

THE PROGRAM IN LINGUISTICS PRESENTS

A MINI-CONFERENCE WITH PATRICIA CUKOR-AVILA AND SALI TAGLIAMONTE

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2013 AT 1:00 - 3:00PM

WHITE HALL 102



LANGUAGE VARIATION AND CHANGE

“Linguistic Change Across Communities: The View from Canada.”

Sali Tagliamonte, University of Toronto, Canada

Canadian English is often thought to be one large dialect from sea to sea (Labov, Ash, & Boberg 2006); however, this homogeneity is said to be an urban phenomenon (Chambers 1991:93). Canada’s largest city, Toronto, sits at the far southern point of the province of Ontario. However, Ontario itself is an area more than four times the size of the United Kingdom. What is happening elsewhere?

In this presentation I synthesize the results arising from a research program studying the transmission and diffusion of linguistic change across the landscape of Ontario. Two contrasting linguistic features, (1) stative possession and (2) quotatives offer a preliminary view. The analyses reveal that the frequency and trajectory of incoming forms, whether have or be like, are parallel regardless of local; however the constraints within each system are systematically differentiated by community. The results show that both the system of the language as well as its history, geography and socio-cultural embedding are crucial for interpreting and understanding language change.

“The evolution of a vernacular: Linguistic variation and change over time in rural African American Vernacular English.”

Patricia Cukor-Avila, University of North Texas, USA

Although most of the defining research on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has been conducted in the urban North, AAVE was a rural Southern variety for most of its history. As late as the beginning of World War II, most African Americans lived in the rural South, and even though the Great Migration brought a dramatic demographic shift in the African American population, substantial numbers of African Americans remain in the rural South today.

This presentation explores rural AAVE both as the variety from which urban AAVE developed and as a variety that more recently has been influenced by urban innovations. It does so by examining the speech of the residents of Springville, Texas, a rural village with a population of 150 that is a former tenant farming community. It looks at rural AAVE as a source variety by examining the speech of Springville residents born between 1890 and 1940; it looks at how urban AAVE influenced rural AAVE by examining the speech of residents born after World War II through 2002. The analysis shows a dynamic, rapidly changing variety characterized by:

1. Continuities that have persisted throughout the history of AAVE, such as zero copula. These features seem to have existed since the origins of the vernacular and survived the move from the rural South to urban areas, even in the North.
2. Rural features, such as a-prefixing, that largely disappeared during the Great Migration to cities and to the North and that disappeared in Springville during the last quarter of the 20th century.
3. Urban innovations, such as habitual invariant be and had+past as a simple past, that seem to have developed in the urban North and spread to the rural South, especially during the last quarter of the 20th century.

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