

Language Diversity and the Public Interest*

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“That’s the good thing about dialects; anybody can do it as a hobby.”

(Taxi cab driver, Albuquerque, NM, January 5, 2006)

The casual comment of a chatty taxi cab driver to a van full of sociolinguistic passengers attending the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America encapsulates the popular perception of dialect diversity in American society. On the one hand, language variation is so transparent that it can be assumed that most speakers of English, particularly native speakers but also speakers of English as a second language (Damann 2006), will readily notice these differences. On the other hand, the remark exposes the presumption common among non-linguists that all language users can make accurate and informed observations about language diversity without any specialized expertise or formal training in the study of language. Not only do people notice language diversity; they feel free to make pronouncements about the status of these language differences, thus creating a good-news-bad-news scenario in which natural observations about language diversity are often accompanied by uninformed opinions espoused as fact.

Language ideology is among the most entrenched belief systems in society, rivaling religion, morality, and nationalism in terms of partisanship. In the US, public controversies ranging from the so-called Ebonics controversy of a decade ago (Wolfram 1998; Rickford 1999; Baugh 2000) to the recent passage of Senate measures to make English the official language of the United States, a “common and unifying” tongue (Associated Press 2006), confirm the intensity of people’s beliefs and opinions about the symbolic status of language diversity. Of course, such debates about language are hardly new; they have erupted periodically in the US since the early attempts of John Adams to establish a national language academy for the new nation more than two centuries ago. At the same time, these debates affirm the pervasive level of public misunderstanding about language diversity. As a number of sociolinguists have now pointed out, this misinformation is not simply innocent folklore; its consequences extend from linguistic prejudice and legal discrimination against speakers of minority languages and dialects (Lippi-Green 1997; Baugh 2003) to the systematic educational misdiagnosis of speakers of dialects and languages other than the standard as ‘deficient’ rather than legitimately ‘different’ (Labov 1976; Adger, Wolfram, and Christian 2007).

It is difficult to imagine a period in the history of human development when issues of language diversity, linguistic subordination, and language loss have been more evident. Just a half-century ago, small, physically remote communities and socially subordinate groups were relatively invisible and inaudible with the dominant, mainstream society. Accordingly, the sociolinguistic status of these communities was unrecognized and their voices unheard. Language varieties often developed, lived, and died without extensive public attention. Today, images and voices can be beamed globally within milliseconds and the naturalness of diversity is readily transparent. One of the obvious implications of the heightened awareness of language diversity is, of course, the increased need for education about the nature and implications of linguistic diversity.

Despite the significance of language in all spheres of public life and at least twelve years of compulsory education in English and/or language arts in US public schools, there is still no

tradition of English language studies that regularly includes the examination of language diversity as a regular part of this education. The need for informed knowledge about language diversity and the dissemination of essential knowledge to the public thus remains an imposing challenge for sociolinguists.

The Challenge of Public Education

Though many sociolinguists assume the social and educational relevance of knowledge about language diversity on some level, this position is certainly not a given in the field of linguistics. In fact, no less a figure than Noam Chomsky, well-known for both his ground-breaking linguistic theories and his political activism, obviously compartmentalizes his professional life and his social life when he observes:

You're a human being, and your time as a human should be socially useful. It does not mean that your choices about helping other people have to be within the context of your professional training as a linguist. Maybe your training just doesn't help you to be useful to other people. In fact, it doesn't (Olson, Faigley, and Chomsky 1991, 30).

Chomsky's stance on the (ir)relevance of linguistics to public life is of course quite contrary to the position articulated in Labov's (1982, 172-73) principles of linguistic involvement where he maintains that linguists have an obligation to use their linguistic knowledge to address language-related social issues, including both the "principle of error correction" and the "principle of debt incurred." My personal position is that our professional training as sociolinguists should, in fact, be used to address language-related social and educational inequality. Language can be used as a tool of social oppression, and linguists can apply their knowledge to address some of the linguistic manifestations of social subordination.

In formal education, very few linguists and classroom teachers have been engaged in programs related to dialect diversity despite the fact that a number of national and state educational agencies affirm the importance of this educational practice. The standards of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) specify that students are to "develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles," and the NCTE/NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) standards for teacher training programs include objectives for the preparation of secondary teachers specifically related to language diversity (2003). A couple of these are illustrated in table 1.

Table 1. NCTE/NCATE standards for teacher training

	NOT ACCEPTABLE	ACCEPTABLE	TARGET
3.1.4	Show a lack of respect for, and little knowledge of diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regional, and social roles;	Know and respect diversity in language use, patterns and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions and social roles and show attention to such diversity in their teaching;	Show extensive knowledge of how and why language varies and changes in different regions, across different cultural groups, and across different time periods and incorporate that knowledge into instruction and assessment that acknowledge and show respect for language
4.4	Show limited ability to create learning environments that promote respect for, and support of, individual differences of ethnicity, race, language, culture, gender, and ability;	Create and sustain learning environments that promote respect for, and support of, ethnicity, race, language, culture, gender, and ability;	Create opportunities for students to analyze how social context affects language and to monitor their own language use and behavior in terms of demonstrating respect for individual differences of ethnicity, race, language, culture, gender, and ability;

Despite the admirable NCTE/NCATE ideals, systematic educational curricula and teacher training programs in compliance with the “acceptable” and “target” standards for learning outcomes related to knowledge about language diversity are virtually non-existent in formal public education programs for students and are rarely incorporated into training programs for teachers.

Programs targeting language diversity are also conspicuously absent from informal public education, apart from the sporadic language controversies that afford linguists their proverbial fifteen minutes of media exposure for a “teachable moment.” In the past two decades, only two national public TV documentaries related to language diversity have aired, *American Tongues* in 1986 (Alvarez and Kolker 1986) and *Do You Speak American?* in 2005 (McNeil-Lehrer 2005). The lack of public discussion about language diversity does not appear to be a simple matter of oversight. Instead, it affirms Fairclough’s observation that beliefs about language need not be made explicit and that language ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible (Fairclough 1989, 85). The application of the correctionist model still dominates the public interpretation of language, and most public discussions of English dialect differences are still consumed by the discussion of the right and wrong way to use the English language. The sustained application of descriptive labels such as “correct,” “proper,” “right,” and “grammatical” when speaking of language differences is hardly accidental; it directly reflects the

underlying belief that non-mainstream and minority varieties of English are simply unworthy approximations of the standard variety. Indeed, the most persistent sociolinguistic challenge in all venues of public education continues to be the widespread application of the so-called “principle of linguistic subordination” (Lippi-Green 1997), in which the language of socially subordinate groups will be interpreted as linguistically inadequate and deficient by comparison with the language of socially dominant groups.

Socialized public opinion about the nature of language differences is only one side of the challenge of public education for linguists. The other side of the challenge is rooted in the entrenched value system within the professional academy. As with practically all academic disciplines, there is a clear-cut status hierarchy in which abstract, theory-driven research is most prestigious, and applied research and public engagement have little academic capital. The research-application dichotomy is instantiated in professional valuation that extends from definitions of core and marginal areas of linguistic study in general to the establishment of criteria for promotion and tenure decisions on a local university level. In the traditional dichotomy between realms of professional responsibility designated as “research” and “service”, service tends to be trivialized in faculty evaluations vis-à-vis research. The road to professional acclaim is rarely paved with public education activities, and it is unlikely to change in the immediate future. This reality brings us back the fundamental rationale for considering sociolinguistic engagement. At the heart of the concern for public education about language diversity is a commitment to sociolinguistic equality rather than professional advancement and status. Some opportunities and obligations simply cannot be measured by their academic capital. I personally must confess that the blend of intellectual inquiry and social engagement has always been one of the most attractive aspects of sociolinguistics, and one of the reasons that language variation studies appealed to me decades ago. Nothing has changed in that regard. On a personal level, I fully agree with Chomsky’s proclamation that “your time as a human should be socially useful,” but I find his dissociation of language from public usefulness to be an ironically obscurantist position on language and life. Further, commitment to applying sociolinguistic knowledge in no way precludes the energetic scholar/teacher from academic success, as evidenced in the fact that some of the most respected research scholars in sociolinguistics have been dedicated to improving public understandings regarding linguistics and language diversity from the outset of their careers.

An Approach to Public Education

While sociolinguistics remains a small, largely invisible professional field, media presentations dominate the representation of American culture. In such a context, the public impact of sociolinguistics is severely limited if it does not effectively use a range of media venues to communicate its messages. The challenge, of course, is to present information in such a way that it is accessible to a broad-based audience of non-experts. Though this may seem like an insurmountable challenge, Deborah Tannen’s popular books (1990; 1995; 2006) and media presence on topics related to language and social interaction have taught us that it is not an unachievable ideal. There are also aspects of language variation that hold inherent intrigue for general audiences, and we need to start by connecting language diversity with this public curiosity.

My first experience with a TV production executive at a public broadcasting station emphatically reinforced the value of audiovisual appeal in presentations featuring language diversity. As the executive surfed through the channels on the television in his office he proclaimed, “You have ten to fifteen seconds to appeal to your potential audience; if you don’t capture their interest during that time period, you’ve lost them.” Five TV documentaries later,

I'm inclined to think that viewers enjoy seeing and hearing diverse language varieties in lively, natural settings and that they will stay tuned if language diversity is presented in a generally appealing format. The notion that media presentations about language should be entertaining may seem somewhat superficial to those of us accustomed to classroom instruction and academic presentations focused more on the transmission of knowledge than on entertainment, but language-related media productions do indeed compete with other types of entertainment, including professionally produced documentaries for educational TV stations. One of the reasons that the documentary *American Tongues* (Alvarez and Kolker 1986) has been effective for two decades now is due to its high entertainment value. The use of striking dialogue and humor also serve as a non-confrontational method for opening up candid discussions about language attitudes. For over a decade, I and my colleagues at the North Carolina Language and Life Project, housed at North Carolina State University, have produced a number of documentaries on language diversity in North Carolina. We have shown that it is quite possible to pique the public's interest in language differences if these are framed in appropriate, natural cultural settings. For example, when our documentary *Voices of North Carolina* (Hutcheson 2005) aired on the non-profit, non-commercial Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in North Carolina, it had a rating of 2.3 per 1,000 viewing homes, significantly higher than the regular programming in that time slot (generally less than 2). Perhaps just as importantly, viewers did not turn the program off; there was no significant drop-off in the early- and late-show audience share during the program, and the station received numerous follow-up e-mails about the viewers' fascination with the program. While a viewer rating of 2.3 may pale by comparison with the rating of a popular major network program, it does demonstrate that presentations about dialect diversity can compete at least within the restricted audience of potential viewers who watch public television.

The themes that frame our presentations of language diversity are typically related to cultural legacy and historical heritage. One can hardly study culture and history without considering the iconic role of language in the sociohistorical and sociocultural development of diverse populations. As one of our Cherokee language speakers put it in *Voices of North Carolina* (Hutcheson 2005), "Language is culture and culture is language." When language diversity is associated with other aspects of historical and cultural roots such as settlement history and traditions such as music and other folkways, a meaningful context for broader cultural and social issues is established for the presentation of language differences. As I often say to inquiring reporters and journalists in search of sound bytes for their articles on issues connected to language diversity, "It's never really about the language; it's always about cultural behaviors that are symbolically represented by language" (Associated Press May 21, 2006). Though the general public may neither understand nor value the seemingly myopic obsession of linguists with technical structural detail, it can appreciate and identify with the symbolic role that language plays in historical, regional, and cultural developments.

One of the attributes of our public outreach programs is the focus on the positive dimensions of language diversity rather than on the controversy sometimes associated with this topic. Despite deep-seated ideological differences between sociolinguistic axioms and public interpretations of language differences, we have taken the position that positively framed presentations of language differences hold a greater likelihood of being received by the public than the direct confrontation of seemingly unassailable ideologies. Some may question the ethics of what appears to be an avoidance strategy in confronting public misperceptions of language differences, but our interpretation is that the initial stage of public presentation is not the place for this discussion. Once a few fundamental sociolinguistic premises about language diversity are established inductively, such a discussion may become more meaningful. Furthermore,

deductive linguistic proclamations about the legitimacy of language diversity rarely lead to the honest discussion of language differences. The most effective and permanent education always takes place when learners discover truths for themselves. Inductive, incremental education that begins with a positive, non-threatening perspective on language diversity provides a much more effective opportunity for an authentic discussion of language issues than direct statements of opposition to deep-rooted positions. In the final analysis, we want our audiences to come to understand the truth about language diversity for themselves.

Venues of Public Education

Venues for public education extend from opportunistic-based, teachable moments that spontaneously arise from current news events involving language to planned programs that systematically target specific or broad-based public audiences. On a sporadic basis, sociolinguists are called upon by the media to provide perspectives and opinions on language-related stories. These stories may range from longstanding national debates about the adoption of English as the official language of the United States to local stories that involve comments or observations about language or dialect. The responses by linguists to such opportunities vary, from those who view these queries as a welcome opportunity for public education to those who dismiss these requests because they may feel that such reporting, or news reporting in general, is superficial and unreliable. I personally think that these occasions offer public exposure that can raise public awareness of language issues if nothing else. When a prominent, nationally recognized linguist such as Deborah Tannen talks about the role of language in social interaction or when John Baugh talks about linguistic profiling on a national network news program, it paves the way for teachable moments in public education. I have, for example, effectively used the 20/20 Downtown news program on linguistic profiling (ABC news, February 6, 2002) and the subsequent U. S. Fair Housing Commission's 60-second public advertisement (Ad Council 2003) about the role of linguistic profiling in housing discrimination as important illustrations of the subtle but significant role of language in discrimination with audiences that range from traditional classrooms to community-based civic groups.

Though news events involving language provide an opportunity for public education, such responses are typically reactive rather than proactive, and linguists have little control over the presentation format or the reduction of their input to a convenient, abbreviated sound byte. Our current proactive efforts have attempted to be more deliberate, detailed, and diverse, ranging from documentaries produced for public television to dialect awareness curricula for teachers and public school students.

Documentaries

Documentary productions of the North Carolina Language and Life Project have ranged from productions for local communities to those produced for general public television audiences, mostly for the state affiliate of PBS, or, in one case, PBS nationally. Some of our productions have focused exclusively on language (Blanton and Waters 1996; Hutcheson 2001, 2004a, 2005), while others have followed local interests to the point of having little to do with language directly (Rowe and Grimes 2006; Hutcheson 2006). The documentary on Lumbee English titled *Indian by Birth: The Lumbee Dialect* (Hutcheson 2001) illustrates a documentary specifically focused on language though it naturally frames this discussion within a cultural milieu, a regional setting, and a sociohistorical background. It includes a vignette on the ancestral language background of the Lumbee Indians and the English roots of Lumbee English, a sociocultural section about the symbolic cultural role of language in community life, a cognitive component that depicts some of the linguistic structures of the dialect, and an affective section

about the attitudes, stereotypes, and misconceptions that often characterize the public perception of this ethnolinguistic variety. The objective is to educate the general public, including local community members, about the role of language in its community setting and the emblematic function of Lumbee English as a marker of socioethnic identity. The sociohistorical and sociocultural legacy of language is of particular significance on a local, community level as well as for outsiders who know little about the Lumbee as a Native American tribe. Language differences are presented in terms of cultural identity and historical heritage rather than language ideology, though issues of linguistic subordination are addressed in indirect ways.

One of our most successful documentaries on public TV in North Carolina, *Voices of North Carolina*, provides an overview of a number of different language situations in the state. These include the status of the Cherokee language, an endangered Native American language, and the varieties of Spanish brought to North Carolina with the recent wave of Latino immigrants to the state in the last decade. Different regional dialects of English are also featured, including Outer Banks English and Appalachian English, along with ethnic varieties such as Lumbee English and African American English. It further features a vignette on language change in metropolitan areas of the South by comparing older, lifetime residents of Charlotte, North Carolina, with younger residents and outsiders who are now predominant in the city's population. As the promotional blurb reads, "Voices of North Carolina is a unique journey through the dialects and language of this diverse Southern state, from Hoi Toider speech on the Outer Banks to the Highland Speech of the Smoky Mountains" (Hutcheson 2005). In a strategic decision to provide credibility to the presentation, we enlisted William C. Friday, President Emeritus of the University of North Carolina University system and arguably the most highly respected public figure in North Carolina, to narrate the documentary. The public television station, the state affiliate of PBS, was so impressed by the interest in the program that they offered a DVD of *Voices of North Carolina* as an incentive give-away item in their annual fundraising campaign, a symbolic recognition of the public appeal of our documentary. To my knowledge, this is the only language documentary ever used in this way.

Although the North Carolina Language and Life Project has had the good fortune of having a highly creative, fulltime videographer (Neal Hutcheson) to direct the production of our documentaries, it should be noted that some projects can be done on a modest budget by students who are interested in filmmaking and/or documentary production. In fact, the first documentary ever produced under the aegis of the North Carolina Language and Life Project was done by a couple of undergraduate students in a linguistics class who were more interested in documentary production than in linguistic analysis. They had no prior experience in filmmaking and production, no equipment, and no budget to carry out the project. We set up an independent study, borrowed equipment from the laboratory of the Communication Department at the university, and operated on a shoe-string budget of less than \$1,500, mostly for travel and supplies. Almost a decade later, their 23-minute production, *The Ocracoke Brogue* (Blanton and Waters 1996), about the dialect spoken on Ocracoke Island, in the North Carolina Outer Banks islands, remains one of our most well-known and economically successful documentaries we have ever produced.¹ Furthermore, it has become a staple feature in the Ocracoke Preservation Society's museum, where it runs continuously whenever the museum is open to the public. Current digital video technology available at most universities makes these types of low-budget, public education projects even more accessible for student production.

Language Exhibits

The museum exhibit is another venue for the public presentation of language diversity. With the cooperation of community-based museums and preservation societies, we have now constructed three permanent museum exhibits that highlight language diversity in North Carolina. The exhibition at the museum of the Ocracoke Preservation Society includes panels on the history and development of the dialect, its current moribund status, and an illustrative list of some distinctive lexical items of the variety, along with the continuously playing documentary that is the center of the so-called “Dialect Room” at the museum.

We also constructed a permanent exhibit on Lumbee language for the Museum of the Native American Resource Center in Pembroke, North Carolina.² The exhibit, funded by a grant from the Informal Science Education program of the US National Science Foundation, features four panels highlighting the ancestral Native American language heritage of the Lumbee, the development of their unique Lumbee English dialect, the representation of Lumbee identity through dialect, and the presentation of some distinctive lexical items of Lumbee English. The exhibit also includes an interactive, touch-screen monitor that allows visitors to select from a menu of two-minute video vignettes that range from segments on the development and status of Lumbee language to an interactive vocabulary quiz. In addition to visitors and community residents, each year thousands of schoolchildren in Robeson County visit the museum to view the exhibition.

A third exhibit was recently constructed in the gallery of the Outer Banks History Center located at the Lost Colony Festival Park on Roanoke Island, one of the most popular tourist attractions in North Carolina. This exhibit, titled “Freedom’s Voice: Celebrating the Black Experience on the Outer Banks,” is by far the most inclusive and extensive of our exhibitions, extending far beyond language variation on the Outer Banks. It includes images, a documentary (Sellers 2006), interactive audiovisuals, and artifacts and panels that highlight the Freedmen’s Colony on Roanoke Island during the Civil War, African Americans’ involvement in the maritime industry, and African Americans’ role in education, religion, and community life on the Outer Banks. A half dozen different listening stations feature the voices of local residents who were a part of our research study on language variation and change in Roanoke Island (Carpenter 2004, 2005). In an important sense, this exhibition combines history, culture, and language in narrating the story of the “other lost colony” on Roanoke Island. Exhibits such as these offer a permanent venue for public education that can be used in both formal and informal education. Such presentations can also be adapted or designed as virtual museums so that their education potential extends well beyond their local, physical community site.

Dialect Awareness Curricula

One of our most ambitious programs in public education involves the development of formal curricular materials on language diversity in the public schools. We have experimented with curricular programs in a number of communities throughout North Carolina, and taught a program annually for more than a decade in the public school in Ocracoke. Unfortunately, formal education about dialect variation is still a relatively novel, and in some cases, controversial idea. Our pilot program has focused on a middle-school curriculum in social studies that connects with language arts study (Reaser and Wolfram 2005a,b; Reaser 2006), but similar units might be designed for other levels of K-12 education as well. The curriculum is based on humanistic, scientific, and social science rationales, and engages students on a number of different participatory levels. In the process, students learn about dialect study as a kind of scientific inquiry and as a form of social science research. The examination of dialect differences offers great potential for students to investigate the interrelation between linguistic and social diversity,

including diversity grounded in geography, history, and cultural beliefs and practices. There are a number of creative ways in which students can examine how language and culture go hand-in-hand as they address language diversity. For example, in one of our lessons, we consider issues of language variation related to Native American groups. Students are shown two eight- to ten-minute video vignettes, one of the Cherokee Indians whose native language is currently endangered, and one of the Lumbee Indians whose native language has been lost for generations. As noted above, though their native language has been extinct since at least the 1800s, the Lumbee developed a unique variety of English that symbolically differentiates them from neighboring European American and African American populations. Through this curricular unit, students consider the loss and endangered status of many Native American languages, the symbolic culture-language connection, language revitalization efforts, and linguistic stereotyping. In the following reflective exercise from Reaser and Wolfram (2006b), students are asked to compare and contrast the different sociolinguistic and sociohistorical situations affecting the Cherokee and Lumbee tribes.

1. How have the histories of the Lumbee Native Americans and the Cherokee Native American been similar?
2. How have they differed?
3. Why have the Cherokee been able to preserve their native language whereas the Lumbee have lost theirs?
4. How does speaking a unique dialect of English differ from speaking a different language like Cherokee?
5. What role does language play in these two communities?

A comparable video vignette on African American English sets the stage for considering issues of language accommodation and style shifting, language and identity, and even the issue of regionality in African American English. In the following exercise, the students in the Ocracoke School start by considering their own speech, then consider the speech of African Americans in different situations based on a vignette extracted from the documentary *Voices of North Carolina* (from Reaser and Wolfram 2006a).

You will see a vignette about language experience. Before you watch the video answer the following questions:

1. Do you every feel that you have to change the way you speak? Why?
2. When you change your speech, is it mostly conscious or unconscious? That is, do you have to think about it or does it just happen naturally?

In the following video clip, you will see some African Americans from North Carolina who are proud of their dialect but also switch their speech to Standard English when they feel it necessary. As you watch the video, think about responses to the following questions:

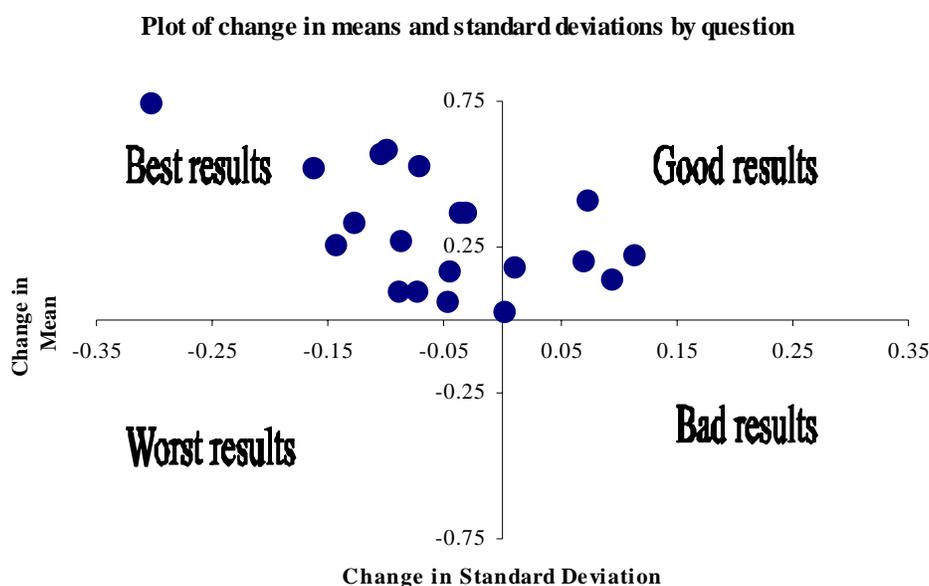
1. Could you hear differences in the speech of individuals in different situations?
2. Could you tell which African Americans lived in cities and which lived in rural areas?
3. Are these African Americans aware of the fact that they change their speech or not?
4. Why do you think that they feel that they must change their speech in different situations?

One of the greatest advantages of a curriculum on dialects is its potential for tapping the linguistic resources of students' indigenous communities. In addition to classroom lessons, students learn by going into the community to collect current dialect data. In most cases, the

speech characteristics of the local community should make dialects come alive in a way that is unmatched by textbook knowledge. Educational models that treat the local community as a resource to be tapped rather than as a liability to be overcome have been shown to be quite effective in other areas of language arts education, and there is no reason why this model cannot be applied to the study of dialects. A model that builds upon community strengths in language, even when the language is different from the norm of the mainstream educational system, seems to hold much greater potential for success than one that focuses exclusively upon conflicts between the community language and school language.

Though we have had great personal success teaching a pilot program on dialect awareness in Ocracoke, the process of implementing a local dialect awareness program taught by classroom teachers without linguistic training is a different matter. However, the formal evaluation of the pilot version of a state-wide dialect awareness program taught by regular classroom teachers (Reaser 2006) shows promising results. Reaser devised a pre- and post-curricular survey measure that included items related to both language knowledge and language attitudes. The plot of the pre- and post-test change for the 20-item test is given in figure 1 (from Reaser 2006:120).

Figure 1. Plot of pre- and post-test results for dialect curriculum (from Reaser 2006:120)



All of the survey items showed change in the direction of increased tolerance toward and/or knowledge about dialect diversity, and 17 of the 20 items indicated a significant change between pre- and post-curricular surveys. Furthermore, 98 percent of the 129 students who were involved in the pilot study reported that they learned something surprising about dialects that would change the way that they thought about language, and 88 percent of the students thought that the information in the curriculum was important for all students to study. With respect to language attitudes, 91 percent of the students found fault with people who were not aware that dialects show systematic patterning and that dialects have historical and cultural value.

We plan to continue piloting these materials with the eventual goal of providing such materials for all eighth-grade social studies students throughout the state. Our decision to target eighth-grade social studies is based in part on the fact that this level is dedicated to the study of

state history and culture, a topic that dovetails neatly with the study of language variation over time and place (Reaser and Wolfram 2005a,b; Reaser 2006). Our rationale for the choice is straightforward: an important component of the state's historical and cultural development is reflected in language diversity that ranges from the endangered or lost Native American languages in the state to the development of distinct regional and sociocultural varieties of English. Our program naturally clearly fits in with the state's mandated course of study for eighth grade social studies (www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/socialstudies/scos/2003-04/050eighthgrade) that includes the curricular themes of "culture and diversity," "historic perspectives," and "geographical relationships." In addition, the dialect awareness curriculum helps fulfill social studies competency goals such as "Describe the roles and contributions of diverse groups, such as American Indians, African Americans, European immigrants, landed gentry, tradesmen, and small farmers to everyday life in colonial North Carolina" (Competency Goal 1.07) or "Assess the importance of regional diversity on the development of economic, social, and political institutions in North Carolina" (Competency Goal 8.04).

A further consideration in targeting the social studies curriculum is that fact that it tends to have more flexibility in terms of innovative materials than language arts, which is traditionally constrained by year-end standardized performance testing. The subject of language diversity may naturally merge with language arts and even science at points where the focus is on language analysis as a type of scientific inquiry. Students are not the only ones who profit from the study of dialect diversity. Teachers also find that some of their stereotypes about languages are challenged and that they become more knowledgeable and enlightened about language diversity in the process of teaching the curriculum. In fact, the classroom teachers who piloted the curriculum were among the most enthusiastic supporters of the curriculum because of the new knowledge they had received in teaching the curriculum to their students.

Popular Books and Articles

One of the most effective methods for disseminating information about language diversity is magazine articles and books for general audiences. Deborah Tannen has demonstrated that popular books about language use in social interaction can, in fact, be quite intriguing to the public and provide an effective venue for public education about the role of language in everyday life, though her popular recognition is certainly the exception rather than the rule among academics. One of the more successful popular writing ventures related to dialect diversity is *Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English* (2001), co-authored by sociolinguist John R. Rickford and his son, Russell John Rickford, then a journalist with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Winner of an American Book Award for outstanding literary achievement, this book demonstrates that the presentation of language diversity can, in fact, reach very broad audiences, though again it is notably the exception in sociolinguistic writing.

Our own efforts to write for general audiences have met with more modest, regional success. The book, *Hoi Toide on the Outer Banks: The Story of the Ocracoke Brogue* (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1997), received considerable publicity on the Outer Banks and the North Carolina mainland as well, and the first run of almost 4,000 copies sold out within several months of its release. A decade after its original publication, the book is still available at tourist sites, in popular bookstores, lighthouses, and museums throughout the Outer Banks. Another trade book, *Fine in the World: Lumbee Language in Time and Place* (Wolfram, Dannenberg, Knick, and Oxendine 2002), is distributed through the Museum of the Native American Resource Center in Pembroke and through the North Carolina State University Extension/Publications program. Though its appeal is fairly local, residents and teachers in

Southeastern North Carolina have found its presentation of the role of dialect in Lumbee life informative. A more recent effort to educate the general public about the status of dialects in American society is the collection *American Voices* (Wolfram and Ward 2006), a book of brief essays for non-experts written by linguists about both well-known and barely recognized dialects of American English that aims to demonstrate that everyone speaks a dialect and that they are all interesting and valuable. It attempts to translate the research of professional dialectologists and sociolinguists into brief, readable descriptions for those who are curious about language differences but have neither the background nor the desire to be professional linguists. The success of this attempt, co-edited by a sociolinguist and career journalist, is yet to be determined, but it may ultimately have to do as much with its marketability as with its readability. Popular literary venues for the presentation of language diversity hold great potential, although the process of writing for such audiences is a formidable challenge that requires writing skills quite different from those typically exhibited by linguists. Furthermore, such ventures are probably best undertaken with professional journalists and/or by those accustomed to writing for popular audiences. Perhaps just as importantly, such literary ventures need aggressive, proactive marketing plans that ensure that they will reach their intended audience.

Dividends of Public Education

The processes and products described above are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive. Indeed, they should be complemented by other activities that range from regular radio and television shows about language diversity to other types of presentations for a wide array of public audiences. The public presentations of linguist Geoff Nunberg are exemplary in this respect; he does a regular feature on language on the NPR show “Fresh Air” and has written numerous commentaries for the Sunday *New York Times* “Week in Review” as well as for other periodicals. Nunberg has also been contributing regular letters from America to the BBC₄ series “State of the Union.”

We have given presentations on the history of African American English for Black History Month and workshops on Lumbee English and the Cherokee language for Native American Heritage Month as part of human relations initiatives at organizations that extend from private corporations such as IBM and SAS to public federal and state agencies. Selecting venues for the presentation of information about language diversity is a challenge that should not be limited by past traditions or precedents of public education. In fact, it requires our most proactive and entrepreneurial endeavors. Mitigating the effects of the dominant language ideology and the widespread application of the principle of linguistic subordination involves long-term, proactive formal and informal re-education on both a local and broad-based level.

Though it may seem like a relatively minor and incidental step, mainstreaming the discussion of language differences constitutes a major accomplishment in public education. For all of the natural interest that language naturally piques, there is little informed public discussion of language as a reflection of historical legacy, regional affiliation, and cultural background. Entire television channels are dedicated to history, geography, and the public interest, but language diversity is rarely represented despite its emblematic role in the development of peoples and cultures in time and place.

As language diversity becomes increasingly recognized in the public sector and the number of moribund language varieties increases precipitously, the sociolinguistic educational challenge increases proportionally. But education about these issues cannot be restricted to occasional, one-time formal institutional presentations; the social and education stakes are simply too high. If, indeed, sociolinguists ever wish to change the current social order of linguistic discrimination and oppression, they must treat this challenge as central and essential

to their sociolinguistic educational mission. Realistically, fundamental change in popular language ideology will take generations to effect and we must utilize the full range of formal and informal educational venues to tell the story of one of the most natural and essential manifestations of human behavioral differences.

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¹ All of the proceeds from the sale of this documentary go directly to the Ocracoke Preservation Society (OPS); in fact, the North Carolina Language and Life Project pays for the cost of production in order to maximize revenues for the OPS.

² The exhibit on Lumbee language was originally one of 13 exhibits selected for inclusion for the Launch Event for the Decade of Behavior displayed for the members of Congress in Washington, D.C. in 2001.