

Dialect differences in Central Pennsylvania: a socio-historical account of regional dialect use and adaptation by African American speakers in the Lower Susquehanna Valley

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When members of minority groups migrate to majority communities, their rates of assimilation (or non-assimilation) to the majority culture are dependent on several factors including, but not limited to, the following: 1) the degree of physical, social, and economic isolation experienced by the migrants in their new location, 2) the history of the migration and ways in which the newcomers are received by the members of the established community, and 3) the strength of the connection the migrants maintain to their former community.

This study examines the socio-historical acquisition and non-acquisition of the regional dialect by African Americans who are at least second generation residents (i.e., natives) of Pennsylvania's Lower Susquehanna Valley (including Harrisburg, York, and Lancaster) and investigates the reasons contributing to differences found among these speakers in terms of the degree to which they have acquired the local variety. The linguistic factors that are considered are region-specific elements of lexicon and syntax; social and historical factors involve the migrant African Americans' relationships to the European American community including physical location (rural vs. urban, integrated vs. segregated), socio-economic status, rates and types of contact among speakers, and the connections maintained by the relocated members to their home communities.

Findings show that European Americans still use substantially more of the local expressions, and that the region's rural African Americans, who are physically isolated from large numbers of other African Americans, and who are in frequent, close contact with whites, are no more likely to integrate the local lexicon into their everyday usage than the African Americans who reside in one of the area's urban centers. Despite the fact that urban Lower Susquehanna Valley African Americans are often closely connected to larger African American communities and have decreased rates of contact with non-African Americans, they also show evidence of familiarity with and usage of the local lexicon, and report *more* usage of regional syntactic patterns (e.g., *the car needs washed*) than do the rural African American participants.