

Since its beginnings, the field of sociolinguistics has examined listeners' perceptions as well as speakers' productions. However, the questions tackled in sociolinguistic perception research have remained relatively siloed and self-contained, especially in comparison to the broad range of work on production. In this talk, I suggest that perception's full ramifications for sociolinguistic theory are only beginning to be understood. I argue that studying listeners can provide insight into a wide range of key sociolinguistic topics, from core aspects of variables to broader societal applications. I also demonstrate how research into sociolinguistic perception directly interfaces with other subfields that explore the perception of variation. To do this, I present results from several experimental studies that exemplify different areas of my current research program, including one that explores the social meanings of adjective intensifiers (e.g., very, really), and another that probes listener knowledge of probabilistic conditioning constraints of the English sociolinguistic variable (ING). I consider how the findings from these studies can speak to traditional sociolinguistic questions not often addressed by work in perception, and how they can be used to raise new questions. I also discuss how such work can build toward broader applications, such as combatting linguistic prejudice. In bringing new approaches and new questions to sociolinguistic perception studies, I aim to mainstream the role of the listener within sociolinguistics, and to better connect sociolinguistics with other areas of linguistic inquiry.



New directions for the study of perception in sociolinguistics

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