
NWAV at 35: A Look at the History, Directions, and Development of NWAV(E), 1972-2006

Conversations with Jack K. Chambers; Ralph Fasold, William Labov; Dennis Preston; John Rickford; Gillian Sankoff; Roger Shuy; Peter Trudgill; and Walt Wolfram

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"To me, the most amazing thing about NWAV(E) is the fact that it is a tradition rather than an organization. No by-laws, official officers, dues, etc. Must be a Quaker professional organization."

-Walt Wolfram

In the fall of 1997, I was a 21-year-old-undergraduate at Northern Illinois University working with Lisa Ann Lane, who was just finishing her graduate work at the University of Chicago at the time, studying performance and the construction of identity via the discourse strategies of suburban Chicago adolescents. As a result of this work, I ended up co-authoring a paper with her that had the good fortune of being accepted as a presentation at a sociolinguistics conference called NWAVE, which was held that year in Quebec City at Université Laval. Our paper was early on a Friday afternoon, and, as I was suffering from a bit of anxiety over public speaking at the time, we decided it would be best for Lisa to present the paper, with me supervising our overhead transparency slides. As the talk came to an end, I still remember the nervousness I felt, as Lisa stepped down from the podium and asked me to come up front, so I could help provide answers during the question period.

However, what followed wasn't what I imagined. We fielded some easy follow-up questions, clarifying a point we had made here or there, and we also answered questions that were a little more difficult. But the feeling that overwhelmed me was one of belonging, respect, and appreciation for the kind of linguistic analysis we were presenting that afternoon. The rest of the weekend, I remember feeling, and seeing examples of, that same sense of community at all the paper sessions I went to.

Nine years later, after learning that we would be hosting NWAV 35 at The Ohio State University and that I would be serving on the organizing committee, I found myself thinking back on these memories from my first NWAV conference. And I began to wonder about the history of the conference itself: how NWAV first began, how it has developed over time, and how the different trends in the field have impacted the direction of the conference over the years. When I mentioned these thoughts to my fellow grad students, I discovered that many of them had also wondered about the same things. And the more we discussed it, the more I realized that there were probably other NWAV attendees out there who shared our curiosity.

So, I decided to do some research, to try and find some answers to these questions. First, I did what most researchers do: I looked at previous work on the subject—the conference proceedings that have been published over the years. And here's what I learned.

In 1972, the first NWAVE meeting was held in conjunction with the 8th SECOL meeting at Georgetown University. Initially organized by Roger Shuy, Ralph Fasold, and CJ Bailey as a special colloquium called "New Ways in Analyzing Variation in English," the conference was an instant success, with participants calling immediately for a second meeting the next year. Both the original event and the second conference are extensively documented in two volumes of working papers from the time: Bailey & Shuy (1973) and Fasold & Shuy (1973). Following the second meeting, it was clear that the conference worked as an annual event, and it has been held every year since.

During its earliest years, NWAV was hosted exclusively by Georgetown. However, by the mid-1970s, the conference began to move to other sites, with the first non-Georgetown NWAVE occurring at the University of Pennsylvania in 1977. Throughout this formative period, a number of important theoretical arguments concerning implicational scales, variable rule analysis, and the application of variable rules in syntax were fleshed out and debated. By the end of the decade, the status of NWAVE, as THE



*Conference Proceedings of the First Two NWAVE Meetings
(Photo Courtesy of David Durian)*

¹ I would like to give special thanks to Gillian Sankoff for her editorial comments on this piece and to each of the seasoned NWAVers I talked with for taking time out of their busy schedules to discuss the history of the conference with me. In addition, I would like to thank Bridget J. Smith, Stacey Bailey, and Angelo Costanzo for suggestions and comments which strengthened the writing, as well as Don Winford and Brian Joseph for allowing me the space to include this retrospective. This piece would not have been possible without these contributions.

conference concerning issues of variationist approaches to language change and variation, was certain, and the tradition of transferring the conference annually from one host institution to another was established.

With the advent of personal computers and the increased use of quantitative methods throughout the period, the 1980s brought a stronger focus to computational and statistical approaches to variationist analysis at NWAVEs. At the same time, papers in contact linguistics became more of a regular feature, as did debates concerning the origins of African-American English. In 1981, Penn was home to the 10th anniversary of the conference, while Georgetown held NWAVE during its 15th anniversary in 1986. The unique flavor of conferences from this era is captured in Sankoff & Cedergren (1981), Fasold, et al. (1987), Denning, et al. (1987), and Ferrara, et al. (1988).

During the 1990s, conference-planning committees began to shift the focus of the conference to include languages other than English. As a result, the conference began to be referred to as NWAV(E). Also during this era, NWAV(E) began to feature papers dealing with ethnographic approaches to the quantification of social identity, reflecting the shift in the field to approaches focusing on individual identity issues. In 1991, NWAV(E) observed its 20th anniversary at its original home, Georgetown University, and in 1996, it celebrated its 25th anniversary in style at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. For readers interested in learning more about this era of the conference, proceedings from many of these NWAV(E)s have been made available via the University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics (Meyerhoff, 1996; Boberg, et al., 1997; Moisset, 1999; Sanchez, 2001), and in Eckert (1991), Arnold, et al. (1996), and Paradis, et al. (1998).

Heading into the 21st century, NWAV(E) celebrated its 30th anniversary at the North Carolina State University in 2001. Since that time, many of the hosts have chosen to use NWAV as the conference title. In the 21st century, it has been hosted by Stanford University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, New York University, and now, The Ohio State University. Each institution has created a distinctive Web site for the conference, demonstrating the recent move to digital communication as a way of disseminating information into the field. At the time of writing, these Web sites are still actively available online, and each offers a unique perspective on the ever-growing size and popularity of the conference. As in the 1990s, the principal home for the publication of proceedings has remained the University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics series. Proceedings for NWAV 30-33 have been published as Johnson & Sanchez (2002), Sanchez & Horesh (2003), Evans, et al. (2004), and Wagner (2005)². NWAV 34 proceedings are available at this year's conference as Friesner & Ravindrath (2006).

So those are the facts about the conference: dates, places, and names, and a good start to the search for information on the history of NWAV. But the story is incomplete. After I read through the proceedings and wrote the overview you've just read, I felt that something was still missing. What of the substance of NWAV as a cultural event, an intellectual gathering place, and an annual institution with devoted attendees? What do people remember about NWAV? How do folks who have attended over the years think the conference has changed? What about the future of NWAV?

Realizing I still had these unanswered questions, I decided to turn to some authorities for the answers. My role on the NWAV 35 committee allowed me to talk to a number of seasoned NWAVers via email—folks who have attended many NWAVs over the course of their careers, and most of whom attended the very first meeting in 1972. In early October 2006, I was fortunate enough to correspond with Jack Chambers, Ralph Fasold, William Labov, Dennis Preston, John Rickford, Gillian Sankoff, Roger Shuy, Peter Trudgill, and Walt Wolfram, and here is what they had to say regarding the conference.³ After compiling the responses, I realized that there was more to the story than my initial research revealed. The conference seems to inspire an energy, enthusiasm and dynamism that spreads like lexical diffusion in the folks who attend. This is why NWAV has been such a successful enterprise for the last 35 years, and will be for many more to come.

David Durian: *"What was NWAV like in the early days of the conference? I've read in the first proceedings that it was held in conjunction with the 8th SECOL meeting. How did it evolve from a special colloquium to a distinct annual event?"*

William Labov: NWAVE was first created by C.-J. Bailey, Roger Shuy and Ralph Fasold at Georgetown, as a conference that would define three streams of linguistics: quantitative sociolinguistics, generative semantics, and discourse analysis. From the outset, it was an annual conference, first located at Georgetown. After Georgetown U. Press stopped publishing the annual volumes, NWAV moved from one host university to another. It is a splendid example of successful continuity without officers, organization and dues. Not long after the beginning, generative semantics disappeared, and over the years, the discourse component has become less important, so that the main current of NWAVE now flows around the analysis of linguistic variation and change.

Gillian Sankoff: In the early 1970s, there was a tremendous amount of excitement about the breakthrough represented by Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) in reconciling synchronic and diachronic linguistics by studying language change in progress. The first NWAVE was held at Georgetown in 1972, profiting from the energy of C.-J. Bailey, who had offered his wave model as an alternative to the variable rule approach, as well as the presence of Roger Shuy, who along with Walt Wolfram, was the author of some of the very first systematic work in the speech community. Henrietta Cedergren, Didi Sankoff and I had spent the three previous years digesting every word of the Social Stratification of English, and came to Washington with some

² Please note that, according to the Penn Linguistics Web site, this volume is currently out of print.

³ In addition, I contacted Henrietta Cedergren and Shana Poplack. Unfortunately, they were not able to respond before our press deadline due to time constraints.

of our first analyses of the Montreal data that was beginning to emerge from our 1971 study, modeled on Labov's SSENVC, but with some innovations in sampling, and broadening the scope of variables we were dealing with. With 64 papers presented that first time, Georgetown continued to hold the conference over the first few critical years, and helped to get it started as a going concern. When the Georgetown crew needed a break, the current rotating system evolved, and in addition to the locations well known to those who have attended over the past decade, they've included Austin, Las Vegas, Atlanta, Québec City, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto,

Ralph Fasold: NWAV(E) was at bottom the brainchild of Charles-James N. Bailey, who was convinced that the proper way to do linguistics was to include variation. He was very much interested in developing a forum for research on variation in the core areas of linguistics: phonology, syntax and historical linguistics. I believe he had as a goal a rapprochement with the Chomskyan linguistics of the day. It disturbed him (and also me at the time) when anthropologically- and sociologically-based research came to be presented as well. Roger Shuy and I helped with the logistical support, but it was C-J Bailey who conceived the conference.

The mission has changed considerably over the years. NWAV meetings now include research in fields like gender, bilingualism, ethnicity, identity - areas we would not have considered in the first years.

NWAV was a product of an organization called the Lectological Society in the first few years. The Lectological Society promoted very theoretical approaches to variation based on the work of Bailey and also Labov.

The first meeting was indeed held in conjunction with SECOL, but even then, variation scholars outnumbered the SECOL participants. Some SECOL members resented the fact that NWAVers seemed to be overrunning their regional conference. From the second NWAV on, it was an important annual event on its own merits.

Walt Wolfram: It was really spontaneous generation, to be honest. The first NWAV was highly successful and folks said, "Hey this worked well; let's have another one. And another one." And now we're in a terminal loop. It's not quite that simple these days because of its size, but it still profits from its informal, non-institutional aura. I don't know of a comparable professional conference of this magnitude.

Jack Chambers: I was still doing theoretical syntax, I'm afraid, when NWAV booted up. I got the proceedings right from the start because it was the forum for Haj Ross [via the paper "A Fake NP Squish"] to spread the word about squishes, the syntax of probabilistic categories (though we didn't call it that at the time). I had already written "Canadian Raising" which has sociolinguistic implications, but it was almost six more years before I actually undertook the variation research that it implied.

John Rickford: I think I've attended virtually every NWAV since the initial meeting at Georgetown. Since I'm a pack rat, I also have folders with the programs and handouts from most of those meetings too.



NWAV(E) Programs of the 1990s
(Photo Courtesy of Gillian Sankoff)

My favorite memories are from that first meeting in 1972. I was just beginning my second year as a graduate student in sociolinguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, and the experience was very heady. On the one hand, there were presentations by sociolinguists and creolists whose work I was already familiar with from their books or articles (e.g. C.J. Bailey, David De Camp, Joey Dillard, Ralph Fasold, Bill Labov, Bill Stewart), and whom it was exciting to see and hear in person. Then there were the relative newcomers, like Peter Trudgill, confirming the validity of Labov's quantitative approach with new data from England, and the young rising stars Henrietta Cedergren and Gillian Sankoff, who gave their talks in English, but could be heard speaking fluently in French or Spanish to their colleagues; Labov had already told us to look out for them as the part of the Montreal group that was beginning to extend the boundaries of the quantitative paradigm, and those of us who were earlier along in our graduate careers tried to envisage ourselves making a similar "splash" as we entered the field. Then there was Derek Bickerton, taking no prisoners as he advocated for the "dynamic/implicational" paradigm, and threw rocks at the "static/quantitative" paradigm; although his attack at this meeting was directed at analyses of Montreal "que" data previously formulated by Cedergren and Gillian Sankoff, he went about it with the same candor and vigor he had demonstrated in his 1971 "Foundations of Language" article, in which, to my great interest, he had used data from my native Guyanese Creole.

Then there were the mainstream historical linguists (Hans Hock, Elizabeth Traugott) and the formal syntacticians, semanticists and phonologists (including Bruce Fraser, George and Robin Lakoff, John Ross, Theo Vennemann, and co-second year student Ivan Sag, who had not yet transferred from Penn to MIT). Their presence and active involvement in the co-creation of this "New Ways of Analyzing Variation" approach with sociolinguists and creolists made me feel as though that meeting was indeed at the leading edge of a revolution in linguistics, a new wave that would meld subfields and usher in a new age. And when C.-J. Bailey declared in his "Preface to the NWAVE Business Meeting, 10-28-72" that he was "happy to be rid of static, homogeneous models and to be rid of the fudges represented by 'my dialect,' 'performance component,' 'optional,' and the rest," we were probably all ready to voice a unanimous "AMEN!" Most of Bailey's remarks, and most of the papers from that first meeting, are chronicled in the *New Ways of Analyzing Variation in English* book that he co-edited with Roger Shuy in 1973 (ahh for the good

old days when NWAV volumes followed NWAV meetings as surely as night followed day), but this closing paragraph does not appear there, and is worth reprinting for its historical feel:

"There is the final matter of continuing the NWAVE colloquiums, of setting up some informal organizations to plan and perpetuate them. Do we need or wish to get together periodically and to record the results in print? I think so. The larger and more formal organizations need to be complemented by a smaller and more intimate one geared to our special needs and interests, if my feelings are correct.

I therefore propose that we set up such an organization, and I nominate _____ to be its first leader."

My first presentation at NWAV was not until a year or two later, but the headiness and excitement of that first NWAV meeting stayed with me and inspired my own education and research in graduate school, and I can remember it as clearly today as if it were yesterday, even though it was thirty-four years ago."

Peter Trudgill: "The very first NWAV was the occasion of my very first visit to the USA. I was 27. I had been invited on the strength of the submission of my paper "Sex, Covert Prestige and Linguistic Change in the Urban British English of Norwich" to *Language in Society*.

I remember:

- Swimming pools in back yards on Long Island as the plane came in to land at Kennedy Airport;
- The restrooms on the Greyhound bus to Philadelphia - I couldn't work out why anyone would want a rest;
- Grass growing out of the middle of the street in Philadelphia;
- Enormous hospitality from Bill Labov and family at his home on my first ever meeting with him;
- Bill's first utterance to me - "Say, Peter, can you do an American accent?";
- Bill's virtuoso performance of *The Signifying Monkey* at the dinner table;
- The taxi driver in DC who couldn't speak English;
- The very warm welcome from Roger Shuy and C.J. Bailey when I finally made it to Georgetown;
- Unforgettable hospitality from Ralph and Gae Fasold, who put me up at their home in Alexandria;
- The enormous sense of intellectual excitement at the meeting - the feeling that we were doing something new and important;
- Giving my first ever conference presentation - it was rubbish.
- Very agreeable and impressively intelligent people with very long hair, like Jerry Morgan;
- Very ebullient and friendly and impressively intelligent people, like Walt Wolfram;
- The very enjoyable anti-Nixon grammatical examples used by people like Ivan Sag, objected to vociferously only by a single Republican protester;
- A determination, upon my arrival back at Reading University, that Variation was the way to go.....

And of course it was."

Durian: *How has NWAV adapted to changes in the direction of the field? Thinking about the entire 35-year run of NWAV, what do you think are the 2 or 3 biggest changes that have impacted the conference over time?*

Dennis Preston: For me, NWAV has always been the trendsetter. It has not so much adapted as it has presented the forum for new trends and new ideas to be spread more widely in the field. Every year when I return, there are a number of papers which reflect (and refine) the introductions and tweakings of the previous year. To list them would be to simply duplicate the vibrant growth of the field itself.

Fasold: The biggest change from my perspective was when NWAV relocated away from Georgetown University. Roger Shuy and I thought of NWAV as a twin of the Georgetown University Round Table. We eventually wearied of running the conference year after year and accepted Penn's offer to host it. It later rotated among Penn, Montreal and Georgetown and soon other universities hosted it as well, and now it is a truly national and international conference. The second biggest change has been the broadening of the area to include a wide swath of the whole of sociolinguistics.

Chambers: In the first decade NWAV solidified the growing sense of the uniqueness of language research that treated social factors as independent variables, by promulgating quantitative, variationist methods for all kinds of studies. One of the complaints of theoreticians at the time was that sociolinguists were obsessed by methodology, and that was partly true but (I now see) inevitable. Once the methods were secure, there was a tremendous expansion in terms of languages, practitioners and approaches. NWAV became (and remains) the most visible manifestation of the global spread of variationist research.

Labov: The first change was the shift to consider variation in language in general, witness the variable loss of the final E. Second was the abandonment of polemics. Early NWAVs resounded with arguments on implicational scales vs. variable rules, generative semantics vs. lexical syntax, debates on the origin of AAVE, and so on.

Over the years, NWAVers have found that language is itself more interesting than disputes of this kind. Third of course was the introduction of more sophisticated mathematical tools: multivariate analysis in the form of logistic regression or multiple linear regression and more recently, the rapid expansion of the use of acoustic analysis.

Sankoff: As someone whose work spans intra-linguistic variation (mainly my work on Montreal French), creole studies (Tok Pisin) and language contact (French-English bilingualism), I am happy to see the important developments that have occurred in studying language contact with the tools of the variationist arsenal, and to see this work represented at the meeting. To me, the most important development in our field has been the advent of *Language Variation and Change*, originally a direct outgrowth of the need to find a regular publication venue for papers presented at NWAVE. I think we owe a tremendous debt to Didi Sankoff for having taken on the burden of the editorship for almost 20 years.

Wolfram: In adapting to the changes in the field, NWAV has been a follower. The conference is the people who attend; accordingly, if folks who do more narrowly defined variation analysis extend their paradigm(s), the conference simply accommodates that shift. In an important sense, the conference simply hosts the people with the ideas; it generates no ideas of its own. When different institutions host the conference, the conference is open to their professional specializations or niche eccentricities. That's good--and that adaptability inspires and preserves the right to go with the flow.



NWAVE(E) T-shirts of the 1990s and 2000s
(Photo Courtesy of Gillian Sankoff)

Durian: Over the years, NWAV has expanded to include areas such as discourse analysis, ethnographic approaches to studying variation, and language contact. Based on your experience with the conference over time, what other areas would you like to see NWAV include?

Labov: No, as I noted before, the discourse component has been receding rather than expanding, as the methods of proof and demonstration have not been able to keep up with the analysis of the more structured areas of linguistics. I think that the most important area for NWAV to attract and develop is the quantitative study of historical syntax. NWAV should be the primary site for papers in this field.

Sankoff: The broader view of sociolinguistics as laid out in Hymes' landmark collection (*Language, Culture and Society*, 1964) has always been important in our field. Macro-social and cultural forces shape language variation and change, and the dialectic between the individual speaker and the speech community is still an important area of research. However, given the rapid growth of the conference over the past few years, and the availability of other conferences that highlight discourse and ethnography, I would like to see a continuing effort to focus on linguistic structure as central. Of course, the beauty of NWAVE has always been that local hosts get to decide these things afresh each year, and more than anything else, I'd like to see that spirit of local initiative remain central to the conference.

Preston: The general areas of pragmatic variation is still underexplored, in the field in general. I hope to see more of it at NWAVs in the years to come.

Chambers: More important than the subject areas, it seems to me, is accountability in the quantitative, variationist perspective. It is a real challenge to seek it out in the concurrent sessions.

Wolfram: I would like to see NWAV include more experimental and psycholinguistic approaches to variation. In part, I say this because it would bring in folks who don't sing in our choir. We need to hear different voices and work on harmonizing. Symbolically, I think that it is important to expand in ways that take us out of our comfort zones as researchers and vary our thinking, if you will.

Fasold: I am nostalgic for the era when NWAV was more restricted (shall I say "focused?"), but I realize that the conference and its community is really all the stronger for being more inclusive.

Durian: How many NWAVs have you attended? What are a few of your favorite memories of the conference from among the years you've attended?

Chambers: There are eye-opening papers every year, and the nicest surprises came from people who were grad students at the time. The main attraction year after year is the congregating factor, being in a place where you run into sociolinguists at 7 a.m. in the coffee shop and 11 p.m. at the bar and all day at the sessions.

Fasold: I've lost count! For the first 20 years or so, I attended almost all of them. One of my favorite memories was of several meetings in the 1990s was having early-morning breakfasts with Walt Wolfram and Dennis and Carol Preston. We called ourselves the Old White Guys, and gave Carol titular "guy" status!

Labov: 35 by the time this appears. I'm afraid there are too many memories jostling each other for any to emerge at the expense of others.

Preston: I've been to nearly all of them; I missed the 1st while I was in Poland on a Fulbright and another for the same reason while in Brazil. My favorite memory is self-aggrandizing, but I'll tell it anyway. Frank Anshen (an NWAV stalwart in its early days) and I were in Philadelphia at a meeting years ago (which, I can't remember) and were on our way to an eatery when Frank mused:

"How come everybody's got their own 'How many X's does it take to screw in a light bulb,' even generativists have one, but we don't. 'How many sociolinguists does it take to screw in a light bulb?'"

I quickly responded (and am amazed to this day at my speed in doing so): "It varies."

I was so impressed with my own wit that I even had a t-shirt made up with this exchange and distributed it to sociolinguistic friends around the world. Alas, most of us have outgrown them, but I will bring (if not wear) the original to this year's meeting.

Sankoff: I haven't missed many - so probably I've attended about 30 NWAV(E)s. The first year I was in Philadelphia (1980), I missed my plane to Detroit and so did not attend the Ann Arbor meeting that year. I had already lent my car to a bunch of graduate students who drove there in it, and wondered what had happened to me. I'll always remember my first view of Walt Wolfram, up on the stage at the Hall of Nations, young, handsome, wearing cowboy boots, and talking like a proud Philadelphian. I was shocked to find out that this already famous person was a member of my own generation! Another highlight I remember very clearly was the fabulous reception Shana Poplack organized in the House of Parliament at the Ottawa NWAVE - but I don't personally have a record of the date of that auspicious meeting. I remember being late getting back to campus from an errand to Di Bruno's cheese store for the refreshments at the first meeting I was involved in at Penn (1981). As I was 7 months pregnant at the time, it probably occurred to some attendees that I might not in fact make it back at all. The catering was a little more "artisanale" in those days.

Wolfram: I stopped counting, to be honest, and only missed a span of NWAVs when I was helping to raise children and coaching youth football. As anyone at The Ohio State University would recognize, Saturday football always takes precedence over NWAV (Isn't that why we're having NWAV in November?). I was at the first NWAV and I hope that I never get to say that I was at the last one.

My favorite presentation at NWAV was the one in which I presented with my son on "How Come you Ask How Come?" As a six-year old, he actually stood at the podium and spoke a few words at the beginning and the end of the presentation. If I might say so, "He was adorable!" By the way, he became the only second grader ever at Woodlin Elementary School to co-author an article (Wolfram and Wolfram 1977). Unfortunately, he hasn't published anything since then and was not granted tenure at Woodlin Elementary School—instead, he went into finance so he could help support me.

Durian: *This year, we had roughly 275 submissions for the conference. In the early days, what were the numbers like? Let's say someone had come to you in 1986, and told you they had a time machine and saw that the conference would be as large as it has been the last few years. What do you think you would have said in response?*

Roger Shuy: We had very few submissions for papers in the early days and virtually all of them were accepted. I can see that having to deal with 275 would tax any host institution. One of the problems of large conferences is that they become too crowded and diverse. The early days NWAVs were small enough to cause a sense of unity and friendliness that gets easily lost when the group becomes large. I can even remember the relatively small size of the LSA meetings in the 50s and 60s, now long lost in its huge size. Interestingly, the ADS meetings that still take place in conjunction with LSA seem to preserve some of that intimacy. Growth in size has its advantages, but also its down sides.

Fasold: Actually it didn't take long for submissions to NWAV to exceed 100 annually. I don't think I would have been surprised if I had been told that the conference would be the size it is today.

Chambers: Every year NWAV is bigger than the year before. The attraction starts with the theory and accelerates with the camaraderie. It always seemed it would flourish.

Labov: I would have been skeptical. The study of change and variation has become a much larger part of the linguistic scene that we first thought it would.

Preston: I had only 150 when I hosted the 2000 NWAV, but I had no inkling then (nor in 1986) that the sociolinguistic industry was not a growth one.

Sankoff: I would have been very surprised!

Wolfram: That's insane! All those folks submitting to NWAV need to get a life—and there aren't enough jobs for all of them.

Durian: *Where do you see NWAV heading during the next 35 years?*

Fasold: Well, as Yogi Berra is supposed to have said, "It's hard to make predictions, especially about the future". In the near term, I expect NWAV to reflect the present-day intellectual trend in the direction of post-modernist thinking and away from a more Enlightenment-inspired approach. By 35 years from now, I think the safest prediction to make is that NWAV will be influenced by some major element that I cannot even think of right now.

Preston: On the academic side, I see it further integrating itself (and being recognized) in the areas which some linguists have believed to be closed to variation study (or open to it only in a trivial way). This integration and recognition has happened slowly but convincingly over the years. I think it will continue to grow.

On the practical side, it becomes increasingly difficult for institutions to host NWAV. The local expenses have grown steadily, particularly as institutions have increasingly seen themselves as entrepreneurial rather than support and service centers. I treasure the floating crap game that NWAV is, but I also wonder if some more organized approach, if only to meetings, might not better insure our glorious get-togethers.

Labov: I think that NWAVE might contract, rather than expand further, for three reasons. (1) Four simultaneous sessions means that we see less than half of the papers we would like to. (2) As numbers of papers grow, the expense of running an NWAV grows beyond a desirable limit. (3) The growth of NWAV is accompanied by the shrinking of the sociolinguistic component at other meetings—the Linguistic Society of America, Berkeley Linguistic Society, Chicago Linguistic Society—which tends to isolate the area from other subfields of linguistics. The solution might be to accept fewer papers and return to three simultaneous sessions—no more.

Sankoff: As I said before, I value above all else the independence and local initiative that has characterized the conference from the beginning. It'll go where the scholars who care about it, take it—and that'll be fine with me.

Wolfram: Hmm. I just hope it ain't headin' the same place I am. It's hard to say. It's a personality-run non-organization so it would depend on the personalities who replace the old guard. The people who aren't sleeping during the sessions should be able to answer this better than me or the other dozers.

Chambers: Ready or not, it will have to develop infrastructure? A permanent organization, slate of officers, maybe some kind of institutional affiliation. We are still running it like an intimate affair, but it has been years since we knew everybody by name and could just hand it over the next year to whoever seemed to be in line. Not many places are big enough to accommodate it now. Without more structure, it could collapse under its own weight, and I don't see that happening.



The NWAV 35 Organizing Committee from Two Perspectives: (L-R) Craig Hilts, Brian Joseph, Bridget J. Smith, Angelo Costanzo, Hope Dawson, David Durian, Ila Nagar, and Donald Winford (Photo Courtesy of Stacey Bailey)

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Prelude: Some Reflections on the History and Future of NWAV

First some dates. we started the sociolinguistics program at Georgetown in 1970, thanks to an NSF grant. The original faculty were Walt Wolfram, Ralph Fasold, Dave Smith, and me. The NSF Review committee that okayed our grant included Dell Hymes, who made sure that we had an ethnographic component, and Joshua Fishman, who made sure that we dealt with language planning.

Wolfram made it clear that he'd be with us only for our first year, and we hired CJ Bailey in our second year, 1971. At that time, sociolinguistics was still in its infancy and we wanted to become the center of such work. Georgetown held the annual GURT but it was usually focused on ESL and language learning/teaching. So we decided to hold our own conference in 1971, which we first called NWAVE, New Ways of Analyzing Variation in English, largely because most of the US sociolinguistic work then was on Black English, as it was called in those days. This was before email, of course, so we (Bailey, Fasold and I) sent announcements by snail mail to the places and people we thought would be interested. SECOL was being held at Georgetown that year and, since we were concerned that we might not be able to attract enough sociolinguists alone, we decided to hold it in conjunction with that already established group. We had no intention to make SECOL a continuing partner, however. And I don't recall there being many SECOL people who attended our meetings, but I could be wrong in this.

About 50 people showed up. Some of the papers described variation in topics other than English. We had an informal discussion at the end of the meeting and Bailey suggested that we form a new organization, called The Lectological Association. It was to be a kind of counter organization, with no dues, no membership list and none of the bureaucratic stuff that other organizations had. For some reason, they elected me president. Our NWAVE registration fee was small, covering only the wine and cheese that we bought for the evening party. Most of the attendees were housed in faculty homes and students provided crash space. It was a very low cost event. Georgetown provided the meeting rooms and coffee gratis. At our "open business meeting," we played around with the name a bit, and soon NWAVE became NWAV, to accommodate variation in other languages. It was unanimous that we should try to continue these events in future years.

Attendance increased at the next year's meeting, also hosted by Georgetown. And also the following year, but maybe only about a hundred attendees. It was great for our students and so we kept having it at Georgetown for the following three or four years--I don't recall exactly how long. Meanwhile, Bailey decided to move on to other things but Fasold and I continued to do the work to hold it each year. The Lectological Association died as easily as it was born. There seemed to be no real need for it. Finally it became evident to us that NWAV should be shared with other universities because the work of running it every year became a burden. Penn was the logical next choice, and Bill Labov held it there, as I recall. From there it spread to other campus sites and you know the rest.

So NWAV began with language variation in the sociolinguistic and ethnographic mode. But it continued to grow with the development of discourse analysis, pragmatics and other things in the 70s and 80s. Today it stands as one of the important outposts of linguistics when real language use is the focus. As you may know, my own interests turned to language in the legal context, a rich subject of variation that hasn't seemed to penetrate NWAV yet, possibly because it's so new. Variation in other contexts, such as medical communication, politics, government, advertising, business, diplomacy, etc. seem to me to be areas for expansion as well. I would also think that some of the exciting work on usage, now being done by people like Arnold Zwicky and Geoff Nunberg, should play an important role in NWAV meetings.

My favorite memories are of the early NWAVs we held at Georgetown, as much for the non-meeting aspects of it for the papers themselves. I used to have a house full (as many as six or seven) participants staying in my home. I can recall late night discussions with Labov, R. Lakoff, Sankoff, Haj Ross, Bruce Fraser, John Lawler, and others that went on into the wee hours. Those were very special times for us all. We bonded in a wonderful and enduring way.

I don't get to NWAV meetings very often these days, although I attended most of the NWAV meetings early days. After I retired ten years ago and [am] now in my mid seventies I find travel less easy than it used to be. The last one I went to was at Raleigh a few years ago. No longer being at a university, I don't get notices of the meetings, making it difficult as well. I would think that there might be some way to alert retired faculty of times and places."

The future of NWAV? I've always wished that I could cut down my travel costs by attending LSA and NWAV on or about the same time. It would seem reasonable to me that if ADS can meet conjointly with LSA, NWAV might be able to do likewise. I like the separation of variation from general linguistics but, at the same time, it pays a steep price. As one of the founders of the American Association of Applied Linguistics, I recall that we organized AAAL to meet WITH LSA at first, so that the deep chasm between theory and applied might be reduced by some kind of communication between them. As AAAL grew, the new leaders decided against this idea and proceeded to separate themselves from the field that fed them in the first place. To my thinking, this was an unfortunate change. We need to talk more with each other across our sub-specializations or Language will continue to put forth only theory papers and linguistics will continue to be thought of as dealing only with abstractions rather than with real-life language use.

I don't suppose the above idea is very practical or that it will be very well received. Maybe the sub-specialties, like language variation, need to establish themselves separately in order to be found credible. But there must come a time when the whole field of linguistics recognizes the contributions of its very diverse constituents. By now I see NWAV as having established the credibility of variation in the overall scheme of linguistics. If there is a next step to be taken, it is one of joining, not separation. But some sort of first step has to be taken. I suspect that it is up to NWAV to take it, since the establishment of LSA seems less inclined to do so.

Looking back, I'm very proud of our having started NWAV at Georgetown 35 years ago. I think it helped move the field in very useful directions. But the fact that NWAV is still a thriving and exciting idea is a credit to many people with vision, energy, and good sense. That it moves around from campus to campus turned out to be a much better idea than I thought it to be at the time we reluctantly gave up our baby for adoption to other parents.

My special thanks to Ohio State for continuing the tradition this year. I wish I could be there to help celebrate this 35th anniversary.

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