1 Coming of Age in African American Language

1.1 Introduction

All speakers of language take a journey in developing linguistic competence. Along this path, one observes the unfurling of linguistic developmental processes, the encouraging voices of family and friends, the challenges, and the decisions that allow a speaker to move from baby talk to an ever-changing linguistic repertoire through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Speakers often take this path for granted as they recount the footsteps that carried them into adulthood. But for the linguist these data are precious and rare. Even as the field of sociolinguistics compiles new longitudinal corpora and utilizes heritage recordings to conduct real-time studies of language change, studies that extend through childhood and adolescence have been limited to a handful of case studies.

Individual stories reveal how development, changing environments, and situational factors all influence linguistic behavior. They allow us to follow the story of Foxy Boston as she moves from a dynamic teen to a professional adult (Rickford and Price 2013). Or, we can watch two boys from the North of England adapt to new communities, new professions, and changing roles in life (Sankoff 2004). These individual stories demonstrate the flexibility, innovation, and accommodation of a single human negotiating their linguistic landscape. Case studies provide deep insight into the human condition. But these stories cannot be generalized to a larger population. So, while individual stories enrich our understanding of what it means to grow up from a linguistic perspective, they remain rare, and they remain individual narratives.

What could a chorus of individuals tell us? What would we find if we could follow whole cohorts of children as they go from babbling babies to trendy teens and accomplished adults? A significant longitudinal corpus of child and adolescent and early adult speech could reveal typical paths of language socialization, illuminating whether hypothesized developmental trajectories authentically represent observed linguistic behavior. We can, for example, discern if entrance to public schools influences speech patterns in predictable

ways, or whether the onset of adolescence predicts innovative linguistic stylizations. We can document the extent to which individuals and cohorts modify their speech upon leaving school to enter the workforce or enroll in institutions of higher learning. This wealth of information has the potential to confirm or alter sociolinguistic theory related to topics ranging from language change to the stylization of language.

Despite the great potential of such rich data, there are practical reasons why such studies are so rare. Recruitment, retention, transcription, and data curation over an expanded period frustrate attempts to carry on such large-scale longitudinal research. A project requires levels of coordinated administrative and research staff with the foresight to manage data collection over the course of decades and transformed technology, to say nothing of funding rarely available for such long-term linguistic research. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that large-scale longitudinal linguistic research appeared to be out of reach.

Lacking the resources to conduct longitudinal studies, cornerstone linguistic theories of language socialization for individuals, as well as language change for communities, have rested upon cross-sectional evidence where cohorts of different ages are compared as a proxy for change over time. Much can be learned utilizing cross-sectional designs where data collected at a single time point from cohorts of different ages are compared to estimate the direction and speed of language change. But cross-sectional data cannot track paths through life stages, leaving the natural road from childhood acquisition to adult sociolinguistic competence obscured and indirectly pieced together. Without longitudinal research, the actual process of linguistic development from childhood through adolescence remained largely a source of conjecture among linguists. In this context, the Frank Porter Graham project reported in this book emerges as an invaluable, unique resource for the study of lifespan change, development, and language socialization.

The story of the Frank Porter Graham study (FPG) begins in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in 1990 at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, where eighty-eight healthy African American infants were recruited from surrounding communities to examine the impact of ear infections, among other factors, on speech development. While this initial effort had a primary medical focus, Drs. Margaret Burchinal, Susan Zeisel, and Joanne Roberts, the founding members of the project, saw the value of the linguistic data collected as a part of their efforts. And so a collaboration among researchers in a range of disciplines and, most importantly, the families of the children themselves was formed. The result of this unprecedented collaboration is a study that provides the first comprehensive view of language development for the first twenty-one years of life. With sixty-seven young adults remaining in the study as of the last data collection time point in 2012, FPG gives us the first opportunity to hear how it sounds to grow up linguistically for a cohort of speakers.

This book provides a glimpse into what it means to mature from a linguistic perspective, particularly in terms of a vernacular variety of English. The research reported within these pages represents the cumulative and collaborative efforts of a host of researchers, family members, and children who worked together to create a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to examine the human condition with respect to language development for the first two decades of their lives. As we listen to these children grow from babies to adults in their own voices and unique styles, we hope to provide a lens into some of the most foundational questions in our field:

- In what ways do life stages correlate with linguistic behavior? Are there predictable points of change?
- How dynamic are individual voices as they grow from infants to adults? Do we see temporal points of stability and variability?
- Can we establish predictable paths of language socialization?

The social lives of the children who led us down this path are a crucial component of the story that follows. Arguably, no social factor is more salient in the United States than race. As African American children growing up in the Southern United States, factors such as the acquisition of African American Language (AAL), the impact of segregation on language, code-switching, and access to literacy are all part of this story. This additional layer invites a number of questions we would be remiss not to address:

- What community, social, and personal factors influence the use of AAL?
- How do ethnolects interact with predominant regional varieties over the lifespan?
- Does the use of vernacular AAL predict literacy skills and educational achievement over time?

Throughout this book, we will wander down the developmental paths that the FPG participants so generously shared with us in search of the answers to these questions.

1.2 The Significance of Longitudinal Research

In the absence of longitudinal studies, cross-sectional studies, that is, the study of data collected at one time point from participants of different ages, emerged as the best alternative to observing language change. Within the field of acquisition, cross-sectional studies provide a glimpse into how individuals develop language, as younger children are compared to their older peers as evidence of how a child might change as they grow. Sociolinguists primarily use cross-sectional designs to estimate community-level language change. Often referred to as the apparent-time method, seniors may be compared to middle-aged and younger cohorts to infer how communities might change over time. Linguists have long noted the confounds of such an approach, with

potential cohort effects or age-grading changes associated with certain life stages, leading to false assumptions of stability or change (Bailey et al. 1991; Sankoff 2004; Wagner 2012b). The fact that allied fields such as sociolinguistics and language acquisition approach cross-sectional designs with such different interpretive aims speaks to the difficulty in utilizing cohort comparisons to estimate language change. How can cross-sectional studies estimate change for both an aggregate community and particular individuals within the community?

Real-time studies, or studies that gather data from the same participants at different time points to track change over time, can clarify whether differences between cohorts are likely due to individual change, community change, or a combination of the two as data collected from distinct time periods are compared for evidence of community change. Indeed, sociolinguistic literature on real-time studies often touts the ability to test hypotheses based on apparent-time evidence as one of the main advantages of these studies (Labov 1994; Sankoff 2004; Wagner 2012b). Labov's (1963) revolutionary introduction of the apparent-time model set a precedent for utilizing heritage data to verify hypotheses about community change. In his study of Martha's Vineyard, Labov relied on Linguistic Atlas of New England (LANE) data to verify whether generational differences in pronunciation reflected community change, where vowels of interest changed within each new generation, or age-grading, where individuals might change their pronunciation as they age. The role of real-time data in sociolinguistic analyses has thus been a central component of the field from the very first studies of variation and change as many studies in sociolinguistics continue to look for real-time evidence to verify whether changes found in cross-sectional data are more likely to be due to age-grading or change occurring at the community level. But individual speakers are lost in the crowd, since such studies cannot trace whether particular speakers within these age cohorts change over time, and interpretations can sometimes be elusive. In follow-up studies of Labov's study on Martha's Vineyard four decades later, different researchers came to quite contrary interpretations about whether the phenomenon he uncovered was actually a progressive sound change or a temporary reversal of a change that would be suspended (Pope 2002; Blake and Josey 2003).

Although comparisons between cross-sectional studies with heritage recordings, like Labov's study using LANE, can strengthen conclusions based on cross-sectional research, such differences in data collection and analysis can produce ambiguity and inference about change for the particular group members. Trend studies, which examine different subjects in a community at different points in time, address these issues by designing consistent methodologies to collect comparable speech samples across time. These studies attempt to resample populations selecting for specific criteria

to identify whether community changes advance over time. Holding data collection techniques constant, these studies provide an additional layer of rigor for verifying community change that may be missing from studies that rely solely on the apparent-time construct. Henrietta Cedergren was one of the first scholars to utilize this method in her study of *ch* lenition in Panamanian Spanish. Fifteen years after finding an adolescent lead for this variable, Cedergren resampled the population between 1982 and 1984 (Cedergren 1987). The adolescent lead remained, even as the sound change had advanced by 10 to 15 percent per age group. This pattern suggested that the original apparent-time adolescent lead documented in 1973 represented not only community-level change, with the sound change advancing generally within the community, but also a certain amount of individual dynamicity. Findings such as these would suggest that the apparent-time method may underestimate the extent of change as individuals may increase their use of innovative variants as they age, shifting their linguistic behavior in the direction of community change. Though trend studies may suggest that individuals are dynamic, these studies cannot document the extent to which individuals within a community change. Such conclusions are based on inference, rather than direct observation.

Panel studies supplement cross-sectional and trend studies by placing the focus of analysis on the individual. These studies sample the same individuals as they age, thus establishing trajectories of change for each member in the study. Panel studies often cover shorter time spans than cross-sectional or trend studies but contain much larger amounts of data for each participant. Multiple time points are a crucial component of panel studies so that researchers can identify whether trajectories exhibit directionality, or whether differences between points represent fluctuations that do not lead to permanent change. In fact, more than two time points are necessary in order to qualify as an authentic longitudinal study.

Gillian Sankoff and her colleagues' work on Montreal French illustrates why linguists need to pay attention to individuals, even when focusing on community change. Depending on the variable under analysis, speakers were found to move both in the direction of community change, indicating that apparent time would underestimate the actual extent of community change (Sankoff, Blondeau and Charity 2001), and counter to community patterns of change, indicating that apparent-time models might overestimate total levels of community change (Sankoff and Wagner 2006). In this context, the value of understanding individual patterns of linguistic behavior cannot be underestimated. If linguists are able to identify the circumstances under which individuals are likely to progress in the direction of community change, stay stable, or retract from community change, the apparent-time hypothesis can be applied with more rigor and precision.

When studying community change, the dynamic individual is a problem to be overcome rather than embraced. However, more and more linguistics scholars turn to this individual dynamicity as the focus of inquiry. Studies of style-shifting, age-grading, and accommodation all track the ordered heterogeneity of individual dynamicity. Panel studies form the backbone of these conversations. When individuals are tracked over time, linguists can examine how changing social factors influence the behavior of their participants. Using longitudinal data, studies demonstrate how interlocutors influence linguistic behavior (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994), how changing schools or communities can lead to change (Sankoff 2004; Carter 2007; Cukor-Avila and Bailey 2011), how gender can influence lifespan trajectories of change (Eisikovits 1998), or even how social network factors or social aspirations can correlate with patterns of change (Moore 2004; Wagner 2008). The importance of panel studies thus extends beyond testing the apparent-time hypothesis by allowing linguists to closely examine what makes individual linguistic behavior dynamic.

The more that linguists learn about how and why individuals may change their linguistic behavior over time, the more that general observations about these changes can be made. These generalizations provide a foundation for understanding how language may interact with the unique social circumstances of different life stages. For example, entrance to school marks the transition from early childhood to middle childhood, so this particular life stage is associated with institutions that fundamentally alter a child's social network. Similarly, retirement, associated with more advanced aging, can lead to widespread changes in social networks, routines, and behaviors. Many scholars have called to theorize the role of life stages in linguistic behavior as it is assumed that common social circumstances associated with moving between different life stages are likely to influence speech (Hockett 1950; Chambers 1995, 2003; Eckert 1997; Kerswill and Williams 2000; Labov 2001; Cheshire 2005; Foulkes and Docherty 2006; Woolard 2011; Wagner 2012b). While cross-sectional data allow for comparisons across age groups, panel data allow linguists to document what kinds of changes individuals make as they pass from one life stage to the next, providing measurable and observable evidence to support the theorization of how life stages influence linguistic behavior.

Each technique, whether cross-sectional, trend, or panel, provides a piece of the puzzle for understanding how dynamic individuals fit within community change. However, only panel studies place the focus on individual dynamicity. At the same time, only panel studies with multiple temporal data points (rather than two points) can provide authentic insight into the dynamic nature of longitudinal progression of an individual. The envelope for inquiry becomes greatly expanded when linguists track individual behavior incrementally at

multiple points over time, opening up the opportunity to explore a host of factors ranging from micro and situational changes, such as how changes in interlocutors or speech tasks influence speech, to large-scale changes, such as how life stage, community, or school changes influence behavior. The more dynamic the linguistic behavior an individual is likely to display, the more important longitudinal analyses become. Indeed, longitudinal studies would be pointless if individual stability is assumed. For this reason, childhood and adolescence should be an obvious focus for such studies. As those who focus on language acquisition already know, there is no time considered more dynamic for language than the transitions across the first twenty years of life. Accordingly, longitudinal analysis is particularly critical for these earliest life stages.

1.3 Childhood and Adolescent Studies in Sociolinguistic Research

Childhood is a dynamic life stage characterized by rapid changes intimately connected to social context and developmental processes, a fact driving those who research language acquisition. Within this subdiscipline, longitudinal studies have been central to our understanding of typical and atypical development (Miller and Ervin 1964; Bloom 1970; Brown 1973). But due to a focus on early acquisition, these studies tend to track children to the point of early elementary school, about age six years, stopping at that point. By contrast, sociolinguists have directed their attention on teens due to their linguistic creativity, their assumed vernacularity, and the possibility that adolescents may play a crucial role in sound change (Eckert 1997; Labov 2001), while, with some notable exceptions, largely ignoring sociolinguistic variation during early and middle childhood. Unlike the field of language acquisition, panel studies have been much more limited and rare in sociolinguistics (Wagner and Buchstaller 2017).

Due to the difficulty of tracking teens across an extended time period, sociolinguistic research on adolescence either tends to employ cross-sectional designs or focuses on ethnographic studies conducted over the course of a year or two at most (e.g., Habick 1993; Eckert 1997; Eisikovits 1998; Fought 1999; Wagner 2008, 2012a; Bucholtz 2011; Carter 2013). Using these techniques, linguists have made huge strides in understanding language acquisition and stylization. And yet this split focus, with acquisitionists tracking early development and sociolinguists documenting adolescent innovation, leaves critical gaps in the field. How do individuals transition from childhood to adolescence? What is the role of middle childhood in the acquisition of style and language change? In what ways do acquisition and social variation interact? These kinds of questions can only be answered using panel studies that span early childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. The FPG study unites these two subfields by

tracking the path from childhood to adulthood, documenting as the linguistic individual negotiates their surroundings and adapts to their environment. While we view these paths through the lens of variationist analysis and composite, scalar analysis, the FPG study is interdisciplinary in nature, granting insight into acquisition, development, and educational performance, among other disciplines. For now, we turn to some of the key questions that have placed adolescence at the center of the sociolinguistic field to demonstrate why such work is so critical to the field.

1.3.1 The Story of Teens

Teens have a special place in sociolinguistics as linguists and laypersons alike assume that teenage stylizations have the potential to reshape and pave the road to language change (Chambers 1995; Eckert 1997; Labov 2001). For linguists, these hypotheses are based on the appearance of "adolescent peaks" in a number of studies, in which the speech of adolescents stands out as more innovative and/or vernacular than their younger or older cohorts. These peaks have been found in a number of studies including research on sound change in Philadelphia (Labov 2001), Panama (Cedergren 1987), and morphosyntactic change in Toronto (Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2009), just to name a few. Why would teens stand out as more innovative? Labov (2001) suggests that this peak is more than just an anomaly. Instead, he is among those who believe that this trend reflects the future of the language, the eventual majority pattern. How do teens come to be out in front of these changes? Why are adults and children left behind? And, most importantly, what are the factors that prompt these changes to begin with?

Under Labov's (2001) account, children move away from parental models when entering school. Once children are exposed to a wider social network, they begin emulating the speech patterns of those who slightly outrank them: the older kids in the school. Over the years, they increment forward, moving closer and closer to their target models, only to surpass them. In other words, teens lead sound change simply because they've had more time to reshape their speech in ways that make them stand apart from their younger siblings and parents. The youngest children remain closer to the parental models because they have not had the opportunity to reshape their language to the same extent.

Evidence for adolescent innovation largely comes from cross-sectional studies. But adolescent peaks are ambiguous and difficult to confirm without the support of real-time studies. While teens may use newer or more vernacular forms as part of their adolescent identities, there is no guarantee that individuals won't adjust their linguistic performance as they adapt to new cultural circumstances and develop their sense of style. So, just as children of the 1990s shed their JNCO jeans, they also fled from uptalk. As noted before, age-grading

raises problems for the way linguists interpret adolescent peaks in cross-sectional data. Do these peaks represent a temporary change, or a change that will affect generations to come? Panel studies that follow individuals over time are able to test whether changes observed in cross-sectional studies continue to advance or disappear when adolescents toss certain variants aside as juvenile or faddish.

1.3.2 Middle Childhood

While previous studies provide convincing evidence that teens do, in fact, deserve our attention, there is additional motivation to investigate younger age groups. Like the middle child in a large family, middle childhood has mostly been ignored by sociolinguists, so that characterizations of this life stage generally rely on a handful of participants, if included at all in studies. Yet, based on Labov's (2001) theory of incrementation, middle childhood is precisely the period when individuals start modifying their speech away from parental models. This hypothesis finds support in the few studies that do focus on middle childhood and preadolescence. For example, Habib (2014) demonstrates in a study of more than fifty Syrian children, age 6 to 18 years, that preadolescent participants most actively utilized linguistic resources for identity construction, as 8-year-old boys turned to local variants to construct a more masculine identity. This work supports Eckert's hypothesis that preadolescence may be a crucial point for linguistic stylization, as the preadolescent girls in her study skillfully demonstrate through the incorporation of innovative linguistic features in their emerging preteen stylizations (Eckert 2011). While teens may stand out the most in cross-sectional studies, sitting at the peak of vernacularity, middle childhood may be the point when individuals start erecting the mountain, creating paths toward the innovations that will set these children apart from their parents as they reach adolescence. Even if change may stabilize in late adolescence, children get the ball rolling.

The little evidence that exists for middle childhood suggests that the transition from home to school may trigger language change and encourage new patterns of linguistic stylization. To fully understand how childhood fits in the linguistic lifecycle of an individual, however, more studies need to track how children move from early acquisition (Roberts 2002; Smith, Durham, and Fortune 2007), where they transition to school networks and, subsequently, find new linguistic role models (Kerswill and Williams 2000), before becoming trend-setting preteens (Eckert 2011). The FPG project is the first project that follows a large cohort of children through this process, not only offering insight into the neglected life stage of middle childhood but also providing evidence for how transitions between childhood and adolescence impact linguistic behavior.

1.3.3 Emerging Adulthood

Because transitions between life stages offer important insights into how individuals linguistically navigate the social changes associated with entering a new life stage, the transition from adolescence to adulthood also marks a potentially critical moment for linguistic development. New demands associated with entering the workforce, new contacts formed in universities, or newfound mobility sparked through military deployments or work-related relocations all set the stage for individual linguistic change. Unlike middle childhood, plenty of eighteen- to twenty-two-year-olds have been included in sociolinguistic studies over the years, but the importance of this momentous period has been lost as these individuals are often dumped into cross-sectional age bins spanning a decade or more. Recent studies on emerging adulthood, as this life stage has come to be called (Arnett 2000), demonstrate that this transition deserves the kind of scrutiny that adolescence has received in the past. These studies indicate that emerging adulthood is associated with modifications in linguistic behavior, particularly for individuals who hold non-local aspirations or who experience contact with speakers of other dialects in educational or work settings (De Decker 2006; Evans and Iverson 2007; Wagner 2008; Bigham 2012; Prichard and Tamminga 2012). The initial waves of research indicate that transitions between life stages can offer valuable insight into when, to what extent, and in what ways individuals adjust their speech when faced with new social dynamics.

The dynamicity across early childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood documented in short-term longitudinal studies and cross-sectional research all indicate that these life stages would benefit from more extended longitudinal analysis. To fully understand how adolescence impacts language, linguists must observe the ways in which children transition into adolescence and emerge on the other side. Indeed, there is strong evidence that middle childhood and emerging adulthood deserve more attention from linguists, as both may improve current understanding of how sound change advances, and the ways in which life stages correlate with linguistic change. Because FPG is a panel study that traverses infancy to early adulthood, this study can identify individual trajectories of change through these critical life stages, establishing trajectories for each individual in the study. Theoretically, these trajectories are necessary to validate Labov's adolescent-centric model of language change, as well as Eckert's theories of the impact that life stages have on linguistic stylization. From an applied perspective, linguists can also examine the ways in which surrounding social factors associated with distinct life stages, such as entrance into school or the workforce, or individual goals and aspirations, impact the ways in which individuals transition through these life stages. Both theoretical and applied perspectives demonstrate how critical long-term

and large-scale panel research is for these life stages. As the FPG study will illustrate, such research has the opportunity to greatly advance current understanding of how individuals develop linguistic repertoires and move through a complex linguistic landscape.

1.4 Ethnolinguistic Variation across the Lifespan

There is additional motivation to study ethnolinguistic variation across childhood and early adulthood, particularly for AAL. Unlike European American English varieties, child vernacular AAL has been a cornerstone of sociolinguistic research due to an assumed link between the well-documented education achievement gap and home language use (Rickford 1999). It is no coincidence that early research into the variety was funded by the US Office of Education, with specific interest in the relationship between African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and school performance (Labov et al. 1968; Baratz and Shuy 1969; Fasold and Wolfram 1970; Wolfram 1971). This work has continued to develop over the years, prompting research into the intersection between reading and AAVE use (Labov, Gadsden, and Wagner 1995; Craig and Washington 2006; Van Hofwegen and Stob 2012), effective teaching strategies (Rickford and Rickford 1995; Sweetland 2006; Wheeler 2016), and vernacular AAL language acquisition (Green 2011; Newkirk-Turner, Oetting, and Stockman 2014; Green and White-Sustaita 2015). An assumed relationship between adolescence and vernacularity has prompted numerous investigations into teenage stylization and AAL (e.g., Labov 1965; Baugh 1983; Rickford 1999), as well as a handful of longitudinal case studies tracking AAL use during adolescence and adulthood (Baugh 1996; Cukor-Avila 2002; Cukor-Avila and Bailey 2011; Rickford and Price 2013). This handful of studies indicates that speakers of AAL modify the extent to which they use vernacular features as they age. These studies additionally provide evidence for the ways in which social structures and linguistic stylization interact over time, from the broad influence of overarching institutional structures to the in situ influence of interlocutors and stylization.

For example, Cukor-Avila and Bailey (2011) track the ways in which changing school structures and parenting models influence trajectories of use for AAL features and innovative quotatives, documenting in real-time how changing school demographics introduced the use of quotative *be like* into the speech of adolescents in their study. These trends provide additional evidence for patterns observed in cross-sectional data in which school demographics correlate with student participation in sound systems associated with the predominant population in a given educational institution (Kohn 2017). Case studies, such as Rickford and McNair-Knox's (1994) famous "Foxy Boston" study, also shed light on how developing roles may influence the use of an

ethnolect for certain variants but not others. Rickford and Price (2013) attributed a decline of vernacular AAL morphosyntactic variants in their participants' speech to the influence of workplace expectations, adult responsibilities, and motherhood. However, a similar shift in vocalic variants was not observed, with participants showing little change for their vowel systems. Such research indicates the need to explore both macro and individual factors that may influence linguistic behavior, while also serving as a reminder that linguistic variants may show distinct paths of change over time.

These studies indicate that changes associated with distinct life stages have the potential to influence participation in ethnolectal variants in distinct ways for a myriad of reasons. Varying levels of segregation experienced in school, work, and social environments, choices to navigate linguistic prejudice in the educational system, the work place, or broader society, or changing social and/or familial roles, all have the potential to lead to variable participation in an ethnolect over the lifespan. It bears repeating that whenever individual dynamicity is found, studies that track individuals over time are best equipped to document why and how individuals modify their linguistic behavior. However, the potential social impact of such research is even more critical given the real-world impact of linguistic prejudice (Rickford and King 2016) and possible links with academic performance.

1.5 History of the FPG Project

The FPG project stands as an unprecedented research undertaking within the field of sociolinguistics, providing the only large-scale multi-decade study of AAL that spans childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood. The study began in 1990 at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, when eighty-eight African American children were recruited as infants from the Piedmont region of North Carolina. With a mean age of 8.1 months, ranging from 6 to 12 months, the majority of children were in the babbling stage at the time of recruitment. By the time of the last data collection point in 2012, some participants were having their own babbling babies, some had entered college, others found places in the workforce, and all were laying the foundations for their lives as adults. The scope of such a project cannot be understated, as participants actively contributed their time and their voices for over twenty years of their lifespan. The researchers who worked with participants were thus able to capture snapshots of each child as they moved from baby, to toddler, to child, to teen, to adult making their own decisions about parenthood, work, and education.

The goals, data collection protocol, and funding streams have developed and changed over time as the focus of the study has shifted. The study began to examine a number of factors, including the role of Otitis Media on language

acquisition, as well as the effects of early educational interventions, social, and psychological factors on cognitive development, language acquisition, and school performance (Burchinal et al. 1996). Given these goals, four main criteria guided initial recruitment: all participants were required to be African American, none could have genetic disorder or other serious complications at birth, all must have a healthy birth weight (greater than 2,500 grams), and all were recruited from nine local childcare centers. Upon entry into the study, 71 percent of participants came from families living below the poverty level according to federally defined guidelines. Additionally, the majority came from households that posed risk factors for school success. So, for example, the majority of mothers were young, single, and many had not completed high school at the time of their child's birth. These selection criteria provide a level of homogeneity to the initial sample as all participants come from a similar geographic area and share ethnicity, and most come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the study, a number of measures related to home and school environments were tracked at regular intervals, particularly during the early years of the study. Home environment characteristics were collected, including measures of language stimulation, responsivity, cognitive stimulation, and emotional support. School characteristics were also documented, including level of poverty within the school district and racial composition of the school, as obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics (Snyder and Hoffman 2003). These surveys and evaluations added a layer of context to the linguistic data collected, allowing researchers to identify the influence of home and school environmental factors on speech. In addition, from age 4 years until the 5th grade, about age 10 years, participants were administered a battery of standardized literacy and language tests annually, providing the opportunity to evaluate academic performance. Finally, and most importantly for the purposes of linguistic research, informal interactions between caregivers and participants were recorded from about 24 months to age 9 years. Early funding for the project was provided by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCJ-370599, MCJ-379154 & MCJ-370649, R40MC-00343), due to the initial medical focus of the study. A number of studies on early cognitive development, the impact of childcare (Burchinal et al. 2000), the influence of family support (Burchinal et al. 1996), and environmental risk factors (Burchinal et al. 2000) on language development were published from this initial wave of research.

As the project progressed, the linguistic value of the study became increasingly apparent. As such, both data collection protocols and funding streams evolved to accommodate the linguistic focus of the study. Starting in the sixth grade, or about age 12 years, each participant recruited a friend into the study. In addition to doubling the sample size, this provided the

opportunity to record interactions between peers. Additional language tasks were introduced to the protocol, including designs to elicit both formal and informal speech. These tasks were adjusted over the years to be age-appropriate, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. School factors such as level of poverty and racial make-up continued to be collected, and the level of poverty in the home environment was also tracked. A selection of standardized literacy and academic tests continued to be collected. However, additional measures, such as a racial centrality survey, were also developed and added to the data collection protocol. The latter half of the study was funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF BCS-0544744; BCS-1129778) due to the primarily linguistic focus of this stage of research. This latter stage of the project has resulted in several comprehensive studies of the development of AAL on a variety of linguistic levels and social factors ranging from the influence of physical growth on acoustic correlates of pronunciation (Kohn and Farrington 2012; Kohn and Farrington 2017), to studies of the acquisition of style-shifting (Renn 2007; Renn 2010), to the impact of AAL on educational testing (Renn and Terry 2009), to evaluations of age-grading (Van Hofwegen and Wolfram 2010).

The final stage of data collection occurred in 2012 when the participants were, on average, 20 years old. Although the majority of participants started out in similar socioeconomic circumstances, each member of the study shaped their own path in life, with some attending college, some starting families, some entering the workforce, and others moving away. Despite these challenges, more than sixty-seven of the original eighty-eight participants participated in the final interview. In addition to a formal and informal language task, participants were able to reflect on their experience in the project, as well as their feelings regarding language use and language change during this period. Many participants fondly recalled snack time, story time, and playing games with Susan Zeisel, field coordinator throughout the entire study, and other researchers in the project, speaking to the level of commitment of both the investigators and the participants to the project as a whole.

The size and depth of the corpus at this time is nothing short of astonishing. The database includes the speech of two generations, numerous speech recordings over the course of 18 years for sixty-seven of the eighty-eight original participants, a cohort of peers at three additional time points, standardized testing information, demographic information, social network information, family and teacher questionnaires, participant reflections on ethnicity, hopes, dreams, expectations, and language use. In the subsequent years, a host of linguists has dug through this treasure trove, often working as a team to discover what the stories of more than sixty-seven children can teach us about life, language, and change.

1.6 Book Outline

This book compiles the shared lessons learned from more than twenty-six years of work on the FPG project. We take both a holistic and particularized approach to the data, analyzing a range of linguistic and social variables to provide an overarching picture of how children change the way they speak over the course of their lifespan.

We begin, in Chapter 2, by addressing what it means to measure a moving target. Specifically, we evaluate the interaction of physical development and language acquisition processes on linguistic behavior, especially for the earliest years of data collection. First, we outline the ways in which data collection evolved to meet the developmental level of the participants over the course of the study, cataloging the variety of data collection techniques that occurred at each data collection point. We then present evidence for the influence of physical and developmental factors on early speech production in the study. Analyses of vowel production confirm patterns observed in cross-sectional studies for the ways in which vocal tract anatomy affects formant production over time. A study of constraints on copula absence indicates a shift from universal developmental constraints to dialect-specific constraints over the first four years of development. This chapter offers valuable insights to the potential and pitfalls of examining early childhood variation, not only illustrating how developmental processes interact with social variation, but also providing advice for those who wish to attempt such work in cross-sectional or longitudinal studies.

Chapter 3 documents trajectories of change over time for morphosyntactic and consonantal variation. This chapter addresses questions of vernacular optimization, identifying the way in which participants modify their use of vernacular AAL as they move through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. These trajectories are tracked using a variety of metrics, ranging from traditional variation analysis of select variables including copula absence, third person singular *-s* absence, and variation in "ing", to composite assessments measuring a range of AAL morphosyntactic variables. This chapter illustrates widespread patterns of age-grading with peak vernacular use in the adolescent years and subsequent declines in emerging adulthood, providing insight into patterns of age-grading for AAL previously hypothesized in cross-sectional studies and case studies.

Chapter 4 addresses changes to the vowel system over time. Although vowel variation has been a cornerstone focus for analysis in European American varieties, demonstrating ongoing sound changes throughout the United States, variation in AAL vowels has received less attention and practically no attention in terms of their change over the lifespan. This chapter examines how the local stable AAL system interacts with ongoing sound changes identified

among European Americans in the region. Unlike morphosyntactic variation, patterns of change appear idiosyncratic, indicating greater community stability over the lifespan and confirming patterns observed in case studies such as Rickford and Price (2013). This chapter indicates differential patterns of change for distinct linguistic subsystems over the lifespan. In addition, these documented trajectories of vocalic variation provide key insights into interpreting apparent-time peaks for vocalic variation in communities undergoing sound change.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to external factors ranging from correlations with caretaker speech and peer speech, and community and school segregation with participation in AAL. A range of psychosocial measures are evaluated within these chapters, including racial centrality, social networks, stress levels, social skills, self-esteem, and perceived relationships with friends. Within the context of these many psychosocial metrics, the strong correlation between community and school segregation and the use of AAL features over the lifespan provides key evidence that spatial segregation is the most important predictor of AAL use.

Chapter 7 examines style-shifting and language interaction over the lifespan. Beginning with the acquisition of style-shifting, we demonstrate that the formality of an interaction does not influence use of AAL until after age 6 years, indicating that style-shifting is a linguistic skill acquired in middle childhood. We then turn to issues of accommodation, examining correlations between mother and child AAL use, as well as peer-to-peer accommodation levels. This chapter holds key insights into the acquisition of style-shifting and patterns of accommodation over the lifespan.

Chapter 8 considers the correlation between AAL use and scores of different components of a standardized reading test, The Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities, focusing on three sections related to reading: (1) Letter-Word Identification, (2) Comprehension, and (3) Word Attack Skills. As with other studies on AAL and literacy conducted as a part of the FPG project (Van Hofwegen and Stob 2011; Terry, et al. 2010), the results indicate an inverse relationship between literacy and AAL use, thus suggesting an effect related to the use of AAL. However, a number of mitigating effects exist, and participants who show greater code-switching abilities tend to achieve higher scores on these sections.

In the concluding chapter, we review how the FPG project presents an unparalleled view into the linguistic lives of children and adolescents as they establish their own paths toward adulthood. This book offers a unique journey through this process, illustrating how development, linguistic structures, social structures, and the social conditions surrounding individuals all play a role in paving these paths. The insights offered by these journeys not only expand our understanding of sociolinguistic behavior over the lifespan, but provide

a critical interpretive lens to complement and, at times, counter the more common cross-sectional analyses that have dominated sociolinguistics over its first half-century of development.

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