

## Individual Linguistic Profile

### What we're doing

The Individual Linguistic Profile is an analysis of the features in your background and in your language that contribute to the unique variety of American English that you speak.

### Why we're doing it

Assembling your profile will help you start to think about the ways that people's backgrounds affect their speech. By considering your own personal and family histories, you'll be able to understand the factors that contribute to the way you talk. It will also help you see how all speakers are affected by external factors. By extension, it will help you understand how linguistic, cultural, geographical, social and other factors contribute to the construction of the many varieties of American English, including the one you speak. Additionally, this assignment gives you a first taste of what it is like to do language variation research. Exploring your own linguistic autobiography encourages you to be a sensitive and ethical observer because you'll experience the perspective of the research participants we'll work with later in the semester.

### How do we do it?

The first part of the assignment will happen in class today, with your working groups. Using the questions below as prompts, talk together about your backgrounds, sharing your preliminary findings as you begin to work through the questions. This is also designed to be an opportunity for you to get to know the other members of your working group.

The next step, to take place outside of class, is to write a narrative, creating as complete a profile of your linguistic background as you can. You might not be able to answer all the questions; we all have varying degrees of knowledge about our ancestors and history. Do the best you can to answer as many of the questions as you can. You are encouraged to talk to your parents, grandparents, and other family members to help fill in your history.

Be ready to present your complete profile on **Wednesday, September 17**. It should be in narrative form, word-processed and written professionally (that is, drafted, revised, proofread, formatted, and polished) so that it can be a resource for your working-group partners and an opportunity for you to work on the writing skills needed for reporting on linguistic research.

### Linguistic Profile Background Questions:

#### 1. Information about your family history:

Where did you grow up? Where did your parents and grandparents grow up?

How long have your parents' families been in the United States? Where did they come from? Do you know why they came? Who were the first ones here? Where did they first settle in the U.S.? Where else have they lived in the U.S.?

If you are not from the United States, how long have you been here? Are other members of your family here? Where else have you lived or visited within and outside the U.S.? Did you learn English here or before you got here?

Is your family background urban or rural or something else?

Did marriages bring together families of different national or ethnic origins and linguistic backgrounds?

What racial or ethnic identities does your family background include?

What kinds of jobs did your forbears have? What kinds of education? What kinds of social status? Are you the first person in your family to go to college?

Feel free to use maps or family trees to organize your information and map out your family's and your own movement around the U.S.

## 2. Information about your linguistic history:

What languages were you exposed to as a child? Are you a native speaker of English? If not, what is your native language? Are your parents and grandparents native speakers of English? Did you or your parents or grandparents grow up in homes that were not primarily English-speaking? What other languages do they speak? What languages were they exposed to as children, and do they speak those languages today? Do they have any speech features or 'accents' that you have noticed? Where do you think they got those features?

What languages do you speak besides English, and how and at what ages did you acquire them?

What geographical changes have you experienced in your life that might have affected your speech? Where have you lived and how long in each place? Do you think any of your speech features are associated with any of your locations or moves?

Do you think you talk like your parents? Your siblings? People at school? None of the above? How would you explain the similarities and differences?

If you are not a native of the United States, and you spoke English before arriving here, what adjustments, if any, have you made to the way you speak English in response to the varieties of English you hear around you? If you learned English here, do you believe that you have features in your English that may associate you with the part of the country where you learned your English?

Has anyone ever pointed out specific characteristics of your speech or said that you have an accent? Do you think you have any interesting or unusual features in your speech? Have you ever been 'corrected' by a parent, teacher, other family members, employers, or friends for the way you talk? What are your feelings about these incidents?

Have you ever deliberately changed your own speech? How? Why did you do it?

## 3. If you think of other questions to consider or factors that you believe have affected the way you speak today, by all means explore them and share them with your group and in your narrative.