

An Interview with APPLE Lecture Speaker Dr. Walt Wolfram

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INTRODUCTION

On March 3, 2023, the Studies in Applied Linguistics and TESOL (SALT) journal interviewed Dr. Walt Wolfram, an invited speaker for the 2023 APPLE Lecture Series hosted by the Applied Linguistics and TESOL Program at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Walt Wolfram is William C. Friday Distinguished University Professor at North Carolina State University, where he also directs the Language and Life Project. He has pioneered research on social and ethnic dialects since the 1960s and published 23 books and more than 300 articles. Over the last two decades, he and his students have conducted more than 3,500 sociolinguistic interviews with residents of North Carolina and beyond. In addition to his research interests, Professor Wolfram is particularly interested in the application of sociolinguistic information to the public, including the production of television documentaries, the construction of museum exhibits, and the development of innovative formal and informal materials related to language diversity for different institutions. He has received numerous awards, including the North Carolina Award (the highest award given to a citizen of North Carolina), Caldwell Humanities Laureate from the NC Humanities Council, the Holladay Medal at NC State, the Board of Governor's Holshouser Award for Excellence in Public Service, and the Linguistics, Language and the Public Award from the Linguistic Society of America. He has been inducted into the American Academy of Arts & Sciences and served as President of the Linguistic Society of America, the American Dialect Society, and the Southeastern Conference on Linguistics. We thank Dr. Wolfram for his participation in this interview.

THE INTERVIEW

[Here](#) is the link to the full interview.

Background

1. How did you first become interested in linguistics, and in the study of American dialects in particular? [[Q1 Video](#)]

The Language and Life Project

2. You and your team use sociolinguistic research to gather and document information, and to teach and engage with the public about linguistic diversity and difference. What would you say are some of the notable impacts of this project? [[Q2 Video](#)]
3. Did you know you wanted to study North Carolina's linguistic diversity or did you realize how diverse the language use was once you started teaching in North Carolina? What drew you to North Carolina? Tell us a little about that experience? [[Q3 Video](#)]

Working with Communities

4. You've collected data from communities all across the US. How do you work with communities that you are not a part of, build their trust, and authentically represent their dialects in your work? [[Q4 Video](#)]
5. You introduced the principle of linguistic gratuity, which is the idea that language researchers should give back in some way to the communities they collect data from. In your 2008 paper with Jeffrey Reaser and Charlotte Vaughn, you gave some examples of how this principle could be put into practice, like through documentaries, museum exhibits, and curricula. Was there some specific experience or event that led you to developing and promoting this principle? [[Q5 Video](#)]

Research

6. You've written extensively about embracing diversity of dialects. We're interested in how these ideas might translate into written contexts. What do you see as the role of dialectal diversity in academic writing? [[Q6 Video](#)]
7. You've shared a lot of impactful projects you've been working on. How do you see this work evolving in the future? [[Q7 Video](#)]

Connection to Language Education

8. Many of us are language teachers. How can an understanding of sociolinguistics help us be better educators? [[Q8 Video](#)]

APPLE Lecture

9. Can you give our audience a few highlights of the campus-infusion model program for language diversity that you will talk about during the APPLE Lecture? [[Q9 Video](#)]

Advice for Scholars

10. In addition to documentaries, you have published several books intended for a public audience. Do you have any advice for how language researchers can make their work accessible to a wider audience? [[Q10 Video](#)]
11. What advice do you have for students who are interested in pursuing a career in sociolinguistics, and what skills do you think are the most important for success? [[Q11 Video](#)]
12. Is there anything else you would like to share that we have neglected to ask you about? [[Q12](#)]

REFERENCES

- Wolfram, W., Reaser, J., & Vaughn, C. (2008). Operationalizing linguistic gratuity: From principle to practice. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 2(6), 1109-1134.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2008.00092.x>