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The South: Still Different

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At LAVIS II I suggested that the South was a touchstone for dialect perception in the United States (Preston 1997). I based that conclusion on two related facts drawn from folk linguistic or, more specifically, perceptual dialectological investigations. First, the South was the most frequently drawn area of the US when respondents were asked to outline on a blank map the parts of the country where people speak differently. This was as true of Southern respondents as it was of those from every other area of the country where this hand-drawn dialect map task had been done (e.g., Preston 1986). Second, the South, along with New York City and its environs, was the worst-rated area of the country when respondents were asked to rate the fifty states, New York City, and Washington D.C. for language correctness. Third, at last as far as some Northerners were concerned, the South was the most dialectally different area of the country.

Figure 1, for example, shows that, when respondents from southeastern Michigan were asked to outline the areas of the United States where people speak differently, a whopping 94% of them outlined a South. The next most frequently rated area was the local one, but it was recognized by only 61% of the respondents.

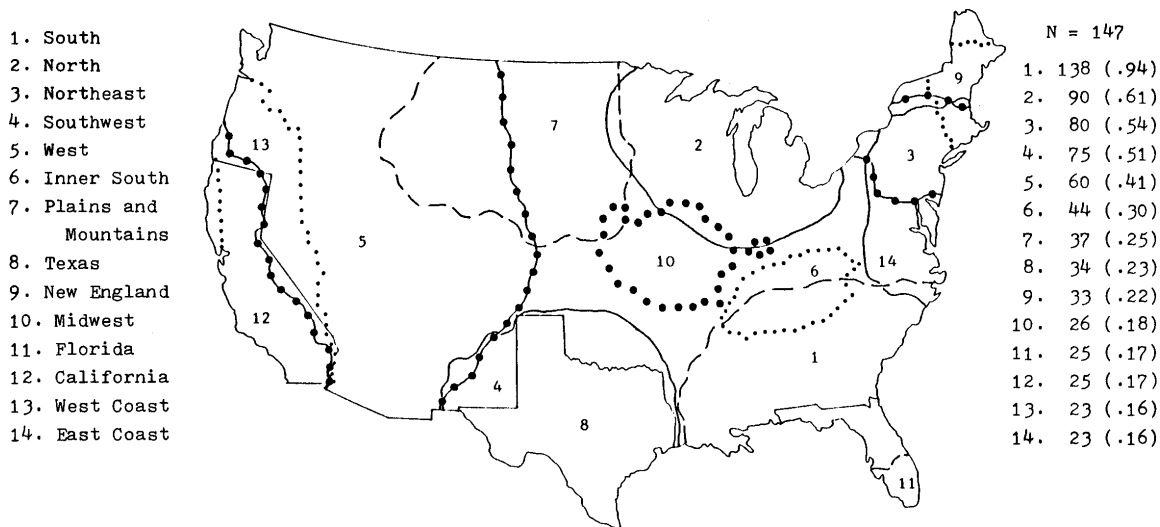


Figure 1. A computer-generated composite of the hand-drawn maps of regional speech areas by 147 southeastern Michigan respondents

Figure 2 shows that, when southeastern Michigan respondents rated the fifty states, New York City, and Washington, D.C. on a ten-point scale for language correctness, the states in the South were lowest-rated, although New York City and New Jersey were poorly-rated as well, but, as Figure 1 shows, that area was also frequently identified as distinct.

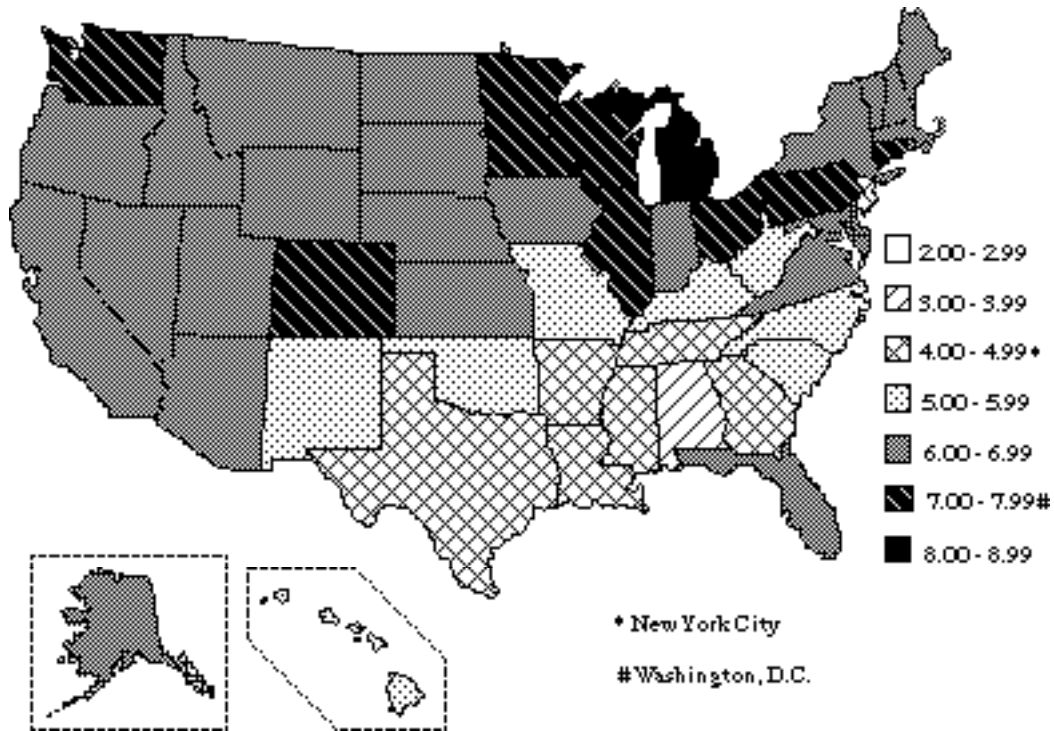


Figure 2. The fifty states, New York City, and Washington, D.C rated for language correctness (1 = least correct, 10 = most correct) by southeastern Michigan respondents (results are shaded by means score ranges) (Insert Figure 2 here.)

These findings and others led me to conclude that the overwhelming folk linguistic concern in such matters was not geographical distribution but the distribution of good and bad language: bad language is Southern, and good language is the white-bread, unmarked stuff of the mythical national newscaster variety, one supposed by the folk to have its origins and provenience somewhere in the upper Midwest. As Figure 2 shows, Michiganders clearly believe they speak it.

I went on to suggest at LAVIS II that the South provided a necessary foil for the country's prescriptive inclinations. How can you be cool if there are no nerds to belittle? How can you proclaim yourself knowledgeable if there are none around who can be

called ignorant? How can you claim to be a good speaker (or recognize that there are areas where good speakers abound) unless there are areas with lousy speakers for you to lord it over linguistically?

One could even suggest that much of this work was unnecessary; any quick look at media, popular culture, the historical record or even introspection of our individual instantiations of the national language mythology would have revealed these obvious truths, and a responsible folk linguistic investigation will certainly make use of such more qualitatively-oriented pieces of evidence (e.g., Niedzielski and Preston 1999).

It was the case, however, even at LAVIS II, that I did not paint a completely negative picture of the status of Southern US English. To have done so would have been to have ignored one-half of the two great truths uncovered in years of work in the social psychology of language, or the study of language attitudes. When respondents are asked to tell us how they feel about language, no matter what the investigative tool, they exploit two dimensions. The first is like the one already discussed: language may be correct or incorrect; it reflects the practices of the dominant culture and stands for conservative, mainstream educational norms, or it does not. Michiganders clearly believe they have put their fingers through this linguistic golden ring and that Southerners, if they wear any linguistic jewelry at all, must have stuff made from much lesser metals.

The second great truth of language attitude study is, however, that not all speakers place exclusive (or even major) value on the standard or correct linguistic norm. Many, perhaps especially speakers of prejudiced-against varieties who are themselves prejudiced against in nonlinguistic areas, value nonstandard, small-group, and local varieties of language for the solidarity and identity functions such language provides.

Asking people where the most correct English in the US is spoken, therefore, did not exploit the full range of linguistic attitudes which needed to be taken into consideration. Respondents were also asked, therefore, to rate the fifty states, New York City, and Washington, D.C. on a scale of one to ten for language pleasantness, a one-word attempt to capture the second great truth of language attitude study. Figure 3 shows the results of that investigation for university-enrolled Southern respondents, primarily from Alabama.

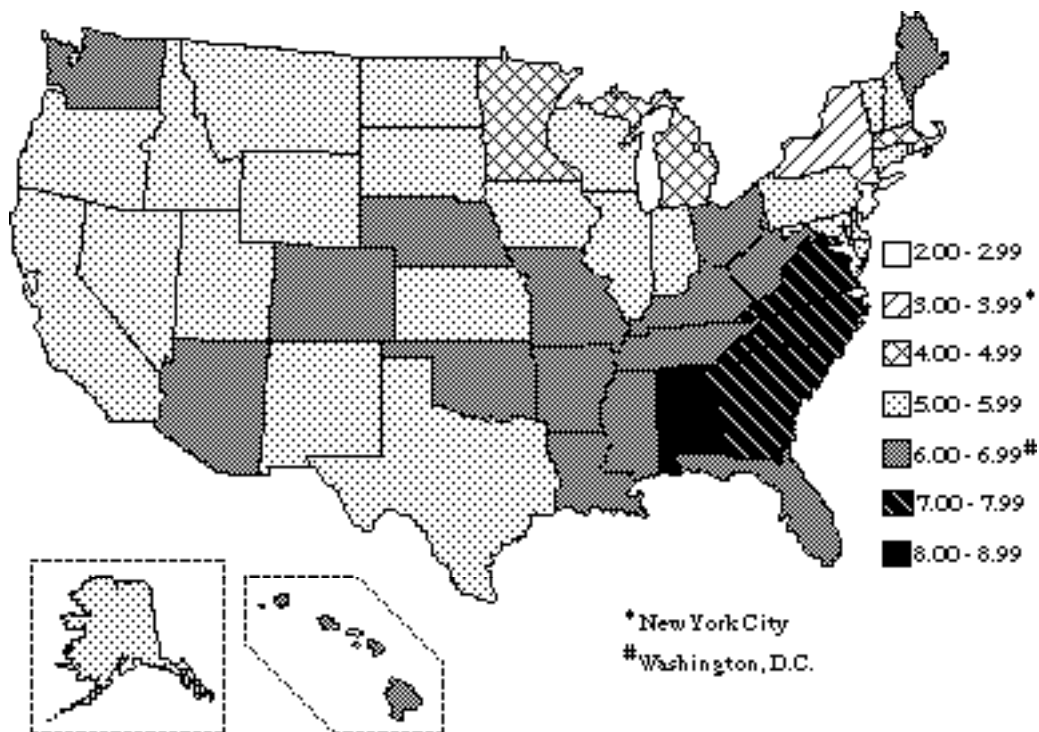


Figure 3. The fifty states, New York City, and Washington, D.C rated for language pleasantness (1 = least pleasant, 10 = most pleasant) by Southern (chiefly Alabama) respondents (results are shaded by means score ranges)

These Southerners appear to feel as strongly about language pleasantness (and that they have it) as Michiganders do about language correctness. I will not show the remaining parts of the full argument for the interpretation which follows, but maps which show the

Michigan rating of language pleasantness reveal that Michiganders no longer find themselves unique (as they did for correctness) and they no longer find the South (and New York City) so deficient. Southern raters are similarly wishy-washy about correctness. They find no difference, for example, between themselves and Michigan, giving both areas (and much of the entire country) a lackluster 6.00.

From these contrastive data sets, I have concluded that speakers have a certain amount of language attitude capital to spend; if they spend it all on correctness, they have little left over for pleasantness, and vice versa. Figures 2 and 3 should make it very clear where Michiganders and Southerners have spent most of their linguistic revenue.

I also reported at LAVIS II that US respondents were sensitive to actual Southern speech in terms of dialect recognition, and this sensitivity, I believe, reinforces its salience, whether it is one derived from the folk recognition of its incorrectness or from its solidarity marking function. Figure 4 shows the sites at which the voices of nine middle-aged, well-educated men were recorded. The samples were carefully edited to exclude any phrasal, lexical, morphological, or syntactic clues to regional provenience.



Figure 4. The nine sites in the US to which respondents had to match speech samples

These voices were played in a random order for respondents from Southern Indiana, who were asked to identify the site each voice sample was from. The site scores (“9” for the Northernmost and “1” for the Southernmost) assigned each voice were averaged, and the results are shown in Table 1.¹

Table 1. Ranks of regional voices, north to south, with mean scores derived from site numbers assigned each voice by the Southern Indiana respondents (based on the sites shown in Figure 4); scores show an overall significance (ANOVA $p < .00001$).

	Rank	Mean
9 Saginaw	3	6.23
8 Coldwater	5	5.88
7 South Bend	1	6.56
6 Muncie	2	6.49
5 New Albany	6	5.72
4 Bowling Green	4	6.21
3 Nashville	7	3.26
2 Florence	8	2.56
1 Dothan	9	1.97

I will not review the ANOVA (and post-hoc) calculations here which show the patterns of distinctiveness for these identifications since, for the Northern and Midwestern voices, they were quite confused. There was, however, no statistical distinction between any two of the three southernmost voices (Nashville, TN; Florence, AL, and Dothan, AL), but all three of these were distinct from all the other voices. This can be seen rather dramatically in a cluster analysis representation of these identifications, shown in Figure 5.

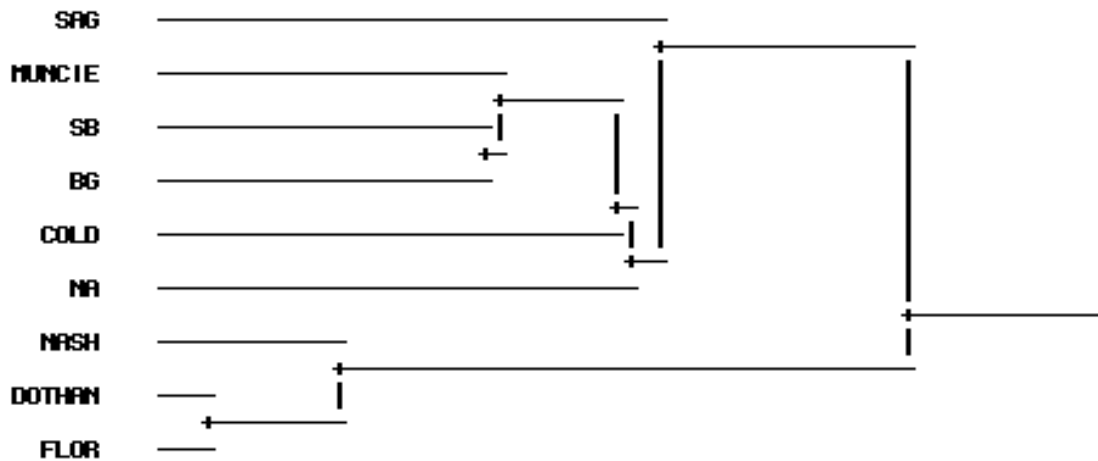


Figure 5. Cluster analysis of site assignments of the nine sample voices by Southern Indiana respondents

The lower left of Figure 5 shows that the three southernmost sites (Nashville, Florence, and Dothan) cluster together before any others. The next clustering is between Bowling Green, KY and South Bend, IN, a very poor respondent performance in terms of dialect similarity. The results were very much the same for southeastern Michigan respondents.

Finally, at LAVIS II I reported that Northerners were very much aware of the South as a different dialect area from their own. Michiganders, for example, on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = the same, 2 = a little different, 3 = different, and 4 = unintelligibly different) rated only Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana in the means score range of 3.26 – 4.00.

In these LAVIS II reports, therefore, I was comfortable in concluding that the South was the most salient dialect area in the country and that its salience could be detected by stimuli of either actual speech samples or labels. Moreover, that salience was based on the perception (primarily) that it was the least correct English of the country and (secondarily) that it was a powerful marker of solidarity for its speakers.

What new evidence has come to light since LAVIS II?

No studies conducted since LAVIS II suggest that the South is not the most salient speech area in the US. Susan Tamasi, who has conducted a variety of perceptual studies over the last several years, some with innovative cognitive anthropological techniques, has concluded from her investigations that "...SAE [Southern American English] stands out as the one variety of American English that has the most consistent and most developed set of perceptions associated with it" (2004). Lance (1999) conducted perceptual surveys in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Georgia, Alabama, Missouri, South Dakota, and Washington and noted that "...a substantial number of participants from all states except MA [Massachusetts] designated a Southern dialect area, and large enough numbers to justify separate maps also outlined Southeastern and Mid-Southern areas" (296). In a perceptual study in Oregon with 65 respondents, Hartley (1999) found that 92% identified a South in their hand-drawn maps, while the second most frequently drawn region was the Northeast with only 75% (316). Fought (2002) found that 71 of her 112 California respondents who used any identification label at all identified a South (120) in contrast with the 45 who identified a Midwest (119). In recent work with 50 Boston respondents Hartley (2005) reports that 84% identify a South while only 78% identify their home area (New England), suggesting that Lance's conclusion about Massachusetts speakers may not have been correct. Most recently, White and Shaw (2004) report that Texas respondents (81) "... indicate salient Northern and Southern perceptual regions."

Many of these recent research reports and others also continue to uncover folk perceptions which regard Southern speech as incorrect. Hartley (2005) shows that Boston raters identify a large South as the home of the least correct English; Fridland, Bartlett,

and Mackey (2004) found that respondents from Memphis rated the South as significantly less correct ($p < .01$) than Northern, Western, and Midwestern regions. None of Tamasi's Southern respondents who moved to Atlanta found their home state to be a place where correct English was spoken while more than 50% of the Midwesterners, Mid-Atlantic residents, Westerners, and New Englanders did (2001).

Some of these correctness findings are based on increasingly subtle methods. Nguyen (2003), for example, played speech samples for University of Michigan freshmen and asked them to transcribe what they heard. She then checked their transcripts for "respelling" attempts to capture the speaker's pronunciation. Among the speakers she used, one was Appalachian US and another British. Although British English was doubtless further removed linguistically from the dialect of the respondent-transcribers, they respelled far more of the Southern Appalachian speaker's words, and she showed a clear correlation between the use of respellings and the listener's evaluations of the speaker's education (as also shown in Preston 1985).

Since earlier work suggests a different distribution for correct as opposed to pleasant speech sites in the US, recent work on that second dimension is reviewed next. Recall that Northern respondents (Michiganders) had a tendency to rate Southern speech less harshly for pleasantness than for correctness and that Southern respondents (mostly from Alabama) rated their own speech very high for pleasantness. Further work continues to support these generalizations, except for Tamasi (2001) whose Southerners did not find their home areas pleasant, but this small study had only four Southern respondents. In contrast, Hartley's Bostonians, for example, do not find the south as unpleasant as they find it incorrect, and, in fact, find New York, New Jersey, and New York City more

unpleasant than any Southern state (2005). Hartley's Oregon raters placed all Southern states considerably higher on politeness than correctness, with two states (Georgia and Louisiana) actually scoring nearly as high as the highly-rated western states (1999:328).

Since several of these pieces of research suggest amelioration of attitudes to Southern English along the pleasantness dimension, I decided to return to the more classic mode of language attitude study by employing a semantic differential task. In Preston 1989 I criticized language attitude studies for playing voice samples for evaluation without knowing the respondents' mental maps of regional dialects. I suggested that such a study which found positive responses to a Montana voice, for example, but did not know if the respondents thought the voice was from Montana (or even had a category "Montana voice") was misleading. With respondents' mental maps now in hand as a result of the generalizations of the hand-drawn task (e.g., Figure 1), respondents could be asked to rate areas which they had previously told us were salient.

To accomplish this task, the usual procedures in a semantic differential language attitude study were followed (Preston 1999). Southeastern Michigan respondents were shown a modified version of Figure 1 and asked to write down all the things that came to mind about the speech varieties in those regions. The most common variety descriptors (and their opposites) were selected for the evaluation task; they were as follows:

slow — fast	formal — casual	educated — uneducated
smart — dumb	polite — rude	snobbish — down-to-earth
nasal — not nasal	normal — abnormal	friendly — unfriendly
drawl — no drawl	twang — no twang	bad English — good English

The respondents, also from southeastern Michigan, were then shown a modified version of Figure 1 and asked to rate each region. The overall results showed exactly what one would expect on the basis of years of language attitude research: two robust factor groups — one focused on language correctness and mainstream norms (Factor Group #1), the other focused on language solidarity (Factor Group #2). I will focus here only on the scores for the local area (the North for these Michigan raters) and the South (see Figure 1). Table 2 shows the ratings and statistical analyses of these results.

Table 2. Means scores (on a scale of 1 to 6) of both factor groups (1=“Competence”; 2=“Solidarity”) for ratings of the North and South

*Only significant (0.05) break between any two adjacent means scores; “‡” marks values below 3.5 (which may be interpreted as the opposite polarity — shown in brackets)

Means scores (ordered) <u>South</u>				Means scores (ordered) <u>North</u>			
Factor	Mean	Attribute	Rank	Rank	Factor	Mean	Attribute
-1&2	4.66	Casual	1	12	-1&2	3.53	Casual
2	4.58	Friendly	2	9.5	2	4.00	Friendly
2&-1	4.54	Down-to-earth	3	6	2&-1	4.19	Down-to-earth
2	4.20	Polite	4	9.5	2	4.00	Polite
∅	4.09	Not nasal	5	11	∅	3.94	Not nasal
	*						
1&2	‡3.22	Normal [Abnormal]	6	3	1&2	4.94	Normal
1	‡3.04	Smart [Dumb]	7	4	1	4.53	Smart
1	‡2.96	No twang [Twang]	8	2	1	5.07	No twang
1	‡2.86	Good English [Bad English]	9	5	1	4.41	Good English
1	‡2.72	Educated [Uneducated]	10	8	1	4.09	Educated
1	‡2.42	Fast [Slow]	11	7	1	4.12	Fast
1	‡2.22	No drawl [Drawl]	12	1	1	5.11	No drawl

The means scores for these assignments (on a scale of 1 to 6) show, in the lower half of the table, exactly what has been suggested above. On the right, the scores for the North are highest for the attributes which formed Factor Group #1 — No drawl, No twang, Normal, Smart, Good English, Fast, and Educated. On the left, the lowest scores for the South are for the same characteristics. As was to be expected for an area which has spent all its linguistic capital on correctness, the Michigan raters have not placed so much emphasis on their own Factor Group #2 attributes, and, as the top right of Table 2 shows, they rate themselves lower for Casual, Not nasal, Friendly, Down-to-earth, and Polite. What is surprising, however, are the ratings for the South for the Factor Group #2 characteristics. Michiganders actually rate Southerners as more casual, friendlier, more down-to-earth, and more polite than they rate themselves.

What does this approach contribute to our understanding of the regard for Southern speech? The major finding of this study is that there is a considerable difference in the rankings here of the affective dimension of attitudes of Michiganders to the South and those given by similar respondents in earlier research. Michigan ratings for the local area for pleasantness were among the highest in earlier research, and the ratings for the South along the same dimension were among the lowest. In the present study, however, the South did significantly better than the local area in three key characteristics of the affective factor group (Friendly, Casual, and Down-to-earth) and was not significantly different on a fourth (Polite).

What accounts for this amelioration of attitude towards the South among these raters? One might suspect that some sort of covert prestige simply attaches itself to Southern speech. If that were the case, however, one might expect to see a strong gender

differentiation (with a male preference for the stigmatized variety), but there were very few gender differences in the ratings, and high ratings for such attributes as Friendly hardly point to stereotypically tough or masculine characteristics. I believe, however, that this last possibility moves in the right direction, but I also believe that previous definitions of covert prestige are too tough and male oriented to cover the entire territory.

Since there is obviously no dissatisfaction with the local variety as a representative of correct English, what is the source of the preference for other varieties along affective dimensions? Recall that I have suggested that a group has a tendency to use up its symbolic linguistic capital in one way or another (but not both).

If these southeastern Michiganders have spent all their symbolic linguistic capital on the standardness of local English and it has come to represent the norms of schools, media, and public interaction, perhaps it is also seen as less suitable for casual, interpersonal use. In short, these young Michiganders don't identify other varieties for their covert prestige on the basis of anti-establishment or tough characteristics alone; they also assign covert prestige to a variety which they imagine would have more value than theirs for interpersonal and casual interaction, precisely the sorts of dimensions associated with Factor Group #2. I do not doubt the existence of covert prestige along the traditional masculine or tough lines that Trudgill (1972) points out; I simply suspect that there are other kinds of covert prestige, or at least one in which friendship, solidarity, trust, informality, strong emotion, and such factors are highlighted. Southern US English would appear to be such a variety for these Michigander judges.

From a social psychological point of view, Ryan, Giles, and Sebastian (1982:9) outline the following evaluative possibilities for majority (LV1) and minority (LV2) speakers:

Table 3: Majority/minority and in-group/out-group language preferences for status and solidarity (Ryan, Giles, and Sebastian 1982)

Type of preference	Judges			
	LV1 speakers		LV2 speakers	
	Status	Solidarity	Status	Solidarity
A. Majority group	LV1	LV1	LV1	LV1
B. Majority group for Status/ in-group for solidarity	LV1	LV1	LV1	LV2
C. In-group	LV1	LV1	LV2	LV2
D. Majority group for status/ minority group for solidarity	LV1	LV2	LV1	LV2

Perhaps speakers of Inland Northern US English (i.e., the Michiganders studied here) have changed from Type B to Type D. In other words, the inappropriateness of their own variety to interpersonal modes of communication has caused them to evaluate other

varieties, which they clearly consider nonstandard, better for the characteristics in Factor Group #2.

Speakers in many societies are often presented with a dichotomous choice between mainstream and nonmainstream behaviors, but a middle ground appears to exist in which they may succeed along traditional lines but also display egalitarian principles, ones which require, on the linguistic front, at least partial or occasional use of varieties seen as stigmatized. These varieties, since they are stereotypically associated with plain talk, ordinary facts, and everyday life also seem to be more appropriate for casual, interpersonal use.

In other words, in resolving the tension between mainstream and nonmainstream behavior, a linguistic option might be the use of a folk-identified Standard English in settings which require that variety and some use of perceived nonstandards in settings which require casual use.

I will not press this favoring of stigmatized varieties into service for general sociolinguistics further, but it is one option in the search for accounts of the introduction and spread of novel elements (particularly into the mainstream speech community); that is, it is an option in the search for answers to the problems of “actuation” and “embedding” (Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968). Rampton (1995) also notes that the adolescent use of stigmatized varieties provides an opportunity for practice (while making the social statement that such selection implies). If that is true, then all the cases of accommodation, imitation, and acquisition of socially motivated non-mainstream varieties are opportunities for the introduction and spread of alternative forms. This may be particularly true when those elements are introduced into the wider speech community

by adolescents whose own native variety is closer to the mainstream, although their initial motivation in acquiring them was accommodation to nonmainstream varieties.

That the young southeastern Michiganders reported on here prefer a stigmatized variety to their own for affective characteristics suggests that they are not only changing their attitudinal perception to “Type D” (Table 3) but that they are also potential borrowers of norms from stigmatized speech communities in their own attempts to achieve a more casual, interpersonal style. I will not suggest that this will cause a massive importation of Southern speech norms into Michigan and other Northern areas, but it clearly sets the stage for influence of just that sort. Even if it would be premature to predict a shift from “you guys” to “y’all,” it is clear that Michiganders, perhaps Northerners in general, have an affective soft spot in their hearts for Southern speech, a variety they are nevertheless convinced is incorrect.

Similar findings have been most recently reported by White and Shaw (2004) for their Texas respondents, who found Northerners to be superior on the following traits: intelligence, education, ambition, talent, success, and proper English. Southerners, on the other hand, were given superior scores for honesty, friendliness, trustworthiness, down-to-earthness, casualness, community, politeness, and large families. They found overwhelmingly, however, that Southerners spoke “Bad English” and that they identified themselves (Texans) as Southerners.

The differentiation between correctness and pleasantness for Southern speakers is shown dramatically in Figure 6, a comparison of Hartley’s Oregon scores for both dimensions. New York City and Alabama share honors for least correct, but Alabama is considerably better rated than New York City for pleasantness, as, in fact, are all other

Southern states. The unpleasantness ratings for the two other badly rated areas (New York and New Jersey) are also lower than that for any Southern state, even ones which are rated much worse on the correctness scale.

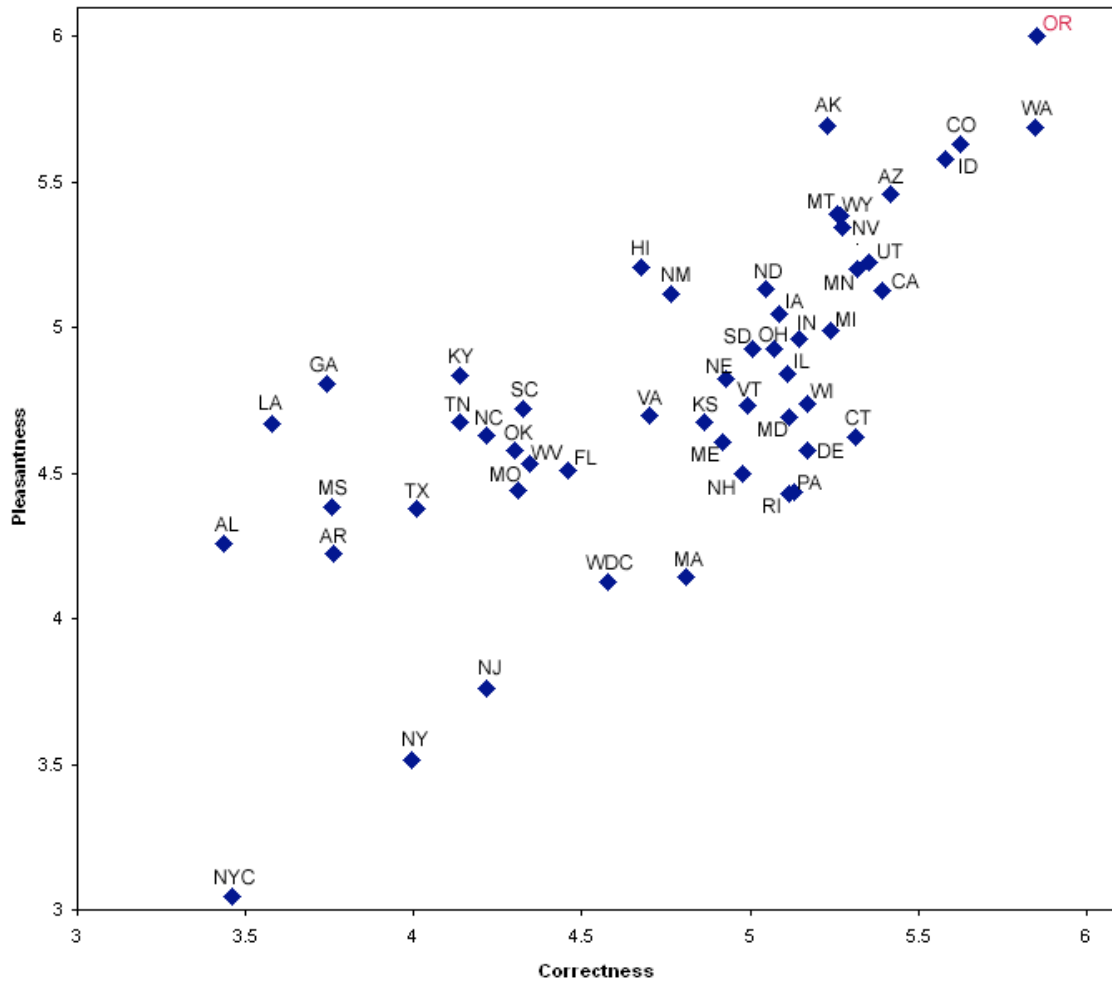


Figure 6. Oregon scores for correctness and pleasantness (on a 7-point scale), derived from Hartley 1999.

Finally, in Introduction to Preston (1999:xxxviii) I suggested that an important area to explore in perceptual dialectology, particularly as it was conducted by linguists, was the influence, importance, and role of single features (or groups of features) rather

than just the consideration of such global constructs as “Southern accent” or “nonstandard speech.” I am happy to report that considerable perceptual dialectological work since LAVIS II has sought to discover the impact of specific linguistic features, much of it within the framework of sociophonetics. First, however, some lexical and grammatical features which have Southern importance.

Goodheart (2004) shows that the St. Louis, Missouri lexical item *hoosier* is strongly associated with Southern speech. In St. Louis, hoosiers are defined as ignorant, backward, and rustic, and Goodheart’s conversational evidence shows a strong association for her respondents between this designation and the use of Southern speechways. Goodheart even suggests that inroads of Northern Speech in St. Louis are a result of locals distancing themselves from this hoosier association, a very clear confirmation of the incorrect and undesirable status of Southern speech in an urban area of a border state. St. Louisians disallow any recognition of desirable affective traits in Southern speech by associating the variety with a purely negative caricature:

J: Can you tell me what a hoosier is?

N: Oh, hell, yeah. Hoosier is somebody who, uh, basically it just means, uh, somebody who, uh, is just kind of a slob kind of person, you know, drinks cheap, cheapest beer, smokes the cheapest cigarettes, goes home with the fattest girl from the bar and brags about it, don't even care, you know. (Goodheart 2004:68)

Krueger (2002) reports on Texas responses to the perfective *done* construction (e.g., I done told him). Of the 99 respondents, 96 called it a Southern speech form, more than twice as many who also identified it as Midwestern (41), and 92 said it would be more likely to be used by a person with less than a high school education. It was more typically male (77) than female (63), and it was associated with rural (67) and working class (51) speakers. In a perceptual match to the classic sociolinguistic age-grading pattern, it was said to be preferred by younger and older rather than middle-aged speakers. In short, for these respondents, when a grammatically stigmatized form was presented, the regional association with the South was strong, as well as the association with other typical sociolinguistic indicators of nonstandardness — sex (male), education (low), rurality, and age-grading.

The phonological features of Southern US English have been even more thoroughly investigated.

Grimes (2002) studied the degree to which selected Southern phonological features would be rated lower than voice samples which contained no such features on semantic differential pairs which measured speaker competence (or, as labeled above, Factor Group #1) characteristics — literacy, wealth, certainty, status, intelligence, education, and occupation. He looked at /z/ > /d/ before negative contractions (e.g., the pronunciation of *isn't* as *idn't*), /ɛ/ - /ɪ/ conflation before nasals, the presence of post-coronal glides (e.g., [njuz] for *news*); /l/ onset-lowering and diphthongization before velar nasals (e.g., [θeɪŋ] for *thing*, /ay/-monophthongization, and vowel breaking (diphthongization or “drawling”) before /r/. The Southern voice was rated significantly lower (on overall means scores for the combined attributes listed above) than the

Northern one for every phonological feature, but the most dramatically low-rated items were /z/ > /d/ and /I/ onset-lowering and diphthongization. Grimes speculates that the first of these may be treated as a lexical rather than phonological fact, but it is also interesting to note that it is the only consonant feature studied in the work reported here. I suspect that even the second most salient feature (/I/ onset-lowering and diphthongization) might also be lexicalized to a few stereotypical words (e.g., *thing*, *bring*, *ring*, and *king*). This study makes it clear that not all authentic Southern features have equal affective perceptual value.

Torbert (2004) also studied the perceptual salience of several Southern vowel features and found that for 24 Duke University undergraduates glide-weakened (i.e., monophthongized) /ay/ was strongly associated with Southern speech. On the other hand, he also found that /o/-fronting was identified as European American rather than African American but not particularly Southern and that /u/-fronting was rated exotic (i.e., not like the respondent's speech). Like Grimes', this study shows that features which may have equal status in regional provenience may have radically different degrees of salience for nonlinguists.

Preston and Plichta (2005) accepted /ay/-monophthongization as a salient feature of Southern speech and wondered if it could be graded by the degree of glide weakening (monophthongization). They found that increasingly monophthongized versions of /ay/ (seven steps, in the word "guide") were rated as more Southern by respondents from all over the US but that a female voice was always rated as less Southern than a male one, even with the same degree of monophthongization. This study shows not only that gradient phonetic items may be used to show degrees of regional association but also that

typical sociolinguistic categories (here the association of male voices with Southern speech, an indication of the latter's nonstandardness) are present even in single-feature studies.

Fridland, Bartlett, and Kreuz (2004) identified the salience of several vowels involved in the Southern Shift (but not /ay/) and found that lowered onset /ey/ was the one most often identified as Southern (when paired with a Northern version of the same vowel), followed by /iy/ (lowered onset), /ow/ (fronted onset), /uw/ (fronted onset), /u/ (fronted), /ε/ (raised onset, centralized offglide), and finally /ɪ/ (raised onset, centralized offglide). Fridland, Bartlett, and Mackey (2004) presented four of these vowels (/ey/, /ow/, /uw/, and /ε/), again paired with Northern ones, and asked which was more educated and which more pleasant. In every case except /uw/, the Southern vowel was rated as less educated. For pleasantness, the Southern versions of /ey/ and /ow/ were rated as less pleasant, but the Southern version of /ε/ was rated as more pleasant; /uw/ was again not significant. This study suggests that salience and evaluation may not always go hand-in-hand and that the pleasantness evaluation in particular may be overcome in contrastive situations with certain individual features, findings not possible when labels with no voice stimuli or global voice stimuli are used in investigations.

Southern speech appears to be salient also in the folk repertoire (or performance style) of Northern speakers. Evans (2002) asked a Northern male speaker to imitate a West Virginia ("Hillbilly") accent. An acoustic analysis of his performance shows that he was successful to a high degree of accuracy in realizing a number of features of the Southern Shift, ones he could not possibly have conscious knowledge of (e.g., back vowel fronting, /iy/-/ɪ/ and /ey/-/ε/ reversal, /ε/-/ɪ/ conflation before nasals). More

importantly, Evans goes on to show that his imitation was acceptable to local West Virginians, who found his voice to be nearly as authentic as a native speaker from the state (105). Southern speech salience is realized here in imitation, and I suspect that, aside from some ethnic² and second language influenced varieties, it is the most frequently and perhaps most accurately imitated variety in the United States.

In conclusion, Southern speech is still the most distinct variety in the United States, just as it was at the time of LAVIS II, and, unfortunately, linguistic prejudice still seems to be the prime reason for that position. On the other hand, more careful analyses of variety perception have shown that, even for Northern speakers, Southern speech has a strong, general affective appeal in addition to its strong solidarity appeal for locals.

Studies of the perception of Southern speech have also provided new methodologies, particularly those which focus on the influence of single features, including many which can be studied within the area of sociophonetics, making full use of our analytic and synthesizing abilities. There have also been a large number of ethnographic and conversational studies of the perceptions of Southern speech, but they require more space than could be given here (e.g., Michigan respondent comments on Southern speech in Niedzielski and Preston 1999). For the most part they confirm the generalizations reached in the more quantitative approaches outlined above, but, of course, they should be pursued as well in our attempts to find out more and more about that variety of American English which has called the greatest attention to itself.

Notes

1 These data were incorrectly cited in Preston 1997 and several other publications.

The figures given here are correct, and I apologize for this statistical lapse in earlier reports.

2 See Preston 1992 for an account of White imitations of Black speech and Black imitations of White speech.

References

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