

## **Bridging the Gap: Dialect Boundaries and Regional Allegiance in Upstate New York**

The *Atlas of North American English* (Labov, Ash, & Boberg 2006) partitions the United States and Canada into some dozen or so major dialect regions based on the results of telephone interviews with randomly chosen speakers from the principal cities of every English-speaking area of North America. Since these dialect regions are defined in terms of the major cities they contain, however, the boundaries between them in most cases lie between the large cities, in less densely populated regions. Therefore the *Atlas* provides little information as to just where in the intercity territory the boundary lies, or what the linguistic situation is for communities closer to the boundary.

This paper presents the results of a pilot study into the dialectological status of two medium-sized and two small cities in upstate New York: from west to east, Utica (population 60,000), Gloversville (population 15,000), Amsterdam (population 18,000), and Schenectady (population 62,000). These four cities bridge the gap between Syracuse and Albany, two cities 150 miles apart and attributed in the *Atlas* to different dialect regions: Syracuse is the easternmost city placed in the Inland North region in the *Atlas*'s data, and Albany is the westernmost city in the Western New England (WNE) dialect region. Albany has also been described (Labov 2006) as distinct from other cities with WNE phonology in that it shows the effect of New York City influence on its short *a* system. The relationship between the Inland North and WNE is especially significant in light of WNE's role as the source of part of the founding population of the Inland North, and sporadic evidence of Northern Cities Vowel Shift (NCVS) influence on the phonologies of some WNE speakers.

A series of Short Sociolinguistic Events (cf. Ash 2002) in Utica found the NCVS to be completely dominant there, placing it squarely within the Inland North dialect. In Gloversville, our adolescent informant displays all the features of the NCVS to an advanced degree and our adult informant to a more moderate degree, placing it within the Inland North region as well. These results expand eastward the known range of the Inland North dialect region by at least 100 miles.

Amsterdam and Schenectady are outside the Inland North region. In Schenectady, we see in one speaker the same New York City-influenced short-*a* system that has been attributed to Albany. Amsterdam appears to be a transitional location. Our adolescent informant in Amsterdam displays a tendency toward the low back *cot-caught* merger, which is absent from our adult Amsterdam informant and both the Inland North and Schenectady/Albany dialect patterns on either side of it, but is known to exist in Vermont.

These results illustrate that dialect boundaries do not necessarily reflect the communication patterns even of smaller settlements dependent on other urban areas. Gloversville and Amsterdam are less than 20 miles apart; residents of both say they read Schenectady newspapers and name Albany when asked about larger cities that are influential on their area. And yet, dialectologically, Gloversville patterns with Utica, 50 miles to the west, and is distinct from Amsterdam. We suggest that this difference may be the persistent result of differences in early settlement history.

Finally, we report here on what is, to the best of our knowledge, a hitherto undocumented feature of the English at least of central upstate New York: secondary stress on the penultimate syllable of five-syllable words in *-ary*, such as *èleméntàry* or *dòcuméntàry*.

### **Selected references**

- Ash, Sharon (2002). "The Distribution of a Phonemic Split in the Mid-Atlantic Region: Yet More on Short A". Penn Working Papers in Linguistics 8.3.
- Labov, William (2006). "Transmission and Diffusion". Available as [www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/Papers/TD.pdf](http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~wlabov/Papers/TD.pdf)
- Labov, William, Sharon Ash, & Charles Boberg (2006). *Atlas of North American English*. Mouton/de Gruyter, Berlin.