

## **Folk dialectology at the top of the world: Alaskan views of English in North America and Alaska**

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Although English as spoken in Alaska remains understudied, some features of Alaskan English production have been documented (Tabbert 1991; Romig 2013; Kwachka 2017). However, the perceptions Alaskans have of varieties of English inside and outside of Alaska are not documented at all. The nature of these perceptions is of particular interest due to geography: Alaska is one of only two states that does not share a border with any of the contiguous states, and getting to any other state requires at least a flight lasting multiple hours. Therefore, one might expect Alaskans to hold different perceptions about local varieties than those from elsewhere in the United States (Montgomery 2012).

This study reports the results of a pair of folk-dialectology tasks completed by Alaskans in order to develop an initial understanding of the folk dialectologies of Alaskans. In the first, 47 Alaskans were given blank maps of North America plus Hawai'i, and asked to hand-draw English-language dialect regions; this was followed by a similar task involving a map of Alaska. In the second, 43 Alaskans were asked to rate the states and territories of the United States using a Likert scale along several axes designed to assess local beliefs about both regional culture and language; this was followed by a similar task involving Alaska boroughs and census areas (i.e., county-equivalents). In all cases, respondents were asked to limit their responses to their beliefs about English, and not to include other languages.

In general terms, Alaskans show some similarities to previous studies in the contiguous United States (e.g., a clear awareness of the existence of a Southern American English region, with 83% of respondents marking such a region). This was found in both the map-drawing task and the state-by-state ratings. However, the details of those perceptions differed depending on the task: A GIS analysis of the area marked as Southern by Alaskans in the map-drawing task resulted in a much larger Southern region than found from studies conducted in the contiguous states; the state-by-state ratings showed a smaller Southern region than the map-drawing task, but still a comparatively large one.

When mapping Alaskan Englishes specifically, however, the metrics for assessing dialect boundaries were based on different factors than those used for North America as a whole. Although some still explicitly based their perceived dialect boundaries on regional factors, two widespread alternative patterns emerged along with the shift to a more local frame: an urban-rural distinction, and distinctions based on the areas in which various Alaska Native languages were historically spoken. In addition, social factors influenced what method Alaskans were more likely to use when showing perceived dialect boundaries, with younger Alaskans and those with a higher degree of local orientation more likely to use indigenous language regions. Since these findings differ from those from the contiguous United States, they suggest that a distinctive orientation of locality for Alaskans has developed over time.