



FULBRIGHT FINLAND
FOUNDATION

American VOICES: A Brief Outline of Accents Across the United States

October 6, 2023

American Voices Seminar, University of Turku, Finland

Presenters: Anezka Boyle, Jim Hawdon, Xenabeth Lazaro, John Barton

Introduction

- The United States is thought of as an English speaking country, specifically “American English.”
- But, there is no official language in the U.S. English is the “de facto” official language as approximately 91% of U.S. residents speak fluent English.
- You’re not far behind us: Approximately 70% of Finnish residents are fluent English speakers!

Introduction

- Despite English being the dominant language, we should recognize that the United States is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world.
 - There are over 350 languages spoken in the U.S.
 - Only 78.5% of people in the U.S. speak English at home.
 - Tremendous variation. For example, over 41 million people (13%) speak Spanish and 3.5% (1%) speak Chinese.
 - There are over 175 indigenous languages still spoken today.

Introduction

This is due to our size and heterogeneity because language is all about mobility and inter-group interaction.

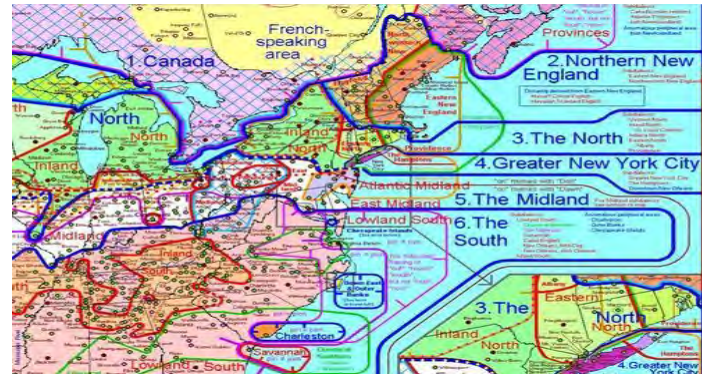
U.S. was colonized by several European powers and people from all over the globe have immigrated there, each bringing their version of their language.

But the U.S. is huge. It is 96.6% the size of Europe, and just as Europe has linguistic variation based on historical patterns of interaction, so does the U.S.



Accents in the United States

- So, while 91% of Americans speak English, we do not all speak the *same English*.
- Linguists recognize over 30 major dialects in the United States, but there is tremendous variation even within these dialects.





[a:]

FLY

VOWEL:[æ]

/t/ /d/

BOSTON

NEW YORK

THE SOUTH

AMERICAN ACCENTS

PART ONE

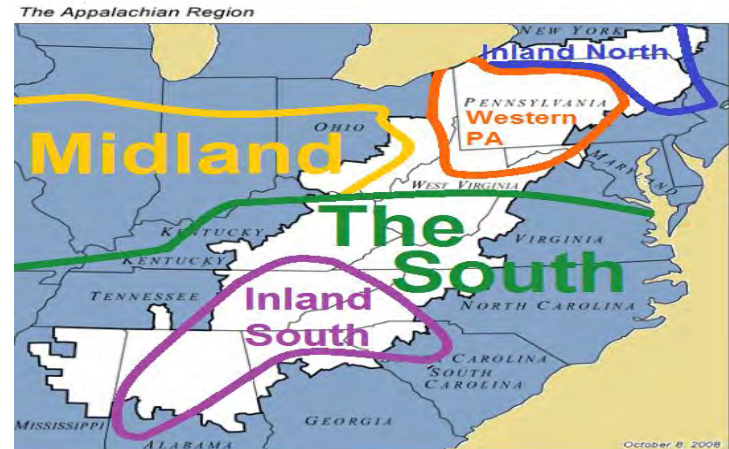
WIRED

Just a few accents found in the U.S.

- We obviously cannot talk about all of the accents in the U.S. or even the major ones. Not only do we lack the time, but we are not linguists nor have we experiences with many of the accents.
- So, we want to quickly focus on our own.

Pittsburghese

- Found in western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, northern West Virginia, and far western Maryland and is traced to Scots-Irish, Pennsylvania Dutch, and Croatian settlers.
- Gawn = Going; Jeet = Did you eat; Crik = Creek; Dahntahn = Downtown; Stillers = Steelers.
- “Jeet yet? Get out of the crik; the car needs washed, and then we’re gawn dahntahn to see da Stillers.”
- We also have our own words:
 - Yinz, Yinzers, Yinzers
 - Redd up
 - Nebby
 - Gumband
 - Dippy
 - Slippy
 - Sweeper
 - Grinnie





SoCal English



Origins + Stereotypes

California is the biggest state by population, BUT if you asked someone what the Californian accent is they would struggle to define it

Valley girl & Surfer caricatures

Gold Rush and Dust Bowl migration

Modern amalgamation



Southern California Accent Diversity

Socioeconomic and Sociolinguistic Variation

“California English” really only refers to white English speakers in California, usually from upper-middle class background

Large Mexican-American population and African American population leads to Chicano English and African American Vernacular English → these do not fall under the umbrella of ‘California English’ because they are established linguistic communities

→ But because they don’t exist in vacuums, all of these accents regularly influence each other.

Distinct SoCal Linguistic Elements

1. *Vowel shift*

- The vowel in, for instance, “dude” moves forward in the mouth produces class Californian “duuuuude” pronunciation

2. *Quotative “like”*

- “He was like, ‘How are you?’ And I’m like, ‘Good, you?’

3. *Discourse marker “like”*

- “I’m, like, totally about to blow chunks.”
- What is the difference in the uses of “like” in these two sentences: :
“It was like 8 feet deep” and “I think that, like, it is entertaining.”

4. *Vocal Fry*

- “low, creaky vibrations” or a “guttural vibration”.

Classic Californian Slang/Miscellaneous



To Bail - to leave

Amped up - excited

Gnarly - extreme, dangerous

Dude - individual, typically male

Hella - very

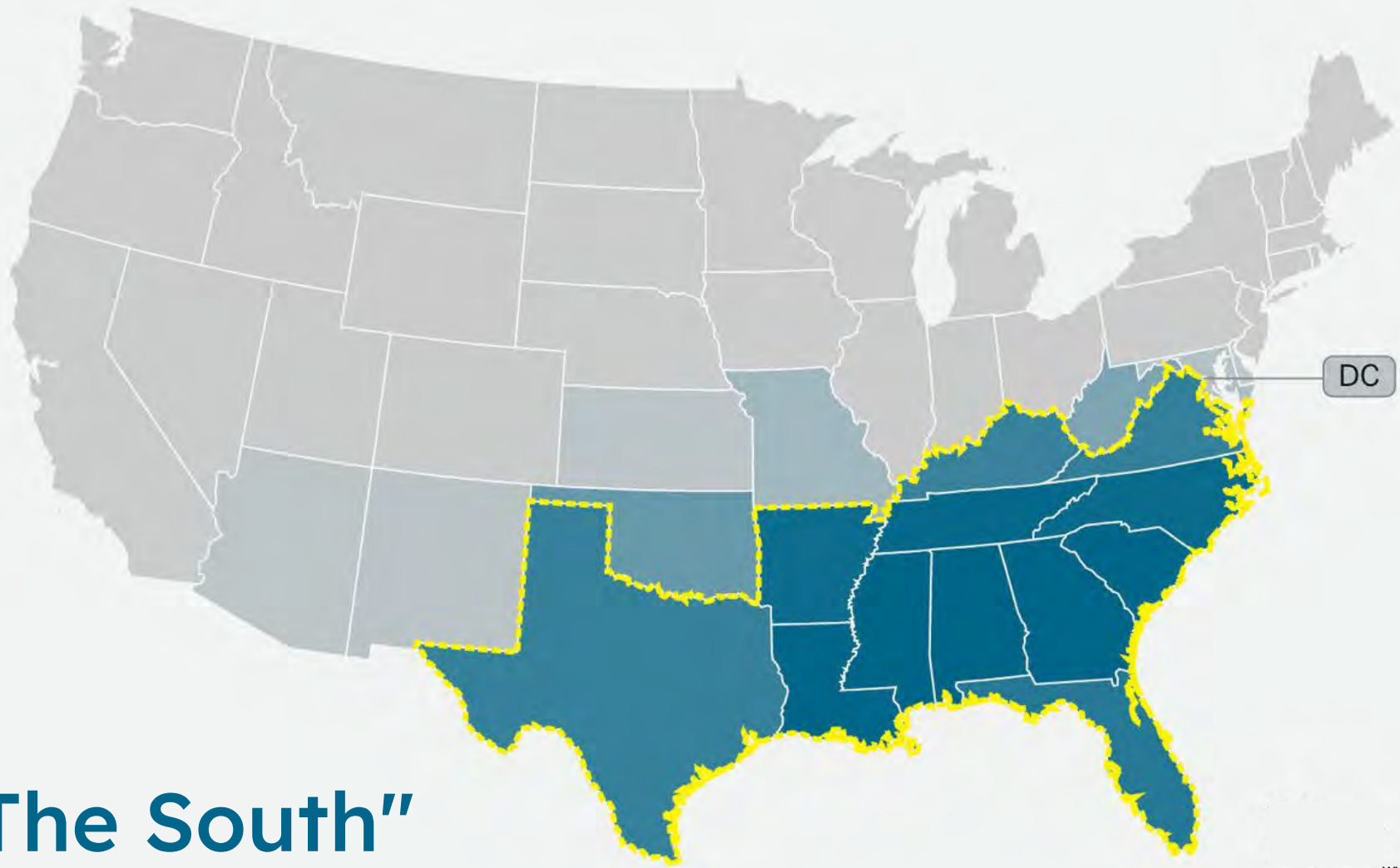
Sick - cool

Stoked - excited

(NorCal vs SoCal - freeway debacle) "the" vs omission of "the"



"The South"









Southern English

- Long "i" diphthong= IPA /a:/
 - I, bye, like, pride
- -ing → -in'
 - talkin', cookin', readin'
- Wh- words /w/ vs. /hw/
 - white, what, while, which

I'm'll ____

I'm fixin' to ____

I'm gon' ____

- I'm drinkin' white wine.
- I'm'll drive down to the library.
- I'm fixin' to see whether she's gon' say "hi".

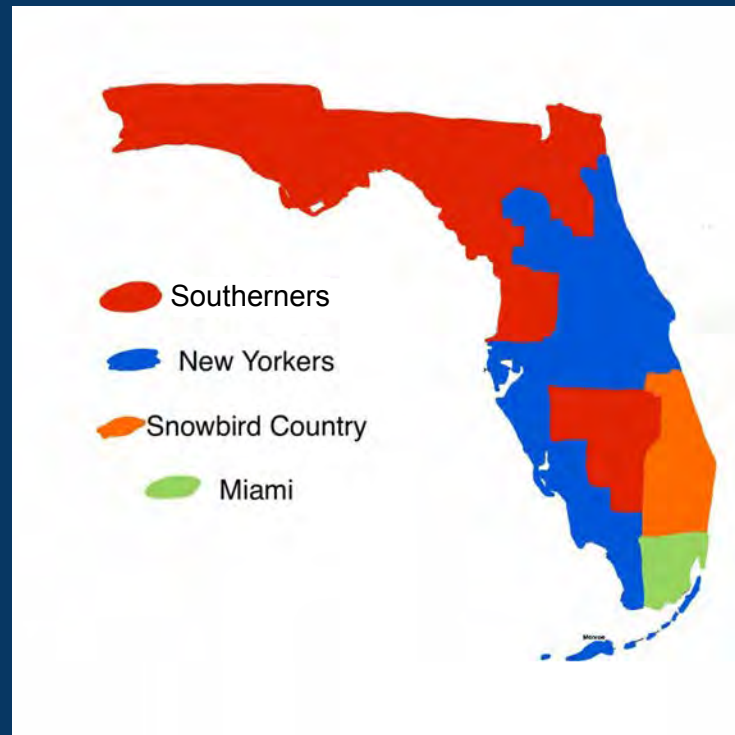
- I'm drinkin' white wine.
- I'm'll drive down to the library.
- I'm fixin' to see whether she's gon' say "hi".

- I'm drinkin' white wine.
- I'm'll drive down to the library.
- I'm fixin' to see whether she's gon' say "hi".

- I'm drinkin' white wine.
- I'm'll drive down to the library.
- I'm fixin' to see whether she's gon' say "hi".

Florida - the “Sunshine” state

- The exception to the “south”
- Linguistically divided into North, South, and the city of Miami region



The “South”, but not... (North Florida)

- Accent is similar to other southern states, like those bordering (Alabama and Georgia)
- Common in the panhandle and northern cities, and more prominent as you go into more rural parts
- Likely to hear the southern “twang”:
 - “Ya’ll” means “You all”
 - “Ain’t” means “Is not”
 - /e/ as /I/ → “ten” becomes “tin”
 - -ing = in’ (freezin’, thinkin’) - Not as often as other “southern” states, but comes up every once in a while

Snowbirds in South Florida (So' Flo')

- “Southern” accent disappears as you make your way to the south
- Perhaps more like a mix of north or northeastern US accent, why?
- **Air conditioning**
 - The introduction of air conditioning to Florida brought an influx of people from the northern states between the 1930s and 1950s
- **“Snowbirds”**
 - People from northern US who come to Florida to retire or escape the cold winter
- **Phonetics:**
 - Intervocalic /t/ → /d/ (e.g., dating, wanting)
 - Because = Becuz or 'cuz

The “Miami accent”

- The “**Northern Cuba**”
 - After the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Miami became home to many Cubans and subsequently to other Latin Americans
- Miami is 70% Latin
 - Latin community keeps growing
- The “**Miami accent**”
 - Influenced by English and Cuban Spanish (Spanglish)
 - Loud and with pazazz
- Phonetics:
 - /th/ → soft /d/ (e.g., that = dat, the = duh, then = den, there = dare)
 - Going to → Gonna
 - Kind of → Kinda
 - And → ‘n’
- Miami slang:
 - “Oye” = “Hi” or “Hello” (e.g., “Oye, what’s up?”)
 - “Dale” = “Hurry up” or “bye”, also used to express support (e.g., “Dale, let’s go!”)
 - “Que bolá?” = “What’s up?” (e.g., “Oye, que bolá?”)
 - “Getty” = a get-together (e.g., “I’m having a getty this weekend”)



“What are y’all doin’
tonight?”

“Let’s go dahntahn!”

Now you try!

“Duuude, that’s like totally
cool.”

“Dale, let’s go!”

Questions?

Thank you!