

Development of implicit language attitudes in children

Cynthia G. Clopper¹, Elizabeth A. McCullough^{1,2}, and Laura Wagner²

¹Department of Linguistics ²Department of Psychology
clopper.1@osu.edu, mccullough.136@osu.edu, wagner.602@osu.edu



Background

- In implicit language attitude tasks, listeners' judgments about a specific talker are taken to reveal listeners' judgments about a dialect group
- For adult listeners (Clopper, Rohrbeck, & Wagner, 2012; Giles, 1970; Luhman, 1990):
 - Ratings of status (e.g., intelligence, wealth) tend to be high for socially prestigious ("standard") dialect groups
 - Ratings of solidarity (e.g., trustworthiness, friendliness) tend to be high for dialect groups that are local to the listener
- In a forced-choice task, 5- and 6-year-old children show no dialect-based attitude differences, but 9- and 10-year-olds thought Northern talkers were "smarter" and Southern talkers were "nicer" (Kinzler & DeJesus, 2013)
 - 9- and 10-year-olds from the North as well as the South showed this pattern, suggesting stereotypes in addition to local solidarity

Research Questions

- When do listeners learn which regional dialects are local to them?
- When do implicit attitudes about regional dialects emerge, and how do they change over time?

Methods

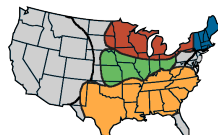
Listeners

- Tested in the Language Sciences Lab at COSI
 - 231 monolingual American English speakers ages 4-75, mostly from Ohio
- | Age | 4-5 | 6-7 | 8-9 | 10-11 | 12-13 | 14-15 | 16-17 | 18-34 | 35-49 | 50+ |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| N | 15* | 24 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 24 |

*data collection is ongoing

Stimulus materials

- Sentence: "She had your dark suit in greasy wash water all year"
- Talkers: 3 women from each of 4 regions in the United States (Midland (M), North (N), New England (NE), South (S))



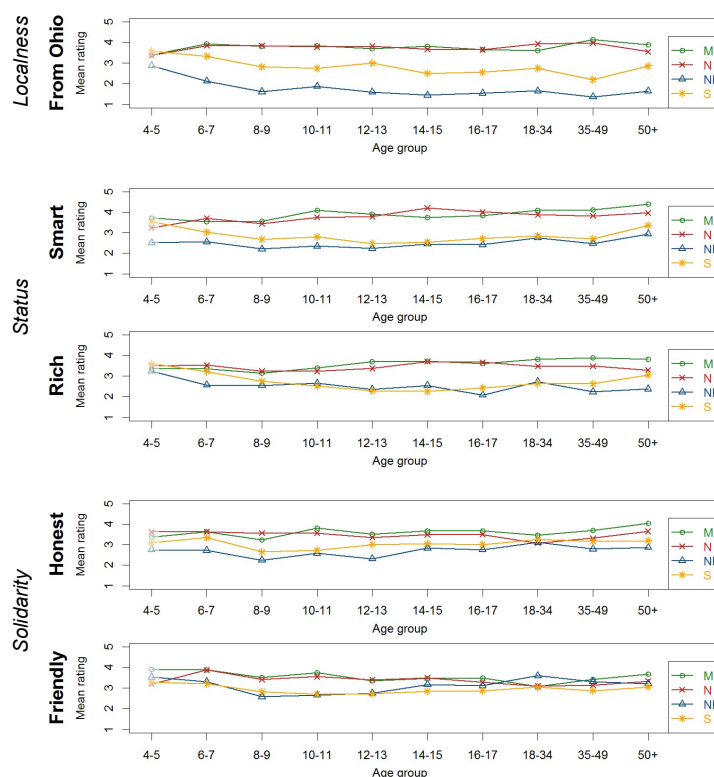
Procedure

- Participants heard sentences and rated each talker on labeled 5-point scales measuring the attributes **from Ohio**, **smart**, **rich**, **honest**, **friendly**, e.g.:
 - Very friendly (5)
 - A little friendly (4)
 - Maybe or maybe not friendly (3)
 - Not really friendly (2)
 - Not at all friendly (1)
- Ratings were blocked by attribute (12 trials per block)
- Blocks occurred in random order for each participant

Predictions

- Midland and North should sound local and should be rated relatively high on measures of status and solidarity
- New England and South should sound non-local and should be rated relatively low on measures of status and solidarity
- At least some attitudes should be differentiated by age 9-10

Results



Summary

- Localness: Midland and North are from Ohio. By age 6-7, New England is not. By age 8-9, South is not.
- Status: Standard/local talkers are smart. For rich, the standard/local advantage does not begin until age 10-11.
- Solidarity: Honest shows a standard/local advantage from ages 8-13, but teenagers and adults make fewer and smaller distinctions. Adults age 18-34 rate all dialects equally. Similarly, friendly shows a standard/local advantage from ages 8-13, but teenagers and adults rate all dialects nearly equally.

Discussion

- By age 8-9, ratings of localness show fully adult-like patterns
- Standard dialects are rated relatively high on status measures, but age of emergence depends on the scale
 - Rich was a difficult word and concept for young children
- Local dialects are rated relatively high on solidarity measures by children, but not for teenagers and adults, contra previous research
 - Teenagers and adults know that it is not socially acceptable to say negative things about others
 - This study took place in a public setting where participants might have felt particularly uncomfortable making subjective negative judgments

Acknowledgments: Thanks to Eryn Ahlers, Kelli McGuire, Liz Nugent, and Mallory Sharp for assistance with data collection, and to the Lacueys discussion group for comments.

