

Regional perceptions of New England dialects  
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Research into the dialects of the New England states (Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont) has traditionally split the region into distinct geographic regions based upon variations in production. Generally, such regions have been considered relatively stable in terms of their variation (Carver 1989, Labov et al. 2006); however, recent work in the area has found that the traditional dialect boundaries have begun to shift (Johnson 2010, Stanford et al. 2012). Such studies have focused on very specific regional changes in production, eschewing the perceptual salience of the features observed to be in flux. To date very few studies have examined how New Englanders perceive the regional divisions, and usually only within small subsets of the larger New England region (Ravindranath and Fernandes 2014). What has not been examined is how speakers across this region both perceive and evaluate local regional dialects.

This study examines regional perceptions of dialects in all six of the New England states. Speakers have been asked to identify areas with differing varieties through the draw-a-map task found in perceptual dialectology (Preston 1989). These responses are then aggregated using GIS software and examined for overlap of perceived regions on the part of the respondents. The data include descriptions provided about the identified regions in combination with evaluations of state-level speaker attributes such as pleasantness, education, and honesty. Historical information about the settlement of the various states (i.e., the splitting of Maine and Rhode Island from Massachusetts at different historical points, recent demographic changes) are considered alongside the data in drawing conclusions, especially as they relate to the Founders' Effect or Doctrine of First Settlement (Zelinsky 1973). Results are used to identify areas of salient dialectal features across New England, informing contemporary and future research into language change in a region considered as stable.

## References

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