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Reviewed Work

Nunnally, Thomas E. (Ed.). 2018. *Speaking of Alabama: The history, diversity, function, and change of Language*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

ISBN: 978-0-8173-1993-9

Hardcover, 303 pp.

$49.95 USD

Speaking of Alabama is an edited collection of eleven chapters on language in Alabama. It also includes a foreword by Walt Wolfram, afterword by Michael B. Montgomery, and introductory and supporting materials by editor Thomas E. Nunnally. Ten of the chapters, as well as Nunnally's introduction and appendices, were originally published as a special issue of *Tributaries: Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association* (Nunnally 2008). The original collection was expanded for the present volume through the addition of a large chapter by Nunnally and Guy Bailey as well as by Wolfram's and Montgomery's entries. The content is otherwise mostly unchanged from the 2008 collection.

Nunnally's preface positions the book as "a case study in trying to make linguistic findings both useful for specialists and accessible to nonspecialists" (xviii). Wolfram's foreword highlights this public-engagement orientation, praising chapters for being "determined to break out of the tradition in which linguists direct their preaching to a small choir of professional linguists" (xi). Readers must therefore approach *Speaking of Alabama* through its intended lens of public engagement combined with specialist insight. As such, this review will briefly summarize each chapter, and then focus on the book's management of the challenge of writing

simultaneously to specialists and non-specialists.

Nunnally's introductory chapter, "Exploring language in Alabama", serves primarily to orient non-linguists to linguistics as a field. It also makes a case for studying language in Alabama.

The first content-driven chapter, Michael D. Picone's "Multilingual Alabama", historicizes the 1990 passage of Amendment 509 to the Alabama state constitution, which set English the official language of Alabama. Then, having acknowledged the contemporary cultural and political meanings of "multilingualism," Picone shifts the view to the indigenous and European languages that predated English in Alabama. Picone also documents African languages of enslaved people and a range of European languages brought to Alabama through various waves of immigration. Picone's history is rich and comprehensive. Rhetorically, it side-steps contemporary ideologies of Alabama as a monolingual English speech community under threat, and instead presents Alabama as a profoundly multilingual space, making multilingualism essential to Alabama's cultural heritage. Montgomery suggests that Picone's chapter is "the jewel in the collection" (238), and it certainly makes a case for being the most successful at both advancing scholarship and engaging publics.

Catherine Evans Davies frames her chapter, "Southern American English in Alabama", as preparatory to studies that follow. Aimed at audiences without familiarity in linguistics, it defines core disciplinary terms and exemplifies these with features of Alabama Englishes.

Nunnally and Bailey's "Extreme North Alabama" begins a series of chapters that examine linguistic features in the context of different areas of Alabama. Their work represents impressive new scholarship that describes the historical, cultural, linguistic, and sociolinguistic divisions between North and South Alabama. They turn to *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (*LAGS*; Pederson et al. 1986–1992) data to detail striking linguistic and sociolinguistic differences between the ten northernmost counties in Alabama and the rest of the state among both white and African American Alabamians. They conclude by identifying emerging social meanings for variables within *LAGS*.

Crawford Feagin returns to interviews from Anniston (cf. Feagin 1979) to ask, "Just what is the Southern Drawl?" Feagin introduces acoustic analysis of vowels and characterizes the drawl in terms of duration and changes in formants, amplitude, and intonation. Feagin categorizes a "basic drawl" and an "expanded drawl," and posits sociolinguistic differences in

these drawling patterns according to macro-level social categories.

In “The heart of Dixie is in the vowels”, Rachael Allbritten provides an overview of the Southern Vowel Shift (SVS) in Huntsville. Allbritten points to speakers orienting to either the city of Huntsville or the surrounding rural areas as locally important predictors of participation in the shift. Allbritten also discusses the complex social space of Huntsville, resulting especially from in-migration connected with work at local military and aerospace facilities.

Anna Head Spence examines “The monophthongization of [aɪ] in Elba and its environs”. Working from narratives about catastrophic floods in the community, Spence reports greater monophthongization among older interviewees than younger ones, and less monophthongization before voiceless obstruents than in other phonetic environments.

Joyce Doxsey also examines /aɪ/-monophthongization in “To [aː] or Not to [aː] on the Gulf Coast of Alabama”, but shifts locales to the Gulf Coast. Like Spence, Doxsey finds /aɪ/ less subject to monophthongization before voiceless obstruents. Doxsey provides interview excerpts that show speakers’ sensitivity to [aː] as a stigmatized variant, noting that stigmatization is greater in the disfavoring pre-voiceless environment than in others.

In “They sound better than we do”, J. Daniel Hasty surveys attitudes toward Alabama accents. In line with other studies (e.g., Preston 1989), respondents rated southern voices higher for most attitudinal dimensions associated with social attractiveness and personal integrity, but lower for dimensions associated with competence. Hasty concludes that Alabamians “have an extremely low view of their dialect” compared with other regions and other parts of the South (199).

Kimberly Johnson and Nunnally provide a reflection-based account of “Code-switching between African American and Standard English”. Written from Johnson’s perspective, the chapter offers “a case (self-)study”, in which Johnson describes experiences navigating across varieties, and the resulting social attainments and alienations of code-switching choices. Johnson and Nunnally report specific code-switching practices from recordings of Johnson speaking to different interlocutors.

Charlotte Brammer investigates narrative conventions, processes, and practices in “College writers as Alabama storytellers”. Brammer shows that Alabamian college students actively draw on a rich cultural reserve of narrative strategies when writing. Compellingly, Brammer argues that college writing programs should “develop greater sensitivity to the

connections among culture, language use, and identity" in order to help novice writers bridge to academic writing (222).

The final content chapter in the collection is Robin Sabino's "Tsalagi language revitalization and the Echota Cherokee", which describes a collaboration to build an online learning resource for Echota Tsalagi. The chapter describes and exemplifies word lesson entries, as well as listing additional educational resources on the site. Site traffic demonstrates that the project generated substantial public interest.

The collection ends fittingly with an afterword by Montgomery, who draws on his vast expertise in the linguistics of Southern US varieties to recommend resources and research questions for future study of language variation and change in Alabama.

Montgomery begins his afterward by calling *Speaking of Alabama* "a volume any state would envy for its own languages" (230). Indeed, Nunnally and the University of Alabama Press have created an enduring resource for Alabama and Alabamians that will be well placed on bookshelves in homes and community libraries. The original *Tributaries* issue deserves the increased visibility and accessibility afforded through conversion to book. Other linguists should seek to replicate this model.

In conceptualizing this collection as an act of public linguistics, Nunnally has taken a commendably wide view of what comprises "linguistics". While the majority of chapters in the collection follow Labovian approaches to language variation and change that are central to American sociolinguistics, the collection also includes Brammer's work, which is more closely disciplinarily aligned with composition and writing program studies, as well as Picone's historical account and Sabino's language revitalization project. Additionally, the perspective of Johnson – who is described as a practicing educator encountering (and making sense of) linguistics during a graduate course – demonstrates meaningful engagement with language varieties and language variation by an emerging linguist in exactly the ways that great linguistics teachers want. Researchers will do well to follow Nunnally's model of incorporating perspectives from a broad purview of language disciplines and levels of disciplinary participation in linguistics.

Given the importance this collection places on public engagement, the project might have been well served by being committed entirely to serving non-specialist audiences, rather than also being positioned as scholarship for linguists. In his introductory note, Nunnally asks

linguists for forbearance when “the exigencies of greater accessibility try their patience” (xix). In truth, though, for linguists who work in language variation and change in the United States, the majority of chapters that appeared in the original *Tributaries* special edition will offer few notable new findings. Datasets are generally small and frequently rather exploratory. Results of studies are mostly reported as broad summaries in order to connect features of Alabama Englishes to the broader body of early 2000s language variation and change scholarship. Most chapters devote considerable space to introducing basic linguistic and sociolinguistic concepts, even though Nunnally's and Davies's chapters and the large appendicies are intended to introduce non-specialists to linguistics and sociolinguistics. These features are appropriate for a non-specialist readership, but linguists who also expect a contribution to specialist knowledge will be under-served by many of the chapters.

At the same time, I suspect that the public engagement component of the book may be compromised by the collection’s efforts to serve an academic readership. This is particularly the case with Nunnally and Bailey’s chapter, which is outstanding scholarship that dialectologists and historical sociolinguists should read. However, it is on a different level in terms of length (74 pages out of 241 content pages in the book), depth, and detail from other chapters, and requires a much greater readerly commitment. Given its placement immediately after Davies’s chapter, which defines basic linguistics terminology for non-linguists, Nunnally and Bailey’s chapter could create an obstacle for non-academic readers. If the book were entirely focused on public engagement, this chapter could have taken a less ambitious approach, which would have been more consistent with the rest of the collection.

On a smaller note in the same vein, I experienced dissonance when chapters occasionally committed to relatively fine-grained specialist conventions that seem irrelevant to public engagement. For instance, Feagin’s chapter used the phonemic transcription system associated with Labov's work (e.g., /ay/ for the phoneme that is conventionally /aɪ/ in the International Phonetic Alphabet). Elsewhere, the collection goes to pains to avoid alienating readers with phonetic transcriptions (e.g., Nunnally and Bailey transcribe *pliers* as “plah-uhz” [86]), so it was surprising to see a line being held on this point and I imagine it being unhelpful to non-specialist readers. Had the collection focused entirely on public engagement, it would have been appropriate to remove such fine differences, and I believe non-specialist readers would have been better served.

Regardless of audience orientation, it must be noted that the chapters which were carried over from *Tributaries* are by-and-large the same as they were when they were published a decade earlier. This is understandable on practical grounds, but it was nevertheless often disappointing that chapters had not been updated for the new collection. For instance, the sociolinguistic situation that Allbritten describes for the SVS in Huntsville seems reminiscent of other communities where high-tech jobs have initiated dialect contact that pushed the SVS into retreat (e.g., Dodsworth & Kohn 2012). I wished that Allbritten's 2008 speculations about the future of the SVS in Huntsville (168) were followed up with new data or with connections to more recent work on sound change in the South. Even more striking is the case of Sabino's description of the Tsalagi revitalization website, which had closed by the time *Speaking of Alabama* was published. The chapter presents an outstanding model for essential linguistic work to preserve and celebrate a language and culture. But the loss of the site carries implications for the ways that such projects are resourced, valued, and maintained. These should be considered critically, and the absence of such critique is a missed opportunity.

In total, though, *Speaking of Alabama* is a laudable effort at public scholarship. Linguists should read Nunnally and Bailey's chapter as new original research and Picone's chapter as an example of rhetorically masterful public engagement. The rest of the collection should be reviewed with an eye toward reflecting on the work we are all challenged to do to teach beyond classrooms and share beyond colleagues.

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