

How can folk linguistics contribute to investigations of L1 and L2 accents?

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Overview

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- 2 Using folk linguistics for investigations into L2 accent in Icelandic
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 - 2.3 Folk conceptualizations of L2 accent and correctness
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1 What is folk linguistics?

“[O]ne might also expect to find that speakers who consider their accents ‘regional nonstandards’ [...] will rank their home areas lower for correct speech than some other areas. On the other hand, since Giles and his associates found that there was a decided preference for the local area along affective dimensions (friendliness, honesty, and so on), one should find such a preference for the local area in a ranking task which asks where the most ‘pleasant’ variety is spoken.”
(Niedzielski & Preston 2003: 44-45)

1 What is folk linguistics?

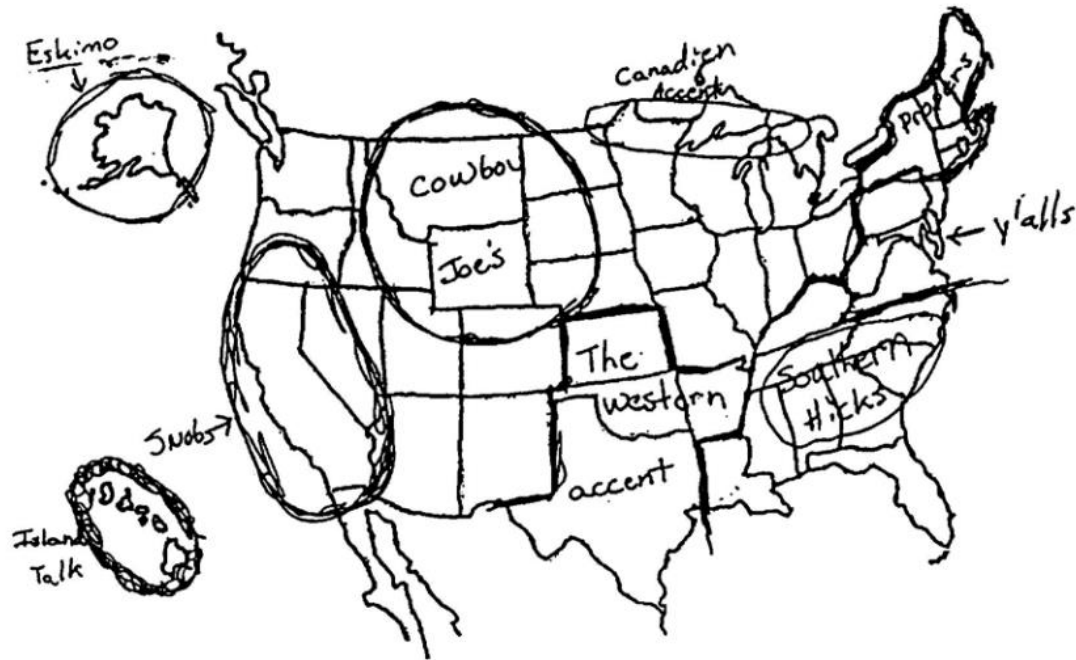


Figure 2.14 Michigan hand-drawn US dialect map

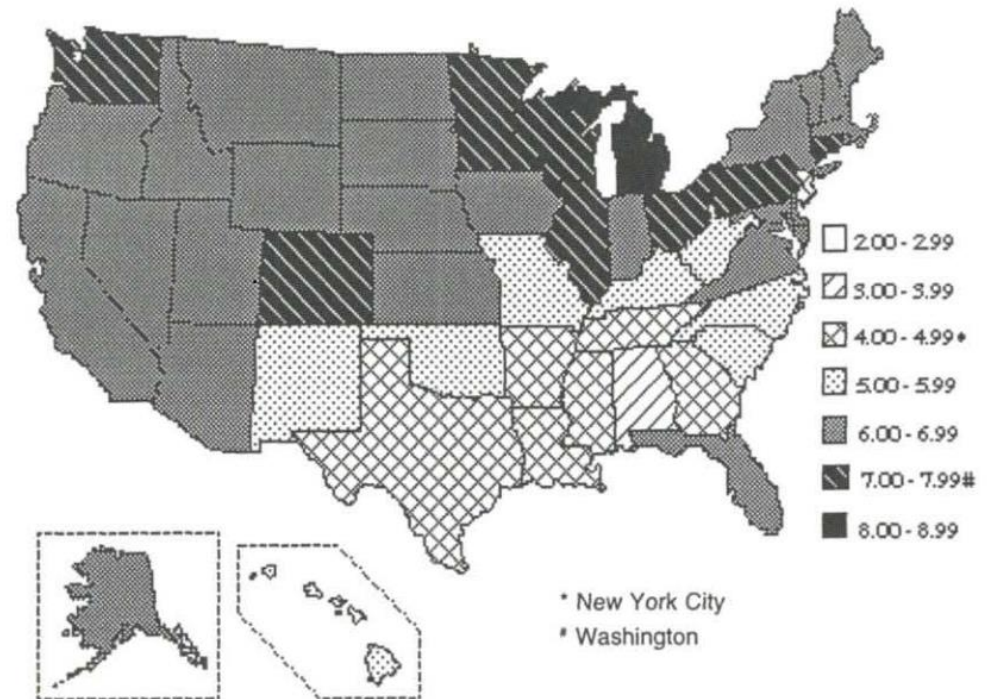


Figure 2.21 Mean scores of Michigan "correctness" ratings

1 What is folk linguistics?

“What is lacking in such settings is an account of what speakers of various regions (and classes, and sexes, and ethnic groups, and ages, and so on) believe. [F]olk linguistics seeks to discover the overt categories and definitions speakers have of linguistic matters.” (Niedzielski & Preston 2003: 44)

To get an idea of how linguistic facts are linked with geographical ones in the folk mind (Preston 1996, 1999, 2020, cf. also Bade 2023; Bijvoet & Fraurud 2015; Cramer 2016; Cornips 2018; Cukor-Avila et al. 2012; Hundt et al. 2010; Kristiansen 2004)

2 Using folk linguistics for investigations into L2 accent in Icelandic

Four of five methods from folk-linguistic research used and adapted for this study (Niedzielski & Preston 2003: 41ff.)

- 1 Voice-placing task
- 2 Degree-of-difference task
- 3 Pleasantness and correctness evaluations
- 4 Free elaboration
- (5 Map-drawing task)

2 Using folk linguistics for investigations into L2 accent in Icelandic

- Qualitative methods with quantitative reference for voice-placing
- Maps and folk themes provided by 32 L1 speakers participating in five focus-group discussions
- **Voice-placing strategies**
 - Voice-placing task based on verbal guises
 - Six verbal guises:
 - Five L2 speakers of Icelandic (from Denmark, Lithuania, the Philippines, Poland, and the US) and one L1 speaker
 - Text: short children's story
- Folk themes connected to the categories **degree of accent, pleasantness and correctness**
- Folk conceptualizations of L2 accent in Icelandic (**free elaboration**)

Example: world map marked by one participant



2.1 Voice-placing strategies

Vigdís: “I thought she was Polish.”

Sunna: “I thought so too.”

Kolfinna: “I also think that I’ve heard this before. I marked Poland and around there.”

Vigdís: “‘glúgga’ [kluk:a] and ‘obna’ [ɔpna]

Kolfinna: “Mmh, I thought I recognized that, which I didn’t do with the first two [i.e., the Lithuanian and American guises].”

Atli: “Yes.”

Vigdís: “There are a lot of Poles here in Iceland, who have learned Icelandic. They just speak exactly”

Sunna: “like this.”

Vigdís: “Yes, I found this to be very similar to them [...]. Of course, we think that it’s Poland because there are so many Poles here. And this accent is somewhat similar to it, their accent.”

2.1 Voice-placing strategies

Kári: “Well, I guessed Scandinavia. But I doubt that this was a Dane because I have known Danes who have lived here for 30-40 years and they can neither speak Danish nor Icelandic.”

Hugrún: “I thought Germany to begin with but then she said ‘glöð’, then I felt it to be Denmark so I wrote Denmark. She said something like ‘glö’ (imitates a Danish accent).”

2.1 Voice-placing strategies

Freyja: “No, I think that maybe a little noticeable with foreigners is exactly this, PP and LL and NN and some kind of blow [blástur]”

Steinþór: “It was also, she just let go.”

Hanna: “Confident [...]”

Dagbjört: “She was just full of confidence.”

5.2 Folk themes connected with pleasantness and correctness

Pleasantness and listener effort:

Margrét: “I found it to be no effort to listen to this one. I just found it very pleasant. More pleasant than, I didn’t need to think at all...”

Vigdís: “This wasn’t exactly unpleasant [‘ópægilegt’] but more, you know, one needed to concentrate.”

5.2 Folk themes connected with pleasantness and correctness

Pleasantness and **speaker effort**:

Sigurður: “I find this okay. I think that this shows an effort to use Icelandic, and that effort is just pretty successful. And that’s enough.”

5.3 Folk conceptualizations of L2 accent and correctness

Margrét: “If you say correct or incorrect, one heard of course that it was, uh, there are certain emphases, that we aren’t taught. [...]

Whether one wants to call it wrong or right, there are at least not the same emphases, how she pronounced ‘mjálmar’, she pronounced it differently from how we learned Icelandic.”

Kolfinna: “Yes. The question is: ‘Is the accent wrong?’ (‘Er hreimur rangur?’)”

Atli: “Yes, exactly.” [...]

Margrét: “Then, of course, this pronunciation was not like the one we learned. But that doesn’t mean that she did anything wrong, but it wasn’t the same.”

5.3 Folk conceptualizations of L2 accent

Dagur: “This is a bit of a matter of definition, what you’re asking. When you talk about correct Icelandic, like I mean, inflections and everything, that’s the big deal. Some, some accents, when pronunciation, that is, when inflections and everything are correct, the grammar, then it’s actually such a little detail. If someone has become so fluent that they just speak themselves, without having a sheet of paper, then they would be really good in Icelandic. Per se. The only thing left would be some deviation in pronunciation, which would be really great, in fact, for a foreigner who has learned Icelandic. [...] So if we are going to just focus, as I think we are doing here, just focus on their pronunciation, judging that on its own, then we are only talking about a small part of the overall experience compared to if she would speak freely. And if we’re going to judge that, even if half of it would be missing, then we are talking about some fifteen percent or, you know what I mean. [...] This is good Icelandic indeed. The big deal in Icelandic is of course all the inflections and cases and all that stuff.”

3 Concluding remarks

What speaker features are salient?

Where are those features placed?

What areas are salient?

Where is the core of a region?

Where is the greatest agreement on what the core of a region is?

Do folk maps overlap with the *de facto* distribution of the features?

What do the folk know about variation in L1 pronunciation?

What ideas and conceptualizations do the folk have of that variation?

What can the above tell us about folk knowledge?

What can the above tell us about the features' role in the current sociolinguistic situation.

What can the above tell us about linguistic change.