Linguistic Advocacy as a Bridge Between Disciplines

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Linguistic advocacy as a bridge between disciplines

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Undergraduate research

- Undergraduate research has laudable goals
  - Enhance research skills
  - Foster professional and scholarly development
  - Engage students more deeply in education
  - Provide faculty mentoring
  - Introduce students to new topics

- But how do we attract students?
Linguistics as advocacy

- Linguistics has a tradition of advocacy
  - Endangered languages
  - Multilingualism in education
  - Descriptivism vs. prescriptivism
- Advocacy is a great “hook”
Flu vaccine initiative

- Sponsored by Virginia Health Department
  - Goal: Increase rate of flu vaccination
  - Focus on economically disenfranchised areas
- This project
  - Goal: Discover why parents weren’t opting in
  - Several possibilities
    - Disengagement: Didn’t even see the forms
    - Logistics: Factors such as low literacy rates
    - Intent: Decision to not vaccinate
Flu vaccine initiative

- Involvement in presentation, publication
- Intuiting linguistic theory through practice
- Ability to read the linguistic literature
- Students had a voice in project development
- Students accomplished something real
- Students developed personal research portfolios
Alaskan Englishes

- At an earlier stage than the flu vaccine project
- How do Native languages, English interact?
- Alaska is a highly multilingual state
  - 19 surviving Native languages
  - 2 surviving colonial languages
  - Nearly 100 other immigrant languages
- Linguistic diversity is part of local identity, pride
- Recognition of local accents
- High linguistic security (at least in urban areas)
Alaskan Englishes

- Urban Alaskan English part of Third Dialect
- Perception of Nativeness in English
  - Nativeness viewed as uneducated, poor
  - Nativeness viewed as authentic, intelligent
  - Positive view of Native-origin borrowings
- Recognizing local accents, with linguistic security
- Discourse of agreeing vs. understanding
Alaskan Englishes

- Involvement in presentation, writing theses
- Ability to read the linguistic literature
- Development of fieldwork, sampling methods
- Students attracted from multiple disciplines
  - English
  - Modern languages
  - History
  - Anthropology
  - Psychology
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THANK YOU
Linguistic advocacy as a bridge between disciplines
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LSA 2014
3 January 2014

Undergraduate research
✓ Undergraduate research has laudable goals
  ➢ Enhance research skills
  ➢ Foster professional and scholarly development
  ➢ Engage students more deeply in education
  ➢ Provide faculty mentoring
  ➢ Introduce students to new topics
✓ But to do undergraduate research we have to attract students
✓ So how do we attract students?

Linguistics as advocacy
✓ Linguistics has a tradition of advocacy
  ➢ Endangered languages
  ➢ Multilingualism and in education
  ➢ Descriptivism vs. prescriptivism
✓ Advocacy is a great “hook”
✓ Today: A couple examples from our own experience

Flu vaccine initiative: The project
Run out of Virginia Tech, sponsored by Virginia Health Department
➢ Goal: Increase rate of child flu vaccination
➢ Focus on rural, economically disenfranchised areas

This part of the project
➢ Immunizations offered free through schools, but low opt-in rates
➢ Goal: Discover why parents weren’t opting in
➢ Several possibilities
  ▪ Disengagement: Parents never even saw the permission forms
  ▪ Logistics: Factors such as low adult literacy rates
  ▪ Intent: Conscious decision not to vaccinate
➢ Students conducted in-depth interviews, conducted discourse analysis
➢ Finding: Reason was intent, with objection to top-down approach
➢ Result: Change in tactics, now working through local contacts
➢ Ultimate result: Likely to improve health outcomes in the region

Flu vaccine initiative: Student involvement
✓ Students came in with little to no background in research methods
✓ Through participation, they have experienced:
  ➢ Involvement in presentation, publication
  ➢ Intuiting linguistic theory through practice
  ➢ Developing ability to read the linguistic literature
  ➢ Having a voice in project development
  ➢ Accomplishing something “real”
  ➢ Developing personal research portfolios

Alaskan Englishes: The project
At an earlier stage than the flu vaccine project
✓ Ultimate question: How do Native languages, English interact?
✓ Alaskan students find linguistic issues interesting
  ➢ Alaska is a highly multilingual state
  ➢ Linguistic diversity is part of local identity, pride
✓ Students conducted fieldwork, have found initial results
  ➢ Urban Alaskan English is part of the Third Dialect
  ➢ Alaskans perceive Nativeness in some speakers’ English
  ➢ Alaskans recognize own accents, but have high linguistic security
  ➢ Local discourses of agreeing vs. understanding

Alaskan Englishes: Student involvement
✓ Students came in with little to no background in linguistics
✓ Through participation, they have experienced:
  ➢ Involvement in presentation, writing theses
  ➢ Developing ability to read the linguistic literature
  ➢ Participation in developing fieldwork, sampling methods
  ➢ Learning statistical analysis

Attracting students
✓ University of Alaska Anchorage has no linguistics major, few courses
✓ Students have come into project from other disciplines
  ➔ English, modern languages, history, anthropology, psychology…

Sending students on
✓ Students have gone from these projects into graduate study
  ➔ Rhetoric, speech pathology, computer game design…
✓ Primary goal has not been to recruit these students into linguistics
✓ Goal is to give students in many disciplines understanding of linguistics
✓ Hope: Serve the discipline by having those elsewhere view us positively
✓ Hope: Linguistics is viewed as a field that does something useful