



Sociolinguistics in Education
Nadia Park (COL 2019)
Advisor: Betsy Rhymes

This summer, I had the privilege of working with Graduate School of Education professor and mentor Betsy Rymes on the topic of sociolinguistics in education. Different from general linguistics, sociolinguistics studies how social factors such as gender, socio-economic status, age, and surrounding neighbors affect one's language. My project with Dr. Rymes had two parts. The first was more interactive, as I was able to visit Strath Haven High School to listen to juniors talk about sociolinguistics and also participate in discussions or questions they had on the topic. Sociolinguistics is usually not a subject taught in high school, but it was at Strath Haven High. The juniors chose projects that covered various areas of sociolinguistics, such as people's opinions on gay speech and the connotation it has had over the years, slang in various locations across the nation, and people's thoughts on specific words like feminism. Using surveys, YouTube videos, and articles, the students were able to gather qualitative and quantitative data to then make their own conclusions and create further questions that came out of their research.

Seeing sociolinguistics as part of the educational system at the high school level was incredibly eye-opening, as it made me realize that there is a myriad of subjects that could potentially be taught in school. Students are easily able to learn anything, like sociolinguistics, which can further help them understand the people around them and beyond their suburban town.

The second part of my research involved more individual work, as I transcribed and coded interviews that my mentor and a graduate student previously conducted. Coding interviews requires identifying specific cases of certain repeating situations in the recording, which I found out was completely different from coding in computer science. I specifically focused on looking for extreme case formulations, or ECF, which are typically when people use the words "no one," "everyone," "never," "always," "really," etc. These were further broken down into more specific categories such as retention, defense, collective, individual, and distancing, that refer to how the extreme case formulation is used to prove a point or make an explanation of some sort. We wanted to see when people used ECF to then describe tendencies that occur during the flow of

conversations. With this, we created a short film of students saying “I always say ____.” There were so many words and phrases that the students knew they used often that neither my mentor nor I had ever heard before, giving both of us a laugh.

Through my research with Dr. Rymes, I have not become a master of sociolinguistics, of transcribing interviews, or of speaking with students in a dexterous manner. But I have begun to easily identify linguistic variations by simply listening to people speak and learn what research in the humanities entails. And of course, I cannot forget how interesting and fun it can be listening to people talk to one another, whether it’s answering an interview question or cracking a joke with a friend.