

# Dialects Around Illinois State University

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Here at Illinois State University, most of us all have one thing in common; we are all from somewhere in Illinois. There are the few exceptions, but for the most part Illinois is our one major common area. Even though most are all from the same state, I have found that there are an assortment of different dialects and speech patterns. I have taken an interest in the differences that I have found throughout the university and I have received the answers to the questions that I had. Why do we all speak differently when we are all from the same state and what influences our speech patterns?

First off, the various dialects that I have come into contact with are Chicago, New York, Boston, southern, and other cultural dialects. The major speech pattern that I have taken an interest in is people who talk faster than the average person as noted by observation. These dialects and speech patterns can be broken down more and more focused in on as the socio-linguistics of Illinois State University Students.

A Chicago based dialect seems to be relatively popular around Illinois State and from research I have found it is because most of the people that attend Illinois State have originated from the surrounding suburbs of Chicago. It has come to my attention that people from Chicago or Chicago suburbs have a tendency to elongate the "a" sound when speaking. Many instances have shown me that this is very true. A girl from California said that when she first came here to Illinois State that she was very surprised by the differences in our speech than hers. Phonetically the long 'a' sound in words gives off more of an 'ow' sound for example, aout instead of out. Some other examples of consonant extension or completely switching is: bit as bet, bet as bat or but, lunch as launch, talk as tuck, locks as lax" (Labov, Sound Change 1991). Many Midwesterners do not view this as incorrect and it is not. There is not one dialect that is correct. This dialect compared to the prestige dialect is quite different but there is not one that is more correct than another. It is important to know the prestige dialect but I do not think from what research has shown that it is the only dialect to be taught or to be known. Knowing an abundant amount of dialects would help to make people more diverse while still knowing the prestige dialect and speaking how they normally would. Not one certain dialect is correct; all are accepted throughout the country.

Another dialect that has been brought to my attention is that of my graduate assistant in my speech class freshman year. He is originally from New York and he is attending Illinois State to get his graduate degree. To do this, part of his training was to help teach a speech course for undergraduates. Many in my class found it hard to concentrate when he lectured because his dialect was so different than what we were used to. This about brought about his patterns of speech. Most of the time he spoke very quickly making it hard to understand him and on top of that he had a thick New York accent, which consisted of him sounding angry all the time (my judgment) along with the slurring of words. "It is said that the New York dialect falls into the same category as the New England

dialect because they both have the same 'r' situation. The dialect drops the 'r' at the end of the words that end in this consonant" (Labov, Sound Change 1991). This is the only similarity in the distinction between the two dialects however an important one. "The big difference between telling these two dialects apart is the 'o' and 'au' shifts into an intermediate vowel so that 'cot' and 'caught' are one in the same. This is the New England dialect close to a Boston dialect, not to be confused with New York" (Labov, Sound change 1997).

These two dialects are very similar but are different in the ways listed above. With knowledge of the differences it is easy to tell the difference between where someone is from. For example, I knew by observing my graduate assistant speak that he was from New York. It is a very distinct dialect. It is also a dialect that seems to have an interesting speech pattern. From speaking with Jeff, (my graduate assistant) he clarified that he does not think that he speaks abnormally faster than people in the Midwest where he was teaching. It is not abnormal to him but to us it is since we are not used to it. When speech is rushed, that is when new words are created. "Ain't originated from is not. It started out 'is not' then became 'isn't' then changed to 'int' and finally to what it is now 'ain't'. This leads to people saying 'I ain't, you ain't, he ain't, we ain't, and they ain't'" (Burridge 103). The rush of words makes new words that are not in the dictionary but everyone is used to them making them acceptable in every dialect (except the prestige.) It is not saying that is wrong but in a certain dialect it is viewed as incorrect while most accept it any use it in everyday language.

Another observation from attending classes and from being around Illinois State University is the high number of professors who are from a different country. They bring along a new dialect all of their own. English is not their first language in many of the cases I found. They are forced to learn English through out their education. They learn what we have learned only research shows that sometimes certain syllables are stressed at a different time that we put stress on them. Listening to these professors in a lecture can become frustrating and challenging for students. Many people that were spoken with on this subject agree that the different stress of words and heavy accents create a barrier in learning. For example, a professor that I had taught the general education course: Politics 140, which is Introduction to politics in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He is from Bangladesh, which is in southern Asia. He is a very intelligent man however he is extremely hard to understand. One major word that was constantly being used in class by him was economics. In the Midwest, we are used to saying it how we know it. We say economics phonetically as 'ekonomiks.' In class, the professor said it phonetically as 'eeconomics.' He stressed the wrong syllables causing confusion in class. He also spoke rapidly fast to get through all the information, which made it much harder to understand him with the wrong stress on syllables, heavy accent, and talking too fast. This dialect is not wrong, just like any other dialect; it is just something we are not used to hearing around the Midwest.

Another dialect found at Illinois State University is Boston. It classifies in the New England dialect, which is stated above to have similarities with the New York dialect. A good friend of mine, Evan, moved to Illinois when he was fourteen years old and now attends Illinois State as a sophomore still talks like he

lives in Boston. To my knowledge he will always keep his New England dialect. It is hard to break an old habit is one way to explain this. For his seven years living in a Chicago suburb, he sounds like he still lives in Boston pronouncing 'au' instead of 'o.' Everyone still understands what he is saying but is thrown by the differences in his speech. It is not incorrect by any means; it is just another dialect that helps diversity around Illinois State.

Along with this Boston dialect also comes along a difference in linguistics. By speaking with Evan and his friends from back home, research shows that they refer to any one, man or woman, by dude. This may just be a teenage thing because that is all that my research covered, but nonetheless it is very interesting. It goes along with an article written by Robert MacNeil who also published a book about how English came about and its origination. He wrote about how people refer to each other as 'guy' when referring to a man or woman of any age. It may just be the young generation of the time right now but it is taking away from sexual identity and also from respect. "Usually when someone is older they are a sir or ma'am not a guy or dude" (MacNeil, *Do You Speak American?* 1). It is found to be disrespectful but a part of the acceptable linguistics in this area.

This also goes along with the way that people were raised, no matter what dialect they speak they seem to have poorer than usual manners linguistically. "Whether you micturate, powder your nose, go to the washroom, have a leak, a piss or a pee, the choice is a matter of appropriate style" (Burrige 201). Around Illinois State, maybe it is just because we are college students and usually have no one to impress, we tend to talk down. This is not a dialect but it is different linguistically than that of the prestige dialect in which we would use when talking to a respectable professor. Different social scenes obviously affect the way in which we choose our words. Language in a bar tends to differ than language in the classroom when speaking to peers. In both situations we are both speaking to others our age but the scene and atmosphere is different causing different words and phrases appropriate for whatever atmosphere. This also plays into ideas in *Blooming English* that "Bad language consists of slang, swears, poor grammar, sloppy pronunciation, and fillers such as "you know?" (Burrige 92). It also states, "swearing is the means of an emotional release" (Burrige 93). Or is it a linguistic trend for young people around Illinois State. It seems that every conversation that people have had at least includes one or two swears or what is considered to be "bad language" by Burrige. Research shows this is a generational linguistic difference because adults around the university do not speak this way, but they use the prestige dialect in and outside of the classroom when speaking with student's and/ or friends.

Another dialect around Illinois State is a southern dialect. Not southern as in the southern states of our country but southern as in southern Illinois. There is small town of about fifteen hundred in southern Illinois called Teutopolis. This town is considered speaking with a southern dialect. Within this town there are many interesting linguistic differences than that of the other dialects discussed above. They use different words and phrases than what we are used to hearing around the Midwest. For example they say soda, instead of pop like they do around the Chicago land area. Another difference is in the pronunciation of the word creek. Around Illinois State, people say creek as it looks with the double

'ee.' In this town they say crick. They replace the double 'e' with an 'i' sound and it is spelled different. Several sources from this town were asked to say the word that was written on the paper and all replied crick instead of what was written on the paper: creek. They also use sack when referring to a bag. Another term they use is house shoes instead of slippers. They also say things like, "The garbage needs out." When I would phrase that as, "The garbage needs to be taken out." It's phrased the same way when they say, "The lawn needs mowed." To me, the way I would say it is, "The lawn needs to be cut." Another interesting phrase came out from researching linguistics around Teutopolis. It is common for people to end some of their sentences in 'not?' It is as though they are asking a question or asking, 'no?' at the end of their sentence, but it seems to be more confusing rather than clarifying. An example is, "I'm thinking about going to the store later, not?" No matter who was questioned there was never a clear explanation for this. I gathered that it is something that has been passed down each generation simply from hearing it and repeating it.

From informal interviews, research concludes that their school curriculum consists of the usual "canon" texts including anything by Shakespeare, Dickens, or Jane Austin (although female, still considered in the canon.) This would be considered the prestige dialect. Interestingly enough the curriculum does not include, and from what they have informed me of has never included, the great text *Huckleberry Finn*, which explores African- American Vernacular English, or anything along the lines of *Huckleberry Finn*. This school curriculum is missing out on this great text and only studying the prestige dialect and the written language in canonized texts yet research shows that either dialect is what they use to speak.

The conclusion to the difference in the linguistics between this town and a town near Chicago is that this is what they have heard all their lives. They are taught and influenced to say these words and phrases by their elders. They know the prestige dialect and recognize it from texts but they speak the way in which they are comfortable. It is not wrong just another dialect that is linguistically different. It is interesting to hear people from this town speak because research has shown that they all speak with the same words and phrases and all though we are not used to them it is understood what they are saying. Research has also concluded that this small town in southern Illinois has a lot of the same words and phrases as towns in the very southern part of our country such as Georgia or Mississippi. I have met several people from both states and have observed the similarities that occur between both states and Teutopolis, Illinois. The one major difference found is that in Teutopolis, Illinois "ya'll" is not a huge part of their speech as it is in many people's vocabularies in Georgia and Mississippi.

A myth is that people from the south are slow and "hicks" because of their southern drawls and their dialect or the different words and phrases that Midwesterners are used to. This is obviously not true but there is still the misconception. Thoughts on this from around Illinois State is that it will always be this way because people are biased on the way that they speak and they believe their dialect is better and correct. Informal research has concluded this but it has also drawn the conclusion that stereotypes will never die out. Another interesting question was asked while informal research was concluding; why is it that people

will keep these stereotypes but the majority of the people around Illinois State love country music and listen to it more than any other genre of music? If southern dialects are stereotyped as slow and “hicks” talking, why do people enjoy country music and do not think of that as slow and of the singers as “hicks”? My question could be answered with an intelligent answer by anyone interviewed.

Another interesting linguistic distinction around Illinois State is that many of the students are always using “fillers” in their language. From observing around Illinois State, research shows that a lot of African-Americans use “fillers” in their everyday language. For example, small phrases that are sometimes thrown into a sentence, like when people check what they said, they say, “you know what I mean?” It makes it harder to understand because it seems to throw people off. It is more distracting than useful however it is culturally interesting and diverse around Illinois State.

Researching African- American Vernacular English brought up the idea of Ebonics and how it has been made fun of by some popular comedians leading to unnecessary stereotypes of African-Americans. Stereotyping should not be done at all but this tends to be helping them become popular. Many students said that they have heard these comedy routines and thought that they were funny but this is increasing the stereotypes more and more. It leads to misconceptions about races and it is unnecessary and not funny. It is important to understand other dialects because it helps to reflect on their culture and back round. Not one dialect is correct or proper, it is what was taught and learned that causes people to use the dialects and speech patterns that they do.

Another use for “fillers” is in place of an unknown word or phrase. “Examples are, ‘um,’ ‘err,’ ‘uh,’ and any other sound that may occur while searching for the right word to be said. Along with this the listener in the conversation throws “fillers” into the conversation as a sort of response to what the communicator is saying. An example of this is, ‘hmm,’ ‘yeah,’ and ‘I understand’ (Burridge 96). This is in all conversation from the informal research I have found around Illinois State. This happens between friends and between students engaging in a conversation with a professor. It gives feedback to the communicator while talking and encourages that the listener understands and that it is clear to continue to talk. All dialects seem to have this is common, even the prestige dialect.

As language progresses dialects have new words/ phrases and new speech patterns occurring every day. The diversity among the group causes new and old words to come in and out of style. In every dialect there are new words that seem to get mixed into the language and gain popularity and become slang. This can happen to any dialect making it grow and become bigger. The speech patterns and words/ phrases may change with time but the tone of voice, speed, emphasis of syllables and pronunciation will not change in a certain dialect, it is continued down generation to generation.

At Illinois State University, most of us all have one major similarity; we are all for the state of Illinois. There are exceptions of students and professors to this similarity, which helps to keep this campus diverse. Even though we are all mainly from Illinois, there is a wide diversity in dialects at Illinois State that

creates many interesting speech patterns and new phrases. It is important to know about other people's dialect because it helps to understand their heritage and culture. I am hoping that others at Illinois State appreciate the diversity around the campus as much as I and many other students have.

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