

Hillbillies, Schmucks and Gangsters: A Perceptual Dialectology Study of the Greater Toronto Area

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Bucholtz et al. (2007) stress the importance of perceptual dialectological research focusing on smaller regions, such as urban areas, in order to shed light on how social values are assigned to the language varieties spoken in the area; yet there is minimal work focusing on these smaller areas. Toronto is one of the most ethnolinguistically diverse cities in the world, yet there has been little work exploring the attitudes of its residents towards the diversity of spoken English surrounding them in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The current study explores the perceptions of GTA residents toward the varieties of English spoken in the GTA. The central goal of this project is to determine whether any linguistic boundaries exist in GTA residents' minds and whether these boundaries reflect linguistically distinct features according to residents. Methods for data collection of the current study follow those used by Preston (1989; 2011) and Evans (2011): fifty-four post-secondary and recently graduated post-secondary students completed a questionnaire and a map task that asked them to indicate which areas of the GTA have different sounding English from their own. These differences could be grammatical, lexical or phonetic. A preliminary qualitative analysis of responses according to participants' ethnicity, gender, linguistic knowledge and social networks, as well as the experimental environment suggests that residents of the GTA distinguish between specific areas with different sounding English compared to their own and harbour different attitudes towards these areas. The main factor contributing to a participant's likelihood of labeling and highlighting areas on the map task, as opposed to leaving it blank, was the participant's geographic area of socialization. Finally, this study provides insight into GTA residents' perceptions of the English spoken in the GTA and supports the notion that perceptual dialectology studies may be conducted in smaller regions.