


North/South Word Variation

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What are we researching?

We surveyed anyone who is from the States in order to see the variation between Northern/Southern accents. We ask about lexical variation and pronunciation, and then we ask participants to identify their accent and experiences based around their accent.

Why are we researching this topic?

We live in Virginia, a state with many variations of accents, we are interested in observing the differences around us.

We are also interested in how these differences are applied across the United States, and the stereotypes attached to Southern vs Northern dialects.

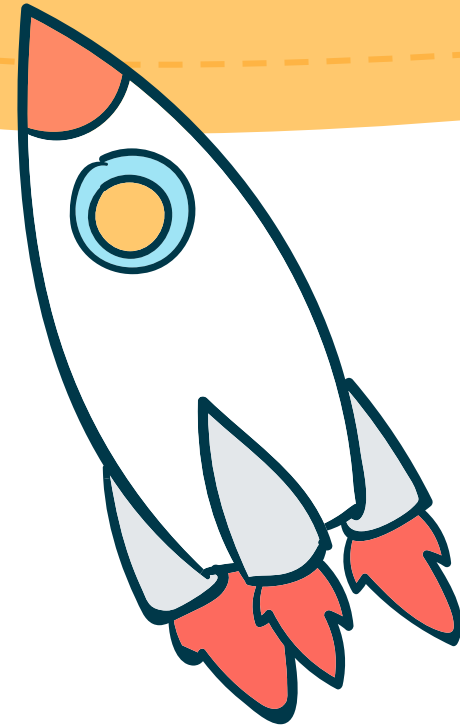
What is the SOUTH?

Barrett et al. references Ayers and Preston →

"[The Deep South] cuts across **Mississippi** and **Alabama**, embracing parts of **Arkansas**, **Louisiana**, and **Georgia** at the edges..." (196)

"In the minds of most Northerners, **Tennessee** and **Kentucky** are perceived as the 'Outer South,' **Texas** is its own kind of South, and **Florida** isn't really South at all." (196)

"highly contested" (187)





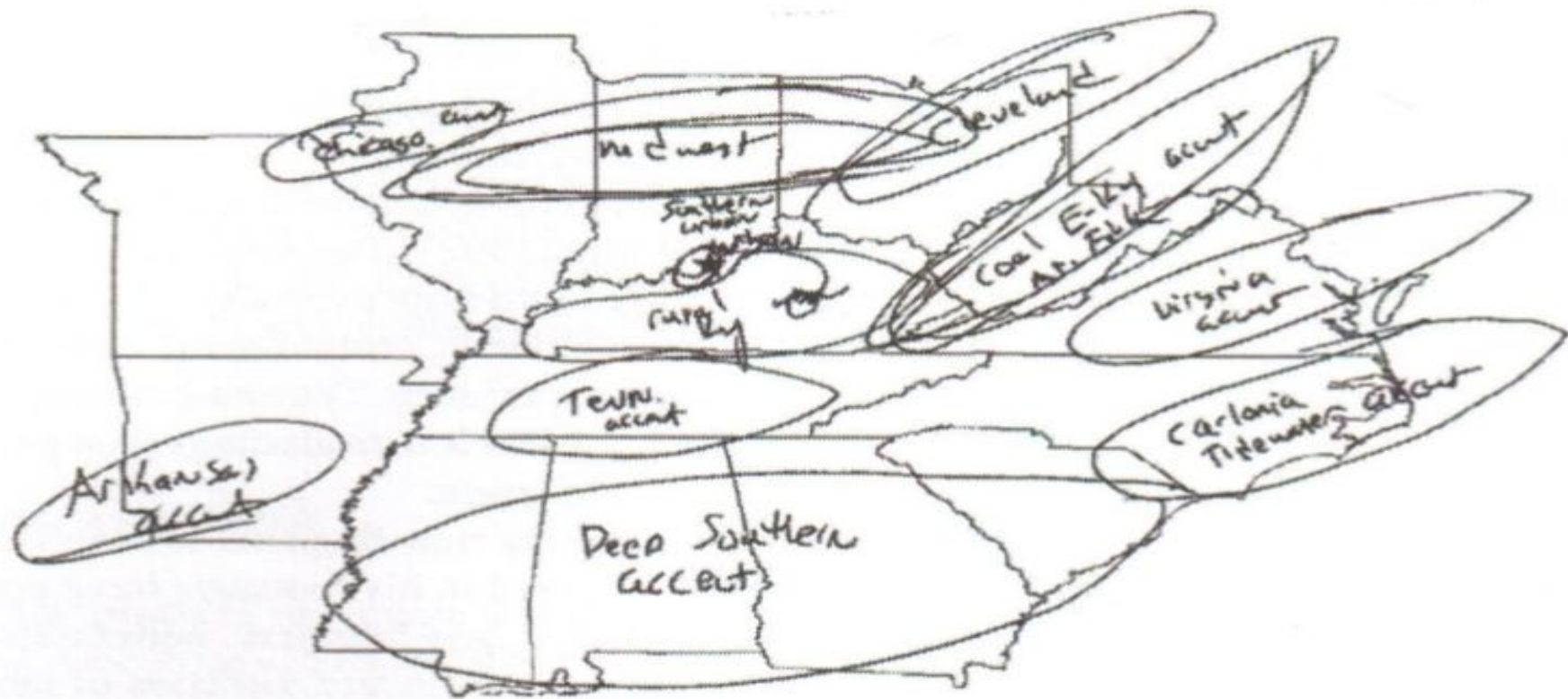


Figure 9.3 Dialect mental map drawn by a resident of Louisville, Kentucky

Source: Cramer (2016)

Methodology



- Survey submitted to the class & our relatives/ acquaintances
 - Lexical variations
 - Perception of accents & discrimination
- We did not collect age or gender

Sociolinguistics Final Project

A short survey on word choice, open to anybody from the US!

edwards.loganm@gmail.com [Switch account](#)

Not shared

* Indicates required question

What is the name of the bug that when you touch it, it curls up into a ball? *

Your answer

What is the bubbly carbonated drink called? *

Your answer

What do you call gym shoes? *

Your answer

Survey Findings

Bug

99 said roly polly/
rollie pollie
22 said pill bug

Beverage

88 said soda
32 said pop
6 said coke

Room

80 said bathroom
39 said restroom

Group of People

49 said y'all
41 said guys
18 said
everyone/everybody

Shoes

58 said tennis shoes
49 said sneakers
13 said gym shoes

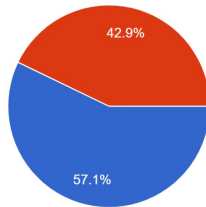
Caramel Pronunciatio

n



How do you pronounce this word: Caramel
140 responses

● CARmel
● CARAmel

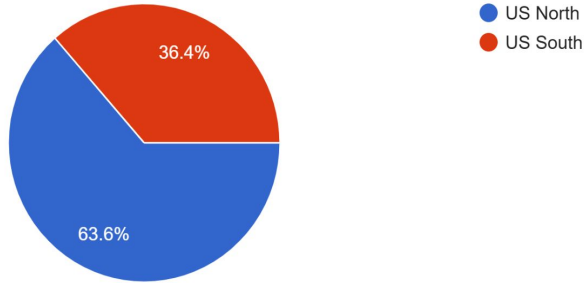


More Specific Findings



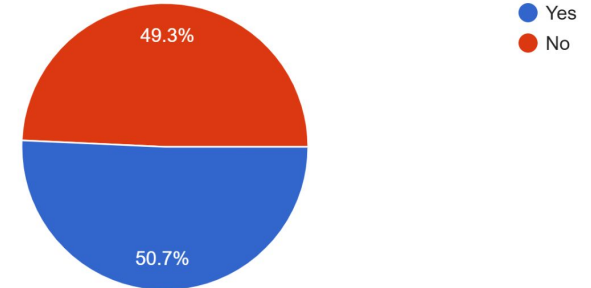
Would you say you are from the US North or the US South?

140 responses



Do you change your accent/the way you speak based on who you are around?

140 responses



Additional findings

61.4% interpret "Bless your heart!" negatively

54.3% do not believe they have an accent





Take-away 1: The Line Splitting the North and

South
Mason-Dixon
25 respondents



9 said Kentucky
8 said Tennessee
5 said DC
5 said MD/VA

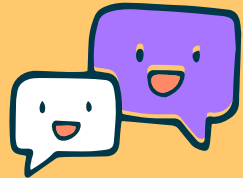
**"anything south
of I-69"**
**"Where they
Waffle Houses"**

4 respondents
use geographical
markers

"geographically,
virginia and Kentucky.
socially, anything
below south carolina
and tennessee is the
south"

Virginia
23 said VA was the
'border state'
"Like under Richmond,
VA you get actual
south."





Connection 1: What is an Accent?

Accent: “Loose bundles of prosodic and segmental features distributed over geographical and/or social space” (Lippi-Green 1997:42)

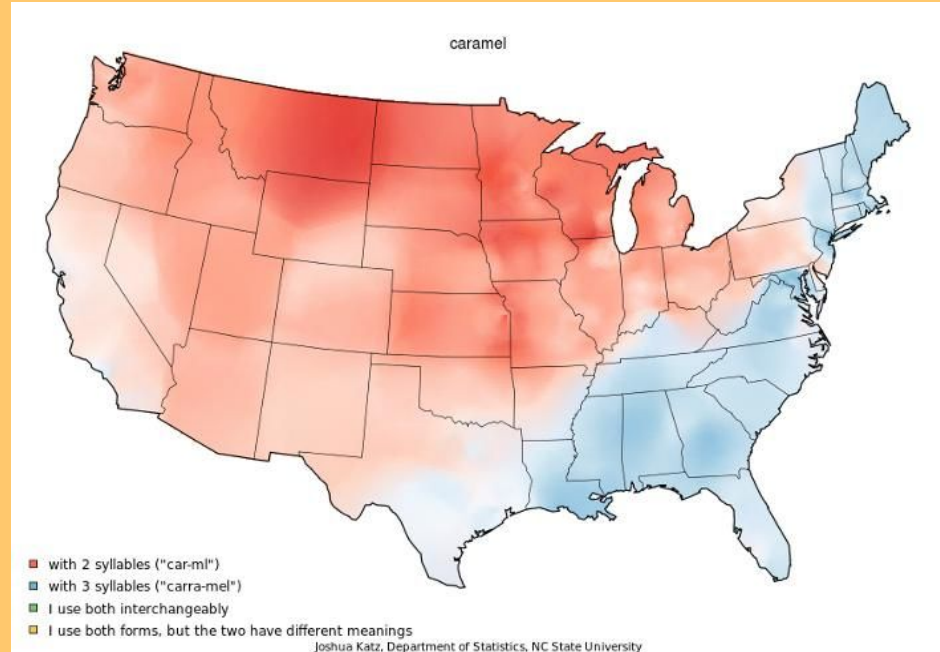
Accent is the most difficult part of a language to acquire after childhood

L1 accent: accent in native variety of a language

L2 accent: breakthrough of native language phonology into the target language

Features of Southern Dialect

- G dropping
- Y'all
- Fixin'
- Pin/pen merger
- Cokes
- CARA-mel



Take-away 2: Language Attitudes Towards the South



Feelings people have about their own language variety or the language varieties of other people.

Examples: "I love your British accent", "Italian is beautiful, German is ugly."

Southern dialects are stigmatized

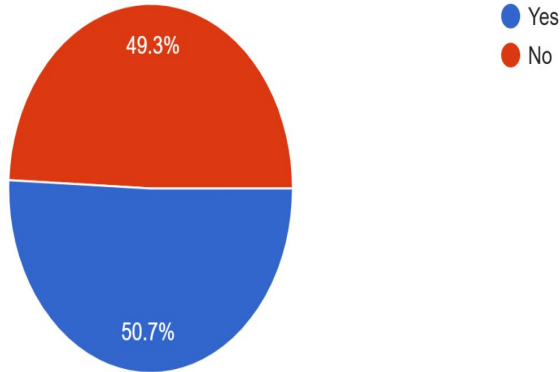


Participant Feedback



Do you change your accent/the way you speak based on who you are around?

140 responses



We noticed that many participants in the survey change the way they speak around others. One participant we interviewed said that although she now calls soft drinks soda, she grew up calling them cokes.

In college most people she was around called them sodas, and she began calling them sodas due to others perceptions.

Connection 2: Barrett et al. Study

Many Americans view those with Southern accents as “stupid”, “backwards”, and “uneducated”.

Study done on “speaking correct English”, 76 young white people from Southern Indiana

Mississippi was ranked last and was the most consistently ranked state.

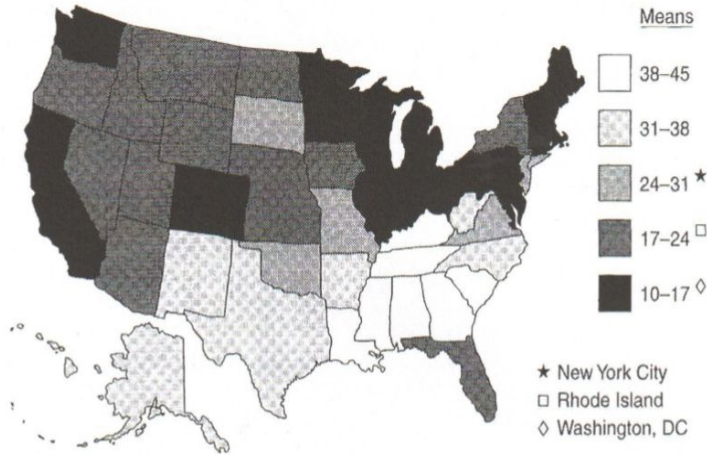


Figure 9.4 Scores for “correctness” of English spoken in different areas

Source: Preston (1996)

Connection 3: Down in the Holler - Vocal Fries with Paul Reed

“I was on an athletic visit to New York City, and I was there and one of the guys was like, ‘hey man, so you’re from Tennessee!’ And I was like, ‘yeah.’ And he looked at me and said, ‘do you guys have phones there?’ ”

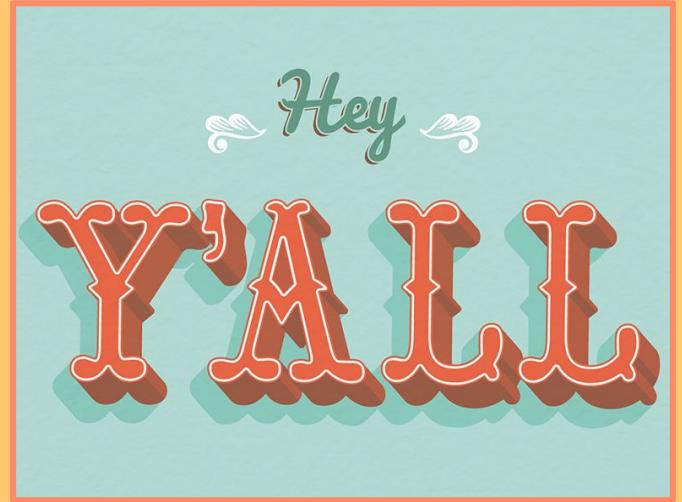


<https://www.podchaser.com/podcasts/the-vocal-fries-591141/episodes/down-in-the-holler-23922159>

Take-away 3: Y'all for All

Although the use of the word “y'all” is associated with the South, most respondents claimed they use it!

Maybe there used to be a more rigid split, but the word has become more mainstream to refer to multiple people.



Mina Le's video essay: Why is "America" cool again?



Further studies

Southern Accents and Partisan Stereotypes: Evaluating Political Candidates

Kathleen Ash, *University of Louisville*


Wesley Johnson, *University of Louisville*

Gracie Lagadinos, *University of Louisville*

Sarah Simon, *University of Louisville*

Jared Thomas, *University of Louisville*

Evan Wright, *University of Louisville*

Jason Gainous , *University of Louisville*

Ash, Kathleen; Johnson, Wesley; Lagadinos, Gracie; Simon, Sarah; Thomas, Jared; Wright, Evan; Gainous, Jason, “Southern Accents and Partisan Stereotypes: Evaluating Political Candidates”, *Social Science Quarterly*, 2020, Vol 101, Issue 5, p1951

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Pratiques sociales et langue(s) anglaise(s)



“Diversity’s good unless you have a Southern accent, then you’re a hick”: Self-evaluation, linguistic insecurity and symbolic domination in Middle Tennessee

Marc-Philippe Brunet

<https://doi.org/10.4000/anglophonia.5131>

Brunet, ““Diversity’s good unless you have a Southern accent, then you’re a hick’: Self-evaluation, linguistic insecurity and symbolic domination in Middle Tennessee”, *Anglophonia : French journal of English studies*, 2022 (34)

Conclusion



1. **South is subjective**
Even our participants were divided.
2. **Many people change their accents**
It was not limited to people from the South.
3. **Negative attitudes towards Southern Accents prevail**
Misconceptions about the South are still prominent.

References

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- - *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=shared&v=8vtqzjkmx9I>. Accessed 22 Apr. 2025.



Any Questions?

