Seattle to Spokane: mapping Perceptions of English in Washington state

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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
Introduction-English in WA

Although some other production patterns emerging:

- Wassink, Squizzerino, 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?).

38 year old female, Seattle
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?).

18 year old male, Wenatchee
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
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?).

WASHINGTOON

23 year old female, Wenatchee
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?).

44 year old female, Seattle
Results—labels given

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hick/Country/Southern</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>“rednecks”, “farmers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>“Spanglish”, “spanish influence”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slang</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>“a lot of slang”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>“warshington”, “word pronunciation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“variety”, “blend”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?).

23 year old male, Cowlitz County
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
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
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

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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