Seattle to Spokane: mapping Perceptions of English in Washington state

Betsy E. Evans

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

http://depts.washington.edu/folkling/

Introduction

This presentation

- Reports the results of a perceptual study that explores perceptions of the English spoken in the state by long-time residents of Washington State (WA)
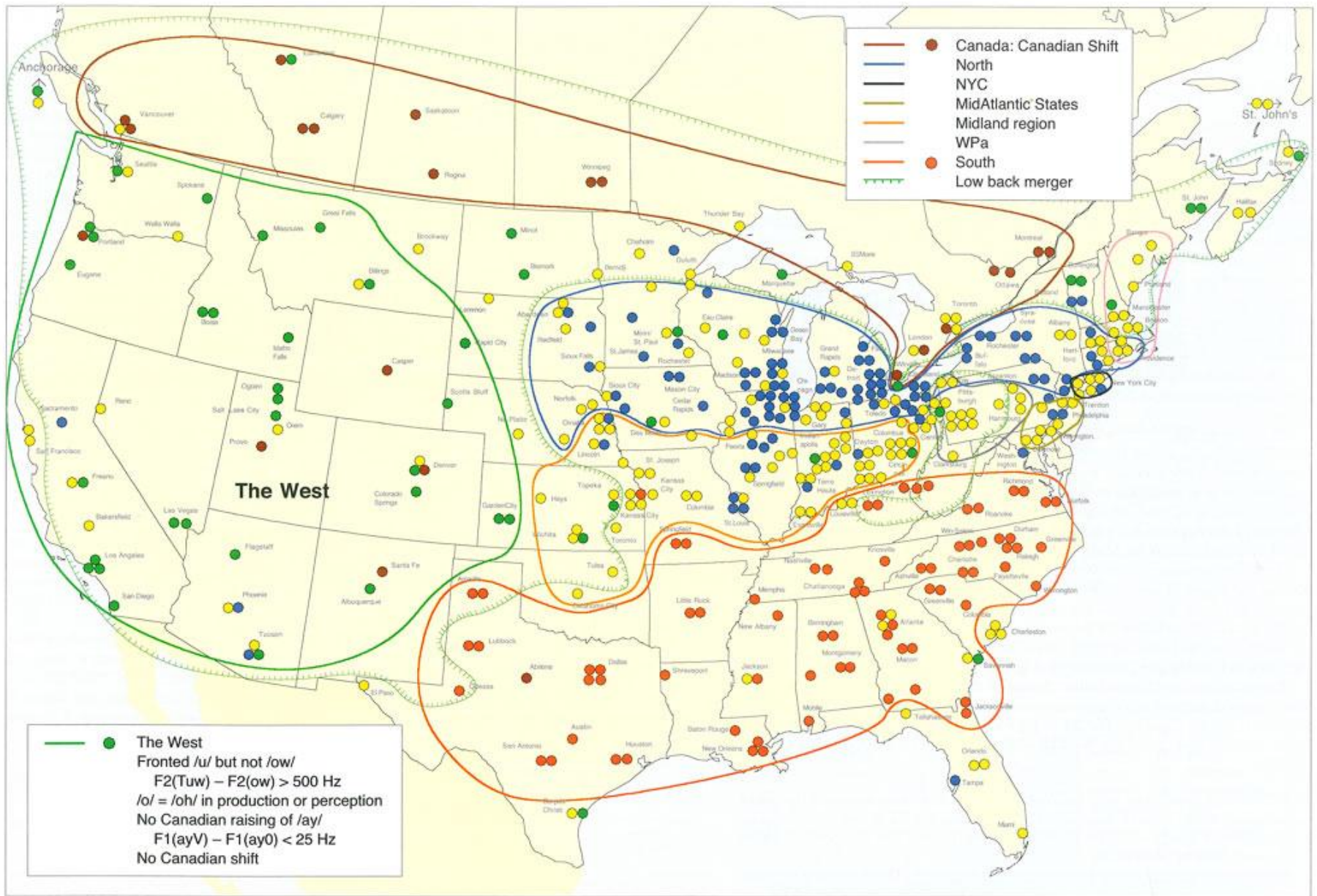
Introduction

- Britain (2004) suggests that understanding space as an extralinguistic variable is an important direction for the future of sociolinguistics:

    – "Critical sensitivity to the socialized nature of human space(s) is required if we are to advance the discipline further" (45).

- This study aims to explore perceptions of geographic linguistic differentiation

Introduction-English in WA

- Little is known about the English spoken in Washington State
  - especially in comparison to what is known about English in other regions of the United States

Introduction-English in WA

- Labov, Ash and Boberg (2006)
  - Atlas of North American English (ANAE)
    - Includes 16 speakers from the PNW (UT, ID, WA, OR)
    - "considerable mixing of language patterns" (136)
      - Heterogeny without structure
    - Distinguishing features of 'the west':
      - low back merger
      - uw- fronting without presence of ow-fronting

Legend (top right):

⬤		Canada: Canadian Shift
		North
		NYC
		MidAtlantic States
		Midland region
		WPa
⬤		South
⌄⌄⌄⌄		Low back merger

The West

Legend (bottom left):

⬤ The West
Fronted /u/ but not /ow/
  F2(Tuw) – F2(ow) > 500 Hz
/o/ = /oh/ in production or perception
No Canadian raising of /ay/
  F1(ayV) – F1(ay0) < 25 Hz
No Canadian shift

Labov, Ash & Boberg 2006

Introduction-English in WA

Although some other production patterns emerging:

- Wassink,Squizzero,Scanlon,Schirra & Conn (2009)
  - Seattle
    - (eyg) and (eg) have merged ('egg' rhymes with 'bacon')
    - raising and fronting of pre-velar /æ/ BAG
      - (æ) proximal to (ɛ) ('bag' sounds like 'beg')
      - Mainly younger females

Introduction
perceptions of English in WA

- No perceptual/attitudinal research on the English spoken in WA
  - Oregon (OR) Hartley (1999)
    - OR residents perceptions of whole of US
      - Consistent with previous research on perceptions of the English spoken in the US
      - OR residents linguistically secure—they rated OR English as the most correct and pleasant
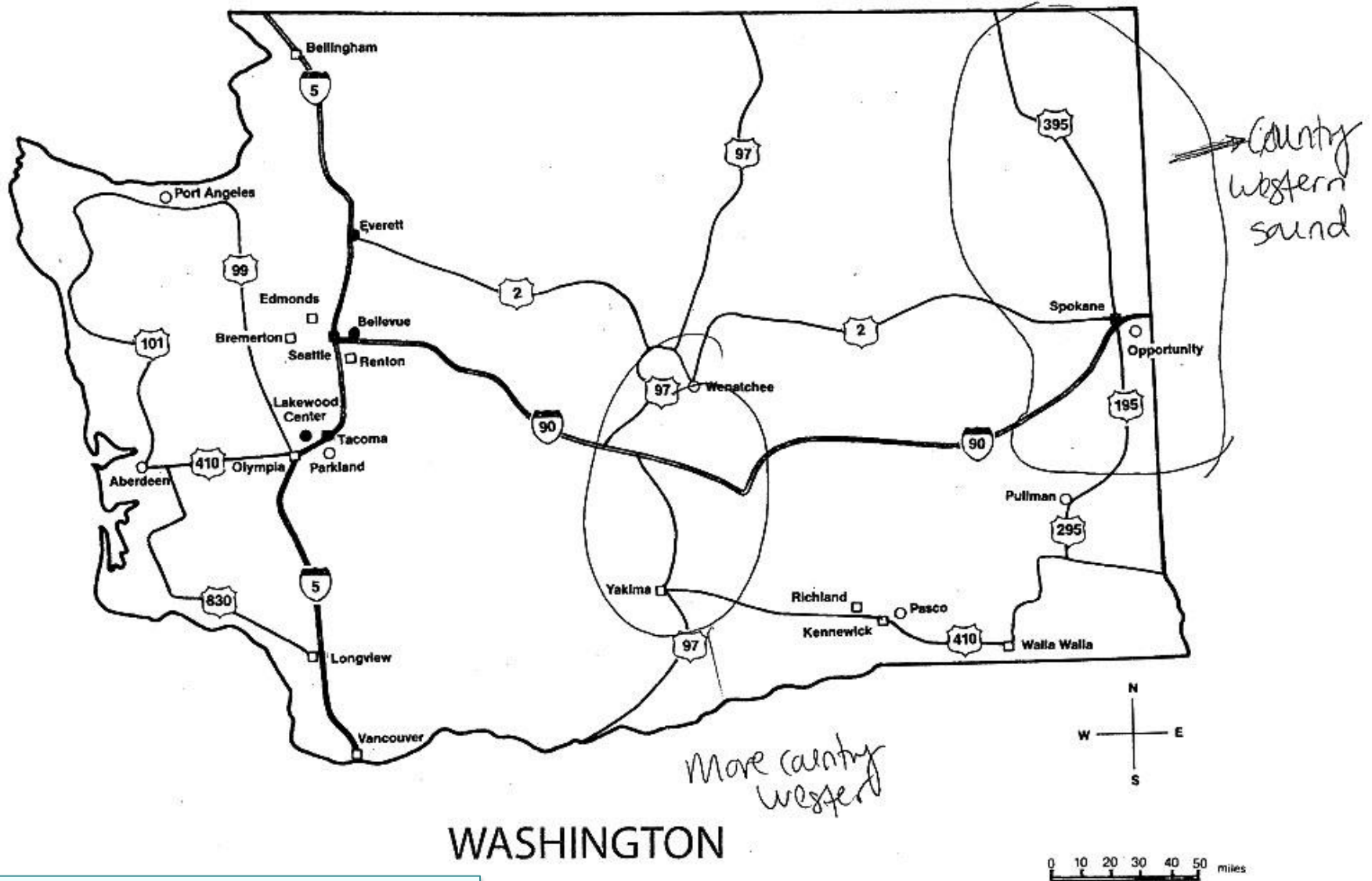
Introduction-English in WA

- We need more information on English in WA

- Perceptual research
  - Is part of a complete description of a communities' language use includes the perceptions of the speakers
    - Thus exploring perceptions of the English spoken in the state by long-time residents of WA helps fill in gaps about what we know about the English in WA
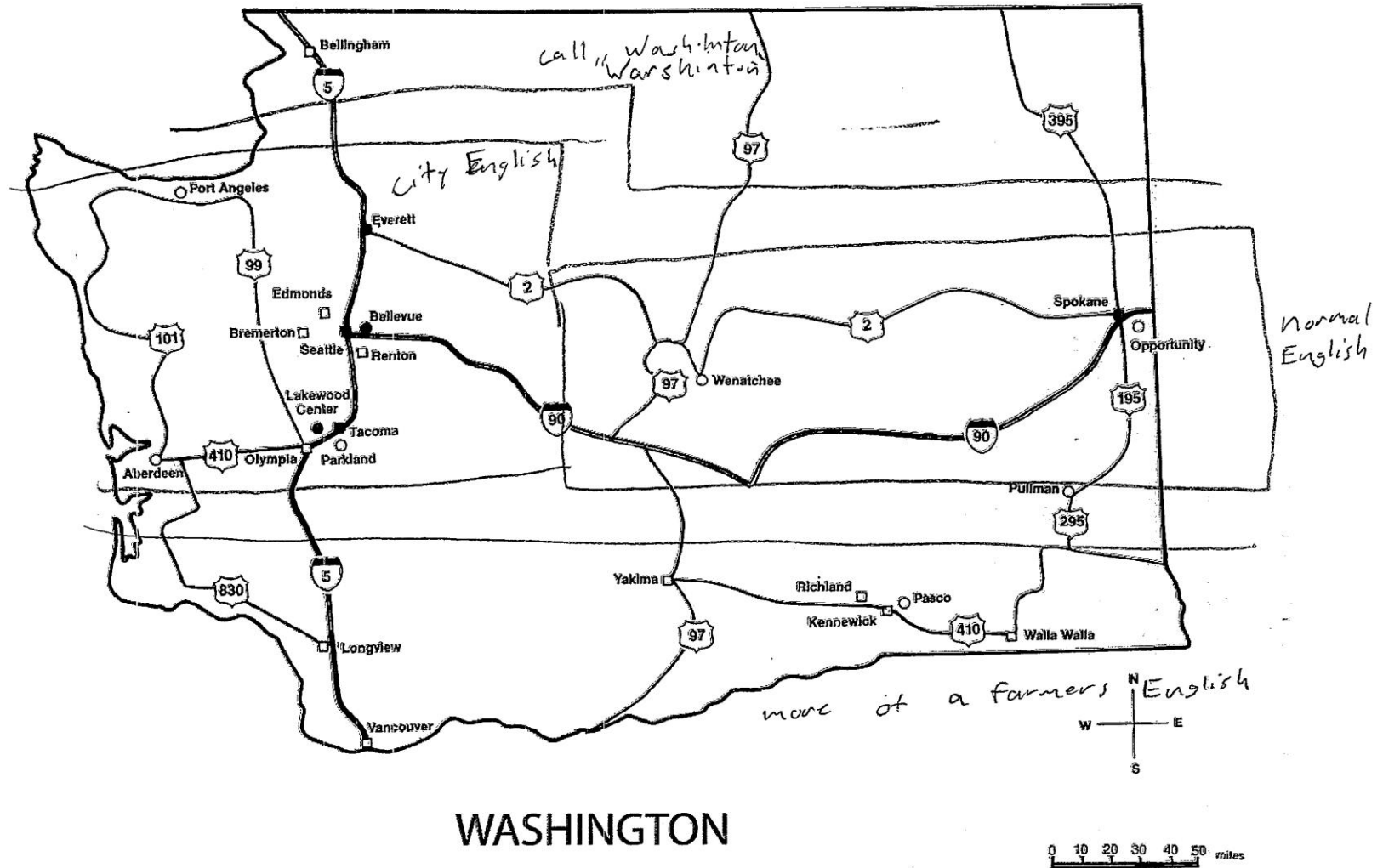
Methods

Maps

- Respondents were asked to indicate on the map places in the state where they think people's English sounds different and to give a label for that variety (Preston and Howe 1987)

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).

Country western sound

More country western

WASHINGTON

38 year old female, Seattle

135

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).

call in Washinton "Warshinton"

City English

normal English

more of a farmers English

WASHINGTON

18 year old male, Wenatchee

154

Methods

- 229 respondents
  - Long-term residents of WA from all over the state
    - Snowball sampling among higher education institutions resulted in large groups of respondents from Seattle, Bellingham, Olympia and Wenatchee
  - 95 females, 83 males
  - Average age is 26 (respondents were over 18 years old)

Methods

- 178 respondents' maps were 'georeferenced'
  - 51 maps had no drawing on them
    - 27 had no polygons but did have comments (e.g. "hear no difference")
    - 24 had no polygons or comments

Methods

Georeferencing procedures

- Each map was scanned and saved as a .pdf file so that it could be read by ArcGIS.
  - ArcGIS 9.0 Geographic Information System software
  - This software allows the respondent maps to be aggregated
- Hand-drawn lines on each map were 'traced' resulting in a map 'layer' of polygons
  - Thus each shape that a respondent drew on their map is represented by a single polygon (resulting in 463 polygons)
  - Polygons were coded according to the label given to them by a respondent allowing for the creation of maps of qualitative themes that emerge from the data
    - 301 polygons (of a total 463) had a label associated with them

Methods

- Each of these map layers of polygons were combined to create a composite map consisting of all the respondents' maps

- This procedure 'translates' individual maps into a composite representation showing the intersections among respondents ideas of differentiation in the state

Results—composite map

- Composite map of all respondents
  - Urban areas salient
 - Eastern/western divide
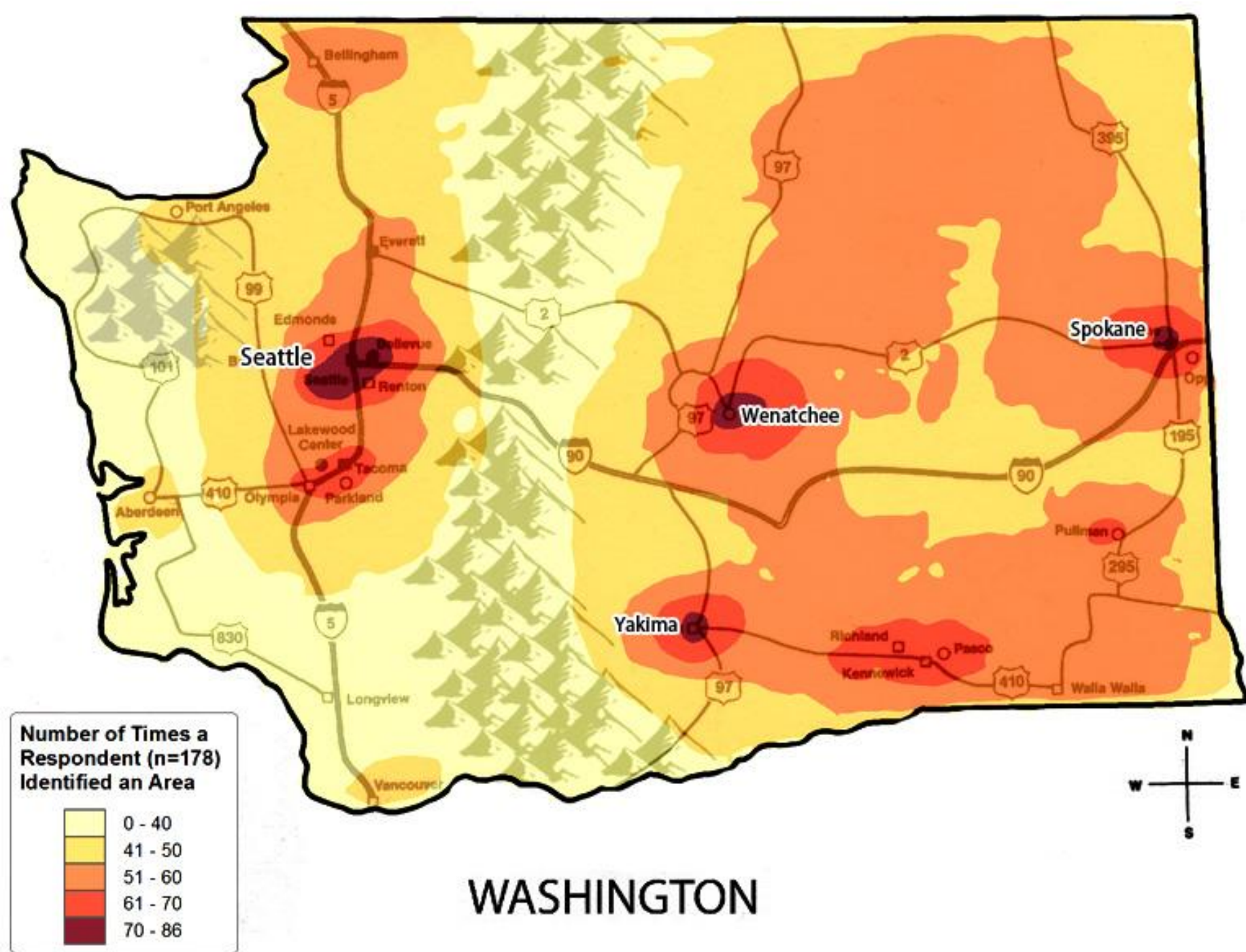
Number of Times a Respondent (n=178) Identified an Area

- 0 - 40
- 41 - 50
- 51 - 60
- 61 - 70
- 70 - 86

WASHINGTON

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).
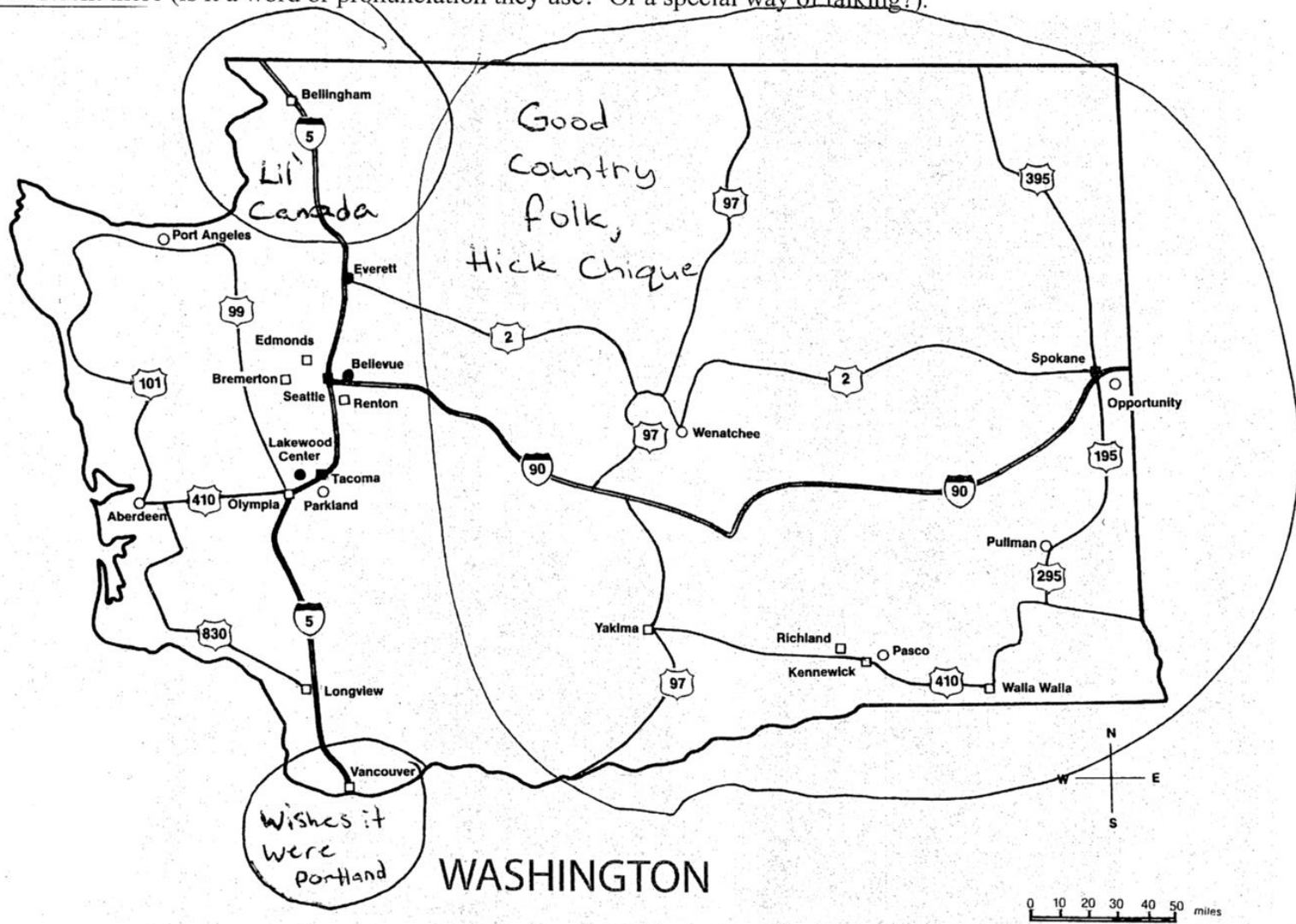

WASHINGTON

little slower ↓

many "farm & country" slangs, etc.

Gangster (hah)
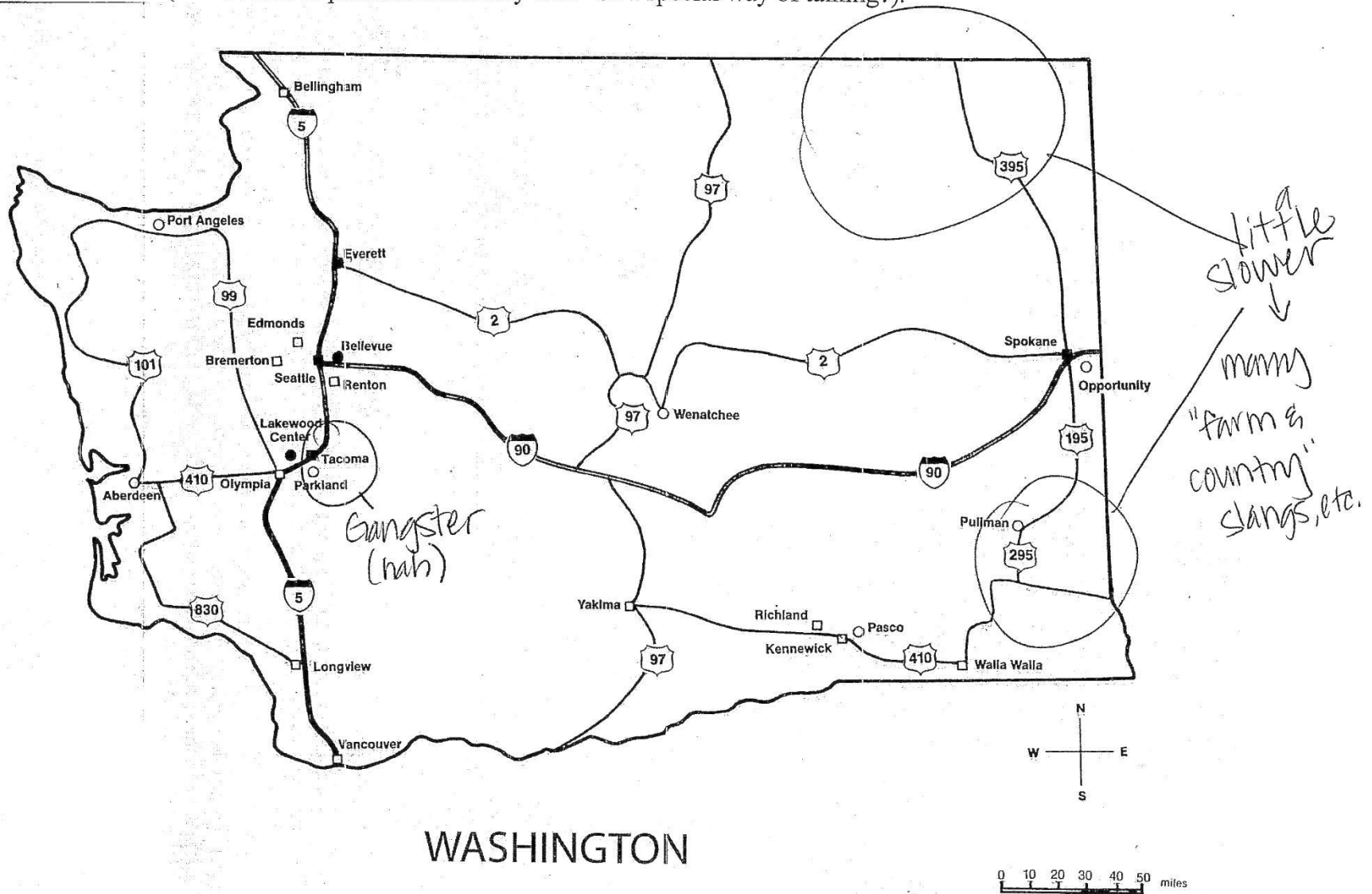
23 year old female, Wenatchee

316

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).

WASHINGTON

44 year old female, Seattle

∞3
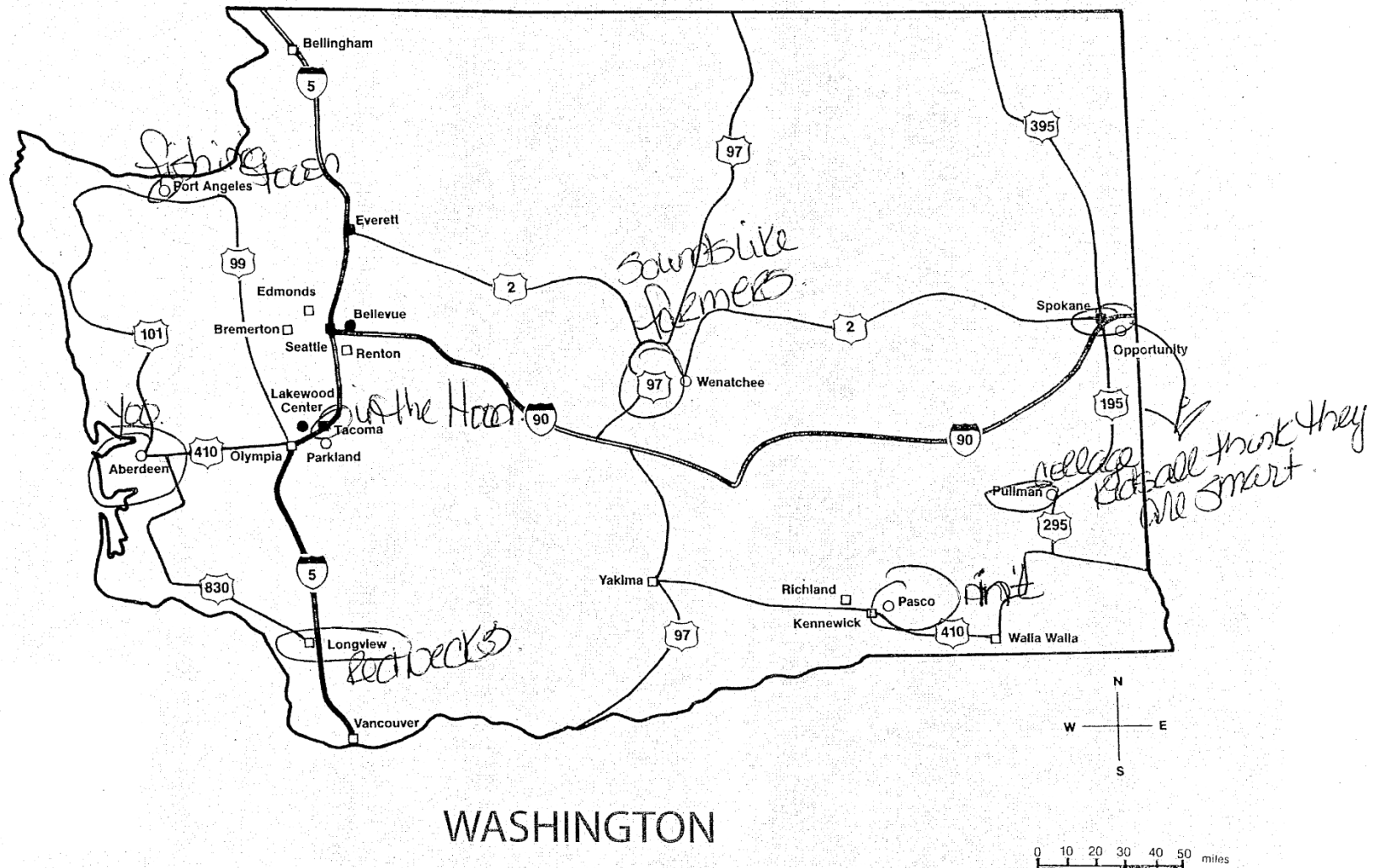
Results—labels given

- Polygons were coded according to the label given
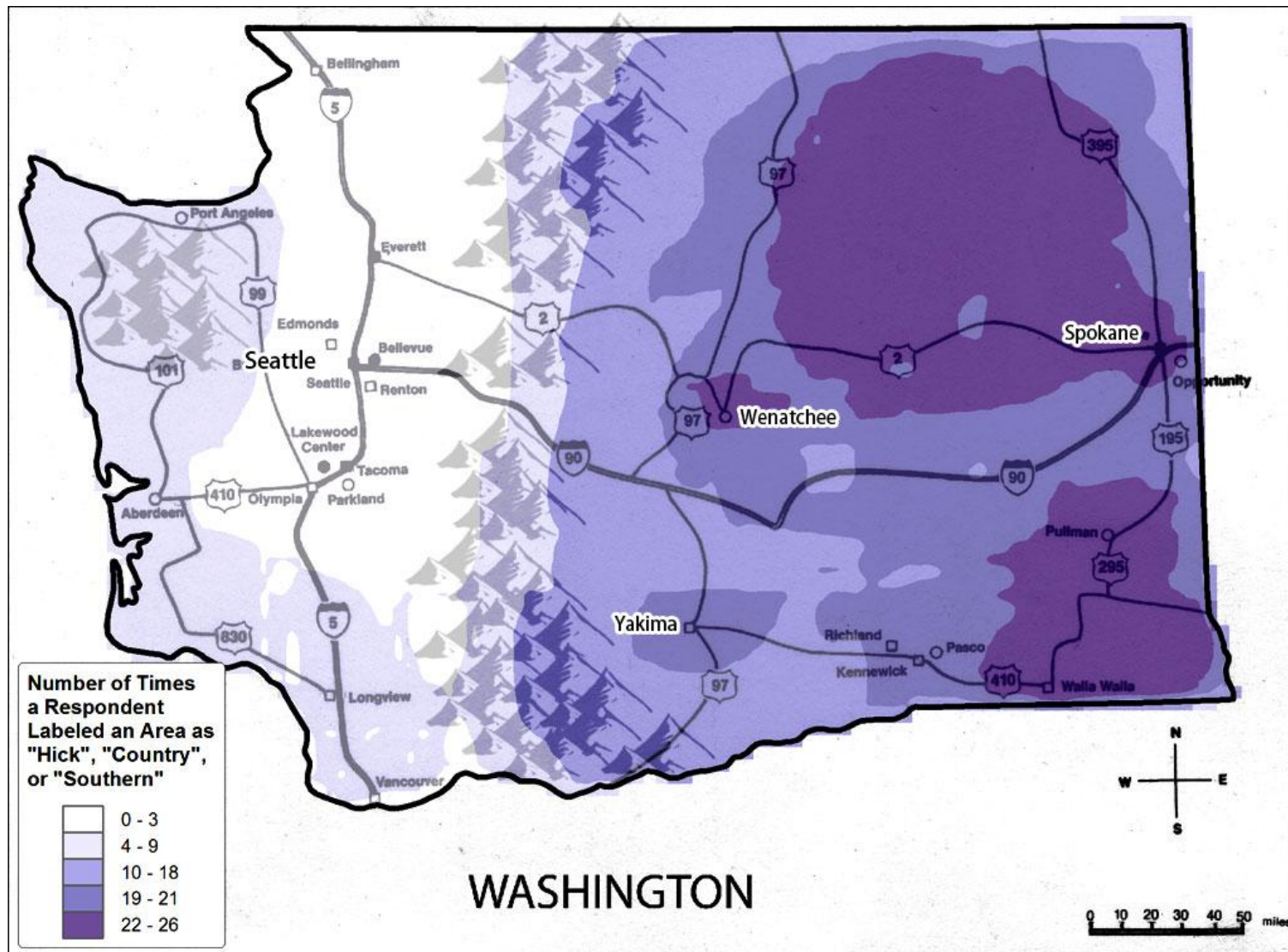 Most frequent labels associated with polygons:

Category	Number	examples
Hick/Country/Southern	86	"rednecks", "farmers"
Spanish	40	"Spanglish", "spanish influence"
Slang	24	"a lot of slang"
Pronunciation	24	"warshington", "word pronunciation"
Variation	14	"variety", "blend"

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).

Lil' Canada

Good Country folk, Hick Chique

Wishes it were Portland

WASHINGTON

0 10 20 30 40 50 miles

23 year old male, Cowlitz County

045

"Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"

Composite map of all polygons labeled "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"

"Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"

- Salience of eastern WA and "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"
  - Linguistic differences
  - Geographic differences
  - Socio-cultural differences

Salience of "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"--linguistic

- Anecdotal attestation of
  - Tensing of lax vowels before voiced fricatives
    - 'innovative', 'pleasure'
- 'intrusive r' ('Warshington')
  - Noted by Reed (1952)
  - Anecdotal evidence from respondents in this study and others

Salience of "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"--linguistic

WESTERN UNITED STATES MIGRATION
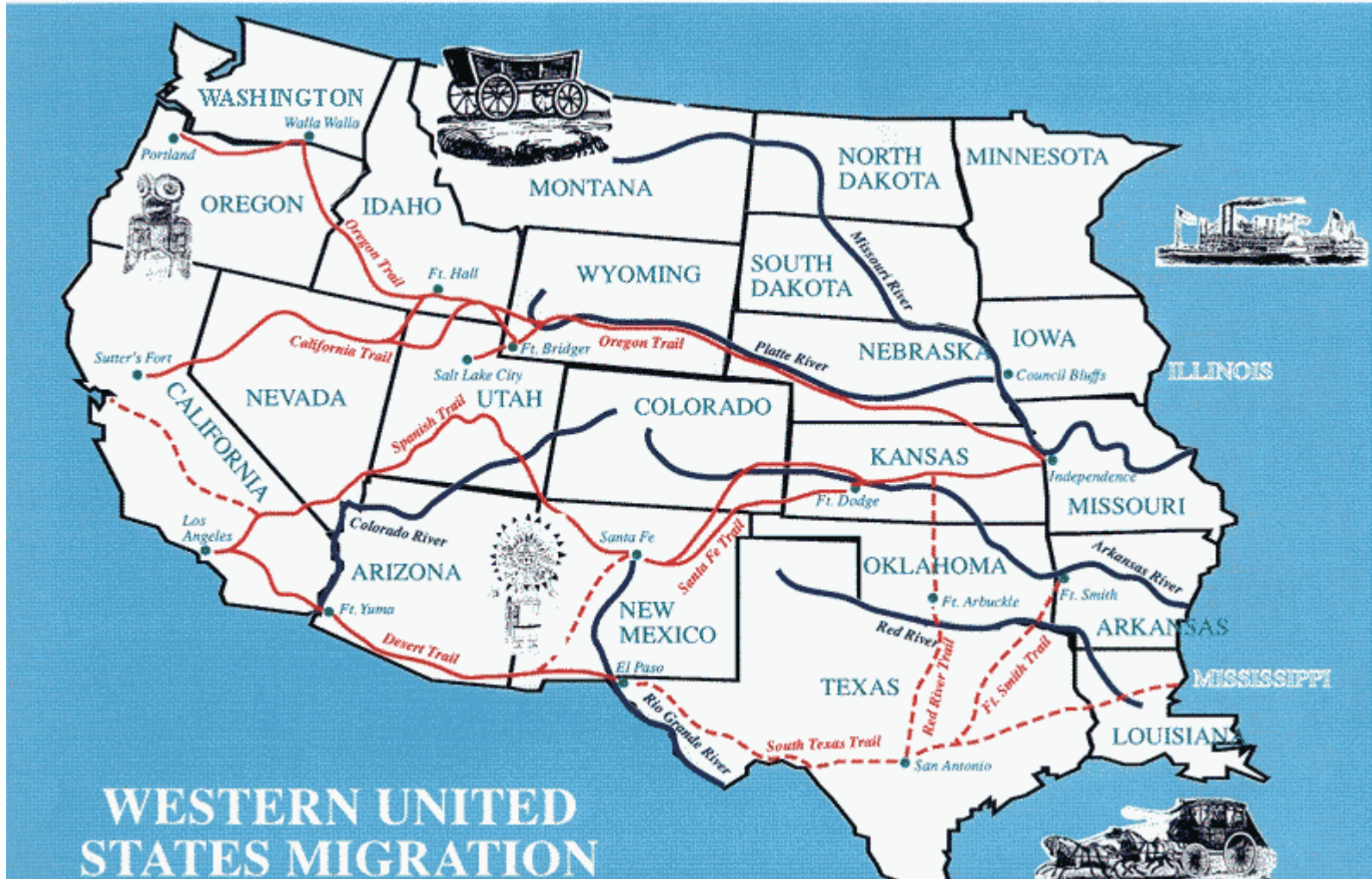
Salience of "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"-- geography

- "Cascade curtain"
  - "Although the Cascade range geographically divides our state, we must strive to eliminate the symbolic barrier the mountains have presented"
    - ➤ Former Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels in 2002 to the Spokane newspaper *The Spokesman-Review*

"Cascade curtain"

Western WA

Eastern WA

Salience of "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"—socio-political

Agriculture–A Cornerstone of Washington's Economy

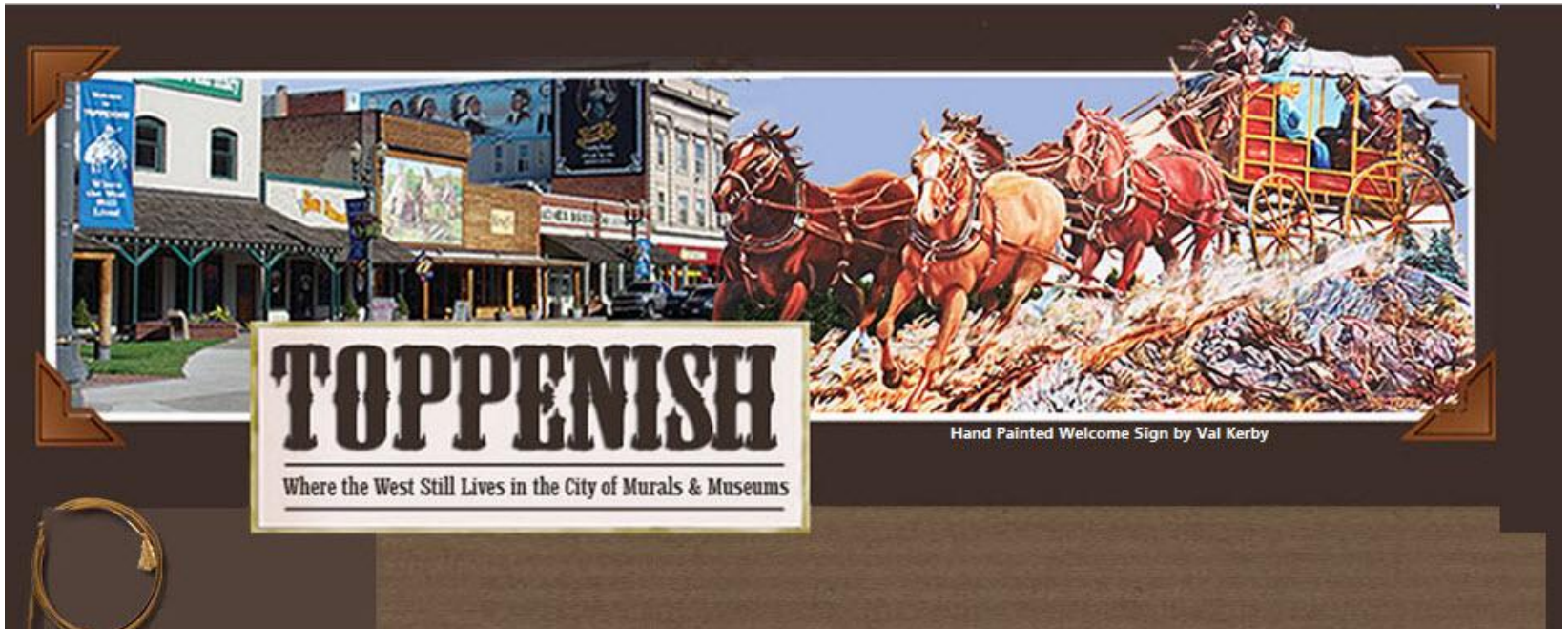County Rankings and Market Value of Crop and Livestock Products
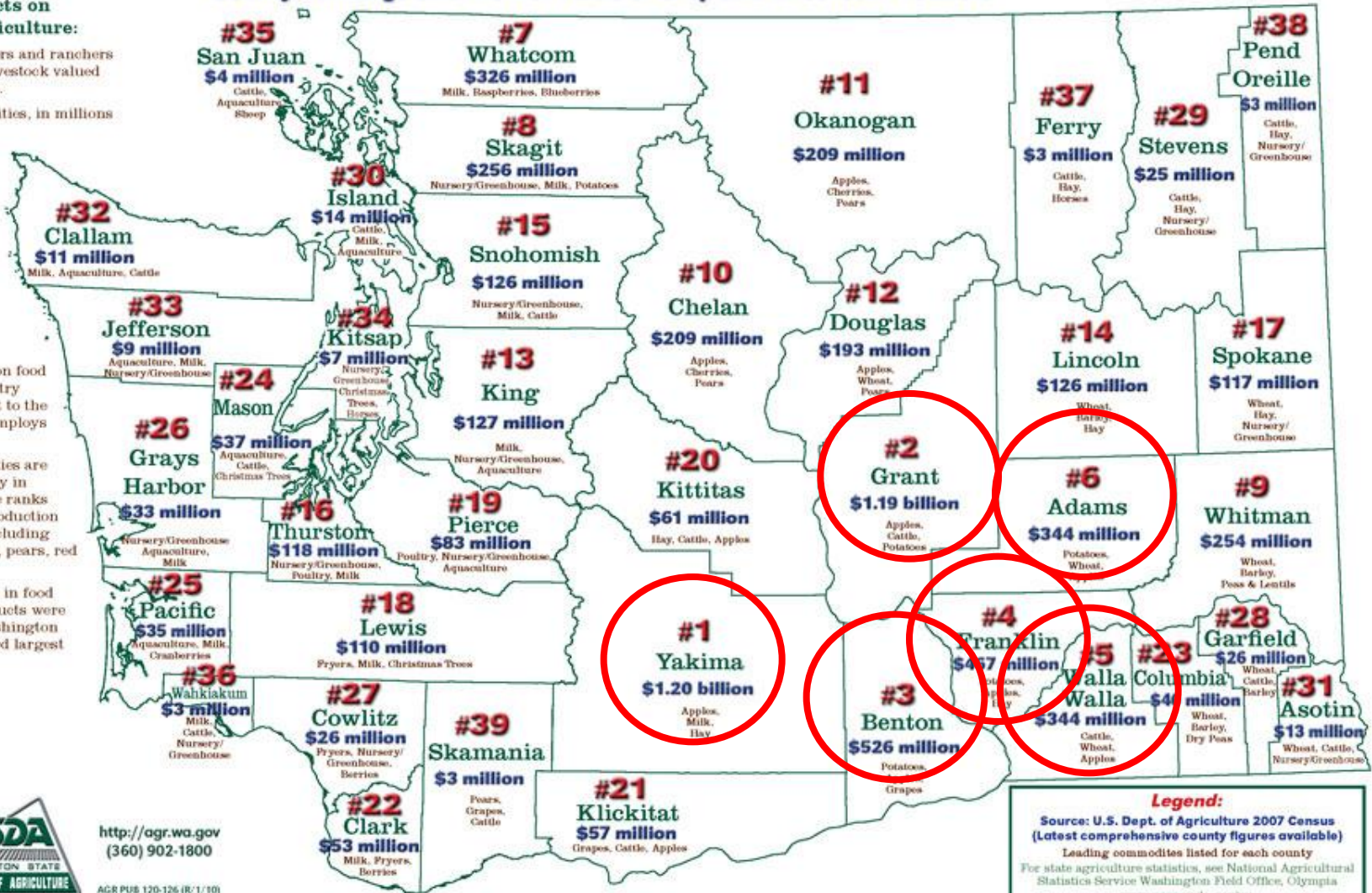
Salience of "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"—socio-political

Salience of "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"—socio-political

- Cultivating the aura of "country"
  - Toppenish, WA Chamber of Commerce: "We're the BEST OF THE WEST!"

Salience of "Hick"/"Country"/ "Southern"—socio-political

Cultivating the aura of "country"
- Omak, WA

Conclusion

- Eastern/western, urban/rural differences were among the most salient 'differences'
    - Eastern Washington was labeled as "hick"/ "country"
        - The "hick"/ "country" label could be attributed to
            » Linguistic differences
            » Geographic differences
            » Socio-political differences

Conclusion

- ## More to explore
  - Salient linguistic features such as
    - Correspondence with production facts
      - Awareness of 'Bag/beg' merger before voiced velar
      - Midlands features of eastern WA?
  - Salient socio-political categories such as
    - Spanish, slang, pronunciation, variation

Conclusion

- Britain (2004:45)

    "Critical sensitivity to the socialized nature of human space(s) is required if we are to advance the discipline [of sociolinguistics] further"

- We need to better understand the links between a community's sensitivity to geographic, socio-cultural, and socio-political differentiation and the emergence of linguistic differentiation
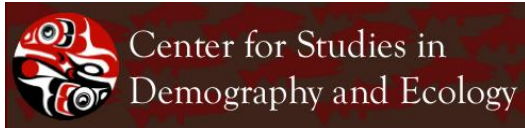
Thank you

http://depts.washington.edu/folkling/

Wheat field, Adams County, southeastern WA

Special thanks

– Matt Dunbar

– Arnisson Andre Ortega

Department of Geography & Center for
Social Science Computation & Research

– UW Sociolinguistics Brown
Bag group

– Faculty at Wenatchee
Valley College, Western
Washington University,
Evergreen State College
who circulated
questionnaires