

Spring 2018 Research Abstract
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Talking Traveling: A Study of Kansan/Californian Dialect Perception in Mobile and Non-mobile Individuals

This study focuses on whether a mobile lifestyle influences dialect perception and if so, how. To study the role mobility has on dialect perception, mobile individuals were compared to non-mobile Kansans via an online survey was distributed via Facebook to 48 participants which asked questions of demography, mobility, and Kansan-ness, as well as a modified Likert scale in order to target specific language attitudes about distinct dialect regions in the United States. This survey functioned to determine if mobility influenced how participants viewed Kansan and California Englishes in relation to each other. A paper-and-pencil map task was also distributed to a group of 22 fraternity men at a land grant university in Kansas to see if mobility influenced the way the participants viewed dialect distribution geographically. In order to examine potential sociocultural dialect associations and/or stereotypes, perceptions of Californian and Kansan Englishes were examined. Californian and Kansan Englishes were examined because, while the two dialects undergo similar phonetic processes, California and Kansas have vastly different cultural association. The goal of this study was to determine whether or not these cultural associations influenced how mobile and non-mobile participants perceived each dialect. It was hypothesized that due to their increased dialect exposure, mobile individuals were more likely than non-mobile individuals to accurately categorize dialect regions on a map, and to evaluate different dialects based more on experience and less on stereotype. This hypothesis was supported by the map task, yet unsupported by the online survey. The study showed that some mobile individuals demonstrated a greater understanding of dialect distribution by creating more detailed dialect maps than some non-mobile individuals. However, this study also showed that

mobile individuals were more likely to rate Californian English as sounding not like them than Kansan English. This implies that Californian English is marked in such a way that makes it undesirable for mobile individuals to associate oneself with it. This phenomenon is perhaps due to the strong Californian stereotypes of the Valley Girl or Surfer Dude, and a desire by the mobile participants to not want to be associated with these, and other potential Californian stereotypes. These findings also raised questions of dialect authenticity and whether social norms and politeness played a part in the perception results. In an age of constant movement, mobility is a relatively new variable in perceptual dialectology. As such, more study is needed to determine the exact scope of influence mobility has on dialect perception, and in extension, on how individuals who speak a specific dialect are perceived.