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Dialect and Influences on the Academic Experiences of College Students

The dialects that college students speak represent a type of diversity that can influence many elements of their experiences in college, including academic experiences. In this study, we examined the influence of speaking a stigmatized dialect on academic experiences for White and African American students (both male and female) from rural Southern Appalachia attending a large research institution in the urban South. This qualitative study was aided by quantitative sociolinguistic methods used to identify and describe students' speech patterns in order to better understand the influence that students perceived their dialect to have on academic experiences. Findings suggest that for more vernacular students, dialect can influence participation in class, degree of comfort in course, perceived academic challenges, and for some, their beliefs about whether or not others perceive them as intelligent or scholarly based on their speech. This study has implications for the consideration of language diversity in fostering welcoming academic environments and in the role of language discrimination and stereotype threat/stereotype management.

Keywords: language diversity, rural college students, stereotypes, Appalachian, academic environment

When considering the factors that influence college students' academic experiences, educational researchers often take into account numerous background characteristics, but rarely is language explicitly cited as one of them. Language has not often been examined on its own, though it

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may be implied when "culture" is discussed. This is problematic because language, closely tied to identity, may have a more profound influence on academic experiences than previously considered, particularly for speakers of stigmatized dialects.

Language is a form of privilege that students and faculty members bring with them to campus in that there is a common standard language ideology—the belief that there is a single, "correct" form of English spoken by educated individuals (Lippi Green, 1997, 2012; Milroy, 2001). This "standard" is typically based on the dominant class's values and: White, middle- and upper-middle-class speakers. Bourdieu (1991) has suggested that educational institutions propagate standard language ideology (of which linguistic hegemony is a by-product); this ideology is used to convince certain speakers that their speech is incorrect and less prestigious than the so-called "standard." Thus, speakers of less valued varieties feel they must adapt their speech or face consequences such as not being taken seriously, not being considered educated or intelligent (Lippi-Green, 1997, 2012), and not being able to take part in what Delpit (1995, 2006) calls "the culture of power." As previously mentioned, language and identity are often inextricably tied, and to reject a person's language is, in a sense, to reject that person and their culture (Lippi-Green, 1997, 2012). Many students who feel pressure to speak what Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2011) refer to as "School English" may feel a tension between home and school (Wheeler & Swords, 2004). This inner conflict can have numerous implications for college students in this challenging transitional time of academic growth and psychosocial development.

For college students who speak stigmatized dialects such as Appalachian English, language can present some challenges that students who speak more standardized varieties are less likely to face. Students from rural Appalachia attend and graduate from college at lower rates than peers in any other region of the United States (Haaga, 2004; Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2004), and many of these students come from underfunded, low-resource schools (Ali & Saunders, 2009). Appalachia is a region that is often stereotyped and marked as "other" by the rest of America. Scholars such as Eller (1999) have suggested that "no other region of the U.S. today pays the role of the 'other America' quite so persistently as Appalachia," noting that for many outsiders, the region is representative of "backwardness, violence, poverty and hopelessness once associated with the South as a whole" (p. x).

These challenges create unique obstacles for students from this region, particularly as their dialects may mark them as different from others on campus. As such, this study explored the influence of language

on rural, southern Appalachian students' academic experiences attending a large research university in an urban area in the southern United States.

Literature Review

Language and dialect play critical roles in education, though the magnitude is often not addressed or fully understood by educators. Reagan (2005) has noted that "language is at the heart of virtually every aspect of education, and indeed, of social life in general" (p. 41), and Scott (2008) has suggested that "language is a critical issue for scholars and practitioners in educational leadership for social justice because it is such a powerful vehicle of culture" (p. 59).

Dialects and Education

While educators attempt to recognize and promote awareness of diversity of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, etc. in the classroom, diversity of language (when it is acknowledged) is often not seen as a type of diversity for scholars and educators to learn about and celebrate, but as an issue that requires homogenization and standardization.

Students' dialects will have a direct influence on their academic performance and even instructors' expectations of students' academic potential (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007; Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006). Dialects are often addressed in the classroom only in the context of attempting to encourage students to accommodate more standardized varieties. In this case, because language and identity are closely linked, students may feel tension between home and school varieties, resulting in psychosocial difficulties (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). This challenge is likely faced by Appalachian students who speak stigmatized varieties of English.

Appalachian Dialects

Today there is no single Appalachian dialect but rather numerous dialects of Appalachian English (Hazen & Fluharty, 2004; Montgomery, 2006).[1] Studies suggest that parts of the region show influences of standardized varieties of English, and in some cases "traditional Appalachian" phonological variants remainwhile morphosyntax moves toward standardized English (Greene, 2010; Hazen & Hamilton, 2008). Many of the well-known features of dialects of Appalachian English are what Hazen and Hamilton (2009) refer to as Appalachian Heritage Language features, including elements of phonology (pronunciation), morphosyn-

tax (grammar), and lexicon (vocabulary). Nonstandardized grammar is often more stigmatized than nonstandardized pronunciation, though even certain nonstandardized pronunciations, such as monophthongal /ay/ in pre-voiceless phonetic environments (a word like "nice" being pronounced as "nahhs") remain stigmatized even among Southerners (Greene, 2010).

Furthermore, as with many dialects, Appalachian dialects vary between social classes, granting certain dialects more prestige than others (Greene, 2010; Hazen, Butcher, & King, 2010), which can result in some dialects privileged, even by other Appalachians. Montgomery (2006) has noted that today many Appalachians have an ability to code-switch given their greater exposure to standardized English in school and suggests that "it also produces self-consciousness or defensiveness about differences between their 'home English' and 'school English,' pitting the values of family and place against the larger world and striving for the mobility to enter it" (p. 1004). This idea may be critical to students' comfort while they are interacting with others on campus and are in certain academic environments.

Stereotypes often depict Southerners as uneducated, unintelligent, backward, lazy, closed-minded, and simple. The dialects of the South are similarly stigmatized. Although on one hand they represent an aspect of the culture of the South which is viewed as pleasant or polite, they are also viewed as being "incorrect" or "bad English." Greene (2010) has suggested that "notions about Appalachians are not that different from notions about Southerners in general, but rather, an intensified version of them" (p. 28).

Montgomery (2004) has indicated that within the South, Appalachia has also been historically stigmatized; as early as the late nineteenth century, Appalachians began to be portrayed in print media as "lazy, illiterate, gun-toting feuders" (p. 149) and viewed by the rest of the country as "backward" and Appalachia the home of "hillbillies." These are stereotypes that play out in the media still today. Dannenberg (2006) has posited that "mainstream attitudes toward Appalachian English build on social stereotypes that have been ingrained into American society for more than a century and are reinforced by modern mass media" (p. 1012). Dialect stereotypes abound in American society (Baugh, 2003; Lippi Green, 1997, 2012; Luhman, 1990; Preston, 1998; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 1998, 2006), and general attitudes about certain language varieties are not "checked at the door" in educational settings.

Negative stereotypes about a student's language could be detrimental not only to his or her self-esteem but also to academic identity and

self-efficacy beliefs. If a student sees himself not as a "good student" but as someone whose accent has reduced him to a "hick" or "hillbilly," the development of a positive academic (and social) identity could be stymied.

Dialect and Codes of Power in Education

Standard language ideology and linguistic hegemony are reproduced in the classroom by the dominant class's values. Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2011) refer to school systems' use of standardized English as "Standard English, formal English, School English, academic English, proper English, educated English, good English" and "correct English" (p. 11). Nonmainstream dialect speakers may have a distinct disadvantage compared to those whose English is already aligned with the preferred variety in educational settings (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Delpit, 1995, 2006). These standardized speakers are noted to have privileges that nonstandardized speakers do not—namely, that the dialect they speak is also more closely related to the preferred communicative style of the academic discourse community (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; White & Lowenthal, 2011).

Studies of Dialect in Higher Education for Speakers of Stigmatized Varieties of English

There have been very few studies specifically addressing the role of dialect in Appalachian students' college experiences or of other speakers of stigmatized varieties of English. Scott (2008) specifically examined the role of dialect for Lumbee American Indian students in higher education, and McBride (2006) explored dialect and identity for professional Appalachian women, noting some of their experiences in higher education. Similarly, Greene (2010) examined dialect and identity construction for Appalachian women, and while the focus of the study was not on experiences in higher education, the study did include some of the Appalachian women's language-related college experiences.

The focus and target populations of McBride (2006), Greene (2010), and Scott (2008) are not directly tied to language issues in higher education for Appalachian students, but linking all three studies are participants who, in higher education, felt that their dialects were divergent from norms and felt some degree of stigmatization; many also indicated feeling a pressure to change their speech to fit in or be taken seriously. These studies highlight elements of the conceptual framework that demonstrates that standard language ideology (SLI), linguistic hegemony, and codes of power in education can shape college experiences for speakers of nonstandardized varieties of English. The present study

further explores this notion and builds upon the limited body of knowledge of dialect's general role in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

The framework used in the present study is centered on the interplay between standard language ideology (Lippi-Green, 1997, 2012), linguistic hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Suarez, 2002), and codes of power in education (Delpit, 1995, 2006) and how this interplay influences college students' academic experiences. In the United States, SLI is widely accepted and the idea that there is more than one acceptable variety of English is often met with resistance and skepticism. Lippi-Green (1997) has described linguistic ideology in American society as "a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class" (p. 64). For example, the "standard" English grammar taught in schools (dominant institutions) reflects the linguistic preferences of the dominant classes, yet it is not inherently linguistically superior: It "has not one whit more logic, historical consistency, communicative expressivity or internal complexity or systematicity than any other variety" (Preston, 1998, p. 140). However, a student who speaks a nonstandardized dialect such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) will often be taught in school that certain grammatical constructions of her native dialect are incorrect and viewed as a "failed attempt" at the standard (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 1998, 2006).

Linguistic hegemony is a by-product of SLI and provides the means for "standardizing" English in American society. Gramsci (1971) has defined hegemony as the dominance of ruling classes over the lower classes through coercion rather than force, which is made possible when the ruling class uses its power (cultural, social, economic) to legitimize a concept and present it as "common sense." Bourdieu (1991) has suggested that education is a dominant institution responsible for the hegemonic practice of propagating SLI and has also posited that those using a dialect of lower value will be less successful because the linguistic and cultural capital they bring with them are not highly rewarded in the educational marketplace. As such, they are excluded from participation in the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1995, 2006) which reflects the preferences of the dominant group. Delpit explains that one aspect of the codes of the culture of power is linguistic—one cannot participate in the culture of power if one does not know the language rules.
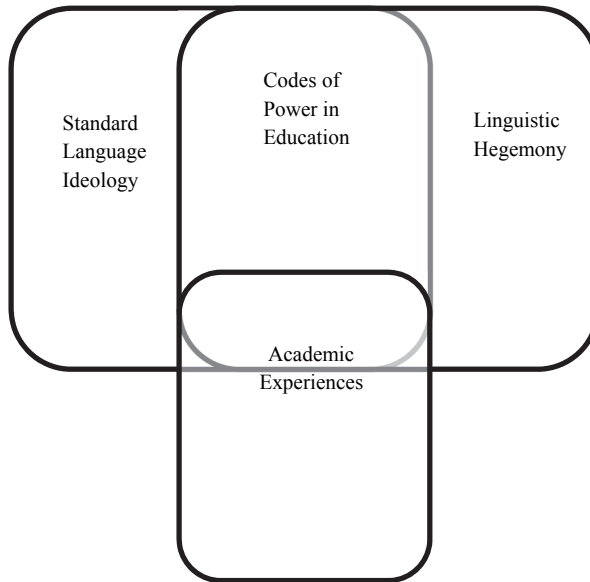
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

In this study's conceptual framework, SLI (Lippi-Green, 1997, 2012) and linguistic hegemony (Gramsci, 1977; Suarez, 2002) overlap to influence the codes of power in educational settings (Delpit, 1995, 2006). These codes of power—namely, the linguistic rules for participating in the culture of power—will influence some of students' academic experiences in higher education.

Methods

Participants were 26 college students from rural, Southern Appalachian who attend a large research university in an urban Southern city, Southern State University (SSU). Researchers contacted students who indicated on their initial university application that they graduated high school in a county in rural Southern Appalachia via email and asked if they met further criteria: They need to have lived in the area since early childhood and had at least one parent who had been born and raised in Appalachia.

Basic interpretive qualitative methods (Merriam, 2002) and socio-linguistic analysis methods (Labov, 1984) were employed to explore the influence of language on rural Appalachian students' college expe-

riences and to add rich, thick descriptions of the participants' speech. The study involved the use of semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) during which students were asked to discuss how their college experiences might have been influenced by the dialect they speak. One-on-one semi-structured interviews took place on SSU campus and were audio recorded, with average interview duration of around 40 minutes. The interview protocol included questions related to students' language use and experiences they have had in college.

Initial coding was performed by the researchers using the qualitative analysis software NVIVO (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012) with transcribed interviews. The coding framework used was directly tied to the research questions, interview protocol, and conceptual framework and was used to explore notions of standard language ideology, linguistic hegemony, and codes of power in higher education in the participants' responses. A peer coder (a colleague with a background in sociolinguistics and education) reviewed the codes to enhance credibility and transferability, or what Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest are the qualitative equivalents of internal validity and external validity, respectively. Member checking was also employed to enhance credibility by giving participants the opportunity to comment on tentative findings, and participants who responded (about half) were in unanimous agreement with the authenticity of the findings.

Sociolinguistic analysis techniques were used to analyze the language used by participants in order to better describe and understand their experiences in relation to the dialect they speak. We analyzed each speaker's dialect through analysis of morphosyntax (grammar) and three salient phonological (pronunciation) features associated with dialects of Appalachian English that would be likely to draw attention on campus given their divergence from campus linguistic norms. We analyzed three phonological features: /ay/ in pre-voiced phonetic environments, /ay/ in pre-voiceless phonetic environments, and /e/. These vowels were selected as variation within these features that carry some of the highest social salience and stigma (Allbritten, 2012; Greene, 2010). We analyzed these features using the acoustic analysis software Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2010) with a minimum of 10 instances per vowel per speaker (Thomas, 2011). For the /ay/ vowels, measurements were taken to determine if the vowel was a monophthong (one sound per syllable; a word like "rice" sounding like "rahs") or diphthong (two sounds per syllable). Monophthongization of /ay/, notably in pre-voiceless environments, carries stigma and would be recognized as different by others on campus. We also analyzed the nucleus, or beginning, of the vowel sound

/e/ in comparison with articulation of /e/ by local peers. When the beginning of the /e/ sound is lowered and backed in vowel space, a word like "weight" can sound like "white" (Albritten, 2012); this feature is often salient and carries stigma. In order to elicit a sufficient number of cases of these vowels (/ay/ and /e/), we additionally had students read a paragraph at the end of the interview written by the researchers that contained numerous instances of the vowels we sought to measure in ideal environments for acoustic measurement.

We did not limit analysis of nonstandardized morphosyntactic variants because given the duration of our interviews, some features simply may not have arisen. For example, a student may use a nonstandardized variant like negative concord in their speech regularly ("We didn't do nothing"), but in the interview situation, they may not have an opportunity to use that feature and thus we would not have recorded it. Additionally, in an interview setting they may have chosen to avoid use of certain features. As such, we analyzed the full transcripts for each speaker for *any* instance of nonstandardized grammar (see Dunstan, 2013) and recorded the frequency of the student's use of that feature based on the number of times it occurred as a ratio of the number of times it could have occurred. For example, if a student's transcripts showed 9 instances in which a past participle was used, and 8 of the 9 times the student used an irregular past participle (e.g., "She had broke the radio"), we indicated that the rate of use for the interview was 89%. The full description of methods and findings of this linguistic analysis can be found in Dunstan (2013).

Our analysis revealed a range of levels of vernacularity. In this study, "more vernacular" speakers are those whose speech contained phonological features associated with dialects of Appalachian English and which would be marked as divergent on campus. Many of these speakers also used nonstandardized morphosyntactic features associated with dialects of Appalachian English. Speakers who are noted as being more standardized are those whose speech did not contain stigmatized features associated with dialects of Appalachian English. Their speech may have contained some pronunciation features associated with dialects of Southern American English, but they were not divergent from campus norms; impressionistically, their speech would not draw attention in the milieu of a Southern college campus. Additionally, their speech contained categorically standardized grammar.

We then used the analysis and description of participants' speech patterns in conjunction with their description of their experiences. Additionally, the lead author used her perceptions as a trained linguist,

Southerner, former resident of Appalachia, and familiarity with South-
ern State campus to describe a few students who fall in the middle of
the continuum. These students use certain stigmatized variables less fre-
quently than those whose speech would be considered highly vernacu-
lar. Even though the frequency of use is lower, these variables may still
draw attention on campus.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are unique in the evidence they provide
for the role of dialect and academic experiences in higher education
settings—an element of diversity which previously has received little
attention in higher education research. Findings suggest that language
plays a role in the academic experiences of the more vernacular stu-
dents in terms of certain aspects of course participation and degree of
comfort in a course, and has implications for students' feelings about
what language is considered scholarly. Findings are presented in two
sections: 1) The Role of Dialect and Influence on Elements of Course
Participation and Performance and 2) The Role of Dialect in Academic
Identity.

The Role of Dialect and Influence on Elements of Course Participation and Performance

Several participants believe that certain aspects of their participation
and performance in college courses were influenced by language and
indicated that the degree to which they felt comfortable in class, espe-
cially to speak up, was influenced by language; many have language-
related concerns about public speaking in general.

Speaking Up in Class. Several vernacular participants suggested that
they were less likely to speak up in class because they are afraid of
peers and faculty perceiving them as less intelligent. They are aware of
stereotypes associated with Southern Appalachian speech as being "hill-
billy" or less educated and less credible:

> Sometimes I think people might think that I'm not educated because of it
> 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. (Elizabeth)

Some cite seeing peers with stigmatized dialects being laughed at or
mocked, causing apprehension about this happening to them and lead-
ing them to be more reticent than they would like to be:

I notice myself like this year especially I don't really speak up too much in class and stuff like that unless I feel really comfortable, and I'm in there with a lot of my peers that are my friends. But beyond that, like, in other classes I don't say too much 'cause I can hear, you know, people snickering or stuff like that when I talk. (Christopher)

They think I'm dumber than I am. It's like in a political science class, I always—I hated speaking up because it seemed like everybody was not really paying any attention to what I said because of my accent. (Emily)

Apart from regular participation in class, when public speaking is a direct requirement (such as class presentations or especially public speaking courses), some of the more vernacular students had more concerns than those with more standardized speech.

Speakers like Isabelle, Sara, Vince, and Robert, whose speech is fairly standardized, generally indicated that public speaking is not major cause for concern due to language. However, Isabelle suggested that if her dialect were more Southern Appalachian, she believes that language might be an issue: "*And then also I guess in doing presentations I feel like I wouldn't be taken as seriously.*" Robert, whose speech is almost hyper-standardized, indicated that he has intentionally made an effort to not sound Appalachian, explaining, "I wanted to make sure that the way I conducted myself in the classroom and in front of classrooms that my speech wasn't a topic of discussion."

The finding that vernacular students' participation and comfort in class is influenced by language is notable. Students with more standardized dialects did not echo the concerns of the more vernacular students, indicating that a more "general" Southern accent flies under the radar in the classroom at Southern State University, which highlights how pervasive notions of linguistic hegemony and standard language ideology are on campus.

Appalachian speakers whose dialects contain more noticeable, stigmatized linguistic features expressed concerns about being literally understood by their peers and professors, which can cause concern for these students prior to speaking in class:

I don't mind speaking in larger classes but I don't prefer them because if you do speak up, then half the people in the class are gonna be like, "What in the world is he saying?" (Joseph)

Because I'd do that [change her speech] and when I make presentations I try and speak with my standard accent because I figure that something I'll say would be misunderstood or not understood at all. (Rachel)

Rachel employs the strategy of changing her speech in class not only to be understood but also because she believes that if she did not, "That would, like, lower my grade and I'm not going to sacrifice my grade."

However, even some of the more vernacular speakers noted that although their participation might be impacted by these concerns, their performance in the course in terms of grades is not: "That's kind of, I guess, put a hamper on my participation level, but it's not my performance or anything. I still do well in the classes. I just don't interact with the professor as much" (Christopher). John points out that because most of his classes are in STEM disciplines, he believes that speech does not matter much, saying that he does not believe his language has influenced his grades: "Most of my classes have been, you do some math and you get a number answer, that's not based on how well you talk, other than my English classes when giving a speech."

Regardless of grade outcome, the fact that vernacular students might be less likely to speak up in class may detract from being fully engaged in the course, thereby depriving classmates from the benefit of any ideas and information these students may have to share.

Several participants specifically cited seeing their peers being laughed at or mocked openly in class for their dialect as a reason for their hesitance to speak out in class. If experiences like these are the reason behind their hesitancy to speak out in class, this signifies a problem on campus that merits attention. These students' experiences do not seem to be unique to SSU; Scott (2008) and White (2005) also noted that students who perceived their own speech to be divergent from campus norms were hesitant to speak in class.

Degree of Comfort in a Course. How comfortable or uncomfortable a student is in a class based on their speech and the speech of others influences classroom experiences. This might mean how comfortable the student is actually attending a class or how comfortable a student might believe that he or she *would be* taking a class. In the first case, consider how language is sometimes a proxy for assumptions about a speaker's values and beliefs; prejudices based on those assumptions can come into play in the classroom setting. Southern American English, particularly dialects of Appalachian English, are often associated in the media with those who are less educated or narrow-minded (Dannenberg, 2006; Greene, 2010; Hsiung, 2004; Lippi-Green, 1997; Montgomery, 2004, 2006). One participant, Christopher, noted that although he believes himself to be open-minded and accepting, peers and faculty in his humanities courses have made negative assumptions about him based on his speech, which made him feel very uncomfortable as shown in this dialogue with the interviewer:

CHRISTOPHER: It was awful. We butted heads all the time, 'cause [the instructor] would always, you know, any type of "country" thing or whatever she'd look and talk to us [Christopher and a peer with a stigmatized dialect]. And we'd just stand out, right there in the middle of class. It was like, "Stop!"

INTERVIEWER: Have there been other teachers who made you the voice of . . . ?

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah. I took a course in race and ethnic relations in the U.S., and that was miserable. That was awful, 'cause I was the enemy basically of the entire class. And we had [mock-imitating instructor], "a prime example of somebody who's 'country' sitting right here." It was bad.

Emily, whose phonology is noticeably Southern Appalachian, felt her peers in political science classes and science classes judged her based on her speech, and she is unlikely to enroll in those types of courses if she can avoid them:

I guess I wouldn't take a political science class again, and I wouldn't take a—like a science class again . . . because you have to pronounce everything perfectly there; and I just felt like that it was a really pretentious attitude in some of those classes that I took.

In those classes she felt that her peers were quick to judge her speech, and it made her uncomfortable:

They'd just be really quick to correct you. Or even if I slipped up on my grammar or something, like nothing—I mean I would never say any 'y'uns' in those classes. But I don't know. . . . You just felt like you needed to sound like everybody else; and you'll sound smarter if you dropped the accent.

On the reverse side, some of the more vernacular students indicated that peers' and faculty's speech, at times, made them feel at ease in a course and free to be themselves, particularly in courses related to agriculture, which attract many students from rural areas: "I really enjoy my animal science classes, 'cause most everyone in the major, I think, sort of speaks the way I do, so that really, I guess the comfort thing again" (Megan). Other students suggested that the professor's speech (or the attitudes about language the teacher held) made them feel comfortable in that environment. Emily was enrolled in a linguistics course for teacher education majors, and her professor's attitudes made her feel accepted:

Oh I just loved it, I just loved it. Like he would use me for an example sometimes, but it wasn't in a demeaning way. And yeah, yeah; he was great. He

didn't make anybody feel like we needed to change the way we spoke or anything like that.

For other students, the degree of comfort they feel or anticipate in a class due to language is more related to the subject matter. Jason feels less comfortable in humanities courses, perhaps as the result of language. Another student, Thomas, suggests something similar: "I guess English classes are always on the ball at pronunciation and things like that. Presentation classes, communication-type classes, those type of kinda class are the ones that I guess I generally avoid." Patty echoes the others: "I guess in English 101 [she felt less comfortable]. I was the weird one 'cause I was the only one that talked funny."

Although some of the more vernacular students indicated that their degree of comfort in a course was influenced at times by language, none of the participants indicated that they would avoid a course they need for their major because of language-related concerns. Nonetheless, once in the course, the degree of comfort students feel can be influenced by language. As such, while these students would not necessarily avoid a required course because of language, they may find themselves in uncomfortable situations when they have no choice but to take a class, though they may feel marginalized once they attend.

Although even the more vernacular participants indicated that, ultimately, if they needed a class to graduate they would not avoid it specifically because of language, and that generally speaking they do not select classes based on how comfortable they might think they will be in a class based on language, once they are enrolled in a class how comfortable they feel being there is important to their success and sense of belonging in the academic community. These findings highlight the notion that instructors should carefully consider language as an element of diversity when attempting to facilitate inclusive classroom environments.

Feeling Additional Barriers Not Faced by Standard Speakers in Academic Settings. The more vernacular participants indicated various ways they feel that they face challenges in the classroom that standardized speakers do not encounter. The less vernacular participants did not suggest they face these challenges, but a few recognized that other students from their home region may encounter them. The most significant challenge noted was that more vernacular students feel they have to put forth extra effort to prove their intelligence. Additionally, and somewhat unrelated to language, several rural students felt their schools did not prepare them as well as their urban peers' schools did; several noted feeling at a loss at times in the classroom because of this, which rein-

forces the "hillbilly" stereotype most participants acknowledged. On top of speaking a stigmatized dialect, being perceived as less educated and feeling academically underprepared could cause vernacular students additional classroom anxiety.

Several students in this study (speakers of standardized and more vernacular dialects alike) indicated a belief that speakers of stronger dialects of Appalachian English face more challenges in college than speakers of standardized varieties. Robert, one of the most standardized speakers who also mentions several times that he is proud *not* to sound Appalachian (through efforts he has made to adapt his speech), talks about what he believes are challenges a more vernacular speaker faces in college:

> I was able to identify people from the same area I was from and recognize that they don't come across as intelligent whenever they use those sort—I don't know if it's dialect or what is the right term I'm supposed to be using, or just they way they sound. It doesn't reflect their potential as a student or their actual performance as a student, and I didn't want to have any sort of barrier that could keep me from getting a position or from getting a TA position where they would have to do an interview where they would see if I was qualified based upon how I was able to carry myself in a conversation. I wouldn't want that to inhibit and so far I think it doesn't.

Other students like Jessica, who is the only African American speaker in the study, believe they face challenges such as being viewed as less professional. Asked how she feels about her belief that her variety of English is stereotyped as being "country" and "unprofessional," she says: "I think it's pretty dumb, and then me being Black, it's kind of a double whammy. And a female. That's a triple whammy." Other students reflect this sentiment that they have had additional hurdles to overcome in academic life in college as a result of their speech:

> But yeah, I guess it does kind of affect you a little bit 'cause, you know, that they think you're not as smart. So then you kinda feel like you have to prove yourself to them. And I don't think you should have to, but you kinda feel that way. It's like, I'm not stupid; here, I'll prove it. (Megan)

Many students indicated concern about being taken seriously by peers and faculty, and feeling pressure to prove one's intelligence could add to this anxiety. Feeling that their variety of English is less valued, therefore requiring them to work harder to overcome others' perceptions underscores notions of the barriers SLI and linguistic hegemony

create on campus with implications for their academic and psychosocial development. If students feel like they have to work harder than others, they may eventually resent needing to prove their merit, or perhaps opt for a less challenging, more welcoming environment. As Schlossberg (1989) has noted, the degree to which a student feels marginalized or that they matter can be critical for success, particularly during periods of transition. Studies such as Hibbett (2005) suggest that it is not uncommon for minority student populations to feel a need to "prove" themselves on campus. If Appalachian students who speak more vernacular varieties of English feel a need to prove themselves, this is possibly an indication of a deficit in the welcoming and inclusive nature of the current campus environment at SSU. Mallinson and Charity Hudley (2010) have suggested that students who feel their speech is devalued in academic settings "may even resist feeling like their language and culture are looked down upon in academic settings by disengaging from the standardized English-speaking school culture and climate altogether" (p. 253).

Not directly related to language, but worth noting, is that several speakers in the study indicated feeling academically underprepared coming to this institution. Students feeling academically underprepared coupled with feelings of linguistic inadequacy in academia could present academic and psychological hurdles to overcome. Even those who noted feeling academically underprepared did suggest that their confidence in their academic ability increased after an adjustment period. They attribute the increase to being good students in high school or being confident in general.

While other students who feel underprepared may fly under the radar, students who speak nonstandardized dialects may have their academic insecurities "put on display," however inaccurately or unfairly. Nonetheless, several participants suggest that their confidence in their abilities allowed them to succeed despite this: "I know that my success as a student comes from my abilities instead of the way I talk. I change the way I talk, though, to keep people from automatically judging me so they don't see me as some dumb hillbilly" (Lauren). While many participants indicated that they have seemingly adjusted well, it raises questions about what the experiences are like for less confident, less self-assured students.

The Role of Dialect in Academic Identity

Dialect may influence academic identity, or how a student sees him or herself fitting into the academic community. If students feel that their natural speech is not valued in academic settings, they may feel pressure

to change and could struggle with this aspect of their academic and personal identities (Charity Hudley & Mallinson, 2011; Dannenberg, 2006; Godley et al., 2006; McBride, 2006; Montgomery, 2004, 2006; Scott, 2008; Wheeler & Swords, 2004). Many participants in this study have, in some ways, felt pressure to change their speech to accommodate the university's language norms. Some students completely changed their speech at all times while others code-switched in certain situations. The more standardized speakers did not feel the same pressure to change (though notably, some of the more standardized speakers are those who have already felt this pressure and preemptively adjusted their speech to avoid stigma.)

Sounding Like a Scholar. For several participants, college was the first time that they realized that their speech was different or marginalized. Some also discussed how faculty sound and how "the model student" sounds. In terms of faculty, the students noted (regardless of their level of vernacularity) that their instructors typically do not sound Southern or Appalachian:

> I've noticed that a lot of the professors don't have country accents like mine. (Elizabeth)

> I feel like [the campus environment] is scholarly and scholars don't have Southern accents. There's not hardly anyone in the anthropology department that actually has a Southern accent, which is kind of weird. . . . I think that goes back to having a Southern accent people tend to think that you are less smart. (Sara)

Apart from noticing faculty's apparent lack of regional dialects (other than non-native speakers), participants also expressed varied notions of what the model college student should sound like to be taken seriously in college. Some believed academic merit is more important than speech, while others believed that language allowed them to be seen as scholars. Students who believed that speech should not matter indicated:

> As long as they know what they're talking about, it shouldn't matter how they say it. (Megan)

> I've met very well-educated people that have a Southern accent, and I've also met very well-educated people who don't. (Rebecca)

One student who felt scholars do not have regional dialects is Joseph, who described a model student: "You think of a neutral accent with a

high vocabulary and lives in the city." Lana similarly noted, "I think the accent would be more neutral, simply because there's always the possibility that if you get the student body president up on the stage and they sound like a country hick, people are not gonna take 'em as seriously as they maybe would somebody with a normal accent who could speak in a professional way . . . ."

Still, while some students believe that those taken seriously in academia sound "neutral," when asked directly whether or not language has influenced the way that they see themselves as students, many participants indicated that it has not. However, some participants like Hank, Kelly, Lauren, Christopher, and others noted that while it does not influence how the see *themselves* as scholars, they do believe that the way they speak influences how their peers (and in some cases, faculty and staff) may view them:

> And they [peers at SSU] hear you talk and they've never heard somebody talk like that and they automatically write you off as being, you know, less intelligent than they are. (Hank)

Participants who note that the way they speak does not influence the way they view themselves as students have a confidence that can be explained by their belief that their works, not their speech, should define them despite what they believe others may think. Thus, although they believe others might not view them as being intelligent, their confidence helps them to push past this feeling:

> I mean I know I'm capable of doing the work. And sometimes I'll get frustrated if somebody wants to laugh at the way I speak but it doesn't get to me really. (Emily)

Similarly, some students such as Kelly also suggest that they believe that a person's academic merit should be held in higher esteem than the way that person speaks:

> In aero[space engineering] I've had my friends say, "You really should, you know, think about trying to take some speech therapy" and I'm like, no, I'm not gonna change myself for anybody else . . . my grades speak for themselves. (Kelly)

Additionally, the more vernacular students who feel confident in their academic abilities seem capable of looking at the positive side of perceived additional academic barriers or hurdles to overcome. Many stu-

dents indicate that they enjoy proving others wrong in instances when they believe themselves to have been judged as less intelligent by peers or faculty members in academic settings:

> I like being in math classes and having my accent and doing well. . . . I like being able to have this accent and do well in a class where I may not be what I envision as the ideal student. (Joseph)

> They build up these notions, and you can tell on their face when you say something that it just throws them off completely. And I love that look on their face. [Laughing] They're just shocked! Like one of my hobbies, I like, I love following the stock market. I trade options. I really enjoy astronomy, too. And people, when you tell them that, they just, they're not ready for it and they just look at you like, "What!? That makes no sense! [both laugh] You're supposed to be a farmer!" (Hank)

Most of these participants are above average students, and many have made significant academic achievements. They are generally confident in their academic abilities and will push through additional barriers possibly because of personal factors such as work ethic, self-efficacy beliefs, etc., and are undeterred by the apparent realization that "scholars don't sound Southern."

Conversely, students like Robert, who is very bright and academically motivated, mentioned several times in our interview how important it is to him to not sound Southern Appalachian. He has, in a sense, "bought into" the hegemony and recognizes that he might be penalized for speaking a certain way due to his perceptions of SLI and linguistic hegemony on campus. He does not mind making this change because he personally prefers more "standard" sounding speech, but this change may be more challenging for students for whom dialect is an identity marker resulting in conflicts over who they are and where they come from versus eliminating an additional hurdle in order to not feel the need to prove themselves.

Language seems to have some degree of influence on the characteristics of those who are seen by these students as serious scholars, though students exhibited a range of opinions about which type of speech is scholarly. Most students believe that what a person does or is capable of doing is more important than how they sound; interestingly, though, several vernacular participants suggested that they would switch to a more standardized variety of speech in situations such as job interviews or speaking with professors, contrary to their statement that academic merit should be viewed as more important than speech. This is some-

what contradictory and highlights hegemonic ideology that these students have "bought into"; despite for the most part believing in themselves and their abilities, they are still aware that in some cases their abilities and accomplishments may not be enough, and therefore they must change part of who they are.

Conclusions and Implications

These findings suggest that language can influence certain aspects of students' academic experiences, particularly if the student's first dialect is stigmatized by mainstream culture. Dialect is influential in terms of how comfortable students feel speaking out in class and in certain classroom environments. Speaking a stigmatized dialect can result in students feeling they have additional barriers to overcome. Additionally, this study found that although dialect does not necessarily influence how students see themselves as scholars, some of the more vernacular speakers believe it influences how others view them.

Implications for Practice

Our primary implication for practice is the importance of educating faculty, staff, and administrators on language diversity. Though faculty and staff in higher education are often viewed as authorities on language, particularly by the media and members of the public, scholars and scholar-practitioners are not immune to the same misinformation and negative language ideologies held by the public at large. In fact, Lippi-Green (1997) has noted that "what is surprising, and even deeply disturbing, is the way that many individuals who consider themselves democratic, even-handed, rational, and free of prejudice, hold on tenaciously to a standard language ideology which attempts to justify restriction of individuality and rejection of the other" (p. 73). The majority of faculty, staff, and administrators will likely have had limited exposure to sociolinguistics or diversity training addressing commonly held myths about dialect and language (Wolfram, 2008). It is critical for the leaders of campus community to understand the impact of language diversity before they can begin to implement changes to foster linguistically inclusive environments.

For example, we have made recent efforts in dialect diversity education on college campuses by way of campus wide development workshops and training (Dunstan, Wolfram, Jaeger, & Cullinan, 2014; Wolfram, Dunstan, Jaeger, & Cullinan, 2014). Language diversity workshops are presented on campus through the campus language diversity initiative, open to all members of the campus community (see Dunstan, Wolfram, Jaeger, & Crandall, 2015). These workshops address com-

monly held language/dialect myths through teaching about dialects in the state. At these workshops, attendees are also presented with both online and personal resources they can use for further self-education and in their classrooms and units, including a free online dialect curriculum that is easily accessible for use by non-linguists, such as the "Do You Speak American" curriculum from the Public Broadcasting Service (Hoyle, Reaser, & Adger, 2005); materials and curriculum from "Voices of North Carolina: Language and Life from the Atlantic to the Appalachians" (Reaser & Wolfram, 2007), which is suitable for K–12 and college students; the North Carolina Language and Life Project YouTube channel (NCLLP, 2008); and a university-based dialect diversity vignette (NCLLP, 2014). Another example of this type of training is new faculty orientation. We presented information on dialect diversity at the new faculty orientation session in fall semester 2013 using a dialect diversity vignette developed at the institution. In this setting, new faculty were also given the opportunity to ask questions about language diversity and implications for their classrooms.

Although this diversity initiative is the first of its kind in higher education and was facilitated primarily by faculty and staff with some training in linguistics, it is easily adaptable through online resources at other institutions and by individuals without a background in linguistics. Through these positively framed and engaging events, faculty, staff, and administrators can begin to gain critical exposure to information about language diversity, which may begin to break cycles of standard language ideology in higher education.

These findings have implications for how faculty members develop open and welcoming classroom environments. Lawry (2012) has suggested that the first moments of class are critical in setting the tenor for the classroom environment. Faculty may use these first moments to set a welcoming tone, perhaps by being explicit in their intent to acknowledge all types of diversity including linguistic, or by using a favorite expression from their native dialect in order to model the idea that speaking dialect in the classroom is accepted and welcomed. Faculty may also choose to be careful when assessing students based on dialect and communicative practices. For example, White (2011) has suggested that in addition to considering language when being culturally sensitive to students' needs, "educators must understand that a failure to participate does not necessarily reflect disrespect for the teacher or the class, a disinterest in the subject matter, or apathy in general" (p. 261).

Implications for Theory and Future Research

These findings also have implications for theory and future research. Some of the more vernacular students suggested that in some way, their

participation in class was influenced by their fear of being stereotyped as being less intelligent or uneducated based on language. This may have implications for a future study and understanding of the theory of stereotype threat and language use (Steele, 1997). Essentially, stereotype threat suggests that when a stereotype is enacted about a certain population, awareness of the stereotype may negatively influence stereotype-related performance. For example, students who speak stigmatized dialects and experience the stereotype that they are less intelligent may exhibit poor performance. As such, there may be additional implications for studying *stereotype management,* which is a concept introduced by McGee and Martin (2011) in their study of Black mathematics and engineering students to "explain academic resilience (traditionally valued high achievement in spite of negative intellectual and societal based stereotypes and other forms of racial bias)" (p. 8). Although originally used to explore stereotype management on a racial dimension, this notion would be equally important to use in exploring dialect and language stereotyping, which overlaps with race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, SES, geographic origin, sexual orientation, and other personal characteristics.

The languages and dialects students bring with them to campus highlight the increasing diversity of today's colleges and universities. As such, institutions of higher education must address this linguistic diversity in such as a way that students of all backgrounds feel that their languages are welcomed, valued, and accepted in order for students to be successful academically. Further, scholars and scholar-practitioners are in a unique position to change ideology surrounding language and possibly begin to break cycles of linguistic hegemony and standard language ideology. By understanding and addressing language as an element of diversity in the classroom, faculty and support staff can assist students in being better able to learn and share knowledge using their own voices, however they may sound.

Note

[1] For the purpose of this study, the definition of dialect is one suggested by sociolinguists Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998): "a neutral label to refer to any variety of a language that is shared by a group of people" (p. 2).

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Appendix. Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little bit about the way you think people generally talk where you're from. Do they have a certain accent or vocabulary that makes your home area special?
2. Do you think you speak basically the same way as most people where you're from, or do you think there is something different about the way that you or your family speak?
3. Had you given much thought to the way you speak (accent, dialect) before you came to college? If so, what were those thoughts and what prompted them?
4. What do you notice (if anything) about the way people (peers, professors, advisors) at Southern State talk?
5. At home in your community, do others generally understand you when you speak? Can you usually understand others in your community when they speak?
6. At Southern State University, do your peers, teachers, and advisors generally understand you when you speak? Can you usually understand your peers, teachers, and advisors when they speak?
7. As a student at Southern State University, have you ever felt that speaking the way you do has influenced your ability to perform in a class in a positive or negative way? Both? Neither?
8. As a student at Southern State University, have you ever felt that the way you speak has had an influence on the way that your peers, teachers, or advisors perceive you? If so, how do you think it influenced them?
9. Are there certain environments in which you feel more/less comfortable than others because of how you speak (or because of how others speak)? If so, what are those environments?
10. Are there certain classes in which you would feel more/less comfortable enrolling because of the way you speak? If yes, did this influence your choice of courses? Choice of major?
11. Do you feel that the way you speak has influenced your choice in friends/activities since enrolling at Southern State University? If yes, how? If not, why not?

12. Do you think the way you speak has changed at all since you came to Southern State University? If yes, has this change been intentional at all?
13. Do you think that the way you speak has had an impact (positive or negative, or both) on your own personal beliefs regarding your ability to succeed in the classroom environment? In a post-college career?
14. Did the way you speak influence the way you saw yourself as a student in high school? What about in college?
15. Does the way you speak influence how much you feel like you fit in on campus in college?
16. Has there been a time in college when you have been proud of the way you speak? Embarrassed?
17. Are there certain times in college (classes, at parties, social clubs, in the dorms) when you change the way you speak? If yes, how so? Why do you think this might be?
18. Are there certain people in college around whom you change your speech? If so, who are these people?
19. Do you think your college experience would be different if you spoke differently? How so?
20. Is there any difference in the way you speak at school versus the way you speak at home?
21. Do you feel like the way you speak is an important part of who you are?