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Seattle to Spokane: Mapping Perceptions of English in Washington State

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Abstract

This research explores perceptions of linguistic variation in English in Washington state (WA). Respondents marked on a map of WA the places where they believe people's English sounds "different" and provided a label for that type of English. The analysis of the results used digital tools to create composite maps consisting of (1) respondents' spatial perceptions of English in WA, (2) spatial perceptions of English in WA according to different demographic groups, and (3) affective values associated with regions identified by respondents. The results suggest that Washingtonians perceive that urban areas and eastern WA are places where English is different. The results also demonstrate that when respondents are surveyed about variation within their own state rather than variation across the country, local types of organizational categories, such as an urban/rural dichotomy or belief in a regional standard, can emerge.

Keywords

American English; language varieties; perceptual dialectology; folk linguistics; language; attitudes; methodological approaches

While some descriptive detail about the English spoken in Washington state (hereafter WA) exists, our knowledge of English in WA and the Pacific Northwest (PNW) is certainly incomplete by comparison with what we know about other regions of the United States. The primary motivation for this study is to investigate the assumption of a lack of consistent linguistic patterning in the PNW (described below). Given that previous research on perceptions of language variation demonstrates that speakers are aware of sociolinguistic patterns, especially with regard to linguistic differences within their own language (Preston 1989, 2010; Rensink 1955/1999; Sibata 1971/1999; Niedzielski & Preston 2003), and that perceptual dialectology serves as a corollary to the description of the linguistic patterns in a variety, one way of answering questions about such patterns in WA is to obtain the perceptions of WA residents. That is, examining the patterns identified by nonlinguists may

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fruitfully guide research into the actual patterns of variation in speech. Thus, the following research questions were posed:

1. Where do Washingtonians perceive differences in English in WA?
2. What affective associations do they have with those differences?

This article focuses on the first research question while touching on the second in order to make some sense of the regions that were identified. To that end, the results of the study address the questions of how Washingtonians perceive spatial differentiation of English in the state and whether residents of different parts of the state perceive the same patterns of difference. Space does not permit a full discussion of the question of affective associations related to perceived differences, but I have examined this issue in other work (see Evans 2011). This study also investigates the implicit discourses about spatial variation in order to reveal the local (emic) spatial categories assigned to perceived variation in WA. In particular, the results demonstrate the importance of spatial scale. That is, investigating variation at the state level provides a more detailed and nuanced picture of variation than might appear when using a larger scale. This research also introduces methodological innovations to perceptual dialectology, using emerging digital tools that allow for a quantitative analysis of these qualitative data. The results highlight key dimensions of the linguistic landscape and point the way toward more detailed research questions for linguists interested in both perceptual dialectology and language variation.

Perceptual Dialectology

The study of nonlinguists' beliefs about language variation and its spatial distribution, known as perceptual dialectology, exposes respondents' sociocultural associations about the spatial distribution of variants that are salient to them. This provides an understanding of how they construct their "social worlds." Wassink and Dyer suggest, "if it is important for us to understand the meaning of variation in phonological forms for the speakers, then clearly we must understand how they construct their social worlds" (2004:13). Thus, the present study was carried out to ascertain what perceptions, including the underlying implicit associations, long-time residents of WA have of the English spoken there.

Research on lay perceptions of and attitudes to different varieties of English is a crucial component of the linguistic description and analysis of a language. As Niedzielski and Preston note, "overt folk notions of geographical variation, based on neither production nor responses to forms, provide a helpful corollary to both production and attitude studies" (2003:41). For example, perceptual dialectological data, by recording which linguistic variants speakers mention, can help the researcher identify which variants are socially salient. In addition, if speakers make affective (i.e., involving feelings, emotion, or mood) judgments about a variant, that data can also provide insight into the social meaning of that variant. As Jaworski and Coupland note, "the distribution of linguistic forms is underpinned by patterns of social evaluation" (2004:11). So while linguists can study features of speech production, in order to fully describe a particular language variety, the affective dimension of those features should be part of that description.

In perceptual dialectology, this affective dimension is directly related to the spatial dimension. Although space has always been a concern of sociolinguists and of dialect geographers before them, the importance of geographical space is now being explicitly considered as a relevant analytic category and important means for constructing and handling our social worlds (e.g., Eckert 2004; Johnstone & Kiesling 2008; Auer & Schmidt 2010; Lameli, Kehrein & Rabanus 2010). Johnstone (2004) proposes that instead of the historically objective categorization that is given to “place,” sociolinguists should treat it as a culturally constructed, emic category. Britain (2004) suggests that space is undertheorized in linguistics. He proposes that understanding space as an extralinguistic variable is important for the future of sociolinguistics and that “critical sensitivity to the socialized nature of human space(s) is required if we are to advance the discipline further” (2004:45).

As a socially constructed category, then, it seems appropriate to examine space when we consider sociolinguistic variation. This renewed interest in space with regard to language is timely. It arises at a time when technology provides new ways of investigating the intersection of linguistics and geography. A key component of perceptual dialectology research has been the collection of perceptions in the field by asking respondents to draw on maps presented by the researcher using a variety of prompts that elicit targeted lay perspectives on language varieties (e.g., best/worst English, most/least correct English). While it is possible to analyze these data without digital technology, the resulting visual inspection of the data by the researcher reflects a qualitative analysis of the salient regions. Useful though such analyses may be, quantitative techniques offer a valuable perspective and may reveal patterns that are otherwise difficult to discern. The quantitative analysis of several respondents’ lines drawn on a map, for example, may allow researchers to make stronger generalizations about respondents’ spatial beliefs. Nevertheless, it has been difficult to achieve such benefits. Preston and Howe (1987) were the first to use digital techniques for analysis, but few others followed. More recently, scholars such as Cramer (2010), Montgomery (2010), and Bounds (2010) have attempted a variety of methods for achieving a quantitative analysis of perceptual dialectological data.

In the present study, hand-drawn maps were digitally analyzed and compared using geographic information system (GIS) software (ArcGIS 10.0). This software allows the responses on maps to be combined into one map, thus aggregating all responses in a way that is not possible through a visual examination of the data. The resulting aggregated digital map can also be queried, providing the researcher with a variety of ways of mapping the data and thus revealing patterns that would be both difficult to see and hard to demonstrate using traditional analog techniques. For example, the researcher can create a map of responses associated with any category that has been coded, such as a respondent’s residence, gender, or qualitative categories that result from the content analysis of the labels. In sum, a digital analysis via ArcGIS provides a variety of maps derived from qualitative and quantitative aspects of the data. In this way, the data generated by digital techniques offer objective evidence of any congruence around subjective responses, illuminating common perceptions and discourses.

English in the Pacific Northwest

To provide a background against which the present data can be considered, this section briefly reviews what is known about English in WA and also the PNW as WA has often been described in terms of its membership in this region rather than as an individual state. The western region of the United States has been the subject of considerably fewer linguistic studies than other parts of the country. Carroll Reed (1952, 1956, 1961, 1967, 1983) collected linguistic atlas data on the English spoken in the PNW beginning in the 1950s. A total of thirty-nine records were made in WA, and Reed conceded that more data were needed (Reed 1983). Nevertheless, Reed (1952:186) briefly describes the settlement patterns of WA, noting that a large portion of settlers were from the “Middle West,” especially Missouri because of travel routes (e.g., railroads, highways). Settlers also came in large numbers from Iowa, southern Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio and, “as a result, the speech of southern Illinois and Iowa may be considered typical for most of the state of Washington” (Reed 1952:186). Reed (1961) provides a phonetic description of the English of the PNW, including an inventory of vowel phonemes.

More recently, the linguistic understanding of the West has been improved by research such as that conducted by Carver (1987) and Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006) in addition to research on specific western states such as California (e.g., Eckert 2008), Nevada (e.g., Fridland 2008), and Utah (e.g., Di Paolo 1992). Carver’s (1987:205) description of the West suggested that “Western speech is both extremely young and still undergoing the modifications and leveling processes of a region in social flux. But this in itself contrasts its speech with that of the rest of the country.” Isoglosses of lexical items from the *Dictionary of American Regional English* and settlement patterns lead Carver to suggest that there is a northwest region defined by a unique combination of dialect features comprising northern speech features that are complemented by southern and midland features. More recently, as part of their broader survey of North America, Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006: 284) examined the speech of this region drawing on an acoustic analysis of phone interviews with eleven speakers from the PNW (Idaho, Washington, and Oregon). They concluded that the western United States “lacks the high levels of homogeneity and consistency” that is found in other U.S. regions.

Very little perceptual dialectology research on the western United States has been conducted. Hartley (1999) examined perceptions of Oregonians, and Fought (2002) and Bucholtz et al. (2007) have carried out studies in California. No such work has been conducted in WA until the present research was undertaken.

In summary, the western United States has not received as much attention from dialectologists and sociolinguists as have other regions, and thus our understanding of the English spoken in the West is still emerging.

Method

The Map Survey Instrument

As described above, the map survey instrument draws on methodology from Preston and Howe (1987) and Preston (1981, 1989) and instructs respondents to draw on a map of WA as follows: “Draw a line around places where you think people’s English sounds different. Next, write down what you’d call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what’s different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).” Figures 1 to 4 offer examples of the map survey instrument.

Asking informants to describe what is “different” is a means for prompting respondents about linguistic variation and has several precedents. Surveying nonlinguists’ perceptions of linguistic similarity/difference emerged in perceptual dialectology in the twentieth century. Weijnen (1946/1999), Rensink (1955/1999), Grooters (1959/1999), and Sibata (1971/1999), among others, explored the “degree of difference” that respondents felt existed between their home regions and those nearby. Preston (1981) employed the notion of degree of difference as a means of inquiry about lay perceptions of language variation. Thus, the instruction to draw lines around where respondents believe English “sounds different” follows from that research and encourages respondents to identify dialect boundaries without prompting respondents with the term “dialect,” a term that has been found to be confusing and loaded for nonlinguists (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998; Niedzielski & Preston 2003). There may be some ambiguity about how respondents interpret “different” in a task like the map instrument, but Sibata (1971/1999) suggests that the instinctive response to identifying language “difference” may be to identify features different from one’s own dialect. Because the aim of the present research is to inquire about lay respondents’ awareness of linguistic differentiation in the region, the term “different” is the most suitable neutral nontechnical term for the prompt. Some labels given by the respondents can serve to disambiguate how the notion of difference was understood and applied and provide some clarification as to how the respondent has understood the directions in the task. For example, some respondents indicated they were describing “others” through the use of third person pronouns in comments such as “they use different styles of speaking,” “Because they use slang,” “they talk like cowboys or country folk,” and “put a ‘r’ in their words Ex. Warshington.”

The map survey instrument used here narrows the geographical focus to the residents’ home state, following the lead of recent perceptual dialectology research that used only regional or single-state maps (e.g., Benson 2003; Bucholtz et al. 2007; Cramer 2010). Those studies showed that respondents provided more localized and detailed evaluations of the regions that in some cases contrasted with evaluations suggested by previous national-scale approaches. Thus, the goal of exploring what Washingtonians think about WA English is better served by a task that presents a state rather than national map. The WA map on the survey instrument is a simplified map and presents respondents with major cities and highways only.¹ In designing the instrument, the goal was to provide enough information to

¹In the maps presented here, the location of the Cascades is roughly indicated (and is not geographically accurate) in order to serve as a reference point for readers. These mountains were not indicated for respondents on the map survey instrument.

help orient respondents without introducing bias into the responses, following the suggestions of Lameli, Purschke, and Kehrein (2008).

Responses to the map survey instrument varied in type and amount of commentary and types of “lines” drawn on them. Figures 1 to 4 illustrate this variety. Figure 1, a map completed by a forty-four-year-old female respondent from Seattle, demonstrates one prominent type of response where cities are circled and brief labels are written near them. This respondent has circled eight cities. Figure 1 also demonstrates that the labels given range from cultural (e.g., “fishing town,” “sounds like farmers”) to linguistic (e.g., “ain’t”) to uninterpretable (“yoo”). Figure 2 shows another common type of response, which was to draw a single line dividing the state. This respondent, a nineteen-year-old male from Olympia, divided the state into two parts and gave a label for each region: “southern accent” for the east and “regular” for the west. Figure 3, a map from a twenty-one-year-old male from Omak (northeastern WA), demonstrates another type of response in which respondents circled regions (in this case, four) rather than cities. Each of the regions were labeled (“Canadian kinda,” “Hick talk,” “Ebonics,” and “redneck”). Other respondents, such as a nineteen-year-old female from Federal Way (about 20 miles south of Seattle), circled regions but gave them no labels (see Figure 4), although the majority of respondents labeled all or most of the regions they drew.² These examples also demonstrate how some responses provided a great deal of detail (Figures 1 and 3) while others did not (Figures 2 and 4). Regions that aren’t delineated by lines or circles and are unlabeled such as the area between the two circles in Figure 4 have been referred to as “nowhere troughs” by Preston (1996). It is difficult to interpret what that lack of marking might mean, and for that reason these areas are not analyzed.

Sampling

A total of 229 map surveys were collected from residents in WA. A minimal amount of demographic information was collected from the respondents in order to ensure anonymity and keep the task brief. Respondents were solicited by local contacts of the researcher and the majority of the maps were distributed at institutions of higher education and completed by students during classes they were taking. The average age of the sample was 26.4. In all, 125 respondents were females, and 104 were males. Long-term residents were sought, and data from other residents were not used. “Long-term residence” was defined as someone who had resided in WA at least half of their life. This was in order to not exclude respondents who had not been born in WA but had lived there for a very long time. Therefore long-term residence uses a life span criterion rather than requiring a particular number of years in the state.

The sample was also coded by region to distinguish eastern and western areas, which were defined by the Cascade mountain range because of its perceived importance as a geographic divide in the state (see below). In all, 128 respondents hailed from the eastern region and 101 from the western region.

²A total of twenty-two respondents drew regions on their map but did not label any of them.

Analysis Procedures

As described above, respondents' hand-drawn maps were analyzed and compared using ArcGIS 10.0 GIS software. This software allowed the areas identified on individual maps to be quantitatively aggregated and queried, permitting detailed analysis of the spatial information captured by the hand-drawn map data. This means that all types of responses such as those demonstrated in Figures 1 to 4 are aggregated to provide a generalized impression of the responses. As such, individual styles of marking on the map (as described above) are necessarily overlooked. There are two types of data created by this method, although they are, of course, interrelated. First, there are spatial associations with difference indicated by the lines drawn on the maps by the respondents. These data respond to research question 1 (Where do Washingtonians perceive differences in English in WA?). Second, the qualitative labels given for the regions that respondents identified, including maps generated from them, compose a different set of data and respond to research question 2 (What associations do they have with those differences?).

Map Analysis Procedure

Each map was scanned and saved as a digital image file so that it could be read by ArcGIS. One-by-one, the hand-drawn shapes on each map were "traced" using a procedure known as "heads-up" or "on-screen" digitizing, resulting in a single GIS polygon "feature" for each shape that a respondent drew on their map.³ Demographic information about the respondent and the labels they provided for each shape were attributed to each polygon. All of these polygon "features" were combined into a single spatial data set, which was then used to generate composite maps consisting of features from all the respondents. This procedure translates individual maps into a composite representation showing the intersections among respondents' ideas of differentiation in the state. The maps were treated to a process of visual enhancement. The final composite maps were "smoothed" for display purposes using a resampling technique known as "bilinear interpolation" in order to remove excessive detail in original composite map resulting from the nature of over four hundred overlapping polygons. The maps were then simplified into classified maps to allow the results to be visualized more clearly. The class breaks are based on maximizing map usability while taking into account the data distribution for each mapped variable. They reflect a modified equal interval approach, using equally ranged classes and logical break values for all but the upper and lower classes/end points of the classification scheme (cf. Slocum, McMaster, Kessler & Howard 2005:60, 68). The resulting composite maps show the overlap of the polygons from the hand-drawn originals as a percentage based on the number of respondents who marked an area as different. Of the 229 total maps, 178 were analyzed in this way. The 51 maps that had no regions identified on them consisted of 20 maps without any comments or regions identified on them and 31 maps with comments written on the map without any regions identified. These maps are discussed elsewhere (Evans 2011, in press). Of those 178 maps with regions, a total of 463 regions or GIS polygon features were recorded. As will become clear during the analysis of results below, this digitized analysis procedure provides

³Interested readers may consult Congalton and Green (1992) for a brief introduction to GIS procedures.

a quantitative analysis whose sophistication cannot be matched by a visual inspection of the data.

Label Analysis Procedure

A content analysis (Bauer 2002) was performed on the labels written on the maps. The majority of the labels ($n = 336/463$) were associated with a polygon drawn on the map. Rather than using predetermined categories, the analysis procedure draws on Garrett, Williams, and Evans (2005) and considers the content of each label in order to group similar labels and find emerging categories. Each category in a label was counted as a single item; that is, if a respondent wrote down more than one word or phrase that represented different categories, each one was counted as a separate answer. So a label for a single polygon such as “Mostly newscaster, Spanglish” resulted in two categories associated with that polygon: “standard” and “Spanish.” While this method of analysis of keywords does allow for some respondents’ opinions to be overrepresented (e.g., one respondent gives more labels than others), it prevents having to choose among a single respondent’s answers. The content analysis resulted in twenty categories. Some of the categories contain only a few labels because they are not similar enough to be combined with other categories. The six largest categories of labels (shown in Table 1) are included in this discussion in order to demonstrate the most frequent responses. Some examples of the labels and metalinguistic commentary will also be discussed to illuminate the results discussed below (for other examples, see Evans 2011, in press).

Results

In this section the composite map from all the respondents is considered in order to arrive at a general picture of Washingtonians’ perceptions. This general picture is complemented by a discussion of the results broken down by region to compare responses from eastern and western Washingtonians. Last, metalinguistic commentary is highlighted in order to illuminate another important feature of these data: evidence of linguistic security on the part of Washingtonians, even in regions that seem to be stigmatized.

All Responses

Figure 5 is a composite map of all 178 hand-drawn maps. This map indicates the overlap of the areas identified by all respondents as places where they “think people’s English sounds different.” The darkest areas indicate where the most overlap occurs, while the lightest areas indicate where the least overlap occurs. As shown in the map legend, the overlap is presented as the percentage of the 178 respondents who identified an area. For example, the darkest locations on the map represent the overlap of areas identified by at least 40 percent of the respondents. For all maps, breaks between classes (distinguished by shading on the map) were selected as groupings of values that maximized map interpretability, using equally ranged classes and manually selecting logical class break values based on the data distribution.⁴ Figure 5 represents the outlines drawn by respondents but not the labels they

⁴Because the choice of values for class ranges can change the groupings visualized on the composite maps, caution must be used when interpreting boundaries between classes as hard divisions between high and low response rates. Thus, these maps are intended to convey general trends in regions of high and low response rates.

assigned. This map therefore provides a composite picture of the respondents' spatial perception of difference in the state.

In Figure 5, the most prominent feature is the apparent salience of urban areas. That is, the major urban areas of WA are the places that were most frequently identified by respondents on their hand-drawn maps. Some of the urban areas with a high frequency of overlap are, in fact, some of the larger cities in WA such as Spokane (population 207,000, the second largest city in WA) and Yakima (population 85,000).⁵ Walla Walla (population 38,000) was slightly less salient than the Tri-Cities (Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick, total population 173,000) or Pullman (population 30,000). It is not the case, however, that salience is strictly tied to city size. For example, in the northwestern portion of the map, Bellingham (population 77,550) was identified by more respondents than was Vancouver (population 165,000).

Urban areas may be salient to respondents because they view the city as a place that brings many people together, therefore resulting in diversity that makes the city different from the surrounding area. This notion is suggested by qualitative labels about "variety" (Table 1) such as "ethnic groups diverse" or "blended from different cultures" that were largely associated with Seattle, the largest city in WA. Urban areas are also regions with which respondents associate "gangsta" and "slang" language (although "slang" is also attributed to some more rural regions; Table 1). Some respondents also perceive urban areas, especially Seattle, as places where people have high levels of education and gave labels such as "know-it-all" and "more educated" (Table 1), most likely because those urban areas identified with those labels are the locations of universities (e.g., Seattle, Spokane, Pullman).

Although an urban/rural distinction may seem like an obvious one, a strong urban/rural oppositional dichotomy has not emerged in many perceptual dialect studies even in conversational data (Niedzielski & Preston 2003:121).⁶ The finding in these data of a strong urban/rural distinction therefore merits some discussion. It seems that the scale of the map instrument may be the reason this distinction is salient here but has not shown up in previous studies. As described above, previous perceptual dialectology research on the United States has often been concerned with speakers' evaluations of language across the entire country, and North/South distinctions tend to be the strongest category on which speakers divide up U.S. English (Niedzielski & Preston 2003). However, Bucholtz et al. (2007:345) found in their perceptual dialect study of California that rural labels like "hick" and "farmer talk" were the most common (17.9 percent) social labels attributed to speech varieties by Californian raters in spite of the fact that rural residents have not appeared as a salient element of the California linguistic landscape to non-Californian raters in other studies. In addition, Fridland and Bartlett (2006), reporting on ratings of U.S. English by speakers in Memphis, Tennessee, found that while Memphians rated their region (the U.S. South) as less correct than other U.S. regions, they rated their own state as more correct and pleasant than their more rural neighboring states (e.g., Mississippi, Arkansas). Fridland and Bartlett (2006) suggest that Memphians downgraded their rural neighbors and upgraded themselves

⁵Population data are from the WA State Office of Financial Management (2010a).

⁶However, see Daily-O'Cain (1999) and Kuiper (1999) for urban/rural distinctions in European contexts.

because of Memphis's position in the region as an urban center. Thus, there is a self-perceived higher status associated with urban centers. The present results and the above examples suggest that when respondents are surveyed about variation within their own state or region rather than variation across the country, other kinds of more localized organizational categories, such as an urban/rural distinction, can emerge.

The second most notable pattern with regard to overall perceived spatial distinctiveness in Figure 5 is an east/west distinction. This distinction is demonstrated by the large region of eastern WA, the area east of the Cascades that was marked by 29 to 34 percent of respondents. In the region west of the Cascades, a smaller area concentrated around Seattle and the Interstate 5 corridor is the focus of attention for 29 to 34 percent of respondents. It is also notable that the area of the western coast of WA was identified by very few respondents, suggesting that the Pacific coast of WA is unremarkable with regard to differences in English spoken there.

The likely reason that the eastern part of WA is salient to Washingtonians relates to an important aspect of WA cultural geography. There is a perceived cultural divide that separates the eastern and western parts of the state along the geographic divide of the Cascades. This divide is reflected, for example, in maps such as Figure 5, which illustrates the common tendency for respondents to indicate eastern and western parts of the state and leave the area of the Cascades empty, although it was not a feature on the map survey instrument (see also Figure 2 for an example from a single respondent). Washingtonians refer to this divide as the "Cascade Curtain." The general acknowledgment of the existence of the Cascade Curtain is exemplified by a four-part series titled "Behind the Cascade Curtain" that was presented in August 2011 by a Seattle public radio station (<http://www2.kuow.org/specials/cascade-curtain.php>). The Cascade Curtain represents a geographic and political divide between "west-side liberals" and "east-side Republicans" resulting from the differing population distribution and topography in the two sides of the state. The eastern region of WA encompasses counties that have a history of agriculture, and they are the top producers of crop and livestock products (Washington State Department of Agriculture 2007). There are a few well-known annual rodeos in this region as well (e.g., in the towns of Ellensburg and Omak). This region also has a much lower population density than western WA (Washington State Office of Financial Management 2010b). Thus a large part of the eastern region may be salient to Washingtonians because of its perceived rural, agricultural, and "cowboy" culture.

In fact, in the present study, eastern WA was frequently labeled as "country" or "hick," and this notion composed the largest category of labels given by the respondents (Table 1). Here, again, the ramifications of the scale of the map are seen in the distinctions made by residents about their own speech that are not present in national surveys. That is, in previous studies where respondents compared states to each other (e.g. Hartley 1999; Niedzielski & Preston 2003; Fridland & Bartlett 2006), WA received positive scores on pleasantness and correctness ratings, suggesting the east/west distinction that exists within WA is not visible to nonlocals (and very likely wouldn't be highlighted by locals either) at a national scale of inquiry.

In summary, the composite map of all the respondents' responses suggests urban areas statewide and a large portion of eastern WA are places where the respondents think "people sound different." In addition, the salience of an urban/rural distinction, a distinction not frequently found in national perceptual dialect map surveys, emerges here enabled by the smaller scale of inquiry.

Responses by Region

Because of the cultural and physical divide of the so-called Cascade Curtain, it is fruitful to explore whether respondents from either side of WA might have differing patterns of spatial perceptions of the state. Figures 6 and 7 show the results of responses grouped as eastern or western residents according to the location of the hometown of respondents. Figure 6 shows a map of the areas identified by respondents from eastern WA ($n = 103$). There are three features in Figure 6 that are especially notable. First, a relatively high percentage of these respondents identified urban areas. For example, Seattle, Tacoma, Wenatchee, and Yakima were identified by at least 31 percent of the eastern respondents. Second, the area covering a very large portion east of the Cascades was identified by 16 to 30 percent of the eastern respondents. This suggests that eastern WA is perceived as different from western WA by several of these eastern Washingtonians. Third, 16 to 30 percent of eastern respondents also marked the area of western WA along the Interstate 5 corridor while excluding the Pacific coastline (except for the city of Aberdeen). This suggests a tendency among eastern Washingtonians to perceive both eastern and western WA as different, possibly reflecting the cultural divide of the Cascade Curtain.

With regard to Figure 7, there are also three notable features. First, western respondents ($n = 75$) identified a large portion of the entire state. This is indicated by the fact that nearly the entire state contains areas that were identified by at least 31 percent of the western respondents. Second, at least 41 percent of westerners identified most of the eastern half of the state. This same percentage of respondents identified only a small area in western WA, suggesting that they perceive a large part of eastern WA as different by comparison to their own region where they marked only urban areas as different. Third, in addition to those in their own region, western Washingtonians marked high percentages of urban areas in other parts of the state as different.

In summary, eastern and western WA respondents agree on many urban areas as places where people speak differently. They also agree that eastern WA is a place where people speak differently but, interestingly, they vary in the percentage of respondents who identified that area. A smaller percentage of eastern Washingtonians (16–30 percent) indicated the region of eastern WA than western Washingtonians (41–45 percent). This may suggest that eastern Washingtonians do not view their own region as very different, or do not view it as different as western Washingtonians do. As described above, the Cascade Curtain phenomenon is likely driving this perception of difference for all Washingtonians. Metalinguistic commentary (described below) provides some insight on these eastern and western residents' perceptions.

Metalinguistic Comments

Close examination of metalinguistic comments can reveal specific linguistic patterns, stereotypes, and attitudes that speakers have toward the speech of a particular region (Preston 2004). In terms of affective judgments, metalinguistic comments in the present results point to a degree of linguistic security on the part of these speakers.

Preston has argued that, when nonlinguists are asked about difference, “the primary consideration is correctness” (1989:71). The preoccupation with correctness relies on an assumption that there is a correct way and an incorrect way to use language, a common ideology about language (Wolfram 1998; Milroy & Milroy 1999). For most U.S. speakers, the “correct way” or “standard” is essentially a variety that is devoid of stigmatized features (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998:12; Lippi-Green 2012:67). The result is that even speakers who use a variety that contains “regionalisms” may believe themselves to be speakers of standard English because they are unaware of those features (or their distinctiveness) in their own speech. For example, Niedzielski and Preston (2003:98) describe the assertions by Michigan respondents of their “newscaster,” or standard, speech in spite of the linguistic evidence that they are speakers of Inland North English (a variety undergoing a major sound change in progress in the United States) and possess features that are noticeably different for speakers from outside the region.

As noted above, linguists haven’t identified a large number of distinguishing features or salient linguistic stereotypes or regionalisms in the PNW. This lack of distinguishing features (even if this is only a perceived lack) may mean that a variety is considered to be “standard,” thus resulting in a certain degree of linguistic security (Labov 1966; Trudgill 1972). In fact, a few respondents from both eastern and western WA labeled their own variety as “normal.” Given that respondents in western WA indicated larger regions in the east as different (Figure 7), it isn’t too surprising to find labels of “normal,” or standardness, attributed to western WA by western residents. For example, an eighteen-year-old male from Seattle labeled the whole of western WA as “people that talk normally and pronounce things properly.” Similar labels were given by other western residents such as “regular” (Figure 2) and “normal English” (a nineteen-year-old female from Seattle).

It is interesting, however, to note that linguistic security is also suggested among eastern WA speakers in spite of the salience of the perceived difference of that region (as seen in Figure 5) and also the pattern in these data for that region to be labeled as “country” or “southern” by many respondents from both regions. These are labels that often correlate with negative status for a language variety in the United States (Niedzielski & Preston 2003; but see Hall-Lew & Stephens 2012 for other associations). As described above, Figure 6 suggests that eastern WA residents, while acknowledging an east/west divide, indicated difference in their own region with slightly lower frequency than they did for western WA (focused on the Seattle area). Furthermore, metalinguistic comments point to a perception of standard English in the west. For example, a female respondent from central WA indicated that her own region is “mostly newscaster” and labeled a large region surrounding Seattle as “Most speak like newscasters (like in central [WA]).” A few other respondents from eastern WA indicated positive evaluation of their own variety such as “normal” (twenty-three-year-old female from eastern WA). An eighteen-year-old male from central WA, shown in Figure

8, labeled the middle section of eastern WA extending to Spokane as “normal English.” A nineteen-year-old-male from Wenatchee labeled his own town and Yakima (to the south) as “standard.” Similar results were reported by Bucholtz et al. (2007:343) in their perceptual dialect study of California. They found that although Northern California was a region that was associated with rural speakers, it was most frequently labeled as “normal.” However, those respondents who labeled Northern California as “normal” were not the same respondents who labeled it as “rural.”

The appearance of linguistic security in a region that is perceived to be different and where this difference is stigmatized, especially by many western respondents (see Figure 7), suggests the possibility of a “regional standard.” That is to say, there is a variety to which locals (eastern Washingtonians) conform and which they perceive to be correct, unaware that the variety is perceived by outsiders (western Washingtonians) as different. Figure 9 demonstrates another example of a central WA resident who notes that the English in his own area is “Just right,” suggesting a degree of linguistic security. The other regions he circles are labeled as “know it alls” (western WA), “Trying to [*sic*] hard” (far eastern WA), or “Informal” (southeastern WA). At the same time, “Just right” may, in fact, carry a hint of linguistic insecurity when considered in conjunction with the label “know it alls” given for westerners. That is, there is a suggestion of education in “know it alls” and while “Just right” is positive, it is not as strong as “normal” or “standard.” This seemingly conflicted type of characterization was also found by Preston (1989) and Hartley (2005) in ratings for maligned dialect areas (New York City and Boston, respectively), with assignment of both positive and negative ratings for solidarity (e.g., friendliness, likeability, honesty) and status (e.g., education, membership in upper classes, intelligence) characteristics. They suggest that this conflict of judgments is due to competing stereotypes of those two cities (e.g., cosmopolitan but crime-ridden). This central WA speaker’s response demonstrates this sort of complexity of linguistic security/insecurity found in low-status dialect areas.

Hartley suggests, “it may be that the traditional categories of linguistic security/insecurity do not apply in the same way in western states, where a multiplicity and therefore awareness of distinctive dialects is not as prevalent as in eastern and southern states” (1999:323). That is, the typical patterns of perceptual attributes regarding linguistic security/insecurity (Niedzielski & Preston 2003) may not be found in western states due to an incipient development of linguistic stereotypes resulting from its more recent settlement history (by comparison to the eastern United States). In more general terms, it appears that some categories are salient at a local scale while being erased at the national scale. This is arguably the case with the urban/rural dichotomy described above. The need for continued inquiry about WA and other PNW state residents’ perceptions of the correctness of English and linguistic security/insecurity is clearly indicated by these comments.

Conclusion

The composite maps described above demonstrate that Washingtonians clearly perceive spatial differentiation in the English spoken in the state. This assertion is supported by three major patterns of differentiation that appear in the results. First, Washingtonians reported a perception of difference in urban areas, a perception that seems to stem from a belief that

urban areas are places that are full of divergent cultures but also educated elites. Second, Washingtonians also noted difference in the majority of eastern WA, a region of WA understood as exemplifying rural and farming lifestyles and labeled as “country.” Third, metalinguistic commentary suggests some linguistic security on the part of Washingtonians, even in eastern WA, a region that was consistently associated with negative comments such as “hick” thus hinting at a perception of a regional standard in eastern WA. These findings indicate a clear need for further research on the production and perception of English in WA in order to further understand Washingtonians’ perceptions of urban/rural speech, country speech in eastern WA, and the complexity of linguistic security there.

These results also demonstrate the value in using a narrower spatial reference point (e.g., region, state) in perceptual dialectology surveys. The salience of an urban/rural dichotomy and the perception of eastern WA as “country” may not have become visible if a national map had been presented to respondents. In other words, when respondents are surveyed about variation within their own state or region rather than variation across the country, other kinds of organizational categories that are important locally but unknown nationally, such as “hick,” “gangsta,” or “just right,” emerge. This in turn helps us understand how groups construe spatial differences by pursuing an emic definition of those categories, as recommended by Johnstone (2004). Namely, by allowing the spatial and descriptive distinctions to emerge from the data and exploring the implicit associations connected to those distinctions through the respondents’ own labels, we arrive at a richer understanding of respondents’ conception of their social worlds.

The present study has also shown that the incorporation of digital techniques into the analysis of perceptual dialect maps can offer a quantitative means for aggregating hand-drawn maps, allowing for an objective account of subjective data. This approach to perceptual data allows us to investigate and generate new hypotheses about language and space.

Research investigating speakers’ perceptions of language variation can provide a better understanding of research on production and contribute to the analysis of language. It is argued here that perceptual dialectology research is essential in order to have a better understanding of English in WA and language variation in general.

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Biography

Betsy E. Evans is an associate professor of linguistics in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Washington. Her research interests focus on the attitudes and perceptions of language variation and the perceptions of spatial distribution of variation in language.

Figure 1.
 Hand-drawn map by a forty-four-year-old female respondent from Seattle.

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).

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Figure 2.
Hand-drawn map by a nineteen-year-old male respondent from Olympia.

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).

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Figure 3.
Hand-drawn map by a twenty-one-year-old male from Omak.

Washington Residents' Perceptions of Where People Speak Differently

All Respondents

Figure 5.
Composite map of all responses.

Washington Residents' Perceptions of Where People Speak Differently Eastern Respondents

Evans 2011 <http://depts.washington.edu/folkling/>

Figure 6.
Results from eastern respondents.

Figure 7.
Results from western respondents.

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).

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Figure 8.

Hand-drawn map by an eighteen-year-old male respondent from East Wenatchee.

2. Please draw a line around places where you think people's English sounds different.
3. Next, write down what you'd call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what's different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?).

Figure 9.
Hand-drawn map by a twenty-year-old male respondent from Central WA.

Table 1

Six Largest Categories of Labels Associated with Areas Marked on Maps.

Category	Number of labels (<i>N</i> = 336)	Examples
Country	86 (25%)	“rednecks,” “farmers,” “hick”
Spanish	39 (12%)	“Spanglish,” “spanish influence,” “Mexenglish”
Pronunciation	28 (8%)	“warshington,” “word pronunciation,” “Different pronunciation slight accent”
Slang	25 (7%)	“a lot of slang,” “more slang,” “hella slang”
Canadian	19 (6%)	“Canadian,” “Canadian influence,” “Lil’ Canada”
Gangster	15 (3%)	“Ghetto,” “gangsta,” “lots of ‘ghetto’ slang + gang talk”