“Almost Classy” to “Mumbly White Trash”:
How Texans perceive dialects in the Lone Star State

This study uses methods from perceptual dialectology to investigate language attitudes in Texas by identifying which regions Texans perceive sound “different” and how they characterize those differences. The current research adds to the growing number of locations such as Korea (Jeon 2011), California (Fought 2002; Bucholtz et al. 2007), Kentucky (Cramer 2010), and Washington (Evans 2011), which have been studied using the “draw-a-map” task (Preston 1989) to examine non-linguists’ views of language variation. These mental maps can provide insight into where dialect boundaries are perceived to exist, the stereotypes and attitudes associated with the perceived dialects, and whether these perceptions correlate with dialect boundaries documented from production data. Data for the present study were collected across the state in spring 2012 and include 367 hand-drawn maps from respondents aged 18-87. Respondents’ comments were coded for semantic categories and perceptual dialect regions were identified from an “all-polygons drawn” map. Heat maps using ArcGIS software were then created to illustrate the geographic locations of the most identified perceptual categories. The maps suggest that some of the perceived dialect areas correspond with geographical boundaries (e.g. *Spanish/Spanglish* in an area along the Mexican border, *Cajun* along the border with Louisiana) but others, such as *Drawl, Twang, or Country* are not as clear-cut and tend to overlap. In addition, the maps suggest that Texans have a clear perception of who sounds “correct” and where they live: “standard” or “correct” Texas speech is most associated with urban/suburban inhabitants of north and central Texas and contrasts with speech perceived as “country” in other urban centers or with people living in rural areas.

References