Cognition and Sociolinguistic Knowledge of African American English

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This talk provides a window into multidialectal processing, and stereotypes that influence that processing. Looking specifically at cognitive processing of African American English (AAE), the most well-studied minoritized variety of English in the U.S., and Standardized American English (SdAE), is critical for building models of language that include multiple linguistic systems in the brain. Especially in the current U.S. sociopolitical climate, we must interrogate linguistic prejudice and discrimination and pinpoint the mechanisms through which predictive processing goes beyond parsing between linguistic differences and discriminating as a means to disadvantage speakers (Craft, Wright, Weissler, & Queen 2020). In this talk, I share my psycholinguistic research which focuses on neurolinguistic studies and emotional prosody processing studies. The EEG studies show that AAE is processed differently than SdAE, and the emotional prosody research shows that by operationalizing the Angry Black Woman trope, emotion judgements influence race judgements. Overall, these studies indicate that language variety impacts processing, but also raise questions about the role of the participant and leveraging linguistic knowledge during processing. This work contributes to further understanding of how social information and stereotypes interface with cognitive processing within a multidialectal frame.