

Dialect Variation - Natalie Schilling-Estes

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1) Age-based variation in African American English in Hyde County, NC

a) African American male, age 87 (born 1910)

We was young fellers and got to fighting, I hit him a lick or two and he run to the shelter to get a axe, and I knowed, I knowed what was in there when he—when he went there and a notion struck me: You better get behind the shelter. And he, when he come out he was looking for me where he left me out there, he had that axe just right, but I was behind him. I was stunting that time, and I run up behind him, you see, I was a better man ‘n he was. I run up behind him and grabbed him and throwed him on the ground and struck him with that fist a time or two and took that axe. And I throwed it way out there and I beat him good. When I turned him a-loose, he didn’t go look for that axe, he went to the house. Aah, but if I’d a stayed out there where he left me, he might woulda chopped me in the head or something, can’t never tell. So, that made his daddy mad cause I beat him. He was taking up for the boy but he weren’t taking up for me.

b) Daughter, 61 (b. 1935)

But I was just always scared of the cotton worm that was in—be in the cotton, them great big old worms. Some of ‘em about that long. Some of ‘em ‘bout that long with big black and striped with horns on ‘em. And some right green, now I was scared of them. And the last year my daddy planted cotton, it was full of them. And he didn’t plant no more cotton, ‘cause he had a time getting that cotton picked. They called ‘em old long black furry ones sweet gum worms. And they had got all in the cotton. And honey, they didn’t plant no more cotton.

c) Granddaughter, 39 (b. 1958)

Well see, I was just in the, like, fourth and fifth grade. Well, honey, I wadn’t nervous, not in there a bit ‘cause I always been a bully. I was—I was in the fourth grade and I went up there to the white school, I’ma put it to you that way, but that it wadn’t ‘cause they scared us ‘cause they didn’t scare me nothin’ cause as long as they fuss I fuss back with them and if they wanted me to fight me I’ll fight them back. So I really wadn’t

scared 'cause I just always grew up to be a bully all my day. It was just my sister probably was nervous because she just, I don't know...

d) Great-granddaughter, 22 (b. 1975)

It's a ghost story that they tell about, like, over something about, when you see these two stars in the sky fighting, there're these two mens that killed theirselves, you know, about fighting, and they was, what, Chet and Tom. Now that's a light be following you 'cause there's so ma-that, so many peoples got killed that a light be following you. And then they have, they have told this story about, like, if this woman be on the road thumbing and you stop and you give her a ride and then you think she honestly in the car with you and then when you turn over she's not in the car with you. Somebody have honestly seen—that honestly happened to somebody, somebody honestly seen that light, but as far as me, I've never seen it cause I don't be trying to worry about seeing nothing like that. But we have been, cause Slokum would be, like seen a—two lights in the sky, them two lights in the sky, but, you know, never known what they was until somebody told us that, it was two, uh what? A slave owner and slave was fighting and they ki—they, you know, somebody said they killed each other right over there.

3) Lumbee Indian English, African American English, White English in Robeson County, NC

a) 70-year-old Lumbee female, Robeson County, NC

And, children, there come a man in the big broad daylight. I could see him as pretty as I'm a-lookin' at you. Come all the way down that ditch bank. I says to myself, I says, I kept a-lookin' at the man; he was a-lookin' in the ditch just like there was somebody in there ditchin'. You know how a man would walk. Could you imagine a man--two men in the ditch a-ditchin' and a man a-walkin' down side of that ditch a-lookin' at them in there throwing that dirt? That's just the way he was a-lookin' into this ditch, this man was, in the broad open daytime. And, honey, he come right on down that ditch. And I spoke and I says, "How in the world did Uncle Pat get through in here by mule?" I knew he couldn't 'cause there wasn't but one road a-comin' into my place, back in them woodses. I says, "He couldn't, I don't see no car nor nothin'." And when he got to the--crossed this ditch. He crossed the ditch and went halfway to the field and come on down this other ditch. There was a little path through, went through my yard and went all across the woodses there. Well, when he got halfway to that little ditch on this side, before it come out here to the road. I was a-lookin' at him plumb good. Honey, just as su--by the time you--just as say, if you'd have said to me, "Lucille, that's Harley Locklear." Honey, I ain't never got so--He had on a brown coat, he had on a pair of brown britches, he had on a brown hat, just like if you'd have spoke to me and said, "Lucille, that's Harley Locklear." Honey, I ain't never got so scared in all the days of my life.

b) 60+ -year-old African American female

People don't sing no more. I tells the people, the people at our church, until we get back to singing something to the Lord, I don't know if Jesus understands what people singing today, cause I don't understand it, I'm not Jes- I don't understand. You hear all this loud music and you don't hear no words. But we need to sing something that's understanding so that we can sing praises to the Lord. Now I'm not saying it might be, he-, he- he-, he's-, he can hear all things, you know, because he ís, he ís all in all, and I know he understand. But I still think we ought to serve the Lord wi-,wi-wi, with songs that sings

praises to him. Cause you know it's something lacking in our churches and I believe that's what it is. And our men folks is not interested; they need to be there. The beautifulest time I ever seen I went to a church out from Lillington, North Carolina.

c) 74-year old White male

Now I've got Canada geese out at my pond and they're, they're wild geese, they're not pen raising out there. And there's, there's a coup-- a pair of them now who was hanging around and getting ready to-to nest out there. Cause the last five years they have--this same pair has been nesting out there on the bank of the pond. And the one year, some kind of varmint tore their nest, well two years, when the bank of the, uh built their nest on the east side the pond, some kind of varmint, I don't know, fox or a coon or a possum, something got tore the nest all to pieces and tore up the eggs. And they didn't reset, but the times that they have nested on the west bank, now you could walk right up, I'd walk up to them, get as close as I am to your feet. She'd just set there, course she doesn't want me to be there, but she won't move. The old gander a-blew at me. But uh, she's hatched five once and six twice, but I know that you--now when they hatches those birds, the last hatch last year. I reckon I was there late in the afternoon looking at her, and I knew it was about time.

3) John' Baugh's study of dialect discrimination

The following sound files illustrate linguist John Baugh's use of three different dialects to make telephone inquiries into housing availability, as part of his study of dialect discrimination, sometimes called linguistic profiling.

Standard American English: Hello. I'm calling about the apartment you have advertised in the paper.

African American English: Hello. I'm calling about the apartment you have advertised in the paper.

Chicano English: Hello. I'm calling about the apartment you have advertised in the paper.

5) Three generations of Smith Islanders

a) 72-year-old male

I'll tell you about teenagers today, something that I didn't experience when I was coming up. It was only--I think there was three boys that went to high school when I was coming up, to Crisfield. But today, they go to high school. I'll tell you something else happens. In the process of learning away from here, they'll lose the knowledge of the water. It might be six years. It might take 'em six years to go through high school. They'll lose six years of the knowledge of the water, which is important. I mean if, if the fellows is gonna stay here and live. 'Cause you've gotta know what to do here if you want to live here.

b) 30-year-old male

LM: I know another guy that--uh, in Havre de Grace [a town in Maryland], his name is, uh, Robin Tyler. He runs the Chesapeake Bay Foundation there. And, and they've got a boat, it's called, uh, Captain Jason III. And he went under a bridge not long ago, and the tide was low, and when he went under the bridge at Havre de Grace. You have a bridge there, right?

FW: Lots of bridges, yeah.

LM: Yeah. And, uh, he just missed the bridge with the top of his cabin and everything. And, uh-- and he weren't realizing the tide was rising, and when he come back, he sorta stripped the top of his cabin, and he ripped his spotlight off.

c) 13-year-old female

Well, it's this real wacky boy around here. His name is Keith, and-- he-- once he, it was a girl named Flora a-coming from Harry's. It was about eleven o'clock, and, um, and he went home, and he put on this, well they said it was a wedding gown, but it weren't. He put it, a sheet, put sheets over it and curtains and all and made it look like a ghost. And he went-- it was real dark out, and she's, I don't know, a little crazy sometimes. And, um, she was walking home from Harry's, and, uh, Harry's is near the graveyard. And he was standing in the graveyard, and when she walked by he followed her, he just followed her.

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And when she got home, she went in the house and locked the door and all. And about one o'clock, she went back out there to see if it was still there. And she looked through the graveyard. He's standing in the graveyard looking down at the graves, looking-- he's crazy.

5) Three generations of Ocracoke Islanders

a) 79-year-old female

This, uh, storm come--the forty-four storm. It come all the sudden. We had a pretty day, just like this. No wind, pretty sunshine. And the neighbor called that day, said, "There's a bad storm heading right straight for us," and we didn't believe it. "There ain't no storm, you know, there ain't no storm come." Said, "Yes, it's heading right straight for Cape Hatteras. And it was a pretty, calm day, and not that, but that night, after it got to dark good, went out with Harry, went out on the porch, and he, the stars was shiny, he says, "I don't think there's no storm," he said, "it don't look like a storm." And everything was calm, but let me tell you, when we woke up the next morning, it was a, I thought the roof was going to come off the house. I never heard such a hard wind! There's a hundred miles, blowing a hundred miles. I never heard such a hard wind.

b) 49-year-old male

Well, like I say we started on that end and started running em back this way, and then they used to come up along--you know, see, there weren't all this--this was swamp here, we used to hunt. On every one of these houses. All these houses from where we turned at the fire station up this way, been built here since the sixties. There was only one house up here in the sixties. All this subdivision, Jackson Dunes, Oyster Creek. And then the ponies would come around, you know, you'd pen em up and they'd come right on the shore out here. You know we had beaches, you know, before everybody started building, you had a little beach all the way around on the sound side, just like you do on the ocean. But now you don't. Everybody's breakwatered and filled in, built. And then in June, we had a cattle penning.

c) 22-year-old female

Melinda and me, the story on us in Greenville was, we lived on the same hall. Of course they put one of us out in this corner and one in that corner, was how it ended up, and that wasn't exactly the quietest way to be, because we hollered the whole year long, back and

forth, talk, talk, talk, and--They elected us to be the fire marshals for that floor, and what we were supposed to do if there was a fire in the dorm, or the fire alarm went off, was run around and knock on all the doors and say, "Fire! Fire!" You know, make sure everybody knew to get out. Well, we got laughing, because have you ever heard Melinda say "fire"? "Far! Far! Far!" And Daddy and everybody told her if she runs around hollers that wouldn't nobody know what in the world she was talking about anyway. You better elect somebody who can at least say the word.