

Linguistic and non-linguistic regions in perceptual dialectology

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Perceptual dialectology: where do non-linguists believe dialect regions are located?

A common methodology: have naïve informants **draw maps** of dialect boundaries (e.g., Evans 2011, Bucholz et al. 2007, Inoue 1996, Preston 1986, and many others). Most non-linguist informants **don't actually know** where dialect boundaries are located; some regions on hand-drawn dialect maps correspond fairly well to linguistic reality, but others bear **no particular resemblance** to any known empirical dialect regions. If people don't know where actual dialect boundaries are, **where do they get their ideas?**

Inoue (1996) finds “**commonly used areal divisions**” on “ordinary geographical maps” and “**stereotypical... geographic labels**” correspond to hand-drawn dialect maps. Evans (2011) finds “respondents regularly perceive eastern Washington [state] as different”, matching a “**perceived cultural divide**” between two halves of the state.

Question for this pilot study:

Are people's beliefs about **where regions with distinctive speech are shaped or determined** by regions being **culturally or geographically salient** for other reasons?

Methodology:

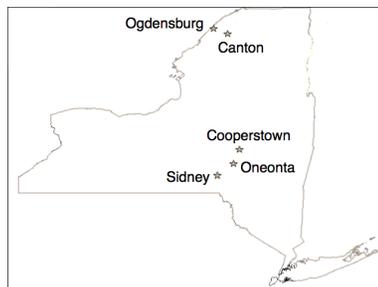
Two map-drawing tasks carried out (in this order) in **two regions** in New York State.

- 1) On an outline map of New York State (with a few cities labeled to help orient), draw and label the **major sub-regions** of New York State.
- 2) On another copy of the same map, draw and label regions that you think have **distinctive ways of speaking**.

Maps collected in summer 2008 in the course of fieldwork reported in Dinkin (2009):

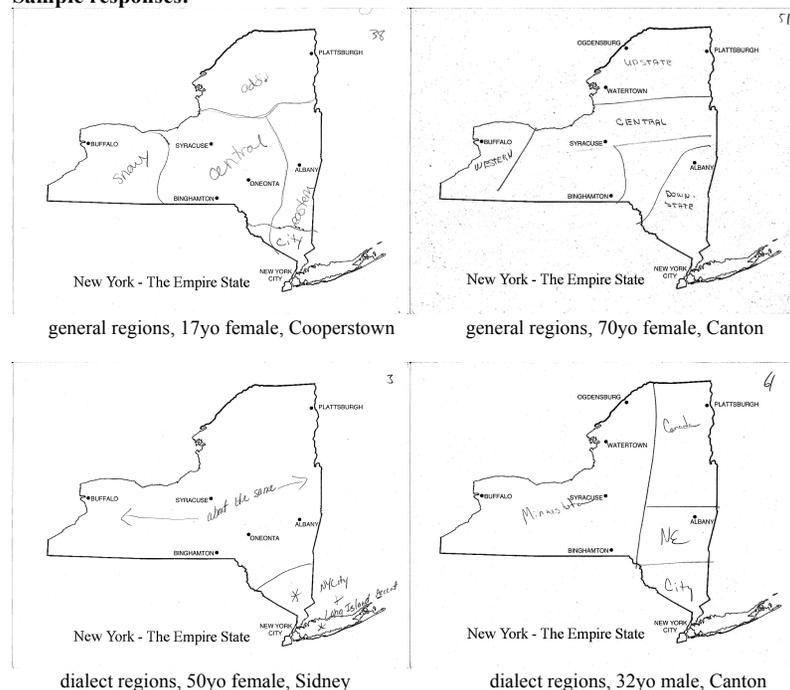
- 14 respondents from **Northern New York** (NNY): Ogdensburg and Canton
- 20 respondents from **Central New York** (CNY): Sidney, Oneonta, Cooperstown —two of whom only completed one map task, so there are 19 of each map from CNY in total.

Respondents performed map-drawing tasks **toward the end** of sociolinguistic interviews, after free conversation but before specific discussion of language.



data collection sites

Sample responses:



Overall results: dialect maps

Broad consensus that the **New York City area** or **Downstate** is dialectally distinct:

- 88% of respondents (18/19 CNY, 11/14 NNY) include NYC in a dialect region that **does not extend beyond** the southeastern sector of the state.
 - Majority of such regions (13 CNY, 10 NNY) are **labeled with NYC-specific names** —“the City”, “New York”, “Bronx”, “Brooklyn”, etc.
 - **Widespread** nationwide belief in small NYC dialect area shown by Preston (1986).
 - **Existence** of such a dialect is more or less **empirically accurate** (Labov et al. 2006).
 - Maps vary greatly in its **extent** (which is not empirically very well-established either).
 - On 7 maps (6 from CNY) some or all of **Long Island** is a **separate** dialect from NYC.
- No other dialect region** was indicated by more than 28% of respondents:
- 9/33 have a **North Country**-type dialect region; 5 have a **Western New York** region.
 - Other than NYC, **empirical** dialect regions have **little influence** on hand-drawn maps:
 - Only 2 are aware of a dialect region containing Buffalo & Syracuse but not Albany.
- No systematic difference** between NNY and CNY maps (except maybe Long Island).

Overall results: non-linguistic maps

Several regions found on majorities of general-region maps:

- **Western New York** region, including Buffalo but not as far east as Syracuse: drawn by 9/14 NNY respondents, 14/19 CNY, 70% overall.
- **North Country/Adirondack** region, between Vermont and St. Lawrence River: drawn by 6/14 NNY, about 13/19 CNY (plus 2 questionable), 58% overall.
 - **East side and/or west side** of North Country, as **individual** regions not reaching all the way across, were drawn by an additional 7 NNY and 1 CNY.
- **Central New York** regions, **not** extending east to Albany or west to Buffalo: drawn by 9/14 NNY, 8/19 CNY, 52% overall.
 - 7/19 CNY respondents drew **East-Central** region including Syracuse and Albany
- **Downstate/New York City** regions, within the southeastern sector of the state: drawn by 6/14 NNY, 16/19 CNY, 67% overall
 - 6 of those CNY maps include **multiple** regions in the southeastern sector —e.g., dividing it into NYC proper, Long Island, and “Downstate”.

Only **significant difference** ($p < 0.02$) between NNY and CNY in major regions:

NNY significantly **less likely** to draw **non-linguistic Downstate/NYC-area** region (though a few labeled a region “Downstate” or “City” that **extended up to Albany**). NNY is **less convinced** than CNY that there’s a **geographically compact general-purpose region** including NYC, though they **agree** there is such a **dialect** region.

Another way of looking at it: **smallest regions including New York City**.

NNY and CNY more or less **agree** on the **size of the dialect region** containing NYC, but have **very different opinions** on the smallest such **general-purpose region**. Similarly, on CNY maps, NYC dialect regions look similar to NYC general regions, but on NNY maps, NYC’s dialect region is **much more compact**.

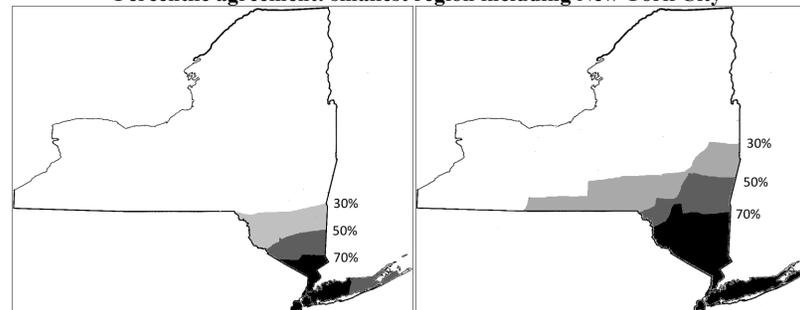
Conclusion

People from NNY believe the SE part of the state **is a region with a distinctive dialect**, even if it doesn’t come to mind when asked just to “name major regions”. Thus the New York City area’s **reputation as a dialect region** is **stronger** or more pervasive than its reputation as just a general-purpose region.

What non-linguists do when asked **where dialect boundaries are** is **not necessarily just** repurposing regional boundaries that are already salient for other reasons (though presumably general-region boundaries can still have an influence).

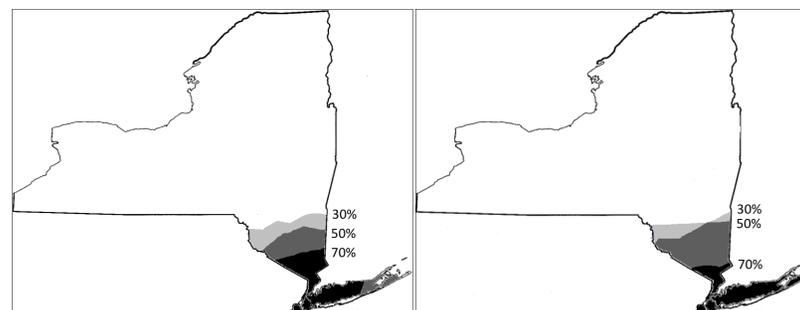
People from different communities can **agree on where dialect regions are** while **disagreeing** on what regions are salient in general.

Percentile agreement: smallest region including New York City



CNY general-region maps

NNY general-region maps



CNY dialect-region maps

NNY dialect-region maps

References:

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