The perspective of linguistic relativity required common characteristics be warranted, not imputed; it prescribed respect for the configurations to which individual histories and ways of life had given rise; it delighted in the variety of human language, as creations of the human spirit, much as one may delight in the variety of styles of art and music to which different cultures and periods have given rise. The perspective of linguistic relativity saw itself as defending the underdog against established prejudice, prejudice unfair to most languages of the world either in forcing them into an ethnocentric Procrustean bed, or in stigmatizing them as inferior for differing from an ethnocentric standard of what a language should be.—Dell Hymes, “Tonkawa Poetics: John Rush Buffalo’s ‘Coyote and Eagle’s Daughter’ (Native American Discourse: Rhetoric and Poetics, Joel Sherzer and Anthony Woodbury, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987:24)

Before I begin the review proper, I have a confession. I’m not a huge fan of the Neo-Whorfian work that posits various attempts to experimentally test some imagined Whorfian hypothesis. I don’t discount such research, I just think that Whorf is more interesting when read in relation to Sapir and Boas and a concern with poetics (see The Language Parallax, Paul Friedrich, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). My goal in this review is not to defend Neo-Whorfian work (they can do that), but to evaluate the kinds of claims made in this book and their relation to broader conversations about Whorf’s writings in linguistic anthropology. I have also framed this review with insights from Dell Hymes and Paul Friedrich that argue for a positive vision of linguistic relativity; one that links with poetics and sees a concern with poetic language and verbal art as a central locus for attuning to the relationship between language and the imagination. The first quote tells us where we’ve come from, and the second tells us where we might go. I do this as a reminder of the continuing value of such work. Toward the end of this review essay, I’ll say something about that positive perspective on linguistic relativity—here the intertwining of the sounds of a language and imaginative acts of interpretation—based on my own work with Navajo poets over the last fifteen years—as one possible way of taking seriously the work of Boas, Sapir, and Whorf.'
Whorfianism is associated with the assertion that “languages evolve according to the needs of their speakers” (32, emphasis in original) or that “linguistic traits consequently shape speakers’ cultural essence” (51). Yet, by the end of the book McWhorter is claiming a distinction between “popular Whorfianism” (first introduced on page 137) and “academic” Whorfianism (167). An honest reading of Chapter 1 (McWhorter’s so-called defense of “Neo-Whorfianism”) shows that chapter to be full of spurious claims and some outright silliness. It is, perhaps, too much to hope that McWhorter’s “manifesto” might also have been a scholarly work.

McWhorter’s handling of the writings of Whorf is at best shallow and superficial. He cites, and I am not making this up, Steven Pinker as a legitimate source on the work of Whorf (169). Pinker is any number of things, but a serious scholar of the work of Whorf is not one of them. McWhorter seems completely unfamiliar with the work of Penny Lee (The Whorf Theory Complex: A Critical Reconstruction, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1996), John Ellis (Language, Thought, and Logic, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), or John Leavitt (Linguistic Relativities: Language Diversity and Modern Thought, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) all of which engage in serious and thoughtful discussions of Whorf’s work. Indeed, McWhorter claims that “Hopi marks time as much as anyone would expect a language to, with good old-fashioned tense markers and plenty of words for things like already and afterward” (xii). But think about this claim for a moment. Who exactly is this “anyone”? And what, exactly, are “good old-fashioned tense markers”? It seems, given McWhorter’s next move is to invoke English adverbs, that McWhorter is arguing that Hopi and English have the same “good old-fashioned tense markers.” Is McWhorter really suggesting that Hopi “tense” is exactly like English “tense”?: I don’t know; this is such a poorly conceived claim that it is hard to understand how to read it. It also seems clear that we—dear English readers—are the “anyone” here. That argument—unstated as it is—that all languages really look like English when you strip away their superficial particularities and cultural miscellany will recur throughout the book (this is repeatedly done when McWhorter reduces other languages to English—see, for example, “many languages use good old that (and this) to mark definiteness” (47)). It’s a curious thing that when you translate Hopi into English, Hopi has a funny way of looking very much like English. Curious, too, I would reckon, that you would reason about a language based on English translations. Whorf would have had none of that.

McWhorter’s book is full of strange contradictions. I like to, following McWhorter (30), call this “having it both ways” (Chapter 2). McWhorter makes much of the fact that languages do not “evolve according to the needs of their speakers” (32, emphasis in original). McWhorter, for example, argues that there is nothing in the environment that would require Tuyuca-speaking peoples to use evidentials (he discards a connection between evidentials and the rain forest environment they live in) (39). As McWhorter summarizes, “the idea that Amazonians have evidential markers because they need to be alert to their environment is . . . a just-so story” (52). Yet, at other times, McWhorter seems absolutely comfortable with a crude environmental determinism argument. For example, McWhorter states that, “a Guugu Yimithirr man processes direction the way he does because his environment forces him to” (18). According to McWhorter, then, the Guugu Yimithirr were passive as their environment forced upon them an absolute frame of reference. Apparently, McWhorter is not familiar with Stephen Levinson’s Space in Language and Cognition: Explorations in Cognitive Diversity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003:48), where Levinson makes clear that such an “absolute frame of reference” cannot be reduced to “simple ecological determinism.” There is something else in McWhorter’s discussion of Guugu Yimithirr that needs to be addressed. I quote McWhorter at length here:

> The scholars who have publicized this aspect [absolute frame of reference] of the Guugu Yimithirr call it stunning evidence for Whorfianism. Namely, they think of this not as something interesting about the Guugu Yimithirr people but as something interesting about their language. (18)

McWhorter cites Levinson’s paper “Relativity in Spatial Conception and Description” from Rethinking Linguistic Relativity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996:177–202) in the notes to Chapter 1 on Guugu Yimithirr from which this quote is taken. But, from my reading of Levinson’s paper he makes no claim for “stunning evidence for Whorfianism”—rather he notes that we need to be wary of assuming our way of classifying directions is universal. John Haviland also takes up the issue of the uses of cardinal directions in Guugu Yimithirr as well in that book (though McWhorter does not cite it) (John Haviland, “Projections, Transpositions, and Relativity,” in Rethinking Linguistic Relativity, John Gumperz and Stephen Levinson, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996:271–323). Haviland, too, makes no claim that it
is “stunning evidence for Whorfianism” and, indeed, he attempts to understand how such a system is actually used, for example, in narratives and in combination with pointing gestures. But the implication that John Haviland (“scholars who have publicized this aspect”), for example, is unconcerned with “the Guugu Yimithirr people” seems utterly misguided. I, for one, cannot read Haviland’s Old Man Fog and the Last Aborigines of Barrow Point (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1998) without sensing a profound appreciation for the Guugu Yimithirr people and for Roger Hart in particular.

Sometimes McWhorter takes the approach of Boas, Sapir, and Whorf to criticize a caricature of Whorf. Here is one of my favorites: McWhorter notes that, “It’s easy to suppose that English’s degree of complexity is ‘normal’” (75) and then challenges that by comparing English to other languages. Whorf would have agreed that we tend to imagine that our language does things “normally” or “naturally” (that is, we tend to assume our language is a relatively unmediated description of the world). Whorf (Language, Thought, and Reality, John Carroll, ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956:82), for example, noted that, “Every language seems simple to its own speakers because they are unconscious of structure.” If all one knows is English, then, of course, English may seem natural and normal. McWhorter here makes Whorf’s argument—he merely pretends he has not. Take as another example McWhorter’s claim (italicized in the original because it’s important), “language structure does not correlate meaningfully with culture” (150). McWhorter then goes on to cite Sapir as agreeing with him. McWhorter might, too, have wanted to add that Whorf (Language, Thought, and Reality, John Carroll, ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956:159) famously noted that, “there are connections but not correlations or diagnostic correspondences between cultural norms and linguistic patterns.” Of course that would go against the caricature McWhorter is creating about Whorf. When McWhorter does quote Whorf, he sometimes presents the quote without giving adequate discussion of the context of the quote. A particularly telling example of this comes from the way McWhorter frames his discussion of the work of Alfred Bloom on Chinese by citing “a less-often quoted passage” from Whorf (the implications drip here). The cited passage from McWhorter (77) is this:

It may turn out that the simpler a language becomes overtly, the more it becomes dependent upon cryptotypes and other covert formations, the more it conceals unconscious presuppositions, and the more its lexations become variable and indefinable. (Whorf, Language, Thought, and Reality, John Carroll, ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956:83)  

This leads McWhorter to the conclusion that, “The whole idea is close to saying that English speakers have thoughts while Chinese speakers merely have notions. Whorfianism, here, seems dangerous” (78). The fuller quote, which follows a discussion of the naive assumptions about attempts to create artificial languages like Ogden’s Basic English and a call for a “world-survey of languages” (Whorf, Language, Thought, and Reality, John Carroll, ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956:81), is much more interesting:

We see here the error made by most people who attempt to deal with such social questions of language—they naïvely suppose that speech is nothing but a piling up of LEXATIONS, and that this is all one needs in order to do any and every kind of rational thinking; the far more important thought materials provided by structure and configurative rapport are beyond their horizons. It may turn out that the simpler a language becomes overtly, the more it becomes dependent upon cryptotypes and other cover formations, the more it conceals unconscious presuppositions, and the more its lexations become variable and indefinable. Wouldn’t this be a pretty kettle of fish for the would-be advocate of a “simple” international tongue to have had a hand in stewing up! For sound thinking in such fields we greatly need a competent world-survey of languages. (Language, Thought, and Reality, John Carroll, ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956:83)  

McWhorter seems to have assumed that languages are merely the piling up of lexations here. McWhorter also takes issue with Whorf’s discussion of “covert formations” and argues that, “it is hard to imagine what scientific approach could illuminate such obscurity and murkiness” (77–78). Luckily, one need not imagine, one can look at a vast array of linguistic work on covert categories inspired by Whorf’s work to see what such an approach might look like. Here, I mention to pay homage to my late professor Carlota Smith, her work on “Aspectual Categories in Navajo” (International Journal of American Linguistics, 1996, 62(3):227–263).

In a section discussing “cartoon linguistics” (53), McWhorter gives us this howler of an example: “Plus, as it happened, I once had a Berber-speaking cab driver, and when I asked him
how to say *win* and *lose* he immediately tossed out exactly the two words for them I had seen in a dictionary” (54). McWhorter shows a casual disregard for the cab driver as a human being, and rather seems interested only in doing the most superficial of linguistic work. There is no discussion of the social context of the elicitation, no understanding of the cab driver and his background. The cab driver merely gives the putative data that McWhorter needs. That’s lousy social science and lousy linguistics, too.

At one point McWhorter claims that, “One might expect that complex grammar would be more typical of ‘advanced’ civilizations. Anthropologists and sociologically oriented linguists often remark that they would expect that intimate groups would have less need of the precision of things like gender and elaborate verb tenses, because shared context could compensate for the fragmentation and impersonality of urban life” (67). This is a rather grand claim with a slippery word like “often” making one immediately suspicious of it. What does “often” mean here? McWhorter doesn’t tell us. Nor, and this isn’t terribly surprising, does he provide any citations to back this claim up. It is simply asserted. Certainly Whorf never made such a claim.

I could go on, but I’ve merely wanted to point out the nonseriousness of this book. Now one could write a serious book that critiqued “popular Whorfianism” or, what I would call, a *naïve Whorfianism* and make a distinction between such views and the more thoughtful and scholarly work that has been done regarding Neo-Whorfian ideas and in linguistic relativity (especially with regards poetics). This is not that book. Toward the end of this book McWhorter (167) claims that he has done that. It is obvious that he has not. It seems clear as well that McWhorter’s “manifesto” (and before that Guy Deutscher’s *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011) reproduces a certain bias in conceiving of languages. While it is debatable—if, perhaps, misguided—whether or not “the world looks the same in any language,” it is absolutely not the case that the world sounds the same in any language (languages, of course, being part of the world). Boas knew this. So, too, did Sapir and Whorf. Poets, too, have known this. McWhorter ignores it. In not taking Whorf’s work seriously, McWhorter misses some of the key insights of Whorf and others which are still of relevance today because they bespeak a more encompassing sensibility about languages of and in the world.

Let me sketch out, briefly, through a discussion of my own long-term work with Navajo poets and poetry, what such a vision of linguistic relativity intertwined with sensitivity to poetics might look or sound like. First, by linguistic relativity, I mean a positive perspective on the ways in which languages facilitate possibilities for us to orient and imagine. This is not a version overly enamored with *constraints* and *determinings*. One way that languages facilitate such possibilities is through the resonances of sounds across a poem and outward to words not said in the poem, but words that haunt the sounds of the poem. Navajos, that I know, sometimes call this aesthetic *saad aheelt'éégo diits'a’* “words that resemble each other through sound” or, shortened, punning. I cannot, of course, do this work on Navajo alone. My sound sensibilities about Navajo are limited. The analysis that follows is based on conversations with Navajo consultants about the sound associations in a particular poem (though I have worked through a number of such poems over the years with a variety of Navajo consultants). Many Navajos that I worked with were quick to point out resonances between and among words and morphemes and consonant clusters. Will such sound associations align among all Navajo speakers? No. Speakers, through use, build felt attachments to linguistic forms. No two speakers build exactly the same felt attachments to linguistic forms. And, over time, associations change.

Here is a poem by Navajo poet, Beauty way singer, and now Vice President of the Navajo Nation Rex Lee Jim that I’ve written about elsewhere (“‘We Don’t Know What We Become’: Navajo Ethnopoetics and an Expressive Feature in a Poem by Rex Lee Jim,” *Anthropological Linguistics*, 2011, 53(3):259–286). The translation was done in consultation with my longtime collaborator Blackhorse Mitchell (writer, poet, singer, educator, Wind way singer, humorist, etc.). Like all translations, this translation is both exuberant (putting in too much) and deficient (leaving out too much) (see *Beyond Translation: Essays toward a Modern Philology*, A. L. Becker, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

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na’ashchxiidi
bíchxįįh
ni’déeshchxidgo
ni’ihchxįįh
chxąq’bee
nànííchxaad
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The badger’s nose stretched round shitting with shit is full

I’ll leave aside a discussion of the morphology of the Navajo and of the complexities of translation or the role of na’ashch(x)iidi in Navajo mythic narratives, and note, instead, Jim’s use of intensification of form through the repetition of the key sound –chx- in the poem. Now the consonant cluster –chx- is an optional form both in writing and in spoken Navajo (all the words can and do occur without the velar fricative [x]). The insertion of the velar fricative [x] here is done as an expressive device indicating an affective stance of pejorative, augmentative, and/or depreciative. It’s not just shit, it’s really nasty shit—the kind, as Mitchell explained to me, that really fills up the toilet. It’s not just a nose, but a huge and hideous snout. It’s also the case that people who use the velar fricative too much are sometimes associated with raving or lacking control. Mitchell recognized the use of the velar fricative as an expressive device almost immediately.

Yet, for Mitchell (and some other Navajos that I talked with about this poem), what was most evocative was the repetition of the consonant cluster –chx-. So what was it this particular consonant cluster was doing? I would suggest, based on conversations with Mitchell over several years and with other Navajos, that the expressive use of -x- in this poem resonates or echoes with the -x- that is normally found in expressions like níchxó’í “it is ugly, disorderly, out of control” or hóchxó’ “ugly, out of control, disorderly.” Such things that lack control, according to some Navajos, are things that need to be returned to order or control or beauty or hózhó. Briefly, among some Navajos there is an important moral distinction between hózhó “beauty, order, harmony, control” and hóchxó’ “ugly, disorderly, lacking control.” Much ritual in Navajo is concerned with returning things that are hóchxó’ to hózhó. In this poem, Jim not only repeats the sound -x- throughout, but in fact creates a consonantal rhyme by way of the repetition of the consonant cluster -chx-. This is the very consonant cluster found in the verb stem –chxo’ roughly and incompletely “ugly.” For Mitchell, the poem, with its use of the consonant cluster –chx-, evokes hóchxó’ and suggests a way to interpret this poem. Jim’s use of the velar fricative is, then, a richly layered and textured poetic accomplishment in Navajo.

While Mitchell stressed to me—as Navajos sometimes do—that each listener of this poem would get “a different image, a different picture” from this poem and that Jim was “creating a descriptive picture” in this poem, Mitchell did note that, for him, the poem suggested that “we don’t think about what we are doing, we don’t know what we become.” Na’ashchxiidí is not behaving in a proper manner and according to Mitchell the -x- seems to add to the view that na’ashchxixidi does not “think about what it is doing” both because of its work as an expressive device, but also because it is used in combination with –ch- and thus resonates with hóchxó’. For Mitchell, this poem seems to suggest that some people are not paying attention to what they are doing to themselves; they are out of control and as such need to be restored to hózhó. The imaginative possibilities evoked, provoked, and convoked through sound in Navajo language poetry are lost in English language translations. As, I would add, are the resonances from English into Navajo. Though, as interlingual puns remind us, new associations can be inspired and evoked. The sounds of a language matter in our imaginative acts of interpretations of poetry as well as other forms of verbal art. Why else care about a sun of York? Or, for that matter, the creativity in and imaginative acts of mondegreens?

Does such an example prove linguistic relativity? I think that is the wrong way to think about the question. I’m not overly concerned with proving linguistic relativity. I’m more interested in thinking through the implications of such imaginative acts and how they are interwoven with the sounds of a language. What it does suggest, then, is that the sounds of a language—the sounds of words or parts of words—can and do inspire acts of imagination. It takes seriously Sapir’s point that:

The fact of the matter is that the “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.
The understanding of a simple poem, for instance, involves not merely an understanding of the single words in their average significance, but a full comprehension of the whole life of the community as it is mirrored in the words, or as it is suggested by their overtones. (“The Status of Linguistics as a Science,” Language, 1929:209)

It also pays respect to the poetry in Navajo by Rex Lee Jim and of the imaginative interpretation of that poetry by Blackhorse Mitchell (among others). Finally, it takes seriously Navajo as something important and not merely English in disguise. It is to acknowledge, then, that, “it is in verbally playful and artistic discourse that we find language turned on to its fullest potential and power, possibilities inherent in grammar made salient, potentials actualized” (“A Discourse-Centered Approach to Language and Culture,” Joel Sherzer, American Anthropologist, 1987:296–297). Poetry and puns are, not surprisingly, utterly absent from McWhorter’s book of the banal.5

At the end of the book, McWhorter tries to argue that his attack on Whorfianism (or is it popular Whorfianism?) is predicated on a concern for humanity and questions of honesty, respect, and accuracy. Given what I have noted above about this book and the kinds of claims it makes, this is perhaps the least convincing part of a thoroughly unconvincing book.

So why review such a book in the Journal of Linguistic Anthropology? McWhorter’s book and before that Deutscher’s book are popular books about a central animating concept—linguistic relativity—in linguistic anthropology and neither author is a linguistic anthropologist. That is not surprising. Linguistic anthropologists have not done well in writing to a broader audience. I offer no reasons why this is so, I merely note the absence. What this means in practical terms is that books like McWhorter’s and Deutscher’s stand in as proxies for linguistic anthropology. We deserve better—our research too important to be left to others, the public too in need of our insights to be fed caricatures. We deserve better, but we—as a discipline—need to make it so.

Let me close with Paul Friedrich’s call for a reformulation of linguistic relativism—a call still worth heeding almost thirty years later—that summarizes my own position on the matter as well.

My general argument, synthesizing linguistic relativism and general poetics, is, as stated at the outset, that poetic language is the locus of the most interesting differences between languages and should be studied together with the poetic imagination of the individual. The open, energizing interaction between these two phenomena—the individual and the linguistic—is at the heart of the general hypothesis.—Paul Friedrich, “Linguistic Relativism and Poetic Indeterminacy: A Reformulation of Sapir’s Position” (The Language Parallax, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986:53).

Notes

1. I’d like to thank Brigittine French for encouraging me to expand this review and say something about that positive conception of linguistic relativity. Thanks also to Danny Law, Sean O’Neill, and Aimee Hosemann for being good sounding boards for what transpires in this review. The debt my comments on Navajo poetry owe to Blackhorse Mitchell and Rex Lee Jim are beyond evaluation. For what my work with Navajo poets has entailed, see Explorations in Navajo Poetry and Poetics, Anthony K. Webster, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009 and Intimate Grammars: An Ethnography of Navajo Poetry, Anthony K. Webster, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015.


4. Here I am thinking of Sylvia Wright’s delightful paper (“The Death of Lady Mondegreen,” Harper’s Weekly, 1954, 201(1254):48–51). Mondegreens are the “mishearing” of poetry or song lyrics based on phonological iconicity (or homophony) (Lady Mondegreen from laid him on the green). I’d also agree with Wright that sometimes the poetry or song is improved because of such imaginative and creative mishearings. See also, “The Sign Is Not Arbitrary,” Dwight Bolinger, 1949, Boletín del Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 5:52–62.
5. The reference here is to Uriel Weinreich’s famous observation that, “whether there is any point to semantic theories which are accountable only for special cases of speech—namely humorless, prosaic, banal prose—is highly doubtful” (“On the Semantic Structures of Language,” in Universals of Language, Joseph Greenberg, ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966:399). To paraphrase for this context, whether or not there is any point to theories of linguistic relativity which are accountable only for special cases of speech—namely humorless, prosaic, banal prose—is highly doubtful.


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During a recent address, William Labov (“The Social Motivation of Sound Change: Recent Developments,” Sound Change in Interacting Human Systems, Berkeley, 2014) called Pittsburgh “the most linguistically self-conscious city in America,” and played “The Dahntahn Song” by Mark Eddie as evidence of Pittsburghers’ awareness of their iconic monophthongal /aw/. In Speaking Pittsburghese: The Story of a Dialect, Barbara Johnstone takes up this consciousness as the object of study, asking which linguistic features Pittsburghers are conscious of, by what historical circumstances this consciousness arose, and which aspects of social identity have become linked to local linguistic features.

Written for linguists and nonlinguists alike, the book is accessible without suppressing key theoretical mechanisms or ignoring complexity in the discourse data. As explained in the Preface,

Trying to describe a city, rather than a smaller, more homogeneous community, has led me to see how important it is to think about the sociolinguistic world from multiple perspectives, as it is experienced by different people, positioned differently in the social and economic world, living in different kinds of neighborhoods, and at different times. The resulting picture is more disorderly, more layered in social space and time, than models that involve orders of indexicality or indexical fields tend to suggest. (x)

Unlike other texts about urban dialects, this book primarily investigates speakers’ ideologies about the dialect rather than the social distributions of its distinguishing linguistic elements. Nevertheless, Chapter 1 provides an informal description of local linguistic features, including the low back merger, monophthongal /aw/, wedge lowering, /l/ vocalization, /o/ fronting, and lexical elements, e.g., slippy ‘slippery’, redd up ‘clean up’, and nebby ‘nosy’. The second person plural yinz is in focus throughout the book. Chapter 1 also juxtaposes these features with their representation in two printed sources about popular perceptions: a folk dictionary and a corpus of 190 print representations of Pittsburghese collected between 1997 and 2000 (cf. Table 1.1). The comparison highlights, as Johnstone observes, the difference in the way that linguists and local speakers experience the dialect: cataloging and understanding features vs. hearing and using particular words and constructions. That is, popular perceptions are not about /aw/ monophthongization, but rather about certain pronunciations of downtown and house because speakers encounter iconic sounds when they occur in words, not in isolation.

Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the notion of regional dialects in linguistics and of theories of “place” in geography, ultimately arguing for a combined material and ideological perspective on the relationship between language and place. Several theoretical strands come together in the ensuing discussion of the social indexicality of linguistic forms, including a Peircean theory of meaning. This theoretical foundation is laid in preparation for Chapter 3’s thesis that linguistic forms first acquire indexical meaning, then symbolic or iconic meaning later; meaning-in-interaction precedes any association with a place. Johnstone argues that Pittsburghese developed in three stages, beginning with the arrival of northern English and Scottish settlers, especially during the late 18th century, followed by further immigration from Europe and ethnic segregation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the context of ethnic segregation, children learned English in the neighborhood from their peers. The early 20th century saw the unionization of the steel industry and working-class solidarity. Working-class white residents were not yet geographically mobile, and so there was no opportunity for local linguistic forms to index localness. No one noticed yinz because everyone used it.