Barbarians at the Gate

Barbarians at the Gate:
Studies in Language Attitudes

Edited by

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

For our families and friends,
and especially for Liam Cường Roberts,
whose arrival was like sudden grace

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INTRODUCTION

PATRICIA DONAHER

The study of language attitudes is about investigating the variety of beliefs expressed about the nature of language and its diverse usages, how these attitudes came to exist (and persist), and how these attitudes shape social action and policy. Language attitude studies have illuminated our understanding of racial issues, social and economic stratification, cultural stereotypes, educational issues, folk linguistics, and, more recently, popular culture. Such studies often take place in classrooms, on the streets of cities and towns, and on the numerous by-ways in between the urban and the rural; however, any venue in which speech or writing occurs is a good place to study language attitudes.

In just the last fifty years, each decade has produced many noteworthy studies into language attitudes, a few of which are noted here as a prelude to the work in this volume. In the 1960s, Wallace E. Lambert, H. Frankel, and R. Richard Tucker developed the matched guise technique to measure language attitudes as a reflection of prejudice for racial and social groups (1966). William Labov's work in the 1960s and 1970s provided additional evidence that dialectal differences among native speakers of the same language, like the varying pronunciation patterns found in New York City, produced unconscious social and economic prejudices (1966). In 1973, Roger W. Shuy and Ralph W. Fasold published *Language Attitudes: Current Trends and Prospects*, a ground-breaking collection of essays that brought together scholars from a number of fields to present their research on how people felt about their own language and the language of others. In 1982, Ellen Bouchard Ryan and Howard Giles edited a new collection of research, *Attitudes Towards Language Variation: Social and Applied Concepts*, derived from large quantitative studies using either matched-guise approaches or large-scale usage surveys. During the '90s, Dennis Preston (1989, 1999), branched off into the area of folk linguistics, and Jean Aitchison (1991) published her seminal book, *Language Change: Progress or Decay?*, which addressed a number of prevalent attitudes about the supposed deterioration of language. Colin Baker published *Attitudes and Language* in 1992, a text which examined where attitudinal

research has been and assessed where it should go next, and in 1998, Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill's *Language Myths* analyzed fundamental language principles in light of the general, nonspecialist's perceptions of language, from acquisition to usage to language policy. In this new millennium, Lynda Mugglestone chronicled the history of attitudes towards the varieties of British English through the advent and aftermath of Received Pronunciation in *"Talking Proper": The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (2003).

These studies are still the primary basis for attitudinal research in linguistics today; however, the field needs more practitioners. In a personal email, Roger W. Shuy (2007) noted that

> Ever since the early seventies, I've thought that this was a crucial area for teachers and students, among others, to learn more about. I once even taught a course called Language Attitudes in Georgetown's linguistics department. We stirred up some interest but after only a small spurt, the field was more or less abandoned by linguists.

Indeed, recent, best-selling publications like Lynn Truss' book, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: A Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (2003), Robert Hartwell Fiske's *The Dictionary of Disagreeable English* (2003), and John McWhorter's *Doing Our Own Thing: The Degradation of Language and Music and Why We Should, Like, Care* (2006) suggest an on-going need for research into language attitudes and the consequences of creating language policy without regard for social, cultural, or economic factors—let alone for human dignity. In fact, the prejudices which have always been a component of culture and which have been transformed into language stigmas by the socializing influence of these kind of mass-produced publications should be of serious concern to everyone—not just linguists, students of language, and teachers of speech and writing. It is too easy to forget—until perchance we re-read our Geneva Smitherman (1977)—that all language acts are also political acts and that *linguism*, language discrimination, is a form of legalized discrimination.

This volume attempts to take up some of the research where previous texts have left off, to introduce new dimensions to the study of language attitudes (particularly in the area of popular culture), to provide examples of ways in which the study of language attitudes can inform and shape our understanding of the point and purpose of language diversity, and to do just a little bit of politicizing and legitimizing. James Milroy (2001) argued convincingly that legitimization comes in part from "the very act of carrying out and publishing the relevant research" on language attitudes; although, he also contended that "of course, this is not necessarily what is

consciously intended" (p. 552). Be forewarned: this is, indeed, what is consciously intended by the authors of this work.

This work is divided into four sections, each representing an intersection of language attitudes research: Authority, Affiliation, Authenticity, and Accommodation. In Section 1: Authority, the authors dissect the authoritative viewpoints of educators and writers of grammar guides. Patricia Donaher examines the usefulness of language attitude surveys in establishing current beliefs about usage. She presents the results of her own attitudinal survey of the participants of one National Writing Project summer institute for K-16 teachers in order to identify a number of current teachers' attitudes about language and to analyze the alignment of those attitudes with the educators' teaching writing practices. Deborah Schaffer surveys twelve mass-market grammar guides published over two time periods, the 1970s-1980s and the 1990s-2000s, for their authors' individual and collective attitudes towards maintaining correctness in English. Her research quantifies the similarities and differences between the two generations of handbooks, including the range of topics covered, their authors' respective attitudes towards descriptivism, and the use of humor, especially word play. In her article, Cynthia Jenéy discusses the prevalent attitudes of self-described technorhetoricians towards online language, as observed in an archived email discussion list of post-secondary composition teachers who are also tech-savvy. Jenéy's review of postings to the TechRhet listserv over four sample periods from 2000-2008 also measures the wired writing professors' responses to public complaints that technology has ruined language.

In Section 2: Affiliation, the researchers examine how language and place intertwine to create a sense of self and other. Susan Tamasi focuses on the regional aspect of linguistic perceptions by having her study participants create dialect boundaries using a pile sort method rather than the traditional map methodology. Her study of thirty Georgia and thirty New Jersey respondents is a cognitively-based perceptual study which yields information about folk categorization, variation in language, and place that is not necessarily spatially constrained. Similarly, in her article, Agnès C. M. Ragone uses a close-reading of two songs to discuss the ways in which the French Rap group IAM creates a multinational identity via its lexical innovations and its manipulation of French prosody and phonology. Ragone also investigates the perceived intrusion of English on French Rap in order to determine the IAM's spatial and linguistic roots.

The authors in Section 3: Authenticity reflect on how language use in popular mediums serves to create a sense of legitimacy. Alena Horn analyzes the distribution of present participial suffix –*in'*/–*ing* and copula

variation in Loretta Lynn's 2002 co-written autobiography in comparison
to her earlier, also co-written, autobiography and Lynn's lyrics to
determine if there has been an increase in the acceptability of informal
language in written mediums. Horn also examines whether these style
shifts are indicative of an authorial conflict between a desired authentic
representation of speech and written language norms. Amie A. Doughty
investigates a similar conflict with reader criticisms of the *Junie B. Jones*
series by Barbara Park. In her article, Doughty applies the theory of
markedness to the series as a way of understanding the importance of
narrative technique in creating realistic characterization. Lastly, in this
section, Milford A. Jeremiah studies the dialogue heard in a reality
television courtroom series, *Judge Mathis*, from the perspective of
linguistic authenticity, with linguistic variation being influenced by the
background of the adjudicate, the case type, and the age, race, and gender
of the defendants.

In Section 4: Accommodation, the authors examine how and why
speakers modify speech patterns in response to situation. James G.
Mitchell analyzes a scene from an episode on the CBS sitcom *How I Met
Your Mother* in the context of other television portrayals of second-
language (L2) speakers. Mitchell's analysis calls into question identity,
what it means to be an insider versus an outsider, and how that status
determines a listener's willing or unwilling accommodation of the L2
speaker. Accent shifts also highlight the ways in which language is
connected to issues of identity, race, ethnicity, and culture. In her article,
Constance M. Ruzich explores the pragmatics of communications and the
ways in which we construct and interpret meanings from subtle variations
in pronunciation. Analyzing a lengthy, online threaded discussion, Ruzich
explores the possibility that there may be no such thing as a neutral
pronunciation choice. Finally, Seth R. Katz analyzes linguistic politeness
theories in relation to speakers' conflicting attitudes towards correctness.
Katz's hypothesis is that conversational participants need to match each
other's diction, vocabulary, and grammar in order to maintain face, as well
as a modicum of politeness.

As these articles affirm, the study of language attitudes is still
germane. Further, in order for public perceptions of language to change
and become commensurate with language fact, the continued study and
publication of research on language attitudes is essential. Yet, attitudinal
researches' focus must change in tenor, as well. The linguists' tendency to
describe rather than prescribe, while admirable in its supposed neutrality,
has exacerbated the schism that exists between the grammarian and the
linguist. Further, as is true in politics, the soft voice of the liberal

perspective is often overshadowed by the strident voice of the conservative. We have only to look at the current best-sellers' lists to see which side of the describe/prescribe debate prevails in the press. Satirically or in the guise of helpfulness—or even nostalgia, like *Sister Bernadette's Barking Dog* (Florey, 2006)—these popular texts negate the public's ability to construct meaningful discourse if the all-important possessive apostrophe is omitted or the writer cannot mark the parts of speech. Linguists need to ban together to turn the tide against a system that continually undermines the public's confidence in its ability to communicate effectively without stringent guidelines. Language is not a product that needs to be perfected or upgraded for its users like the standardization of computer software; instead, its users need lessons in adaptability in order to merge seamlessly with the many speech communities they encounter.

Academic research alone, however, can do little to legitimize particular usages, and for this reason, I propose that more linguists foray out from the ivory tower now and again and become guerrillas for language diversity and tolerance. Join forces to promote dialect acceptability. Work to avoid polarization as if matters of language were mathematical problems with finite solutions or, worse, moral issues in which there are right and wrong answers. This either/or mentality is unconsciously supported by even our own discussions of dialects as *standard* and *nonstandard*. To label one as standard, when what we mean is that it is the lingua franca of the power group, we undermine the validity of the other language varieties under discussion. This may seem a small matter; however, remember how important the findings of sociolinguistics were in highlighting the devastating effect on female aspirations and the perpetuation of gender bias through the seemingly innocuous employment of male signifiers like *he* or *his* to talk about mixed gender groups.

Polarizations, like standard and nonstandard, have regularly been used in the legitimate study of language variety differences without much of an examination of the associated social consequences of these supposedly neutral terms. However, as Milroy (2001) noted, once we designate a language as standard, it becomes the *unmarked* variant by which we study the nonstandard or *marked* variant. In thus labeling the differences, we examine the nonstandard language in terms of what it is missing, as if this somehow makes it a lesser version of the original. For this reason, I suggest that we begin to use terms like *perceived error* to designate usages the general public or grammarians designate simply as error so as to magnify that this is an attitude of perception, not of language error. I would suggest that we be more precise in our terminology when

discussing language varieties. These varieties are not 'standard' and 'nonstandard'; they have names, often as a result of geographical considerations, but also because of cultural associations. So, for example, we should say *Southern American English* (SAE), *African American Vernacular English* (AAVE), *Received Pronunciation* (RP), or *Estuary English*. Instead of *Standard American English*, we might try *Network* or *Broadcast American English* as a reflection of the predomination of this form in oral media, as well as in public and business discourse. If we lack precise names, then we should aim to create a representative term for the language variety being discussed, but which attempts to avoid stigmatizing. The power of language to construct and, more importantly to re-construct, reality must be a lesson that we take to heart as we actively crusade against polarizations that lead to language bias.

Until true understanding is attained, the mass media will remain the bully-pulpit for language conformity. The linguist's job must be to inform the public—not just other academics—about nature of language and how our attitudes toward it shape our thoughts and actions.

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I. AUTHORITY

Even if you do learn to speak correct English, whom are you going to
speak it to?
—Clarence Darrow (1857 – 1938)

The problem with defending the purity of the English language is that
English is about as pure as a cribhouse whore. We don't just borrow words;
on occasion, English has pursued other languages down alleyways to beat
them unconscious and rifle their pockets for new vocabulary.
—James Nicoll (1961-)

Experts disagree over correctness in
English even more than everybody else. And they do it louder, too.
—Dennis Baron (1944-)

CHAPTER ONE

THE LINGUIST'S DILEMMA:
USAGE SURVEYS, TEACHER ATTITUDES,
AND THE QUESTION OF ACCEPTABILITY

PATRICIA DONAHER

Abstract: Patricia Donaher's article provides an overview of Sterling Leonard's (1932) and Albert Marckwardt's (1932) work with the National Council of Teachers of English, examines the usefulness of language attitude surveys in establishing current beliefs about usage, and presents the results of her attitudinal survey of participants of one National Writing Project summer institute for K-16 teachers. Like Leonard's original study, her 2007 study attempts to identify a number of current teachers' attitudes about language and the alignment of these attitudes with the educators' teaching writing practices. The study also reflects upon the efficacy of consciousness-raising educational forums for altering language attitudes. The institute teachers exhibited a theoretical tolerance for a number of perceived errors that can occur in student writing. Experienced Teacher-Consultants (those who had taken previous summer institutes) were not significantly any more or less tolerant of survey items than newcomers to the institute. Most institute participants still held strong positions against dialectal forms, but were moderately inclined to accept a range of other deviations from those usages prescribed in grammar guides. Providing the teachers with the provenance and relevant historical precedence for the survey items did not appear to dissuade the participants from viewing dialect as 'error.' The moderate level of acceptance of other deviant forms in conjunction with the participants' general view of the importance of balancing process and product in the teaching and grading of student writing suggests that these teachers are amenable to a grammar-in-context approach to writing.

"I agree that the sentiment of your poem is correct," I said. "But I cannot vouch for the grammar."

"If I get the sense right," answered Simple, "the grammar can take care of itself. There are plenty of Jim Crows who speak grammar, but do evil. . . . I figure it is better to do right than to write right, is it not?"
—Langston Hughes, in dialogue with his alter-ego, Jesse B. Simple

We cannot force the standards of a small, select coterie upon the great mass of students in our schools.
—Ruth Mary Weeks, Forward to *Current English Usage*

Introduction

This study began when a teacher in my department told me of going to hear Dennis Fritz, author of *Journey Toward Justice* (2006), give a talk about how modern DNA testing overturned his wrongful imprisonment for rape and murder. During the conversation, my colleague said something to the effect that Fritz had had a really interesting story to tell, but that the colleague had been distracted by the number of "verbal faux pas"— especially by the number of double negatives used by the speaker. This encounter, like many others I've had with fellow teachers, got me thinking again about how teachers view perceived errors in student speech and writing and whether common complaints about student work are more about venting frustration than about actual teaching practices.

This study is preliminary and reflects just one small point in my on-going research into the language attitudes of teachers, particularly of teachers associated with the programs of the National Writing Project (NWP) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). It attempts to identify a number of current teachers' attitudes about language and their alignment with teaching practices by surveying the participants at one summer institute sponsored by the NWP. The study also reflects upon the efficacy of consciousness-raising educational forums for altering language attitudes.

Usage Surveys and Measuring Teachers' Language Attitudes

While discussions of the history of language attitudes research focus mostly on the research done from the 1960s through the 1990s,[1] attitudinal research was originally conducted via usage surveys and studies of acceptability. In the 1932 *Current English Usage* survey, published by the National Council of Teachers of English, Sterling Leonard set out to

discover whether antiquated language attitudes of the previous century towards written and spoken discourse continued to hold sway in the 20th century. The NCTE was the logical choice for study sponsor since the organization began as a task force in 1911 "out of protest against overly-specific college entrance requirements and the effects they were having on high school English education" (NCTE website).

Like most linguists of the time, Leonard (1932) was convinced that the declarations of usage dictionaries and handbooks were "based on traditional pronouncements of dubious value" (p. 95). Leonard states his purpose as follows:

> This study undertakes, within its limits and on the basis of replies to the questionary, to do three things: first, to show what is the trend of current usage and whether it coincides with the rules taught in our schools; second, to bring to light diversity in usage, so that something may, if possible, be done to control it; and third, to point out some of the general criteria referred to by the judges in making their decisions. (p. 4)

Although his second aim may be misconstrued as the usual goal of a grammarian to "control" language, Leonard's concept of control falls more in line with modern composition pedagogy: overtly teach students about speech communities such that they might modify their speech and writing based upon an awareness of audience.[2] Further, he hoped that his study would show that "allowable usage is based on the actual practice of cultivated people rather than on rules of syntax or logic" (p. 95). To test his belief, Leonard surveyed 229 individuals, from linguists to teachers, from journalists to business leaders, on 230 expressions representative of a variety of previously contested or evolving forms. Respondents were to rate each item in one of four ways:

1. Formally correct English, appropriate chiefly for serious and important occasions, whether in speech or writing. . . .
2. Fully acceptable English for informal conversation, correspondence, and all other writing of well-bred ease. . . .
3. Commercial, foreign, scientific, or other technical uses. . . .
4. Popular or illiterate speech, not used by persons who wish to pass as cultivated, save to represent uneducated speech, or to be jocose; here taken to include slang or argot, and dialect forms not admissible to the standard or cultivated area. . . . (pp. 96-97)[3]

The conclusion of Leonard's (1932) study is the cornerstone on which much contemporary composition theory rests with regard to issues of punctuation:

Perhaps the clearest implication of this study is that the way to learn to punctuate is to write with a real audience in mind and to test the effect of what has been written on that audience. Pupils can, if carefully directed, find for themselves where their compositions break down because of failure to separate sentences, or because of punctuating fragments as sentences, or because of the omission of some fundamental mark needed for clarity. Once this skill has been established, punctuation should be a live matter to them, and solid agreed procedure can be summed up in a few basic principles and simple rules. (p. 85)

Yet, Leonard's results, and the results obtained by other field researchers in the years since 1932, show that it is primarily linguists and composition theorists who remain centrally committed to an audience-based standard in which some diversity in speech and writing will occur and even be embraced. Other kinds of public school and university teachers, however, largely ignored or sometimes ridiculed these studies, such that Albert Marckwardt was wont to complain in another NCTE publication, *Language and Language Learning* (1968): "instead of liberating the child as native speaker and writer of his own language, the schools have attempted to make him over according to some stultifying concept of 'correctness'" (p. 56). Marckwardt's own early study, conducted with Fred G. Walcott, *Facts about Current English Usage* (1938), attempted to validate Leonard's study via a closer examination of Leonard's survey items, concluding that "the teacher is not only safe in accepting the so-called 'established' usages of the Leonard report, but there are seven chances out of eight that a 'disputable' item is wholly current in standard English as well" and, further, that the teacher's "censure of these expressions cannot be on the basis that they are not to be found at present on the pages of reputable writers or in the mouths of cultivated speakers" (p. 50).

Also following Leonard's lead, Charles Carpenter Fries (1940) attempted a scientific study of current American usage, as it was derived from its historical, regional, literary, and social bases (*American English Grammar*, pp. 9-10), and during the following two decades, the *Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage* (1957), *Current American Usage* (1962), and even the controversial *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1961) served, in Marckwardt's mind, as additional, "reliable syntheses of the research on usage which had been carried on during the preceding two decades" (*Language and Language Learning*, 1968, pp. 11-12). This continuing research, however, was little noted by teachers, and Marckwardt reports, "I know of few teachers, for example, who ever consult the tabulated summary sheets of the Leonard study . . . yet those

tables are very often germane and can throw considerable light on the brief summaries in the body of the report" (*Language and Language Learning*, 1968, p. 13).

These subsequent researchers continued to find linguistic conservatism in both the broader public and, most importantly, among influential individuals, like teachers and journalists. Some researchers, like Marckwardt, saw a connection between this conservatism and what he termed the "linguistic insecurity" of the general population as a specific result of the industrial revolution that created a fast-rising middle class ("Issues in Standard English," 1974, p. 22). Marckwardt also routinely brought to light the efforts of earlier researchers to counter the conservatism of the early prescriptivists, like T. R. Lounsbury's 1904 *The Standard of Pronunciation in English*, J. Leslie Hall's 1917 *English Usage*, and the Preface to the second edition (1934) of *Webster's New International Dictionary*, in which "the feasibility and the existence of a single, infallible, and permanent standard" was deemed impossible (*Language and Language Learning*, 1968, pp. 9-10). In the 1970s, Frederick Williams and his colleagues also published a number of investigations into the language attitudes of teachers, concluding that "there was much evidence to suggest that linguistic attitudes play a significant role in the kinds of intervention strategies and practices developed by educational planners" (1976, p. ix). Despite this extensive attitudinal research, Marckwardt and J. L. Dillard (1980) concluded in *American English* that while

> Some changes may have been made, . . . the prescriptive attitude, in one guise or another, lives on in our school systems and in handbooks of usage. . . . Consequently, many Americans, especially those who are socially mobile, lack confidence and assurance of the essential aptness and correctness of their speech. (pp. 154-155)

At the same time, the ancillary flowering of the field of composition studies led several researchers, as well as the NCTE and the NWP, to focus more and more on bridging the gap between what linguists and composition theorists know is true of language and what teachers in the field believe, faithfully, about writing—one expression of language—and how it should be taught (cf. David Bartholomae, 1980; Lisa Ede & Andrea A. Lunsford, 1984; Robert J. Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford, 1988; Mike Rose, 1989; Paulo Freire, 1990; and Kenneth Bruffee, 1993, among innumerable others). Teachers, composition theorist Mina P. Shaughnessy (1977) asserted, are "for many reasons . . . inclined to exaggerate the seriousness of error" (p. 120) and to perpetuate the linguistic insecurity

described by Marckwardt. Shaughnessy has noted that as the "custodians" of cultured usages, many teachers put the "emphasis upon propriety in the interest not of communication but of status" and that this focus on correctness "has narrowed and debased the teaching of writing" (p. 120). Shaughnessy's detailed study, *Errors & Expectations*, is a convergence of the linguist's quantification of teacher language attitudes and the affirmation of the composition theorist's contextualized language pedagogy which seeks to balance the importance of process and product in the teaching of writing.

The NWP, which this study focuses on, and the NCTE have convincingly and forcefully advocated a process pedagogy[4] over a current-traditional[5] one in the teaching of writing since at least the 1970s; indeed, their advocacy began even earlier, as the NCTE was the original disseminator of several early studies beyond those discussed here, including Roger W. Shuy's *Social Dialects and Language Learning* (1964).[6] The NWP is closely allied with the NCTE, and the NWP and NCTE overlap their annual conventions so that the two groups can offer teachers a wide range of workshops and panel sessions on all aspects of English studies. The NWP summarizes what the various writing project sites do as "improving the teaching of writing and improving the use of writing across the disciplines by offering high-quality professional development programs for educators in their service areas, at all grade levels, K–16 and across the curriculum" (Website, 2008). Among others, the NWP specifies the following as "Core Principles" of its instructional paradigm:

> ➢ Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing. Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically.
> ➢ There is no single right approach to teaching writing; however, some practices prove to be more effective than others. A reflective and informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop comprehensive writing programs. (NWP Website, 2008)

Harvey Daniels and Steven Zemelman (1985) outline their experiences with the Illinois Writing Project (IWP) as typical of the philosophical and practical aims of the larger NWP. In *A Writing Project: Training Teachers of Composition from Kindergarten to College*, Daniels and Zemelman include a chapter specifically on the "Content vs.

Correctness" debate in order to show how dramatically the writing project's programs can change a teacher's focus when grading student work. Using an in-class essay by a high school freshman as a discussion tool, the authors described the ways in which some 2500 teachers responded to the piece of writing over the 12 years the IWP had utilized it in their teacher workshops. The assignment, "The Five Dollars," was written by a student who uses Black English Vernacular (BEV), including lines like, "I saw my mother bag on the drawer," but it is also the personal essay of a ninth-grade boy, whose first writing assignment was to "*Write a story about the last time you cried*" (pp. 136-137). According to Daniels and Zemelman, the piece "dramatizes the fact that, in order to respond helpfully to any student's written work, teachers need to understand their students' background, culture, dialect, experience, values, and personalities—as well as the usual assortment of academic criteria" (p. 139). The teaching of writing is, then, not about correcting errors, but about connecting with our students over the making of meaning. The NWP continues to provide teachers from all disciplines the tools, via its workshops and institutes, to meet this goal.

Research Questions

Thinking about the helpful intersection of linguistics and composition theory in shaping a pedagogy of writing, I designed this study to gauge the following:

1) How prevalent among the surveyed teachers were some of the attitudes measured in Leonard's original study and the follow-up studies referenced? Had the goals of the NWP (and by its affiliation, the NCTE) been achieved to the extent that the teachers in the study exhibited a general tolerance for deviations from the rules of Standard English in grading student writing?

2) Do the teachers studied make 'exceptions' for or allow for differences in usage and syntax resulting from regional or dialect differences?

3) If the surveyed teachers were provided with additional information about language history, linguistic principles, sociolinguistics, and composition theory, would it perceptibly alter their language attitudes? Or is a more comprehensive language curriculum still to be advocated, as suggested by the editors of *What Teachers Need to Know About Language* (Carolyn Temple Adger, Catherine E. Snow, & Donna Christian, 2002)?

The Study Group

I gathered the data on the attitudes of certified, experienced teachers from a number of grade levels in Northwest Missouri. The study group consisted of my 19 fellow participants in the 2007 Prairie Lands Writing Project Summer Invitational Institute, an educational opportunity for regional teachers, offered through the Prairie Lands Writing Project (PLWP) at Missouri Western State University. Of the 19 survey participants, two taught kindergarten, five taught elementary school, four taught middle school, four taught high school, and four taught at the college level. In addition to English, writing, and reading instructors, three participants taught subject areas other than language arts: high school French and Spanish, elementary school math and science, and elementary school art. The PLWP institute begins with three preliminary Saturday meetings in the spring before the July institute, and the institute itself runs a total of four weeks, four days a week, 6 hours a day.

PLWP is the Northwest Missouri site for the National Writing Project; all NWP sites conduct an annual summer institute for area teachers. Institute participants must have completed at least one year of classroom teaching in any discipline before applying for an institute. The PLWP Invitationals grant either graduate credit for the participants or provide a small stipend. Six of the participants of the 2007 PLWP Invitational had completed several earlier institutes and were acting as either co-directors or facilitators for this institute; one teacher had completed the institute the previous summer and was returning for a second time; the other 12 participants, plus myself, were taking the institute for the first time. Although I was a participant in this institute (and a NWP newcomer), I did not take my own survey. Survey responses for the Invitational, then, reflect the opinions of my 19 fellow institute participants, both newcomers and experienced Teacher-Consultants, as the NWP designates instructors who have completed at least one summer institute. Since almost 38% of the group surveyed were experienced TCs, their overall responses to the survey items were compared with the responses of the institute newcomers.

Methodology

Using a direct, rather than indirect, method the first part of the study consisted of a closed-question survey of the participants' classroom practices with regard to the teaching and grading of student writing (their pedagogical stances) and questions directly associated with measuring

their attitudes toward common syntactic forms that illustrated 'errors' as designated by most grammar guides. These sample 'errors' were representative of items in Leonard's original survey, but were drawn from historical works, literary works, language history, grammar guides, and student samples. Each sample item was ranked on a 4-point scale of *Very Acceptable* (1) to *Not Acceptable* (4) with an additional check box for those individuals unable to discern an 'error' in the sentence. In figuring the overall rating averages, this *Don't See an Error* choice was given a factor of zero since the participant response could mean one of two things: either the respondent did not see an error, but one was present in the sample sentence *or* the respondent did not see an error because there was no error in the sample sentence. Respondents were not given information about the sources of the example sentences, but were asked to "rate the acceptability of the perceived errors in grading student papers" (Donaher, 2007a). Surveys were created using SurveyMonkey.com, an online survey tool that provides support for both free, basic questionnaires and for paid, advanced surveying tools.

Each participant in a PLWP institute investigates a research question (often referred to as 'a burning question') about their teaching practices and prepares a presentation for the institute participants on their research findings and classroom solutions. Typically, each presentation includes one or more hands-on classroom activities that can be utilized by the other participants in their own classrooms. My burning questions were those outlined under Research Questions above. I created the pre-presentation survey in consultation with the 2007 Invitational co-director and a department colleague, gave the survey to the institute participants at its third pre-institute meeting, performed an initial analysis of the responses, and prepared a presentation, activities, research materials, and a post-presentation survey which reflected the direction my presentation would take and which focused on particular concerns raised in the first survey. The first survey was administered anonymously for me by the institute's co-director.

I began my presentation of the first survey results with a short reading/discussion activity, using the title piece from David Sedaris' essay collection, *Me Talk Pretty One Day* (2000), and a series of pre-reading and post-reading questions to guide study participants to make a comparison between their own classroom practices and language attitudes and the teaching practices and language attitudes portrayed humorously, yet disturbingly, in Sedaris' essay[7]. Unlike the NWP essay, "The Five Dollars," the Sedaris piece wasn't a student sample which study participants were asked to critique; instead, it was a satire about a

particular kind of learning experience, the kind in which the teacher is viciously prescriptive and the students, in their roles as victims of the system, form a sympathetic solidarity. After the participants individually read and responded to the Sedaris piece, we shared and discussed these initial, off-the-cuff revelations. Next I told the group that,

> My presentation is about how we think about language and how we react to the language of others. It's about how we approach our classes, our students, their parents, our peers, and our administrators on matters of language use. It's about how we have internalized certain attitudes promulgated over the centuries and how we can reprogram our thinking to embrace diversity, and yet still have 'standards.' (Donaher, 2007b)

And I presented the group with a conundrum (based on the first survey) as to what we emphasize most when we teach and grade student writing: process versus product—and how that conundrum might be related to our own, sometimes ambiguous, attitudes toward language.

The bulk of my presentation focused on sharing the survey results with the participants, with the questionnaire items ranked from the more acceptable to the least acceptable within the following grammar handbook categories: sentence level issues, subject-verb agreement, word usage, pronouns, inclusive language, non-errors, British usage, and dialect forms. Each survey result was followed by a brief explanation of the provenance of the sample form and how it might be considered 'error.' In some cases, I explained how the sample derived historically. My purpose was to establish the possible acceptability of some of the least acceptable of items. I concluded my presentation with a short, open-question survey which asked additional attitudinal questions about the forms institute participants found the most contentious. The study group also had the opportunity to expand on or amplify their survey answers and to evaluate the effectiveness of my presentation.

Results: Pre-Institute Survey

Process versus Product

To examine what the teachers claimed as their own teaching and grading practices in terms of process and product, they were given the following two questions: 1) When TEACHING writing, which do you emphasize most? and 2) When GRADING your students' papers, which do you emphasize most? For each question, participants could select one of the following responses: The Process; The Product; Both, but Process

more than Product; Both Process and Product Equally; Both, but Product more than Process. In addition, a check box was available for the teacher who didn't officially teach writing or who didn't have student papers to grade (Donaher, 2007a). It was clear from the responses that the survey participants were already familiar with the terminology of *process* and *product* and that they saw themselves as focusing on one or the other at various points in their teaching and grading of student writing.

As may be expected, most of the teachers placed a higher value on the process of writing when teaching writing. Seven respondents marked that they emphasized "Both, but Process more than Product" (36.8%) when teaching writing. Another four respondents claimed that they emphasized only "The Process" (21.1%) while teaching writing. No one claimed to emphasize only "The Product" while engaged in the act of teaching; however, there were four respondents who claimed to emphasize "Both Product and Process Equally" (21.1%). Thus, 15 out of the 19 teachers surveyed (78.9%) emphasized process at least as much as product when teaching writing; of these, 11 teachers (57.8% of the total 19 respondents) valued a process approach to the teaching of writing more than an emphasis on the final product.

As may also be expected, a large number of the teachers placed a higher value upon the product of writing when grading student work. Seven respondents marked that they emphasized "Both, but Product more than Process" (36.8%) in the grading of student papers, with an additional three respondents claiming to grade only "The Product" (15.8%). Thus, 10 out of the 19 teachers surveyed (52.6%) placed a greater emphasis on the finished product. However, an almost equal number of teachers (47.5%) claimed to place at least an equal emphasis upon process and product when grading student work: four teachers claimed to grade "Both Process and Product Equally" (21.1%); four claimed to grade "Both, but Process more than Product (21.1%), and one claimed to grade only "The Process" (5.3%).

There was, then, a slight disconnect overall between what the teachers valued as they taught writing versus what they valued when they sat down to grade it. Overall, about 80% of the teachers valued a process approach at least equally with an emphasis on product in the teaching of writing, while only about 48% placed a value on process when grading student work. In comparison, slightly more TCs (graduates of previous institutes) valued a process approach at least equally with an emphasis on product in the teaching of writing (6 respondents out of 7 respondents; 86%), but a larger percentage of TCs claimed to at least value "Both Process and Product Equally" in the grading of student writing (5 respondents; 71%) as