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# A View from the West: Perceptions of U.S. Dialects from the Point of View of Oregon

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Introduction

Although much work has been done is this century to describe the actual linguistic situation within the US, only research within the past few decades has focused on people's attitudes and beliefs towards the varieties of speech that exist in the US. In a series of studies in the early 1980s (summarized in Preston, this volume), Dennis Preston examined the perceptual dialectology of residents in Hawaii, New York City, western New York, southern Indiana and Michigan. This work has provided much helpful information in understanding American perceptions of US regional speech, however, a comprehensive picture of the language attitude situation is not possible until data have been collected from each of the major geographical and dialectal areas of the United States. To date, no research has been done which examines the perceptions of west-coast residents towards varieties of speech in the US. This study begins to fill this gap is the literature by focusing on the perceptual dialectology of residents from one west-coast state, namely Oregon.

The data in this study were collected primarily from residents living in the greater Eugene-Springfield area of Oregon, although a small number of residents of Portland also participated in the research. There were a total of 66 respondents, 32 males and 34 females, ranging in age from 20 to 78. All of the respondents were of European-American descent, with the exception of one respondent who identified himself as Native American. The respondents has all lived in Oregon for the majority of their lives, with 27 of the 66 having only lived in Oregon.

Respondents were first given a map of the US, which included state boundary lines but no state names. They were asked to draw circles around areas "where people talk the same" and to label them using whatever terms or phrases they felt best described the speech in those areas. Table 1 shows the frequency with which regions were identified in this task as being distinct speech areas.

| Region Identified | # Respondents identifying region (n=65) | % Respondents identifying region |
|---|---|---|
| South | 60 | 92.3 |
| Northeast | 49 | 75.4 |
| Texas | 36 | 55.4 |
| Midwest | 31 | 47.7 |
| West | 29 | 44.6 |
| New England | 24 | 36.9 |
| California | 17 | 26.2 |
| Pacific Northwest | 16 | 24.6 |
| Hawaii | 15 | 23.1 |
| Northern | 14 | 21.5 |
| Southwest | 12 | 18.5 |
| Alaska | 9 | 13.8 |
| Plains & Mountains | 9 | 13.8 |
| West Coast | 8 | 12.3 |
| Louisiana/"Cajun" | 8 | 12.3 |

**Table 1.** Frequency of Identification of Dialect Regions

The South was by far the most salient region, with 92.3% identifying some part of it as a distinct speech area. The Northeast followed, with 75.4% distinguishing it and so forth. Although Table 1 provides an overall frequency with which different regions were identified in hand-drawn maps, it does not indicate which states respondents believed comprised each area. Since this

varied some from respondent to respondent, the best way to interpret overall perceptions of each region was to tally which states were included in each region when that region was identified by a respondent as a distinct dialect area. By examining the overall tallies, it is then possible to differentiate "core" states which make up a perceptual region (i.e. those most commonly associated with that area) from "peripheral" states in a kind of layered map. Examples of such layered perceptual maps follow for several of the regions given in Table 1.
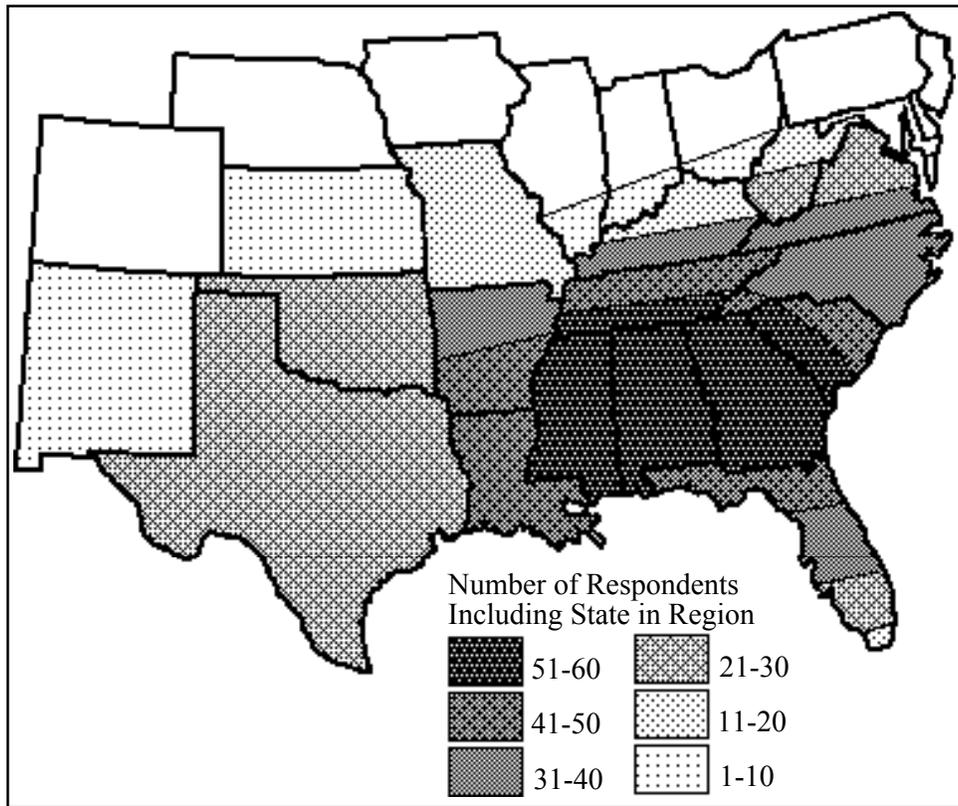


**Figure 1**. Results of Hand-Drawn Maps of a "South"
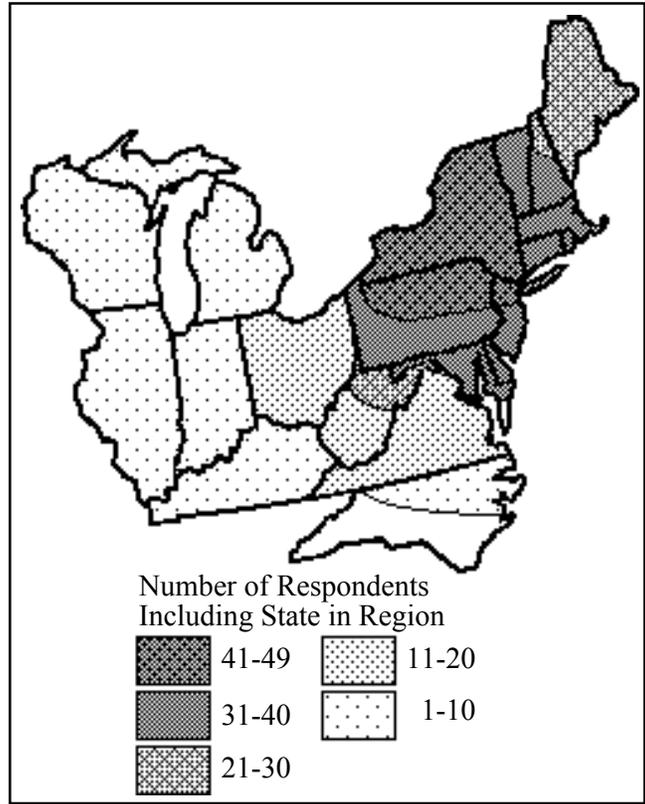
**Figure 2**. Results of Hand-Drawn Maps of a "Northeast"
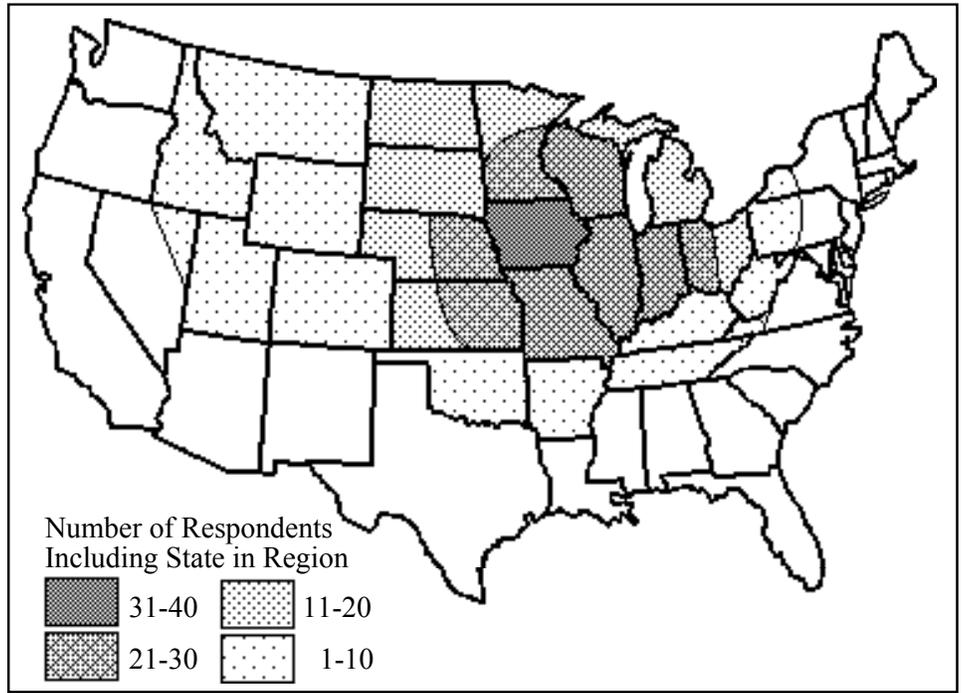


**Figure 3.** Results of Hand-Drawn Maps of a "Midwest"
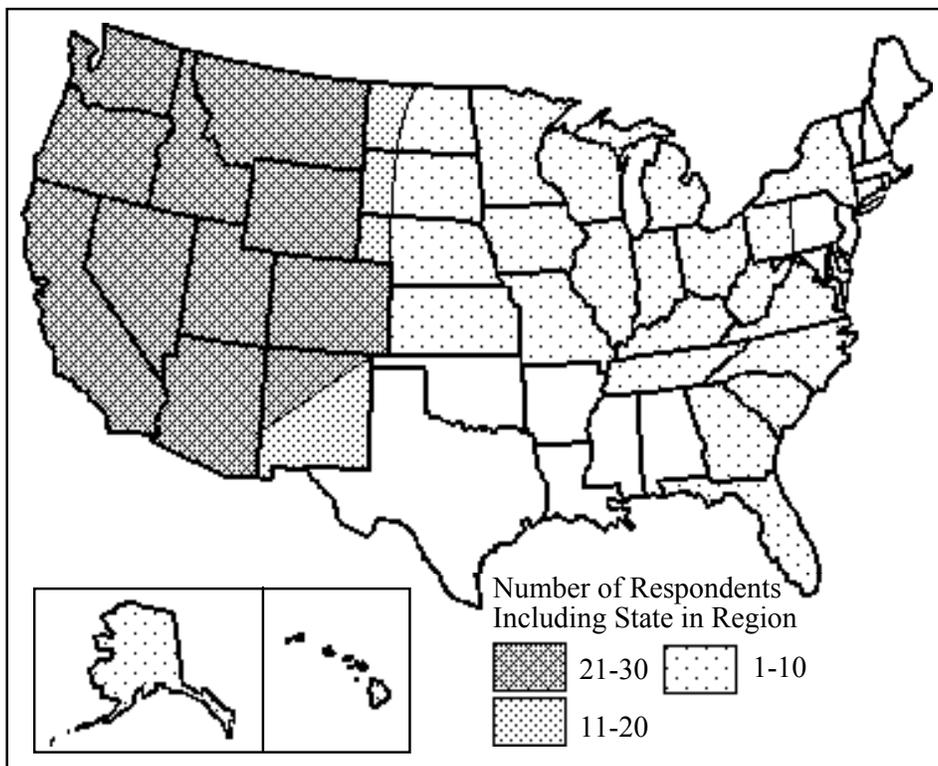
**Figure 4.** Results of Hand-Drawn Maps of a "West"

How Different are They?

After completing the hand-drawn maps task, respondents were given an alphabetical listing of the 50 states plus New York City and Washington D.C. and asked to rate each area on a 4-point scale depending on how similar the speech in that area sounds compared to the respondents' own speech. The scale was as follows:

        1 = people there sound like me
        2 = people there sound a little different from me
        3 = people there sound very different from me
        4 = people there sound so different from me I can't understand them

This "degree of difference" data was first subjected to chi-square tests of independence to determine whether gender, age group or whether the respondent had ever visited the state (subsequently referred to as "visit status") had any significant effect in the ratings. Since very few

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states (and none consistently) showed significant chi-squares for any of the independent variables listed above, subsequent statistics were run on the entire population as a whole.

The next step in the analysis was to run chi-square tests which compared the ratings of each state to every other state. Results of these tests are not presented here, since the groupings of states produced by this procedure were too large and overlapping to give a meaningful picture of Oregonian perceptions of degrees of dialect difference. A clearer pictured emerged once the data were subjected to Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS) analysis, combined with K-means cluster analysis. Although these are two separate statistical operations, the results can viewed together, as shown in Figure 5. In this figure, the plotted points are the output of the MDS analysis, while the circles represent the K-means cluster results.

MDS analysis provides a graphic picture of how the states cluster together along two dimensions. Although the horizontal dimension is fairly easy to interpret, something like similarity to Oregon speech, the vertical dimension is less clear and is apparently working primarily to differentiate Hawaii from all other states. It may be a "kind of accent" or even a "pleasantness of accent" dimension, since the southern states are clearly differentiated from the northeastern states, with western and midwestern states clustering around the zero point on this dimension.
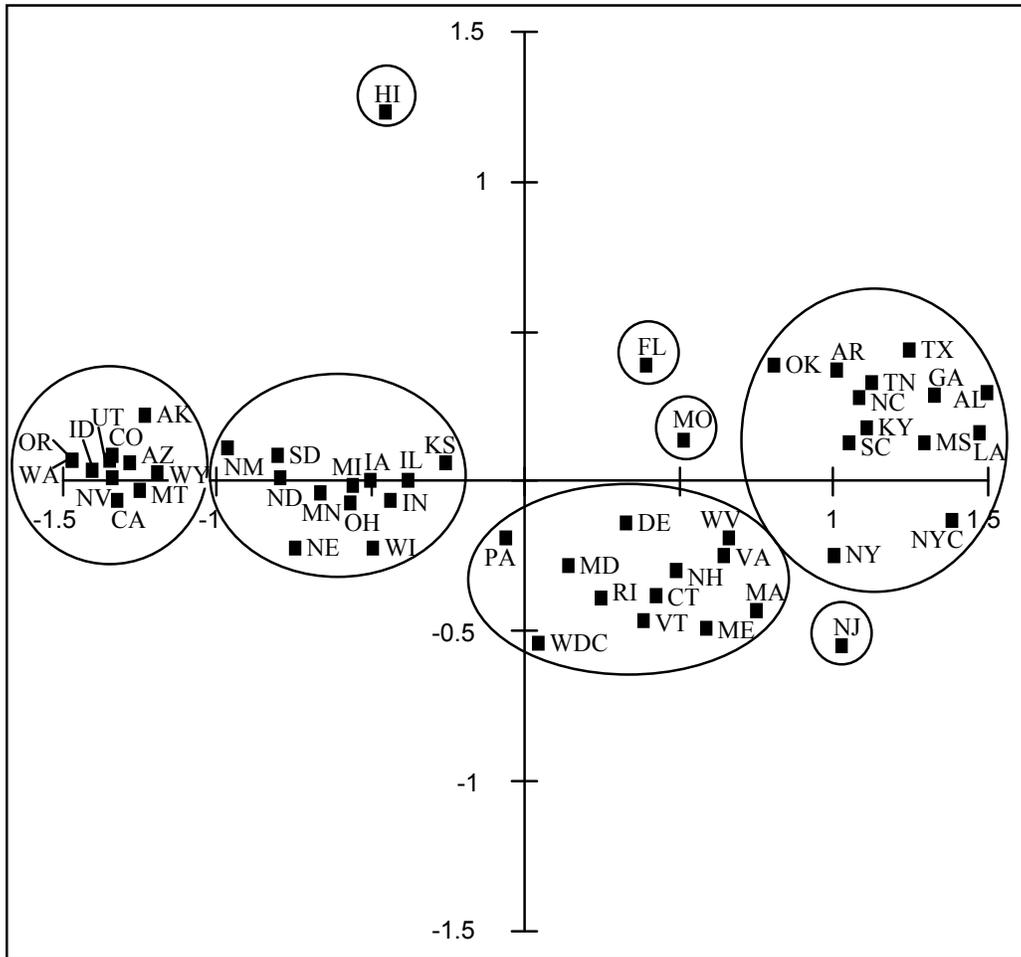
**Figure 5.** MDS Analysis of Degree of Difference Ratings with K-Means Clusters

<u>Whose Speech is Most Correct and Most Pleasant?</u>

Respondents were finally given two more alphabetical lists (one at a time) and asked to rate each state or city on a 7-point scale as to how "correct" and how "pleasant" the speech in that area is (1=least correct/pleasant, 7=most correct/pleasant). The order in which these two tasks were presented to respondents was reversed for half of the respondents in order to eliminate overall any possible ordering effects for the two tasks. No definition or criteria for determining "correctness" or "pleasantness" were provided by the researcher. If the respondents asked questions about what was meant by these terms, they were told to use their own judgments.

As with the degree of difference task, the correctness and pleasantness data were first subject to chi-square tests to determine if gender, age group or visit status influenced ratings. Again, no significant effects emerged overall for these independent variables in either task. Chi-square tests comparing each state with every other state were also run, followed by MDS and K-Means cluster analysis.  The results of these last two statistical tests are presented in Figures 6 and 7.
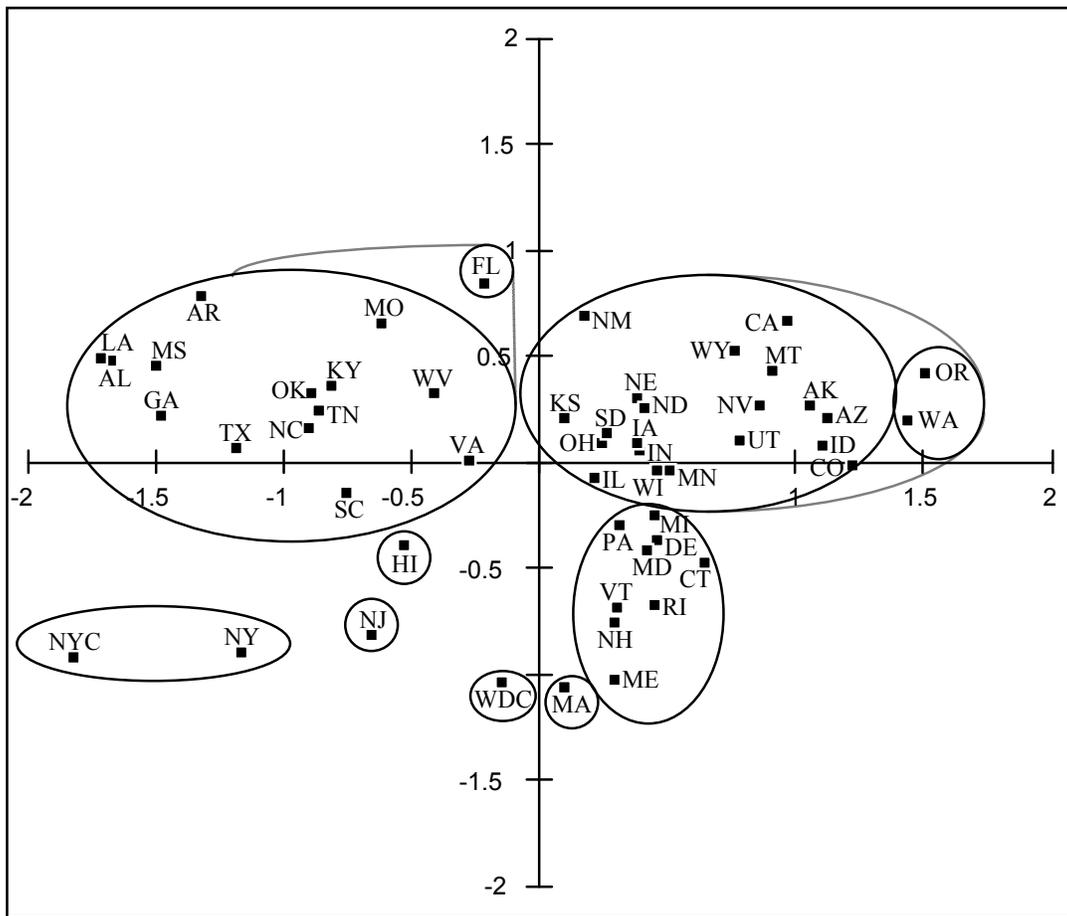


**Figure 6.** MDS Analysis of Correctness Ratings with K-Means Clusters
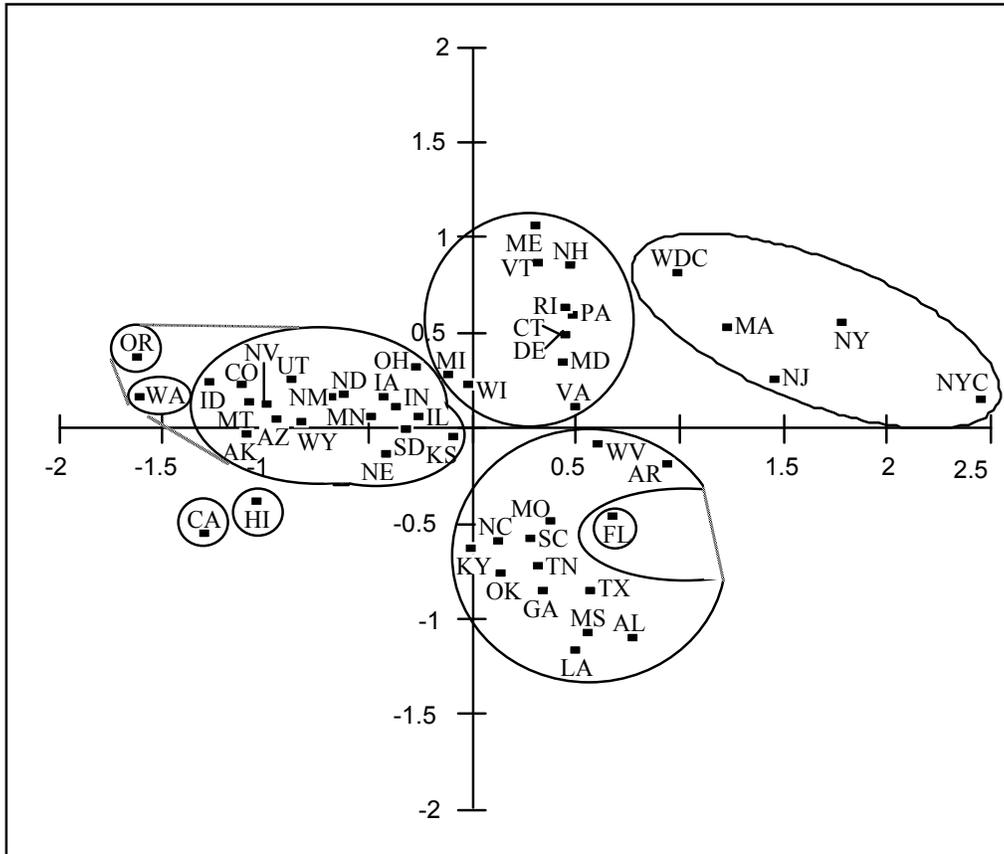
**Figure 7.** MDS Analysis of Pleasantness Ratings with K-Means Clusters

(It should be noted that the K-means cluster statistic makes no assumptions as to how many groups there are in the data set. The researcher must specify the number of groups that should be calculated and will likely need to try different numbers of clusters before the best analysis is achieved. In Figures 6 and 7, the dotted lines represent the results of the K-means cluster analysis if a smaller number of clusters are selected.)

By comparing the evaluations of states with one another for each of the three rating tasks (degree of difference, correctness, and pleasantness) in combination with the regions outlined and the labels given on the hand-drawn maps, it is possible to make some generalization about this respondent group's perception of US regional dialects.

<u>Perceptions of Western States</u>

To begin with, the hand-drawn maps and the degree of difference ratings show that Oregonians consider the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Colorado, Utah, California, Nevada, Montana, Arizona, Alaska and Wyoming to constitute a distinct dialect region. It is clear that New Mexico is a kind of border state between the perceptual regions of West and Midwest. The MDS analysis of the degree of difference data places it midway between Wyoming (a western state) and South Dakota (a midwestern state). Although 32 respondents rated it a "1" (i.e. people there sound like me) for Degree of Difference, the K-Means cluster analysis for degree of difference groups it with the midwestern states. Finally, on the hand-drawn maps, the state is split, with the majority of respondents who drew a "West" including the northwest corner of the state in the "West" (see Figure 4).

While these western states are clearly distinct for Oregonians in terms of degree of difference, this distinction is less clear in the correctness and pleasantness ratings. The majority of western states are lumped together with the midwestern states in these categories according to K-Means cluster analysis (Figures 6 and 7). In terms of correctness, Oregon and Washington are distinguished from the rest of the western states as a separate cluster, and each makes up its own cluster in the pleasantness K-Means cluster analysis. These results reveal a desire on the part of the respondents to distinguish the local area (in this case Oregon and Washington) from surrounding states, even when there is no noticeable difference in terms of accent (reflected in the degree of difference ratings). This result conforms with the general tendency for self-identification found in respondents from other geographical areas (Preston, 1986).

This desire to differentiate Oregon and Washington as a distinct area is also illustrated by the 16 respondents who drew a separate "Pacific Northwest" area on their hand-drawn maps (Table 1). In follow-up interviews which were conducted after the ratings tasks were completed, several respondents commented on the fact that the speech in Oregon and Washington was very similar but could be distinguished from that of surrounding states. For example, one respondent

made the comment, "I can be in Washington and not feel like I'm not in Oregon but I can be in Idaho and I can tell a difference."

Regarding the relationship of Oregon and Washington, in the MDS analysis for degree of difference, Oregon and Washington received identical scores (-1.46, +0.07).  Although the MDS scores are not exactly the same for Oregon and Washington in terms of correctness, the K-Means cluster analysis produced an Oregon/Washington cluster. When it comes to pleasantness, however, Oregon and Washington emerged as distinct clusters. This suggests that Oregonians want to maintain at least a small claim of uniqueness, but the interpretation of this result is not entirely straightforward. Preston (1993b) claims that "the preference for local norms along affective lines is stronger in areas where there is linguistic insecurity" (p. 35). Since Oregonians view themselves as entirely unique only on the affective scale, this might indicate a slight degree of linguistic insecurity. This claim is somewhat tenuous, however, in light of the fact that Oregonians also rate themselves highest in terms of correctness, a fact which points to a great deal of linguistic security. 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.

A desire to distinguish California somewhat from other western states, and particularly from Oregon and Washington, is reflected most strongly in the pleasantness ratings. While 18 respondents rated California as a "7" in terms of pleasantness, almost as many (16) rated it a "4". It is unclear how to account for this discrepancy, since there were no significant effects on the ratings of California in terms of gender, age group, or visit status. What is clear is that many of the respondents wanted to differentiate California from other western states, but did not choose to do so in terms of degree of difference or correctness.  Instead they opted to use the available affective dimension of "pleasantness."

Past research has revealed that status and in-group solidarity are the two primary evaluative dimensions along which language attitudes can be measured (Ryan, Giles, and Sebastian, 1982). In this study, the category of "correctness" was used to measure status

distinctions, while "pleasantness" was chosen to reflect degree of solidarity. In view of this, the ratings of California reveal that while these Oregonian respondents recognized the more or less equal social status/power of California residents, they feel a lack of solidarity with them. This lack of solidarity is underscored by the fact that California is singled out from other western and midwestern states in terms of pleasantness K-Means clusters even when Oregon and Washington are collapsed into this large cluster.

The following comments from the follow-up interviews illustrate the somewhat negative view that some respondents have towards California (interviewer comments and questions appear in brackets):

> ...I lived in California for a short time when I was a teenager and wanted to be away from home, to start my own life, and I hated it...I was in L.A., well I lived in Wittier, which was outside L.A....I only lived there 11 months and I was ready to come home. I remember the first time it rained, I looked up in the sky and I cried and said, "Thank you God"...

> ...people in California talk their own language which I don't understand [what do you mean by "talk their own language?"] their whole terminology is a different - task it seems like their words are bigger and a lot of it seems to be, at least in the areas I've been in, technical terms and a lot it I guess I think of Silicon Valley in regards to computers and all the technical variety...

While California is differentiated slightly from other western states in the respondents' perceptions, Alaska is situated squarely within this cluster of states on all three scales. It is likely that this identification of Alaska with the west is a result of the historic connection between Alaska and the port cities of Seattle and San Francisco. The hand-drawn maps support this conclusion as well. Although 9 respondents (13.8%) indicated Alaska as a separate region, a greater number (12) included it in their "West" or "Pacific Northwest." The remaining respondents simply did not include it in any specific region. Even when Alaska was circled as a separate speech area, several respondents labeled it as "Frontier," another indication that Alaska is perceived more in terms of the settlers that migrated there, embarking from the Northwest,

rather than in terms of the native populations which inhabited the territory long before the arrival of the European-Americans.

The inclusion of Alaska within the "West" is also interesting in light of the fact that Hawaii was not considered part of this region on any scale. In fact, in the K-Means cluster analysis for all three rating categories, Hawaii emerges as a distinct cluster. On the MDS analysis of the degree of difference data (Figure 5), it appears that the vertical dimension is used primarily to differentiate Hawaii (which received a value of +1.23) from all other states (which fall between -0.55 and +0.44 on the same dimension). Furthermore, 15 respondents (23.1%) indicated on their hand-drawn maps that Hawaii comprised a distinct dialect region, while only 7 included it in another region (either West or California). Several respondents labeled the speech in Hawaii as "native-like", which seems to indicate that the influence of the indigenous population of the islands on the speech in that state is significant in the respondents' perceptions. Again, this makes Alaska's ratings even more interesting because there does not seem to be an equally strong association of indigenous languages effects on the speech of Alaska. Even more substantial is the perception of Asian influence on the Hawaiian speech, with one respondent even labeling it "Japanese Golfland."

Perceptions of Midwestern States

According to the degree of difference MDS and K-Means cluster analysis, the Oregonian conception of the Midwest consists of the states of New Mexico, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. The hand-drawn maps reveal that Iowa is the "heart" of this region (see Figure 3). The cluster of midwestern states is the most closely related to the western states in several ways.

First, in the K-Means cluster analysis of the degree of difference data, the midwestern and the western clusters of states collapse together if only 7 (rather than 8) groups are chosen. The midwestern and western states are also lumped together on the correctness and pleasantness tasks with the western states (with the exception of Oregon, Washington and for pleasantness

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California) in the K-Means cluster analysis, although they are clearly two subgroups in terms of their MDS values.

Michigan appears to be a kind of border state between the Midwest and the Northeast for these respondents.  While it falls clearly within the center of the Midwest cluster on the degree of difference ratings, it is part of the K-Means cluster of northeastern states in terms of both correctness and pleasantness. On the hand-drawn maps, 20 respondents included it within their boundaries of a "Midwest," while only 6 incorporated it into a "Northeast."

It is possible that the "split personality" of Michigan is a result of the sensitivity of respondents to the North Cities Vowel Shift, a phonological change in progress which began in major cities on the east coast and is slowly spreading from urban center to urban center across the north. This shift is well underway in Michigan cities.  If this were the case, however, one would suspect that it would be in the degree of difference ratings, which are based on the sounds of the language in each state, that Michigan would be rated most like northeastern states. Perhaps the traditional association of Michigan with other midwestern states, particularly Great Lakes states such as Illinois and Wisconsin, is too great to be overwhelmed by a phonological change in progress, while at the same time there is some recognition that "something" (i.e. the NCVS) makes it sound more like states in the northeast.

The most recent work within Michigan suggests that university students rate their own speech as much more similar to east coast varieties than respondents in studies done ten years ago did (Preston, 1996).  Thus it seems that the influence of the NCVS on Michigan speech is a recognizable reality not only for professional linguists, but also within the general population. If this is in fact the correct interpretation of the Michigan ratings, it might also explain why Wisconsin clusters with the midwest in terms of degree of difference and correctness, but with Michigan and the northeastern states on the pleasantness task. Since the NCVS began on the east coast and is slowly moving westward, overall the shift is further along in Michigan than Wisconsin. Because of this, Wisconsin may sound a little bit "northeastern", but not as much so as Michigan.

Ohio appears also to be a kind of border state between the Midwest and the Northeast, but in a different way than Michigan. Ohio clusters with the midwestern states on all three scales, but the hand-drawn maps reveal some disagreement among respondents as to which region it belongs to. 22 respondents include the western half of the state in the midwest, but only 11 incorporate the entire state in this region. On the "Northeast" map, 19 respondents include only the eastern half of the state, while 11 respondents incorporate the whole state. Ohio thus appears to be a border between the Midwest and the Northeast in the same way that New Mexico is split between the West and the Midwest. It is important to note here that the first large group of settlers in the Willamette Valley in Oregon came from the Ohio Valley states and Tennessee. There were also large numbers of settlers from Missouri, Illinois and Iowa (Carver 1987). Thus while the geographical location of Ohio may have caused some respondents to incorporate it into the northeast, particularly on the hand-drawn maps, the historical connection between Ohio and other midwestern states as the major migration origination points for Oregon settlement was more influential in the rating tasks.

Perceptions of Northeastern States

The next group of states which emerges from the MDS and K-Means cluster analyses of the three tasks is a northeastern cluster. The primary states in this cluster are Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, with some variability among the three tasks for Washington D.C., Massachusetts, Virginia, West Virginia and Michigan and Wisconsin (as discussed previously).

For the degree of difference task, Washington D.C. is included in the northeastern cluster. It is isolated as its own group in terms of correctness, falling somewhere in the middle of the ratings for midwestern and northeastern states . For the pleasantness task, however, it is grouped with Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and New York City, having received the third highest number of "1" (i.e. least pleasant) ratings (after New York City and New York).

In terms of correctness, the fact that Washington D.C. emerges as a distinct cluster is likely a result of the specialized styles and jargon associated with the discourse of government functions. That it is grouped in terms of pleasantness with the cluster which includes New York City, clearly the cluster with the least favorable ratings, is perhaps the most interesting result. This may well be an indication of growing dissatisfaction with the current political scene, particularly in light of controversy at the time the data were collected surrounding an Oregon senator, which eventually led to his resignation from Congress.

Massachusetts follows the same pattern as Washington D.C., being clustered with the northeastern states in terms of degree of difference, emerging as a distinct cluster for correctness (also with ratings somewhere in the middle of the northeastern and midwestern states), and grouping with New York City, New York, New Jersey and Washington D.C. on the pleasantness task (receiving the fourth highest number of "1" ratings). Since this grouping cannot be a result of the perception of government, however, an alternative explanation must be found. The most likely reason for the differentiation of Massachusetts from other northeastern states is the stereotypical (and actual) Boston accents. On the hand-drawn maps, in fact, several respondents used the label "Bostonian" to refer to a general New England area. The historic connection between Boston and the Pacific Northwest, particularly in terms of the fur trade in the first half of the 19th century, may also be important here.

Virginia and West Virginia appear to be transitional states between the Northeast and the South for the respondents in this study. Although grouped with the northeastern states in the K-Means Cluster for degree of difference, they fall in with the southern states in terms of correctness. They are split in the pleasantness ratings, with Virginia grouped with the Northeast and West Virginia clustering with the South. The hand-drawn maps also confirm these states as border states, since almost an equal number of respondents included them in the Northeast region as in the South (see Figures 1 and 2).

Perceptions of New York City, New York and New Jersey

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Figure 2 shows that New York is the center of the hand-drawn maps of a Northeast, and that in general New York City and New Jersey get incorporated into this perceptual region. It is interesting then that New York City, New York and New Jersey are never included in the K-Means clusters of the northeastern states. In fact, New York City and New York both get included in the cluster of southern states on the degree of difference scale. They form their own cluster in terms of correctness, and as stated already combine with New Jersey, Massachusetts and Washington D.C. to form a cluster in terms of pleasantness. New Jersey emerges as a distinct cluster for degree of difference and correctness.

The results for New York City are unsurprising given the stereotype of New York City inhabitants as fast-talking, cold, and rude. Consider the following comments made in the follow-up interviews:

> ...When we used to go to the flea markets in, well, Greenfield and those we used to think New Yorkers were mad at each other--that's just how they talk, they always sound like they're arguing and that...yeah, and they're just, that's the way they speak, and we used to kind of, they'd yell and scream and you'd look back thinking they were fighting and they were just visiting...

> People seem to talk very fast up there from what I've experienced...

While the results of the New York City ratings were expected, it is particularly interesting that New York state gets "dragged down" with New York City. Chi-square tests reveal no significant difference between the ratings given to New York and New York City on any of the tasks. Furthermore, these two regions are always in the same K-Means cluster. Thus, there appears to be little difference in Oregonian perceptions between the City and the rest of the state. This result is strikingly different from the results of maps drawn by residents of both New York City and western New York reported in Preston 1986. Both sets of respondents indicate that New York City and New York state are distinct dialect regions. The respondents in western New York even further differentiated western New York as a separate region.

The ratings of New Jersey are also clearly influenced by the New York City stigma, although not in precisely the same way as New York state. For both degree of difference and correctness, New Jersey forms its own cluster, as mentioned previously. This may be due in part to New Jersey having its own stereotypical accent (i.e. "New Joisey"). It may also be the case that New Jersey is seen as a kind of "transitional" or "buffer" state between New York City and other northeastern states such as Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland. In general, New Jersey does seem to occupy a location in-between New York City and the northeastern states on the MDS plots.

Perceptions of Southern States

On the hand-drawn maps, the South is clearly the most salient dialect region, with 92.3% of respondents indicating at least some portion of it as a distinct region. The states unequivocally part of this region are Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Arkansas, North and South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas and Oklahoma. Missouri is included in K-Means clusters for correctness and pleasantness, but forms its own cluster in terms of degree of difference. West Virginia joins the group in correctness and pleasantness, and Virginia is part of the cluster in terms of correctness, as discussed previously. Florida forms a distinct cluster on all three scales, although it joins the southern cluster on the correctness and pleasantness scales if fewer clusters are selected.

In terms of actual ratings, the southern states are rated the most dissimilar to Oregon. Between 43 and 58 respondents rated all the "core" southern states except Oklahoma either a "3" or a "4" on this scale. Of non-southern states, only New York City received such a large number of low ratings. For correctness, the southern states also fall at the bottom of the list in terms of ratings. Finally, the ratings for pleasantness rise dramatically for all of the southern states, with Georgia and Louisiana actually receiving the most "7" ratings after the western states.

Missouri's marginal status as a southern state (reflected in the fact that it forms its own K-means cluster) is interesting for several reasons. First, the largest number of settlers in Oregon in

the latter half of the 19th century came from Missouri (Carver 1987). Thus the recognition of Missouri as not as different from Oregon as the other southern states (in terms of degree of difference ratings) may be a result of this historic connection. That these Oregonian respondents group Missouri with southern states at all, however, is intriguing in and of itself, since the respondents from the five areas that Preston (1986) examined tended to place Missouri in the Midwest, rather than the South. It seems that in Missouri we once again find a kind of transitional state, in this case between the South and the Midwest. This is supported by the hand-drawn maps in which more respondents include Missouri in the Midwest (Figure 3) than in the South (Figure 1), even though the respondents clearly associate it with the South in the ratings tasks.

Texas is also an interesting state to examine in terms of the discrepancy between hand-drawn maps and the ratings tasks. 55.4% of respondents singled out Texas (sometimes including Oklahoma) as a distinct dialect area on their hand-drawn maps (Table 1). In none of the three ratings tasks, however, did Texas appear as a distinct K-Means cluster. It seems, then, that while there is some recognition of a distinct dialect in Texas, this distinctness is not great enough to overcome the general category "Southern" in the minds of the Oregonian respondents.

With Florida there appears to be precisely the opposite discrepancy between the hand-drawn maps and the ratings tasks than occurred with Texas. In this case, Florida was generally incorporated into the maps of the South but emerged, at least potentially depending on the number of cluster groups used, as a distinct K-Means cluster on all three of the ratings tasks. There are two possible explanation for the singling out of Florida.

First of all, there may be the recognition of influences from northern dialects due to (particularly) retiree migration from the North to the milder climate of Florida. This appears to be the explanation, for example, of Michigan raters' perceptions of Florida, since Florida falls together with Michigan on factor analyses of both correctness and pleasantness data (Preston 1993b). The second explanation has to do with influence of (primarily Cuban) Spanish on the language in Florida. Given the fact that Florida would not be a likely retirement spot for

Oregonians, in combination with several respondents who used labels such as "Cuban" on their hand-drawn maps, this second explanation is more plausible.

In terms of overall ratings, the southern states received the lowest ratings in terms of correctness, especially the four states of the "deep south," i.e. Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. At the same time, the pleasantness ratings are substantially higher; many southern states are in fact rated higher than many midwestern and northeastern states. This conforms to the stereotypes of "Southern hospitality" and a slower pace of life. Speaking about people from Kentucky, for example, one respondent says:

> ...they act like they've got all the time in the world, you know--"nothing wrong with me, I'm just taking my time," I can't do it, but it sounds great...

In general, then, Oregonians view the South as one large dialect region. Although they discriminate somewhat a "deep South" from an "outer South" and "Texas" on their hand-drawn maps, this distinction is not great enough to create separate K-Means clusters in any of the ratings categories. An examination of the MDS plots, however, does reveal that the Southern cluster is the "loosest" of all the clusters, i.e. its points are the most spread out.

Comments on Research Methodology

The most interesting difficulty that emerged in the course of this research was the reluctance on the parts of many respondents to provide correctness ratings. 14 respondents gave all states the same rating (anywhere from a "4" to a "7"), while an additional four respondents simply left this task completely blank. As they were actually filling out the correctness questionnaire sheet itself, many respondents either wrote or said comments such as "People are correct for wherever they are from", "I don't consider speech in terms of correctness or incorrectness, but in terms of difference", "Grammatically--as seen by a prescriptive linguist!", and "It's all so subjective!". In the follow-up interviews, people also offered explanations of their objections to this task. Consider the following comments:

...Well, of course, I think each individual thinks that they speak the proper way, and so somebody that differs real drastically, you're thinking they really don't know how to speak, you know, or they don't know how to express themselves, but I'm sure that somebody who speaks drastically different than I do thinks their speech is perfect too...

...I honestly don't believe that I have ever consider-- I have never rated things when I was listening to them as being correct or incorrect, it was just that person's way of doing it -- living in the neighborhood where I did, why, we accepted everybody or we didn't get along and - I I was aware that, well you can't say that what was spoken in English was correct and what we spoke was not and it's the same thing with what was spoken in the east coast and I never thought that what was spoken in Boston was any better than what I spoke out here...

...the correctness issue, I mean, well what is correct language anyways? you know, it's all relative to who's looking at it and the person you're coming from...

The fact that so many respondents objected to the correctness task is a sharp contrast to Preston's experience in giving this same task to respondents in Michigan and Indiana. He says of his raters:

It should be noted that very few respondents complained about this task...Although they complained that they did not have information about this or that state, the ranking of most areas for correctness was for them a reasonable task and represented opinions overtly held about the sites where better and worse English was spoken (Preston 1993b, p. 31).

I believe this difference between raters in Oregon and Michigan and Indiana is largely a result of the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity which has been a part of West Coast experience since early settlement days and continues to be a dominant force in the experience of westerners. Another possible explanation for the difference between Preston's raters and the respondents in this study may also be the factor of time. Since Preston's data was collected roughly 10 years ago, the reluctance of the respondents in this study may be an indication that Americans are becoming more sensitive to the issue of what constitutes "correct" language.

Interestingly enough, while there was so much objection to the correctness task, there was little complaint about any of the other tasks. Thus, to rate someone's speech as less pleasant than

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one's own didn't appear to be as big an offense as labeling them "incorrect." One respondent describes the difference in the two tasks in this way:

> [why do you rate everyone the same on correctness but differentiate in terms of pleasantness?] Because it seems like it's an aesthetic quality and something that brings you know, it's kind of an artistic thing it seems like it's something you can appreciate where correctness to me seems to me like there's some scale and there's some right and wrong to it and I don't see that as relevant in terms of speech...

While Oregonians may be less dogmatic about what constitutes "correct" speech, it would not be fair to say that they are true linguistic relativists. Clearly the results of the pleasantness ratings show that they have some definite ideas that not all regional speech is equally acceptable.


Conclusion

The results of this study show that residents of Oregon tend to view the United States in terms of five major dialect regions: West, Midwest, Northeast, South and Hawaii. Within each of these major regions, there are a few smaller sub-regions, such as the Pacific Northwest, (southern) California, metropolitan New York City, and Florida. Between each region, there seemed to be one or two "transitional" or "border" states. These included New Mexico (between West and Midwest), Michigan (between Midwest and Northeast), Virginia (between Northeast and South) and Missouri (between South and Midwest).  The overall findings of this study are summarized graphically in Figure 8.

The states of Oregon and Washington were rated the highest in terms of correctness and pleasantness, while New York City was rated the lowest in both categories. In general, the other western states as well as the midwestern states were rated similarly, fairly high on both correctness and pleasantness scales. The South, which was the most salient dialect region for the respondents in this study, was rated poorly for correctness but fairly well for pleasantness. Both Hawaii and Florida tended to fall into their own groups in terms of the ratings, primarily because of the influence of non-native English speakers in those states.
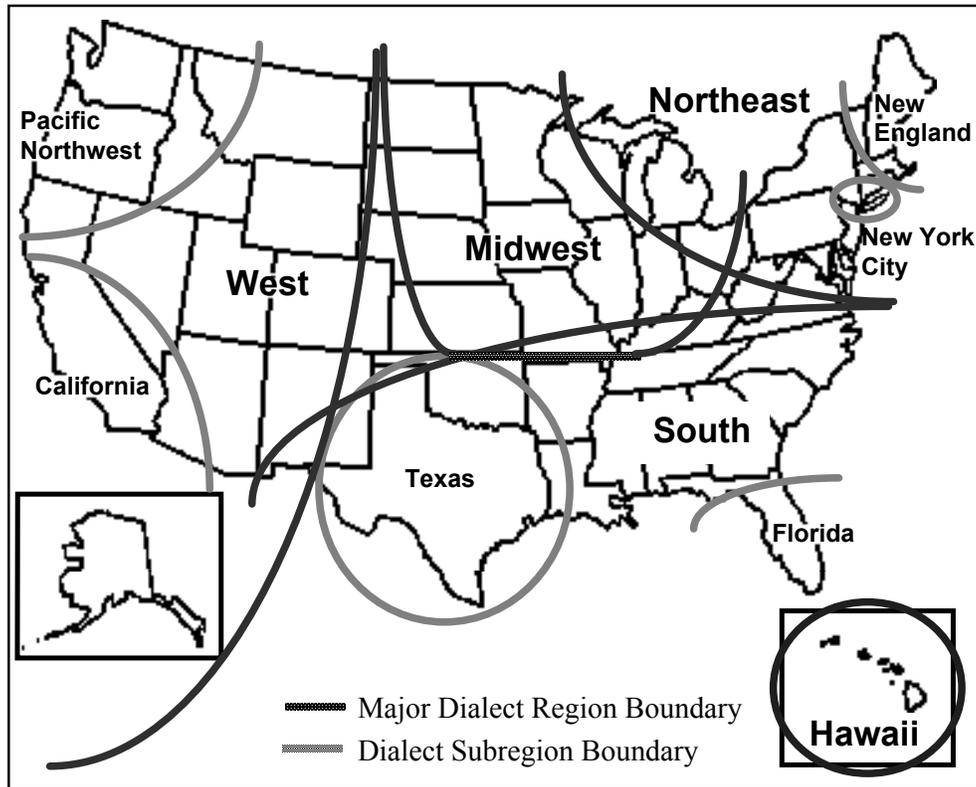
**Figure 8.** Oregonian Perceptual Speech Regions Summarized

This study is the first to examine the perceptual dialectology of any west coast residents. It should be noted that the respondent group in this study represents only a small portion of Oregonians. They were almost all European-Americans and residents of two urban areas on the western side of the state. To make more comprehensive generalizations about Oregonian language attitudes, it would be necessary to survey a wider range of both geographical and ethnic groups.

In order to gain a more general understanding of the language attitudes of western residents, it is necessary to replicate this research throughout the western region. At a minimum, it would be good to survey residents of Washington, northern California and southern California. Of course, each state has a unique settlement history, and therefore the most comprehensive

picture of western perceptual dialectology would require research in every state. This study is thus merely a beginning to what could become a much more extensive research program.

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**About the Author**

Laura C. Hartley received her Ph.D. from the Department of Linguistics and Languages at Michigan State University and is Director of Research at Lesley College in Boston MA. In addition to her language attitude studies, her research and teaching interests include a focus on cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural communication. She has presented her research findings at AILA and NWAV conferences, among others. She is coauthor of a study of labels of perceived dialect areas from several regions of the United States.