Linguistics research

By Nancy Coleman

The first installment of the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States, a project housed and aided by the University of South Carolina since 1974, will be published this summer.

USC professor Raymond O'Cain and three full-time student researchers have conducted most of the research under the direction of Dr. R. W. McDaid, a native of Greenville, S.C., and professor at the University of Chicago.

Field workers have interviewed 1,216 informants in 518 communities from southern Ontario to northeastern Florida and from the Atlantic Ocean west to eastern Ohio and Kentucky since the project's inception in 1961. Representatives from almost every county in South Carolina were interviewed. Interviewing is now complete, but McDaid estimates it will take 15 more years to edit and publish the remaining information with the current staff.

ACCORDING TO O'CAIN, the university has aided the project not only with funds but also with space, release time and recording equipment. The National Endowment of the Humanities has also given the project a three-year grant and the American Council of Learned Societies, original sponsor of the project, has continued with some support.

The research fills 15 filing cabinets, O'Cain said, and the finished atlas will hold about 60,000 pages of Atlantic dialect speech patterns.

Although primarily a technical study for linguistic researchers, the project is the most thorough of its kind, O'Cain said he thinks many laymen will be interested in the project's aim of seeing how language is being preserved and used. Interviews are typically conducted in several sittings.

Field workers wrote the target words down in phonetic symbols, recording them exactly as they were pronounced. They also noted different words for the same object and grammatical usage. Results of the interviews, some million and a half words, are either phonetic, written phonetically, or contained in notebooks housed in Thomas Cooper Library.

O'Cain said 65 percent of the material is taken from the years 1903 to 1941, 25 percent from the late 1940s to 1950 and five percent from 1965 to 1974.

"SOUTHERN CAROLINA'S contribution to regional speech study

"Not to respect the differences in speech is to imply disrespect for the person who uses them."

— Raymond O'Cain,
linguistics researcher

University of Michigan and the University of Chicago, O'Cain said. "The only university in the Southeast that rivals the work done here is Emory."

Dialect boundaries follow migration routes and no attempt has been made to misinterpret the project, O'Cain said. In South Carolina, the Low Country dialect is that of the coastal plantations largely dominated by Charleston's influence. The Up Country dialect was influenced by the migration of people from Pennsylvania and West Virginia down through the mountains of Virginia, North Carolina and northern South Carolina.

Speech reflects the total life experience, O'Cain said, and is an integral part of a person's identity. Studies have even shown correlations between voting patterns and speech or between the way barns are built and speech.

"CONCERNING correctness in speech, O'Cain said the word is seldom used among linguists. "We simply draw a line that there may be a correlation between social class, culture or education and speech," he said. "There is a great deal of variety in pronunciation among even the very cultured. There are very distinct traditions in every group — in Charleston, Boston, New York, everywhere — none are superior."

Enrollment percentage up despite nationwide trend

By Mary Jean Baxley

Student enrollment at USC is at 73 percent of those students it accepts, while other colleges throughout the nation are feeling the effects of student shortages.

"We usually enroll 66-68 percent," according to Arthur West, USC's director of admissions, "and our current rate compares favorably with some of the highest yields in the country."

Statistics for 1978 seem to be following the upward trend with applications running today 15 and one-half percent over enrollment of last year among freshmen and 10 percent ahead on transfer students, West said.

But university officials aren't being deceived by the present statistics. The point out that states will face a situation that never arise in South Carolina to try to convince our students to leave here and go to their state to attend college.

But the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education predicts an increase of 20 percent in the post-civilian college population through 1985 and the state's 1972 higher education needs study. "It's not going to be as bad in South Carolina as it is in other places," West said. "But as out-of-state colleges and universities see our high student population, it's only logical they are going to come and try to recruit those students."

Large college recruiting day programs at state high schools are already attracting recruiters from institutions in Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, Alabama and other states where students are less available, he said.

"WITH INFLATION like we have now, the economic advantages of staying home and going to school are a very attractive element," West said.

The 65 separate colleges, universities and technical schools in the state must all get a share of the state's student population to survive and the ones that cannot do this are going to close down, he said.

A hard-sell approach hasn't become necessary at USC yet because, according to officials, the school is not simply seeking bodies to fill quotas.

"If the public is knowledgeable about USC, the school can sell itself. The trick is getting the information to the public," West said.

"THE ATTITUDE of the faculty in cooperating with the administration in recruiting students is another reason for our success," according to West. Faculty departments sponsor workshops and meeting for student groups, bringing prospective students to USC.

O'Cain said Southerners are on the negative end of a stereotype concerning speech, "Not to respect the differences in speech is to imply disrespect for the person who uses them," he said. "These factors simply represent opportunities and experiences of people."

The professor said he tries to instill in his linguistics students the idea that the way they speak is an legitimate reflection of their background — and that they should feel proud of themselves if ridiculed because of their superior tolerance for cultural differences.