

Expanding Diversity: Investigating Language at WWU
Anne Lobeck, English Department and Linguistics Program

Expanding diversity to language

Across campus, there are numerous initiatives, clubs, scholarships, programs and taskforces designed to attract and retain a more diverse student body and enhance the university experience at WWU. Policies safeguard students against discrimination based on legally protected characteristics: Race, Color, Creed, Religion, National Origin, Sex, Age, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, etc., but noticeably absent from this list is language, though it is through language (oral or signed) that we express identity and culture, and create community. The broad ethnic categories we use when we talk about diversity (Asian, Black, Pacific Islander etc.) obscure students' complex linguistic identities, identities that provide invaluable insights into their experience, both negative and positive, on campus. Investigating and raising awareness of linguistic diversity at WWU will enhance the experience of both students who identify as minorities and those who do not, highlighting their unique linguistic histories, identities and cultures, and challenging the misconceptions and stereotypes that privilege speakers of so called "Standard" or mainstream English over others.

There is no dearth of examples of linguistic diversity at WWU. Students who identify as Asian may be monolingual English speakers, or bi- or multilingual in a range of different languages (Mandarin, Japanese, Hindi, Vietnamese, Ilocano). They may/may not have family members who speak languages other than English at home. Students who identify as Hispanic/Latino/a may be of Dominican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Mexican, or European descent. They may or may not speak Spanish, and if they do, the varieties of Spanish they speak differ in significant ways. Students who identify as Black or African American may speak African American English, Jamaican or Haitian Creole, Garifuna, or some other language. Students who identify as White may be mono- or multilingual; they may speak British, South African, or Australian English, or Midland, Southern, or Northeastern American English. Students who identify as Alaska Native or American Indian often come from communities whose languages, integral to understandings of place, space, tradition and relationships, are endangered or moribund. Those who identify as Pacific Islander may speak highly stigmatized language varieties (Hawaiian Creole English for example) and may have diverse home languages (Tongan, Samoan, Hawaiian). Other linguistic communities fall outside these inadequate ethnic labels including Deaf/deaf signers, LGBT discourse communities, and urban versus rural English speakers, among others.

But there is also no dearth of misconceptions and misperceptions about language and linguistic diversity, misperceptions our students often hold. For example, anyone who identifies as Asian, Hispanic, Native American, etc. is a native speaker of a language other than English; speakers of Southern American English dialects are less educated than speakers of Northern varieties; African American English is "slang;" Jamaican Creole is "broken English;" Chicano English is "Spanglish," a mix of Spanish and English, though many Chicano English speakers speak no Spanish at all. Young urbanites in Seattle perceive the English of Central Washington to be "gangsta," and of Pullman to be "hick," perceptions based on social attitudes about ethnicity, race, and class rather than on linguistic fact (Evans' *Seattle to Spokane* project; Long and Preston 2002). Such myths can lead to discrimination in the classroom, workplace, and elsewhere (see Baugh 2003 on linguistic profiling and violations of the Fair Housing Act; Lippi-Green 2012 on accent discrimination; Rubin 2002 on linguistic discrimination against Asian teaching assistants). A companion myth to notions of "good" and "bad" language and accents is that one must master "Standard" English for success, but the notion of a single, agreed upon Standard English is an idealization (Cameron 1995; Milroy & Milroy 2002; Lippi-Green 2012). Yet educational assessments are based on this idealization (the Common Core State Standards) in ways that privilege mainstream English speakers, and marginalize non-mainstream speakers (Canagarajah 2013; Charity-Hudley & Mallinson 2010; Delpit 2006; Higgins 2009).

Background and preparation

A comprehensive investigation of linguistic diversity at WWU is a long-term project, and must involve both the campus and the community. Successful models of such pursuits include the *Wisconsin Englishes* and *North Carolina Language and Life* projects; both are the result of campus and community working together to research and raise awareness of local language variation (both projects have companion books: *Wisconsin Talk* and *Talkin' Tarheel*, respectively). The first step in developing a similar project at WWU is to gather data on the linguistic demographics and language attitudes of our student body. I have begun this preliminary fieldwork, designing a linguistic diversity survey that I will pilot in classes, AS clubs, student Facebook groups etc., and refine over the year and administer, in final form, during Spring. I will also (with the help of my students, who are eager to participate) conduct student interviews, and gather video clips and recordings. I will consult with campus and community constituencies to gather additional information on linguistic diversity on campus and its impact on student culture and experience (Ethnic Student Center; TESOL; DRS; EOO; Woodring's Center for Education, Equity and Diversity; Fairhaven's Center for Law, Diversity and Justice; President's Taskforce on Diversity; Whatcom Literacy Council; Bellingham School District, Northwest Indian College, etc.).

Description of summer project

I am requesting this summer grant to compile and synthesize the results of this research and fieldwork in a comprehensive report, which will provide data on (a) the linguistic diversity of our student body and (b) on students' language attitudes, and will (c) offer ways to highlight, support, and capitalize on the linguistic diversity of the campus community and (d) address linguistic discrimination both inside and outside of class. I will also create a presentation representing the data, with interpretations, students' voices themselves, and relevant video clips. I will distribute the report and presentation to faculty and administrators, and if possible, link these materials to WWU's Diversity web site. I am confident that with the support of a summer grant and the time to devote uninterrupted attention to the project, I can complete this work.

Results and Next Steps

Completion of the summer project will leave me poised to write and submit articles on my findings to journals (*Language and Linguistics Compass*, *Multilingual Matters* and/or *American Speech*), and to present my research at the Linguistic Society of America and American Dialect Society 2016 annual meetings, gathering important information and support from colleagues involved in similar projects. Importantly, the results of the summer project will form the foundation of a proposal for external funding, to design and implement the larger, more comprehensive campus-wide linguistic diversity project at WWU, which I envision (similar to *Wisconsin Englishes*) as a web site containing demographic language data of WWU and surrounding communities, results of language attitudes studies; information on regional languages, accents and dialects, language maps, teaching resources, news articles, and other materials. Potential funding agencies include Humanities Washington; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Ford Foundation, among others).

Impact on the university, students, the field, and the community

My summer project is the essential first step in expanding diversity to explicitly include language, a topic that has before now been under no specific scrutiny at WWU or other regional institutions (work on Pacific NW English, in which I am also involved, addresses neither languages other than English nor attitudes about speakers of those languages). WWU would thus be the flagship in this research, and in the exchange of these results with the surrounding community. My summer project will enhance not only my research but my teaching, enriching and deepening my expertise in linguistic diversity, language ideologies and discrimination, and providing my students (and colleagues) with a unique way to engage in fieldwork locally, and to pursue research which contributes in new ways to the campus-wide conversation on diversity (see Purnell, Raimy & Salmons 2013 of the *Wisconsin Englishes* project, for the benefits to faculty, students, and the community of this kind of work).

Selected Resources (grouped by topic)

American Dialects, Language Attitudes, and Identity

American Dialect Society

<http://www.americandialect.org/>

Benson, Erica J. (2003) Folk linguistic perceptions and the mapping of dialect boundaries.

American Speech 78.3: 307-30.

Bucholz, M. (1995) From Mulatta to Mestiza: Language and the Reshaping of Ethnic Identity.

In K. Hall and M. Bucholtz (eds.) *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*.

New York: Routledge. 351-374.

Fought, Carmen (2006) *Language and Ethnicity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Labov, William (1972) The Logic of Non-Standard English. In A. Cashdan and E. Grugeon (eds.)

Language in Education. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 198-211.

Leap, William (1993) *American Indian English*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

Long, Daniel and Dennis R. Preston. 2002. *Handbook of perceptual dialectology*, Volume II.

Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Wolfram, Walt and Natalie Schilling-Estes. (2006) *American English*. Second Edition.

Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Indigenous Languages of the Pacific Northwest

Living Tongues Institute <http://www.livingtongues.org/>

Pacific NW Languages <http://www.native-languages.org/northwest-culture.htm>

Pacific NW Endangered Languages

<http://www.opb.org/news/article/pacific-northwest-hot-spot-endangered-languages/>

Linguistic Diversity in Education

Canagarajah, Suresh (2013) *Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms*.

Routledge, New York.

Charity Hudley, A. and C. Mallinson. *Understanding English Language Variation in U.S. Schools*.

New York: Teachers College Press.

Common Core State Standards <http://www.corestandards.org/>

Delpit, Lisa. (2006) *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York. New Press.

Delpit, Lisa (2008) *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom*.

New York. New Press.

Gee, James P. (2011) *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. Oxford: Taylor and Francis.

Higgins, Christina (2009) *English as a Local Language: Post-colonial Identities and*

Multilingual Practices. Multilingual Matters. New York.

O'Neil, Wayne (1972) The Politics of Bidialectalism. *College English*, Vol. 33, No. 4. Urbana: NCTE.

Smitherman, Geneva and V. Villanueva (eds.) (2003) *Language Diversity in the Classroom:*

From Intention to Practice. Carbondale. Southern Illinois University Press.

White, J. W., & Lowenthal, P. R. (2011). Minority College Students and Tacit "Codes of Power":

Developing Academic Discourses and Identities. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 283-318. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.

Young, Vershawn A. (2010) Nah, We Straight: An Argument Against Code-Switching. *JAC* 29.1-2: 49-76.

Zamel, V. (1998) Questioning academic discourse. In Zamel, V. & Spack, R. (eds.) *Negotiating*

academic literacies: Teaching and learning across languages and cultures. 187-197.

Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Linguistic Diversity Projects

North Carolina Language and Life Project

<http://ncsu.edu/linguistics/ncllp/index.php>

Studying Varieties of English: Raymond Hickey, Essen University, Germany.

<https://www.uni-due.de/SVE/>

Wisconsin Englishes Project

<http://csumc.wisc.edu/wep/>

Purnell, T. E. Raimy & J. Salmons (2013) *Wisconsin Talk*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Wolfram, W. & J. Reaser (2014) *Talkin' Tarheel: How our voices tell the story of North Carolina*.

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Linguistic Ideology and Discrimination

Baugh, John (2003) Linguistic Profiling. In S. Makoni, G. Smitherman, A.F. Ball, and A.K. Spears (eds.)

Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in African and the Americas.

New York: Routledge. 155-168.

Bonilla-Silva, E. and Forma, T.A. (2000) "I am not a Racist but...": Mapping White College Students'

Racial Ideology in the USA. *Discourse Society* 11:50.

Lippi-Green, Rosina (2012) *English With An Accent*. Second Edition. New York: Routledge

Rubin, D.L. and K.A. Smith (1990) Effects of Accent, Ethnicity, and Lecture Topic on

Undergraduates' Perceptions of Nonnative English-Speaking Teaching Assistants.

International Journal of Intercultural Relations 14 (3): 337-353.

Smalls, D. L. (2004) Linguistic Profiling and the Law. *Stanford Law and Policy Review* 15: 579.

Standard English

Cameron, Deborah (1995) *Verbal Hygiene*. New York: Routledge

Curzan, Anne (2002) "Teaching and the Politics of Standard English." *Journal of English Linguistics* 30 (4):

339-352.

Fairclough, N. (1989) *Language and Power*. London: Longman.

Finegan, Edward (2012) "Standardization: Prescriptive Tradition." In *Historical Linguistics of English:*

An International Handbook. A. Bergs and L. Brinton (eds). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. 967-80.

Milroy, J. and L. Milroy (2002) *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*. London: Routledge.

Milroy, J. (2001) Language Ideologies and the Consequences of Standardization. *Journal of sociolinguistics* 5. 530-555.

Pacific NW English Projects

Seattle to Spokane Project: Betsy Evans, University of Washington

<http://depts.washington.edu/folkling/>

English in the Pacific Northwest Project: Alicia Wassink, University of Washington

<http://www.artsci.washington.edu/NWenglish/>

Northwest Voices: Ed Battistella, Southern Oregon University; Kristin Denham,

Western Washington University; Anne Lobeck, Western Washington University

https://ife.qualtrics.com/form/SV_eJRrblOUP1GnJJi

WWU Diversity

<http://www.wwu.edu/diversity/>