

NEWS & EVENTS  
LECTURE BY DR. CHRISTOPHER M. STEWART

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**The Sociolinguistics of Parisian French: Language Attitudes and Speech Perception**

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*A Linguistics Colloquium sponsored by the Department of Linguistics & TESOL*

Time and Location

Lecture: Friday, November 20, 2-3:30pm, in Trimble Hall 200

Abstract

Throughout the 20th century, large, mostly labor-related migrations to Western Europe led to contact between Western European languages and those of newly arriving immigrant groups. In the Parisian region, such a demographic shift often gave rise to ethnic minority communities struck by urban poverty, socio-geographic isolation and sociolinguistic stratification. Parisian French has, thus, been observed to subsume both a standardized prestige variety and a set of language practices recognized as an urban youth vernacular with ethnic implications. The studies described in this presentation examine how Parisians perceive these standard and non-standard language practices. In a web-based perceptual mapping task, 136 subjects evaluated the desirability, reputation and linguistic correctness of 21 cities in the Parisian region. The results indicated that subjects possess fine-grained mental maps of linguistic prestige in the Parisian region, maps constrained by subjects' age, gender, socio-economic status and level of anti-immigrant bias. In a related speech perception experiment, 34 of the 136 subjects from the first study placed resynthesized speech stimuli in the cities they had previously evaluated. Stimuli containing increasingly strong levels of prosodic traits observed in the Parisian urban youth vernacular were reliably placed in cities with low levels of linguistic prestige. Subjects with lower levels of sociolinguistic experience, a measure of subjects' experience with non-standard French, regional varieties and foreign languages, placed negatively evaluated stimuli in cities with lower levels of linguistic prestige than those with higher levels of sociolinguistic experience. It will be concluded that these studies provide insights into the sociolinguistics of urban areas, a test of how social cognition shapes the perception of socio-phonetic variation and a snapshot of language attitudes in the Parisian region.