

Attitudinal shifts among undergraduates in linguistics courses

David Bowie

University of Central Florida, Department of English
dbowie@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu

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ATTITUDINAL ASSUMPTIONS

- ▶ Linguistics makes several assumptions about language
 - ▶ No language or language variety is more primitive than another
 - ▶ Language change is natural
 - ▶ One naturally occurring form is no better than another
- ▶ These assumptions are not widely held by non-linguists
- ▶ Linguists use some terms (e.g., *grammatical*) is unusual ways
- ▶ Linguists have written books that attempt to bridge the gap

THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

- ▶ The university
 - ▶ Very large doctoral-granting university
 - ▶ 46,719 students (85% undergraduate)
 - ▶ No linguistics department or linguistics major
 - ▶ Linguistics minor offered by the English Department
- ▶ Linguistics courses
 - ▶ Some related courses offered in allied fields
 - ▶ Five other linguistics courses are regularly offered
 - ▶ Some courses do double duty

LINGUISTICS COURSES AT UCF

- ▶ Principles of Linguistics
- ▶ Introductory survey of core subfields
- ▶ History of the English Language
 - ▶ Also covers historical linguistics in general and phonetics
- ▶ Cross-Cultural Communication
 - ▶ Includes a focus on anthropological approaches to language
- ▶ Linguistics and Literature
 - ▶ Covers corpus linguistics and dialectology
 - ▶ Not covered by this study
- ▶ Modern English Grammar
 - ▶ Includes coverage of syntactic theory

THIS STUDY

- ▶ Survey of student attitudes toward language issues
 - ▶ Students surveyed at beginning and end of courses
 - ▶ Same surveys each time
 - ▶ Delivered and filled out electronically
- ▶ Content of the survey
 - ▶ 22 statements about language as prompts
 - ▶ Responses made using a 4-point Likert scale
 - ▶ Not a forced-choice design
 - ▶ Nearly all respondents answered all prompts

SURVEY RESPONSES

Class	Responses	
	Start	End
Principles of Linguistics	55	51
History of the English Language	60	42
Cross-Cultural Communication	35	30
Modern English Grammar	28	28
Total	178	151

CHANGES (ALL CLASSES)

Prompt	Rating	
	Start	End
Regional dialects are just as correct as Standard English	2.01	1.78
Ethnic dialects are just as correct as Standard English	2.51	2.32
The sentence "It is me" is grammatical	2.61	2.30
The sentence "If someone goes to Subway at noon, they will probably have to stand in line" is grammatical	2.24	2.07
The sentence "What are you looking at?" is grammatical	1.99	1.93
The sentence "Who did you see in Miami?" is grammatical	1.87	1.68
Double negatives are illogical	2.24	2.42
Double negatives are grammatical	3.09	2.85
Some languages have no grammar	3.33	3.29
Slang is bad	2.96	3.07
People use non-standard dialects out of laziness	2.96	3.06
The United States should have an official language	2.26	2.37
I speak English with an accent	2.21	2.27
I speak English properly	1.96	1.90

Key: 1 = strongly agree / 4 = strongly disagree
Insignificant results are in small type
Significant, low effect results are in *italics*
Significant, moderate effect results are in roman type

CHANGES (PRINCIPLES OF LINGUISTICS)

Prompt	Rating	
	Start	End
Regional dialects are just as correct as Standard English	1.86	1.74
Ethnic dialects are just as correct as Standard English	2.44	2.29
The sentence "It is me" is grammatical	2.84	2.29
The sentence "If someone goes to Subway at noon, they will probably have to stand in line" is grammatical	2.26	1.94
The sentence "What are you looking at?" is grammatical	2.33	2.04
The sentence "Who did you see in Miami?" is grammatical	2.04	1.57
Double negatives are illogical	2.25	2.40
Double negatives are grammatical	2.92	2.96
Some languages have no grammar	3.44	3.28
Slang is bad	3.07	3.15
People use non-standard dialects out of laziness	3.14	3.12
The United States should have an official language	2.30	2.41
I speak English with an accent	2.12	2.22
I speak English properly	1.91	1.91

CHANGES (HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Prompt	Rating	
	Start	End
Regional dialects are just as correct as Standard English	2.20	1.64
Ethnic dialects are just as correct as Standard English	2.57	2.19
The sentence "It is me" is grammatical	2.75	2.38
The sentence "If someone goes to Subway at noon, they will probably have to stand in line" is grammatical	2.37	2.24
The sentence "What are you looking at?" is grammatical	1.96	2.12
The sentence "Who did you see in Miami?" is grammatical	1.96	1.94
Double negatives are illogical	2.25	2.69
Double negatives are grammatical	3.15	2.53
Some languages have no grammar	3.13	3.21
Slang is bad	3.03	3.12
People use non-standard dialects out of laziness	2.98	3.29
The United States should have an official language	2.27	2.50
I speak English with an accent	2.22	2.24
I speak English properly	2.00	1.93

CHANGES (CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION)

Prompt	Rating	
	Start	End
Regional dialects are just as correct as Standard English	1.81	1.68
Ethnic dialects are just as correct as Standard English	2.31	2.23
The sentence "It is me" is grammatical	2.48	2.43
The sentence "If someone goes to Subway at noon, they will probably have to stand in line" is grammatical	2.29	2.25
The sentence "What are you looking at?" is grammatical		
The sentence "Who did you see in Miami?" is grammatical		
Double negatives are illogical	2.37	2.45
Double negatives are grammatical		
Some languages have no grammar	3.34	3.28
Slang is bad	2.93	2.95
People use non-standard dialects out of laziness	2.82	3.18
The United States should have an official language	2.59	2.23
I speak English with an accent	2.18	2.18
I speak English properly	2.07	1.98

CHANGES (MODERN ENGLISH GRAMMAR)

Prompt	Rating	
	Start	End
Regional dialects are just as correct as Standard English	2.14	2.18
Ethnic dialects are just as correct as Standard English	2.79	2.68
The sentence "It is me" is grammatical	2.00	2.07
The sentence "If someone goes to Subway at noon, they will probably have to stand in line" is grammatical	1.89	1.86
The sentence "What are you looking at?" is grammatical	1.70	1.71
The sentence "Who did you see in Miami?" is grammatical	1.64	1.61
Double negatives are illogical	2.04	2.00
Double negatives are grammatical	3.18	2.96
Some languages have no grammar	3.50	3.43
Slang is bad	2.61	3.00
People use non-standard dialects out of laziness	2.71	2.50
The United States should have an official language	1.79	2.25
I speak English with an accent	2.43	2.54
I speak English properly	1.86	1.75

SO WHAT?

- ▶ Attitudes can be shifted by linguistics teaching
 - ▶ Effect is generally muted, but consistently positive
 - ▶ Effect differs from course to course
 - ▶ Course content is not predictive of the effect
 - ▶ Speculation: Instructor's preference may have an effect
- ▶ Several potential factors remain understudied