

# Newsletter

## Winter/Spring 2018



**BILINGUALISM MATTERS** at PENN STATE

### Letter from the Editors

Dear friends,

We are very excited to share with you this Winter/Spring 2018 issue of our Bilingualism Matters newsletter. For this issue, we've selected the theme "Languages in Pennsylvania". This theme might sound a bit curious at first. After all, what does language in Pennsylvania have to do with bi- and multilingualism? What we aim to demonstrate with this newsletter is that, in fact, Pennsylvania, and places in the U.S. where mainly English is spoken, are rich with linguistic diversity. We've included a linguistic landscape of Pennsylvania on page 2 to illustrate how there are actually many speakers of other languages here, most especially in the southeast portion of the state. But this linguistic diversity is not limited to just languages other than English. On page 3, language scientist Grant Berry shows you his English vowels, and discusses how vowel systems in natural language differ, not only by region, but also by individual. On page 4, we delve into the etymology of place names in Pennsylvania, many of which can be traced back to the languages of PA's first inhabitants.

We designed this newsletter to show how, even in places where English is the primary language, linguistic diversity surrounds us. From a language science perspective, this diversity is something to celebrate, as it presents us with a never ending stream of interesting questions to investigate. We hope that as you read you'll be inspired to ask your own questions, and perhaps even gain a few insights into the topics we touch upon. As always, we welcome your thoughts, questions, and ideas, and we look forward to continuing the dialog!

Sincerely,

The Editors (Frances, Annie, Grant, Lindsey, and Isabel)

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## Linguistic Landscape of Pennsylvania

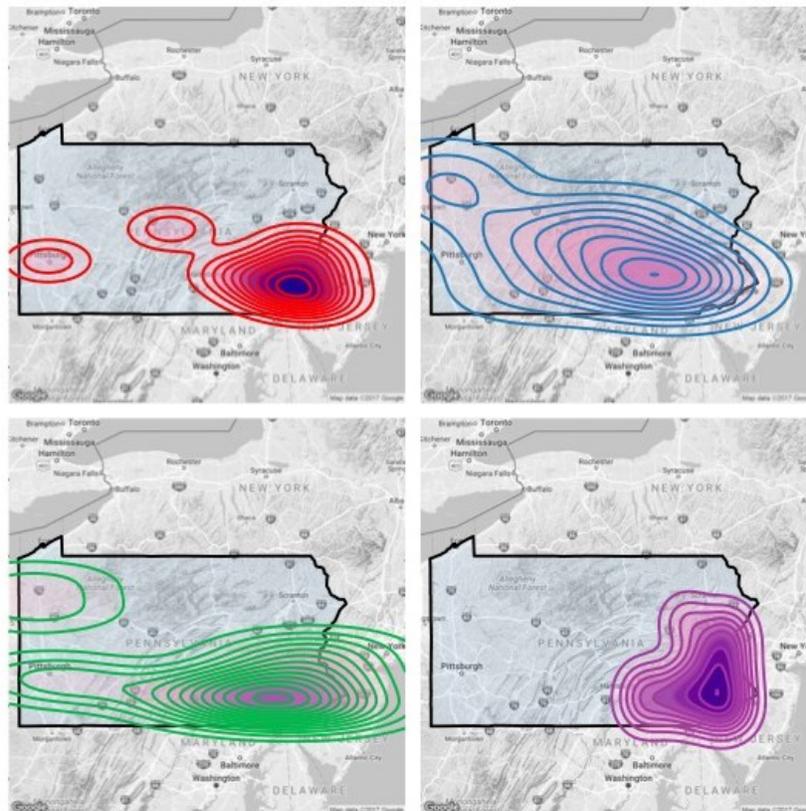
The linguistic landscape of Pennsylvania is incredibly diverse, including more than 20 different languages or language families. Apart from English, the population of Pennsylvania employs languages such as Spanish, Chinese, Dutch, and German, to name only a few. With today's technology, understanding the linguistic landscape of Pennsylvania is easier and more interactive than ever. Below you can see what areas of Pennsylvania have the highest proportion of Chinese, Dutch, German, and Spanish speakers.

In Centre County, Chinese is the most commonly spoken language other than English. Approximately 1.8% of the population of Centre County speaks Chinese, or about 2,700 residents. Chinese is closely followed by Spanish, spoken by 1.5% of the population, or approximately 2,200 residents. Other notable languages spoken in Centre County include Dutch (including Pennsylvania Dutch and Afrikaans), reporting 0.9%, or approximately 1,300 speakers. Korean is spoken by 0.8% of the population, or around 1,200 speakers. Other languages represented in Centre County include, but are not limited to Russian, German, Arabic, French, Japanese, Hindi, Vietnamese, African (including Amharic, Ibo, Twi, Yoruba, Bantu, Swahili, and Somali languages), and Slavic languages.

In the borough of State College alone, there are over 1,000 speakers of Chinese, over 800 speakers of Spanish, and 700 speakers of Korean. In addition to the languages spoken in Centre County, State College is also home to speakers of Portuguese, Tagalog, and other Indic languages.

For more information about the linguistic landscape of Pennsylvania, please feel free to peruse the Statistical Atlas: <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Pennsylvania/Languages#data-map/county>

<https://www.census.gov/>



Language — Chinese — Dutch — German — Spanish

## a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y

By Grant Berry

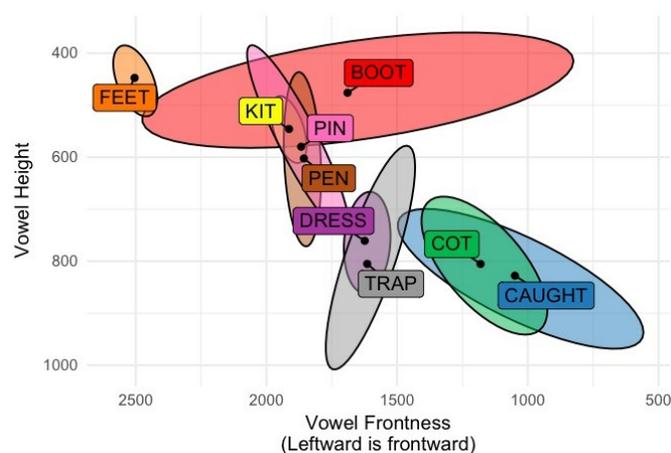
Many will recall these vowels from English class in primary school, but what exactly is a vowel? What makes a vowel a vowel and not a consonant? As far as linguists are concerned, a vowel is any sound you make where the air from your lungs isn't blocked in some way—like by your tongue, lips, or teeth—when you produce it. For example, if you make an *s* sound, your tongue raises and touches the front of the roof of your mouth, disrupting some of the sound coming from your lungs, but when you make an *ah* sound (like you're at the dentist), this doesn't happen. Even when you say *ee* (like in *feet*), which makes your tongue raise, the tip of your tongue doesn't make contact with anything and the sound waves escape without too much resistance. Different varieties of English in the US vary widely in the number of vowels they use, but most varieties have at least twelve.

The range of variation in vowel systems across the US is a major defining feature of distinct varieties. Different regions of the US may change their pronunciation of certain vowels, making them sound different to people who aren't from those areas. For example, you may hear a Philadelphian talk about the *Iggles* game when referring to Philadelphia's football team, and you may hear someone from Pittsburgh say they're going *dahntahn* when they're heading downtown. It can also happen that the same word sounds different to people from different areas. In Philadelphia, the vowels in *bought* and *bot* sound different, but they're the same in Pittsburgh (and most of the US, too). In Pittsburgh, *steel* and *still* sound the same, but not to speakers from most other regions of the US. In my hometown (Kansas City), *pin* and *pen* sound exactly the same, but I often confuse people here in State College (I also say *melk* instead of *milk*, which usually makes people I'm talking with cringe; sorry to gross you out, but that's just my variety).

To measure variation in vowels, linguists first have to be able to properly locate them in your mouth. Where does your tongue have to be to make a specific vowel sound, and how can we tell from just listening to recordings? It turns out that the way that energy is filtered by your tongue when speaking tells us something about where the tongue is; the energy that's not there is like the tongue's acoustic shadow. Linguists use that information to extract focused areas of energy called *formants* (because together they form the whole

speech signal). As it happens, the first two formants correspond pretty well to your tongue's position in your mouth. The first formant tells us something about how high the tongue is, and the second formant tells us about how forward or backward it is. Together, this information allows us to get a pretty good guess where the tongue is when you make certain sounds, and we can then compare these data across speakers from different areas to see how they differ from one another.

Here are some of my vowels.



Like I said, I don't pronounce *pen* and *pin* differently from one another, and I don't make a distinction between *caught* and *cot*. My *boot* and *feet* vowels are also pretty fronted, which might be influence from my time doing research in Philly. In any case, you can see that vowels can be pretty variable, even when the same word is spoken by the same person—imagine how variable the categories are among speakers from different geographic areas, different age groups, and different language backgrounds! Where do you think your vowels are? Do *pen* and *pin* sound the same to you? What about *cot* and *caught*? How are your vowels different from your friends, your parents, or your teachers? The only way to know is to listen!

## Making language meaningful: Etymology in Pennsylvania

Have you ever wondered about the original meaning of your last name, or about the peculiar spelling of a river or a street name? People often strive to find the meanings behind words, and names can be particularly intriguing and mysterious. At times, we find strong evidence tracing a word's origin and previous meanings (i.e., its etymology). But sometimes, if evidence is weak, false etymologies and urban legends may prevail. A word's etymology can be particularly difficult to reconstruct if it belongs to an understudied language. For example, words from Native American Languages surround us in our everyday lives. They are historically understudied, and many are endangered or even extinct, yet their presence remains in many of the words we utter each day, often without our knowledge. Here we discuss possible etymologies for just a few of these words, gathered using the limited resources available.

You may have heard of the PA borough of *Punxsatawney*, known for its famous furry resident groundhog Punxsutawney Phil. The Lenâpé people are the original inhabitants of this borough, and it turns out that its name reflects that. The origin of the word *Punxsutawney* seems to be related to the two Lenâpé words *punxo* 'full of sand flies' and *utaney* 'city, town,' rendering 'town full of sand flies' – at least according to a late 19th century dictionary.<sup>1</sup> And if you live close to Western Pennsylvania, you've surely heard of the Allegheny River, yet the etymology of this river's name remains rather muddy. A report by the Susquehanna River Basin Commission indicates that *Allegheny* means 'Stream of the Alligewi' – an ancient Native American tribe.<sup>3</sup> Other sources suggest that *alleg* likely descends from Lenâpé *welhik*, meaning 'good, fine', from which we can infer the meaning 'good, fine, beautiful stream.'<sup>4</sup> And if we're keen observers of word structure, we can also notice that *heny* in *Allegheny* bears resemblance to part of another Pennsylvania river name: *hanna* in *Susquehanna*. Digging a bit further, we find that this part of the word is from Lenâpé *hanne*, meaning 'stream, river.' Since both *Allegheny* and *Susquehanna* refer to rivers, this bit of detective work allows us to infer with some confidence that both Allegheny and Susquehanna originated, in part, from the Lenâpé word for river.

Although we know something about *hanna*, the origin of the *susque* part of *Susquehanna* remains highly mysterious. Some sources argue that it relates to 'Sasquesahanough, [the] name of an Iroquoian tribe in

an unidentified Eastern Algonquian language,'<sup>5</sup> while others discuss Lenâpé *sisawehak* 'oysters' or *assisku* 'mud, clay' as possible origins, rendering 'oyster river' or 'muddy river.'<sup>1:6</sup> Other explanations abound, including the Susquehanna River Basin Commission's suggestion that the Iroquois and the Algonkians had distinct names for the river, with its present day name being most closely related to the Algonkian nomenclature.<sup>3</sup> To complicate matters, a professor by the name of A. L. Guse argues that *Susquehanna* is of Tockwock origin, and signifies the Brook-stream or the Spring-water-stream."<sup>7</sup>

As the name *Susquehanna* illustrates quite clearly, there is much yet to be discovered about the etymologies of many every day words in English. To better understand where these words come from, we need more information, but how do we obtain it? One way language scientists are approaching the problem is by documenting and working to revitalize endangered languages. We hope this piece helps to show why this work is necessary if we want to understand our own language, and so many of the words we use each day.



*The Susquehanna River*

### Sources:

- 1 Lenâpé-English Dictionary. From an anonymous MS. in the archives of the Moravian Church at Bethlehem, PA. (1888). D. G. Brinton & Rev. A. S. Anthony (Eds), pp. 119, 149, 132, 23.
- 2 [www.Punxhistory.org](http://www.Punxhistory.org) (accessed, Dec. 9, 2017).
- 3 *Native American Waterbody and Place Names Withing the Susquehanna River Basin.* (6447). S.S. Runkle, p. 84, 6.
- 4 *The Composition of Indian Geographical Names illustrated from the Algonkian Languages.* (5<sup>2</sup> 1 4) J. H. Trumbull, p. 57.
- 5 [www.collinsdictionary.com](http://www.collinsdictionary.com) (accessed, Nov 17, 2017).
- 6 *Lenape Heritage in American Place Names.* (6458) J. P. Rayapati. (accessed, Nov 17, 2017).
- 7 *The Historical Record: A Monthly Publication devoted principally to the early history of wyoming valley and contiguous territory with notes*

**Q: In what part or parts of PA have you spent most of your time?**

**Katy:** I have only lived in Central PA, so I definitely identify with the area, particularly Penns Valley area, where I've lived for the last 10 years.

**Q: Are there features of English that you feel are specific to Penns Valley?**

**K:** There's a strong Amish presence in the Penns Valley community, so I hear them speak in Pennsylvania Dutch. I know that's not specific only to my area, but more central and southern PA. When they do speak in English, there's a definitive, heavy accent.

**Q: What differences do you hear when people who aren't from Central PA talk?**

**K:** I tend to hear a slight accent (or accent to me anyways) in someone from the Pittsburgh area. I still have family in Ohio, and my husband is from New York. I hear accents in their voices.

**Q: What sorts of things do you do to support outreach work for the Center for Language Science and Bilingualism Matters at Penn State?**

**K:** My work consists of managing the logistics for all of our events, including coordinating volunteers, organizing all materials, and everything administratively in between!

**Q: What do you enjoy most about doing outreach?**

**K:** I enjoy being involved in all aspects of our outreach work, from the planning and organizing phases to seeing each event come to realization. I'm a very detail-oriented person and truly enjoy this aspect of my job. The most enjoyable, for me personally though, is connecting with the children and families at our events.

## Bilingualism Matters Featured Partner:

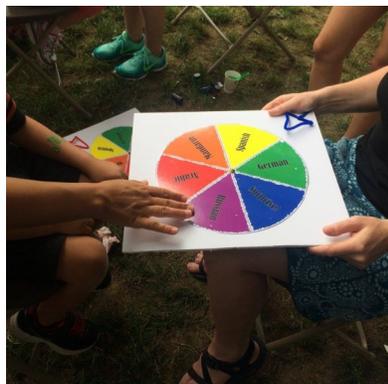
**Katy VanAmburg**

Katy is the Administrative Support Assistant for the Center for Language Science, and a native of Central PA. Her coordination work is essential to the success of our outreach events.



## Upcoming Events

Our outreach events are a wonderful time to connect with the surrounding community, families, and students at Penn State. We participate in many events throughout the year, always with games and demonstrations in tow. At family events, we have kid-friendly activities like face painting and language games. We hope to see you at our next event!



*Bilingualism Matters at ExplorationU at Bald Eagle High School (left) and Central PA Arts Festival (right).*



Join us for **World Stories Alive**, a series focused on stories and songs from *eight* different languages! Saturdays at 11am from January 20 to April 14 at the Schlow Library. Visit our website (pg. 6) for more information!

## Contributors



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