

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

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ANAE (Labov et al. 2006) defines dialect regions in terms of major cities.

Recent work on dialect situation between major cities, at dialect-region boundaries:
Bigham (2006), Irons (2006), Balkman (2006)

New York State sits at the boundary between several *ANAE* dialect regions, particularly **Inland North** and **Western New England**.

Inland North:

- Home of the Northern Cities Vowel Shift (NCS)
- Includes Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, and points west

Western New England:

- Includes Albany as well as cities in western New England proper
- Albany also shows diffusion of features from New York City region

Significance of Inland North–WNE Boundary

- Comparatively recent divergence between Inland North and WNE (Boberg 2001)
- Erie Canal, which drove settlement of Inland North, begins in WNE at Albany

Bridging the Gap between Syracuse in the Inland North and Albany in WNE:

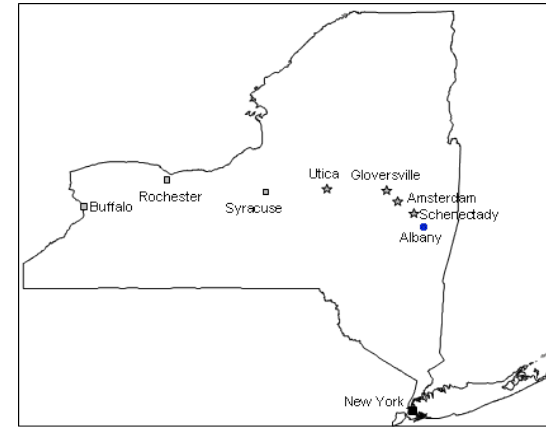
City	Population	dist. from Syracuse	dist. from Albany
Syracuse	147,000	0	120 mi.
Utica	60,000	45 mi.	80 mi.
Gloversville	15,000	90 mi.	40 mi.
Amsterdam	18,000	95 mi.	25 mi.
Schenectady	62,000	110 mi.	15 mi.
Albany	96,000	120 mi.	0

(distances are as the crow flies)

Methodology:

Utica: Short Sociolinguistic Events (cf. Ash 2002) carried out in July 2006, 10–25 minutes each. Ten interviews; five acoustically analyzed.

Gloversville, Amsterdam, Schenectady: Telephone interviews following methodology of *ANAE*; at least two in each city. Respondents include a 16-year-old girl in Gloversville and a 13-year-old boy in Amsterdam.



Map: New York State, with major cities and cities in this study.

Results:

Utica: Clearly part of Inland North, with NCS.

- 17-year-old Susan S. and 64-year-old Janet B. both show robust NCS
- All Utica informants but one at least impressionistically seem to have NCS
- Exception: 75-year-old James C., who has only lived in smaller towns

Gloversville: Also part of Inland North but more marginally.

- 16-year-old Julie M. shows fairly robust NCS system
- 52-year-old Betty S. shows weak NCS, not yet gone to completion

Utica and Gloversville expand the known range of the NCS eastward by 90 miles.

Schenectady: Part of WNE dialect region together with Albany.

- No interview subjects show a trace of NCS
 - All over 65 years old; however, Janet B. in Utica is 64 and displays total NCS
 - Thus we'd expect to see *some* /æ/-raising if Schenectady were Inland North
- 77-year-old Elaine B. and 68-year-old Benjamin W. show WNE vowel system:
 - nasal or continuous /æ/-system
 - same general phonology as Inland North but without NCS (Boberg 2001)
- 80-year-old Linda K. in Schenectady has Albany /æ/-system (Labov, to appear):
 - like New York /æ/-system without structural constraints
 - tensing before /m n f θ s ʃ b d g/, no effect of syllable boundary
 - indicates Schenectady is within Albany's dialectological sphere of influence
- Schenectady is in Albany's sphere of influence wrt. commuting, newspapers, etc.

Amsterdam: Outside Albany dialect area; general WNE system; not Inland North.

- 61-year-old Fred B.: standard WNE vowel pattern
 - nasal /æ/ system
 - clear *cot/caught* distinction
- 13-year-old Laurence C.
 - no diagnostic features of Inland North at all, even the ones found in WNE
 - *cot/caught* mostly merged: not like Inland North, WNE, or Albany

Eastern boundary of Inland North is **between Gloversville and Amsterdam:**

Two small cities, 10 miles apart, **both regionally oriented towards Albany and Schenectady**, but in different dialect regions.

So the boundary of the Inland North appears to lie **within the greater Albany/Schenectady area.**

Two possible explanations for the difference between Gloversville and Amsterdam:

1) NCS is **slowly expanding eastward.**

- has already reached Gloversville; may eventually reach Amsterdam
- difference between cities is just a result of the time at which research was done
- Betty has incomplete NCS vowel system because NCS is new to Gloversville

2) Gloversville is more open to NCS than Amsterdam for **historical reasons.**

- construction of Erie Canal in the 1820s created initial conditions for NCS
- Amsterdam is older settlement than Gloversville
 - Amsterdam had 3,000 people by 1810, before Erie Canal
 - Gloversville had 14 families by 1828, after completion of Canal
- Amsterdam's basic dialect pattern was established before Inland North existed
- Gloversville's dialect still being formed at the same time as Inland North
- thus Amsterdam would be less susceptible to Inland North sound changes

Caveat:

These conclusions are based on just two speakers from Amsterdam and two from Gloversville. That's enough to conclude that Gloversville is in the Inland North and Amsterdam isn't, but not enough to have great confidence in either (1) or (2) as an explanation of why.

Main finding:

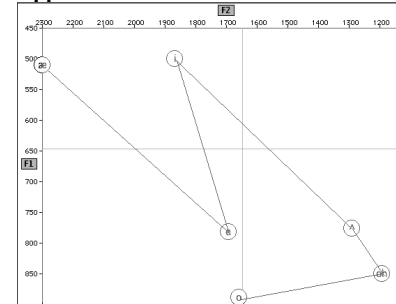
The boundary of a major dialect region can separate a town from the urban area it's most closely connected to, and group it with cities it has no particular relationship with. In other words:

Small cities and towns can show dialectological behavior that does not reflect their regional affiliation.

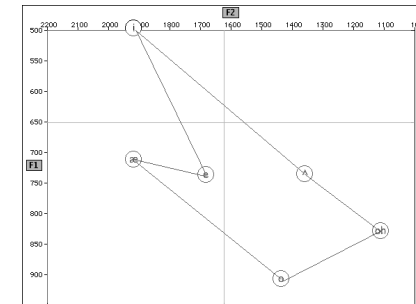
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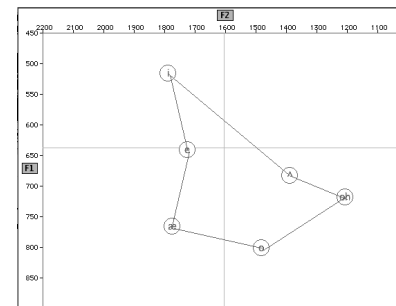
Appendix: Selected vowel mean charts



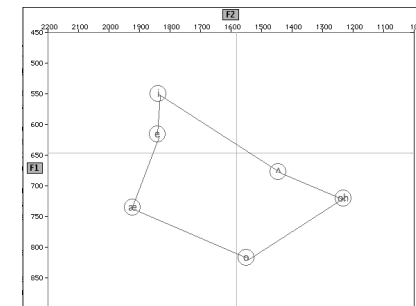
1. Janet B., 64, Utica



2. Betty S., 52, Gloversville



3. Fred B., 61, Amsterdam



4. Benjamin W., 68, Schenectady