"It's Complicated": Perceptions of Dialect Southernness in Deer Park, Texas

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Motivations

Do you think Deer Park is part of the South?

CF33B: Well, when I think of the South . . . I think of South Carolina, Georgia, the old Confederacy. . . I guess it is technically part of the South, geographically speaking, but I think of it more as Southwest.

Excerpt from Oxley (2009)

Motivations

Do you think Deer Park is similar to the South, or do you think it's distinct in some way?

CF33B: I think it's similar. I think it's distinct in that I think Texans are a little bit more independent, and they think of themselves more as Texans than they do as Americans.

Do you consider yourself to be a Southerner?

CF33B: No, I really don't. I consider myself to be a Texan.

Excerpt from Oxley (2009)

Goals

- To examine notions of "the South" as understood by Deer Park (DP) residents, in particular:
  - Which states DP residents classify "the South"
  - Which subregions within the South are salient for DP residents
  - Which states' dialects DP residents consider similar to the DP dialect
  - How dialect southernness is understood at the local (city) level

Background: Perceptual Dialectology

- Perceptual dialectology (PD): study of non-linguists' beliefs about language variation and its spatial distribution (Preston 1999, Niedzielski & Preston 1999, Evans 2013)

- Given blank maps of a region (i.e., U.S.), subjects circle and label places where people talk differently

- Valuable insight into language variation, ideology, and identity (Preston 1993)

Background: Perceptual Dialectology

- In research across the U.S., "the South" has been the most frequently identified region (Preston 1986), however:

  - "Core" of this region is in Southeast (Niedzielski and Preston 1999)

  - Texas (TX) often singled out as its own region or grouped with West/Southwest (Preston 1986, Hartley 1999, Lance 1999)

  - Sensitive to scale: salient local categories/distinctions obscured in studies at national level (Bucholtz et al. 2007, Evans 2013)

Background: Defining Southernness

Criteria for Southernness	Texas		
	Southern	Intermediate	Not Southern
Climate		✓	
Large African-American Population		✓	
Incomplete Plumbing			✓
Few Dentists			✓
High Illiteracy Rates	✓		
Large Baptist Population	✓		
Country Musicians	✓		
No Law Against Sex Discrimination Until 1972	✓		
5+ Chapters of Kappa Alpha Order	✓		
Self Affiliation		✓	

Source: Reed (1991), Ely (2011), Johnstone (1999), Hall-Lew and Stephens (2011)

Background: DP, Pasadena, & Houston

- Local orientation: focusing on 3 cities within Houston metropolitan area
- Cities differ in size, ethnic diversity, income, and education

	Deer Park, TX	Pasadena, TX	Houston, TX
Population[†]	32,010	149,043	2,099,451
Ethnic Composition	70% White, 26% Hispanic	33% White, 62% Hispanic	26% White, 44% Hispanic, 23% Black, 6% Asian
Median Household Income[††]	$75,557	$46,998	$44,124
% with High School Degree or Higher[††]	87%	69%	74%

[†]2010 Census, [††]2007-2011 American Community Survey

Survey

- Online attitudinal survey
- Questions elicited ratings and commentary focused on 3 dimensions:
  - Similarity to DP dialect
  - Dialect standardness
  - Dialect southernness
- City-level and state-level questions for each dimension (map of U.S. with state abbreviations provided)
- Mixed methods approach: closed and open-ended questions to enable quantitative and qualitative analysis

Question Types: Southernness

- Given list of 50 states, check all which are part of the South

- Identify subregions within the South

- Select 1 most southern state

- Rate southernness of DP, Pasadena, and Houston dialects (1 = not very southern, 5 = very southern)

Question Types: Similarity

- Rate each of 50 states, Pasadena, and Houston according to similarity to DP dialect (1 = very different, 5 = very similar)

- Describe differences between cities of DP, Pasadena, and Houston (w.r.t. dialect and other differences)

Quantitative Analysis

- Excel macro used to generate shaded U.S. maps based on frequencies, means for rating data (Barbetta 2009)

- Probabilistic Principal Components Analysis (PPCA) and k-means cluster analysis used to examine groupings within the state similarity to DP ratings (Roweis 1997, Tipping and Bishop 1999)

- Paired t-tests conducted to determine whether the ratings of DP, Pasadena, and Houston differed significantly from each other

Qualitative Analysis

- Responses within each category grouped into themes, set of themes expanded via content analysis of responses (Smith 2000)

- AntConc concordancing software used to generate initial set of themes based on frequent n-grams in open-ended question responses (Anthony 2007)

  – Example from city comparison questions: "more diverse" mentioned 11 times, "ethnic groups" mentioned 7 times, "Hispanic population" mentioned 13 times, and "melting pot" mentioned 3 times

Results Overview

Dialect Southernness

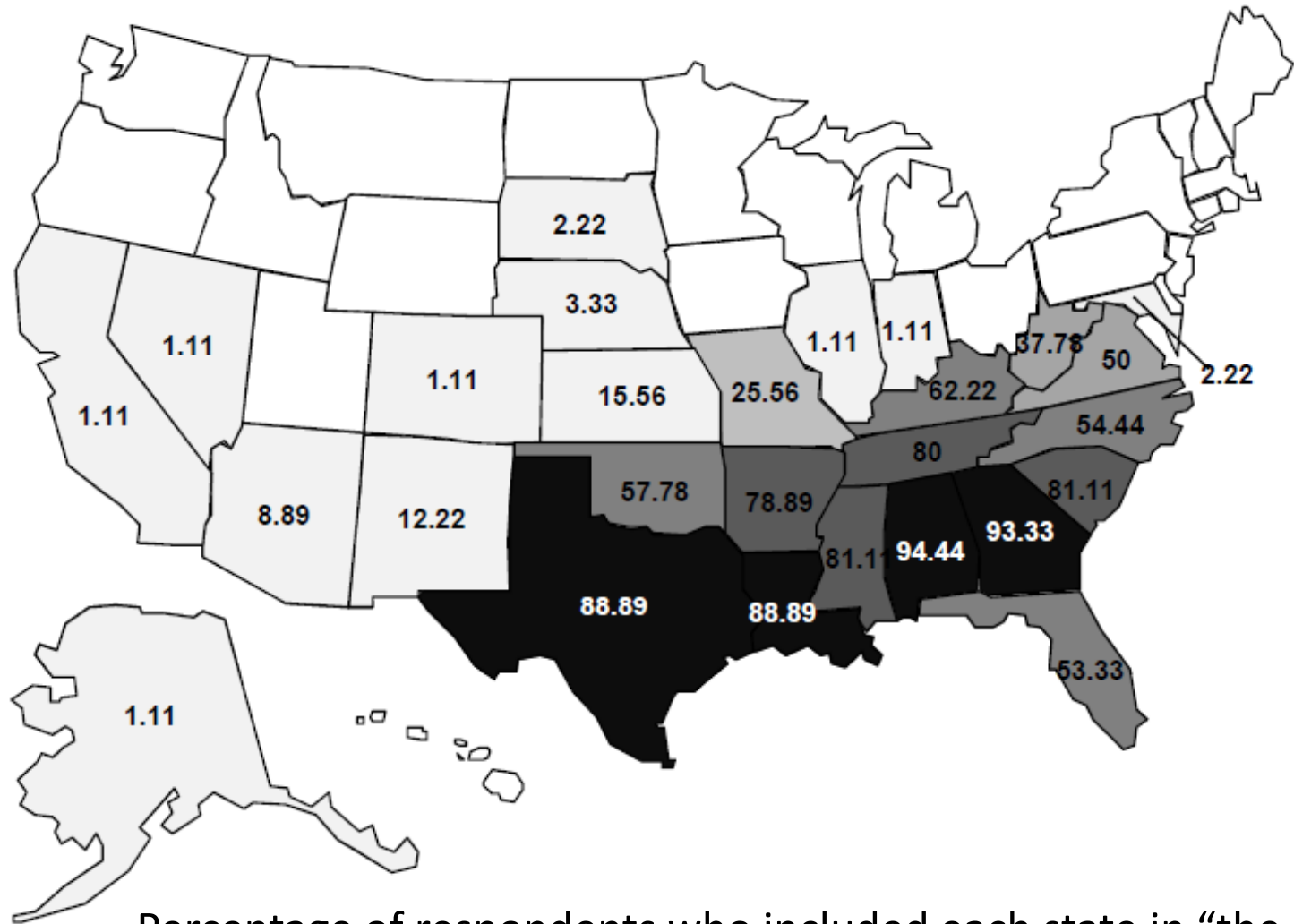   - States in the Southern Dialect Region

     - Most Southern State

     - Subregions within the South

     - City Southernness Ratings

Dialect Similarity

     - State Similarity Ratings

Results: States in the South

Percentage of respondents who included each state in "the South."

Results: Most Southern State

State	Respondents
Alabama	26 / 87 (30%)
Georgia	20 / 87 (23%)
Mississippi	13/ 87 (15%)
Texas	7 / 87 (8%)
Louisiana	3 / 87 (3%)
Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia	1 / 87 (1%)

- While almost 90% of respondents included TX in the South, TX was chosen as **most** southern state by only 8% of respondents

Results: Subregions within the South

Subregion Description	Respondents
Deep South	17 / 78 (22%)
Louisiana / Cajun	14/ 78 (18%)
TX	13 / 78 (17%)
Southwest versus Southeast	11 / 78 (14%)
Florida	8 / 78 (10%)
TX + 1 Other State	7 / 78 (8%)
Subregions within TX	7 / 78 (8%)
Mountain/Appalachian/Hillbilly	7 / 78 (8%)
"Twang" or "Drawl" Region	7 / 78 (8%)
The Carolinas	7 / 78 (8%)
Middle or Central South	6 / 78 (6%)
Northern Area versus Southern Area	4 / 78 (5%)
Urban versus Rural South	3 / 78 (4%)

Results: Subregions within the South

TX as a Unique Region:

"Texas is in a class by itself - a unique one -- hmmm maybe that's because we were once a nation." (CF60)

Southwest versus Southeast:

"Texas, to my mind, has more of a 'southwest' dialect and mindset than 'deep south.' We have southern accents, euphemisms, and speech patterns, but without the extreme drawl and idiosyncratic vocabulary found in the deep south." (CF33B)

Results: Subregions within the South

Subregions within TX:

"'East Texas' has a distinct dialect (twang,hick), Deep South Texas has a distinct dialect (Spanglish), West and North Texas also have a certain dialect" (CF57)

"The folks from the East Texas Piney Woods have a different dialect then the West Texas Cowboy yet they are in the same state." (CM53C)

Results: Subregions within the South by Age Group

Subregion Description	Respondents in Youngest Age Group (18-31)	Respondents in Middle Age Group (32-47)	Respondents in Oldest Age Group (48-67)
Deep South	5 / 37 (14%)	3 / 21 (14%)	9 / 32 (28%)
TX	8 / 37 (22%)	2 /21 (10%)	3 / 32 (9%)
Urban/Rural	3 / 37 (8%)	0 /21 (0%)	0 / 32 (0%)

Results: City Southernness

DP vs Pasadena

"Pasadena has a much larger percentage of Hispanic families in their city compared to Deer Park. Because of this I know that their dialect might not be as 'southern' as ours in Deer Park." (CF34)

"Because Pasadena is a lower income city than Deer Park, I think their dialect becomes more urban...inner city, so it blends better with the outskirts of South Houston . . . but there is still a distinct hispanic influence in Pasadena toungue." (AmF29)

Results: City Southernness

DP vs Houston

"A greater percent of out of state/country citizens live in Houston than in Deer Park, therefore diluting the southern dialect that exist in Houston compared to Deer Park." (HF25)

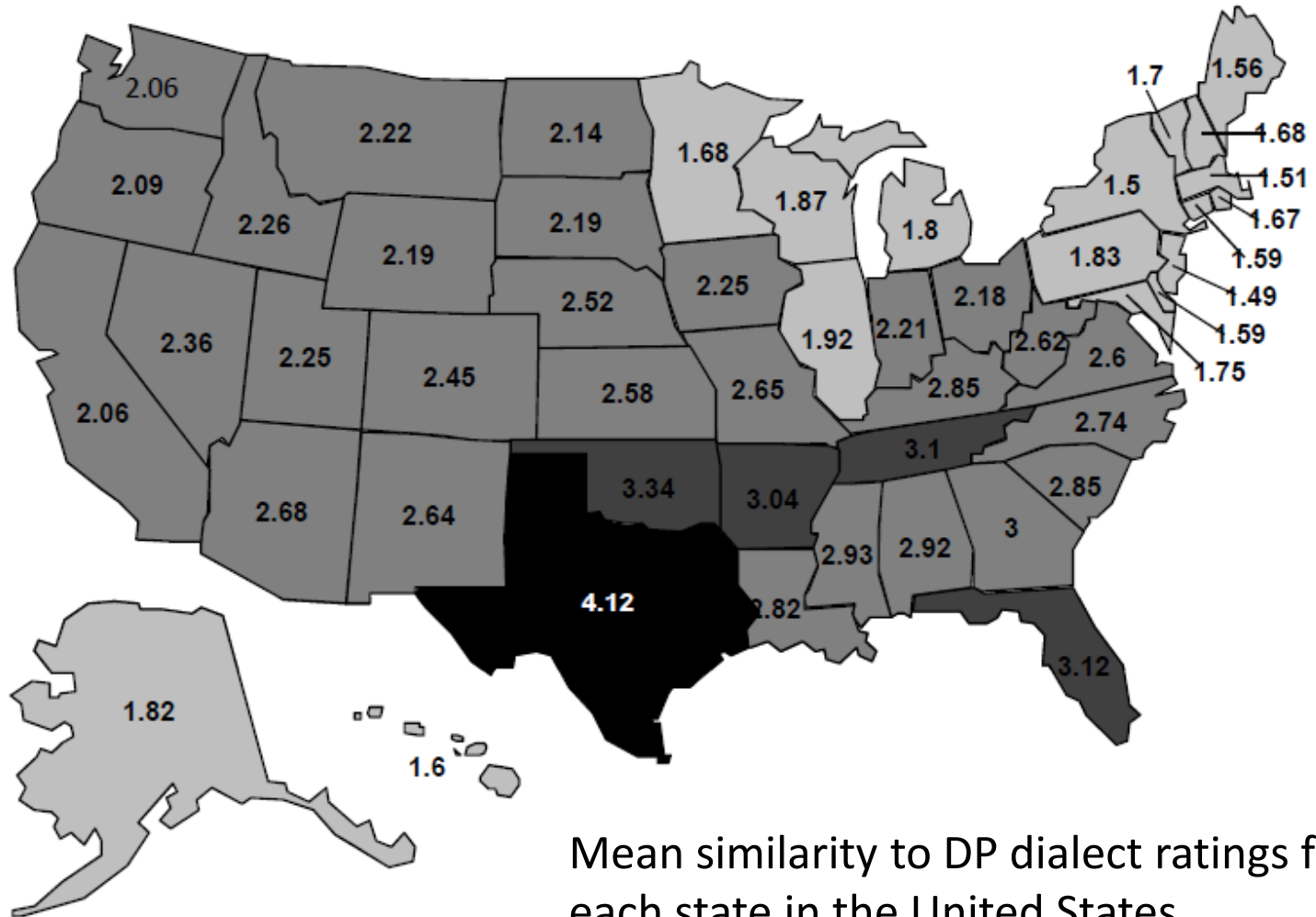"Deer Park seems more southern like simply because it is not urban like Houston." (AF21A)

"Houston is more diverse, therefore the dialects are certainly more diverse and generally less southern." (CF23B)

Results: City Southernness

Based on a paired samples t-test, **no statistically significant difference** between DP dialect southernness ratings (M = 4.01, SD = 0.74) and Pasadena dialect southernness ratings (M = 3.93, SD = 0.86), $t(89) = 1.47$, $p > .05$ (two-tailed).

Based on a paired samples t-test, **there was a statistically significant difference** between DP dialect southernness ratings (M = 4.01, SD = 0.74) and Houston dialect southernness ratings (M = 3.67, SD = 0.87), $t(89) = 3.79$, $p < .0005$ (two-tailed) – DP was rated as more southern than Houston

Results: Similarity to DP

Mean similarity to DP dialect ratings for each state in the United States.
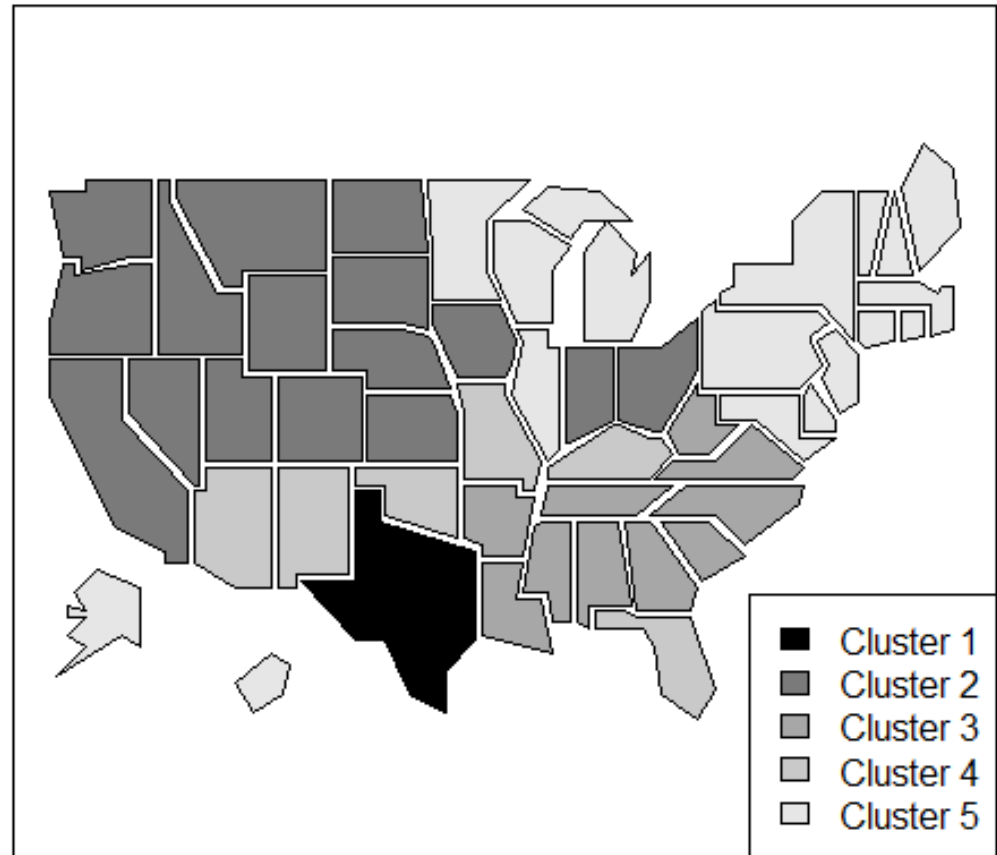
Results: Similarity to DP

Southern Clusters:
- Cluster 1 = TX
- Cluster 4 = Peripherally southern states
- Cluster 3 = Deep South

Non-Southern Clusters:
- Cluster 2: The West
- Cluster 5: The North/Northeast

PPCA and *k* means clustering of similarity to DP ratings with *k* = 5 clusters.

Conclusions

- "The South" is not monolithic; southernness is gradient, not categorical
  - The South consists of several southern regions
  - Southernness is a matter of degree – states, cities, and dialects framed as "more" or "less" southern (Hall-Lew and Stephens 2011, Johnstone 1999)

- Examining southernness at the regional/subregional level provides detail which may be missed in research focused on the entire country (i.e., Niedzielski and Preston 1999, Lance 1999)
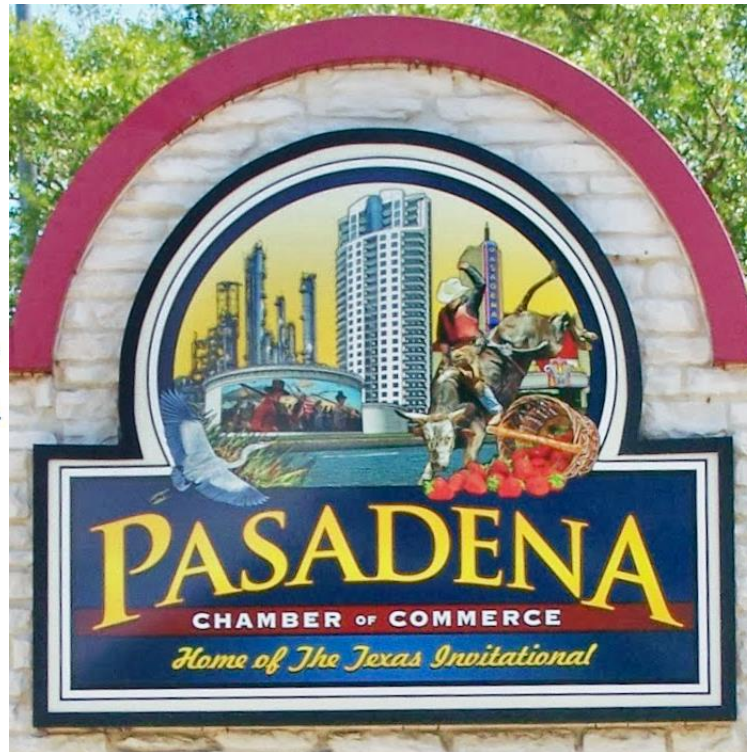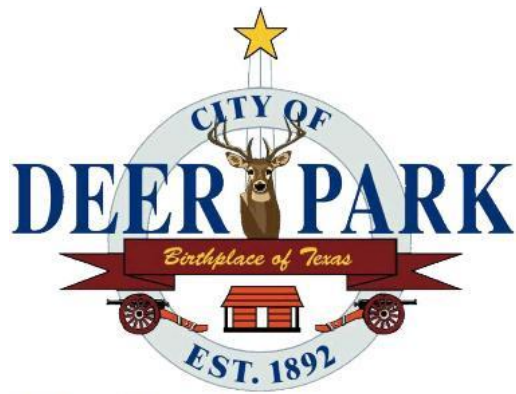
Conclusions

- City-level results provide further evidence of importance of scale in PD research (Evans 2013):
  - Subjects engage with concepts like dialect southernness at a more local level than explored in previous PD research
  - Salient distinctions between DP community and surrounding communities emerge, particularly regarding ethnic diversity and "urbanness"
- Even in a small community like DP, subjects exhibit variation in perceptions of "the South"
- Responses highlight interconnectedness of dialect southernness and similarity to DP

Future Directions

- Differences may be related to identity - respondents who identify as "Texan" rather than "Southern" may be more inclined to:
  - Single out TX as a unique dialect region
  - Rate TX differently from the rest of the South
- Further research needed to understand relationship between "Texan" and "Southern" identity in DP and how this identity shapes the folk linguistic landscapes of DP residents

Thank you!

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