

# Addressing Linguistic Inequality in Higher Education: A Proactive Model

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*Although most institutions of higher education in the United States have now developed diversity, equity, and inclusion centers, programs, and initiatives, language equality tends to be excluded from the typical “canon of diversity.” Language remains an overlooked or dismissed issue in higher education while it insidiously serves as an active agent for promoting inequality in campus life. Based on two empirical studies, one of students from Southern Appalachia attending a large urban university in the South, and one of tenured faculty at the same university, I establish the need for the awareness of language inequality in higher education. I then describe a proactive “campus-infusion” program that includes activities and resources for student affairs, academic affairs, human resources, faculty affairs, and offices of institutional equity and diversity. As an interdisciplinary team from different administrative and disciplinary programs within the university, we used a variety of venues, resources, and techniques to educate the faculty, students, and staff about the significance of language inequality on campus that has had an ongoing effect on higher education.*

**I**n a career spanning more than a half-century of teaching in higher education, I have served in institutions that range from elite private universities with large linguistics departments to small, open-enrollment HBCUs, and large land-grant, research-extensive universities where linguistics was incorporated into larger departments such as communication sciences and English. In these higher education contexts, the linguistics programs have always considered it a foundational premise that all language varieties were based on systematic, complex patterns, and that there were no linguistically superior or deficient languages or dialects.<sup>1</sup> I regrettably admit that, at the same time, I was aware that this axiom was not shared throughout the university, even within linguistics programs. In fact, in many aligned disciplines, it was commonly assumed that nonstandardized versions of English were simply a “collection of errors” or “ungrammatical” patterns to be stamped out in the process of higher education. While these universities might have been progressive in their stances on other social issues, language equality was exempted from inclusion. In fact, in the historical predecessor of the

HBCU where I served, students were required to pass an exam in standardized English to qualify for graduation, in addition to other requirements.

Over the past couple of decades, diversity has become a growing topic in universities, and practically every university in the United States now has a version of an “office of diversity, equity, and inclusion.” The themes covered in such offices have developed into a canon of diversity, including topics related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual preference, and so forth. What is typically missing from such canons, however, is language. As noted in an article in *The Economist*, language is typically excluded, and it has rarely been addressed explicitly in diversity, equity, and inclusion offices.

The collision of academic prejudice and accent is particularly ironic. Academics tend to the centre-left nearly everywhere, and talk endlessly about class and multiculturalism. . . . And yet accent and dialect are still barely on many people’s minds as deserving respect.<sup>2</sup>

A casual survey of university diversity statements and programs indicates that a) there is an implicitly recognized set of diversity themes within higher education and b) it traditionally excludes language issues.<sup>3</sup> Topics related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual preference, and age 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 themes in the canonical catalog of diversity issues. How can we address discriminatory issues of race, sex, gender, and class without including the conversational interactions and language labels that index each identity marker (see Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser in this volume)?<sup>4</sup> And how can we contend with inequalities of race and ethnicity without tackling offensive, explicit, and implicit racist language use at an institutional level (see Sharese King and John R. Rickford in this volume)?<sup>5</sup> Institutional offices of diversity, like academic disciplinary fields and scholars, are indeed vulnerable to the construction of a canon of issues restricted to customary and traditionally recognized topics while ignoring or dismissing topics that are outside of the traditional foci.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, language is one of those issues that remains unrecognized in the higher education diversity canon while it insidiously serves as an active agent for promoting inequality in campus life.

I recount my personal experience here because, like many other linguists, I have often followed the practice of compartmentalizing linguistics in higher education. For the majority of my career in higher education, the linguistics programs in which I served operated as isolated enclaves of linguists in a university setting where our foundational axioms about language were disregarded and dismissed by aligned disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and education. A pair of empirical studies, one on university students speaking a nonstandardized variety of English and one on faculty backgrounds and perceptions of language, finally

caused me to realize that I had been ignoring a sociolinguistic conundrum in my own experiences of higher education.<sup>7</sup>

One of the pivotal studies of student behavior related to dialect differences comes from Stephany Brett Dunstan's examination of students from the mountains of Appalachia who attended a large state university in an urban region of the South. In this university context, their speech was quite different from the majority of the students who were Southern but not from the Southern mountains. Dunstan conducted extensive interviews with the selected students and analyzed their use of a couple of iconic vowel productions found in that region of western North Carolina (for example, the pronunciation of the vowel in *time* and the vowel in *bought*), as well as the use of some socially stigmatized grammatical features (for example, multiple negation in *He ain't do nothing* or subject-verb agreement in *We was down there*).<sup>8</sup> In addition to the sample of their speech, the students discussed questions about their sense of belonging, their comfort level in class, and their interactional experiences related to language differences at the university.

Dunstan found that dialect played a significant role in student experiences on campus, including their academic and social life, as participants from the region expressed hesitance to speak out in class for fear of drawing unwanted negative attention.<sup>9</sup> These students also indicated that their dialect could influence how comfortable they felt in certain courses and in interactions with other students and instructors. For example, one student indicated that he felt more comfortable in his economics courses where there was considerable linguistic diversity than in his sociology course where his peers and instructor used his dialect (sometimes negatively) to make him the representative of all rural white males. Quotes from a few students typify these comments:

I don't really speak up too much in class and stuff like that unless I feel really comfortable... 'cause I can hear, you know, people snickering or stuff like that when I talk...<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes I think that people might think that I'm not educated... just because I have this accent and you hear a country accent and you think hillbilly, and then hillbilly, no education. So I think it's just the social norm to think that way.<sup>11</sup>

One of the outcomes of Dunstan's study indicated that student experiences related to language differed by departments and colleges within the university, but not in a way that aligned with traditional sociopolitical ideologies found in most universities. In most universities, the humanities and social sciences tend to embrace more progressive, liberal political and social stances, as opposed to those in the physical sciences or economics.<sup>12</sup> But students in Dunstan's study reported that their treatment by instructors and students in the social sciences and human-

ities courses was more negative than those in the physical sciences with respect to dialect differences.<sup>13</sup> In part, this may be because of the language-gatekeeping and guardianship role assumed by faculty in the humanities and social sciences disciplines. At the same time, it attests to the acceptance of an ideology by some professors in these universities in which language differences do not cluster with attitudes about other kinds of social and cultural differences. Therefore, it is open to implicit bias.<sup>14</sup> As pointed out by sociolinguist Rosina Lippi-Green, language diversity is often “the last acceptable prejudice,” and may persist in situations where other progressive sociopolitical stances are embraced and promoted.<sup>15</sup>

Students with nonstandardized dialect features said they had to work harder than students with more normalized dialects to prove their intelligence to both faculty and peers. Participants also indicated that language influenced their sense of belonging; some students indicated feeling a need to code-switch to fit in or be accepted academically or socially. Although significant outreach has been conducted in terms of language diversity in the communities in North Carolina and in the K–12 system, we began to realize that we had not specifically addressed this issue in the community of higher education, where students from diverse backgrounds might be facing issues academically, socially, and personally because of language differences.<sup>16</sup> The results of Dunstan’s study revealed discomfiting exceptionalism and marginalization within and outside of the classrooms of higher education related to their native “mountain dialect,” a Southern Highland variety of English often referred to as Appalachian English.<sup>17</sup>

Following up on Dunstan’s study of a specific dialect community’s experiences in higher education, we decided to interview a sample of faculty at the same university about their dialect background and current experiences with language variation in their interactions in the classroom. I sent out a randomized request to one-third of the faculty to see if they would be willing to be interviewed. More than seventy faculty members volunteered to be interviewed, and my colleagues at North Carolina State University and I conducted the interviews. Questions included a discussion of their home dialect from their community of origin to their progressive and current use of language in the academic community of practice, resulting in several different research studies based on these interviews.<sup>18</sup>

Some faculty exhibited explicitly positive perspectives, but others offered insight into underlying prejudicial attitudes and perceptions relating to language. Some of the statements reflected issues of standard language ideology in academia: in particular, the idea that student and faculty scholars should aspire to certain hegemonic styles of speech, notably those associated with the white middle class. In addition to faculty members’ perceptions of students’ language in the classroom, participants also shared thoughts on how they believed others on campus perceive their language. Several faculty members suggested a belief that the way they are perceived by students and colleagues is shaped by their language and the factors

that have influenced their speech, such as race/ethnicity, geographic origin, and gender. For example, one instructor believes that his social class dialect and geographic origin influenced his credibility as a scholar in the eyes of his peers:

I've always been insecure about [my speech] and I'm still insecure about it to this day. In fact, earlier this week I got invited to do an interview on NPR radio. I'm like, I would love to talk about the research I'm doing and to share that, but to be interviewed on a national radio program where it's just my voice and nothing else, I'm scared to death....I hate going to professional conferences for that very reason. I love reconnecting with colleagues and meeting new people. I'm an editor of a journal in my field and you know I get treated very, very well and everybody's respectful to me, but I know that the moment I get up to the podium and I open my mouth, you know for half the audience at least it's going to just – my credibility's just going to sink and I have to spend the rest of the time like building it back up, you know.<sup>19</sup>

Faculty who shared this perspective also observed that they make or have made a conscious effort to change their speech. This finding is interesting since linguistic representation matters for students who want to feel that they belong in the academic community. If faculty feel the need to code-switch to accommodate perceived norms of valued language in the academy, students from diverse backgrounds may not hear faculty who sound like them.

In examining the disciplinary backgrounds of faculty in the study, however, sociolinguist Aston Patrick did find a benefit to speaking a local dialect.<sup>20</sup> Her analysis based on the set of interviews indicates that faculty regard Southern, rural dialects as devalued in many parts of the university, but that “these dialects confer *benefits* to faculty in the colleges of agricultural sciences, natural resources, and veterinary sciences because of these colleges’ significant connections to rural areas and communities.”<sup>21</sup> Her analysis demonstrates that professors may benefit when they speak Southern or rural dialects of English within university colleges that have a high proportion of students from rural backgrounds and when conducting fieldwork with rural, Southern communities. The benefit of speaking a Southern or rural dialect, however, did not extend to other colleges whose faculty have greater bias against nonstandardized varieties of English. Patrick’s study demonstrates that acceptance or nonacceptance of varieties of English among professors may vary depending on context and constituencies, highlighting the need for greater nuance in understanding how conventional in-group and out-group dynamics of social identity formation can shift in local contexts, even within the university.

The analysis of these faculty data by sociolinguist Caroline Marie Myrick examines the role of language and gender ideologies.<sup>22</sup> Myrick’s mixed-methods analysis uncovers linguistic expectations and pressures that female faculty perceive as normative in academia, including how and why they conform to or re-

sist these expectations.<sup>23</sup> Many female professors report being advised in graduate school and beyond to alter their speech to sound “more competent” in a university setting, including their resistance to so-called vocal fry (the lowest register [tone] of a person’s voice characterized by its deep, creaky, breathy sound) or “uptalk” (using a rising terminal intonation at the end of a declarative statement to make it sound like a question), two indexes of women’s speech that are considered “nonprofessional.” Men have considerably more classroom flexibility in language usage, since male language is unmarked and normative in the classroom. Women, on the other hand, are sanctioned for indexing femininity such as uptalk and vocal fry at the same time they may be sanctioned for violating gender-norm expectations. This places them in a double bind, in which their multiple identities as women and scholars intersect to produce a unique form of social oppression.

Sociolinguist Peter Andrews conducted a chronotropic analysis of the data in terms of ethnicity, describing the “comfortably white classroom” where normative, standardized speech prevails.<sup>24</sup> In this context, the use of regionalized Southern English may enhance solidarity between Southern instructors and Southern white students – but African American Language is marginalized. For example, one white Southern male professor made the following observations about the speech of an African American male graduate student in his seminar:

And his speech patterns are very Black. He’s not altered his speech patterns like I see most of them trying to do when they come here. In fact, it’s so much so, that he comes across very unprofessional. . . . I would say I have a hard time treating him professional because he’s so jive-y in his talk. It’s just “street talk” almost, the way he talks . . . and I’m like, “How can you look and talk like this?” . . . because you’re really making it hard for me.<sup>25</sup>

The same professor offered the following contrast for a white female Midwestern student in the class:

So I think, yes, that if I had that [Midwestern] voice that I would use it. I think I definitely would. Because I always notice it when someone has one. And I point it out to them . . . so I’m teaching people how to speak, right? And we had this Midwestern-voice girl, and her diction was just perfect. And after she gave her seminar, I said, “You know, you sound like a radio announcer. You could go into radio,” I said. “You’ve got that nice Midwestern,” I said. “Perfect. It’s just beautiful, you know. Use it.”<sup>26</sup>

We have also found that African American faculty face the burden of being exceptionalized as a token representative of ethnicity and gender in their use of language.

I’ve been told by a couple of students over the years that I’m the very first African American person that they’ve ever spoken to in their life . . . and I ask them, “What has

that experience been like?" . . . And so, you know, how I speak is really important to make sure that those students see, you know, that African American people can talk just like you.<sup>27</sup>

Results from empirical studies such as these reveal how language use and attitudes by professors in the academy operate to reproduce and instantiate language inequality in our institutions of higher learning. It is not just the student body that needs vital information about dialect diversity; faculty and administrators are equally in need of such substantive information. This knowledge influences how faculty interact with and assess students, how they interact as colleagues, and how they view themselves as members of the academic community. Indeed, studies such as these challenge us to "educate the educated," who are the gatekeepers of language in our academic communities, along with the students who are discriminated upon based on erroneous linguistic assumptions.<sup>28</sup> 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.

**A**lthough our program in linguistics has been engaged in proactive language awareness activities outside of our campus for several decades now, the landmark study by Dunstan and the follow-up study of faculty language experiences have inspired our program to address issues of language inequality that exist in our own backyard.<sup>29</sup> After meeting with the diversity officer of the university to explain our findings, we obtained a modest grant from the office of diversity to implement a program on linguistic diversity throughout the campus.

The conceptual framework underlying the program is based on psychologist Paul Pedersen's Multicultural Development Model, which includes the stages of awareness, knowledge, and skill.<sup>30</sup> Because language is rarely addressed as a type of diversity in college and because standard language ideology and linguistic hegemony are so pervasive in American society, members of the campus community are largely unaware of the attitudes and assumptions they hold about language. We devised a program that seeks to raise awareness through an inductive process in which participants initially think critically about beliefs they hold. The second stage of the model, knowledge – the cognitive domain – addresses factual linguistic evidence to dispel common myths and fallacies associated with language variation. Finally, the third stage, skill, addresses the behavioral domain by offering strategies for inclusion and for considering language and dialect when interacting with others from different linguistic backgrounds.

The initial goals of the program were: 1) to raise awareness about language as a form of diversity on college campuses and on our campus in particular, 2) to educate a full range of members of the campus community about language variation and diversity, and 3) to provide multifaceted resources and strategies for

the campus community to facilitate the inclusion of language diversity in diversity programming. The initial target was undergraduate students, for whom we designed positively framed interactive workshops in a variety of undergraduate courses that addressed language myths and facts regarding the dialects that students might hear on campus. Upon completion of the workshops, participants should recognize that: 1) the scientific study of language does not acknowledge a single correct variety or “standard” of any spoken language and that “standards” are social constructs, 2) speakers of any language necessarily speak a dialect of that language, and 3) all dialects are systematic, patterned, and rule-governed. Participants in the workshops included first years through seniors with a range of majors, and several hundred students completed both pre- and postworkshop surveys aimed at measuring language attitudes and beliefs and assessing learning outcomes. The postworkshop survey also asked 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 met the learning outcomes of the workshop.<sup>31</sup> Given the initial success, and the shift in students’ previously held attitudes and beliefs about dialects, we decided to scale up the program to reach a broader audience across campus.

The program is an interdisciplinary, collaborative endeavor, rather than a group of linguists who set themselves apart as the exclusive experts on issues related to language variation. The program coordinators represented different colleges, as well as faculty and 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 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 presented are “a fresh take on diversity” to most academics outside of the field of linguistics, it was relatively easy to obtain a pledge from members of the campus to participate in our program.

With the development of the campus-infusion model depicted in Figure 1, the leadership team pursued connections across campus in various divisions and began sharing language diversity awareness materials in several forms. As Figure 1 notes, the campus-infusion model includes student affairs, academic affairs, faculty affairs, and campus diversity programs. We were strategic in selecting units and programs in each of these areas in an effort to fully address the entire campus community. Over the next couple of years, we conducted more than fifty work-



Figure 1  
The Campus-Infusion Model in Implementation

Student Affairs	Academic Affairs	Human Resources	Faculty Affairs	Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity
New student orientation	New graduate-level course taught spring 2014	New employee orientation (vignette)	New faculty orientation (vignette; speakers)	Diversity education week
Partnership with Global Training Initiative	Development of undergrad-level language diversity course	Resource personnel and online resources	Resource personnel and online resources	Resource personnel and online resources
Welcome festival	Workshops/lectures in undergrad/graduate courses			
Housing				
Student leadership training	Peer education: diversity ambassadors			
Resource personnel and online resources	Resource personnel and online resources			

Source: Stephany Brett Dunstan, Walt Wolfram, Audrey J. Jaeger, and Rebecca E. Crandall, "Educating the Educated: Language Diversity in the University Backyard," *American Speech* 90 (2) (2015): 274, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-3130368>.

shops with faculty, staff, and administrators, ranging from new faculty employees to the service workers throughout the university.

For the diversity initiative, we produced specific video vignettes of three to six minutes that we posted online for the campus population and used regularly in our workshops and presentations, including new student orientation for first years. One vignette was filmed on the university commons and included spontaneous responses from passing students, staff, faculty, and key administrators, including the chancellor of the university, to questions about their speech and

about language diversity on campus.<sup>32</sup> Another vignette, “I Sound like a Scholar,” 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.<sup>33</sup> These vignettes continue to be key components in presentations and serve as a resource for others on campus in diversity training/programming. We also created a brand of language diversity related to the North Carolina State University’s mascot, the Wolfpack. More than a half-dozen years after the initial launch, campus residents and personnel can still see digital versions of the poster on video boards throughout campus, and the brand button on diversity remains popular with students who receive them at different events on campus (see Figure 2).

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 specific audiences. The workshops are centered on the learning outcomes previously described in this essay and follow the following format: 1) defining a dialect; 2) addressing common myths/truths about dialects; 3) addressing issues of linguistic discrimination; 4) addressing how language variation might impact you, your discipline, work environment, interactions with others, and so on; and 5) 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 on experiences, explore their attitudes and beliefs about language, work through examples of dialect patterning, and collectively discuss strategies for using this knowledge.

The engagement of students plays a critical role in the implementation of the campus linguistic diversity programs. From its inception, students were involved in workshops, the production of videos, and the staffing of exhibit booths on and off campus. The programs also targeted different student groups, like those in university housing. Many undergraduate students live on campus, and residence halls are a critical environment for the psychosocial development of college students and informal learning.<sup>34</sup> Students in residence 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.

Linguistics 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 we discuss in our report on the study, the LDA program offers students an opportunity to become involved and to develop leadership roles in multiple dimensions of advocacy and activities on campus.<sup>35</sup> Graduate students, in particular, often have limited engagement experiences compared to undergraduates, in part due to their myo-

Figure 2  
“Howl with an Accent” Campus Poster and Button



Source: Language Diversity Ambassadors, North Carolina State University, <https://howl.wordpress.ncsu.edu> (accessed May 17, 2023).

pic focus on their academic subject.<sup>36</sup> 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 that informs students of events and assists in event logistics. The team also hosts booths at various functions for students and the campus community.

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 last couple of years, meetings have included:

- A presentation and discussion of language issues in the University’s Book of Common Reading for 2019–2020, *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah. This ac-

tivity 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.<sup>37</sup> This event was cohosted by the NC State Union Activities Black Student Board.
- A student presentation on “Queer Language” that presented the state of current ideology and research about the notion of speech in queer communities.
- 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*. This event was cohosted with a university sorority that requested that LDA give a presentation on the topic.<sup>38</sup>
- A demonstration and discussion of language misogyny in classic Disney films over time.

LDA’s programs focus on current language events relevant to campus life, and presentations and discussions have included themes such as language and politics, language and the LBGTQIA+ community, and gendered language in Disney films, among current topics. In many cases, these events are cosponsored with other student organizations to facilitate a collaborative and interdisciplinary perspective in considering language variation. LDA staff also engage in class presentations and 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. In fact, during the 2021–2022 academic year, the LDA did more than twenty presentations for first-year writing instructors who requested a lecture on language diversity as a part of their course. Language Diversity Ambassadors have also worked to create an online digital repository of resource materials (such as PowerPoint presentations, audio-visual materials, and assessment materials) that all team members can access for their use.<sup>39</sup> They also participate actively in social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Through their regular promotion venues, they have raised the awareness of language diversity on campus, leading to an increase in student enrollment in linguistics courses and a general awareness of language variation under the rubric of the Educating the Educated campaign.

**A**s I 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 described here if we expect to make a significant difference in campus life. 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 a diversity initiative at a neighboring university similar to the one described here 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, which are limited to the relatively narrow issue of dialect differences on a Southern metropolitan campus. For example, prejudices exist with respect to second-language acquisition accents just as readily, though these issues were not a part of the empirical study included in our examination. Linguists also need to form alliances outside the narrow confines of their linguistic department that include proactive collaboration with the campus office of diversity program and aligned disciplines.

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. While we have had a highly successful initial campaign in the Educating the Educated program, it needs to become integrated into the regular programs offered by the office of diversity at the university. When I give presentations about linguistic inequality at various universities around the country, one of my first requests is, “Would you please invite representatives of the office of diversity to the talk?” And when they attend, they commonly remark that this program is unique, and they want to incorporate a similar one at their university. In fact, a number of universities around the United States are now beginning to include dimensions of language variation in their diversity programs. 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 bias, one of the most significant and overlooked dimensions of inequality, is substantively confronted, and interdisciplinary solutions must be programmatically incorporated into programs of diversity in our institutions of higher learning.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Walt Wolfram**, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2019, is one of the pioneers of sociolinguistics. He is the William C. Friday Distinguished University Professor at North Carolina State University, where he also directs the Language and Life Project. He has published more than twenty books and three hundred articles on language variation, and has served as executive producer of fifteen television documentaries, winning several Emmys. His recent publications include *Fine in the World: Lumbee Language in Time and Place* (with Clare Dannenberg, Stanley Knick, and Linda Oxendine, 2021) and *African American Language: Language Development from Infancy to Adulthood* (with Mary Kohn, Charlie Farrington, Jennifer Renn, and Janneke Van Hofwegen, 2021).

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> In sociolinguistics, *language variety* or simply *variety* refers to differences in speech patterns, for example: dialect, register, and general style. Standardized English is one of many varieties of English. For more on varieties in sociolinguistics, see Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and Cecil L. Nelson, eds., *The Handbook of World Englishes* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).
- <sup>2</sup> R. L. G., “The Last Acceptable Prejudice,” *The Economist*, January 29, 2015, <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2015/01/29/the-last-acceptable-prejudice>. See also Stephany Brett Dunstan, Walt Wolfram, Audrey J. Jaeger, and Rebecca E. Crandall, “Educating the Educated: Language Diversity in the University Backyard,” *American Speech* 90 (2) (2015): 266–280, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-3130368>; and Walt Wolfram, “Sociolinguistic Variation and the Public Interest,” *Cadernos de Linguística* 2 (1) (2021): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.25189/2675-4916.2021.v2.n1.id357>.
- <sup>3</sup> Kendra Nicole Calhoun, “Competing Discourses of Diversity and Inclusion: Institutional Rhetoric and Graduate Student Narratives at Two Minority Serving Institutions” (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2021), <https://www.proquest.com/openview/552b09ea236453a210e8b541d03188fe/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.
- <sup>4</sup> Aris Moreno Clemons and Jessica A. Grieser, “Black Womanhood: Raciolinguistic Intersections of Gender, Sexuality & Social Status in the Aftermaths of Colonization,” *Dædalus* 152 (3) (Summer 2023): 115–129, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/black-womanhood-raciolinguistic-intersections-gender-sexuality-social-status-aftermaths>.
- <sup>5</sup> Sharese King and John R. Rickford, “Language on Trial,” *Dædalus* 152 (3) (Summer 2023): 178–193, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/language-on-trial>.
- <sup>6</sup> Walt Wolfram and Karen Eisenhauer, “Implicit Sociolinguistic Bias and Social Justice,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Work of John R. Rickford*, ed. Renée Blake and Isabelle Buchstaller (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2020), 269–280.
- <sup>7</sup> Caroline Marie Myrick, “Language and Gender Ideologies in Higher Education: An Examination of Faculty Discourses” (PhD diss., North Carolina State University, 2019), <https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/handle/1840.20/36471>; and Stephany Brett Dunstan, “The Influence of Speaking a Dialect of Appalachian English on the College Experience” (PhD diss., North Carolina State University, 2013), <https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/handle/1840.16/8561>.
- <sup>8</sup> Dunstan, “The Influence of Speaking a Dialect of Appalachian English on the College Experience.”
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 239.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 340.
- <sup>12</sup> Daniel B. Klein and Charlotta Stern, “Professors and Their Politics: The Policy Views of Social Scientists,” *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 17 (3–4) (2005): 257–303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913810508443640>.
- <sup>13</sup> Dunstan, “The Influence of Speaking a Dialect of Appalachian English on the College Experience.”
- <sup>14</sup> Erin Beeghly and Alex Madva, eds., *An Introduction to Implicit Bias: Knowledge, Justice, and the Social Mind* (Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, 2020).

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