



GATESOL In Action

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Welcome from the Senior Editor

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Do I Hear an Accent?

This is a question sometimes sounding like a bold statement that I often get from people meeting me for the first time or implicit in colleagues' teasing about the way I speak. What is it about accent and language variation that spurs conversation and/or controversy? In general, variation in our lives provides an alternative, another form, way of being, seeing, or variant way of doing. The alternative, from the perceived or dominant accepted norm, can be a very positive attribute or a very negative characteristic for some people, depending on their own lived histories and experiences with others' ways of thinking and being and ... speaking. What reaction should be expected? Sometimes one cannot place the response to a variation, in particular in the case of this editorial, linguistic variation. One is often left speculating on the intent behind the

question. Diversity, as an associate of variation, can be seen as so beautiful when we consider the diversity of plants in our gardens, or the animals in the animal kingdom, for example. People with different ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity however, bring along a historical and social complexity that may not be evoked in the same way as the diversity of plants or animals.

For example, in today's Atlanta Journal Constitution (Bilefsky, 2016), I read about the fatal beating of a Polish immigrant in London, England. He and another friend were having pizza in a local restaurant and were chatting in Polish when a group of boys and girls (15 and 16 years of age) beat them up while calling them racial slurs. One of the men died from the injuries. The newspaper writer hypothesized that the beating was precipitated by the two men's Polish and was believed to have been also exacerbated by the United Kingdom's recent referendum to leave the European Union. Here, difference was not accepted or celebrated. It may have been perceived as a threat. Many other similar linguistic examples of intolerance can be found in countries around the world.

In another example, close to home, here in Georgia, legislation was created to keep the linguistic and ethnic differences at bay. Immigrants who came to the United States as children with undocumented parents, are suing the University System of Georgia over a policy that does not allow them to attend the top

universities in the state. In addition, they must pay out of state tuition fees for the universities that they are allowed to attend. However, the federal Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programs afford these youths the rights to stay in the United States. According to the PEW Research Center (2015), 75% of the total unauthorized immigrant population in 10 states are Mexicans. The question to be asked is, is there an historical association between certain immigrants and the legislations created to keep them on the periphery?

Indeed, Baron (nd) reports that from as early as the 1750s “American nativists have sought to eradicate minority languages and discourage bilingualism wherever it could be found.” German was the target in the 1750s and he states that “today . . . there is opposition to non-Anglophones and bilinguals --- this time not Germans but Hispanic and Asian Americans.” Baron notes that “ELA, English Language Amendment to make English the official language of the US have yet to be passed.” On the plus side, New Mexico (1989), Oregon (1989) and Washington State (1989), Rhode Island (1992) have English Plus resolutions that encourage the preservation and maintenance of home languages and the study of English as an additional language (English Plus Resolution, 1989).

In striving to recognize the validity of linguistic variation, we must acknowledge that acceptance of variation or difference is associated with many

factors such as the speaker's ethnic background, race, class, gender, country or state or county of origin, family and community membership etc. The issue of linguistic variation is highly political and therefore, when the question is asked, "Do I hear an accent?" one is inclined to be cautious in determining the questioner's intent.

The papers in this edition are the insightful stories of educators as they reflect on their own positioning regarding languages and linguistic variation. As always, the place to start any interrogation is with oneself. What do I hear, see, think, and feel when I hear an accent that is different from my own? How do I feel about those undocumented parents who bring their young children into my home country? Should we accommodate all the languages spoken by immigrants or should we have one official language? What is my stance?

Our writers for this edition are all United States based but from varying backgrounds: Park, coming from South Korea, Wang and Li coming from China, and Poindexter and Lewis, from the United States. Collectively, these authors give us insight into the complexity of the critical issues surrounding identity and language, multilingualism, the hegemony of English, outsider and insider status in speaking varieties of English, and perceptions regarding the many Englishes accents and variations that exist in the world.

All the papers, with the exception of Li, were written in my doctoral class on Language Variation and Learning at Georgia State University in the spring of 2015. As the instructor of this class, I want to say that while I gave extensive feedback to my students, they also had opportunities for additional feedback when they participated on a panel at the 2015 Georgia Association of Teacher Educators' (GATE) Conference on Jekyll Island in October of 2015. I thank all those who attended the session and provided additional feedback, in particular Dr. Barbara Benson, past president of GATE. Once the revised papers were uploaded to our GATESOL Journal system, all the papers were subjected to the journal's review process with at least two or three reviewers each and here I pause to thank our reviewers. Not all the doctoral papers have made it to the final round so I applaud all the submitters who stayed the course and made it to publication.

As educators, we all need to recognize and confront our biases and subjectivities so that we can work to change them for the betterment of ourselves and all the learners who come in our path. After all, we too, came from somewhere and we all have accents.

Let's embrace and celebrate linguistic diversity and diversity of all types!

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