

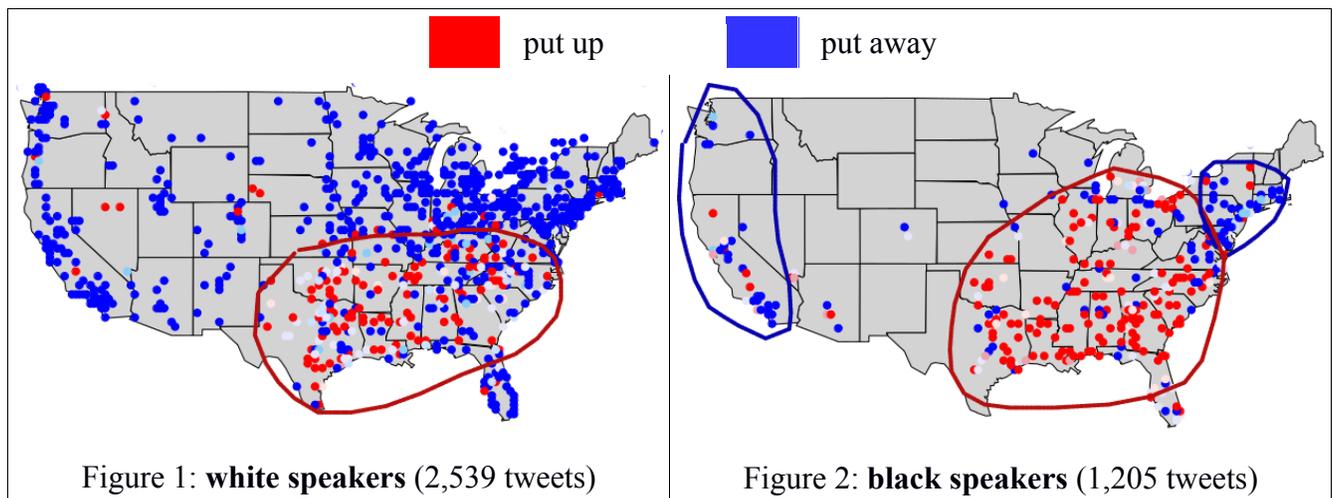
## 'Finna Put the Groceries Up': Comparing African-American and European-American Regional Variation

Martha Austen

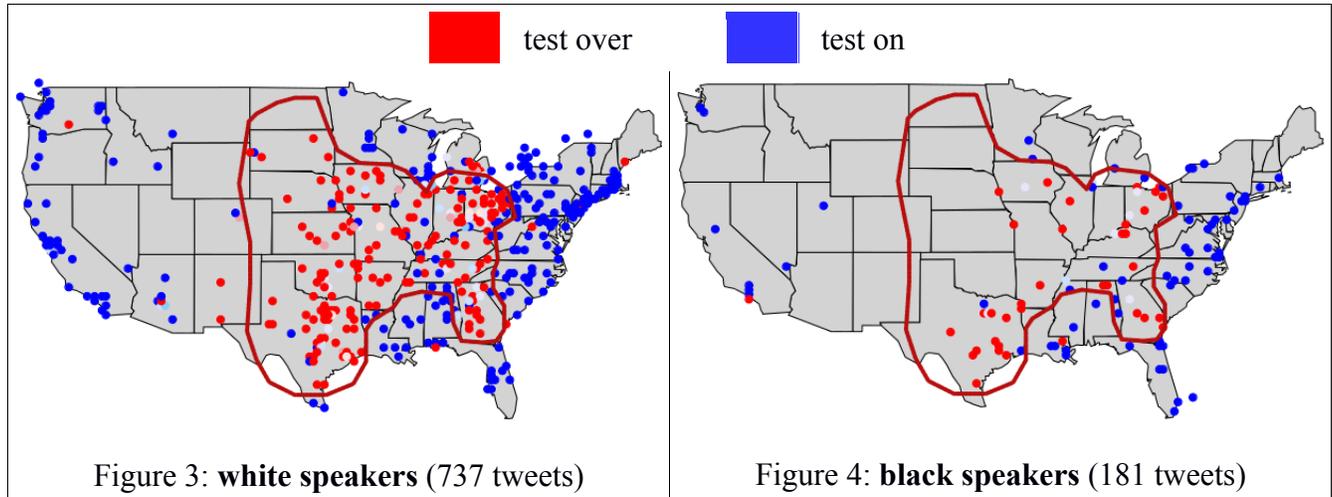
As part of efforts to de-stigmatize African-American English and legitimize it as a “real”, rule-governed language, early variationists emphasized its uniformity across the United States (Labov et al. 1968; Wolfram 1969). Researchers also reported that AAE speakers do not participate in regional European American sound changes (Labov et al., 2005, p. 297). These findings led, in Wolfram's (2007) words, to the “sociolinguistic myth” of a supraregional, monolithic AAE. As Wolfram notes, recent studies prove this myth false (Cukor-Avila 2001; Mallinson and Wolfram 2002). While these demonstrate that regional variation exists within AAE, little work has yet examined this variation on a large scale; for example, most dialect atlases focus on European Americans. Do large regional dialects of AAE exist? If so, do the boundaries of these regions correspond to those of European American English?

This study addresses these questions by mapping the use of two lexico-syntactic variables, *put up/away* (*put the groceries up/away*) and *test over/on* (*test over/on chapter five*) by black and white speakers. *Put up* and *test over* were hypothesized to be features of Southern English, and therefore likely to be used by some non-Southern AAE speakers as well. Data were gathered from Twitter to enable rapid, large-scale collection of the variants in use, using user profile pictures to classify race. In aggregate, this method should provide a noisy but accurate outline of variation. The reliability of the racial classifications was tested with *fixing to* – a feature of white Southern English (Ching, 1987; Bernstein, 2003) – and its derivative *finna*, a feature of AAE (Green, 2002; Smith, 2009), both roughly corresponding to standard English 'about to'. The control variants showed the expected distributions: *fixing to* was used mainly by white speakers in the South, and *finna* mainly by black speakers throughout the US.

As hypothesized, white speakers used *put up* only in the South (Figure 1). Black speakers showed a different regional pattern: speakers in the South and Midwest favored *put up* compared to speakers on the West Coast and in the Northeast (Figure 2). These results support those of Jones (2015), who finds evidence for Northeast and “Great Migration” (encompassing the South and Midwest) regions of AAE. This suggests that AAE dialect regions are different from those of European American English.



*Test over* displays a unique pattern involving parts of the South and Midwest that does not conform to any previously reported dialect region (Figures 3 and 4). Here, black and white speakers pattern together, demonstrating that they can share regional features. While this finding has been reported before within single communities (Cukor-Avila 2001), *test over* extends these results to a broad scale, showing identical isoglosses across black and white speakers. Building on the evidence discussed in Wolfram (2007), this work further demolishes the idea of a monolithic AAE.



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