

Speech perception, the social psychology of language, and sociolinguistics

In this talk I present several studies that illuminate what Preston 2011 terms the "Contrastive Mandate." Preston calls this a "notice-empowering process," characterizing this process as one whereby listeners notice (consciously *or* subconsciously) forms that speakers use that may contrast with their own usage, and crucially, that listeners *expect* their interlocutors to use.

These studies are drawn from not only linguistics, but also sociology, language ideology, and the social psychology of language. They demonstrate that speakers' beliefs and attitudes about language -- broadly described as "language regard" (Preston 2011) -- inform and govern speech perception. These studies shed light on what specific types of cognitive abilities humans use as they make sense of language; as most speech perception researchers suggest, the multidimensional processes involved in perception tap into various types of information that range from acoustic, contextual, social, and psychological. Listeners "know" such information in very different ways: they are overtly aware of some things, such as when they say "People who say X are Y," (even if hundreds of language attitudes studies show that often what they "know" in these cases is inaccurate). Listeners are covertly aware of some things, such as when we react on, for instance, perceptual tests *as if* they have certain information, but claim no conscious knowledge of such information.

To suggest that speech perception is a complicated is hardly original: we know that humans do not merely transform acoustic information into linguistic information, but rather use all types of cognitive processes. Of course, we pay attention to our world, and we create and modify cognitive categories as a result of what we observe. Most of this helps listeners understand interlocutors in complicated conditions: noisy environments, speakers who use different language varieties, language changes, etc. But some of our linguistic categorization leads to inequities, such as in education and the legal arena. Studies from the fields of the social psychology of language, sociolinguistics, and speech perception which demonstrate language regard and its consequences are explored.

Preston, D. 2011. The power of language regard: discrimination, classification, comprehension and production. *Dialogica. Special Issue II*. 9-33.