

How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher: Folk Lexicography and the Discursive Construction of Dialect and Place

In an analysis of a corpus of print and online folk dictionaries, Hilliard and Wolfram (2003) provide a descriptive overview of this genre, sketching the contents of such dictionaries and overt goals of such dictionaries and speculating that they serve functions related to identity and solidarity as well as promoting the regions whose speech they depict. This paper takes a much closer look at one folk dictionary, *Sam McCool's New Pittsburghese: How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher*, exploring the particular historical circumstances of its production and reception and the role it has played in the "enregisterment" (Agha, 2003) of "Pittsburghese" in the local imagination as a distinctive, clearly bounded local dialect. I argue that a full understanding of the role folk representations of dialect play in vernacular norming and language change requires taking a historical and ethnographic perspective on the discursive and social practices that give rise to such metalinguistic discourse.

How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher has been in print for almost 25 years. Almost all of the 80 interviewees for the Pittsburgh Speech and Society Project said they owned the book or had seen it. Tracing the history of local talk about talk in the context of economic change and mobility, I show that the booklet exemplifies a way of framing discourse about localness that can be traced to the early 20th century (Johnstone & Danielson, 2001) and became much more common beginning in the 1960s, when identity began to be thought of in regional and class terms rather than religious and ethnic ones. I then show that *How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher* is the prior text for much subsequent discourse of this sort, both in that its format and much of its content have been borrowed repeatedly in other written representations of local dialect, and in that many of Pittsburghers' ideas about what is distinctive about local speech come from this book and texts that draw on it.

Finally, I explore the functions of texts like *How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher*. Building on work by Johnstone and Baumgardt (2004) and Johnstone and Andrus (2005), I argue that representations of speech are among the mechanisms through which dialects and places are constructed and linked in discourse about experiences of talk and space. In the process, nonstandard forms associated with social class are reimagined as indexing region, as images of community and place are constructed and become focused via talk about local language.

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