

2 Language with an Attitude

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Language attitude study has focused largely on the clues that language use provides a listener to a speaker's group membership and the triggering of the listener's beliefs about the group. Although classic work in the social psychology of language supports this general picture, elaborating on the substructure of those beliefs through various techniques, it is also clear that language has a life of its own and that our understanding of folk belief about various aspects of language itself also plays an important role in understanding the foundations for language attitudes.

In other words, although stereotypes are strong in attitudinal responses, they must be interpreted through the template of folk theories of language as well as of groups, and the results of both folk and attitudinal studies are tied here to a more linguistically-oriented interpretation, one which tries to develop a connection among performance, attitudes, perceptions, acquisition, and (almost needless to say) variation.

1 Language and People

It is perhaps the least surprising thing imaginable to find that attitudes towards languages and their varieties seem to be tied to attitudes towards groups of people. Some groups are believed to be decent, hard-working, and intelligent (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be laid-back, romantic, and devil-may-care (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be lazy, insolent, and procrastinating (and so is their language or variety); some groups are believed to be hard-nosed, aloof, and unsympathetic (and so is their language or variety), and so on. For the folk mind, such correlations are obvious, reaching down even into the linguistic details of the language or variety itself. Germans are harsh; just listen to their harsh, guttural consonants. US Southerners are laid-back and lazy; just listen to their lazy,

drawled vowels. Lower-status speakers are unintelligent; they don't even understand that two negatives make a positive, and so on. Edwards summarizes this correlation for many social psychologists when he notes that "people's reactions to language varieties reveal much of their perception of the speakers of these varieties" (1982: 20).

Of course, none of this correlation of stereotypes to linguistic facts will do for linguists, who find the structure of language everywhere complex and fully articulated, reflecting, as most present-day linguists would have it, the universal and species-specific human capacity for language. Where consonants are made, how vowel length is distributed, and what morphological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic strategies are employed to express negation are all reflexes of the complex interaction of the underlying components of the organizing system which allows human language.¹ Nevertheless, an understanding of this correlation between group stereotypes and linguistic facts, no matter how scientifically suspect at the linguistic end, appears to be particularly important in the more scientific calculation of the social identities we maintain and respond to. The apparent difficulty in establishing language-and-people connections was, at first, a great concern to social psychologists. The person-in-the-street might not be so willing to own up to racist, sexist, classist, regionalist, or other prejudicial attitudes. Questionnaires, interviews, and scaling techniques (which asked about such characteristics directly) were suspect data-gathering methods since they allowed respondents to disguise their true feelings, either to project a different self-image and/or to give responses they thought the interviewer might most approve of.

An early method used to circumvent such suspected manipulation of attitudes by respondents was the "semantic differential" technique (developed by the psycholinguist Charles Osgood at the University of Illinois, e.g. Osgood et al. 1957) set within a "matched-guise" stimulus presentation. The Canadian social psychologist Wallace Lambert and his colleagues played recordings of the same speaker (to avoid voice quality interference in judgments) in two "guises" (in the earliest case, in French and English to determine attitudinal responses to these two languages in French-speaking Canada, e.g. Lambert et al. 1960). Judges marked scales of opposites such as "fast-slow," "heavy-light," and so on (which did not appear to directly assess language characteristics), and the statistical treatment and interpretation of these ratings set off a frenzy of language attitude studies (most fully developed in the work of Howard Giles and his various associates and provided with both examples and theoretical foundations in Giles and Powesland 1975). Although this work was not without criticism (for its artificiality and other drawbacks, e.g. Agheysi and Fishman 1970), it set the standard for such studies for quite some time and managed to provide the first important generalization in language attitude studies – that of the "three factor groups." Analyses of large amounts of data seemed to group together paired opposites which pointed to *competence*, *personal integrity*, and *social attractiveness* constructs in the evaluation of speaker voices (summarized in Lambert 1967). A great deal of subsequent research in this mode confirmed

that these constructs were very often at work, and, more interestingly, that standard (or “admired accent”) speakers were most often judged highest on the *competence* dimension while nonstandard (or regionally and/or ethically distinct speakers) were rated higher for the *integrity* and *attractiveness* dimensions. Subsequent work has often conflated the two latter categories into one, usually referred to as *solidarity* (e.g. Edwards 1982).

Even early on, however, it became clear that the path from stimulus to group identification to the triggering of attitudes towards the group so identified was not a trouble-free one. In perhaps the earliest study of attitudes towards regional and ethnic varieties in the US, Tucker and Lambert (1969) note that neither northern nor southern European-American judges identified the ethnicity of educated African-American speakers better than chance (scores ranging from 47 percent to 54 percent). If judges misidentify the group membership of the stimulus voice, how can consistent or even valid attitude judgments be collected? Milroy and McClenaghan (1977) note an interesting consistency of ratings of Scottish, Southern Irish, Ulster, and RP (i.e. “Received Pronunciation,” the superposed British-English standard pronunciation) varieties even when judges misidentified accents. They comment on this finding as follows:

It has been widely assumed that an accent acts as a cue identifying a speaker’s group membership. Perhaps this identification takes place below the level of conscious awareness. . . . Presumably by hearing similar accents very frequently [one] has learnt to associate them with their reference groups. In other words, accents with which people are familiar may *directly* evoke stereotyped responses without the listener first consciously assigning the speaker to a particular reference group. (1977: 8–9; italics in original)

Irvine (1996) has more recently commented on this transfer of linguistic features to social facts which apparently make the unconscious reactions Milroy and McClenaghan note possible:

Iconicity is a semiotic process that transforms the sign relationship between linguistic features and the social images to which they are linked. Linguistic differences appear to be *iconic* representations of the social contrasts they *index* – as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence. (1996: 17; italics in original)

In other words, the presumed social attributes of a group are transferred to the linguistic features associated with it (as Irvine notes), and an occurrence of those features may directly trigger recognition of those attributes without being filtered through (conscious) identification of the group (as Milroy and McClenaghan note). Extremes of such iconicity in American English might include “ain’t” and multiple negation, both of which apparently trigger negative evaluations with no need for any (specific) group association.

Although this program of social psychological research into language attitudes has been productive, I believe it has left much to be done. If Irvine is correct, there are at least two very large areas left relatively unexplored.

- 1 What linguistic features play the biggest role in triggering attitudes?
- 2 What beliefs (theories, folk explanations) do people have about language variety, structure, acquisition, and distribution which underlie and support their attitudinal responses and how might we go about finding them out and using them to supplement and even guide future language attitude research?

2 The Linguistic Detail

Perhaps not surprisingly, the study of the relative importance of various specific linguistic features has not been prominent in the work conducted by social psychologists. They have typically used such global stimuli as “languages” or “dialects” (the latter in the broad sense to include class-, gender-, and even age-related varieties), but they have not asked which of the lower-level features of those varieties were most important to the triggering of an attitudinal reaction. Sociolinguists, on the other hand, armed with the knowledge of the delicate variability in performance, have sought to find out whether or not that variation is mirrored in judgments.

Aware of the low regard in which their variety is held, New Yorkers have, as a rule, severe “linguistic insecurity.” But Labov’s work in the 1960s (1966) shows that they are also very sensitive to some specific linguistic features which they most strongly associate with their “bad” speech. As is well-known, the pronunciation of “r” (after vowels) in New York City (NYC) is the “prestige” or “correct” form. Higher-status speakers (and all speakers when they are more careful of their speech) are more likely to pronounce such words as “car,” “here,” and “door” with a final “r.”

Labov designed perhaps the first linguistically-sensitive attitude research experiment in which he asked NYC judges to listen to passages which contained such sentences as “He *darted* out about *four* feet *before* a *car* and got hit *hard*” and “We didn’t have the *heart* to play ball or *cards* all *morning*.” He got the same female respondents to read these passages several times and obtained samples in which they always used “r” and others in which they deleted “r” only once (one in the word *hard* in the first passage and another in *cards* in the second). He called these “r” passages the “consistent r” and “inconsistent r” samples. He then played both samples of each woman’s performances interspersed with other voice samples and asked NYC judges from several different social status groups to pretend that they were personnel managers who were to rate the voice samples they heard for “occupational suitability” along a seven-point scale (Labov 1966: 411):

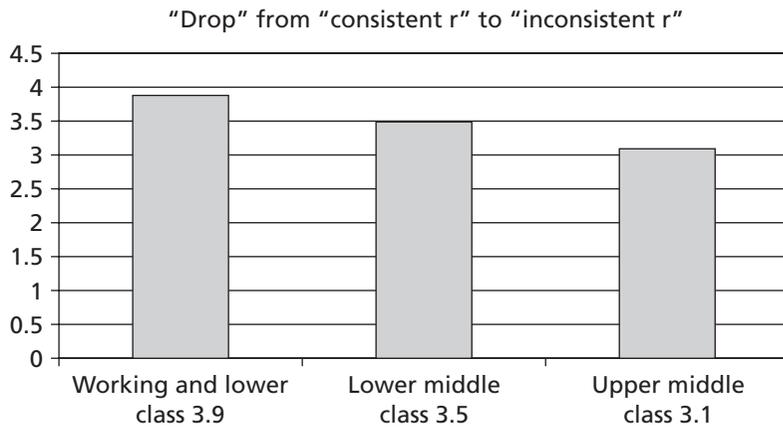


Figure 2.1 Three social status group judgments of lower "occupational suitability" of "inconsistent r" production

Source: Labov (1972)

- TV personality
- Executive secretary
- Receptionist
- Switchboard operator
- Salesgirl
- Factory worker
- None of these

The judges in every social status group rated the "inconsistent r" performances lower on the occupational suitability scale by dramatic margins. Figure 2.1 shows the average drop in ratings along the occupational suitability scale between the "consistent r" and "inconsistent r" performances. For example, if a lower- or working-class judge said that a "consistent r" performance was that of an "executive secretary," then he or she was likely to rate the "inconsistent r" presentation as that of a "factory worker" (four steps down the scale). It's interesting to note that upper-middle-class judges rated the two performances less dramatically different (only three steps down the scale for the "inconsistent r" performance), and such differences allowed Labov to consider at the same time the differential rates of "r" production according to status and the different judgments of variable "r" production by the same groups.

New Yorkers are, as these ratings show, extremely sensitive to even "mild" use of "r"-deletion, rating speakers three to four full categories down on the seven-point occupational scale when they fail to realize only one out of four or five instances of this feature. I have no doubt that such tests can be developed for a large range of linguistic features. Of course, they should test the sensitivity of out-group as well as in-group respondents (expecting that different features and different degrees of sensitivity might emerge).

Table 2.1 Confusion matrix and summary statistics by dialect

Responses	Stimuli						Row	
	AAVE		ChE		SAE		Total	
AAVE	a	923 (15%)	b	280 (5%)	c	196 (3%)	1,399	(23%)
ChE	d	235 (4%)	e	1,607 (27%)	f	41 (1%)	1,883	(31%)
SAE	g	842 (14%)	h	113 (2%)	i	1,763 (29%)	2,718	(45%)

$\chi^2 = 4,510$; $df = 4$; $p < 0.001$; $AI = 0.72$; percentages = percent of total for that cell.

Source: Purnell et al. (1999)

Since Labov played New York voices for New Yorkers, one might still ask what role linguistic detail plays in the recognition (and, presumably, subsequent evaluation) of a greater variety of voices, particularly when evaluation may be done along scales tuned to discover more than occupational suitability. In a recent study, Purnell et al. (1999) recorded three versions of the same speaker saying “hello” in Chicano-English (ChE), African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), and Standard American English (SAE).

As table 2.1 shows, even though they were exposed to only one word, the respondents identified ethnicity far better than chance (at an “Accuracy Index” level of .72, indicating that better than 70 percent of the tokens were correctly identified). The diagonal cells (*a*, *e*, and *i*) should be approximately 33 percent each if the respondents had been 100 percent accurate, and two of the cells (*e* and *i*, at 27 and 29 percent, respectively) are very close to that ideal. Only cell *a* is low (at 15 percent), and cell *g* shows why: 14 percent of the AAE voices were incorrectly recognized as SAE.

Although this one discrepant cell is difficult to account for, the acoustic factors which allowed identification appear to be straightforward. In an analysis of the tokens of “hello” which were presented for identification, it was found that the first vowel (/ε/) was significantly fronter (determined by extracting its F2 value) in the AAVE and ChE guises. Additionally, pitch peak was higher for the /hε/ syllable in the AAVE guise token only (as was syllable duration). With these minimal acoustic cues, therefore, AAVE and ChE could be distinguished from SAE (on the basis of a fronter or tenser /ε/ vowel), and AAVE could be distinguished from ChE (and further from SAE) on the basis of pitch peak and syllable duration. Purnell et al. (1999) also show how dialect identification allows the realization of attitudinal factors in specific action, for the three varieties used in the acoustic experiment were also used in telephone calls to prospective landlords (each of which began with the sentence “Hello, I’m calling about the apartment you have advertised in the paper”). The two non-SAE varieties fared considerably worse in securing appointments; for example, in the Woodside (CA) area; the SAE speaker guise was

given an appointment to see housing at roughly the 70 percent level; both AAVE and ChE guises were given appointments only about 30 percent of the time.

It may not be the case, however, that all linguistic markers of social identity have the same force. In an older study, Graff et al. (1983) altered only the formant characteristics of the onset of the /aʊ/ diphthong in an otherwise typically AAVE speaker from Philadelphia (so that the diphthong was altered to /æʊ/. When the sample was played for both African-American and European-American judges in Philadelphia, both groups agreed that the speaker was European-American. Apparently, the realization of this diphthong as /æʊ/ is so strongly associated with European-American speakers that it was able to “overwhelm” any other evidence of ethnicity in the sample.

So far these approaches to linguistic detail in attitude study (or to the background information respondents use in making judgments which reflect attitude) have not assumed any level of awareness of the feature in question by the respondents themselves. In fact, Labov reports that “few of the respondents consciously perceived the values of the variables which caused their reactions” (1966: 455). In other work, however, a more direct appeal to respondent consciousness of variation has been made. Modifying a “Self-Evaluation Test” developed in Labov (1966), Trudgill (1972) measured the difference between performance and obviously conscious self-report for a number of variables in Norwich English. A respondent was acquainted with a local variable and asked to make a self-report of his or her use of it. For example, the vowel of “ear” has a prestigious form [ɪ^ɹ] and a nonprestigious (local) form [ɛ:ɪ]. Trudgill classified his respondents as speakers of the prestige form if they used more than 50 percent of that form in the casual speech portion of their interviews. He then classified as “over-reporters” those respondents who claimed to use [ɪ^ɹ] but, in fact, preferred [ɛ:ɪ] in their casual speech. Likewise, he classified as “under-reporters” those who claimed to use [ɛ:ɪ] but in fact preferred the prestige form in their casual speech. The remaining respondents were classified as “accurate.” His results are shown in table 2.2.

These data show that men say they use a great deal more of the local (nonprestigious) form than they actually do (and that women say they use more of the prestigious one). From this, Trudgill suggested that some variables have a “covert prestige,” an attraction based on working-class, local, non

Table 2.2 Percentage over- and under-reporters for the “ear” vowel in Norwich

	Total	Male	Female
Over-r	18	12	25
Under-r	36	54	18
Accurate	45	34	57

Source: Trudgill (1972:187)

“school-oriented” norms and that such norms were particularly appealing to men. Women, he suggested, were more oriented, perhaps because of power differentials in society, to norms which reflect the “overt prestige” of the wider society. Although his conclusions are far-reaching for general sociolinguistic work and work on gender in particular, here it is simply important to note that his respondents provided interesting attitudinal information based on specific linguistic features and that those responses were made at a conscious level.

Consciousness, however, may mislead assessment of others’ performances as well as our own. Niedzielski (1999) studied the local (Detroit) awareness of “Canadian raising” (in which the onsets of the /aʊ/ and /aɪ/ diphthongs are raised before voiceless consonants). She played a Detroit female speaker’s pronunciation of the word “house” in which the onset of /aʊ/ was considerably raised (see figure 2.2). Although Detroiters associate this pronunciation with Canadians (even caricaturing it with a /hus/ imitation), they quite regularly perform it themselves, as this speaker obviously does. She asked Detroit

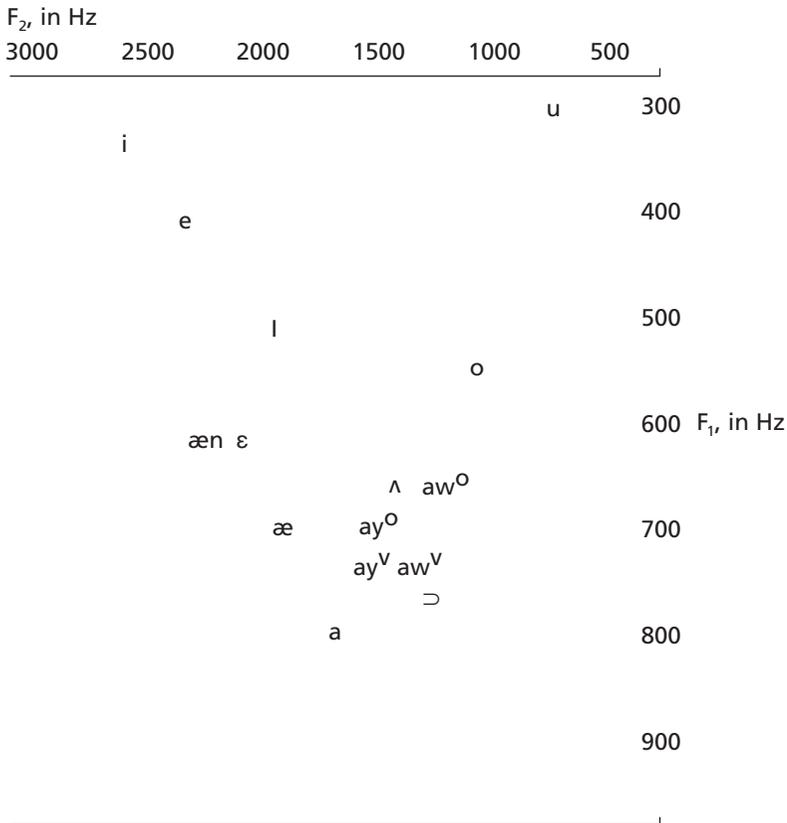


Figure 2.2 Vowel space of the Detroit female speaker on the test tape
 Source: Niedzielski (1999)

Table 2.3 Influence of nationality labels on token selection (for “house”)

token label	#2 ultra- low	#3 canonical /a/	#4 actual token	Total
CANADIAN <i>n</i> =	15% 6	25% 10	60% 24	40
MICHIGAN <i>n</i> =	38% 15	51% 20	11% 4	39

$\chi^2 = 23.48; p < 0.001$

Source: Niedzielski (1999)

respondents to match this vowel with one of three others (synthesized tokens, which they had heard several times). The first (#2 in table 2.3) is called “ultra-low” since it represented an onset considerably below the norm (for F1) for /a/ in local speech. The second is called “canonical” /a/ and represented the height of /a/ as given in Peterson and Barney (1952), an acoustic study of “General American” vowels. The third token to which the sample was to be matched is called “actual,” and was the same token used in the sample itself, one in which the onset was considerably raised (as seen in figure 2.2). Respondents heard these tokens mixed with others, but the presentation was significantly different for two groups of respondents. Although the same token of “house” was played for both, one received an answer sheet which had the word “CANADIAN” prominently printed (in red) at the top of the page; the second group received an answer sheet with the word “MICHIGAN” at the top. Any difference in token-matching by the two groups, therefore, can be attributed to that apparent “identification.”

As table 2.3 shows, the labeling had a strong effect: 60 percent of the 40 respondents who had the word “CANADIAN” printed on their response sheets matched the token presented with the “actual” one (i.e. accurately) in contrast to only 11 percent of the 39 who had sheets with “MICHIGAN” on them. Fully 51 percent of the “MICHIGAN” respondents heard the token as “canonical /a/” and 38 percent even heard it as “ultra-low.” It is obvious that the exterior identification of the home site of the sample voice exerted an enormous effect on the sound which was “heard” by the respondents.²

In Labov (1966) another appeal was made to the conscious level in the evaluation of specific linguistic variables in the construction of a “Index of Linguistic Insecurity.” Labov asked respondents in his New York City study which of two variants (e.g. [kætʃ] versus [ketʃ]) of a number of variables was correct and which they typically used themselves. Each time they noted that one was correct but that they used the other, he added a point to their “insecurity

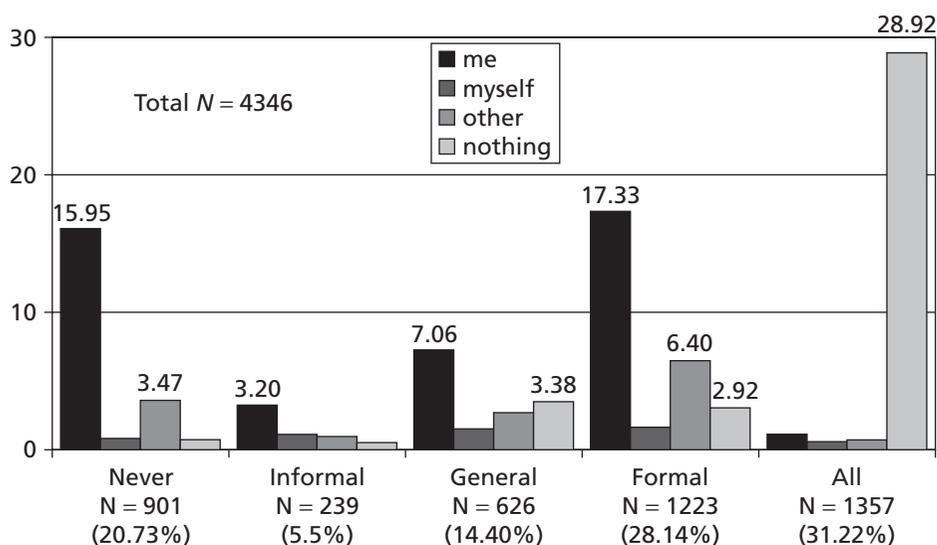


Figure 2.3 Results for ratings of “They gave the award to Bill and I”

Source: Al-Banyan and Preston (1998)

index.” Although he was able to show from this that the most insecure group was the lower-middle class (paralleling a distinct linguistic insecurity he had shown earlier in their hypercorrect behavior in performance, see Schilling-Estes, this volume), he did not show the degrees of insecurity associated with the specific variables he presented.

In a modification of this approach, Al-Banyan and Preston (1998) presented a number of traditionally nonstandard morphosyntactic and syntactic constructions to undergraduate students at a large, Midwestern US university. In each case, the respondents were asked if they would (1) always use the construction given, (2) use it only formally, (3) use it in ordinary, “on-the-street” interaction, (4) use it only very casually, or (5) never use it. For example, they were asked to evaluate the sentence “The award was given to Bill and I,” illustrating the hypercorrect (but historically well-precedented) substitution of the nominative for oblique case in conjoined noun phrases in object position. They supplied the form they would use in the variety of situations presented them if they did not choose the form given. Their responses were coded according to whether they chose “me,” “myself,” or “other” as the alternative. Figure 2.3 shows the results for this one grammatical item.

Of the only 21 percent of the respondents who indicated that they would never use this form, the majority (16 percent) indicated that they would use the prescriptively sanctioned “me”; but 28 percent found it the form they would use for “formal” situations, indicating that they would use “me” in less formal contexts. Thirty-one percent (the highest percentage) indicated that it

was, for them, the form appropriate for all contexts. If attitudes to “standard” usage are to be measured, such studies as these reveal that a modern standard (for these university students, reflected in the combined “formal” and “always” categories at a level of 59 percent) rather than one which even liberally-minded linguists might agree on needs to be taken into consideration.

Such studies make it clear that language attitudes can be related very specifically to individual linguistic features, but it is equally clear that that relationship is not a simple one. In some cases, precise acoustic features appear to trigger accurate identification (e.g. the frontness or tenseness of the vowel and pitch prominence on the first syllable of “hello” as shown in Purnell, et al. 1999); in others, an acoustic feature appears to be so strongly identified with a group that it can overcome all other surrounding evidence (e.g. the [æ] onset to the /aU/ diphthong as a marker of European-American identity in Philadelphia as shown in Graff 1983); in others, the frequency of one variant or another has a powerful effect on social judgments (e.g. r-deletion in New York City as shown in Labov 1966); in still others, there may be a great deal of inaccuracy in both self-report of the use of a specific feature (e.g. for the vowel of “war” as shown in Trudgill 1972) or in the identification of the vowel quality of a specific feature (e.g. for the presence of “Canadian Raising” as shown in Niedzielski 1999).

This variety of identification and attitude potential for precise linguistic features will come as no shock to sociolinguists, who have found for some time now just such careful tuning in the factors which govern production, reaching from Fischer’s (1958) account of how gender and status guided children’s production of the velar and alveolar variants of “-ing” to Schilling-Estes’ (1998) account of how membership in a male poker-playing network predicted the use of a classically “local” variant of /ay/ on Ocracoke Island, North Carolina.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that finely-tuned choices among linguistic features, reflecting the social forces and groups which surround them, play as complex a role in attitudinal formation and perception as they do in language variation itself. In fact, it seems to me that perception, evaluation, and production are intimately connected in language variation and change and that much that might go by the name “sociolinguistics” could as well be known as “language attitude study.”

Perhaps some of these differential responses to a variety of linguistic details may operate along a continuum (or several continua) of consciousness or “awareness” (just as language use involves degrees of “monitoring” or “attention to form,” e.g. Labov 1972: 208). In Preston (1996a) I review a number of these possibilities for “folk linguistics,” suggesting that folk-linguistic facts (i.e. linguistic objects as viewed by nonlinguists) may be subdivided for “awareness” along the following clines.

- 1 *Availability:* Folk respondents range in their attention to linguistic features from complete disregard for to frequent discussion of and even preoccupation with them.

- 2 *Accuracy*: Folk respondents may accurately, partially accurately, or completely inaccurately represent linguistic facts (and their distribution).
- 3 *Detail*: Folk respondents' characterizations may range from *global* (reflecting, for example, only a general awareness of a variety) to *detailed* (in which respondents cite specific details).
- 4 *Control*: Folk respondents may have complete, partial or no "imitative" control over linguistic features.

An important fact about these several clines is their relative independence. For example, a respondent who claims only a general awareness of a "foreign accent" may be capable of a completely faithful imitation of some of its characteristics and a completely inaccurate imitation of others. On the other hand, a respondent who is preoccupied with a variety might have no overt information about its linguistic make-up but be capable of performing a native-like imitation of it.

Perhaps the range of so-called language attitude effects ought to be treated in a similar way. That is, attitudinal responses which are based on the respondents' association of a sample voice with a particular social group may be different from ones based on reactions to linguistic caricatures such as *ain't*. Responses which may be based on some sort of cline (e.g. masculine–feminine, degree of "accent") may be different from those based on the recognition of "categorical" features (e.g. correct–incorrect).

3 Attitudes and Folk Perceptions

Since linguists know, however, that linguistic details have no value of their own (in spite of the "life" they seem to achieve by virtue of their social associations), it will be important to return to the second of the questions suggested above: what underlying beliefs, presuppositions, stereotypes, and the like lie behind and support the existence of language attitudes? Ultimately, it seems to me, this will require us to give something like an account of a folk theory of language, and in what remains I will try to offer some thoughts in that direction.

In doing language attitude research, perhaps it is important to first determine which varieties of a language are thought to be distinct. For example, where do people believe linguistically distinct places are? That is, what mental maps of regional speech areas do they have? In Preston (1989) I complained that language attitude research did not determine where respondents thought regional voices were from and, worse, did not know if respondents even had a mental construct of a "place" where a voice could be from; that is, their mental maps of regional speech areas might not include one with which a sample voice could be identified.

For example, if one submitted a voice from New England to California judges and the judges agreed that the speaker was "intelligent," "cold," "fast,"

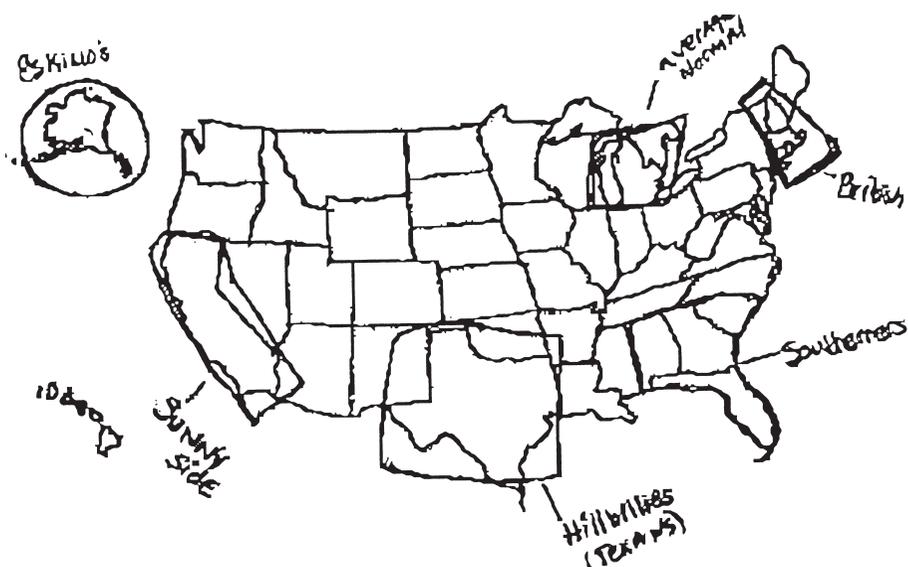


Figure 2.4 A Michigan respondent's hand-drawn map

and so on, researchers could reasonably conclude that Californians judged that voice sample in that way. They should not conclude, however, that that is what Californians believe about New England voices, for a majority of the judges might not have agreed that the voice was from New England. (Perhaps they would have called it a "New York" voice.) More generally, Californians may not even have a concept of "New England" speech. Perhaps the most detailed mental map of regional US speech available to them is one which simply identifies the "Northeast" (whatever their folk name for that region might be).

How can we devise research which avoids this problem? Following the lead of cultural geographers (e.g. Gould and White 1974), we might simply ask respondents to draw maps of where they believe varieties are different. Figures 2.4 and 2.5 are typical examples of such hand-drawn maps from Michiganders.

Although we may profit from an investigation of these individual maps (by, for example, looking at the labels assigned to various regions, as in, e.g. Hartley and Preston 1999), their usefulness for general language attitude studies depends on the degree to which generalizations may be drawn from large numbers of such maps. This may be done by drawing an (approximate) boundary for each salient region from the first map and then "overlying" each subsequent respondent's map and drawing the "perceptual isoglosses" for each region. A more sophisticated version of this procedure makes use of a digitizing pad which feeds the outlined area of each salient region into a

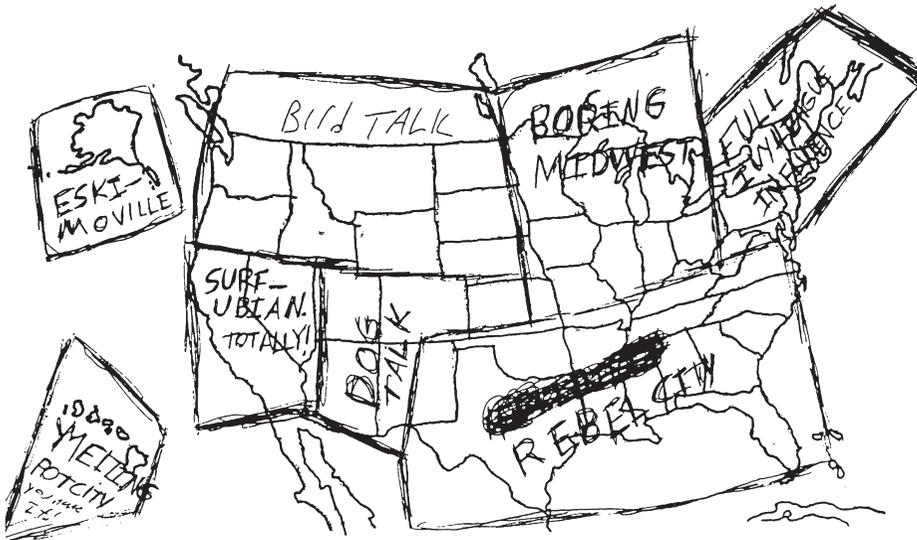


Figure 2.5 Another Michigan hand-drawn map

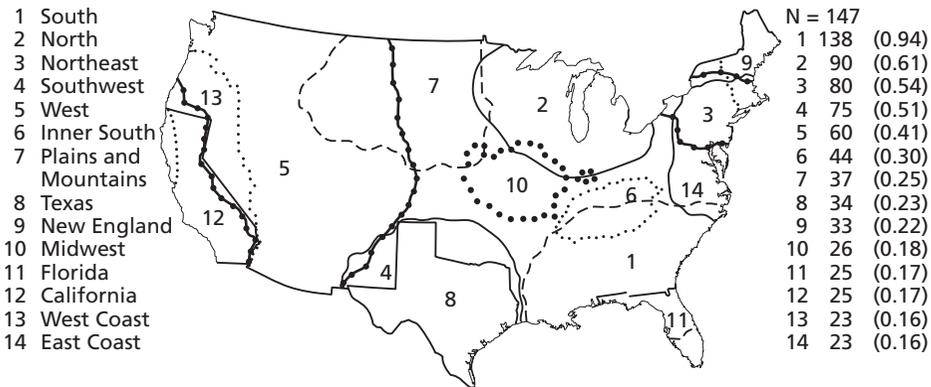


Figure 2.6 Computer-assisted generalizations of hand-drawn maps showing where southeastern Michigan respondents believe speech regions exist in the USA

computer so that a more precise numeric determination can be made of the “boundary” of each hand-drawn region (Preston and Howe 1987). Figure 2.6 shows a computer-determined map for the mental map of US regional speech areas derived from the hand-drawn maps of 147 southeastern Michigan respondents (from a variety of status and age groups, male and female).

Armed with this “cognitively real” map of the dialect areas of the USA (as seen by Michiganders), we might now approach the study of attitudes towards these regions in a classically social psychological manner. What characteristics would be relevant to an investigation of attitudes to these speech areas? Again, the best method is to go to the respondents themselves. Characteristics for judging were elicited by showing a large number of Michigan respondents a simplified version of figure 2.6 and asking them to mention any characteristics of the speech of those regions which came to mind. The most frequently mentioned items were selected and arranged into the following pairs.

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

It was important, of course, that the Michigan map was shown to Michigan respondents and that the characteristics elicited were to be used by Michigan judges. Respondents from other areas have different mental maps and might list other characteristics.

The judges (85 young, European-American lifelong southern Michigan residents who were undergraduate students at Michigan State University) were shown a simplified version of figure 2.6 and given the following instructions:

This map shows where many people from southern Michigan believe speech differences are in the USA. We will give you a list of descriptive words which local people have told us could be used to describe the speech of these various regions. Please think about twelve of these regions, and check off how each pair of words applies to the speech there.

For example, imagine that we gave you the pair “ugly” and “beautiful”

ugly beautiful
 a b c d e f

You would use the scale as follows:

If you very strongly agree that the speech of a region is “ugly,” select “a.”

If you strongly agree that the speech of a region is “ugly,” select “b.”

If you agree that the speech of a region is “ugly,” select “c.”

If you agree that the speech of a region is “beautiful,” select “d.”

If you strongly agree that the speech of a region is “beautiful,” select “e.”

If you very strongly agree that the speech of a region is “beautiful,” select “f.”

The next step in this research is to determine whether or not the number of paired items used in evaluating the regional dialects can be reduced, a procedure normally carried out by means of a factor analysis (which groups together

Table 2.4 The two factor groups from the ratings of all areas

Factor group no. 1		Factor group no. 2	
Smart	0.76	Polite	0.74
Educated	0.75	Friendly	0.74
Normal	0.65	Down-to-earth	0.62
Good English	0.63	(Normal)	(0.27)
No drawl	0.62	(Casual)	(0.27)
No twang	0.57		
Casual [formal]	-0.49		
Fast	0.43		
Down-to-earth [snobbish]	-0.32		

Parenthesized factors indicate items which are within the 0.25 to 0.29 range; “-” prefixes indicate negative loadings and should be interpreted as loadings of the opposite value (given in brackets).

the paired opposites). The results of such an analysis for all areas rated are shown in table 2.4.³

Two groups emerged from this statistical procedure. The first (which I will call “Standard”) contains those characteristics which we associate with education and the formal attributes of the society. Note, however, that the last three items in this group (“Formal,” “Fast,” and “Snobbish”) are not necessarily positive traits. Group no. 2 (which I will call “Friendly”) contains very different sorts of characteristics (including two which are negative in Group no. 1 but positive here – “Down-to-earth” and “Casual”).

These two groups will not surprise those who have looked at any previous studies of language attitudes. As already noted, many researchers have found that the two main dimensions of evaluation for language varieties are most often those of *social status* (“Educated” above) and *group solidarity* (“Friendly” above).

A full analysis of these data would go on to consider how each of the regions rated fared with regard to these two groups, but I believe a sample of two particularly important areas (for these respondents and doubtless others) will provide a good insight into the mechanisms at work here.

I have chosen to look at the respondent ratings of areas 1 and 2 from figure 2.6. The reasons are straightforward. Region 1 is the US “South,” and figure 2.6 shows that it was outlined by 94 percent (138) of the 147 respondents who drew hand-drawn maps. For these southeastern Michigan respondents, it is clearly the most important regional speech area in the USA. The second most frequently rated region (by 90 out of 147 respondents or 61 percent) is the local one, called “North” in figure 2.6, but perhaps more accurately “North Central” or “Great Lakes.” At first, one might be tempted to assert that the local area is always important, but a closer look at figure 2.4 will show that

these southeastern Michigan raters may have something else in mind when they single out their home area; this respondent was not unique among Michigan respondents in identifying Michigan, and only Michigan, as the uniquely "normal" or "correct" speech area in the country.

Table 2.5 shows the means scores for the individual attributes for the North and South. Perhaps the most notable fact is that the rank orders are nearly opposites. "Casual" is lowest-rated for the North but highest for the South. "Drawl" is lowest-rated (meaning "speaks with a drawl") for the South but highest rated (meaning "speaks without a drawl") for the North. In factor group terms, the scores for Group no. 2 (and "-1" loadings, where the opposite value was strongly loaded into a factor group) are the lowest-ranked ones for the North; these same characteristics ("Casual," "Friendly," "Down-to-earth," and "Polite") are the highest-ranked for the South. Similarly, Group no. 1 characteristics are all low-ranked for the South; the same attributes are all highest-ranked for the North.

These scores are not just ordered differently. A series of statistical tests showed that there is a significant difference between the attribute ratings for the North and the South, except for "Nasal" and "Polite." For those attributes in Group no. 1 ("No Drawl," "No Twang," "Fast," "Educated," "Good English," "Smart," and "Normal"), the means scores are all higher for the North. In other words, these Michigan raters consider themselves superior to the South for every attribute of the "Standard" factor group. This is not very surprising, considering well-known folk and popular culture attitudes.

For those attributes in Group no. 2 (or -1), the means score is higher for the South for "Casual," "Friendly," and "Down-to-earth." There is no significant difference for "Polite" (as noted above), and the North leads the South in Group no. 2 attributes only for "Normal," but it is important to note that "Normal" is to be found in both groups. These data suggest that, at least for these 85 young Michiganders, the "Friendly" attributes (excepting only "Polite") are more highly associated with southern speech than with speech from the local area.

A few other statistical facts confirm and add to the results reported so far. Note (in table 2.5) that no attribute rating for the North falls below 3.5 (the median value of the six-point scale), while all of the Group no. 1 ("Standard") attributes are rated below that score for the South. Perhaps even more dramatically, statistical tests of the means scores for North and South independently show that there is no significant break between any two adjacent means scores for ratings of the attributes for the North. On the other hand, there *is* such a significant difference for the South between the Group no. 2 (and -1) attributes and the Group no. 1 attributes, as shown by the "*" in table 2.5. In other words, there is a continuum of relatively positive scores for the North and a sharp break between the two groups for the South.

Since many of the hand-drawn maps of US dialect areas by Michigan respondents label the local area "standard," "normal" (as in figure 2.4), "correct," and "good English," there is obviously no dissatisfaction with the local variety as a representative of "correct English." What is the source of the

Table 2.5 Means scores of both factor groups for ratings of the “North” and “South”

Factor	Means scores (ordered) <i>South</i>		Rank	Rank	Means scores (ordered) <i>North</i>		Attribute
	Mean	Attribute			Factor	Mean	
-1 & 2	4.66	Casual	1	12.0	-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

* 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 here and in Table 2.4)

preference for the southern varieties along the “friendly” dimensions? Perhaps a group has a tendency to use up what might be called the “symbolic linguistic capital” of its variety in one way or the other (but not both). Speakers of majority varieties have a tendency to spend the symbolic capital of their variety on a “Standard” dimension. Speakers of minority varieties usually spend their symbolic capital on the “Friendly” dimension.

Perhaps many northerners (here, southeastern Michiganders) have spent all their symbolic linguistic capital on the standardness of local English. As such, it has come to represent the norms of schools, media, and public interaction and has, therefore, become less suitable for interpersonal value. These young Michiganders, therefore, assign an alternate kind of 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 Group no. 2.

Already armed with the information that respondents tend to evaluate language variety along these two dimensions, I took an even more direct approach to eliciting judgments about such variety, again with no recourse to actual voice samples. I asked southeastern Michigan respondents to rate the 50 states (and Washington, DC and New York City) for “correctness.” The results are shown in figure 2.7.

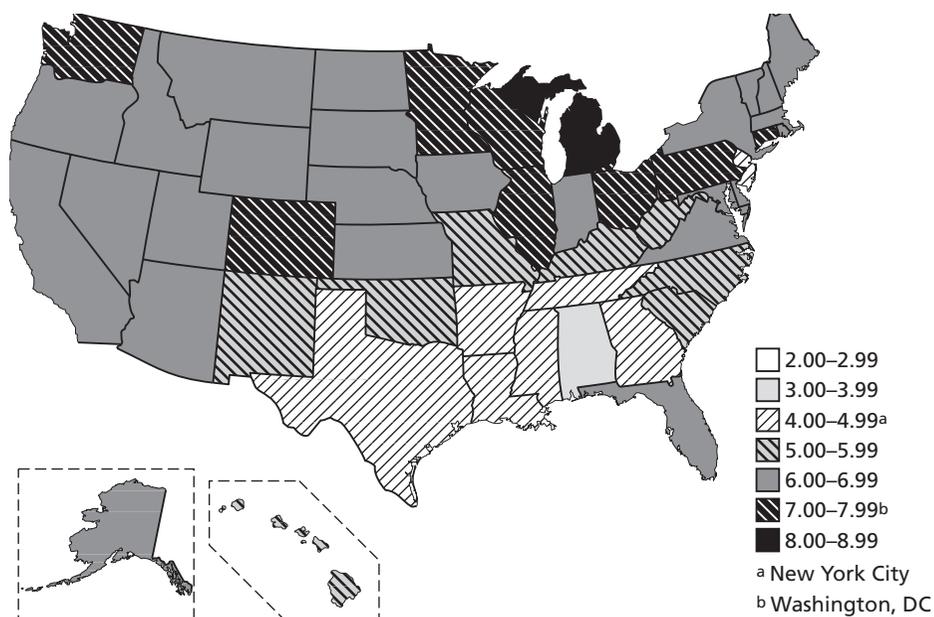


Figure 2.7 Means of ratings for language “correctness” by Michigan respondents for US English (on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = least, and 10 = most correct)

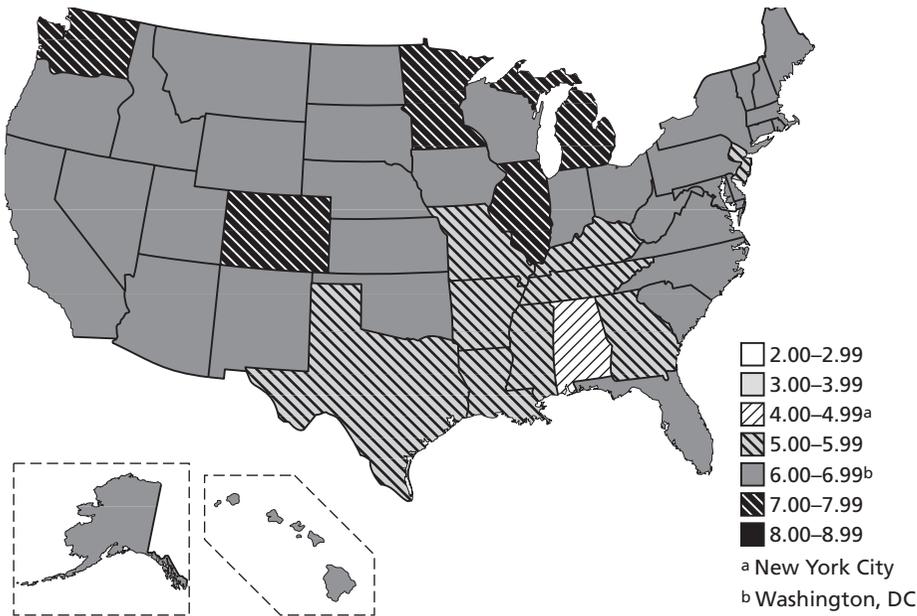


Figure 2.8 Means of ratings for language “pleasantness” by Michigan respondents for US English (on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = least, and 10 = most pleasant)

Again, it is clear that the South fares worst. On a one–ten scale (with one being “least correct”), Alabama is the only state which reaches a mean score in the 3.00–3.99 range, and, with the exception of New York City and New Jersey, the surrounding southern states (Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia) are the only other areas rated in the 4.00–4.99 range. In short, the importance of southern speech would appear to lie in its distinctiveness along one particular dimension – it is incorrect English. It is only Michigan which scores in the heady 8.00–8.99 means score range for language “correctness.”

What parallel can we find in such work as this to the scores for the attributes in Factor Group no. 2 (“Friendly”) already reported? Figure 2.8 shows what Michigan raters have done in a direct assessment of the notion “pleasant” (as was shown above in figure 2.7 for “correctness”). As figure 2.8 shows, the South fares very badly again. Alabama (actually tied here by New York City) is the worst-rated area in the USA, and the surrounding southern states are also at the bottom of this ten-point rating scale. One may note, however, that the ratings for the “pleasantness” of the English of southern states are one degree less harsh than those for “correctness.” Similarly, there is no “outstanding” (8.00–8.99) rating as there was for “correctness,” making Michigan no

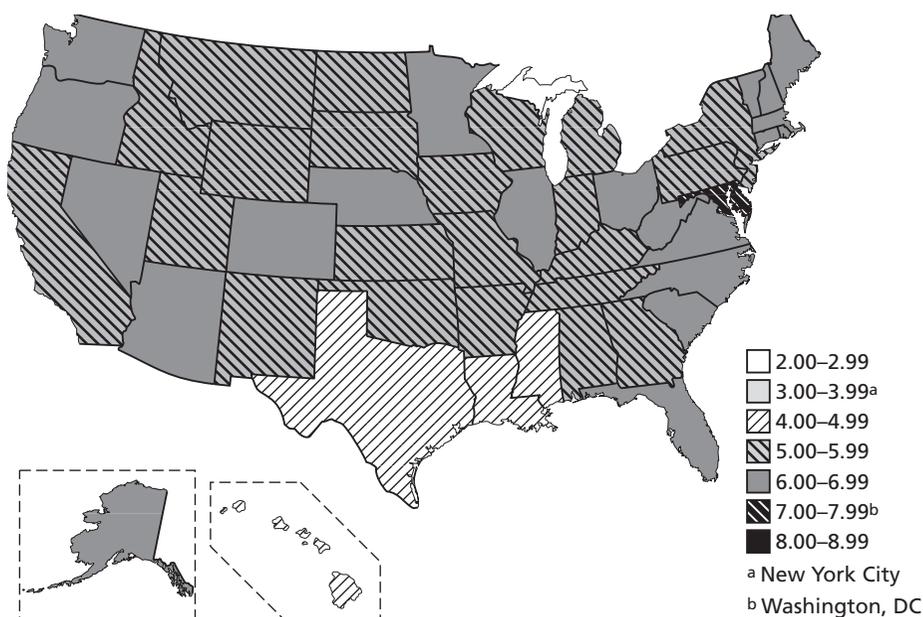


Figure 2.9 Means of ratings for language "correctness" by Alabama respondents for US English (on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = least, and 10 = most correct)

longer the uniquely best-thought-of area (since it is joined here by Minnesota, Illinois, Colorado, and Washington). In previous work (e.g. Preston 1996b), I have taken this to indicate that northern speakers have made symbolic use of their variety as a vehicle for "standardness," "education," and widely-accepted or "mainstream" values.

Then what about US southerners? If northerners (i.e. Michiganders) are committed to their "correctness" but only half-heartedly to the "pleasantness," will southerners (e.g. Alabamians) show an interestingly different pattern of responses? Unfortunately, I have no factor analytic study based on the cognitive maps of southerners, but I can show you how they have responded to the "correct" and "pleasant" tasks already discussed for Michiganders.

Just as one might have suspected, as figure 2.9 shows, Alabamians are much less invested in language "correctness" (and well they should not be since they are constantly reminded in popular culture and even personal encounters that their language is lacking in this dimension). Imagine the horror of a Michigander in seeing figure 2.9. Their own "correct" English speaking state scores no better than the fair-to-middling "5" which Alabamians assign to

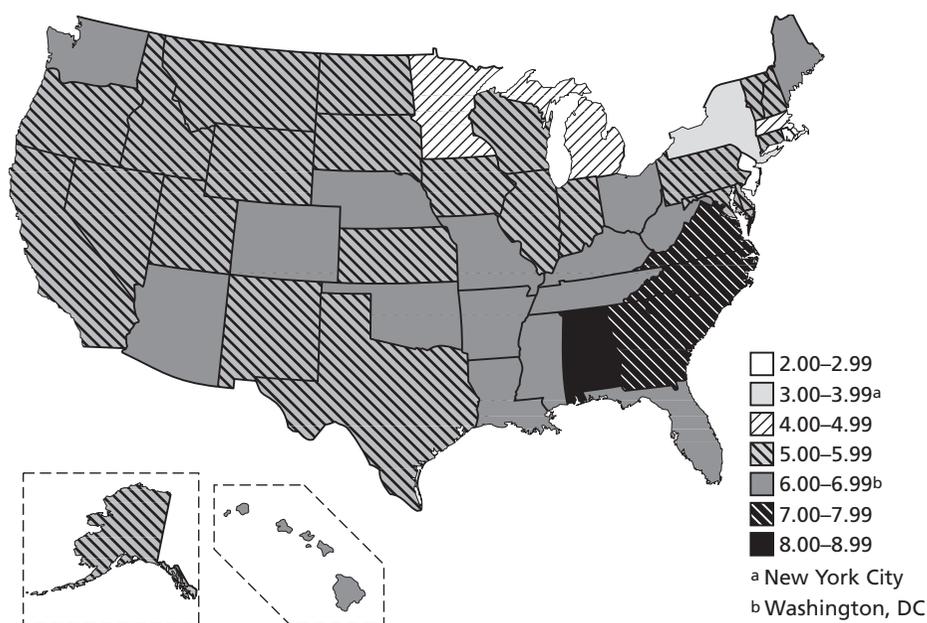


Figure 2.10 Means of ratings for language “pleasantness” by Alabama respondents for US English (on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = least, and 10 = most pleasant)

many areas, including their own (showing no break in correctness on a trip from Alabama all the way north to Michigan!).

If figure 2.10 reminds you of figure 2.7, you will surely conclude that Alabamians are invested in something, just as Michiganders are, but it is clearly “pleasantness,” not “correctness.” In this simple task, therefore, I believe to have shown very straightforwardly the sort of differential investment in local varieties discussed above. In one sense, of course, such studies are “language attitude” studies; in another sense, however, they form important background understandings for the study of attitudes among different social and regional groups. How can we study more detailed aspects language attitudes unless we know that a group is “correctness” investing or “solidarity” investing? And, of course, as I hope to have shown in this entire section, how can we measure language attitudes unless we know something of the cognitive arrangements our respondents have made of the terrain we want to explore? Although part of the game belongs to us (the linguistic detail), the real territory (as perhaps in any linguistic work) lies within the cognitive maps (whether of geographic or social facts) of those we study.

4 Toward a General Folk Theory

What of the larger promise? How can we go about fashioning a more general folk theory of language, one which surely underlies all attitudinal responses? I believe much of the attitudinal data outlined above, including the mental maps of and attitudinal responses to regional varieties of US English, is dominated by the notions of “correctness” (the more powerful) and “pleasantness.” I also believe a great deal of folk belief and language ideology stems from these facts. Speakers of “correct” dialects do not believe they speak dialects, and educational and even legal repercussions arise from personal and institutional devaluing of “incorrect” varieties. On the other hand, speakers of prejudiced-against varieties (like prejudiced groups in general) derive solidarity from their distinct cultural behaviors, in this case, linguistic ones.

In a more direct attempt to get at this underlying fact, although the research tradition is not as long or as active, particularly in the USA, some attitude researchers have collected and analyzed overt folk comment about language (e.g. Labov 1966). When asked how New Yorkers speak, for example, a southern Indiana respondent replied with a little folk poetry (showing that sensitivity to NYC “r” is not an exclusively in-group phenomenon):

T’ree little boids, sitting on a coib
Eating doity woims and saying doity woids.

Some comment is more detailed and revealing. The following Michiganders assure the fieldworker (H) that they (just like national newscasters) are speakers of “standard” English:

H: Northern English is standard English?

D: Yeah, yeah.

G: That’s right. What you hear around here.

S: Yeah, standard.

D: Because that’s what you hear on the TV. If you listen to the newscast of the national news, they sound like we do; they sound sort of Midwestern, like we do.

And, not surprisingly, Michiganders know where English which is not so standard is spoken:

G: Because of TV though I think there’s kind of a standard English that’s evolving.

D: Yeah.

G: And the kind of thing you hear on TV is something that’s broadcast across the country, so most people are aware of that, but there are definite accents in the South.

There are more complex (and rewarding) conversations about social and regional varieties of US English which may be analyzed to show not only relatively static folk belief and attitudes but also how these beliefs and attitudes are used in argument and persuasion. Such investigations are particularly important in showing what deep-seated presuppositions about language are held (e.g. Preston 1994). Many of these conversations (and their parallels and contrasts to professional opinion) are given Niedzielski and Preston (1999). I will provide only one here which I think supports the claim that correctness dominates in US folk perceptions of language but which also allows a slightly deeper look at what sort of theory might allow that domination. H (the fieldworker) has asked D and G (his respondents) if there is any difference in meaning between the words “gift” and “present” (Niedzielski and Preston 1999).⁴

- D: Oftentimes a gift is something like you you go to a Tupperware party and they're going to give you a gift, it's – I think it's more impersonal, – than a=
- H: [Uh huh.
- D: =present.
- G: [No, there's no difference.
- D: [No? There's real – yeah there's really no difference.
- G: [There is no difference.
- D: That's true. Maybe the way we use it is though.
- U: Maybe we could look it up and see what “gift” means.
- D: [I mean technically there's no difference.
(They then look up *gift* and *present* in the dictionary.)

Although there are several interesting folk linguistic (and of course discursal) facts about this short excerpt, the shock for linguists comes in D's remark that there is no difference in the meaning except in “the way we use it.” Of course, what other difference could there be? I believe this remark (and many others I have seen in the course of surveying “folk linguistic conversations”) points to a folk theory of language in which language itself is somehow external to human cognitive embedding – somewhere “out there.” Figure 2.11 illustrates what I have come to believe the essential difference between folk and professional theories to be.

In the linguistic theory, one moves up (and away from) the concrete reality of language as a cognitively embedded fact in the capacities of individual speakers to the social constructions of language similarity. These higher-level constructs are socially real but considerably more abstract than the “real” language, embedded in individual speakers.

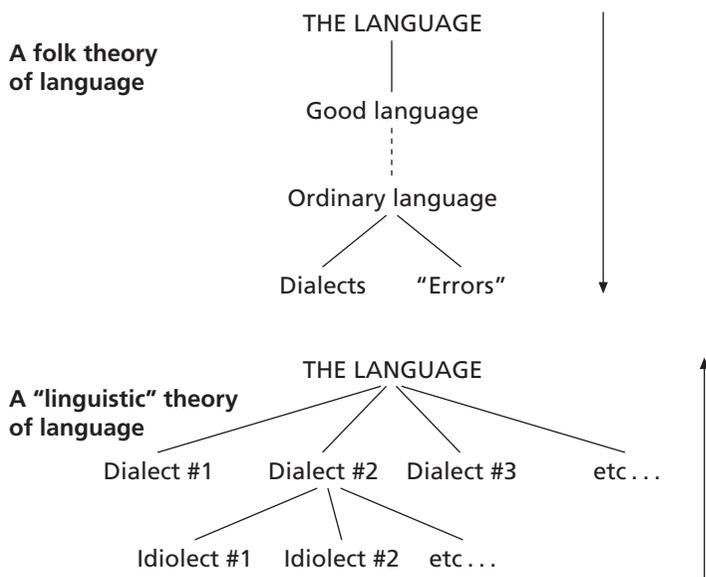


Figure 2.11 Folk and "linguistic" theories of language

In the folk theory, just the opposite is true. A Platonic, extra-cognitive reality is the "real" language, such a thing as English or German or Chinese. Speakers who are directly connected to it speak a fully correct form (the only rule-governed variety), although one may deviate from it comfortably not to sound too "prissy." Go too far, however, and error, dialect, or, quite simply, bad language arises. Since this connection to the rule-governed, exterior "real" language seems a natural (and even easy) one, many folk find it difficult to understand why nonstandard speakers, for example, persist in their errors (and often find them simply lazy or recalcitrant).

It is such a theory, I believe, which lies at the root of most evaluations and discriminations of language variety. It is the overwhelming fact against which all language attitude study (at least in US English) must be measured. In short, attitude study, within a linguistic setting, should proceed along both lines of enquiry: what are the linguistic facts of identification and reaction, and what are the underlying constructs which promote and support them? In "correctness," I believe, we have at least some of the answer.

NOTES

- 1 This does not mean that linguists themselves have no "language attitudes." First, there will be some viscerally, intellectually uncontrollable responses to language variety which maintain

- themselves from the scientist's pre-scientific period. Second, what attitudinal responses linguists might have to languages and varieties after they are trained as linguists is an empirical question, one little investigated – but see Preston (1975) for, at least, grammaticality and acceptability judgment differences between linguists and non-linguists.
- 2 This study is an acoustic corollary to such interesting global studies (in which linguistic detail is not explored) as Williams et al. (1971). They showed, for example, that standard English-speaking children's voice samples were downgraded (for such traits as "industriousness" and "competence") if they were played so that the judges thought a minority child (Mexican-American or African-American) was actually speaking.
 - 3 Although the paired opposites were presented to the respondents with "negative" and "positive" sides randomly distributed, the "positive" poles were all moved to the high (i.e. "6") end of the scale for all the quantitative analyses reported below. I realized after I did this that there might be cultural misunderstandings of what I consider to be the "positive" end. They are "Fast," "Polite," "Down-to-earth," "Educated," "Normal," "Smart," "Casual," "Good English," "Not nasal," "Friendly," "Speaks without a drawl," and "Speaks without a twang." I apologize to readers who disagree with my assignments. That should not detract from the contents of the paper.
 - 4 Since H is not a native speaker, such a question seemed "reasonable."

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