Whaddayaknow?: The Modes of Folk Linguistic Awareness

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A common approach to language awareness is through the contrast between folk and scientific knowledge, the former usually getting brief attention and being assigned little value. This paper argues that the folk awareness of language may be characterised in several different ways, having to do with a wide variety of linguistic characterisations (e.g. overt ‘availability’, ‘degree of accuracy’, ability to ‘control’ language varieties, and the level of specificity of folk knowledge). Only the second of these has to do directly with the folk versus linguist dichotomy, although cognitive constraints on what non-linguists ‘usually’ know are important factors. More important, however, at least for speakers of American English, are the constraints imposed by notions of language ‘correctness’. In addition, folk linguistics is shown here to be a dynamic area of study, perhaps best uncovered by the analysis of ongoing discourses about language in speech communities. Finally, the value of folk linguistic awareness for both its scientific merit and its importance to applied concerns is briefly discussed.

Four modes of folk linguistic awareness

Labov (1993, 1994) has recently reasserted his belief that non-linguists have a limited awareness of the facts of language, particularly those of a systematic nature. Some linguists (usually those specifically concerned with undocumented languages) have been concerned with the degree to which non-linguists can provide accurate accounts (e.g. Silverstein, 1981), and some applied linguists have been concerned with the practical relationship between the overt knowledge of rules and language abilities (e.g. Ellis, 1989 for second or foreign and Mellon, 1969 for native language instruction (writing)). In general, however, awareness (or ‘consciousness’ or ‘overt knowledge’) has played a very minor role in the concerns of linguists. This includes sociolinguists, although the notion ‘attention to speech’ has played an important operational role in the study of the ‘stylistic continuum’. I believe that a simple on-off characterisation of non-linguists’ awareness of language (or evidence of ‘knowledge’ at any level of awareness) cannot be made. Nor do I believe that ‘attention to speech’ is necessarily the underlying concern in such matters in general. The following taxonomy (which will be elaborated with examples from research) is an attempt to account in greater detail for the modes of language awareness in (principally non-linguist) cognition.

(1) Availability: Not all facets of language (whether of performance, ability, or reaction) have equal availability to non-linguists:

(a) Unavailable: non-linguists not only do not but will not comment on some topics (e.g. specific phonological features of some so-called accents; some matters of ‘pure’ syntax).
(b) **Available:** non-linguists will discuss some matters carefully described by a fieldworker (e.g. some ‘deviant sentences’ of syntactic research), but they do not normally do so.

(c) **Suggestible:** Although seldom initiated in ordinary conversation, non-linguists will comment on topics if they arise, and they do not require elaborate description from a fieldworker.

(d) **Common:** Topics of usual folk linguistic discussion.

(2) **Accuracy:** Although it has no bearing on the value of the data, folk descriptions of every aspect of language may be ‘scientifically’ inaccurate or accurate.

(3) **Detail:** A linguistic object may be characterised with great specificity or none.

(a) **Global:** For example, the phonological detail of an accent might be unavailable; that does not limit comment on the accent.

(b) **Specific:** In some cases, linguistic characterisation is detailed (e.g. accounts of speakers who are said to ‘drop their g’s’ in -ing forms).

(4) **Control:** non-linguists may or may not control (i.e. perform) a variety (or any aspect of it).

Note that all the above categories are clines or continua (although some, e.g. (1) and (4) seem to have discrete categories and others (e.g. (2) and (3) appear to be simply dichotomised. In all cases, however, those representations are merely prose conveniences expressing ‘settings’ along a continuum on the one hand or extremes on the other.

The relative independence of the modes of folk linguistic awareness

It is perhaps even more important to note that the above modes of awareness are apparently relatively independent of one another; a ‘setting’ in one will not determine the setting in another. Therefore, as Figure 1 shows, a wide variety of combinations is possible.

The specific relationships between modes is reviewed in the following sections.

available — X — unavailable

detailed — X — global

accurate — X — inaccurate

full control — X — no control

Figure 1 Variable (independent) positions (hypothetical) on the continua of the modes of folk linguistic awareness
Availability and Accuracy

What non-linguists claim to know about language may or may not correspond to scientific information. The most famous relevant anecdote in the linguistic literature is probably this from Bloomfield’s well-known ‘Secondary and tertiary responses to language’:

A physician of good general background and education … told me that the Chippewa language contains only a few hundred words. Upon question, he said that he got this information from his guide, a Chippewa Indian. When I tried to state the diagnostic setting, the physician, our host, briefly and with signs of displeasure repeated his statement and then turned his back on me. (1944: 418)

The ‘physician of good general background and education’ clearly has the notion ‘Chippewa language’ fully available for folk comment; it is also clear that Bloomfield’s opinion (and surely that of all professional linguists) is that the doctor lacks accurate information.

Availability and Detail

A topic might be common but only globally characterised. This appears to be the case for many ‘foreign accents’ which are noticed and commented on but never have specific linguistic features attributed to them by non-linguists. For example, a respondent who is pressed by a fieldworker to indicate how she would identify a ‘Polish accent’, which she says a number of her relatives have, is not able to provide any detail whatsoever:

K: It’s Slavic maybe? Influence? - Uh. Your- your Polish, and - your German, =
F: [ ]
F: Uh.
K: =and (I don’t-) they all have- and your Russian, there’s kind of a same: -
accent, but it’s a little different, (from where you came over).
F: Uh huh. Can you give me some examples.
K: (very quietly) No::.
(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)³

Availability and Control

A topic might be common, but a respondent may have no control over it whatsoever. In some cases, respondents are not even able to control (i.e. perform on demand) a variety which they claim to be proficient speakers of because the setting or context is not right. After A claims to be a proficient speaker of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) which her parents have claimed to have little or no knowledge of, her parents and the fieldworker coax her to give some examples, but she explains why it cannot be done, and her mother (R) elaborates:

R: So say something.
A: [No: I don- I can’t really say any now cause I’m not among people who=
C: [So say something yeah.
D: ( ) say something.
A: =speak, it just comes out (laughs).
R: Oh yeah. That's another thing, sometimes - when- like when we're with other=
C: Uh.
R: =Blacks we could do it. (laughs)

(Preston, 1993b: 199)

Accuracy and Detail

A characterisation might be detailed or global and in either case inaccurate or accurate. Although K (cited above) can provide almost no details about her Polish relatives' accent, even her global characterisation of 'Slavic' (including Polish, Russian, and German) is enough to be inaccurate (from at least one linguistic point of view). It is very important, however, to examine folk characterisations for accuracy on their own terms. Perhaps K has in mind some phonological (or other) features of Polish, German, and Russian accents which they do, in fact, share (e.g. devoicing of final consonants). If that is the case, the inaccuracy is simply the trivial one of labelling. Labov, responding to Hoenigswald (1966) for example, notes the confusion in folk linguistic data by citing respondents who call both 'nasalised' and 'denasalised' speech 'nasal'. Suppose, however, that the folk term 'nasal' means something like 'inappropriately nasalised' — either too much or too little. In that case, again, the inaccuracy is only a trivial matter of labelling, simply a difference between the folk vocabulary and a technical one (as Figure 2 shows).4

In other cases, precise detail is offered, but the folk linguistic analysis is scientifically inaccurate. Consider the following Michigan respondent's discovery of the putative southern lexical item 'var'.

DH: Our painters on the site are all Southern guys and one guy's from uh Kentucky you know I was talking to him the other and he's so bad it's like 'Yeah. I went over [var] and when we got over var' and he and exactly, he used that word for everything. 'We go over var, I was drinking that =

M: (laughs)
DH: =moonshine', and it's bad. A-

M: 'over var'?

DH: 'Over var'.

SH: (laughs) 'Var' (what is that) (laughs)

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

What DH's Kentucky painter acquaintance has said is not 'over var' at all, and
they need not have puzzled over the odd lexical item. The process is actually pretty simple:

1. ‘over there’ → ‘over thar’ from a regular historical vowel alternation [ɛ]→[ə] (e.g. ‘bear’ and ‘bar’)
2. ‘over thar’ → ‘ov’ thar’ [ovðər] from weak (unstressed), syllable loss
3. ‘ov’ thar’ → ‘ovvar’ [ovvər] from total assimilation of the [ð] by the preceding [v] (and compensatory lengthening)

The geminate or ‘long [v]’ which results from this process lets the Northern speakers ‘hear’ the entire word ‘over’ and assume that the second item is ‘var’, and he actually pronounces the ‘-er’ in ‘over’ in his imitation. Although the respondent offers considerable detail about a dialect he obviously has encountered first-hand, his ‘morpheme boundary’ claim is simply not accurate.

**Accuracy and Control**

A variety might be commonly imitated (‘controlled’) but inaccurately so. For example, European-American (E-A) imitations of AAVE were found to contain numerous linguistic (as well as cultural) inaccuracies. One conversational imitation of AAVE contains the following exchange (Preston, 1993a: 336):

A: Youse parties a lot?
B: Yeah, we’s parties a lot.

Perhaps B performs a faulty analysis of the non-standard plural ‘youse’ [yuz]
and takes the [2] to be a contracted copula. Like many folk accounts of AAVE, his may include the belief that copulas are just sprinkled around like so much pepper. Why not ‘we’s’, even before another verb, then? Of course, ‘youse’ may not be the triggering event here, and B may have actually experienced (in others’ folk imitations or in actual contact) hypercorrect forms such as ‘We’s here’ or ‘We’s ready’ and extended this contracted copula to a preverbal position on the basis of some sort of ‘feel’ for the copula’s frequent role as an ‘auxiliary’. In short, a respondent might have some degree of control over a variety, but it might be totally inaccurate.

**Detail and Control**

A respondent might have considerable control over the details of a variety which he or she might have available in only a global way. This is perhaps the best known of these overlaps, for many respondents can control the details of a ‘foreign accent’ imitation, for example, but can provide no descriptive account of the details themselves. Of course, there is rather more overlap in these final two categories since there is nothing to be controlled but details, although even accounts of how those details are controlled are often completely unavailable or wildly inaccurate. I would still maintain that this category is a cline since partial control may, of course, refer to the consistency of representation.

This outline of the folk modes of awareness of language and their relative independence leads, I believe, to the following conclusion: we must not limit what we call language awareness (or ‘attention to language’) to one class or type of behaviour. One who can globally characterise a variety (e.g. a ‘Polish accent’) has a gross categorisation of language difference available, even though, admittedly, failure to characterise (or produce) any detail does not allow us to measure the degree of accuracy of the observation. Furthermore, although we might test such respondents to discover the degree to which they are adept at identifying authentic Polish-accented English, that would simply test another level of perceptual skill, for even if the results showed that they could not tell German-accented English from Polish, we could hardly deny the perceptual salience of the notion ‘Polish accent’. Laferrere (1979), for example, shows that Boston Jews identify the use of a less-prestigious low-back, slightly rounded variant of /o/ (in such words as ‘short’) as ‘Irish’, when, in fact, her own work on the ethnic distribution of the form in Boston shows that Italian-Americans use the non-prestige form with the greatest frequency. Her explanation is simple: ‘Boston Irish’ is a folk term available for a wide range of social stereotypes; ‘Boston Italian’ is not so ‘caricaturistic’.

In short, folk awareness of language is not only a matter of degree but also one of mode. When people characterise (however generally, however badly) linguistic facts, we cannot say they are ‘unaware’. Conversely, when people mimic varieties perfectly but cannot provide any overt detail of what it is that is controlled in that imitation, we would also not want to say that they were ‘unaware’. For every act of language production and language perception (including attitudinal as well as ‘processing’ perception), the mode and degree of awareness is an open question.
Factors which contribute to the modes of folk linguistic awareness

The remaining questions, if these modes of folk linguistic awareness are accurately represented, concern the more detailed facts which determine and activate the modes (and account for the various ‘intensities’ or positions on their respective continua in a particular instance). I will suggest that the following matters largely determine the degree of activation of these modes.

1. **Communicative primacy**: folk linguistic tasks, even when elaborately defined, seem to be realised in or are at least secondary to communicative (i.e. semantic, pragmatic) concerns

2. **Formal training and/or knowledge**

3. **Linguistic structure and cognitive abilities**

4. **Correctness**: transmitted formally or informally, directly or indirectly

5. **Publicity**: e.g. popular culture, media exposure

6. **Folk culture artifacts**: e.g. lore, performance

**Communicative primacy**

Non-linguists show considerable inability in overcoming the semantic-pragmatic demands of communication in either their notice of or comment on linguistic matters. In a recent Linguist-L e-mail summary (7/29/94), Hudson quotes a colleague’s (Kittredge Cowlishaw) anecdote about a teacher, who, working with flash cards for sentence-construction, criticised a child who combined the cards ‘at night/two cats/played/with a kite’. The teacher observed: ‘That’s obviously not a sentence; cats don’t play with kites’. In Niedzielski & Preston (submitted), a number of ‘classic’ GB problem sentences are presented to respondents for correction (and comment). I cannot review here the details of their responses to the variety of constructions presented, but even a superficial review of the data shows that quick-and-easy ‘sense-making’ mechanisms were overwhelmingly adhered to, while specific construction-related semantics is blithely ignored. That is, what a linguist might take to be the required sense of a grammatically questionable sentence was simply ignored by the non-linguist correctors. For example, a number of respondents suggested that ‘Who did you give a picture of to?’ Could be corrected by deleting the ‘of’, but none noted that a change in the sense would result. Perhaps even more surprisingly, several respondents suggested that ‘Whom did your interest in surprise?’ would be better put as ‘Who are you interested in surprising?’ but, again, did not comment on the change in meaning. One respondent’s correction of ‘Someone who John expected to be successful though believing to be incompetent was in my office’ revealed that even discoursal (or ‘story’) pragmatic forces were at work: ‘Someone who John expected to be successful was in my office, but I found out he was incompetent.’ After a short pause, the respondent continued: ‘So I didn’t hire him’. It is perhaps all the more surprising that ‘just’ making sense (rather than grappling with the specific problem at hand, at least as a linguist would frame it) was an acceptable alternative, for these sentences were put to native speakers by non-native speakers with the request that errors in sentence construction be corrected. The respondents, therefore, had every reason to believe that the intended sense of the sentence as it was presented
was important; i.e. they did not believe that only a ‘game’ of grammaticality judgment was being played. 

In fact, I believe that the straight path from linguistic facts (of any sort, at any level) to report is a very rocky one, impeded by the nature of communication itself. If attitudinal factors (i.e. the sorts of social prejudices which create linguistic stereotypes) do not intervene to foreground some structural element (as I shall discuss below), structural elements themselves appear to be overwhelmingly subservient to communicative functions.

In several years of training transcribers of conversation, I have offered prizes (within the severe limits of a professorial salary, of course) to students who can provide two pages of error-free double-spaced transcription. Everything is loaded in favour of the students’ winning. Most are linguists-in-training; they are informed of the prize before the work, and ‘error-free’ is generously defined. (Noisy sections of tape or disputable interpretations are not used to discredit a transcription, and the students themselves are used as judges.) No one has yet claimed the prize.

How can linguists, whose focus is on form (and who are teased with reward!), err so badly? An inspection of typical mistakes shows that even multiple listenings by linguistically sophisticated transcribers miss (or supply) facts; they are not detected because the communicative (propositional) core of the language event flows freely. ‘I said that he left’ may be listened to many times and still appear in a transcript as ‘I said he left’ (or vice versa). ‘Bill took the dog out for a walk’ might be rendered as ‘Bill took the dog for a walk’ (or vice versa). In every case, the report is informationally accurate, but the details are off.

The students are always amazed at their silly mistakes, but the point is straightforward. Even settings which focus on the details of form may be subverted by the fulfilment of the communicative function. This communicative power may be so great as to submerge apparently glaring differences, no less for self-report (perhaps more!) than for the report of others’ speech. I once told a new acquaintance (a Slavic linguist with no information about United States varieties) that he was from northwestern Ohio. The amazed Slavist allowed that that was so, and wanted to know the arcane details on which the identification was based. One of the telling facts was his use of such constructions as ‘My shoes need shined’ (opposed to the more widely distributed ‘My shoes need to be shined’ or ‘My shoes need shining’.) Well-travelled linguist though he was, he had never noticed that his structure differed. In fact, he went away to check and returned shattered — for he was a devoted prescriptivist — to find that many speakers of United States English found his construction weird, non-native, and the like; I return to those observations in a moment. It is important to note that the linguist under discussion is from a section of the United States known in regional dialectology as the ‘North Midland’, a seldom-caricatured and rarely stigmatised area (for ‘cultural behaviour’ in general and no more for language), perhaps even the fictional home of a putative spoken Standard American English (where national radio and television announcers are supposed to come from). It is, therefore, an area of high linguistic security, so our linguist would have little reason to believe that anything he did was out of the ordinary. His inaccurate first response, then, on being told that this construction was used to identify his regional speech, was ‘Everyone says that’. Since his own performance, distinct as it was, awakened no
caricatures of region or status, he simply translated the performance of all speakers of educated varieties into his own. Given that he had only negative evidence to go on (in his adult life, surrounding speakers did not use the construction), it is not surprising that he emerged from graduate school (in an area where the construction is not used), worked overseas (with a considerable variety of English speakers), and reached his thirties before his linguistic world was made more hostile by me.

It is important to notice, however, that even our linguist’s providing of positive evidence (his use of the odd construction) awakened no comment in years of contact with non-users. Recall that he is a North Midland, relatively high social status speaker; his phonology awakens no caricatures, and his auditors simply could not believe, therefore, that his syntax could be so strange. That is, they assumed that what he said was normal, partly overcome by the rest of his unremarkable performance, partly by the overwhelming communicative function of interaction, and partly, doubtless, by his personal status. (It might be objected that all of our linguist’s acquaintances over the years were simply too polite to point out his odd construction, but since many of his best friends were linguists, I reject that interpretation.)

In short, I believe that the communicative function of language (in caricature-free environments) is so strong that it overcoming the ability to give an accurate report of performance — whether of self or of others and whether of general or restricted phenomena. The inaccuracy of self-report when person stereotypes are engaged is well known — near-southerners claim there is nothing southern about their speech; speakers of AAVE claim not to know it, etc.

**Formal training and/or knowledge**

Activation of all the modes of awareness has been attributed experimentally or anecdotally to linguists. That is, the ‘stuff’ of language is available, accurate, and detailed, and many linguists pride themselves even in control. On that last point, a piece of sociolinguistic apocrypha goes as follows: in the 1970s heyday of the early study of AAVE, a small group of E-A sociolinguists was practising newly-established skills in AAVE in an elevator. So intent were they in their practice that they did not notice that the elevator stopped and another passenger got on. In fact, it was a while before they noticed that their new fellow passenger was, in fact, African-American (A-A). One can imagine his or her surprise at encountering a number of apparently middle-class E-As deeply engrossed in an AAVE conversation, but I will leave it up to future historians of sociolinguistics to ferret out the truth (or falsity) of this anecdote. Suffice it to say that linguists assume that the first three modes are a part of the business itself and that the last is often sought after (and even boasted about) by many.

A few empirical studies have focused on the difference in responses by linguists and non-linguists, but they have not provided the generalisations which would be most pertinent here.\(^5\) Spencer (1973) shows that linguistically naive and linguistically sophisticated judges of grammaticality tend to agree with one another but disagree with the judgments of the linguists whose sentences were submitted for judgment. Newmeyer (1983: 65) suggests that the experiment is flawed because the sample sentences themselves are taken from work at a period...
in linguistics ‘when most linguists considered a sentence grammatical only if it could be supplied with a normal context’. Newmeyer goes on to summarise Labov (1975), who suggests that there is even variation in grammaticality judgments among linguists according to theoretical camp. The generative semanticists of the 1970s, for example, would have predicted that ‘John didn’t leave until midnight, but Bill did’ was ungrammatical, but interpretivists would have found it grammatical. Although Labov (1975) goes on to suggest principles for the elicitation of sound grammaticality judgments, it is clear that his general opinion is that, among linguists and non-linguists alike, such judgments are not trustworthy. Of course, those interested in folk linguistics (and, presumably, in questions of language and society in general) would not dismiss folk judgments of language, regardless of their accuracy, since they form part of the ethno- graphic detail of a speech community, but that is a well-known argument and will not be repeated here (e.g. Hoenigswald, 1966).

The remainder of the empirical studies which focus on the differences between linguists and non-linguists all seem to highlight the linguist’s greater ‘permissiveness’ in matters of usage (e.g. Preston, 1975). However, that general theme is more thoroughly developed below when the general concerns of language standards and correctness are discussed.

Linguistic structure and cognitive abilities

Silverstein (1981) outlines the types of linguistic facts which non-linguists can have awareness of, particularly in respondent explanations in the study of an undocumented language. Although the classifications he provides are not derived from experimental settings, they are the result of extensive work among field-trained respondents. Silverstein’s categories are as follows: (1) unavoidable referentiality, (2) continuous segmentability, (3) relative presuppositionality, (4) decontextualised deductibility, and (5) metapragmatic transparency. I personally believe that this classification is an extremely important one for the considerations discussed here (and for our considerations of the role of awareness in language as it bears on the variationist enterprise in general). I spend, therefore, perhaps an unusual amount of space in explicating.

Unavoidable referentiality

Linguistic units either point to something (in a real or ideational world) or they do not; that is, they either do or do not have ‘reference’. Silverstein illustrates ‘unavoidable referentiality’ with the deference-to-hearer versus solidarity-with-hearer pragmatic system of many European languages — e.g. German Sie (deferential) versus du (solidary); French vous (deferential) versus tu (solidary). These items are unavoidably referential, for, although they carry the pragmatic meanings of deference and solidarity, at the same time, they refer to individuals e.g. du does not just ‘mean’ solidarity (in the pragmatic system); it also ‘means’ you (in the referential system) (Silverstein, 1981: 5). In contrast, the well-known raising of the low-front vowel (i.e. [æ] to [ε] or even [I]) in northern US cities is also richly pragmatic, carrying at least such speaker and situational characteristics as gender, status, area (urban versus rural), and degree of formality. On the other hand, the low-front vowel (in any of its guises), is not in itself unavoidably referential. That is, the low-front vowel (technically, the variable
(æ), for it may be pronounced in a non-low front position) does not by itself pick out or refer to anything in the real or ideational world.

Silverstein suggests that the pragmatic meanings of unavoidably referential forms are more likely to be a part of folk linguistic awareness, and in the case of the examples given above, he is surely correct. Europeans are aware of the pragmatic system symbolised by alternative forms of the second-person singular pronoun. On the contrary, residents of such places as Detroit, where the low-front vowel raising described above is well established, are overtly aware neither of the change in progress nor of the pragmatic meanings the change supports.

Although Silverstein’s predictions can be shown to be accurate for the most part, it is possible to think of folk linguistic exceptions. For example, the items can and could, which clearly bear some referential load, are part of a pragmatic politeness system (Brown & Levinson, 1987); past-marked modal auxiliaries (e.g. could, would) are ‘more polite’ than non-past-marked forms (e.g. can, will). Native speakers of English, who unconsciously apply the system and even rate the forms appropriately on ‘scale of politeness’ tests, are not, however, usually overtly aware of the pragmatic opposition. Perhaps the low-level or ‘abstract’ referentiality of such forms as modals (and other ‘structure’ words) contributes to their subconscious rather than overt realisation as members of pragmatic systems.

On the other hand, the presence or absence of non-prevocalic /r/ in New York City speech, although highly symbolic in the pragmatic system (i.e. /r/-presence symbolising higher social class membership and greater formality and /r/-absence symbolising the opposite), is not, in itself, referential. In this case, however, /r/ has become a linguistic ‘stereotype’ (Labov, 1972), an item which is fully available to the awareness of speech community members. It is impossible, therefore, to predict accurately on the basis of referential status alone which items may play a part in the folk linguist’s conscious repertoire, and the remaining four of Silverstein’s predictors will have similar probabilistic rather than categorical value.

In some other cases, however, a non-referential linguistic level (e.g. phonology itself) may be available to folk awareness, but, as I have already suggested, only in a general or ‘global’ way. Folk respondents are aware, for example, of some undifferentiated non-native accents, dialect varieties (often those which awaken no strong attitudinal responses), temporary speech disturbances (e.g. colds, drunkenness), superposed prescriptions, and so on. What is interesting about just these examples is that, although phonology is the area referred to in the account, specific items are usually not available for folk comment:

B: A friend of mine was from North er yeah she’s from North Dakota and when she came here she lived here for several years and she had a funny? way of describing the way midwesterners talk.

M: Um hum.

B: And she’d say you guys talk real funny. She said you talk up and down. And she said out in North Dakota we talk sideways. I said D. Explain that to me what is up and down and sideways talk. She said that’s the only way I can describe it.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)
Here we may be tempted to agree with Labov that, at least in the Anglo-American tradition, folk terms for phonological matters (intonation?) are lacking. Such general references to pronunciation contrast sharply with specific accounts of items, usually when the folk view has been shaped by a strong attitudinal caricature:


M: ((laughs))
((laughs))

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

Here J, although he may not be able to articulate it in the following terms, is clearly ‘aware’ of a rule which substitutes the diphthong [ɔɪ] for a syllabic [r] in New York City speech. It seems extremely unlikely, in the face of the variety of words in the above little poem and in other instantiations of this rule found in folk linguistic data, that this is a lexical (hence partly ‘referential’) rule. Of course, when a phonetic difference is lexicalised (e.g. ‘hep’ for ‘help’ in some varieties of Southern US English), Silverstein’s condition for unavoidable referentiality is met. Many speakers stigmatise (and even caricature through imitation) the pronunciation ‘hep’, but they do not note (or stigmatise) I-vocalisation (in such items as ‘hill’), even when it results in complete loss.

Continuous segmentability

Linguistic units which non-linguists are most likely to be aware of are not interrupted by other material. In ‘I am going to town’, the entire sentence, each word, phrases such as to town, and even inseparable morphemes such as -ing are all continuously segmentable. The form which refers to the progressive aspect, however, is am -ing, and always displays discontinuity in English (Silverstein, 1981: 6).

In the folk linguistic data we have collected, however, in a rather lengthy discussion of the passive — an equally discontinuous phenomenon (i.e. be + -en), several respondents provide evidence of considerable folk awareness. (That the speakers involved are well-educated should not deter us from describing the data gleaned from this interaction, and others like it, as folk linguistics, for ‘folk’ are defined here as ‘non-specialists’.) Subject–verb agreement (a clearly discontinuous dependency) and split infinitives are also frequently discussed phenomena, but, like the non-referential items discussed above, they all seem to qualify as exceptions to Silverstein’s rules on the basis of their status as linguistic stereotypes — further evidence, perhaps, of the dominating concern of prescription (and proscription) in folk comment.

Relative presuppositionality

This refers to the degree to which a pragmatic function of language depends on other factors to realise its meaning. The higher the relative presuppositionality, the greater the chance for folk awareness. At the high end of this scale are such items as this and that, which successfully function only if there is a physical reality to which they can be linked, a relative physical (or metaphoric mental) distance which supports the choice between them, or a prior mention of some
entity (Silverstein, 1981: 7). It is important not to confuse this strict dependency which is a feature of items with high relative presuppositionality with the more general notion of context sensitivity. An item like here, with very high relative presuppositionality, is, in fact, not very context sensitive, neither to the surrounding linguistic nor non-linguistic context. Here means the same thing in a wide variety of tense-aspect configurations (‘He’s on his way here’; ‘I’ve been here before’) and in a church or in a saloon.

At the other end of the scale, phonological matters have no dependency on a specific element in the surrounding linguistic or non-linguistic world. A non-prevocalic /r/, for example, is always just a non-prevocalic /r/. Nothing like ‘a locus’ (necessary for here) or ‘previous mention of a female person’ (necessary for she) provides ‘meaning’ to non-prevocalic /r/.

Although there is considerable evidence that folk are aware of the sort of creative pragmatic marking made by speakers who use more or less of one form or another, even at the level of phonology (where relative presuppositionality is lowest), it is also the case that such awareness, as I will discuss more thoroughly below, appears to develop from associated attitudes about speakers, attitudes which make stereotypes out of linguistic elements. The same might be said of lower-level grammatical features (e.g. agreement) whose referentiality is low, particularly in a language such as English.

**Decontextualised deducibility**

This refers to those linguistic items which can be given a ready meaning by folk respondents without extensive reference to context. Here Silverstein apparently means to refer to the general sort of context excluded from the strict dependencies described in (3) immediately above. The more elaborate the context one needs to differentiate an opposition or pragmatic contrast, the less likely it will be available to folk awareness. Nevertheless, Silverstein claims that one common path folk comment on linguistic objects takes is that of specifying the ‘deducible entailed presuppositions’, a characterisation which, he says, is the equivalent of stating the meaning. In other words, providing the contexts in which the use of the form in question fits or is true is a common folk linguistic activity (Silverstein, 1981: 13–4).

This approach is common in folk accounts, particularly in discussions of the meaning of words. The fit between increasingly specified contexts and the conditions under which the word can be said to belong is a ploy explicitly remarked on by D in the following:

((In a discussion of Christmas customs, H (the fieldworker) has asked if there is any difference between gift and present; D has said earlier there is not, but he returns to the question.))

D: Oftentimes a gift is something like you you go to a Tupperware party and they’re going to give you a gift, it’s- I think it’s more impersonal, than a=

H: Uh huh.

D: =present.

G: No, =
there’s no difference.

D: No? There’s real- yeah there’s really no difference.

G: There is no difference.

D: That’s true. Maybe the way we use it is though.
U: Maybe we could look it up and see what ‘gift’ means.

D: I mean technically there’s no difference.

(They then look up gift and present in the dictionary.)

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

D’s distinction between ‘technical’ meaning and ‘use’ points in the direction of ‘decontextualised deducibility’; that is, although he feels the words mean the same at some definitional level which is open to expert knowledge, the fit of the words into different contexts may reveal distinctions. After some time passes in the conversation, he comes up with an appropriate frame:

D: In advertising sometimes they’ll say: you know, ‘We have a gift for you’.=

H: Yes, yes.

D: Or - or something.
H: But they don’t use ‘present’.
D: Um - I don’t think as much.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

D goes on to say that his bank offers a gift if one opens an account; present would be unlikely in that context. The finely-tuned characterisation of meaning is determined through the folk activity of matching the item to those contexts which meet the required characteristics.

**Metapragmatic transparency**

When the folk characterise what went on, they are more likely to reproduce exactly what was said only if the performance was a ‘metapragmatically transparent’ one. Suppose that Wanda is cold and that Karla is near the thermostat. Wanda has a number of options:

Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrk!
I’m freezing.
Aren’t you cold? I wonder if the furnace is broken?
Would you mind if we had a little more heat in here?
Turn up the heat.

‘Turn up the heat’ has the greatest metapragmatic transparency. That is, accounts of the interaction between Wanda and Karla are more likely to result in an observation that ‘Wanda asked Karla to turn up the heat’ than in an embedding of any of the other request forms. (Wanda said ‘Aren’t you cold’, and by that meant for Karla to turn up the heat’ would be a strange folk report.) In other words, folk awareness seems to focus on direct rather than indirect speech acts.
Although the folk linguistic data we have collected has no such ‘translated’ reports of speech activities, they do show evidence of a folk awareness of indirectness. In one case the fieldworker relates a story of an international student’s cool reception at a US student’s house who asked her to ‘Come and see me sometime’. A respondent tells the fieldworker that ‘Yeah, sometimes what is necessarily SAID, is not — what is actually meant’.

Except for these occasional counterexamples, however, I agree in general with Silverstein’s generalisations about those cognitive and linguistic aspects of language which are likely to hinder or advance accessibility. I believe, as I have already hinted, however, that all of them can be overcome by factors yet to be discussed.

I do not discuss here, however, other (‘non-linguistic’) concerns which may influence accessibility: memory, attentiveness, and other such cognitive factors and their correlation with both simple (e.g. part of speech, linguistic level) and complex (e.g. ‘transformational complexity’) linguistic factors. Doubtless these are important matters and deserve attention.

**Correctness**

Anyone who has even superficially examined United States’ folk linguistic data cannot avoid being struck by the overwhelming frequency of appeals to correctness. I personally believe it is no exaggeration to say that it may be the most powerful contributor to awareness in American English, particularly since it seems capable of overcoming those very factors outlined above (e.g. communicative primacy, structural linguistic elements) which have a tendency to impede awareness. In a number of studies of the perception of regional varieties (e.g. Preston, 1989a, 1993c), I have shown that the notion of language correctness plays a major role in the folk awareness of the identity of regional varieties of US English. For example, as Figure 3 shows, respondents do not hesitate rating areas of the United States for language ‘correctness’ when asked to do so.

In another task (in which non-linguists are asked to draw the boundaries of US dialect areas), roughly 90% of the respondents from every area studied so far characterise an area which can be identified as ‘southern’. In some cases, the second-place area they draw is agreed on by as little as 60% of the respondents (e.g. Preston, 1989c). Since, as Figure 3 clearly shows, many US respondents agree that the south is the ‘most incorrect’ place, one might argue that normative evaluation is a key to identity itself.

In fact, this concern with correctness will cause me to go further here in distinguishing what the folk perceive as even the proper content of observations about language itself. Non-linguists use prescription (at nearly every linguistic level) in description; linguists, on the other hand, find the sources for prescription in power, esteem, tradition, and the like, not in the underlying nature of language itself. In other words, for linguists some language facts acquire special status due to their association with certain segments of society. To be sure, the folk associate language facts and social groups, but they reject the cause and effect relationship: good language is not good just because it is (and has been) used by ‘good’ speakers. Good language for non-linguists is a much greater abstraction; it is good because it is logical, clear, continuous (in an etymological sense), and so on.
Figure 3 Michigan (above, N = 147) and southern Indiana (below, N = 123) mean score ratings of the states, the District of Columbia, and New York City for 'language correctness' on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 = 'least correct').

For them, this notion of good language extends itself even to the boundaries of what the language is or may contain. What is not a part of that logical, continuous entity is not really language at all. ('Ain't ain't a word, is it?'). Appeals to the dictionary and grammar books are, therefore, not really appeals to trusted authorities on usage; they are appeals to priest-like figures who have insight into the Platonic abstraction that is the language. If these guardians of the public linguistic trust fail in their responsibility to provide access to the abstraction, by, for example, basing their work on usage, they may be open to public outcry (e.g. reactions to Webster's Third International Dictionary).

Recall that D (cited above) contrasts 'the way we use it' with 'technically' in determining the difference between gift and present. Many linguists will find this naive, for, for them, 'the way we use it' is the determiner of the sense. D, like other folk linguists, however, knows that there is an abstract reality (one only glimpsed in dictionaries and grammars) in which, apparently, these two words mean the same thing and that this abstraction lurks behind (and takes precedence over) use. The introductory linguistics battle against prescriptivism is often seen as a social or human contest, one which tries to instill linguistic relativism by
defeating folk beliefs about the language of the prejudiced-against or socially marginalised. There is a deeper philosophical position involved in the confusion of prescription and description, however. For the folk, social stratification provides only another exemplification of the distribution of goods in a society; it is not the source of the shape of the goods themselves. A real language exists in folk belief, and even enfranchised speakers themselves may stray from it for any number of reasons.

What many folk linguists have to say about the nature of language will, therefore, appear to professional linguists to be filtered through reactive, attitudinal factors. Folk observations, however, may often reflect only the difference between a belief in a technical abstraction (the language itself) and what is actually done, the latter, in the folk mind, of apparently little interest to language professionals.

It is important to note that this Platonic or ‘transcendental’ (Milroy & Milroy, 1985: 38) prescriptivism is not the outpouring of an overactive linguistic insecurity. The area where the research was done for much of the data reported here has no such self-image (e.g. Preston, 1993c), and many of the respondents in this survey felt no such linguistic embarrassment.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 4 Folk (a.) and linguistic (b.) taxonomies (partial) of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’

Figure 4 contrasts a folk versus linguistic taxonomy of some of these issues. Many linguists agree that although such phenomena as drunken speech, interference from other systems, and slips of the tongue may be interesting, they need to be edited out in constructing a grammar of a language which leads back to the guiding cognitive principles on which it is constructed. The X in the linguistic taxonomy is, therefore, a perfect reflection of the language, the performance which reflects the competence of Chomsky’s famous ideal native speaker-hearer.

Of course, it is understood that speech communities in the Bloomfieldian sense — that is, collections of individuals with the same speech behaviour — do not exist in the real world. Each individual has acquired a language in the course of complex social interactions with people who vary in the
ways in which they speak and interpret what they hear and in the internal representations that underlie their use of language. ... We abstract from these facts ..., considering only the case of a person presented with uniform experience in an ideal Bloomfieldian speech community with no dialect diversity and no variation among speakers. (Chomsky, 1986: 16-7)

In terms of Figure 4, it is at the level 'The Language' itself where dialectal, stylistic, and even individual diversity are edited out for the linguist. 'The Language' is a cognitive, internal reality of an individual speaker, and linguists often pretend, for the sake of scientific progress, that a mass of linguistic clones exists. To show all the concerns of the folk taxonomy in a linguistic one, we would have to show a much grander scheme — Figure 5. In an attempt to get to the principles of human language, many linguists cut through the mass of diversity in Figure 5 and simply pretend that the individual performance isolated at X is the performance of an ideal Bloomfieldian speech community. Figure 5 shows that the difference between the folk and linguistic taxonomies of Figure 4 is more radical than it first appears. Many linguists have created an agreed-on abstraction ('The Language') by pretending that there is a group of error-free, monodialectal, monostylistic speakers. They know that such a group does not exist. The folk, however, appear to believe in their abstraction ('The Language' in Figure 4), and they rate a considerable array of factors as deviations from it.

Linguists agree with the folk that slips, interference, and the like are deviations, but other varieties are treated by linguists as alternative examples of 'The Language'. A linguist is happy to write the rules of AAVE, Coastal Southern English, or lower-class New York City English. Any of these specific varieties might be the basis for an abstraction; for the folk, such varieties deviate from the single abstraction.

Teachers of introductory linguistics will immediately recognise an instantia-

![Diagram](image-url)

**Figure 5** A more elaborate linguistic taxonomy of competence and performance
tion of this folk belief which is incredibly difficult to overcome. The abstraction is rule-governed; the deviations are not. The linguist’s so-called rules of AAVE or lower-class New York City English are, therefore, nonsense. What rules could there be when the forms under discussion are simply failures to observe the rules of ‘The Language’? In more linguistically familiar terms, such varieties for the folk are performance deviations from competence, not alternative competencies.

If non-standard varieties have no rules, one might expect the folk to believe that there might be people without rules (at least so far as their language behaviour is concerned). That, however, does not seem to be the case. When the use of non-standard forms persists, the folk make explicit reference to the ‘internal recognition system’ that even non-standard speakers have which allows them to ‘sense’ not only the error of their ways but the details of the ‘real system’. This may be, as in the first example just below, knowledge-based or, as in the second, performance-based.

G: And so somebody got it in their head that what was actually SPOken should be the correct English. (hhh) And then through the idea of saying well it’s racist not to teach it and started pushing it. (hhh) they tried to push that as an (deliberately) actual correct way to speak. (pause) And thank God for most of us it died. It didn’t work. Because it IS improper to say. The children=

H: Yes.

G: =themselves - all of us at time may say the improper endings. We may say it. (hhh) But we recognise it if somebody says to us ‘Is it correct’, you say ‘No’, you know, ‘This is the correct way (to) speak’. (hhh) But- to sit and TEACH it incorrectly I don’t think is right. Cause you DO say ‘I have gone’. You do not say ‘I have went’.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

J: And I used to teach Black children. And I had a difficult time understanding what they were saying. And I found out later though that they were - it was intentional, because they could speak - like we speak. And they were- because I - was having difficulty with this o(h)ne little b(oh)h(y). He was twe(h)yve. (hhh) And - I - was supposed to test him, for uh reading problems. And I couldn’t understand what he=

H: Uh huh.

J: =was saying. And so I called uh the teacher next to me was Black. ( ) next=

H: Oh;? Uh huh.

J: =to me. (hhh) So I did go over and get her, and I asked if she would help me. (hhh) And she came in and she - just- said to him, she said ‘You straighten up and talk — the right way. She’s trying to help you’.

((laughs))

H: So uh you mean uh - he shou- can: - I mean, he know how to =

J: ( ) understood=
J: =Talk correctly.

H: talk to correctly. But he won’t.

J: Well, she said she did, but he wouldn’t.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

It is little wonder, then, that the fixation on correctness leads to more social ills than one might suspect. Non-standard speakers are not simply those whose environment, class, and lack of opportunity have failed to equip with the standard variety, they are also persons who have somehow rejected the deeper internal knowledge which they surely have about the correct way to behave (at least linguistically).

Publicity

Some aspects of language (or even entire varieties) may be more accessible to non-linguists due to media exposure. Speakers of American English who would have heard AAVE, Hawaiian Creole English, Caribbean English Creoles, Spanish-accented English, subcontinent Indian English, Australian English, and many other varieties only rarely in the media in the 1950s and 60s are now treated to a regular flow of such variety, not all, it is important to point out, in caricatured, fictional settings. There is, however, very limited investigation of even the incidence (and accuracy) of variety representations in popular media, although there are some notable exceptions. Trudgill’s (1983) study of the importation of American phonological norms (particularly those of southern and AAVE varieties) into the singing styles of British rock groups is an excellent example of such investigation of media influence, limited, as it is, to a small subgroup of the population, although, one must note, an influential one.

Since many of the artifacts of popular culture, widely disseminated by the media, are, in fact, parallel to, derived from, and even occasionally lead to folk culture artifacts, much of what I have to say about those phenomena below may be indirectly related to this category as well.

Folk culture artifacts

I have given publicity rather short shrift, for I assume that one of the results of media exposure (although not a necessary one) is that some variety (or some aspects of it) may gain folk artifact status. I assume, however, as I believe most folklorists would, that such artifacts are more commonly passed on (and have a livelier and longer existence) through traditional (oral, face-to-face) cultural means. In fact, one definition of folklore goes so far as to call it ‘artistic communication in small groups’ (Ben-Amos, 1972: 13), and, at about the same time, another notes that it ‘is a collective term for those traditional items of knowledge that arise in recurring performances’ (Abrahams, 1969: 106). Performance, in fact, would appear to be the principal concern in modern folklore studies, and Bauman (1975) provides a list of ‘keys’ for the express purpose of identifying a ‘performance’. (These ‘keys’ are ‘special codes’, ‘figurative language’, ‘parallelism’, ‘special paralinguistic features’, ‘special formulae’, ‘appeal to tradition’, and ‘disclaimer of performance’ — a list heavy in linguistic matters.)
A substantial part of folk linguistic awareness (or activation of the modes I have outlined above) appears to take place within (or, better, depend upon) this folkloristic framework. Put differently, I believe that the existence of what a folklorist might call a ‘performance potential’ (for any aspect of a variety) is a powerful contributor to the activation of the modes of folk linguistic awareness outlined above.

I want to illustrate the importance of a variety as a folk linguistic artifact to language awareness with examples drawn from variety imitation, in particular, examples drawn from my and my students’ research carried out in the mid-1970’s on A-A imitations of E-A English and E-A imitations of A-A English (Preston, 1993a).

At the most general (or global) level, although this information was gathered anecdotally from collectors rather than from recorded sessions themselves, the importance of the status of a variety as a folkloristic artifact is dramatic. When E-As were asked by close friends of the same ethnicity to ‘talk like a Black person’, their responses were unquestioning and immediate (or followed some sort of momentary ‘rehearsal’). In short, E-As have AAVE as a ‘folk artifact’. In contrast, A-As (collected from under exactly the same circumstances, i.e. by ethnic-same friends in comfortable and familiar surroundings) did not immediately identify the task and often questioned the collector at length about what was expected of the respondent. In short, the instruction ‘talk like a White person’ did not elicit the same immediate recognition of a traditional folk artifact.

Let me make clear what I am claiming here, for there are potential misunderstandings. I do not for the moment believe that all aspects of E-A identity (and behaviour) lack folk value for A-As. There are both long and short (but well-established) traditions of such figures as the ‘stupid massa’ or the ‘bigoted southern sheriff’ in A-A (and more general US) lore, and many such figures play a role in the verbal, especially narrative, lore of a considerable variety of A-A cultures (which, after all, are not monolithic). My point is that these (and many other aspects of E-A identity and behaviour) are indeed such folk artifacts but that E-A English is not, in itself, a primary (or even secondary) one. In short, it is not a commonplace in A-A groups for a performance to involve a clear (and unmistakable) reference to (or imitation of) E-A English, one which carries with it the immediate speech community recognition of exactly what it is the performer is about, including a clear understanding of what symbolic characterisation is intended.6

One might object to this claim, for example, by citing some specific routines performed by A-A comedians. In one, for example, Richard Pryor used his version of a male, E-A voice (relatively nasal, relatively high-pitched, relatively monotone, and lacking in taboo or non-standard characteristics). In the situation he developed, his E-A character was obviously a husband, and the ‘missing lines’ clearly belonged to his wife. The part of this ‘encounter’ which inevitably brought howls from the audience went as follows:

**E-A Husband:** Will we be having sex tonight?
[pause for wife’s conversational turn]
**E-A Husband:** No? Oh well. What the heck.

E-A Husband: Will we be having sex tonight?
Pryor depended on a large number of social stereotypes and understandings in this brief comic piece. Most specifically, he plays on his audience's understanding of the role of gender in male–female sexual relations. At a most superficial (but not at all unimportant) level, for example, Pryor must have assumed that his audience would feel that his E-A husband was unnaturally uninvolved emotionally in the question of whether or not he had sex. The announcement that there would be none is simply no great disappointment to him, and (however nervously) his audience (particularly perhaps the males) would have been relieved by their laughter at one for whom such an important matter meant so little. Additionally, these same laughers would have also no doubt found comfort in the fact that the butt of Pryor's humour was an individual whose so-called 'male rights' could so easily be overcome by a woman's simple refusal. Who is 'wearing the pants' here and who is 'pussy-whipped' are common folk tropes which help us understand the stereotypes which give meaning to Pryor's joke.

So far, however, this interpretation does not touch on race-ethnicity. Why does Pryor bother to create an imaginary E-A couple for this scenario? At this level, Pryor plays on more distinctly A-A stereotypes of E-As, ones which do not specifically refer to sex at all. One, I would claim, appears to be that of 'emotional involvement' itself (or at least the display of it). Pryor depends on the belief that A-As are somehow more 'invested in' their emotional lives and more likely to overtly express dissatisfaction (or satisfaction). Over the past few years, sports fans have witnessed a clear reaction to this stereotype on the part of rule-makers. Such guardians of public decency have decreed that certain 'displays' (e.g. dancing, strutting, taunting, slamming the ball) after sports accomplishments are 'illegal' behaviours. Although the rule-makers' excuse is that such behaviour promotes animosity which leads to violence, could it not also be that such restrictions are a response to what some believe to be inappropriate A-A behaviour? The classic E-A hero should conquer, politely return the ball to the referee, jog from the playing area (with no 'gyrations' or 'antics') and modestly accept the enthusiastic congratulation of team-mates and the admiration of the fans.

Clearly much more could be said about the forces which are at work in the understanding of this humour, but let me return to what I believe to be the linguistic importance of this point.

First, note that, although Pryor's comedy was popular, imitations of his imitations were short-lived. They did not find (or create) a lasting niche in either A-A or E-A folklore. I assume that this is simply confirmation of what I had to say above about the importance of face-to-face (or 'traditional') transmission of folklore (as opposed to media influence). 'Will we be having sex tonight' is now as ancient (and forgotten) as Laugh-In's 'You bet your sweet bippy'.

Second, and more important, Pryor's imitation did not appeal to the rich, underlying set of E-A 'stock characters' in the A-A folk tradition. In fact, the supposed E-A linguistic features he employed simply accompanied the fact that the figure in his joke was an E-A; he could have been a banker, an artist, a plumber, a retired person, an unemployed one — so long as he was E-A. In short, Pryor's use of E-A linguistic features was not a necessary (or principal) part of the use of
E-As as folk artifacts. Better put, E-A English is not, in itself, a folk artifact for A-As. No wonder, then, when they were asked to ‘speak like a White person’, the respondents we worked with found the request strange — the genre was simply unfamiliar.

It is also important to understand that in making these claims about the general unavailability of E-A English among A-As that I am not in the least suggesting that language variation is never a principal folk artifact for A-As. In some A-A narrative traditions, for example, the rich catalogue of stock performers must be carefully matched to linguistic performances. In a number of recordings I have of an A-A Chicago woman’s stories about Alabama, she frequently portrays the voice of an ‘older Mississippi country woman’, one who is often the focus of humour when she misunderstands the way modern or urban things work. In one story, for example, she accuses the post office workers of stealing a turkey from the pan which she purchased from a mail-order supplier. Since the illustration in the advertisement she had seen showed the pan with a turkey in it, she was sure her accusation was accurate. The teller does not alter her linguistic performance when the postal workers speak, but she alters grammar, morphology, phonology, and vocal character when the older woman speaks. In another anecdote, this same stock character is annoyed at the nosiness of E-A agents who always want to know her destination when she attempts to buy a round-trip train ticket. Although there is more than one-half hour of recorded non-narrative talk by this respondent and many opportunities to use the form, she never uses the construction ‘gwine’, one which she uses many times when the old lady speaks in this narrative. It is simply not the case, therefore, that linguistic caricature (hence, awareness) plays no role in A-A verbal lore.

To return to my principal example, however, let me reassert that our A-A respondents often queried the request ‘to talk like a White person’ and apparently did not have E-A English ‘available’ as a folk artifact. Additionally, when the request was carried out, it was frequently done with no recourse to any linguistic devices other than content and topic selection. In the most striking example of this, a small group of A-A women, complying with the task, pretended to have a ‘tea-party’ as their situational caricature of what a group of E-A women might be doing. Their conversation included ‘mock racist’ discussions of A-A servants, A-A physical features and dietary habits, and their horror at inter-racial sexual contact. During their ‘conversation’, there were occasional references to the food and drink which were a part of the pretend setting they had created (including an occasional clanking of a glass or plate to indicate the ‘noise’ of the tea-party). At one point, one of the respondents exclaims ‘Them crumpets is delicious!’ Nobody points out (nor does any nervous laughter indicate) that there is anything wrong with non-standard ‘them’ or verb-subject agreement in this ‘imitation’ of E-A speech. In fact, the entire task appears to be understood as an imitation of E-A women’s behaviour with no linguistic ‘back-up’ whatsoever.

In sharp contrast, there is no occurrence of E-A imitations of A-As in these data without careful attention to the (obviously available) rich repertoire of accompanying speech factors. The respondents imitated such stock characters as ‘basketball players’, ‘A-A music show hosts’, ‘welfare recipients’, ‘bad-asses’, and ‘panhandlers’, but they always depended on linguistic features below the
level of content to help along these imitations, just as my A-A Chicago respondent differentiated her ‘old country woman’, ‘preacher’, ‘church lady’, and ‘city slicker’ with particular linguistic features.

I shall not belabour this point further, but I think a strong claim can be made that folk linguistic awareness is enhanced (perhaps particularly in the ‘control’ mode) when the object is a folk artifact, an object which may be featured in performance. Why some varieties (or some aspects of some varieties) are objects and others are not is in part a question for sociologists, folklorists, and anthropologists, but I believe it is a question for linguists as well.

I shall, however, go a little further here in substantiating my claim that the folk artifact status of a variety enhances, in particular, the control mode of folk awareness. In what at first I considered to be an ill-advised attempt, a student once set out collecting E-As’ attempts at reading a number of sentences in A-A English. I assumed that the task was so distant from the normal ‘performance’ settings of E-A abilities to control even a E-A version of A-A English that the experiment would not reveal much. The task revealed, however, the importance of performance in linguistic awareness, at least within the ‘control mode’. When the respondents took on this task as a non-performance, that is, when they tried to ‘analytically’ produce whatever features of AAVE they had at their disposal, the results were not convincing, but, at least, exposed the specific features which (presumably) have the highest-level availability. I will claim that these ‘non-performed’ performances reflect a rather more systematic knowledge of the variety, for the words were not of the respondents’ own choosing but were those supplied in the list of sentences to be read. As we shall see, however, the list of such items is a small one. One respondent never treats his task as a performance, and his list of modifications includes only the following (not all consistently done):

- post-vocalic r-lessness [e.g. ‘store’] and l-lessness [e.g. ‘hall’]
- back-vowel fronting [e.g. ‘brother’]
- monophthongisation of diphthongs [e.g. my]

Particularly missing from this first respondent’s attempts are any overall characteristics of performance such as vocal quality or pitch range. Another respondent, who begins the reading in what one might call ‘partial’ performance mode (with a ‘raspier’ and ‘lower’ voice than his normal one) uses the following segment caricatures in the first part of his task:

- back-vowel fronting [e.g. ‘one’]
- [I] — [e] conflation before nasals [e.g. ‘pen’]
- stop substitution for interdental fricatives [e.g. ‘brother’]
- post-vocalic r-lessness [e.g. ‘store’]

Once into the task, however, he clearly moves from a partial to a ‘fuller’ performance (when he considerably fronts, lengthens, and overemphasizes the final syllable of ‘trouble’ in the sentence ‘That poor boy sure can get in trouble’). The vocal caricature features listed above also increase, and the overemphasizing and lengthening of the final syllable of each test sentence persists.

With the sentence ‘What is that thing’, his vocal quality caricature increases
again. In addition, however, he adds the following segmental and other features in the most ‘fully’ performed sentences of the task:

- raising, tensing, and diphthongising of the mid-front lax vowel before the velar nasal [e.g. ‘thing’]
- cluster simplification [e.g. ‘fast’]
- post-vocalic l-lessness [e.g. ‘hall’]

In short, the greater the performance mode, the denser this respondent’s use of (his notion of) AAVE features.

The second respondent also clearly adopts a ‘persona’ in his performance, and that shift dramatically enhances the effect (if not the accuracy) of the imitation. Although we cannot know the identity of the persona selected by the respondent (since we did not ask), it is fair, I believe, to suggest that it was selected from that rich repertoire of folk artifacts at the person level in the E-A characterisation of A-As. It is interesting to note that female respondents to this task, even those who switched to a performance persona, as evidenced by changes in general vocal character, did not increase their AAVE features. Since we might expect AAVE to carry so-called covert prestige in the E-A speech community, we might also expect it to be more frequently used (and therefore, of course, ‘better’ performed) by males. That is certainly the case here.

As I have already shown, AAVE is not the only imitated variety in American English, and it may be that in some of these imitations there is no use of an extensive set of folk identity characterisations. In a respondent’s imitation of ‘Joisy’ speech cited above, for example, it is not at all clear that a specific persona is used. In the richest set of imitations from Niedzielski & Preston (submitted), it is also not clear that United States northerners always make use of such folk personae in their imitations of southerners, although it is clear that a rich repertoire is available (e.g. overweight European-American, good-ol-boy law officer, a caricature so well-known that even a major American car manufacturer has used it in its advertising campaigns).

In the following, a Michigan respondent (‘J’) imitates Tennessee newscasters, who, he says, ‘spoke normally’ (i.e. without southern speech features noticeable to him) until they interviewed a local person. He then imitates their shifted performances with the following string: ‘Y’all know what I’m talking about now, don’t you?’

[yæw:nowəhæmtʰɔkəbɔtwɔdɔfnuf]

The following analysis will show this is both good and bad. The focus is on the vowels.

1. The diphthong [æw:] in ‘y’all’ is an authentic Southern diphthong (replacing the more widely spread [ɔw]); however, it is not the vowel of ‘all’ (which, in all Southern varieties, is never fronted and in many is even backed and raised).

2. The final [I] in ‘y’all’ is neither reduced nor vocalised, a feature common to most Southern varieties.
(3) The [o] in ‘know’ is neither fronted, raised, nor strongly diphthongised, any of which would have made the form more acceptably ‘Southern’.

(4) The first element of ‘what’ is [w], although a voiceless or even aspirated (i.e. [hwa]) form is common in some Southern varieties.

(5) The vowel in ‘what’ is simply [a], and, like the vowel in ‘know’, is not fronted, a feature in some Southern varieties.

(6) The end of ‘what’ and transition to ‘I’m’ is unusual. There is no final consonant (not even a glottal catch) at the end of ‘what’. Such total final apical stop deletion is not uncommon in allegro speech in Southern (and A-A) varieties, but it is oddly followed by a strong [h] before the following vowel (in ‘I’m’). Perhaps J is familiar with such (limited) Southern caricatures as ‘hit’ (for ‘it’) and believes that an [h] before ‘I’m’ is justified. If so, this is simply an overgeneralisation.

(7) The vowel in ‘I’m’ is the authentic Southern [a]. Although it is not commented on by the respondents themselves, I suspect that this is the most common vocalic caricature of Southern speech (perhaps limited to a set of lexical items).

(8) The vowel of ‘talk’ is appropriately [æ], as it would be in many Southern varieties. Although this might be a candidate for imitation for many Northern speakers, it almost certainly is not for J. He is from rural northern MI and has spent only the last 15 years or so in the more urban southeastern part of the state. He is almost certainly not, therefore, a participant in the recent Northern vowel change (i.e. the so-called ‘Northern Cities Shift’, see, e.g. Wolfram, 1991: 85–90) which would have changed his [æ] to [a]. When he uses an [o] in ‘all’, therefore, he is simply using his own vowel.

(9) The substitution of [n] for [ŋ] in ‘talking’ and the loss of the initial syllable of ‘about’ may be parts of J’s caricature, but both are common in the informal speech of all regional varieties. Since informality is often confused with standardness, however, such general changes may simply be a part of an imitation strategy which would have Northern speakers use whatever ‘non-standard’ elements are available to them when they imitate ‘Southern’, a strategy also frequently used in E-A imitations of A-A speech.

(10) The diphthongs in ‘about’ and ‘now’ are [awi]; J does not front the first element to [æ] nor is the diphthong reduced. This failure to imitate is perhaps a little odd since an ‘accurate’ Southern version of this diphthong was used (inappropriately) in ‘y’all’ (see (1) above).

(11) The [o] vowel of ‘don’t’ is not modified (see (3) above).

(12) The proximity of [t] and [y] in ‘don’t you’ results in the coalesced form [ʃ]; as in (9) above, however, I am sure this is simply an informal, allegro speech phenomenon common to all regional areas but employed here as a part of the general non-standard caricature of Southern speech (and evidence of the folk confusion of informality with non-standard).

Segment-by-segment, then, this imitation is technically not so good. Nevertheless, the impression it leaves is successful (as the laughter after J’s performance indicates), because a successful imitation need be neither complete nor accurate. Students of the representation of dialects in literature have long been aware of the value of the limited use of ‘authentic’ material in ‘artistic’ performance.
It may be safely put down as a general rule that the more faithful a dialect is to folklore [i.e. linguistics], the more completely it accurately represents the actual speech of a group of people, the less effective it will be from the literary point of view. (Krapp, 1926: 523)

If this rubric is also known to folk performers, however unconsciously, it will be difficult to decide when folk imitations are ‘inaccurate’ due to lack of knowledge and/or ability and when they are inaccurate because folk performers feel that they have done enough to effectively establish whatever point is being made by the imitation. A more folkloristically-oriented study of the data I am treating here would catalogue the folk linguistic conventions used to imitate different varieties (by different speakers, for different purposes, in different settings, etc...). Following Krapp’s rubric stated above, J’s use of such items as [a] for [øy] in ‘I’m’ (and, perhaps, his faulty [æv] in ‘y’all’) may be sufficient ‘pepperings’ of the segmental stream to ‘Southernize’ his imitation.

Indicating the percentage of items which have been modified does not, however, answer all the questions of folk imitation from a more linguistically-oriented point of view. In the case of the skilled dialect writer, I assume, perhaps falsely, that he or she is a skilled user of the dialect in question and that every opportunity to use a dialect feature is a decision-point, i.e. each time there is an opportunity to use the dialect, the writer makes a decision whether or not to employ it. Of course, I make no such assumption about oral folk performances. The fact is that some caricatures (e.g. reduction of [øy]), although themselves not consistently used, are the only ones used. Other elements of the imitated variety which might have been used (e.g. the substitution of [e] for [i] before nasals) never occur at all, and one may conclude (assuming there is enough evidence) that they are not a part of the possible repertoire of the folk performer.

Additionally, although imitation defines a level of awareness of its own (i.e. ‘control’), it does not answer questions about the positions of the other modes of awareness. For example, I never encounter overt discussion of the reduction of [øy] in any of the many taped discussions I have of Michigan respondents talking about Southern speech. One might conclude, therefore, that the item is available only in the more covert modes of folk linguistic awareness. This overlooks, I believe, the common folk process of definition by ostentation. That is, Labov may be right in his complaint that the folk lack words which describe phonological features (at whatever level), but that lack does not necessarily mean that a certain feature is available only to the ‘unconscious’ levels of folk awareness.

In fact, the relation between imitation and comment is complex. For example, r-lessness, a most frequently studied phenomenon in the professional literature, is never once commented on in the conversations cited here; nevertheless, it is a feature of several imitations. In a discussion of Southern speech, the main topic of which is ‘you all’, two respondents (neither of whom claims to be a good imitator) offer the caricaturistic Southern phrase ‘Y’all come back now, you hear’ with clear r-deletion (or schwa vocalisation) in the last item. The same imitator of ‘Joisy’ speech who used ‘boids’ and ‘woids’, adopted his military buddy’s Boston r-less pronunciation of ‘car’ because, he explained, it was ‘easier’.

To my surprise, the Southern caricature ‘help’ [hɛp] was not mentioned in the data reviewed here, nor any other case of ‘l’ loss or vocalisation, an indication,
perhaps, that consonants (except for the aforementioned ‘r’) have played a minor role.

One cannot be so sure, however, as already suggested, that even the diphthongal reduction in ‘I’m’ in J’s imitation, which has been examined in such detail, is not a lexical caricature. Unfortunately, the limited number of imitative phrases in these data and others which I have available to me will not allow me to pursue this. A large number of cases might let one assert that certain lexical items were ‘principal carriers’ of certain imitative phonological strategies, and richer data might even allow investigation of the possibility that imitators are sensitive to phonological ‘rules’ (including, perhaps, even environments). Wolfram & Schilling-Estes (1995) show that Ocracoke islanders centralised performances of /ay/ and /aw/ are, in fact, sensitive to low-level phonological environments, but the imitations they study are islanders’ caricatures of their own speech.

In fact, it is mostly non-segmental characteristics which allow J and his interlocutors to ‘appreciate’ his performance as Southern. That performance, and many other imitations studied, illustrates, predictably, the slower tempo or rate of Southern speech. The most common label for this phenomenon is ‘drawl’, although a number of respondents have folk-etymologised this item to ‘draw’. Two respondents refer to it as a ‘cadence’ and a ‘rhythm’, one of them illustrating it with the word ‘temperature’, giving it an especially elongated final vowel — [tempəˈtjuːrə]. Although it is not overtly commented on, these imitations seem to make it clear that the ‘drawling’ aspect of Southern speech is to be located in the vowels, a perception supported by professional investigation and comment (e.g. Feagin, 1985). Linguists’ investigations of ‘drawling’ in Southern speech, however, focus on it as a variable, stylistic phenomenon, one related to such factors as status, age, gender and the like. Folk linguists simply identify all Southern speech as ‘drewled’.

J’s performance does not give us an opportunity to investigate it, but one might have expected greater comment on Southern stress shift to the initial syllable, particularly in light of such caricatures as PO-lice, but mention of this feature occurred only rarely.

M: The girl that just started working with us this summer, there are some words that she says (0.5) you know when she pronounces the words, I forget what they are—Oh (1.25) ‘Monroe’ [mənˈriː]. The city of Monroe. We have a rental office in Monroe. She calls it [ˈmʌnroʊ].

N: Oh really?

M: And we laugh every time she says it. We say ‘Oh, MONroe is on the phone’ and— and you know, she laughs right along with us — and I said ‘Why do = [ ]

N: Uh huh.

M: = you say MONroe instead of monROE and she said (1.75) ‘I don’t know. That’s just the way people around’ — She’s from CI - the Cleveland area and she said people a lot of people just pronounce it that way.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

Of course, M’s acquaintance does not say MONroe because she is from
Cleveland, a decidedly non-Southern speech area. The ‘people around’ from whom she learned it are Monroe, MI natives, and it is easy to explain why they have a Southern stress shift feature — many of them are Southern or only one generation removed from Southern. Apparently the respondents here do not know that Monroe is one of the southeastern MI sites which has a (desired) reputation for a concentration of Appalachian immigrants. Due to the intense development of the post-World War II automobile industry and to limited employment opportunities in parts of Appalachia at that time (coupled with a lengthy coal strike), many Appalachians migrated (and have continued to migrate) to southeastern MI for employment. Although no history or careful social survey of this population has been done, their presence is still well known. The east side of Ypsilanti, MI, a small city with major automobile industry plants, is so recognised for this population that it is called ‘Ypsitucky’.

M: I keep hearing about these Ypsituckians.
B: Oh yeah that was World War II.
M: Are they - I mean do you know any Ypsituckian people=
J: =Yeah, there’re a lot of them.

[ There’s a lot of people.
B: (Well-)
B: We work with them.
M: You d(h)o? What do you mean THEM. Are they - I mean are they - - Do =
B: See we work with ( )
M: =they still sound like they’re=
B: =town was ( ) small and
J: =Yeah.
M: Do they still sound like they’re from the South?
J: I swear to God when you talk to them, - and they still got the uh the=
B: I don’t notice that ( )
B: =twang the twang=
J: =You know, the twang

[ Uh huh.

[ A twang. And a lot of them have been here - you know like from
-- forty-five.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

Another respondent is impressed with the fact that even lifelong Ypsilantians have Southern speech:

N: The reason it’s called ‘Ypsitucky’ is, because there’s a lot of people — that live in Ypsilanti, that have lived in Ypsilanti all their life, that speak with a Kentucky uh, Kentuckian uh: slang. Very Southern, very Southern.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)
I turn now to elements beyond what the folk call ‘accent’. Recall that the first item in J’s performance is ‘y’all’, and there is no doubt that this is the Southern caricature par excellence. It is, as well, the subject of considerable overt discussion. Our respondents are even involved in asking one of what Montgomery (1992) refers to as the two principal questions about the form: ‘...whether you all is ever used as a singular’ (p. 356). For one respondent, it is apparently his interpretation of it as a singular which makes it so striking:

R: Like uh in the South, if I were addressing you, - and J was with you, I might say ‘you all’. ‘You’ as opposed to: you or or J in this case directing it =

H: ( )

R: =to you, I might say ‘you all’.

(Niedzielski and Preston, submitted)

In fact, ‘you all’ as a singular appears to be an important matter to R, for he repeats this interpretation to H in another interview, and B, a Chicagoan who was in Houston for a short time, believes that ‘y’all’ is a singular and has an account of its plural as well:

B: Well it’s funny down there - well first of all up here, if you’re talking to=

X: Uh huh.

B: =a bunch of people you say, ‘Well, do you GUYS want to go - over HERE’.

X: Uh huh.

B: Down there, - if you’re talking to one person, you say ‘you all’.

X: Uh huh.

B: ‘If y’all go over here’.

X: ‘If you all go-’ Yeah.

B: Then if I’m talking to both of you, I’ll say ‘All you all’.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

Another respondent, however, who learned her ‘y’all’ from longer exposure in the South, has retained it apparently only as a plural, for she notes that the Northern equivalent is ‘youse guys’ or ‘guys’. Her excuse for its retention is simply ‘...I ((laughs)) like it’. Although she also cites ‘hey’ as a Southern form for ‘hi’ in greetings, ‘y’all’ may be the only consistent lexical caricature for many respondents. Others which occur from time to time appear to be ‘colourful’ or ‘rustic’ items which are similar to the proverbialisms and folk speech forms discussed more fully below. One respondent, for example, tells of her shock at hearing her Southern husband call a boil on her shoulder a ‘rising’. Even her Southern parents (who, she admits, would have ‘said it funny’ — i.e. with a reduced diphthong, which she imitates) would not have called it a ‘rising’.

There also appear to be grammatical forms which are commonly repeated as part of the Southern imitation routine. J is not alone in using a tag at the end of
his exemplary sentence ('Y'all know what I'm talking about now don't you'). I have already cited the r-less use of the tag 'you hear', and I believe it is a good candidate for a Southern grammatical caricature. Both casual and non-standard constructions appear to be part of Northerners' general strategies in imitating Southern speech, but longer strings or stock phrases are also a part of the Northern imitator's repertoire. Respondents do not just use the tag 'you hear', but use it at the end of the caricaturistic 'Y'all come back now'. It is perhaps also worth noting that the 'now' of such stock phrases is also characteristic and is a part of J's performance. For example, a respondent who imitates Texas speech, says 'Do y'all want to go out horseback riding now?', but there is no contextual reason whatsoever for a temporally-interpreted 'now' to be used in such an exemplary sentence. Perhaps there is no better evidence that a folk performer has a stock phrase in mind than a failed attempt to deliver it. One respondent is, I believe, reaching for some such stereotype as 'Y'all come down and see us sometime, you hear', but he has not quite got it:

H: Ca- yo- give me an example. ((i.e. of Southern speech))
G: Y- y'all come down and see you someone else sometimes.

(Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

From a speech act point of view, it is striking that nearly all these Southern speech imitations are 'offers' or 'invitations', perhaps covert recognition of the stereotype of 'Southern hospitality'. There are a number of discussions about Southern 'temperament' and the like, but these caricatures would lead us away from more language-centered concerns.

Beyond these stock phrases, there seems to be considerable agreement that proverbialisms and other brief folk speech performances are particularly abundant in Southern speech (see Preston, 1989b). For example, after a fieldworker suggests that Southerners have 'funny little sayings' (and offers 'even a blind squirrel finds an acorn every once in a while'), her respondent agrees and cites her Southern husband's use of 'busier than a one-armed paper-hanger' and 'harder than Chinese arithmetic', although she is 'not sure' that such expressions are Southern.

One respondent is very explicit about the artistic superiority of Southern folk speech:

S: Whe(h)n No(h)rtherners ge(h)t angry, like, you know - people around - where I lived in Ohio and even back in New York, - they they're almo-=

X: Uh huh.
S: =they're almost they're quite straightforwards. You know, 'You- you're a big dummy and this this this this this - and this. It's like not using a lot of creativity - Ju(h)- just being very straightforward and saying boom boom boom. But in the South, - it's mo(h)re like - I- I don't want to use any swear words.
X: It doesn't matter.
S: But it's more creative.
Whaddayaknow? Folk Linguistic Awareness

B: Heh heh.
S: It's much more creative.
B: 'You're dumber than a -
   It's-
S: Yeah. 'You're dumber than shit'.
X: ((laughs))
B: They compare you. - You say 'You're dumber than a bag of rocks', or you=
X: ((laughs))
S: No(h)=
   ( )
B: =know 'You're so- that's stupid'.
X: =((laughs))
S: 'Get off your ass, you. You ain't doing nothing today. Why you're slower
   than my uncle's donkey'.
X: ((laughs))
B: Yeah, I mean they use examples of uh what you're doing right or wrong.
   (Niedzielski & Preston, submitted)

Both these respondents have incorporated the formula 'X-er than a Y' into their
characterisation of southern speech, allowing them even novel (or 'productive')
use of it.

Although I have been pessimistic about the imitations I have been able to
investigate here as regards their usefulness in identifying the precise configuration
of awareness modes outlined above (see Figure 1), I believe that we can learn a great
deal about both the degrees and the modes of folk linguistic awareness by
investigating more carefully the degree to which specific linguistic units are (or are
not) a part of some group's folk characterisation (particularly at the imitation level)
of another and whether or not extensive 'folk artifact' stereotyping takes place.
Unfortunately, although the encouragement of sociolinguistic-folkloristic friendship
is long-standing (e.g. Hymes, 1972), in fact, the two fields have not interacted in so
lively a manner as one might have hoped.

In fact, I believe that this relationship may be even more productive than
Hymes implied, playing a central role in some of the classic sociolinguistic
concerns of language variation and change, including the particularly mysterious
'style-shifting' capacity of all individuals, even if one chooses not to view
variation diachronically. The role of 'self-imitation' in performance speech
(contrasted with non-performance utterances) is shown to be an important
element in determining the status and possible direction of competing vowel
systems in North Carolina offshore island speech (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes,
of self- and other-imitation by a Cardiff (Wales) radio personality plays upon a
long list of local and even international caricatures and is an important
consideration in determining the causes (and effects) of 'style-shifting'. This
more 'linguistically'-oriented discussion, however, goes beyond the bounds of this paper.

Conclusions

What details of language non-linguists are aware of appears to depend more on a considerable variety of sociocultural rather than strictly linguistic facts, although such a characterisation as Silverstein’s is helpful in outlining the areas of linguistic cognition which may be more and less likely to feed sociocultural employment. In US varieties, and, I suspect, many others, the concern for 'language correctness' (often combined with stereotypical features of ethnicity, region, gender, or other identifying factors) is perhaps the single most profound predictor of awareness. In fact, the identification between language use and social groups may be so intense as to result in what Irvine (1996) calls 'iconicity'. That is, the language itself has attributed to it characteristics assumed about the group with which it is associated. In the folk linguistic data reported on here, therefore, 'dumb language' does not refer to content at all but to the language used by groups who are assumed to be unintelligent. In some cases, specific features are 'known' and imitated or even discussed (e.g. multiple negation) as support for such characterisations.

Many linguists (applied and even theoretical) have done a great deal to promote 'language awareness' in the sense of understanding scientifically discovered aspects of language structure and use, and there is no doubt that such understandings are important for many in public life (e.g. teachers, lawyers, health professionals). I believe this programme should be coupled with another one which asserts that the discovery of what non-linguists believe about and do with language ('folk linguistics' in general) is an equally important issue, one worthy of study not only for its independent scientific value but also for the undeniable importance it has in the language professional’s interaction with the public in this most human of concerns.

Notes

1. I use 'awareness' here in a sense not usually applied in this publication. Language Awareness has most often promoted the understanding of what linguists (and others) have discovered about language and what those findings have to say to teachers, lawyers, doctors, and other non-linguists, a goal I heartily endorse. I mean, by 'awareness', the 'degree' of consciousness non-linguists have in general about language, and I relate this to the broader field of study recognised (at least for those most overtly known pieces of linguistic information) as 'folk linguistics'. In short, I assume it is important not only to know what language is and how people use it but also what they think about it.

2. Although Labov recently defends the use of 'attention to speech' as an operational device employed in the sociolinguistic interview to elicit positions on the 'stylistic continuum' (e.g. Labov, 1994), he is fully aware that word lists and reading passages are not ordinary, interactional modes of behaviour and would, no doubt, acknowledge the contribution of 'deeper' or more interpretive accounts. It is clear, however, that Labov does not intend 'attention to speech' to be equated with overt or 'conscious' awareness of linguistic facts. This must be the case, for respondents who are evidencing the influence of 'change from below' (that is, change from below the level of conscious awareness, e.g. Labov, 1972) do so with increasing frequency (generally for prestige forms) of the use of just such variables precisely in the elicitation
environments which trigger greater attention to speech (e.g. word lists and reading passages). Attention to speech may be, therefore, in terms I introduce below, a 'global' concern that does not require overt knowledge of a linguistic 'detail' to be effective. One might use the term 'monitoring' for 'attention to speech', but the term appears to have been preempted in linguistic use by Krashen, who clearly does intend to imply that knowledge of the linguistic unit is involved (in his 'monitor theory' of second language acquisition, e.g. Krashen, 1988, in which the 'monitor' appears to be either 'on' or 'off', not set to lesser or greater degrees, as is clearly the case in Labov's proposal).

3. The conversational excerpts here are mostly taken from Niedzielski & Preston (submitted). The transcription conventions are generally those devised by Gail Jefferson as outlined, for example, in Schenkin (1978).

4. It is important to note that the discussion here refers to the general occurrence or 'vocal set' of nasalisation in the stream of speech and not to the incidence of either phonetically determined or phonetically assimilated nasal segments. Of course, that distinction might not be clear at all to non-linguists, many of whom call French a 'nasal' language (in the same way, one assumes, that English-speaking folk respondents call German a 'guttural' language primarily on the basis of its velar fricative).

5. In some cases, research has dealt with the differences among respondents from different educational levels (as well as with the differences between linguists and non-linguists). For example, Gleitman & Gleitman (1970) show that better-educated respondents are more likely to offer interpretations of novel compounds which correspond to the 'linguistic rule' involved (e.g. a better educated respondent said a 'house-bird glass' was a 'very small drinking cup used by a canary', while a respondent from the less well-educated group called it a 'house-bird made of glass', i.e. glossed it as if it were 'glass house-bird' in spite of the stimulus) (p. 171). I will not deal with these considerations of awareness which have to do with educational level (or with potential differences in responses due to differences in 'intelligence', age, gender, or cultural background), although all such matters, rather than the simple linguist versus non-linguist dichotomy, might play a role.

6. I would be happy to learn of exceptions to this generalisation, even if within a very restricted speech community or narrowly-described genre, or even a single instance of a genre. It is clearly not a restriction on minority imitations of majority speech in general for just such immediate, symbolic recognition, as Basso's well-known account of Western Apache imitations of European-American speech shows (1979).

References


