Crystal, David. 2003. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Flexner, Stuart Berg. 1982. *Listening to America: an Illustrated History of Words and Phrases from our Lively and Splendid Past*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
Flexner, Stuart Berg and Anne H. Soukhanov. 1997. *Speaking Freely: a Guided Tour of American English from Plymouth Rock to Silicon Valley*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Fought, Carmen. 2003. *Chicano English in Context*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Gleick, Peter H. 2000. "Harry Potter, Minus a Certain Flavour." *New York Times*. July 10. A 19.
Labov, William. 2001. *Principles of Linguistic Change. Vol. 2: Social Factors*. Malden MA: Blackwell.
Leap, William L. 1993. *American Indian English*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
Lighter, J. E., ed. 1994–. *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, vols. 1, 2. New York: Random House.
Mathews, Mitford M., ed. 1951. *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*. 2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Mencken, H. L. 1963. *The American Language*, 4th edn. and 2 supps., abridged by Raven I. McDavid, Jr. New York: Knopf.
Todd, Loretta and Ian Hancock. 1986. *International English Usage*. London: Croom Helm.
Tottie, Gunnel. 2002. *An Introduction to American English*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Trudgill, Peter. 1985. *Coping with America*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.
Trudgill, Peter and Jean Hannah. 2002. *International English: a Guide to Varieties of Standard English*, 4th edn. London: Edward Arnold.
*Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th edn. 1999. New York: Macmillan.

In: E. Finegan & J.R. Rickford (eds) (2004): Language in the USA. CUP. 39-57.

# 3 Regional dialects

WILLIAM A. KRETZSCHMAR, JR.

## Editors' introduction

This chapter treats *regional* dialects – a topic of tremendous interest to the general public. The first part is introductory, covering, among other things, the fact that no two people speak exactly alike but that regional speech is still a reality, for people from the same region do speak more like each other than like people from other regions. The US regional dialects developed in part from the separateness and isolation of the earliest colonial settlements and in part from the different mixtures of people who populated each region (Native American, German, African, and so on). Although some of the distinctiveness of the speech habits of the earliest settlers has been ironed out, broad regional patterns still remain, although they are constantly in flux, and they are to some extent abstractions.

The chapter draws extensively on maps and tables, and William A. Kretzschmar uses them to outline the boundaries and salient features of the main (Eastern) American English dialects in the mid-twentieth century, based on the work of legendary American dialectologist Hans Kurath. Kretzschmar shows how Kurath established isoglosses that demarcated dialects on the basis of people's familiarity with lexical alternatives like *darning needle* (Northern), *mosquito hawk* (Southern), and *snake feeder* (Midland), all of which refer to the 'dragon fly.' Subsequent analyses of pronunciation patterns essentially confirmed the regional dialect patterns that had been established on the basis of word use.

The chapter closes with a discussion of twenty-first-century regional dialect patterns. More recent studies of the word usage and pronunciation patterns of US dialects confirm the broad regional speech difference identified half a century earlier, but vocabulary and pronunciation changes have occurred, and to quote Labov and Ash (1997) (who are cited at length in this chapter), "the local accents [of major US cities] are more different from each other than at any time in the past." This chapter suggests that something closer to a uniform national dialect is spoken by the well educated, but that regional differentiation and vibrancy are evident among working-class and lower middle-class Americans.

## Background

While all Americans know there are regional dialects of American English (see chapter 26), it is actually quite difficult to prove them right. Detailed investigation of what Americans say – their pronunciation, their grammar, the words they use for everyday things and ideas – shows that each of us is an individual in our language use, not quite the same as any other person studied. All English speakers do of

course share a great many words, a core grammar, and much the same sound system but, despite all that we share, American English speakers also vary in their speech. Some, for example, know that a *dragonfly* can be called a *snake feeder* or a *mosquito hawk*, others that it can be called a *darning needle*. Some rhyme the word pairs *cot* and *caught* and *Don* and *dawn*, but others do not rhyme them. To say how they got into the swimming pool last summer, some would say *dived*, others *dove*. There are various possible pronunciations and word choices and grammatical constructions for almost anything that any American would ever want to say – and thus the number of possible combinations of the choices that anyone could make is practically infinite. Surveys carried out in the middle of the twentieth century for the American Linguistic Atlas Project (ALAP) demonstrated that no two speakers in the extensive survey gave exactly the same set of responses to its questionnaire about everyday speech (cf. Houck 1969). It is simply not true that all Americans from a particular region share exactly the same choices of words, pronunciations, and grammar, or that a complete set of choices from one region (say, the North) is different from the set chosen by speakers from another region (say, the South). Moreover, speakers from different social groups within the same locality, and even the same speaker in different situations and at different times, will make different linguistic choices (see part 3 of this volume, "The Sociolinguistic Situation").

Yet we are not wrong to notice that people from different regions of the USA do seem to speak English differently. In large terms, the speech of people from one region is generally more similar to the speech of people from the same region and less similar to the speech of people from other regions. Americans can often (though not always) recognize the speech of a fellow American as coming from a different part of the country from our own, just as we can recognize an American speaker as talking differently from, say, a speaker of British English or Australian English – though we often cannot recognize a Canadian speaker so readily. What we are recognizing in any of these cases is a tendency for people from a particular place to make some of the same choices of words, pronunciations, and grammar as other people from the same place. Analysis of data from the American Linguistic Atlas Project shows that among a wide range of linguistic features tested, any particular feature tends to be used by people who live relatively close to each other (Kretzschmar 1996a, Lee and Kretzschmar 1993). Words that are not known by very many people in the ALAP survey tend to be known by people who live near each other; and words known by larger numbers of speakers tend to be found in geographical clusters, rather than distributed evenly across the survey area. Other studies also suggest that geography is one of the most important factors for sharing variant linguistic features (e.g., LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985, Johnson 1996). Such tendencies for any given linguistic feature to be used in specific places can be described statistically for the ALAP survey data. In real life, when we hear relatively unfamiliar words or pronunciations or grammar in someone's speech, we have to guess where those features might be used according to our own sense of probability.



The relative association of particular features of English with Americans from some particular part of the country has its roots in American history. Unlike England, where the English language has a history stretching back to the fifth century AD, North America has a history of settlement by English speakers of only about 400 years. The relatively short period of settlement has not allowed time for dialect differences as sharp as those found in Britain (e.g., between Scottish English and the English of the Thames Valley) to develop in North America – and it is not likely that such sharp regional differences will emerge in future, given mass public education and other social conditions that do not favor the development of sharp dialect differences. Yet regional differences have in fact emerged in North America and they show no sign of disappearing.

Two factors led to the development of dialects in America. First, and by far the most important, settlements in the American colonies began as separate isolated communities, and each developed somewhat different speech habits during the early colonial period. As settlement proceeded inland from the coastal outposts, the speech habits of the coastal communities were carried to the interior by sons and daughters of the established colonists and by new immigrants who landed at the coast and acquired speech habits as they made their way to the frontier (which for some immigrants took years). Settlement proceeded generally westward in three large geographical bands as far as the Mississippi River, corresponding to what is now the Northern tier of states, a Midland region, and the Southern region. In the North the speech habits that became established in Upstate New York (which differed from the speech of New York City and its environs, originally Dutch in settlement, and from the speech of New England, which was separated from the Inland North by mountains) were carried westward by means of water travel on the Erie Canal and Great Lakes as far as northern Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The South had no convenient waterway to facilitate travel, and the varied topography of the land – mountains, the piney woods, wiregrass – was not all well suited to the pattern of plantation agriculture that dominated the colonial economies of Virginia and the Carolinas. Southern settlement thus proceeded more slowly, and in a patchwork of communities across Georgia and Alabama until settlers reached more generally suitable plantation lands in the plains and Mississippi Basin areas of Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, and East Texas. Philadelphia was the focal city for settlement in the Midland region, which proceeded west in two broad streams. The National Road was built through Pennsylvania, eventually as far as central Illinois, close to the present-day route of Interstate 80. Settlement took place along the road, and settlers could also reach the Ohio River valley and then use the waterway to settle farther inland. This more northerly stream of Midland settlement carried Midland speech habits, which mixed to some degree with the speech habits of the Northern region. The more southerly stream of Midland settlement followed the course of the Shenandoah River south through Virginia towards the Cumberland Gap in Tennessee. Mostly these South Midland settlers were subsistence farmers, and they occupied whatever land could support them throughout the Appalachian Mountain region and the uplands as far west

as Arkansas, and also in the lowlands of the Southern states where the land was not suitable for plantations. In addition to Midland speech habits, these settlers also acquired speech habits characteristic of the Southern region, especially those Midlanders who found their way to marginally productive land near plantation country. These historical patterns of settlement – North, Midland, and South – created the basic framework of regional American dialects that we still see – and hear – today. (See figure 3-1 [Kurath 1949: fig. 3], which we will discuss further below.)

The second historical factor that influenced regional varieties was the people who originally settled the separate colonies. Each colony had its own particular mix of colonists who spoke dialects from different areas of England, or who did not speak English at all. Undoubtedly, some traces of these immigrant speech habits have survived. Lists are available that highlight the contributions to the American English vocabulary of Native Americans, Germans, the Spanish, and other non-English-speaking groups (Marckwardt 1958: 22–58). A list of the contribution of words from African languages to Gullah, a Creole variety still spoken in the Sea Islands off the southern coast is also available (Turner 1949), along with a list of words of African origin still used in the southeast (McDavid and McDavid 1951). As for British dialect influences, special studies of the relationship between Scottish English and Appalachian English have been made (e.g., Montgomery 1989, 1997, Montgomery and Nagle 1993). However, so-called "colonial leveling" resulted from a tendency not to preserve any more than occasional distinctive habits of regional English dialects or isolated words or usages from immigrant languages other than English. Speculative accounts (e.g., Trudgill 1986) of a colonial American koiné (a regional dialect used as the common language of a larger area) perhaps overstate the case, since we see that different settlement patterns have created different and long-lasting dialect regions, but there were indeed reasons for settlers not to maintain the sets of speech habits that marked British dialects of English (Kretzschmar 1997). Whole communities of speakers of a dialect or language did not usually settle together, and most communities that began as homogeneous settlements in time blended into the surrounding culture. The strict religious communities of the Pennsylvania Dutch that still preserve their (now archaic) German language are the exception that proves the rule. Thus it is not true that any American regional variety of speech derives particularly from one British dialect source. Appalachian English, for instance, is not particularly descended from Scottish English, although it does show some Scottish influence. Because of population mixture, each colony had a range of speech habits out of which its own regional characteristics could eventually emerge (see, e.g., Miller 1999). ALAP evidence shows that dialect areas in the eastern USA share essentially the same original word stock, but have preserved it differently (Kretzschmar 1996b). While we cannot discount influences from British dialects and the non-English-speaking population, these influences were secondary to the formation of their own speech habits by the early populations of the different colonies.



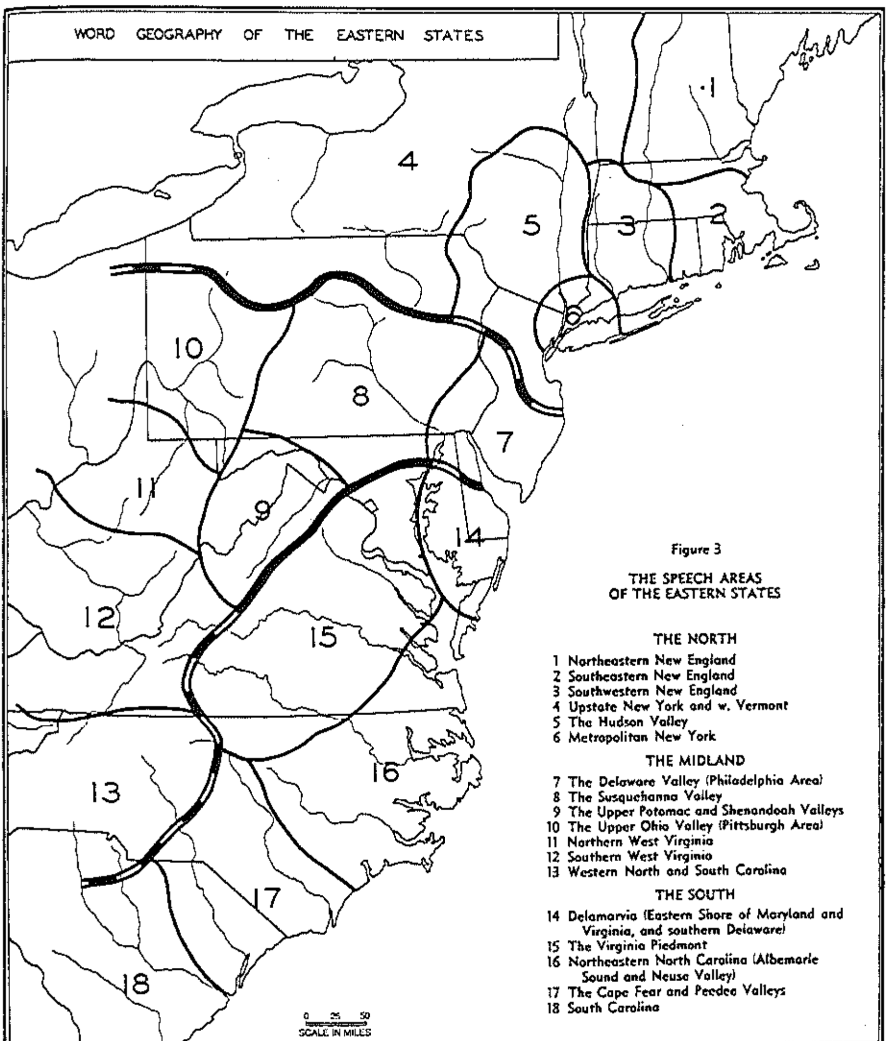


Figure 3-1 *The Speech Areas of the Eastern States*
Source *From Kurath 1949*

Finally, it is unwise to assume that speech habits that we associate with a particular region have been used there for a long time. Among features most commonly associated with Southern American English, the pronunciation of the vowel in *fire* as a near rhyme with *far*, the pronunciation of *pin* and *pen* as words that rhyme, and the vocabulary item *fixin' to* 'preparing to, about to' were rare

or non-existent before the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Bailey 1997). Likewise, other features commonly associated with Southern speech such as lack of pronunciation of *-r* after vowels (as in words like *four* pronounced as *foa* or *foe*) and *a*-prefix on verbs with *-ing* endings (like *a-running*) are also in rapid decline. Similarly, the relatively infrequent variant terms for *chest of drawers* in ALAP data from the eastern USA actually recapitulate terms found in old furniture pattern books (Burkette 2001). The most common American term for this piece of bedroom furniture is now *dresser*, but in the ALAP data of the 1930s and 1940s the most common term was *bureau*, and other terms, now relics, may have been prominent still earlier (Burkette 2001). While individual habits of speech – whether words or pronunciations or grammatical usages – are likely to come and go, the tendency to use different habits in different regions will nonetheless continue. As a consequence, regional variation may well persist in much the same geographical patterns even after such changes in speech habits (cf. Bailey and Tillery 1996). It is thus fair to say that regional dialects of American English are continuously rebuilding themselves, simultaneously dying away with the loss of some speech habits that formerly characterized them and being reborn with new speech habits that speakers might recognize as probably coming from a particular region.

The remainder of this chapter presents evidence for the status of regional dialects in the mid-twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. First, evidence collected for the ALAP project is used to characterize mid-twentieth century regional varieties; then, more recent evidence is given for regional variation. For both periods it is important to remember that "speaking a regional dialect" is really nothing more than a tendency for a speaker to make some of the same linguistic choices as other people from the same location. A "dialect" is thus a generalization, an abstraction that seizes upon a few selected linguistic features to characterize a variety of the language. A dialect is not a social contract or a comprehensive set of linguistic rules by which all the residents of an area must abide.

## Regional dialects at mid-twentieth century

Figure 3-1, a 1949 map of dialect areas in the eastern USA based on ALAP evidence, is an example of a dialect generalization. In order to make the map, Hans Kurath, one of the most accomplished dialect geographers, began with individual words, like those used to designate the *dragonfly*, and he plotted where ALAP speakers used them, as in figure 3-2 (Kurath 1949: Map 141). You can see that *darning needle* mostly occurs in the North, *mosquito hawk* and *snake doctor* in the South, and *snake feeder* in Pennsylvania and areas of the Appalachian Mountains as far south as western North Carolina. Such a neat pattern, where each different variant seems to occupy its own part of the map, is extremely unusual in the ALAP evidence; most patterns of distribution for words (or for pronunciations



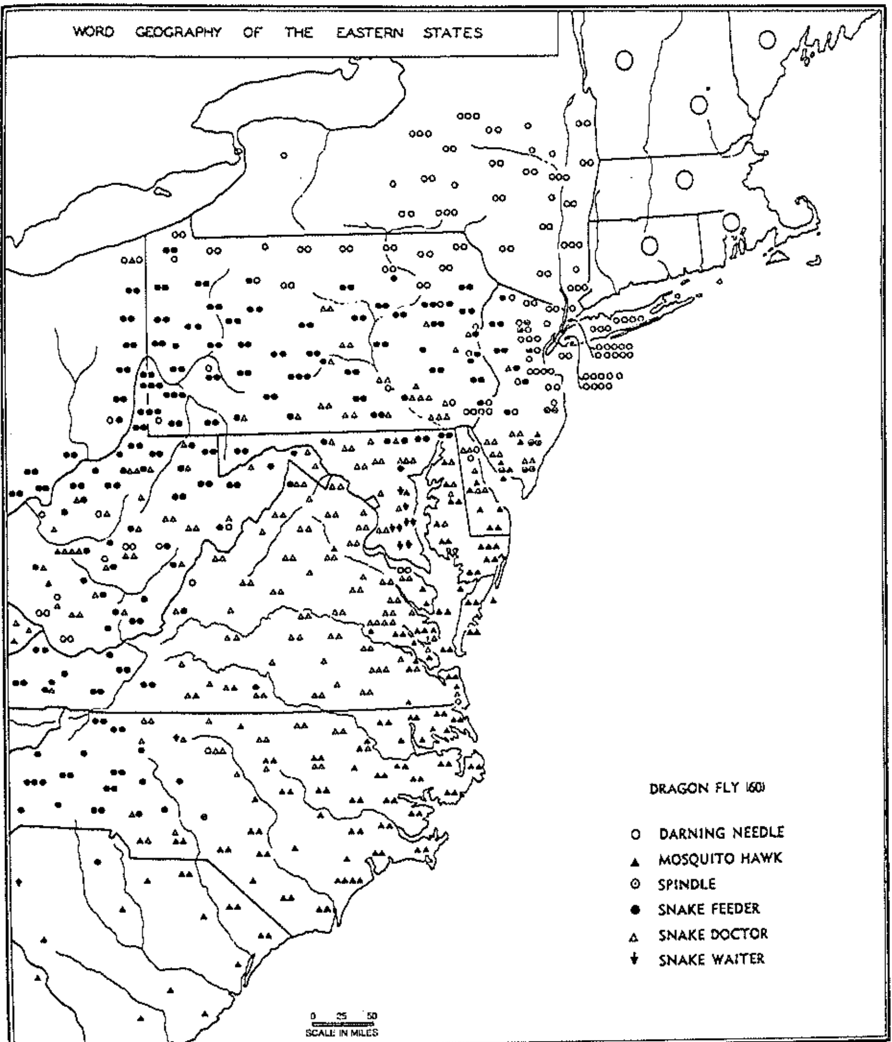


Figure 3-2 *Dragon fly*
Source *From Kurath 1949*

or grammatical features) show a rather spotty areal distribution, with more than one alternative in use in any given area. The *dragonfly* variants, however, show only a relatively small number of words out of their own areas, for example, occurrences of *snake doctor* too far north in Pennsylvania or *darning needle* too far south in West Virginia. From maps like these, the dialect geographer carefully

selected features from which to make a different kind of map such as is shown in figure 3-3 (Kurath 1949: figure 5a). He drew best-fit lines, called "isoglosses," to indicate the boundary of the majority usage of his carefully chosen words. Here, the dotted line shows the Southern boundary for *darning needle*, which matches where *darning needle* occurred most of the time in figure 3-2, except for the stray occurrences in West Virginia. To speak in terms of tendencies, if someone heard an American from the time of the ALAP survey say the word *darning needle* in reference to an insect, it would be a very good guess to say that the speaker came from north of the isogloss – but the guess might be wrong because *darning needle* was also used occasionally elsewhere.

Figure 3-3 also shows the next stage of that older process for making a dialect generalization. In this case, the researcher tried to find words whose isoglosses would run in about the same place. Here *darning needle* is combined with isoglosses for *whiffletree* (a variant term for part of the equipment for hitching horses to a wagon – still an everyday rural practice in the 1930s and 1940s) and *pail* (as opposed to *bucket*), all terms used in the North. Such a combination of isoglosses is called a "bundle," and bundles of isoglosses are represented by the boundaries of dialect areas shown in figure 3-1. The heavy black lines in Pennsylvania and Maryland/Virginia represent the thickest bundles of isoglosses. At each end of the heavy black lines, their continuation has been represented with a double line to indicate less agreement in the path of the bundled isoglosses. For instance, in figure 3-3 the isoglosses diverge in eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey, just where the double lines appear in figure 3-1. All of the thinner lines separating the subsidiary dialect areas of the region also represent bundles of isoglosses, but the bundles have fewer constituents than the ones represented by the heavy black or double lines. There was no fixed rule for how many isoglosses had to be present to make a bundle, but the numbers were quite small in relative terms. Out of the thousands available in the ALAP data, only about 400 words were plotted for Kurath's (1949) *Word Geography*, and only a very small number of the mapped words yielded clear isoglosses at all, much less isoglosses that ran together to form bundles that could mark major and subsidiary dialect boundaries. This earlier technique allowed Kurath to confirm judgments he had made about American dialect areas on the basis of his experience and his study of historical settlement patterns: all he needed was a small number of representative isoglosses for that purpose (see Kretzschmar 1992, 1996a). A later study showed that patterns of American pronunciation in the ALAP data largely matched the patterns derived from the vocabulary variants (Kurath and McDavid 1961). The dialect boundaries of figure 3-1 are thus more suggestive of tendencies rather than being sharp boundaries where, if speakers crossed them while traveling, they could hear sharply different dialects in the speech of the local population on each side. Travelers who go long distances before stopping are apt to hear greater differences in speech habits between stops than they would have heard if they had stopped more frequently along the way.

In addition to these famous maps, Kurath also produced tables indicating whether a word was used regularly (marked by X), fairly commonly (marked



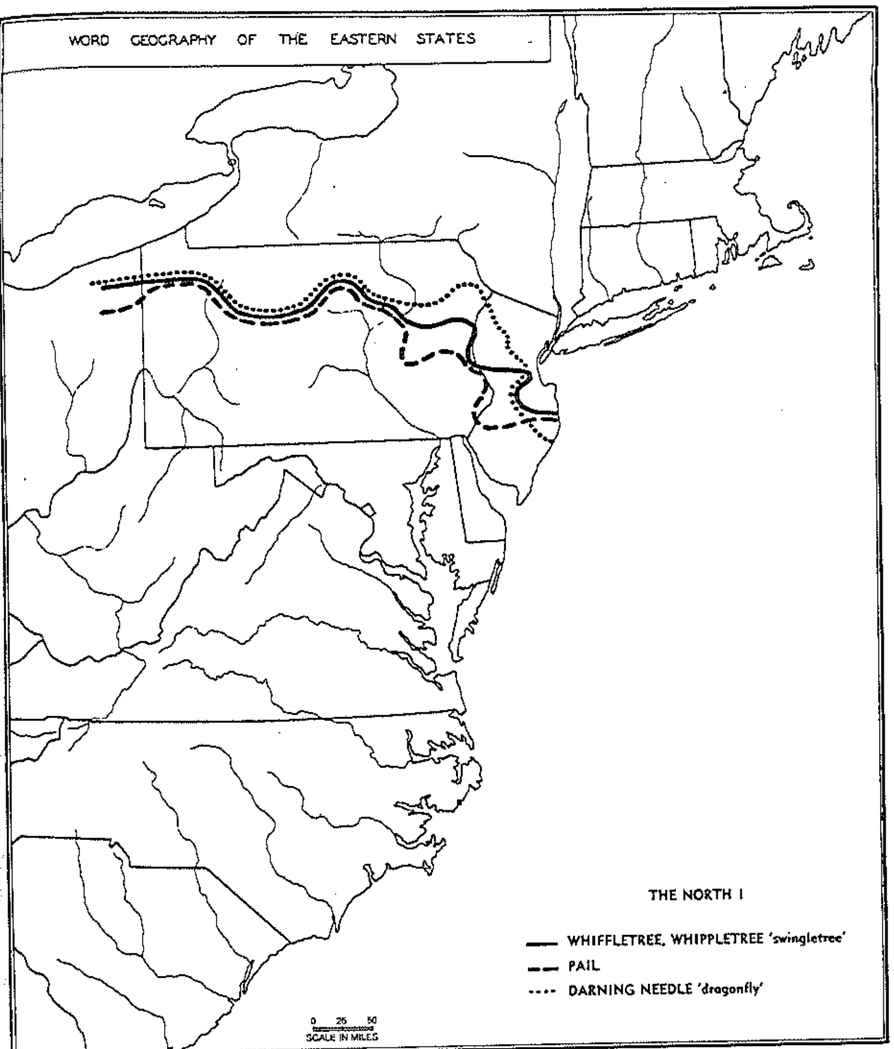


Figure 3-3 *The North I*
Source *From Kurath 1949*

by —), rarely (marked by · or a blank space), or not at all in the subsidiary dialect areas of a major dialect region. Figure 3-4 is the table for the Northern region (Kurath 1949: table I). Only a few terms such as *pail* and *darning needle* are shown as being used throughout the North, and a few more occur in most of the North but are lacking in one of the subsidiary dialect areas. (The numbers in parenthesis after each word – e.g., pail (17) – refer to discussion elsewhere in Kurath's book

THE NORTHERN AREA

× regular
— fairly common
· rare

| | Ohio | New York State: Upstate | New York State: Hudson Valley | New England: Western | New England: Eastern |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *(1) The North* | | | | | |
| pail (17) | × | × | × | × | × |
| whiffletree (21) | × | × | × | × | × |
| bowl (37) | × | × | × | × | × |
| johnny cake (44) | × | × | × | × | × |
| darning needle (60) | × | × | × | × | × |
| angle worm (60) | × | × | — | × | × |
| stone wall (16) | | — | × | × | × |
| nigh-horse (39) | — | — | — | — | × |
| *(2) The North without Eastern New England* | | | | | |
| stoop (10) | × | × | × | × | |
| stone boat (21) | × | × | × | × | |
| fried-cakes (45) | × | × | — | — | |
| lobbered milk, loppered milk (47) | × | × | × | × | |
| sugar bush (61) | × | × | × | — | |
| button ball (61) | | × | × | × | |
| belly-gut(ter) (95) | × | × | — | — | |
| *(3) The North without the Hudson Valley* | | | | | |
| buttry (10) | — | — | | — | — |
| spider (17) | × | × | | × | × |
| fills, thills (20) | × | × | | × | × |
| teeter board (22) | × | × | | × | × |
| coal hod (23) | — | — | | × | × |
| hasty-pudding, Indian pudding (50) | × | × | | × | × |
| Dutch cheese (47) | × | × | | × | — |
| horning (82) | × | × | | — | |

Figure 3-4 *The Northern Area*
Source *From Kurath 1949*

and are not germane to our discussion here.) The tables also show that some words are used in only two of the major dialect regions, but not in all three. For example, figure 3-5 shows words that were used in the Midland and the South, but not as much in the North (Kurath 1949: table V). Figure 3-6 shows words used in the North and the South, but not throughout the Midland (Kurath 1949: table VI). The table for the Southern region (figure 3-7; Kurath 1949: table III), which includes a column for the South Midland, indicates clearly the complexity of speech habits in different areas of this most recognizable of American regional dialects. These tables show us again that Kurath's major American dialect regions are generalizations that, while not wrong, are based on a small number of representative words and that the dialect regions contain large degrees of internal variation within them.

In addition to the plotting of separate pronunciations as they occurred throughout the ALAP survey area, mid-twentieth-century dialect geographers also wished



THE MIDLAND AND THE SOUTH

× regular
— fairly common
· rare

| | South: South Carolina | South: North Carolina | South: Virginia Piedmont | South: Eastern Shore | Midland: South Midland | Midland: Western Pennsylvania | Midland: Eastern Pennsylvania | Midland: West Jersey | North |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| dog irons, fire dogs (8) | × | × | × | · | × | — | · | · | · |
| paling fence (16) | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | — | |
| bucket (17) | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | · |
| spicket (18) | — | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | |
| singletree (21) | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | |
| seesaw (22) | × | × | × | × | — | × | × | — | — |
| comfort (29) | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | |
| pully-bone (37) | × | × | × | × | × | — | · | × | |
| corn pone (44) | × | × | × | × | × | × | — | | |
| roasting ears (56) | × | × | × | × | × | × | — | | |
| pole cat (59) | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | · | |
| ground squirrel (59) | × | × | × | — | × | × | — | — | |
| granny (woman) (65) | × | × | × | × | × | — | × | · | |
| right smart (74) | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | · |
| agin I get there (89) | — | — | — | — | × | — | · | | |
| Christmas gift! (93) | × | × | × | × | × | — | — | | |

Figure 3-5 *The Midland and the South*
Source *From Kurath 1949*

THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

× regular
— fairly common
· rare

| | South: South Carolina | South: North Carolina | South: Virginia Piedmont | South: Eastern Shore | Midland: South Midland | Midland: North Midland | North: Hudson Valley | North: Upstate New York | North: Western New England | North: Eastern New England |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| quarter to (4) | — | — | × | — | | · | — | — | — | — |
| curtains (9) | · | — | — | — | | — | · | — | × | × |
| piazza (10) | × | × | · | | | | — | | × | × |
| gutters (11) | × | × | × | — | | — | × | · | — | × |
| corn house (14) | — | · | × | — | | | · | · | — | — |
| spider (17) | — | — | · | · | | · | — | × | × | × |
| low, loo (36) | × | × | × | × | · | · | | — | — | — |
| harslet (37) | × | × | × | × | — | | — | | — | × |
| nanniel (38) | — | — | — | × | · | | · | — | — | — |

Figure 3-6 *The North and the South*
Source *From Kurath 1949*

to construct vowel systems that showed the relationship between vowel sounds within dialect regions. They isolated four types of vowel systems in the eastern USA, as shown in figure 3-8 (Kurath and McDavid 1961: 6–7).

Differences between the systems are subtle and still noticeable in the speech of Americans from the regions specified. The vowels found in the words *crib*, *three*,

THE SOUTHERN AREA

× regular
— fairly common
· rare

| | South Midland | | | South: Virginia Maryland | | | South: The Carolinas | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Western N. C. | West Virginia | Valley of Virginia | Piedmont | Tidewater | Eastern Shore | Albemarle Sound | Cape Fear | South Carolina |
| *(1) The South and the South Midland* | | | | | | | | | |
| light-bread (44) | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | × |
| clabber (47) | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | × | × |
| snack (48) | × | — | — | × | × | × | × | × | — |
| middlins (46) | × | × | — | × | × | × | — | × | |
| ash cakes (44) | — | · | — | × | × | — | — | — | — |
| (hay) shocks (14) | × | × | × | × | × | · | × | × | |
| (corn) shucks (56) | × | × | × | × | × | — | × | × | × |
| you-all (43) | — | — | × | × | × | — | × | × | × |
| waiter (82) | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| pallet (29) | × | — | × | × | × | · | × | × | × |
| gutters (11) | × | · | × | × | × | · | × | × | × |
| (barn) lot (15) | × | — | · | × | · | | × | × | |
| roll the baby (64) | — | | — | × | — | — | — | — | × |
| salad (55) | — | | · | × | × | · | × | × | |
| rock fence (16) | × | × | × | × | — | · | | | |
| *(2) The South* | | | | | | | | | |
| low (56) | — | · | | × | × | × | × | × | × |
| hasslet (57) | — | | | × | × | × | × | × | × |
| lightwood (8) | | | — | × | × | × | × | × | × |
| turn of wood (19) | | | | × | × | × | × | × | — |
| co-wench! (37) | | | | × | × | × | × | × | × |
| *(3) Virginia and the South Midland* | | | | | | | | | |
| garden house (12) | | | — | — | × | · | × | | |
| wesket (27) | | · | — | — | — | · | — | | |
| lumber room (10) | · | | — | × | — | · | · | | |
| soft peach (54) | · | | · | × | — | | · | | |
| nicker (56) | — | × | — | × | — | — | | | |
| snake doctor (60) | · | — | × | × | · | · | | | |
| come up! (58) | — | — | — | × | · | | | | |
| batter bread (44) | | | · | × | × | | | | |
| *(4) The Carolinas and the South Midland* | | | | | | | | | |
| whicker (56) | — | | | | — | × | × | × | × |
| johnny cake, a griddle cake (44) | — | · | · | | · | × | — | — | — |
| clabber cheese (47) | × | — | | | · | · | × | × | — |
| breakfast strip (46) | — | | | | — | | — | — | — |
| kerosene (24) | × | | | | — | | × | × | × |
| woods colt (65) | × | × | — | | | | — | × | × |
| goop! (38) | — | | | | · | | | × | × |
| *(5) The Southern Coast* | | | | | | | | | |
| curtains (9) | | · | · | · | × | — | × | | · |
| spider (17) | | | | | — | · | × | × | |
| mosquito hawk (60) | | | | | — | × | × | × | × |
| press peach (54) | | | | | — | — | × | × | × |
| piazza (10) | | | | | — | | — | × | × |
| earthworm (60) | | | | | — | | × | × | × |

Figure 3-7 *The Southern Area*
Source *From Kurath 1949*



Type I: *Upstate New York, Eastern Pennsylvania, and the South Midland*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *crib:three* | ɪ | i | | ʊ | u | *wood:tooth* |
| *ten:eight* | ɛ | e | ɜ | ʌ | o | *sun:road* |
| *bag* | æ | | ɑ | | ɔ | *law* |
| *five* | | ai | au | | ɔi | *boil* |
| | | | *thirty* | | | |
| | | | *crop* | | | |
| | | | *down* | | | |

Type II: *Metropolitan New York, the Upper South, and the Lower South*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *crib:three* | ɪ | i | | ʊ | u | *wood:tooth* |
| *ten:eight* | ɛ | e | ɜ | ʌ | o | *sun:road* |
| *bag* | æ | | | | ɔ | *law* |
| | | | | ɑ | ɒ | *crop:car* |
| *five* | | ai | au | | ɔi | *boil* |
| | | | *thirty* | | | |
| | | | *down* | | | |

Type III: *Eastern New England*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *crib:three* | ɪ | i | | ʊ | u | *wood:tooth* |
| *ten:eight* | ɛ | e | ɜ | ɵ | o | *road:rode* |
| *bag:car* | æ | a | | ʌ | ɒ | *sun:law, crop* |
| *five* | | ai | au | | ɒi | *boil* |
| | | | *thirty* | | | |
| | | | *down* | | | |

Type IV: *Western Pennsylvania*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *crib:three* | ɪ | i | | ʊ | u | *wood:tooth* |
| *ten:eight* | ɛ | e | ɜ | ʌ | o | *sun:road* |
| *bag* | æ | | | | ɒ | *law, crop* |
| *five* | | ai | au | | ɒi | *boil* |
| | | | *thirty* | | | |
| | | | *down* | | | |

Figure 3-8 *Vowels systems in the Eastern USA*
Source *From Kurath and McDavid 1961*

*ten*, *eight*, and *bag* are shared by all four regional pronunciation systems, as are those in the words *thirty* and *down* and those in the words *wood* and *tooth*. By contrast, the other vowels vary in the relationships within the four systems of figure 3-8, and the variation increases in the separate subareas included in the four systems (Kurath and McDavid 1961). In type III for Eastern New England, for instance, the vowel of *car* (and other words like it) is fronted so that it is close in pronunciation to the vowel of *bag* (this is the "Boston" pronunciation often imitated in the phrase "pahk the cah"). Eastern New England also shows a merger of two vowel sounds kept separate in types I and II, the vowels of *crop* and *law*. The vowel system of Western Pennsylvania also has merged these two vowel sounds, but does not have the (fronted) Boston vowel in *car*. The type II system (Metropolitan New York, the Upper South, and the Lower South) does not merge the vowels of *crop* and *law*, but those vowels are more retracted into the low-back vowel range. Metropolitan New York does not share one of the features strongly associated with Southern and South Midland pronunciation, namely, the "slow diphthong" that makes speakers from other regions hear the word *fire* as *far*. It is one of the "phonic and incidental features" that color the pronunciation of every subarea (Kurath and McDavid 1961).

## American regional dialects for the twentieth-first century

The ALAP researchers described regional American dialects as they existed in the middle of the twentieth century. We now consider what has happened to the regional patterns during the rapid technological and cultural change that has swept America along since World War II, and we consider future prospects for regional dialects.

A more recent treatment by Carver (1987) has mapped American vocabulary with reference to the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (*DARE*) for which field work was carried out in the 1960s and 1970s (Cassidy et al. 1985–). He found essentially the same dialect areas that Kurath and McDavid had found, although he used a different method to create his maps and preferred different names for some areas. He often noted that some of the words earlier selected for the mid-twentieth century ALAP isoglosses were rare at the time of the *DARE* field work, or no longer found at all. This does not mean that the earlier regional dialect areas had disappeared. Quite the opposite: since the later dialect areas are much the same as the earlier ones, the more recent lists of words from the different areas are successors of the earlier ones. The speakers of the regional dialects changed their habits, but the basic regional patterning of American speech remained in place.

An index of entries in the first two *DARE* volumes provides lists of the words for which all of the different regional labels were used (*An Index* 1993). For instance, there are 1,540 words labeled as "South" and 1,318 as "South Midland," although 851 of these words actually carried both labels (Metcalf 1997: 267). These counts give an indication of the extent to which words can be associated with American dialect regions. The figure for the label "Northern" is smaller (624), but still substantial. Hawaii had the most words (133), followed by Texas (125), California (123), Pennsylvania (113), and Louisiana (110); New York is also prominent if labels for New York City are added to those for the state (87 + 35 = 122) (Metcalf 1997: 273–74). It is not unreasonable to talk about the speech of a state, although state boundaries are political and not usually defined by isoglosses or other linguistic means. As the counts show, however, a smaller number of words associates with any state than with labels for dialect areas. From Kurath's earlier maps, it is evident that a state often has more than one major dialect region within its borders. Only 56 words in the first two volumes of *DARE* were associated with cities, and more than half of those were associated with New York City (Metcalf 1997). *DARE* evidence thus confirms the persistence of large American regional dialect patterns into the second half of the twentieth century, even if some words have become obsolete and others have emerged to take their place. *DARE* suggests that these large regional patterns may be more salient, at least according to word counts, than states or cities as ways to describe and recognize American dialect patterns.

Extensive work in urban areas, particularly in Philadelphia and New York City, has confirmed the vitality of regional dialects. William Labov and his associates found "increasing diversity" in the pronunciation of US English and sought to highlight

> the main finding of our research, one that violates the most commonsense expectation of how language works and is supposed to work. In spite of the intense exposure of the American population to a national media with a convergent network standard of pronunciation, sound change continues actively in all urban dialects that have been studied, so that the local accents of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago, and San Francisco are more different from each other than at any time in the past . . . Though the first findings dealt with sound change in Eastern cities, it is now clear that it is equally true of Northern, Western and Southern dialects. (Labov and Ash 1997: 508)

Three large patterns of sound change have been identified, and they are called the Northern Cities Shift, the Southern Shift, and Low Back Merger (Labov 1991). The term *sound change* refers to the fact that the pronunciation of both vowel and consonant sounds is not eternally fixed but may change over time. For discussion of regional dialects, such changes are important because they are not uniform for all speakers. Different changes occur within different groups of speakers. The term *shift* refers to the apparent tendency of English vowels to change not one at a time but according to larger characteristic patterns. The Low Back Merger is best characterized by the fact that the words *cot* and *caught*, and the names *Don* and *Dawn*, are homophones in the area of the merger, while people elsewhere pronounce them differently. One ongoing change of the Southern Shift is the seeming reversal (the facts are actually somewhat more complicated) of the pronunciation of what in the USA are traditionally called the *long e* (IPA [i])

Figure 3-9 *Urban dialect areas based on the acoustic analysis of the vowel systems of 240 Telsur informants*
Source *http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/NationalMap/NatMap1.html*

and *short i* (IPA [ɪ]) sounds. Among Southern Shift speakers, the name *Bill* is pronounced much like the name *Beale* would be pronounced in other parts of the country, and vice versa, and *steel mill* is pronounced close to what most people in the rest of the country would recognize as *still meal*. The Northern Cities Shift involves a sequence of changes so that each of the following words might be heard and interpreted as something else by speakers from outside the area: *Ann* as *Ian*, *bit* as *bet*, *bet* as *bat* or *but*, *lunch* as *launch*, *talk* as *tuck*, *locks* as *lax* (Labov 1991: 19).

The resulting patterns of sound change have specific geographic extension, as shown in figure 3-9 from the Atlas of North American English.

As Labov explains the map,

> A remarkable finding of [figure 3-9] is that the major phonological boundaries of the U.S. as determined by new and vigorous sound changes which arose in the twentieth century coincide with the major lexical boundaries based on vocabulary.



In other words, the Northern Cities Shift occurs in the region occupied by what Kurath had called the Northern dialect area. Like the ALAP data, the Atlas of North American English also describes subsidiary areas. Thus, Eastern New England and the Inland North correspond to areas that Kurath also suggested (Labov's North Central region is farther west than Kurath's surveys). Kurath's Midland dialect region is recapitulated in Labov's Midland and West, which is characterized by the Low Back Merger pattern. As figure 3-8 shows, Western Pennsylvania shows a merger of *crop* and *law*, and it is this merger that serves as the centerpiece of Labov's description of the western part of Kurath's Midland and Far West. (The Low Back Merger pattern also applies in Canada.) Finally, the region for the Southern Shift corresponds to the Coastal and Upper South areas identified in the mid-twentieth century, and the Southern Shift has urban extensions in Philadelphia and New York City (Labov 1991: 36–37). As figure 3-8 shows, Kurath and McDavid had previously associated the vowel pattern of New York City with that of the South.

Observation of ongoing sound change confirms the one constant we expect for all languages: they will continue to change as long as people speak them. We are perhaps surprised that changes in American English seem to be occurring *within* the dialect regions described on mid-century evidence, in regions that have their foundations in the history of American primary settlement patterns. American regional dialects show no signs of disappearing; they are simply showing natural internal changes in the habits of their speakers.

What should we think of Labov's surprise, probably shared by many readers of this chapter, that "intense exposure of the American population to a national media with a convergent network standard of pronunciation" has not broken down regional dialects? This paradox – the strong continued existence of regional dialects when most educated Americans think that dialect variation is fading – is the topic for another essay (Kretzschmar 1997), but it is possible to say here that American English has developed a national dialect for the usually well-educated participants in a national marketplace for goods, services, and jobs. The well-educated share a national speech pattern within their own social stratum, unlike earlier periods in the history of American English when they shared regional dialects with working-class and lower-middle-class speakers. The solution to the paradox of the rise of national speech habits and the continuing existence of regional ones as set forth by Labov is that regional dialects are not separate from the social factors that influence the language habits of speakers – which should not surprise us at all once we come to think about it.

## Suggestions for further reading and exploration

For information about the different regional surveys and for examples of complete lists of what people said in response to particular survey questions for the American Linguistic Atlas Project (ALAP), go to *http://www.us.english.uga.edu*.

The most recent handbook describing the methods used is Kretzschmar et al. (1993). For early summaries of findings, see Kurath (1949), Atwood (1953), McDavid (1958), and Kurath and McDavid (1961). For dialect developments toward the end of the twentieth century, see Carver (1987). One of the best informed and most entertaining writers on regional American English was Raven McDavid, some of whose essays have been republished in McDavid (1979; see especially "Postvocalic -r in South Carolina," "The Position of the Charleston Dialect," and "Sense and Nonsense about American Dialects") and McDavid (1980; see especially "New Directions in American Dialectology"). Other collections of articles that treat regional American variation include Glowka and Lance (1993), Frazer (1993), and Schneider (1996). Evidence about early regional variation may be found in Mathews (1931). A synthesis of ideas on colonial development of varieties is Kretzschmar (2002). For Southern American English, Pederson's monumental *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (1986–92) is complemented by Bernstein et al. (1997) and Johnson (1996). The *Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English* (2001) offers side-by-side American and British pronunciations, and its discussion of American English points out many differences in regional pronunciations. For lots of linguistic fun, browse in any volume of *DARE* (Cassidy and Hall 1985–2002) or visit the website for the Atlas of North American English at *http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas*.

## References


*An Index by Region, Usage, and Etymology to the* Dictionary of American Regional English, vols. I and II. 1993. *Publication of the American Dialect Society* 77.

Atwood, E. Bagby. 1953. *A Survey of Verb Forms in the Eastern United States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Bailey, Guy. 1997. "When Did Southern American English Begin?" In *Englishes Around the World: Studies in Honor of Manfred Görlach*. Vol. 1, ed. Edgar Schneider. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Pp. 255–76.

Bailey, Guy and Jan Tillery. 1996. "The Persistence of Southern American English," *Journal of English Linguistics* 24: 308–21.

Bernstein, Cynthia, Thomas Nunnally, and Robin Sabino, eds. 1997. *Language Variety in the South Revisited*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Burkette, Allison. 2001. "The Story of Chester Drawers," *American Speech* 76: 139–57.

Carver, Craig. 1987. *American Regional English: a Word Geography*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Cassidy, Frederic G. and Joan Houston Hall, eds. 1985–2002. *Dictionary of American Regional English*. Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press.

Frazer, Timothy, ed. 1993. *Heartland English*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Glowka, Wayne and Donald Lance, eds. 1993. *Language Variation in North American English*. New York: Modern Language Association.

Houck, Charles. 1969. "A Statistical and Computerized Methodology for Analyzing Dialect Materials." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa.

Johnson, Ellen. 1996. *Lexical Change and Variation in the Southeastern United States 1930–1990*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Kretzschmar, William A., Jr. 1992. "Isoglosses and Predictive Modeling," *American Speech* 67: 227–49.

1996a. "Quantitative Areal Analysis of Dialect Features," *Language Variation and Change* 8:13–39.

1996b. "Foundations of American English." In Schneider. Pp. 25–50.





1997. "American English for the Twenty-first Century." In *Englishes Around the World: Studies in Honor of Manfred Görlach*, vol. 1, ed. Edgar Schneider. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Pp. 307–23.

2002. "American English: Melting Pot or Mixing Bowl?" In *Of Dyuersitie and Change of Language: Essays Presented to Manfred Görlach on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, eds. Katja Lenz and Ruth Möhlig. Heidelberg: C. Winter. Pp. 224–39.

Kretzschmar, William A., Jr., Virginia G. McDavid, Theodore K. Lerud, and Ellen Johnson, eds. 1993. *Handbook of the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kurath, Hans. 1949. *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kurath, Hans and Raven I. McDavid, Jr. 1961. *The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. [rpt. 1982. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press].

Labov, William. 1991. "The Three Dialects of English." In *New Ways of Analyzing Sound Change*, ed. Penelope Eckert. Orlando: Academic Press. Pp. 1–44.

Labov, William and Sharon Ash. 1997. "Understanding Birmingham." In Bernstein, Nunnally, and Sabino, eds. Pp. 508–73.

Lee, Jay and William A. Kretzschmar, Jr. 1993. "Spatial Analysis of Linguistic Data with GIS Functions," *International Journal of Geographical Information Systems* 7: 541–60.

LePage, Robert and Andrée Tabouret-Keller. 1985. *Acts of Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marckwardt, Albert H. 1958. *American English*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mathews, Mitford. 1931. *The Beginnings of American English*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McDavid, Raven I., Jr. 1958. "The Dialects of American English." In W. Nelson Francis, *The Structure of American English*. New York: Ronald Press. Pp. 480–543.

1979. *Dialects in Culture*. Ed. William A. Kretzschmar, Jr., with the assistance of James McMillan, Lee Pederson, Roger Shuy, and Gerald Udell. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

1980. *Varieties of American English*. Ed. Anwar Dil. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

McDavid, Raven I., Jr. and Virginia G. McDavid. 1951. "The Relationship of the Speech of American Negroes to the Speech of Whites," *American Speech* 26: 3–17.

Metcalf, Allan. 1997. "The South in *DARE*." In Bernstein, Nunnally, and Sabino, eds. Pp. 266–76.

Miller, Michael. 1999. *Dynamics of a Sociolinguistic System: Plural Formation in Augusta, Georgia*. Eds. Ronald Butters and William A. Kretzschmar, Jr., *Journal of English Linguistics* 27, Number 3.

Montgomery, Michael. 1989. "Exploring the Roots of Appalachian English," *English World Wide* 10: 227–78.

1997. "Making Transatlantic Connections between Varieties of English: the Case of Plural Verbal -s," *Journal of English Linguistics* 25: 122–41.

Montgomery, Michael and Stephen Nagle. 1993. "Double Modals in Scotland and the Southern United States: Trans-Atlantic Inheritance or Independent Development?" *Folia Linguistica Historica* 14: 91–107.

*Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English*. 2001. Eds. Clive Upton, William A. Kretzschmar, Jr., and Rafal Konopka. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pederson, Lee. 1986–92. *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States*. 7 vols. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Schneider, Edgar, ed. 1996. *Focus on the USA*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Trudgill, Peter. 1986. *Dialects in Contact*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Turner, Lorenzo D. 1949. *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.