

Obituary

Wendy Herd, 1973–2020



Wendy Herd, a rising researcher in the production and perception of speech and its social ramifications, passed away, far too young, on August 11, 2020.

Born on May 19, 1973, in West Plains, MO, Wendy graduated from the University of Missouri, Columbia, in 1995. She taught high school English, Spanish, and French, a full-time job she held during most of her graduate career. Wendy obtained an MA (2004) and PhD (2011) in linguistics from the University of Kansas, Lawrence. In 2017, Wendy earned tenure at Mississippi State University, Starkville. The same year, she was also recognized as the Mississippi Public Humanities Teacher of the Year.

Wendy's research was disciplined and expert from the start. Her MA thesis consisted of a thorough acoustic and perceptual analysis of close to 10,000 stimuli from 20 speakers (Herd et al., 2011), showing that speakers make small systematic acoustic differences to distinguish words such as *writer* and *rider* and that the perception of the distinction is driven by word frequency.

Wendy's dissertation continued this ambitious tradition, using acoustic, psycholinguistic, and neurolinguistic methods to explore the acquisition of phonetic categories. Wendy's choice of three phonemes (/d, r, r/) differing in phonetic, allophonic, and phonological status across English and Spanish allowed her to go beyond the traditional investigation of the difficulty of learning a novel sound in a second language. This study (Herd et al., 2013) provided the first systematic comparison of the benefits of different training methods, with participants receiving discrete training in either speaking, listening, or both. Perceptual training provided the largest gains for second-language learners, but production training was effective as well.

After her move to Mississippi, Wendy started exploring phonetic aspects of Southern English, culminating in a

special session at the 174th Acoustical Society of America (ASA) meeting, a special *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America (JASA)* issue (Shport and Herd, 2020a), and an article in *Acoustics Today* (Shport and Herd, 2020b). Most recently, Wendy showed that a simple acoustic measure, voice onset time (VOT), may serve as a sociolinguistic marker in Black and white speakers (Herd, 2020).

Wendy's research made pivotal contributions in theoretical, applied, and methodological domains. Her approach was to seek converging evidence from language comprehension and language production, often examining multiple languages, understudied dialects, and second-language learners. This research deepens our understanding of the relationship between speech perception and production and the acquisition of new speech categories, with pedagogical implications for language teachers.

Wendy had only just begun to hit her stride, with many ongoing and future projects. We will miss the unrealized academic contributions but, even more so, we will miss her individuality. Wendy will be remembered for her sharp intellect, her positive energy, her tenacity combined with a cheery disposition, and her unending strength and determination. Speech science lost a wonderful human being.

Wendy is survived by her husband of 19 years, Zac Herd, daughter Breanna and son Jacob, a brother and sister, and her parents.

Selected Publications by Wendy Herd

- Herd, W. (2020). Sociophonetic voice onset time variation in Mississippi English. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 147, 596-605.
- Herd, W., Jongman, A., and Sereno, J. A. (2010). An acoustical and perceptual analysis of /t/ and /d/ flaps in American English. *Journal of Phonetics* 38, 504-516.
- Herd, W., Jongman, A., and Sereno, J. A. (2013). Perceptual and production training of intervocalic /d, r, r/ in American English learners of Spanish. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 133, 4247-4255.
- Shport, I. and Herd, W. (2020a). English in the Southern United States: Social factors and language variation. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 147, 525-683.
- Shport, I. and Herd, W. (2020b). Sounding Southern: Identities expressed through language. *Acoustics Today* 16(3), 44-52.

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