

EXPERIENCE REPORT

SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

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ABSTRACT

Although the disparity between sociolinguistic knowledge and popular beliefs about language diversity is well documented, little proactive attention has been given to changing public misconceptions. How can programs about linguistic diversity be presented when the prevailing public language ideology is largely fueled by the principle of linguistic subordination and interpreted in terms of a correctionist model? The approach to dialect awareness presented here is based on the underlying assumption that the public is inherently curious about language differences and that this intrigue can be transformed into public education venues. It connects the legacy of language variation to legitimate historical and cultural themes that are intrinsically interesting to the public, and assumes that the most effective and permanent education takes place when learners discover truths for themselves. It further presumes that positively framed presentations of language differences in sociocultural and sociohistorical context hold a greater likelihood of being received by the public than the direct confrontation of seemingly unassailable ideologies. The presentation considers three quite different venues to exemplify engagement: (1) an extended, long-term engagement commitment in a small, historically isolated research community; (2) language documentaries in public education; and (3) the role of activist linguists on university campuses. The presentation demonstrates that the public rhetoric on linguistic diversity can, in fact, be reconciled with a linguistically informed perspective and that language-awareness programs can serve a range of audiences utilizing a variety of venues.

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RESUMO

Embora a disparidade entre o conhecimento sociolinguístico e as crenças populares sobre diversidade linguística estejam bem documentadas, pouca atenção proativa tem sido dada a mudar concepções equivocadas do público. Como podem ser apresentados programas sobre diversidade linguística quando a ideologia de linguagem que prevalece publicamente é amplamente alimentada pelo princípio de subordinação linguística e interpretada em termos de um modelo centrado em correção? A abordagem para a consciência dialetal exposta aqui é baseada na suposição subjacente de que o público é inerentemente curioso sobre diferenças linguísticas e que essa história pode ser transformada via fóruns de educação pública. Ela conecta o legado da variação linguística a temas históricos e culturais legítimos que são intrinsecamente interessantes ao público, e assume que a educação mais eficaz e permanente acontece quando aprendizes descobrem verdades por si mesmos. Além disso, presume que apresentações que perspectivam positivamente diferenças linguísticas em contexto sociocultural e sócio-histórico ensejam uma maior probabilidade de serem recebidas pelo público do que o confronto direto de ideologias aparentemente incontestáveis. A apresentação considera três fóruns bastante diferentes para exemplificar o engajamento: (1) um compromisso amplo e de longo prazo de engajamento numa pequena comunidade de pesquisa historicamente isolada; (2) documentários linguísticos na educação pública; e (3) o papel de linguistas ativistas nos campi universitários. A apresentação demonstra que a retórica pública sobre a diversidade linguística pode, de fato, ser reconciliada com uma perspectiva linguisticamente informada e que programas de conscientização linguística podem servir a uma variedade de públicos, utilizando uma variedade de fóruns.

KEYWORDS

Engagement; Knowledge Activism; Social Justice; Linguistic Inequality; Public Education.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Engajamento; Ativismo do Conhecimento; Justiça Social; Desigualdade Linguística; Educação Pública.

Dedicated to the memory of Jan Blommaert (1961-2021), whose endeavors seamlessly linked theory, empiricism, and activism

In a world in which knowledge is at once more widely available than ever before, and more exclusive and elitist than ever before, knowledge is a battlefield and those professionally involved in it must be aware of that. Speaking for myself: a neutral stance towards knowledge is impossible, for it would make knowledge anodyne, powerless, of little significance in the eyes of those exposed to it. Which is why we need an activist attitude, one in which the battle for power-through-knowledge is engaged, in which knowledge is activated as a key instrument for the liberation of people, and as a central tool underpinning any effort to arrive at a more just and equitable society. I have been a knowledge professional, indeed. But understanding what I have done as a professional is easier when one realizes the activism which, at least for me, made it worthwhile being a professional.

(BLOMMAERT, 2020, <http://tachesdesens.blogspot.com/2020/>)

INTRODUCTION

To many students, linguistics is a vulnerable discipline that is still considered to be an esoteric, graduate-school specialization. In this context, linguistics is often viewed as an exceptionalized intellectual endeavor with little relevance for application. As Noam Chomsky, who was both a philosopher of language extraordinaire at the same time he was one of the world's most recognized political activists, once noted in an interview with Olson, Faigley and Chomsky (1991):

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; Chomsky, 1991, p. 30 *emphasis added*).

Closer inspection reveals that the discrete divide between theory and practice is problematic. In fact, one of the pioneering theorists of language, Ferdinand de Saussure, noted more than a century ago.

Of what use is linguistics? ...In the lives of individuals and of society, Language is a factor of greater importance than any other. For the study of language to remain solely the business of a handful of specialists would be a quite unacceptable state of affairs. In practice, the study of language is in some degree or other the concern of everyone. (Saussure, 1916 [1986, p. 7])

Dwight Bolinger, whose 1972 Presidential Address at the Linguistics Society of America was titled "Truth is a Linguistic Question," put the everyday relevance of language into perspective when he observed that:

The workings of language are terra incognita to the average person, who daily treads a minefield thinking it is familiar ground. There is no sense of urgency to learn what one thinks one already knows. The linguist's task is double: to infuse complacency with curiosity and to answer the resulting question the best he [sic] can. The public needs to know enough about our specialty to realize how it affects their lives" (Bolinger, 1979, p. 404).

American humorist and novelist, Mark Twain, put the dilemma in broader ideological context by noting that “It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you in trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.” With respect to language, the fundamentals of language structure and use are highly misunderstood and largely dismissed in popular culture. Popular language ideologies that socially stigmatized language varieties are little more than a “collection of errors” or that some people do not speak dialects are in conflict with foundational linguistic description and explanation. Furthermore, language is used as a tool of exclusion and social oppression to reproduce social inequality. Linguists, as social beings, therefore have a responsibility as knowledge activists to address fundamental issues of inequality related to language. Or, as Bolinger (1979, p. 407) put it, “Language should be as much an object of public scrutiny as any of the other things that keenly affect our lives—as much as pollution, energy, crime, busing, and next week’s grocery bill.” My personal position is strongly aligned with Blommaert’s quote above; as I find that “understanding what I have done as a professional is easier when one realizes the activism which, at least for me, made it worthwhile being a professional.”

At the same time, I have found that the connection of research and engagement is a productive and positive experience for my graduate students as well. Research suggests that student engagement is a key element that influences student success (Day et al. 2012; O’meara, 2008; O’Meara; jaeger, 2016), and that combining engagement with rigorous research has a synergistic, complementary effect. Experience in engagement further broadens background for employment beyond the academy; “through participation in engagement activities graduate students gain additional skills that may not be exercised in their dissertation research and teaching duties, such as overseeing budgets, planning and evaluating programs, political involvement, and working with diverse populations” (Day et al. 2012, p. 169). My contention is that engagement is good for both researchers and their students.

1. VENUES OF ENGAGEMENT

Cameron et al. (1992, p. 24) observe that “if knowledge is worth having, it is worth sharing.” To many this sharing is quite restricted to our professional colleagues in disciplinary professional conferences and publications, but I would argue that this should be the case not only with our colleagues in the academy, but with others who might benefit from it, including the communities who provide us with our data and other public communities. As Rickford (1999, p. 315) puts it, “The fundamental rationale for getting involved in application, advocacy, and empowerment is that we owe it to the people whose data fuel our theories and descriptions.” Perhaps more fundamentally, we should be committed to

a search for fundamental truths about matter, nature, behavior, and society. When it comes to language diversity and variation, however, there is a tolerance for misinformation that is matched in few subject areas (e.g. Bauer; Trudgill, 1999; Lippi-Green, 2012). And the factual misinformation is not all innocent folklore; it actively reproduces social inequality, prejudice, and discrimination based on language differences. At the very least, then, our research should assume responsibility for replacing misguided notions and erroneous beliefs about language diversity with information about the authentic nature of these language differences.

In this essay, I consider the impact of research derived from a range of sociolinguistic projects in the Southeastern United States, particularly within the state of North Carolina. Sociolinguistic outreach and engagement may involve a comprehensive set of activities and programs, from formal curricular programs on language in the public schools to the dissemination of rapid, anonymous informal education to casual strollers at a state fair or television viewers browsing program channels during leisure time. In the following sections, I discuss several levels of and venues for formal and informal education, and consider their impact on different populations. The target populations range from the communities that provide our data to programs for informal and formal public education. Naturally, audiences for sociolinguistic insights do not fall into neatly compartmentalized generic categories such as “professional” and “public.” Baumgardt (2012), in his discussion of “science accommodation” – the adapting of technical, scientific knowledge for presentation to those outside of a field of expertise—observes that the impact of sociolinguistic perspectives has to be considered in terms of a wide array of diverse audiences and encounters. These audiences range from immediate and direct contacts to mediated and indirect audiences.

2. RESOURCES FOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC TRANSMISSION

Sociolinguists have typically used venues and genres conventionally available to academic professionals for presenting their findings and perspectives on language diversity. These include journal articles, textbooks, websites, occasional, invited media interviews, and editorial opinion articles in newspapers and popular magazines. According to Baumgardt’s (2012) interviews with prominent sociolinguists in the United States, most do not feel successful in conveying their knowledge to audiences beyond the academy, though Baumgardt notes that the cascading, diffusional effect of sociolinguistic knowledge through allied professions and students may make those efforts more successful than the pessimistic self-evaluations by sociolinguists seem to indicate.

At the same time, the potential venues for sharing information about language differences seem limited only by our imagination and creativity. In fact, Joshua Katz, a

graduate student in statistics at North Carolina State University at the time, applied a relatively straightforward heat map visualization based on the 2003 Harvard Dialect Survey conducted by Bert Vaux and Scott Golder (see http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/cambridge_survey for current survey) to present data on lexical distribution in American English and to create a popular quiz based on these data that pinpoints the regional identity of speakers throughout the United States. The results, published in the *New York Times* in December 2013 (<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/12/20/sunday-review/dialect-quiz-map.html>), received more than 38 million hits, becoming the *New York Times*' article with the highest number of hits for the entire year. The social media trending created an instant sensation, and sociolinguists could only envy the buzz created by Katz's adaptation and presentation of data that had been accessible to professionals and to the public for almost a decade. Perhaps more importantly, the generated interest illustrated the natural curiosity that just about everyone has about language differences, and the potential for disseminating sociolinguistic information in a media world far different from the one in which sociolinguistics developed in the mid-twentieth century. Venues for sharing sociolinguistic insights obviously need to extend beyond the traditional parameters of academic disciplines, and many of these necessarily involve technical and creative expertise and alliances rather than simple cross-disciplinary, academic collaboration.

One of the most popular venues we have developed for public and educational audiences over the past couple of decades is video productions, ranging from posted vignettes on a YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/NCLLP>) to the programs for television. The audiences for these "language and life" productions range from national audiences (e.g. *Mountain Talk* [Hutcheson, 2004]; *First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee* [Cullinan; Hutcheson, 2015]), to regional (*Voices of North Carolina* [Hutcheson, 2005]; *Spanish Voices* [Cullinan, 2011]), to those produced primarily for community organizations (e.g. *The Ocracoke Brogue* [Blanton; Waters, 1995]). Our latest documentary, *Talking Black in America* (Hutcheson; Cullinan, 2018) is a mini series of four episodes on different dimensions of African American Language in the US is in progress. Fortunately, high-quality video recording equipment and user-friendly editing software are now available, making video documentary production more feasible for students and faculty.

The compilation of oral histories on CDs or website streaming is yet another convenient and straightforward way that we can share the diverse voices of communities where we have conducted sociolinguistic research. Based on sociolinguistic interviews, and with the assistance of community members, we have put together collections of stories that reminisce, celebrate, and entertain both community residents and outsiders. We have partnered with the Ocracoke Preservation Society to produce two such compilations a decade apart (Childs; Wolfram; Cloud 2001; Reaser et al., 2012), and a similar project was

undertaken with community members in a small, isolated African American community in the Smoky Mountains (Mallinson; Childs; Cox, 2006) using data extracted from interviews conducted for sociolinguistic research and repurposed for oral history compilations.

The museum exhibit, both in physical and digital format, is another productive venue for significant sociolinguistic presentation and engagement. With community-based preservation societies and museums, it is possible to construct permanent or limited-time exhibits that highlight language variation. For example, an exhibit we created titled *Freedom's Voice: Celebrating the Black Experience on the Outer Banks* (Vaughn: Grimes, 2006) included images, a documentary, interactive audiovisuals, artifacts, and audio clips first recorded for sociolinguistic interviews and re-appropriated for oral histories to complement informational panels that highlighted African Americans' involvement in the history of coastal North Carolina. This exhibition brought together history, culture, and language through narrations of the story of the previously overlooked contributions of African Americans at the island site of the so-called "Lost Colony" of Roanoke Island in coastal Carolina. At the same time, we conducted research on this enclave sociolinguistic community that contributed to the sociolinguistic research literature (Carpenter; Hilliard, 2005).

One of the most successful exhibits we have used to present sociolinguistic research in a public forum is an annual booth at the North Carolina State Fair that has a yearly attendance exceeding one million people. Video vignettes and free dialect buttons celebrating dialect use (e.g. "bless your heart", "dingbatter", "I speak North Cackalacky" [a folk term for the State of North Carolina], etc.) are very popular with attendees. In addition, an interactive, touch-screen monitor allows visitors to guess the regional voices of speakers from the archival recordings. The 10-day fair is staffed largely by student volunteers as part of a service-learning endeavor in which students interact about language in North Carolina with fair attendees.

Writing about sociolinguistics for non-specialized audiences is often difficult for linguists, and most do not have the journalistic expertise to write general books and articles for broad-based audiences, though there are a few notable exceptions (e.g. Tannen, 1990; Rickford; Rickford, 2000). With varying degrees of success, we have authored trade books aimed at these non-linguist audiences. For example, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes' (1997) *Hoi Toide on the Outer Banks: The Story of the Ocracoke Brogue* remains available to tourists who visit the Outer Banks more than two decades after it was written, and Wolfram et al.'s (2002) *Fine in the World: Lumbee Language in Time and Place* is useful for residents of the community, educators, and others curious about the language variety of the Lumbee American Indians, the largest group of American Indians East of the Mississippi River (population circa 55,000). Translating highly specialized technical knowledge about science into accessible descriptions for lay people has proven to be a rhetorical and writing challenge for those attempting to extend their descriptions beyond the academy (Reaser;

Myrick, 2015), but we have also found that the incorporation of digital enhancements can reinforce print data and make descriptions come to life for readers. For example, our trade book aimed at residents of and visitors to North Carolina, *Talkin' Tar Heel: How our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina* (Wolfram; Reaser, 2014), relies on more than 130 audiovisual enhancements, where readers get to experience the language as they read through text, accessed through numerous Quick Response Codes (QRs), along with more than 60 images of people and places. Figure 1 includes a copy of a page with quotes from a long-time, elderly resident of the city of Charlotte about traditional attitudes towards Northerners who move to the South. Instead of simply reading the quote in orthographically altered script for the effect of dialect, readers can scan the QR using any portable internet device like a smartphone or tablet to go directly to the quote and see and hear the speaker.



FIGURE 4.4. Author Martha Pearl Villas discusses the rapid changes she has seen in Charlotte. (Photograph by Neal Hutcheson)

southern dialect: “And these No’thuhnuhs come down heuh, and we take ‘em in. And befo’ you know it, it ain’t the same. It’s really not. They don’t think and ac’ like we do. Well they shu’ don’t tawk like us. They have a shahpness to theuh speech, don’t you think so? Most South-uhnuhs and all, ah mean ah feel like we have kahna a soft, melodious voice. Of cou’s’e, whah shouldn’t ah think it; ah don’t know any different.”²² Notice that her speech, as an elderly, upper-class resident of the city born in 1916, is characterized by r-lessness and i ungliding. And the content is permeated with the undercurrent of tension between the old and the new.



To view the video of this quote, visit <http://www.talkintarheel.com/chapter/4/video4-6.php>

Figure 1. Page image of trade book with QR enhancement

Many of the audio and video enhancements are extracted from our archive of audio and video footage gathered as a part of our various research projects. The integration of QRs is somewhat novel in the field of linguistics, and *Talkin' Tar Heel* is, to our knowledge, was the first book making extensive use of this format in linguistics. The general reader experiences language and dialect rather than imagining it, and all the reader has to do is

navigate any web browser to the provided URL, or use a smartphone or any device with a QR reader to snap a picture of the QR code, to access the media directly. In the enhanced e-Reader version of the book, these enhancements are embedded within the text itself so a reader simply has to click on the icon.

Probably the most ambitious—and in many ways, the most essential—program to promote more sustained impact from sociolinguistic research/information involves formal education about language variation before the university level. As noted earlier, school-based programs have still not progressed beyond a pilot stage, though the dialect awareness curriculum developed by Reaser and Wolfram (2007) fits in with the standard course of study for the state of North Carolina for eighth grade social studies. It is also the first program endorsed by a state Department of Public Instruction in the United States, showing the current lack of progress in disseminating sociolinguistic information in the elementary and secondary curriculum. This language and dialect awareness program aligns with the curricular themes of “cultures and diversity,” “historic perspectives,” and “geographical relationships” as they relate to North Carolina. 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). Students are not the only ones who profit from the study of dialect diversity; teachers who use the specialized instructor’s manual can add sociolinguistic expertise to their pool of expertise.

The kinds of venues described in this section underscore both the range and the potential of sociolinguistic education and impact. It also emphasizes the role of collaboration beyond the academy in maximizing effectiveness. Our most productive alliances, in fact, have been with creative and technical professionals, working with graphic designers, artists, programmers, producers, and marketing experts who help facilitate our attempts to infuse a wide variety of audiences and populations with an understanding of language variation and the role of language in society. This is the current reality, potential, and challenge of sociolinguistic engagement.

3. EXEMPLARS OF ENGAGEMENT

In this section, we consider three case studies from our extensive engagement programs over the past several decades. First, we examine a long-term program on the island of Ocracoke, where we have conducted research and engagement for almost three decades

now. The second involves our current focus on the production of language-based documentaries for the public as well as for secondary and higher education. The first case involves a commitment to a small island community where just about everyone now knows who we are, and every student in grade 8 (13-15 years of age) in the school has been formally introduced since 1993 to dialect variation in their formal education. The second case targets the general population of the US as well as various institutional groups such as schools, businesses, and civic groups of various types, and the third case involves a program for higher education on a university campus of approximately 35,000 students and 7,000 faculty and staff. These cases were selected to represent disparate kinds of communities and purposes for engagement.

3.1. THE OCRACOKE COMMUNITY

Ocracoke is a small, sand-based island on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in the US in the Atlantic Ocean. Though it stretches for approximately 13 miles, it is only inhabited at the southeastern portion of the island where all of residents live within a square mile. It was settled by Europeans in the first decade of the 1700s as a pilot town to guide and unload ships that could not navigate the shallow water of the sound to the west of the island. It existed in relative isolation as a marine-based community until the mid-twentieth century, when it developed a tourist industry that is sustained to this day. Of the approximately 900 permanent residents of the island presently, about 350 are so-called O'cockers, that is, residents whose continuous lineage on the island extends for multiple generations. During the tourist season from April-November, 3,000-5,000 visitors are on the island a day, from day trips to those who live there throughout the summer tourist season. In the mid-twentieth century, the island began to get paved roads and a regular ferry service was established by the State of North Carolina, making it readily accessible by regular boat service, weather permitting. Today, it is only accessible by ferry service, boats, and a small airport that is used mostly for emergencies. The location of Ocracoke is shown by the satellite map in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Satellite map of Ocracoke.

Our original research interest in the so-called “Ocracoke Brogue,” beginning in 1992, was its distinctive dialect, which includes several unique structural features (Schilling-Estes; Wolfram, 1994; Wolfram; Schilling-Estes, 1995; Wolfram; Hazen; Schilling-estes, 1998) and its endangered status as a dialect due to the inundation of outsiders. As our research developed, we became interested in the development of “performance productions” of set phrases (Schilling-Estes, 1998) that utilize prominent features of the dialect, and its status as one of the few dialects that is not identified as “American”, resulting in more than 30 research articles and several books on this variety.

From the outset of our research, we became engaged with the Ocracoke School and the Ocracoke Preservation Society, giving a presentation to the high school students and faculty about the dialect during our initial visit of a week. We further established connections with the Ocracoke Preservation Society to work with them on recording and preserving the speech of islanders as we were conducting our early set of sociolinguistic interviews. Within couple of years, we established a dialect exhibit that included a 16-minute documentary produced by several of my students that ran on a loop all day long in the so-called “dialect room” of the preservation museum, and it remains popular more than 25 years after its production. In fact, attempts to update the original documentary (edited in 1995) have been rejected by the community in favor of the original documentary that has now been seen on the island by well over a half-million visitors. We have produced an hour documentary on Outer Banks speech for television and a DVD is for sale at the Preservation Society’s store, have published a trade book (Wolfram; Schilling-Estes, 1997) for tourists, produced two oral history CDs with community residents (Childs; Wolfram; Cloud, 2001); Reaser et al., 2011), and taught a curriculum we developed on dialects in the schools and taught annually since (1992), excepting 2021 due to the COVID19 virus. In addition, we have collaborated on the production of shorter vignettes on Ocracoke speech that appeared on

national television networks such as CNN Big Story, CBS Good Morning, and for local and state channels, and participated in dozens of popular media accounts about the variety over the years. Each summer, we also give a lecture about the dialect as a part of the Ocracoke Preservation Society's Back Porch series of talks.

On such a small island, just about everyone knows us and our team of faculty and students from North Carolina State University and our affiliation with the community over the past quarter of a century. We even have a yearly "Brogue Banquet", where we treat local residents to dinner with our students. And on our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/NCLLP>) we have more than a dozen vignettes about the island dialect. Virtually every O'cocker and other residents now in their forties have studied about their native dialect and other dialects of North Carolina, and it has become a highlight of the grade 8 (13-15 years of age) social studies curriculum. In fact, in 2021, when classes were virtual, we were asked to teach the curriculum to the group of ninth graders in 2022 so that no class would not miss the opportunity to learn about their unique dialect heritage.

From an engagement perspective, the important consideration is what difference this has made in the lives of the students and residents of the island. Comments on Facebook, where the "brogue" comes up for discussion on occasion, clearly reveal a sense of pride about the dialect as a culture icon of a distinct way of life that Ocracoke celebrates. When we initially started our interviews in the early 1990s, some residents were cautious about talking to us, thinking that our efforts to elicit speech were to ridicule islanders for their "incorrect" ways of speaking. Now, the students discuss how the dialect has become a source of pride in terms of their distinct island community. The dialect is even highlighted in marketing about why Ocracoke is a unique tourist location, and a number of islanders have been extremely generous in speaking to the regular stream of media personnel who come to island to document this receding language variety. While we are currently in the process of documenting how islanders' language attitudes have changed over the decades have changed, we have had a number of conversations that have documented the value of the engagement. As the current teacher of the social studies course where we teach the curriculum noted in a Facebook post a few years ago:

"You have given this Island a gift...one that our children's children can forever watch AND listen to. Long after the brogue is gone they will be able to "hear" the way things were!! ...Always know that!!"
(Gwen Howard Austin, 8th Grade Social Studies Teacher, Ocracoke School. *Facebook*, Nov.24, 2016)

It seems clear from this quote and other comments by members of the community that this long-term small community engagement has made a difference in the views of the community about their language variety. Though language gratuity is not without issues (cf. Wolfram. 1998), it is apparent that long-term community engagement can make a positive difference in the life of the community

3.2. THE LANGUAGE DOCUMENTARY

One of the most popular venues we have developed for public and educational audiences over the past couple of decades is video productions, ranging from posted vignettes on a YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/NCLLP>) to the regular production of television broadcasts. The audiences for these productions range from national audiences (e.g. *Talking Black in America* [Hutcheson; Cullinan, 2018], *Signing Black in America* [Cullinan; Hutcheson, 2020], *Mountain Talk* [Hutcheson, 2004]; *First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee* [Cullinan; Hutcheson, 2015], to regional (*Voices of North Carolina* [Hutcheson, 2005], *Spanish Voices* [Cullinan, 2011]), to those produced primarily for community organizations (e.g. *The Ocracoke Brogue* (Blanton; Waters 1995), though these are not mutually exclusive.

Though our success in documentary production has now convinced the administration at our university to employ a talented, full-time videographer on hard money as an integral part of our research-engagement program, it is important to understand our modest beginning. Our first documentary was, in fact, produced by a couple of undergraduate students in a linguistics class who were more interested in documentary film production than 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 the next semester, borrowed equipment from a generous Communication Department, and operated on a shoe-string budget of less than \$1,500 used exclusively for travel and supplies. Twenty-five years later, their production of *The Ocracoke Brogue* (Blanton; Waters. 1995) remains one of our most successful documentaries we have distributed. It has become a staple component of an exhibit on local dialect at the Ocracoke Preservation Society's museum where it still runs all day long on a loop at the in the "Dialect Room." Current editing software technology available at most universities makes these types of projects quite accessible at modest cost, but documentary production and videos are still significantly underrepresented as a resource for sociolinguistics.

In other publications (Wolfram; Cullinan; Hutcheson, 2016; Wolfram; Reaser; Vaughn, 2006), we have detailed the social, technical, and strategic dimensions of documentary production in sociolinguistic engagement, and the relationship between technique and strategy in a way that combines local voice and linguistic expertise. Our documentary and video projects are relatively unique for a linguistic program since we have had two fulltime videographers and technological autonomy for film production for 15 years, but it has paid dividends in terms of productivity. We have produced 14 documentaries for television, hosted a YouTube channel that has over 90 vignettes, more than 42 thousand subscribers, and has had more than 14 million views since its inception over a decade ago. Our documentary *Talking Black in America*, which was awarded an Emmy in the area of cultural

documentary, aired on national television and has had more than 300 screenings at universities, high schools, and public and private corporations. At latest count, it has been integrated into more than 200 courses in higher education. One of the benefits of the documentary such as this is its functional educational life. Our experience with other documentaries produced in the 1980s, such as *American Tongues* (Alvarez; Kolker, 1988) and the *Story of English* (MacNeil; McCrum; Cran, 1986), is that they have a useful educational life of two to three decades. One month after posting our latest film production, *Signing Black in America* (CULLINAN; HUTCHESON, 2020) on YouTube, it had over 21,000 views within a month. Documentaries and meaningful vignettes are thus a critical venue for educating both formal and informal audiences about language diversity, to say nothing of the multiple media stories and podcasts centered on these video productions. Linguistics as a profession needs to collaborate with media production departments in interdisciplinary endeavors to broaden their scope of service if such venues are to be expanded in cohesive, meaningful engagement of linguistics.

3.3. CAMPUS-BASED DIVERSITY PROGRAMS

Notwithstanding the current emphasis on embracing diversity on university campuses, linguistic subordination is still actively practiced, tolerated, and reinforced in most institutions of higher learning. Substantive empirical evidence (Dunstan, 2013; Andrews, 2018, Myrick, 2019) reveals that institutions of higher learning are conducive sites for the practice of linguistic inequality and, in fact, serve as active agents in its reproduction. The university community is a place where many students mix socially and educationally for the first time with others from a wide range of places and backgrounds, bringing issues of language differences to the fore. Accordingly, many students confront issues of language diversity in a practical, transactional setting for the first time.

Most institutions of higher learning are well aware and concerned about issues of diversity, and we personally have yet to encounter a university that does not have a recognized program or office of diversity. At the same time, our informal survey of university diversity statements and programs indicates (a) that there is at least an implicitly recognized canon of diversity themes within higher education and (b) that it traditionally excludes language issues. Topics related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual preference, and so forth are commonly included in these programs, but language is noticeably absent, either by explicit exclusion or by implicit disregard. Ironically, issues of language intersect with all of the canonical themes in the catalogue of diversity issues. For example, how can issues of sex and gender be considered without including the conversational interactions and language labels that index misogyny? Or, how can inequalities of race and ethnicity be addressed without tackling offensive and exclusionary

racist language use? Institutional offices of diversity, like academic disciplinary fields and scholars, are indeed vulnerable to the construction of a canon of themes and issues restricted to customary and traditionally recognized topics while ignoring or dismissing topics that are not a part of their established focus. Unfortunately, language is one of those overlooked issues that goes unrecognized in the diversity canon as it actively and insidiously promotes and enhances inequality on campus.

Several recent studies at a large urban-based university in the South (e.g., Dunstan, 2013; Andrews, 2018; Myrick, 2019) reveal the need to address issues of linguistic inequality in higher education, implicating both students and faculty in the practice of explicit and implicit linguistic bias. But it is not enough simply to document linguistic inequality. Socially responsible linguists and sociolinguists are called on to challenge extant ideologies about language, and to implement strategies that promote the practice of sociolinguistic equality. In Wolfram and Dunstan (2021), we have documented the need for proactive, programmatic intervention; in the following sections we describe our intervention program, referred to as “Educating the Educated” (Dunstan et al., 2015; Wolfram; Dunstan, 2021).

The empirical results of student and faculty interactions and attitudes reported above cannot be ignored or dismissed if sociolinguistic equality is to become a practiced reality in higher education. Academics are the primary gatekeepers of language norms in higher education, and they are the ones who should be leading the initiative to break down the gates of sociolinguistic injustice and exclusion in our institutions of higher learning. Accordingly, innovative, creative ideas need to be transformed into purposeful action that has the potential for a widespread effect within these institutions. Unfortunately, few institutions of higher learning have even recognized the need to include anything about language disparities in their statements on diversity, let alone programmatically implement activities related to linguistic diversity. While these are still in the process of implementation, a small but growing number of institutions around the US and beyond that have responded to the challenge to incorporate language diversity within their diversity initiatives.

Armed with the results of Dunstan’s (2013) pivotal study, we contacted the Office of Diversity and set up a meeting to discuss the implications of her study for the university. That step seems so obvious that it should be unnecessary to state it, but it is critical initial move. Happily, our experience has indicated that diversity administrators are usually quite receptive to expanding the scope of diversity and ideas about the ways in which this can be accomplished. We then submitted a grant proposal to the Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity (OIED) to implement a linguistic diversity program that included a range of workshops, materials, and resources. To be honest, we did not really need the modest financial support offered by the grant, but it was essential for language variation to be included programmatically under OIED as the university’s official Office of Diversity. The proposed goals of our initiative were straightforward:

1. Raise awareness about language as a form of diversity on college campuses in general and at NC State specifically
2. Educate a full range of members of the campus community about language variation and diversity
3. Provide multifaceted resources for the campus community to facilitate the inclusion of language diversity in diversity programming

The conceptual framework underlying the program is based on Pedersen's (1988) Multicultural Development Model, which addresses awareness, knowledge, and skill. Members of the campus community are largely unaware of the attitudes and assumptions they hold about language and, by extension, speakers of those dialects/languages. Accordingly, the program seeks to raise awareness through an inductive process that asks participants to think critically about beliefs they hold. The second stage of the model provides the factual, scientific linguistic evidence to dispel common myths and misunderstandings associated with language variation. Finally, the program offered strategies for being inclusive and enabling participants to reflect on ways in which they can consider language and dialect when interacting with others on campus and in society from different linguistic backgrounds.

One of the important dimensions of the program is its interdisciplinary, collaborative organization. It was not simply an elite group of linguists who set themselves apart as the exclusive experts on issues related to language variation. Instead, the program coordinators represent different colleges and faculty/administrative roles at the university, thus offering different perspectives, disciplinary affiliations, and administrative networks for the program, leading to a "campus-infusion model" for implementation. The primary team for implementing the program involved an educator, a linguist, and an administrator. Using university organizational charts, we identified key units and divisions to approach, which would reach broad and diverse audiences across campus. We then identified key personnel from each of these units and divisions and began discussions with leaders and gatekeepers regarding our program, its objectives and potential collaboration with their units. Given the commitment of our campus to creating diverse environments and because the ideas the program presents are "a fresh take on diversity" to most academics outside of the field of linguistics, it was relatively easy to obtain a commitment from members of the campus community to include our program in diversity programming across campus.

With the development of the campus-infusion model, the leadership team pursued connections across campus in a variety of divisions and began sharing language diversity awareness materials in a variety of forms. One prominent type of activity was a workshop format and over the next couple of years we conducted more than 50 workshops with a

wide range of university-based groups on the basis of our campus-infusion model, using a number of connections with different administrative units. In student affairs, one of the targeted groups was university housing. A large number of undergraduate students live on campus, and residence halls are a critical environment for the psychosocial development of college students and informal learning (Pascarella; Terenzini, 2005). Students in residency halls engage in diversity programming, thus offering an opportunity for inclusion of language diversity as part of this education. Accordingly, we provided language diversity training for all new Residence Hall Directors and Resident Advisors for the university.

The workshop format has been fairly standardized, although we adapt certain elements of the workshops (primarily the implications for practice, and examples given during the workshop) for the specific audience. The workshops are centered on the learning outcomes previously described in this paper and follow the following format:

- Defining what a dialect is
- Addressing 3 common myths/truths about dialects (everyone speaks a dialect; the “standard” is a social construct; all dialects are rule-governed and systematic)
- Addressing issues of linguistic discrimination
- Addressing issues of language variation contextually for the audience (how language variation might impact you, your discipline, work environment, interactions with others, etc.)
- Implications for practice (how audience members can use dialect diversity to create inclusive and respectful environments)

The workshops are interactive in nature, calling upon audience members to reflect upon experiences, explore their attitudes and beliefs about language, work through examples of dialect patterning, and collectively discuss strategies for using this knowledge.

We organized workshops around the following learning outcomes: that upon completion of the workshops, participants would be able to recognize that (1) the scientific study of language does not acknowledge a single correct variety or “standard” of any spoken language, and that variation in language is a natural occurrence and “standards” are social constructs; (2) speakers of any language necessarily speak a dialect of that language, and that it is not possible to speak a language without also speaking a dialect; and (3) that dialects are systematic, patterned, and rule-governed. In pre- and post-workshop surveys in the pilot study aimed at measuring learning outcomes for 149 students, Dunstan et al. (2015) found that there significant differences for 9 of the 10 questions asked about attitudes and beliefs. Questions included general beliefs about language (e.g., “I believe that there is a single, standard English (similar to “newscaster English” or the way people in the

Mid-West speak) that everyone should try to speak”; “I believe that a dialect is a failed attempt at good English.”), their own speech (e.g., “I do not believe that I have an accent”), and the speech of others (e.g., “The way that some people speak is lazy or careless”).

We also became involved in the array of programming for new students. This programming includes booths at new student orientation and an event called *Packapalooza*, an all-day street fair on the main campus road to which all students (and the public) are invited. The street fair includes food, music, vendors, and booths from student and academic campus groups. Since the inception of Packapalooza, the Language and Life Project at North Carolina State has hosted a booth that students could visit to learn about language diversity and pick up buttons and a brochure about the program. This event is attended by more than 85,000 students, NC State community members, and members of the public, providing an excellent venue for reaching the campus community and public. Each year, we give out a couple of thousand language diversity buttons, have countless discussions with students and other visitors about language, and give new students and others the opportunity to sign up for participation in our linguistic diversity programs and events.

We further engaged with Academic Affairs, introducing a graduate level course and undergraduate courses on language and society in the Department of Sociology titled Language and Society. A master’s level course introduced in the College of Education included students from higher education administration, elementary education, human resource management, and counselor education programs. The course, geared toward educators, spanned issues of language diversity from K-12 to higher education and aimed to prepare educators to discuss and teach language diversity in their fields. There is also a Variety in Language Course that all graduate students in English may take to fulfill a requirement in linguistics or rhetoric, and this course routinely attracts 30-45 students a year in all subfields of English studies. A new undergraduate course in Sociology, Language and Society was also introduced; it has proven to be quite popular and has been taught every semester for several years now with full enrollment.

We also provided workshops for the First-Year Writing Program and for the Writing and Speaking Tutorial Center. Members of the team and student ambassadors to instructors in the First Year Writing Program (a part of the general education program), specifically tailoring these workshops to the specific issues participants in these areas might encounter as they work with linguistically diverse students.

The post-workshop survey also asked open-ended questions related to how interesting and beneficial students found the workshop. The response from students was overwhelmingly positive, and the assessment data collected indicated that they were interested in the material covered and generally met the learning outcomes of the workshop; 97 percent of the students agreed that the workshop was interesting and that

they learned something new about language diversity. The majority of participants (75 percent) further suggested that the workshop changed the way in which they view their own speech, and two-thirds of the participants indicated that the workshop improved the way in which they view their own speech. Such results indicate that, at the very least, participants gain knowledge and awareness, the initial step in attitudinal and behavioral change. Such results are highly encouraging that such workshops serve an instrumental role in challenging extant ideologies of language subordination on campus.

For the campus population, we produced specific video vignettes of three to six minutes for the diversity initiative that were posted online and are used regularly in our workshops and presentations. One vignette (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQYNEHwDFhE>) was filmed on campus and included spontaneous student responses to questions about their speech and about language diversity on campus collected on the university commons with passing students, staff, faculty, and key administrators, including the head (Chancellor) of the university. Another vignette, “I Sound like a Scholar” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjfC-1lgOrY&t=11s>) features students from different regions, ethnic backgrounds, and language backgrounds saying the phrase “I sound like a scholar” to underscore the fact that language variation is not connected with intelligence or scholarly achievement. These vignettes continue to be key component of presentations and serve as a resource for others on campus in diversity training/programming. We also created posters and buttons for distribution on campus to raise awareness, such as buttons and posters (See Figure 3). Posters highlighting the NC State Wolfpack mascot are placed across campus media stations in locations such as residence halls, classroom and administrative buildings, and in digital format on hall monitors.



Figure 3. “Howl with an accent” button and campus diversity poster

An essential role in the implementation of campus linguistic diversity programs is the engagement of students. From its inception, students were involved in workshops, the production of videos, the staffing of exhibit booths on and off campus. Students also established a student organization officially recognized by the Student Involvement Office

in the Division of Academic and Student Affairs named the “Linguistic Diversity Ambassadors” (LDA). As discussed in Dunstan et al. (2018), the LDA program offers students an opportunity to become involved on campus and to develop leadership roles in multiple dimensions of advocacy, activities, and activities on campus. Graduate students, in particular, often have limited engagement experiences (Dunstan et al. 2018; O’Meara 2008) compared to undergraduates, in part due to their myopic focus on their academic subject areas. The engagement of graduate students, however, can help promote peer education, leadership development, and diversity training. Since 2013, the Educating the Educated Program has involved the LDA for meetings, events, promotional ventures, and other activities related to language variation supported structurally and financially by the Division of Academic and Student Affairs. It has a profile on the NC State “Get-Involved” website (<https://getinvolved.ncsu.edu/organization/studentinvolvement>) that informs the student body of events, assists and assists in in event logistics. The team also hosts booths at various functions for students and campus the community, including Packapalooza, the huge block party described about that that welcomes the members of the NC State community to campus at the beginning of the school year.

A substantive function of the LDA is a monthly meeting for students and others that highlights a language issue of relevance to the campus community. For example, in the 2019-20 year, we included presentations and discussions on the following topics.

- A screening of the documentary and discussion of the documentary, *First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee*, with panel discussants that include a Cherokee language expert, the executive producer of the film, and a representative of the Native American Student Association and the director of Native American Student Affairs Group at NC State University.
- A presentation and discussion of language issues in the University’s book of common reading for 2019-20, *Born a Crime*, by Trevor Noah; this activity is a recognized campus seminar event in connection with the book of common reading.
- A screening and discussion of the documentary *Talking Black in America* as an event celebrating Black History Month on campus. This event is typically hosted by the NC State Union Activities Black Student Board.
- A student presentation on “Gay Language’ that presented the state of current ideology and research about the notion of speech in the queer community.
- A presentation and discussion of American Sign Language, including diversity in ASL that is featured in a Language and Life Project documentary, *Signing Black in America* (Cullinan; Hutcheson, 2020). This presentation was co-hosted with a university sorority, who requested LDA to do a presentation.

LDA's programs focus on current language events relevant to campus life, and presentations and discussions have include themes such as language and politics, Language and the LGBTQ community, gendered language in Disney films, among current topics. In many cases, these events are co-sponsored with other student organizations in order to facilitate a collaborative and interdisciplinary perspective in considering language variation. LDA staff also engage in in-class presentations, guest lectures, and write op-ed pieces for the school newspaper and other venues as issues about language arise in higher education and on campus. Language Diversity Ambassadors have also worked to create an online digital repository of resource materials (PowerPoint presentations, audiovisual materials, assessment materials, etc.) which all team members can access (<http://howl.wordpress.ncsu.edu/>) for their use. They also participate actively in maintaining in our social media venues such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and so forth. Through their regular promotion venues, they have raised the awareness of language diversity on campus, leading to an increase in student enrollment in linguistic courses, linguistic majors, and general awareness of language variation under the rubric of the Educating the Educated campaign. Our linguistics program operates within the English Department, which has grown significantly in expanding its notion of language variation, integrating it into first-year writing programs and other courses within the English curriculum.

Linguists and sociolinguists can play a prominent role in confronting linguistic inequality in higher education. But they cannot do it simply by espousing their position in the limited linguistic courses they teach or in conversations that they have with other professionals. As we have demonstrated, linguistic subordination is a pervasive ideology in higher education that is manifested in faculty, students, and staff. Accordingly, it calls for the campus-infusion model that we described here if we expect to make a significant difference on campus life. Furthermore, more research is required to document the broad swath of linguistic inequality embraced in higher education. While it may seem obvious to sociolinguists that linguistic prejudice and discrimination are pervasive on college campuses, it is not nearly as transparent to the campus community. In fact, a proposal to implement a language component in the diversity similar to the one described at a neighboring university was met with the response that "there is no evidence that language diversity is a problem on campus." There are many dimensions of linguistic intolerance in higher education in addition to those researched here, and they need to be fleshed out to document the widespread scope of the problem.

Linguists also need to form alliances outside the narrow confines of their linguistic department, including proactive collaboration with the Office of Diversity. When the author of this paper gives presentations about linguistic inequality at various universities around the country, one of his first requests is "Could you please invite representatives of the Office of Diversity to the talk?" And when they attend, they commonly remark that this is a program

that they want to incorporate at their university. In fact, a number of universities around the US are now beginning to include dimensions of language variation in their programs. But linguists also need to collaborate with other disciplinary fields and administrative units to implement linguistic diversity initiatives, bringing an interdisciplinary perspective to the program. Educators, specialists in aligned fields, and administrators familiar with effective methods for program implementation need to be a part of the program. Happily, some have started to include language in their diversity initiatives, but many more institutions of higher learning need to ensure that language, one of the most significant and overlooked dimensions of inequality, is substantively confronted and programmatically incorporated into programs of diversity in our institutions of higher learning.

4. CONCLUSION

In this presentation, I have encouraged linguists to take a more active role in engagement by setting forth programs in three, quite disparate venues that include (1) extended involvement in a community research program, (2) the role of documentary production in informal and formal education, and (3) a proactive role in campus diversity programs. While these require different sets of expertise and application, they all point to the fact that linguistic departments cannot be excused from engagement if we care about linguistic justice. We can no longer afford the comfort of autonomous linguistic departments that focus simply on the description and explanation of language apart from its social context. There are many other venues that might have been included in this discussion, such as museum exhibits, the production of trade books for popular audiences, developing curricula on dialect variation for K-12 students, the use of social media for linguistic justice, and other venues described elsewhere (Wolfram, 2016). Linguists have expertise and perspectives that are highly applicable to issues of justice and equality, and they can no longer afford to sit behind closed doors in isolation from these issues in our society. If they become engaged, they can join Jan Bloomaert in asserting that “what I have done as a professional is easier when one realizes the activism... made it worthwhile being a professional.”

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