed speakers lived in Cuba, lower correctness scores were given to both standard and nonstandard stimuli, and that when speakers were believed to reside in the US, higher correctness scores were given to standard and nonstandard speech. This research shows how language regard can be used to examine the persistence of evaluative norms when migration separates speech communities.

4. Ethnolinguistic assertions regarding people who allegedly "Talk White," or "Talk Black"
   John Baugh, Washington University in St. Louis

Racial attribution regarding speech has existed in the United States for centuries, and results from linguistic stereotypes that have evolved since Africans were first enslaved in this country. This paper presents evidence from various sources, including sociolinguistic interviews, historical accounts pertaining to the speech of slaves and their owners, and stereotypical depictions of black speech and white speech that appear in performances as well as social

media. These racial characterizations make clear that many non-linguists, and especially those who are monolingual speakers of American English, often regard the speech of others through explicit racial or ethnic terms that confirm and reinforce racial stereotypes about speech in the United States. Stereotypical speech labels often exceed race, and other groups, including Jews, Gay Men, Southerners, and New Yorkers are also subject to stereotypical linguistic caricatures that have nothing whatsoever to do with race, but which serve to perpetuate and illustrate stereotypes about the ways that people from diverse backgrounds regard the speech of others whose backgrounds may be substantially different from their own. The foundational research methodologies established through studies of perceptual dialectology are instrumental to the evaluations of the ethnolinguistic assertions that are described in this paper.

5. Perceptions of Black American Sign Language
Robert Bayley, University of California, Davis
Joseph C. Hill, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester Institute of Technology
Carolyn McCaskill, Gallaudet University
Ceil Lucas, Gallaudet University

In the American Deaf community, there is a perception that a Standard American Sign Language (ASL) exists, traceable to the language taught at the first deaf school, the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut in 1817 and widely used at Gallaudet University and later dispersed to deaf schools throughout the United States (Croneberg 1965; Hill 2012). Just as in the case of spoken languages, varieties that diverge from what is perceived as standard are often the object of negative attitudes. This paper is based on a large-scale study of the ASL variety that developed in the segregated deaf schools of the U.S. South (McCaskill et al. 2011). Data come from interviews and elicitation tasks with 96 signers, ages 35 and under and 55 and older, in six southern states where African American and white deaf children attended segregated schools, in some cases as late as 1978: Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. We examine signers' perceptions of the ASL variety known as Black ASL that differs in systematic ways from the ASL varieties used by most white Deaf signers. Results of multivariate analysis show that on a number of dimensions, Black ASL, particularly as used by signers who attended school before integration, is closer to the standard variety taught in ASL classes and used in ASL dictionaries. For example, Black signers are more likely to use the two-handed version of signs such as DEER, which may be produced with one or two hands. They are also less likely to use the lowered form of signs such as KNOW, which in citation, or dictionary form, are produced at the level of the forehead, but which are variably produced at a lower level. Nevertheless, despite evidence that their variety is closer to the standard taught in ASL classes, many of the older signers interviewed felt that white signing was superior. Attitudes among the younger signers were more mixed. While a few younger signers said that white signing was better than Black signing, others said that Black signing was more powerful in expression and movement and it had rhythm and style while white signing was more monotonic and lacked emotion. This paper explores the complex mix of attitudes expressed by study participants in the six Southern states in relation to the historical development of this distinctive variety of ASL.

6. Cracking the Code: *Wedgies* and Lexical Respectability
   J.K. Chambers, University of Toronto

One of the abiding lessons of Dennis Preston's folk linguistics is that fresh insights can sometimes arise out of homely situations. I exemplify that lesson with a case study of lexical standardization that is arguably the best-documented example so far of the rise from regional variability to widespread (standard) acceptance. In the framework of language regard (Preston 2011), this study tracks the steps from noticing to classifying with considerable precision. The semantic field involves an obscure schoolyard prank that was originally referred to with disparate local names, and the study plots its ascent to general recognition under the standard term *wedgie*. The empirical evidence comes from fortuitously timed surveys ten years apart in the Dialect Topography of Canada. The progress of change between those surveys is filled in by evidence from public corpora. Striking as this case study is with the amassed evidence before us, its emergence as a sociolinguistic prototype out of what seemed at first to be a disorderly situation stands as a cogent reminder that scientific advances sometimes come from looking in unlikely places.