

“EVERYBODY SOUNDS THE SAME”: ‘MARGINAL’ DATA IN PERCEPTUAL DIALECTOLOGY

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Introduction

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- This paper describes responses to a perceptual dialectology map survey instrument
 - ▣ Asks respondents to mark on a map the places where they believe English is spoken differently and to label them if possible (Preston 1989)

Introduction

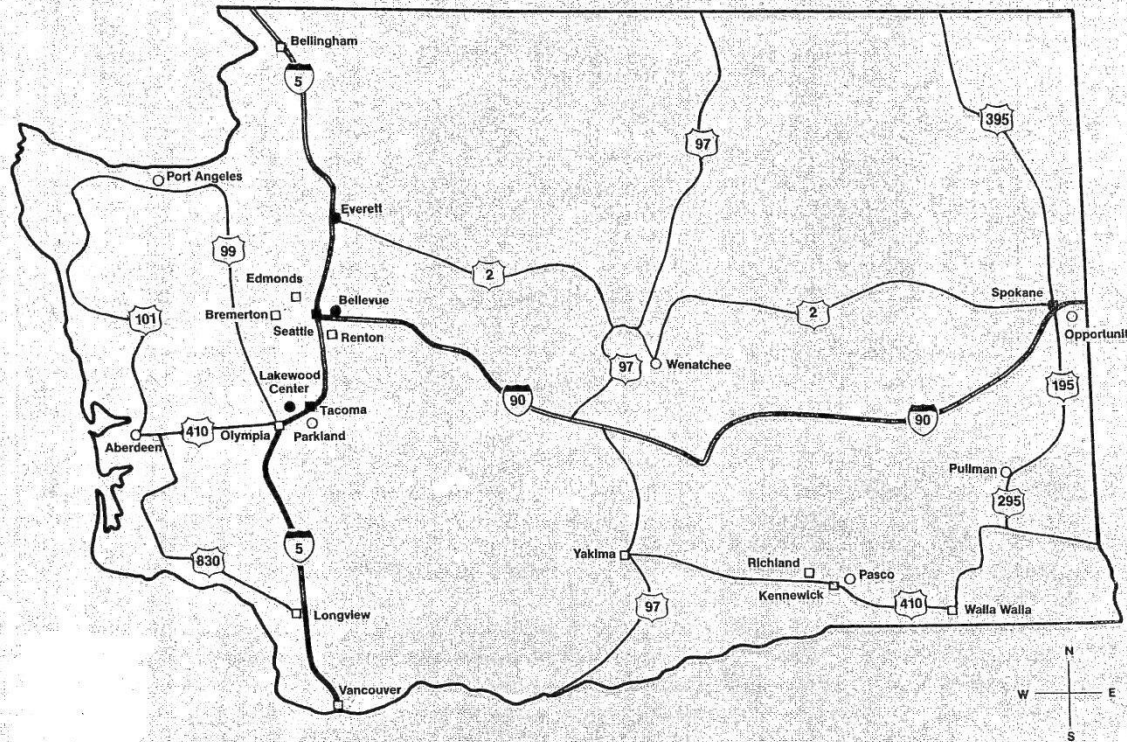
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- The focus is respondents who did not complete the survey as directed
 - ▣ For example:

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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?).

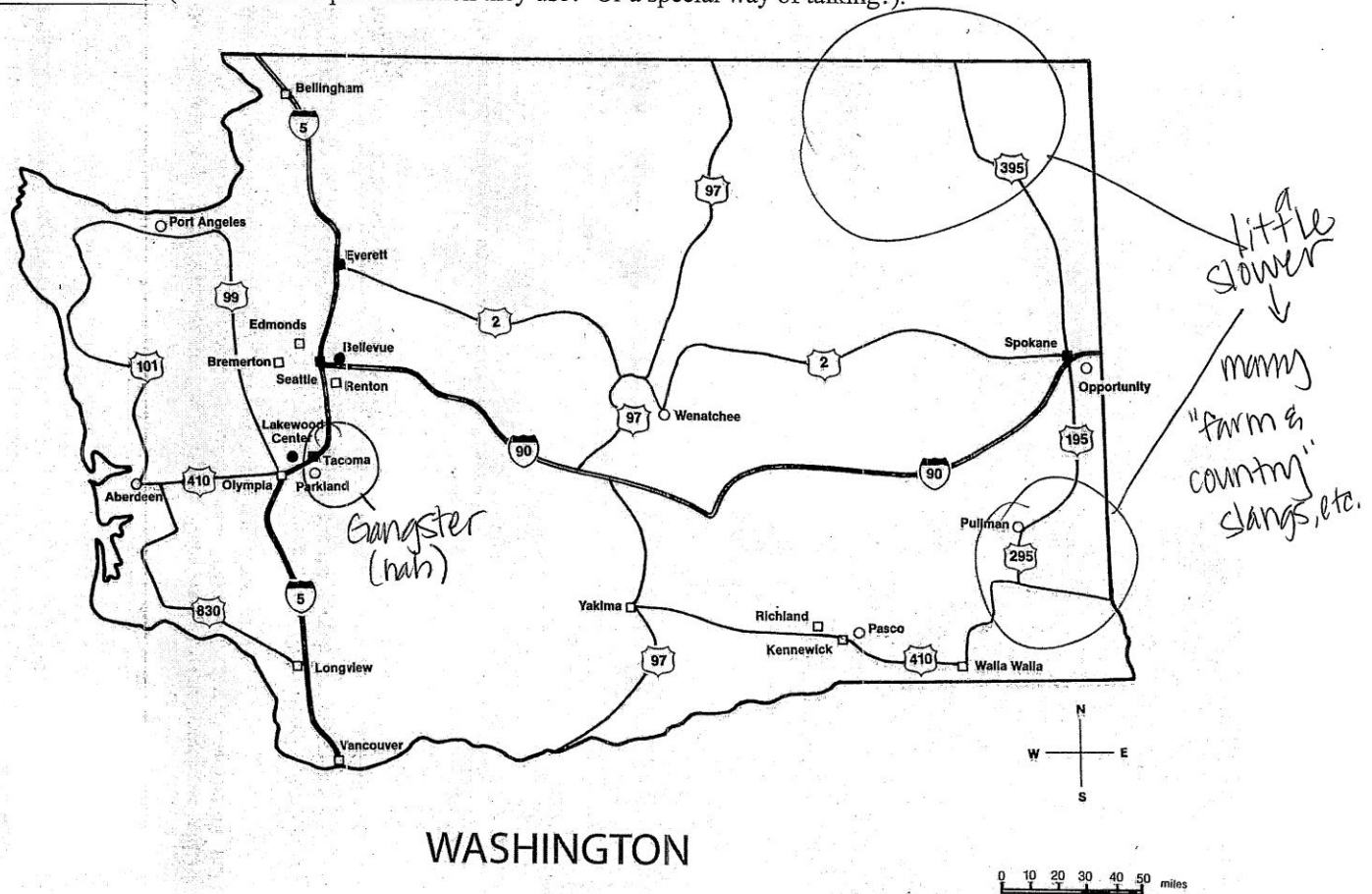


WASHINGTON

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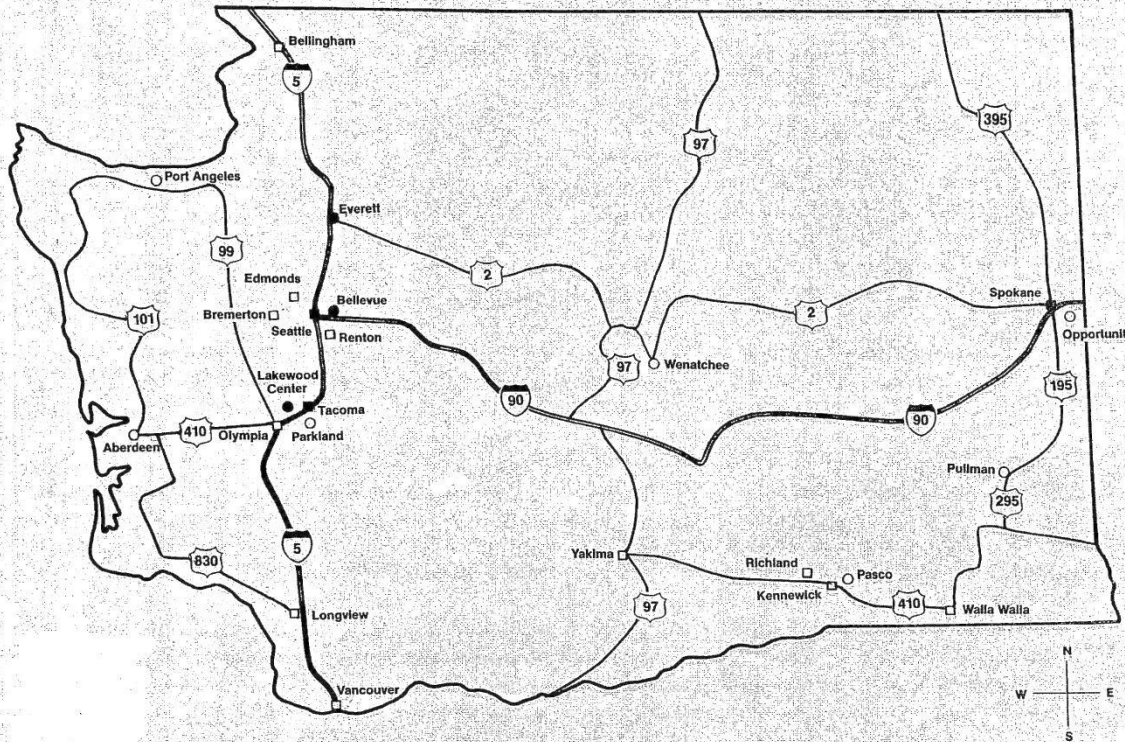
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WASHINGTON

63 year
old female
from
Western
WA

Introduction

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- Usually these survey answers are excluded from data analysis (e.g. Long 1999:179)
- Instead of 'unusable', these responses can be considered as 'marginal' and be part of a fruitful analysis

Introduction

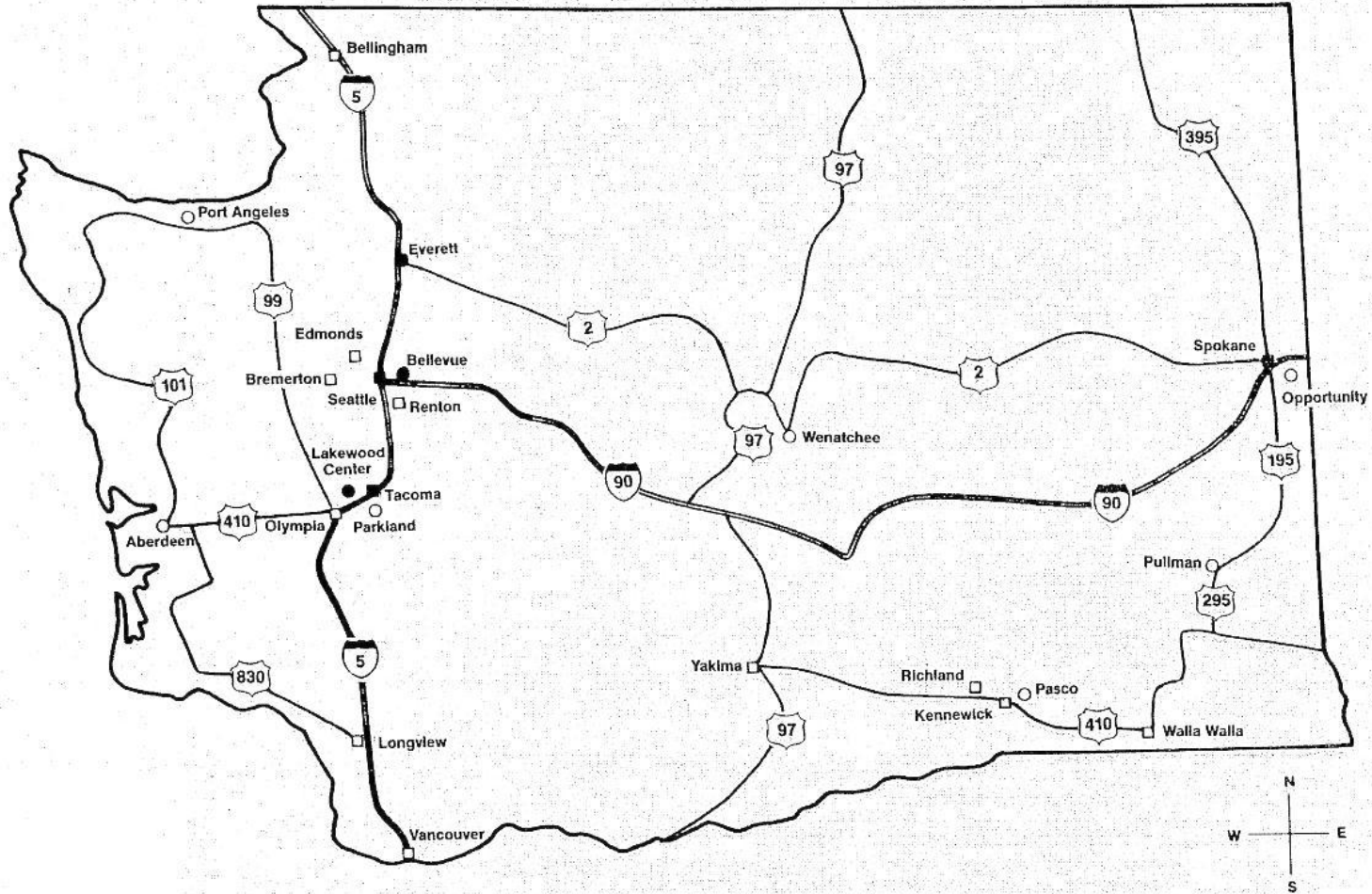
- Considered as a separate data set, we can learn from respondents who complete linguistic survey tasks in their own way
 - Not to suggest that *any* sort of incomplete response lends itself to analysis
 - Only a consistent type of non-compliance to a specific survey task is considered here
- ‘Partial participation’ can inform us of language ideologies and socio-cultural assumptions
- A response that indicates ‘there is no difference’ is, in fact, a response

Data

- Of 229 respondents who completed the survey, 178 completed the task as directed
- 20 completed demographic information only
- 31 wrote comments on the map but drew no lines
 - ▣ Although these responses comprise a small sample, they demonstrate important kinds of language ideologies held by respondents such as
 - The homogeneity of dialects
 - The importance of the rural/urban dichotomy
 - The association of social distinctions with linguistic features

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?).

NONE!
 I don't find any difference in speech EAST OR WEST.



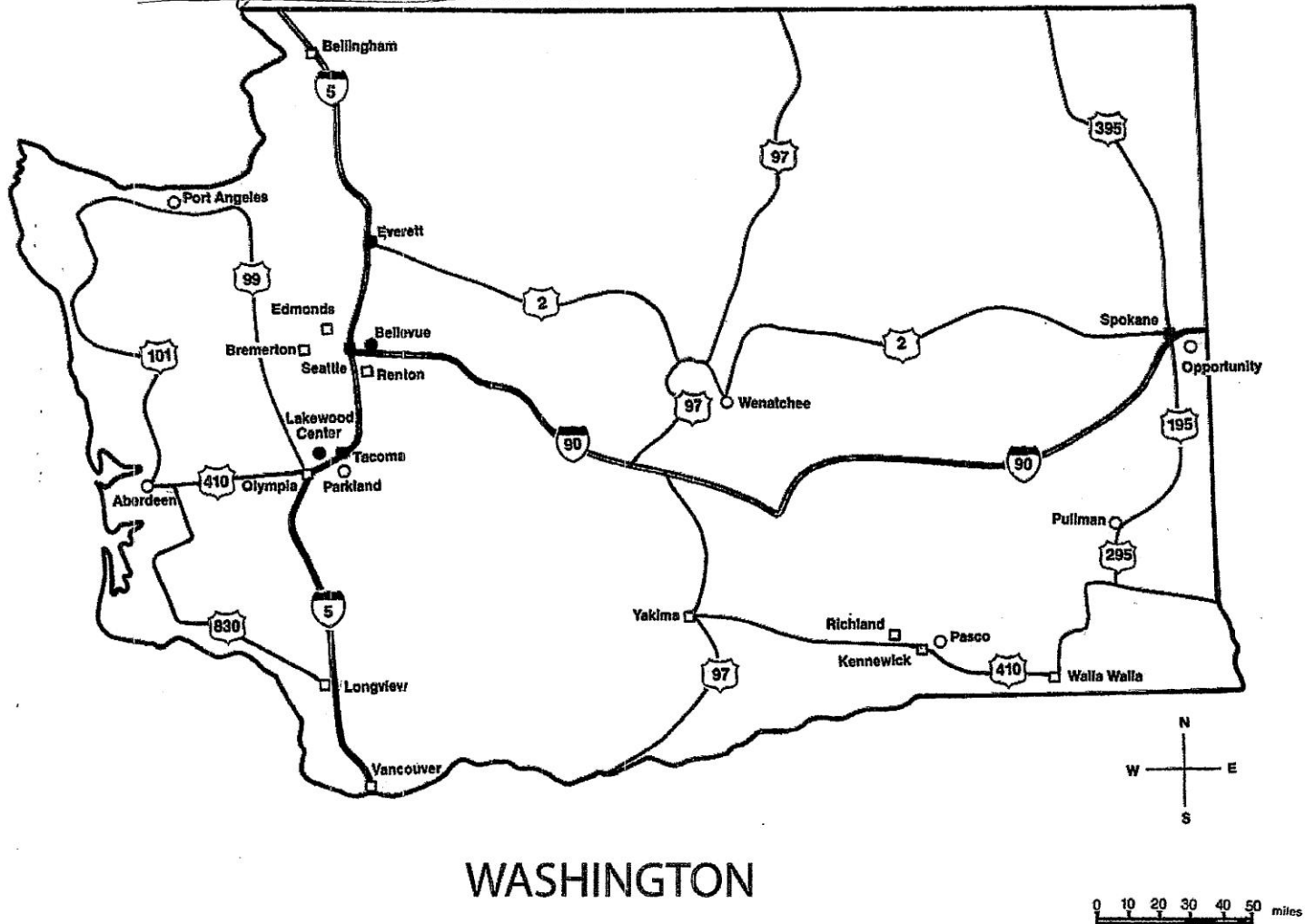
WASHINGTON

10 Response from a 75 year-old male from Walla Walla

099

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They all sound alike.



Data

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31 wrote comments on the map but drew no lines

- males (n=14), females (n=17)
- western WA (n=22), eastern WA (n=9)
 - More western WA respondents than larger data set
- average age of this group of respondents = 33
 - slightly older than the average age of the larger data set (26)

Data

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A content analysis resulted in five categories

- 41 comments from 31 respondents
- Each word or phrase that represented a different category was counted as a separate comment (even if from the same respondent)
 - E.g. “Washington has a fairly neutral accent, but outside of the metropolitan areas (specifically in the East) you might be able to catch a slight drawl” =2 comments;
 - “WA has a neutral accent”
 - “eastern WA has a drawl”
 - Although this allows for some respondents’ opinions to be overrepresented it prevents having to choose a single answer
- Comments grouped by category according to their content

Data

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1. There are no differences (n=19)
 - *NONE! I don't find any different in [sic] speech East or West*
 - *Hear no difference*
 - *Everybody sounds the same to me*
2. Differences are urban vs. rural (n=10)
 - *I would say that rural English can have more inflection as opposed to city English which is more monotone. Rural English can also take on an embraced Appalachian or Texas sound*
 - *E Washington tends to have a little more "twang" to it*
 - *not specific areas, but more based on city size. People (some, not all) from smaller towns are more relaxed when they speak, while some people from larger cities are more rushed and uptight*

Data

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3. Differences aren't geographic (n=8)

- *I am having difficulty with this survey because Washington is a rather hodge-podge when it comes to dialects. I can not [sic] differentiate accents based on area, both due to lack of exposure and to an open mind*
- *I've never noticed any differences--except Spanish accent, which randomly distributed in Washington [sic]*
- *I think most of educated Washington sounds about the same*

4. I don't know (n=2)

- *Really have stayed in Seattle most of the time*
- *only lived in one town*

5. Uncategorizable (n=2)

- *Different pronunciation slight accent*
- *The year long residents in Pullman tend to talk slower than the rest of Washington.*

Discussion

- With regard to interpreting lay language differentiation
 - ▣ Irvine & Gal (2000) provide a framework for understanding ideological processes through which “people construct ideological representations of linguistic differences” (37)
 - ▣ Processes of language differentiation particularly relevant here since this research specifically asked respondents about where ‘difference’ exists
 - ▣ Erasure, Fractal recursivity, Iconization

Discussion

1. There are no differences (n=19)

▣ Reflects a belief in homogeneity of English in WA

- *“In my opinion, people born and raised in Washington do not have accents. The ones I hear are from other parts of the U.S. or other countries.”*

▣ ‘Erasure’

- “a social group or a language may be imagined as homogeneous, its internal variation disregarded.” (Irvine & Gal 2000:38)
- An ideological scheme in which WA is linguistically homogenous suggests the process of erasure

Discussion

2. Differences are urban vs. rural (n=10)

- ▣ Urban/rural distinction is socially salient
 - urban/rural distinction was also important among the respondents who fully completed the map survey
- ▣ Responses in this category are fairly neutral
 - *E.g. “Urban areas are different from the country, mostly in relation to lifestyle”*
- ▣ ‘Fractal recursivity’
 - “the dichotomizing and partitioning process that was involved in some understood opposition (between groups or linguistic varieties, for example) recurs at other levels” (Irvine & Gal 2000:38)
 - A distinction of ideological perceptions of urban and rural lifestyles applied to language suggests a process of fractal recursivity

Discussion

3. Differences aren't geographic (n=8)

- ▣ linguistic differentiation associated with social groups such as social class, race or culture that are not tied to geography
 - *“I think most of educated Washington sounds about the same”*
 - *“most of the accents relate to race or speech [sic] impediments”*
 - *“I don't know if it's geographic location that makes the difference, but rather a choice of which culture to embrace”*

Discussion

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3. Differences aren't geographic (n=8)

▣ 'Iconization'

- Process by which “[l]inguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them” (Irvine & Gal 2000:37)
- Ideological beliefs about social groups and language in WA reflect a process of iconization

Discussion

- These responses provide an important reminder
 - ▣ of the ideologies inherent in research questionnaires
 - ▣ of the variation in language ideologies in the respondent community
- Such ‘unusable’ responses can be analyzed as ‘marginal’ data rather than excluded, allowing otherwise overlooked language ideologies to emerge

Thank you

Washington Residents' Perceptions of Where People Speak Differently All Respondents

