

Standard language ideology is alive and well in public speaking textbooks

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Abstract. For more than 50 years, the field of linguistics has recognized the equality of human languages, including all dialects of all languages. In this study we examine how current popular public speaking textbooks handle issues of linguistic variation in English. We looked specifically at textbook discussions of accent, grammar and pronunciation. Unfortunately, we have found the majority of textbooks we examined serve to maintain the outdated “deficit” model of language variation, to the detriment of students.

Keywords. dialects; textbooks; language attitudes; language ideology; public speaking

1. Introduction. Going back more than 50 years, sociolinguistic research has recognized that all human languages are rule-based, logically ordered systems. For example, Labov (1969) argued convincingly that African-American English is just as rule-based and logical as so-called “Standard American English,” which is the prestige dialect that is preferred in most academic environments in the United States (see also Wolfram 1970, Fasold 1972, Green 2002).¹ Since this early work, much more research has confirmed the logical structure not only African-American English but many other varieties of English in North America, including of a host of other so-called “nonstandard” dialects (for discussion of many features of the grammars of North American dialects, see Wolfram & Ward 2006; Reaser et al. 2017: 268-292; Kortmann et al. 2004; Schneider et al. 2004; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 2016). Given this extensive body of research, Reaser et al. (2017) succinctly summarize a core tenet of Sociolinguistics: “No variety of a language is inherently better in terms of its logic, its systematic structure, or its ability to express creative and complex thought.” (Reaser et al. 2017:3).

Despite this conclusion, outside of the field of linguistics most members of the general public maintain strong attitudes about language in general and about dialects specifically, considering certain dialects of English prestigious and other dialects of English “deficient”, “incorrect”, “illogical”, “slang” or “broken”. In other words, the vast majority of non-linguists are believers in the “Standard Language Myth” as described by Lippi-Green (2012). This is the belief that there exists one “proper” form of English that is superior to all other varieties of English, and that any deviance from the standard form represents a linguistic deficit, or a lesser form of the language. As discussed above, this belief has no scientific basis. Wolfram (1970) describes the situation as follows: “In terms of the sociolinguistic situation, it is quite common for a socially dominant culture to view a socially subordinate one as having an inadequate means of communication. This view is a common manifestation of linguistic ethnocentrism of the dominant

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¹ A note on terminology: We put “standard” and “nonstandard” in quotes throughout to disaffirm the Standard Language Myth (Lippi-Green 2012). We also use the term “dialect” throughout, but do so for all linguistic varieties. In other words, so-called “Standard English” is just another dialect, linguistically not better or worse than any other dialect.

classes.” Wolfram (1970:181). The field of linguistics can often be quite contentious, but there is wide agreement that all human languages are equivalent in having structured rules, and equivalent in allowing speakers to express themselves fully.

Although linguists have tried to spread the word of language equality for decades, our efforts have not been effective enough. The Standard Language Myth and the related deficit position with regards to “nonstandard” dialects are still very strong. One need only look at the 1997 Ebonics controversy and the public and media reactions to it to see that public opinion in favor of the deficit position has remained strong (Alim & Baugh 2006; Baugh 2004; Lippi-Green 2012; Rickford 1999; Ronkin & Karn 1999; Wolfram 1998; among many others).

Back in 1970, Walt Wolfram made efforts to spread the word to the field of Communication, publishing a paper in the National Communication Association’s journal *The Speech Teacher*, which is now called *Communication Education* (Wolfram 1970). In this paper, Wolfram implored Speech instructors to move away from a deficit view of “nonstandard” dialects to a difference view. Some 50 years later, we evaluate how current public speaking textbooks that are widely adopted in Communication departments in the US handle the deficit vs. difference divide in discussions of dialects, grammar and pronunciation. We are trained linguists who were hired to teach in Communication departments at Community Colleges in the CUNY system in NYC. As part of our teaching loads we teach public speaking, and, noticing problematic discussions of language in the public speaking textbooks we were using, decided to see if this was an isolated phenomenon. Unfortunately, we have found that deficit thinking still thrives in many public speaking textbooks. For example, we found the following statements in public speaking textbooks describing the use of variants of “nonstandard” varieties of English (1). Quotes like these represent common misunderstandings of language variation and serve to misinform students and teachers in ways that have been shown to be detrimental to student performance in the classroom, especially students who are not speakers of a so-called “standard” variety.

- (1) a. “Bad grammar is much like having a bit of spinach in your front teeth.”
(Nelson et al. 2013:185)
- b. “Some business and professional people find ‘improper’ English as offensive as body odor or food stains on the front of a shirt.” (Gregory 2018:241)
- c. “If you tend toward lazy speech, put more effort into your articulation.”
(O’Hair et al. 2019:135)

Overall, we have found that the majority of the 17 textbooks we looked at reflect deficit views towards linguistic diversity, despite the overwhelming conclusion from decades of linguistic study that all varieties of language are equal.

The paper is organized as follows: In section 2 we discuss *deficit vs. difference* views on linguistic variation and the different pedagogical approaches taken in the classroom by proponents of each of these views. In section 3 we discuss the reach of introductory public speaking courses, many of which spread deficit views of variation, as opposed to introductory linguistics courses, which take a difference approach. Section 3 also discusses content in textbooks and the influence textbooks on students. Section 4 presents the findings of our survey of 17 top public speaking textbooks. We show that the majority of these texts misclassify dialectal forms of English as “errors,” revealing a deficit approach to linguistic variation. Section 5 concludes the discussion.

2. Difference and deficit views. As discussed in the introduction, there is wide consensus in the field of linguistics that all human languages are equal in terms of their logic, structure and ability

to express creative and complex thought. The *difference* view acknowledges the grammatical status of all languages and dialects and acknowledges that the prestigious status of some varieties and the stigmatized status of others has nothing to do with any inherent properties of any language. The social status of a given language variety is a product of the perceived social status of the people who speak that variety. All languages are rule-based systems. Given this view, whether or not the forms in (2) are grammatical depends on which variety you speak (and potentially how prescriptive your view of language is).

- (2) a. I don't have any money.
b. I ain't got no money.

It is a social reality that individuals who use forms like (1b) are more likely to face linguistic discrimination in employment, housing, and all aspects of society. Historically, educators have taken a *deficit* approach to protecting students from such discrimination: identify (1a) as the correct form, and (1b) as incorrect - deficient, or flawed representation of "correct" (1a). More recently, linguists have pointed out that this approach is in fact ineffective - it does not help students acquire the desired forms (1a) and it increases their linguistic insecurity. Instead, linguists have pushed for a *difference* view, which does not see one or the other being an "error" or "mistake", but instead sees them as different forms from different, equally valid varieties. Practitioners of this approach may still encourage students to acquire the "standard" forms, but they try to achieve this goal in a more systematic and less stigmatizing way.

2.1. DEFICIT APPROACHES IN THE CLASSROOM. Deficit thinking has resulted in deficit-model programs in schools, with detrimental results for students. As Reaser et al. explain,

"While deficit-model programs have been rejected by linguists, deficit thinking persists in classrooms, and such thinking can have damaging effects on students who do not natively speak a standard dialect. Recent studies of classroom teachers have found that many classroom teachers enact policies or pedagogies that reflect deficit views of vernacular speakers (e.g. Dyson and Smitherman 2009; Godley, Carpenter & Werner, 2007). Surveys of teachers also find widespread deficit views (e.g., Blake & Cutler, 2003; Cross, DeVaney, & Jones, 2001). These and other recent studies have confirmed that these views are detrimental to students' learning and literacy (e.g., Dyson and Smitherman 2009; Fairbanks 1998; Godley, et al. 2007). When deficit views of language persist in school settings, they harm students who, given society's current language norms, are most in need of linguistically sensitive pedagogies." (Reaser et al. 2018:114).

Students who speak "nonstandard" dialects are more likely to feel out of place in a classroom setting than their "standard" speaking peers. For example, Dunstan & Jaeger (2015) studied the effects of negative language attitudes toward both White and African-American college students from rural Southern Appalachia who attended a large research institution in the urban South. They found that speakers of stigmatized "nonstandard" varieties can feel uncomfortable about their language to the point that they feel uncomfortable speaking up in class and feel like they have more barriers to overcome than other students. They also can feel that the way they speak can influence how others view them (Dunstan & Jaeger 2015:796).

This effect can be compounded by the fact that "nonstandard" dialect speakers have an additional burden of mainstream dialect acquisition. In his book on Second Dialect Acquisition, Siegel (2010:169-174) discusses a number of obstacles faced by Dialect two (D2) learners in

educational contexts where Dialect one (D1) is the dialect that students speak at home and in their communities and D2 is the “standard” dialect used in school. First, unlike native speakers of D2, D1 speakers have to learn how to read and write in a language they do not already know, including in content courses. Second, they are expected to do this without being given any special instruction. Third, they have to deal with constant correction when trying to express themselves in their D1 (usually denigrated as “incorrect” and not suitable for the classroom).

In addition to these obstacles, Siegel lays out three additional challenges faced by D1 speakers in the education system, including a lack of student awareness of differences between their native D1 and the target D2 in school, negative attitudes of teachers towards the D1, peer pressure and identity issues faced by students. First, many students, especially at younger ages, are not aware of differences between the dialect they speak and the “standard” target dialect in school (see Siegel 2010:172-174). If the students are not made aware of the differences between dialects, they may not recognize when they are not using target forms. If differing features between the D1 and D2 are not perceived or noticed, learning will not occur. This situation is exacerbated when teachers are not familiar with features of the students D1 either.

Second, given the power of Standard Language Ideology (Lippi-Green 2012), it is not surprising that many teachers come into the profession with negative attitudes regarding “nonstandard” dialects. Unfortunately, these attitudes can lead to bias in assessing the academic competence of students. Siegel reviews a number of studies that show that many teachers lack an understanding of dialect variation, and therefore make incorrect assessments of the academic proficiency of D1 speakers. These incorrect assessments lead to lower expectations of students (Cheshire 1982; Cecil 1988; Cross et al. 2001; Granger et al. 1977), and these lower expectations have in turn been shown to lead to lower performance results for students (Cheshire 1982:63; Ogbu 1978:133-135; Fairchild & Edwards-Evans 1990:78-80; Irvine 1990:43-61). Furthermore, Siegel adds that, “we have already seen that constant correction of the D1 makes some students retreat into silence, and denigration has the same effect. The result is that some children develop a negative self-image because of the rejection of their language, and by association, their culture, while others respond by rejecting the formal education system itself.” (Siegel 2010:170).

Finally, Siegel notes that peer pressure and identity issues can also serve as obstacles to classroom learning of a D2 (see also Reaser et al. 2017; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 2016). Although a student’s D1 may be looked down upon by the dominant group in a society, use of the D1 can help to define a student’s social identity as a member of their social group as opposed to the dominant group. Thus, the learning and adoption of the D2 can exact social costs on a student both in the classroom and in their communities. Siegel (2010:170-172) cites a number of illustrative examples from the literature that document the social stigmatization that can be experienced by D1 speakers that use the dominant D2. For example, Cheshire & Trudgill (1989:100) quote a student from Birmingham, England reporting that you don’t want to sound “posher than everyone else” or you’ll get picked on. Leong (2000: 25) reports that (in reference to Pidgin, a.k.a. Hawai’i Creole English) that several people say they find, “at times using Pidgin is necessary so they won’t be seen as someone who is *high makamaka* [a person who tries to act high and mighty].” In Australia, Hudson (1983:16) reports the story of an Aboriginal woman who spoke to a white woman in “standard” English while her friends nearby laughed at her for “speaking ‘high’ English,” a sign of snobbery.” Finally, Fordham (1998:209) notes that, “Black people who choose discourses that mimic those of Whites *while in predominantly Black contexts* may be marginalized by their communities.” (emphasis in original). These are but a few examples of the complex social situations that “nonstandard” dialect speakers must navigate when learning or

using the “standard” dialect. These conflicts can lead to students feeling that they have to choose between one dialect over the other.

To sum up, research has strongly shown that deficit pedagogy is at best ineffective and at worst harmful to students. Deficit approaches are unsuccessful because they offer no systematic approach to language differences (just “errors”), they do not allow the use of the D1 to help analyze the D2, they promote “error” correction that hinders student self-expression and participation, they make no efforts to promote awareness of dialects, and they treat dialectal forms negatively, decreasing motivation and self-esteem among D1 students. (Siegel 2010:202-218).

Despite the aforementioned obstacles, there are strategies that have been shown to be effective in teaching second dialects. In the next section, we will briefly summarize three of these strategies and their application to teaching public speaking.

2.2. DIFFERENCE APPROACHES IN THE CLASSROOM. Siegel (2010:202-218) outlines three successful difference approaches to teaching second dialects, *instrumental*, *accommodation*, and *awareness*. In this section we briefly review these three approaches. The *instrumental* approach encourages the use of the home dialect (D1) initially in order to promote literacy, in order to help students then transition to the D2, in a similar manner to transitional bilingual programs. This approach is best used when students share the same D1. Similarly, in the *accommodation* approach there is some acceptance of the use of the D1 in the classroom, but it is not used as a medium of instruction or language of study. This approach encourages students to express themselves even if they haven’t yet mastered the dialect of instruction. This approach can be used in classes with students from different linguistic backgrounds. Finally, in the *awareness* approach, the student’s D1 is treated as a resource that can be used for learning the D2 and for education in general, rather than an impediment. In this approach dialect awareness is promoted in the classroom. This can be done by comparing and contrasting the grammatical and pronunciation patterns of D1 and D2, learning about the socio-historical development of dialects studied, and showing the rule-governed status of all dialects. As with the accommodation approach, this approach can work in classes with students with mixed linguistic backgrounds.

There are numerous documented cases where each of these approaches have proved successful. Here we will focus on the accommodation and awareness approaches, which are the most germane for our present purposes. Siegel (2010: 206-208) reports that the accommodation approach has proved successful in contexts where the students’ D1 is African-American English. For example, in a study of students at the first grade level, Piestrup (1973) found that the most successful teachers in terms of reading scores were those who used both African-American English and “standard” English in the classroom, allowing students to express themselves freely, and the least successful were those who interrupted students to “correct” grammar and pronunciation. At the high school level, Campell (1994) reports results from an inner-city senior high school that allowed students to freely use D1 or D2 in the classroom and also had discussions of language variation in class. These results show an increase in student self-esteem and increased use of the D2. Siegel also documents the successes of awareness approaches Siegel (2010:210-218). Focusing again on cases from the US, a number of studies reported improvements in test scores for African-American English D1 speaking students who were instructed using awareness methods. These include decreases in the use of “nonstandard” features in the English writing of African-American English D1 university students (Taylor 1989), high scores on a writing proficiency tests (Hoover 1991) and improved test scores and retention rates for adult education learners (Schierloh 1991). Similar improvements have been reported for D1 Hawai’ian Creole

English speakers, with increases in oral language proficiency and skills (Actouka & Lai 1989; Afaga & Lai 1994).

To sum up, research has shown that difference approaches produce better educational student outcomes than deficit approaches for students whose D1 is not the “standard” D2. These approaches are more successful because they use the D1 as a resource for student learning rather than an impediment, they promote the ability to separate varieties and notice differences, they promote easier acquisition of literacy and academic skills by transferring D1 skills to the D2, they allow students to express themselves more easily in the classroom which fosters greater cognitive development, they lead to greater awareness of positive attitudes towards dialects among teachers, and increased motivation and self-esteem among students. Regarding these approaches, Siegel concludes,

“With regard to classroom [Second Dialect Acquisition], the evaluations of instrumental, accommodation and awareness approaches demonstrated that the use of the students’ D1 in the classroom had none of the detrimental effects predicted by educators or parents. On the contrary, the approaches in general led to higher scores in tests measuring reading, writing or oral skills in the standard D2 and in some cases to increases in overall academic achievement. Other benefits included greater interest and motivation, and higher rates of participation.” (Siegel 2010:218)

3. The Reach of Public Speaking vs. Linguistics and the Importance of Textbooks. While we have established that linguists are generally in agreement as to the superiority of the difference approaches, we must emphasize that these approaches are not always adopted. In this section, we return to the field of Communication Studies, and build the argument that the field, and its textbooks, deserve the attention of linguists.

3.1. PUBLIC SPEAKING VS. LINGUISTICS. While linguistics has grown considerably since the 1950s, it remains a relatively small academic field, with accordingly limited reach compared to other disciplines. For this reason, it is particularly important that we linguists do our best to ensure that the linguistic information that is being promulgated by other fields is up-to-date and accurate. As many as three times more students take public speaking courses than introductory linguistics courses in higher education. The most recent data available (from 1992), shows that while only 6% of undergraduates take a general linguistics course, 22% take a public speaking course (Adelman 2004). These numbers have doubtlessly changed over the past 30 years, but there is reason to believe that there is still a large gap between the two. One such reason is that there are simply far more Communication Studies departments in the US; according to the LSA (Linguistic Society of America 2018), there are currently 250 Linguistics departments or programs in the US, while The NCA reports that there are 813 undergraduate Communication Studies programs (National Communication Association 2017).

In addition, Moreale et al. report that in a 2004 survey of Communication departments, 79.4% reported that their “Basic Course” in Communication serves as a general education course at their institution (Morreale et al. 2016:344).² In their 2016 survey, the majority of responding schools (60.8%) reported that their Basic Course was public speaking, followed in second place by a hybrid course covering interpersonal communication, group communication and public

² Morreale et al. define the “Basic Course” as, “That communication course either required or recommended for a significant number of undergraduates; that course which the department has, or would recommend, as a requirement for all or most undergraduates.” (Morreale et al. 2016:341).

speaking in the course (27%). The rest (12.2%) were classified as “other,” meaning neither public speaking nor the hybrid course (Morreale et al. 2016:43). So, the vast majority of the Basic Courses (87.8%) include a public speaking component, and well over half (60.8%) focus entirely on public speaking. Finally, Morreale et al. report that students are required to purchase a commercially produced textbook 71.5% of the time at 2-year schools and 68.3% of the time at 4-year schools (Morreale et al. 2016:349).³ Seventy-eight different textbooks were reported to be used when teaching the basic course in the survey, but only ones that were mentioned five or more times in the survey were mentioned by name.

Given the large proportion of students who will take a public speaking course in the US and engage with public speaking textbooks as opposed to the much smaller proportion of students who will take an introductory linguistics course and engage with textbooks that communicate a difference message in their college careers, it is imperative that we work to influence the messages sent by the relevant material covered in public speaking courses to meet the minimum standards agreed upon in the field of Linguistics.⁴ Next we briefly discuss the influence and contents of textbooks.

3.2. THE INFLUENCE AND CONTENT OF TEXTBOOKS. In a study of diversity in images used in public speaking textbooks, Gullicks et al. (2005) note that students often view textbooks as authoritative sources of knowledge, and thus take information in textbooks as fact. In addition, they note that textbooks have long been used as a tool of “deculturalization,” referring to the description of “deculturalization” in Spring (2001) as being, “the continued process of reinforcing Anglo-American cultural values and beliefs in schools by attempting to eradicate the cultures of Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and immigrants from Ireland, Southern and Eastern Europe, and Asia.” (Gullicks et al. 2005: 248). It is clearly understood that what information appears in textbooks is often a political decision that is not always based on fact, and that textbooks are most often written from the outlook of the ruling class, with the viewpoints of groups that have less power marginalized (Apple & Christian-Smith 1991; De Castell 1989; Hickman & Porfilio 2012). Language and culture are inexorably tied together, so marginalization of certain language varieties certainly fits under the rubric of deculturalization.

Given the power and reach of textbooks, it is important to make sure that the information they promote/disseminate is both correct and helpful to the students and faculty they serve. To this end it is important to look at textbooks to determine whether or not the information they provide is current and whether or not the information reflects best pedagogical practices. In the forward to Hickman & Porfilio (2012), Catherine Lugg poses the following questions to educators regarding textbooks:

1. *How do the textbooks you assign in your classes marginalize historic ‘others’? Who is visible? Who is left invisible? What material is just flat out erroneous?*
2. *How do the projects (research papers, group projects and the like) similarly marginalize historic ‘others’? Who is visible? Who is left invisible?*
3. *What concrete steps can you take to readdress the political imbalances within your own curricular materials?* (Lugg 2012)

³ Current or previous editions of three of the textbooks we examine below were mentioned by reporting schools, either in the 2016 survey or the previous 2010 survey; namely, Lucas (2015), Jaffe (2016) and O’Hair et al. (2018).

⁴ According to the numbers provided by Morreale et al. (2016), an estimate that hundreds of thousands of students are assigned commercial public speaking textbooks every year would be conservative.

Keeping these important questions in mind, in the following section we present our study of current public speaking textbooks and their treatment of dialectal variation.

4. Public Speaking Textbook Study. This study measures the progress made toward adopting a difference approach to linguistic variation in public speaking textbooks since Wolfram (1970).

4.1 ARTIFACTS. The present study examines 17 public speaking textbooks, selected through three processes. First, we reached out to top education publishing houses and asked for copies of their most popular public speaking texts. Next, we referred to *Amazon.com*'s list of top selling public speaking texts. Finally, we included two open educational resources, as they would not be identified by either of the other two criteria.⁵

4.2 PROCEDURE. We analyzed the sample to assess whether each text took a difference, a deficit, or a mixed approach to language variation using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Quantitatively, we counted how many textbooks misclassified dialectal variation as errors. The qualitative analysis looked for other indications of a deficit approach to linguistic variation expressed through disparaging language about language difference, including terms describing dialectal variation such as: *misarticulation*, *mispronunciation*, *grammar errors*, *incorrect pronunciation*, *improper English*, *grammar mistakes*, or *articulation problems*, as well as warnings to, *use proper pronunciation* or *use grammar correctly*. For the difference approach, we looked for statements affirming the equality of all dialects/accents and their communicative validity. An illustrative example of difference vs. deficit language can be seen in a comparison of a discussion in Jaffe (2015) and a discussion in Griffin (2017) surrounding the pronunciation of the word "nuclear". In (3), Jaffe mentions two different pronunciations of "nuclear", making no prescriptive judgement on which is preferred. On the other hand, in (4) Griffin chooses one pronunciation as "correct" and the other "incorrect". Thus, in (3) Jaffe provides an example of *difference* language and in (4) Griffin provides an example of *deficit* language. The examples in (1) in the introduction also represent clear examples of what we classify as deficit language.

(3) "Pronunciation, the way you actually say words, includes articulation and stress. Articulation is the way you say individual sounds, such as *these* or *zese*, *bird* or *boird*. Some speakers reverse sounds, saying *aks* instead of *ask*, for example, or *nuculer* for *nuclear*." (Jaffe 2015:Ch. 14)

(4) "Pronunciation and articulation may seem similar, but pronunciation refers to how correctly a word is said, whereas articulation refers to how clearly a word is said. For example, saying the word nuclear as "*nu-cle-ar*" (correct) rather than "*nu-cu-lar*" (incorrect) has to do with pronunciation, and mumbling either pronunciation rather than speaking it clearly has to do with articulation." (Griffin 2017:Ch. 10)

4.3. RESULTS. Of the 17 textbooks surveyed, four (24%) made no mention of accent or dialect. Of the remaining 13 (76%), only one (6%) made exclusive use of difference language when discussing linguistic variation, while five (29%) made exclusive use of deficit language, and seven (41%) used both difference and deficit language, often in different sections of the book. These results are summarized below in Table 1.

⁵ The textbooks we examined are Barton et al. (2018), Beebe & Beebe (2018), Coopman & Lull (2014), Ford-Brown (2017), Gregory (2018), Griffin (2017), Gunn (2018), Jaffe (2015), Keith & Lundberg (2019), Lucas (2016), Nelson et al. (2013), O'Hair et al. (2019), The Public Speaking Project (2001), Rothwell (2016), Sprague et al. (2018), Valenzano & Braden (2016) and Wrench et al. (2016).

4.3.1. EXAMPLES OF DEFICIT LANGUAGE. In this section, we discuss examples and patterns of deficit language found in both those texts that make exclusive use of the deficit language and those that use both difference and deficit language (12 texts in total, or 71%). Every textbook in this category misclassified dialectal variation as an error or mistake. We take this kind of mislabeling to be an example of a deficit language being used to characterize linguistic variation. A valid word or phrase from another dialect of English should not be considered a speech or pronunciation error, because doing so is indicative of negative attitudes toward language variation.

Discussion of dialect and/or accent	76%
Exclusive use of deficit language	29%
Exclusive use of difference language	6%
Mix of difference and deficit language	41%

Table 1. Results of Survey

For example, when a student who pronounces *ask* as [æks] reads that their pronunciation is an *error* or a *mistake*, she is hearing that the speech of her parents, grandparents and her community is inadequate. Many of the textbooks list the same words as examples of pronunciation errors, but it does not seem to be for any systematic reason. For example, “nuclear” is discussed in six of the textbooks, likely because it was made famous by President George W. Bush’s pronunciation as [nʌkjələ]. The variation of ‘ask’ as [æks] is also identified as “incorrect” in six textbooks, likely due to the high level of stigma associated with it. Rothwell (2016) is the only author to cite a source for the selection of “errors”: a page called “100 Most Often Mispronounced Words and Phrases in English” on *yourdictionary.com* (“100 Most often Mispronounced...” n.d.). This website, however, offers no information about how this list was assembled, and seems similarly arbitrary. In fact, in the entry for “ask”/[æks], the website tells us to ignore information from a linguist and trust the non-specified author of the list instead: “This mispronunciation has been around for so long (over 1,000 years) that linguist Mark Aronoff thinks we should cherish it as a part of our linguistic heritage. Most of us would give the axe to ‘aks.’” In another entry, we are told that the correct pronunciation of ‘zoo’ should be [zo] (rhyming with ‘go’). Yet another tells us to say “cardsharp” instead of “card shark.” To put it mildly, this is not a serious list. In his defense, at least Rothwell (2016) provided the source of the “errors” he presents in his textbook, as unreliable of a source that it happens to be. None of the other textbooks mentioned where the information on “errors” they seek to correct came from. The irony of public speaking textbooks, which go on at length about the importance of using reliable sources for student speeches, presenting in most cases completely unsourced information is rich indeed.

In Tables 2 and 3, we provide additional examples from (Gregory 2018), showing the “correct” and “incorrect” pronunciations in the transcription system used in the text. In the final column, we list American English dialects where this so-called “incorrect” pronunciation is found. Again, no source of information is cited, and no systematic presentation of the data is provided in the text beyond “correct” and “incorrect” forms in a list. It is notable that all of the examples of “incorrect” pronunciation in Table 2 represent valid pronunciations from dialects of US English. In other words, these forms exemplify dialectal variation, not “errors.” Note also that in the case of *environment*, a reasonable interpretation of the “incorrect” pronunciation

transcription is in fact considered a “standard” pronunciation by Mirriam-Webster.com. Indeed, a quick check of various other online dictionaries reveals a great deal of inconsistency in the prescribed pronunciation of *environment*.

Only two (12%) of the textbooks surveyed discuss syntactic “errors,” with Table 3 listing a selection of “mistakes” from Gregory (2018). Again, the “mistakes” are all common forms in dialects of US English, which we list in the third column, and no reference to a source of the list information is provided.⁶

Word	“Incorrect” Pronunciation	“Correct” Pronunciation	Dialects where the feature appears
across	uh-crost	uh-cross	Appalachian and other rural varieties (Reaser et al. 2017)
chef	tchef	shef	Some Latino English speakers and English language learners (Reaser et al. 2017)
environment	en-vire-uh-ment	en-vi-run-ment	Various varieties of English
library	li-berry	li-brar-ee	Southern-based varieties (Reaser et al. 2017:271)
recognize	reck-uh-nize	rec-og-nize	Various American dialects (Mencken 1919)

Table 2. A selection of “Common Pronunciation Mistakes” from Gregory (2018:242)

“Incorrect”	“Correct”	Dialects where the feature appears (Reaser et al. 2017)
He don’t	He doesn’t	Majority of US vernaculars
Between you and I	Between you and me	Most US vernaculars
I had went	I had gone	Majority of US vernaculars in North & South
hissself	himself	Most US vernaculars
She ain’t here	She isn’t here	Most US vernaculars
He be late	He is late	African-American English

Table 3. A selection of “Common Grammar Mistakes” from Gregory (2018:242)

4.3.2. AN EXAMPLE OF DIFFERENCE LANGUAGE. The sole textbook we found to make exclusive use of the difference approach to language variation was *Public Speaking: Concepts and Skills for a Diverse Society* (Jaffe 2015). In it, she discusses language variation and acknowledges linguistic discrimination stemming from that difference. However, instead of advising the reader to assume a “standard” dialect in public speech, she advocates for acceptance of linguistic diversity,

⁶ Note that in Table 3, Gregory’s “correction” of “He be late” is a mistranslation. In AAE habitual *be* is an aspectual marker denoting an activity that takes place habitually (see Reaser et al. 2017:66; Green 2002:47-52). Thus, a more accurate translation into “standard” English would be “He is always/habitually late.” This is yet another example of a lack of understanding of dialectal variation displayed in many public speaking textbooks.

as seen in the excerpt in (5). While this discussion is limited in scope, it succeeds where the others in our survey have failed: it recognizes and places value on linguistic diversity.

- (5) “In a multilingual world and in pluralistic classrooms and workplaces, accents are everywhere, and as travel, immigration, and technology continue to shrink the world, you’ll hear even more in the future. Unfortunately, we tend to judge one another on the basis of accents that indicate social class, ethnic group membership, or status as a nonnative speaker of English; however, *Diversity in Practice: Culture and Delivery* presents a good argument for affirming a variety of accents.” (Jaffe 2015: Ch.14-4a)

4.3.3. TEXTBOOKS WITH BOTH DIFFERENCE AND DEFICIT LANGUAGE. As noted above, 41% of textbooks surveyed show examples of both difference & deficit language within the same textbook. For example, in one passage Sprague et al. (2018) discuss accent as adding charm and personality to one’s speech (6). However, soon after they warn that use of dialectal variants such as “axe” for “ask,” or “warsh” for “wash” will affect how listeners will judge you (7). Of course, given the strength of Standard Language Ideology, this might be true in some cases, but there is no discussion of these types of judgements being baseless. In another textbook, both difference and deficit language is used in the same sentence (8).

- (6) “There is no need to eliminate or hide your accent. Your manner of speaking is part of your personality. The differences can add interest and charm to your presentation.” (Sprague et al. 2018:Ch. 25)
- (7) “If, however, a person says “warsh” instead of “wash” or “ax” instead of “ask,” many listeners will consider this deficient and draw conscious or subconscious conclusions about the speaker’s educational level, competence, and intelligence.” (Sprague et al. 2018:Ch. 25)
- (8) “...dialects are regionally accepted errors of articulation and/or pronunciation, and one is not any better or more accurate than another.” (Valenzano & Braden 2016:92)

Note that to call a pronunciation form an “error” clearly marks it as inferior, and contradicts the statement that “one is not any better or more accurate than another.” The existence of statements affirming the value of linguistic diversity in 41% of our textbooks suggests that the authors do not understand the contradiction between statements like (6) and (7), or within (8).

In this section, we have discussed the results of our survey of public speaking textbooks. We have seen that 71% use deficit language to discuss linguistic variation. In addition, the repeated contradictory language we found in the sample suggests that there is true confusion in the field of Communication Studies as to what constitutes a speech error and whether “nonstandard” dialects are truly valid linguistic variants.

5. Conclusion. This study has found that many current public speaking textbooks take a deficit approach to language variation. Unfortunately, current research has shown that deficit approaches are ineffective in helping students acquire “standard” varieties and can cause real harm to students. We strongly recommend that deficit language be removed from these textbooks and be replaced with discussions that raise awareness of linguistic variation and the equal status of all varieties. We believe that it is our responsibility as linguists to raise awareness of this problem with our colleagues in Communication and work for a change in approach towards linguistic variation. We are currently reaching out to out to colleagues in our institutions and at national

conferences to try and spread the word. We urge other linguists to become aware of how linguistic variation is being discussed in neighboring disciplines and to become active in trying to effect change where needed, in the spirit of Charity (2008). Returning to the questions about textbooks posed by Lugg (2012) in section 3.2, many current public speaking textbooks are marginalizing students and providing erroneous information. Our work to redress the problem continues.

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