

Varied perceptions of Southernness in dialect transition zones

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Introduction

- Transition zones present people with linguistic and cultural variation
- People need to negotiate the social consequences of this variation
- “Southern” is one of the most recognized dialect regions in the United States (Preston 1989)
- The Southern dialect is stigmatized outside of the South, so people in transition zones that border the South must negotiate their relationship with that dialect and another dialect
 - Do people in different parts of the same transition zone treat southernness similarly?
 - If not, what factors contribute to differences?



Overview

- Oklahoma
 - Regional identity survey (Bakos 2013)
 - Perceptual dialect maps (2009–2015)
- Indiana
 - Regional identity survey (Weirich 2017)
 - Perceptual dialect maps (2013–2016)
- Comparison of results



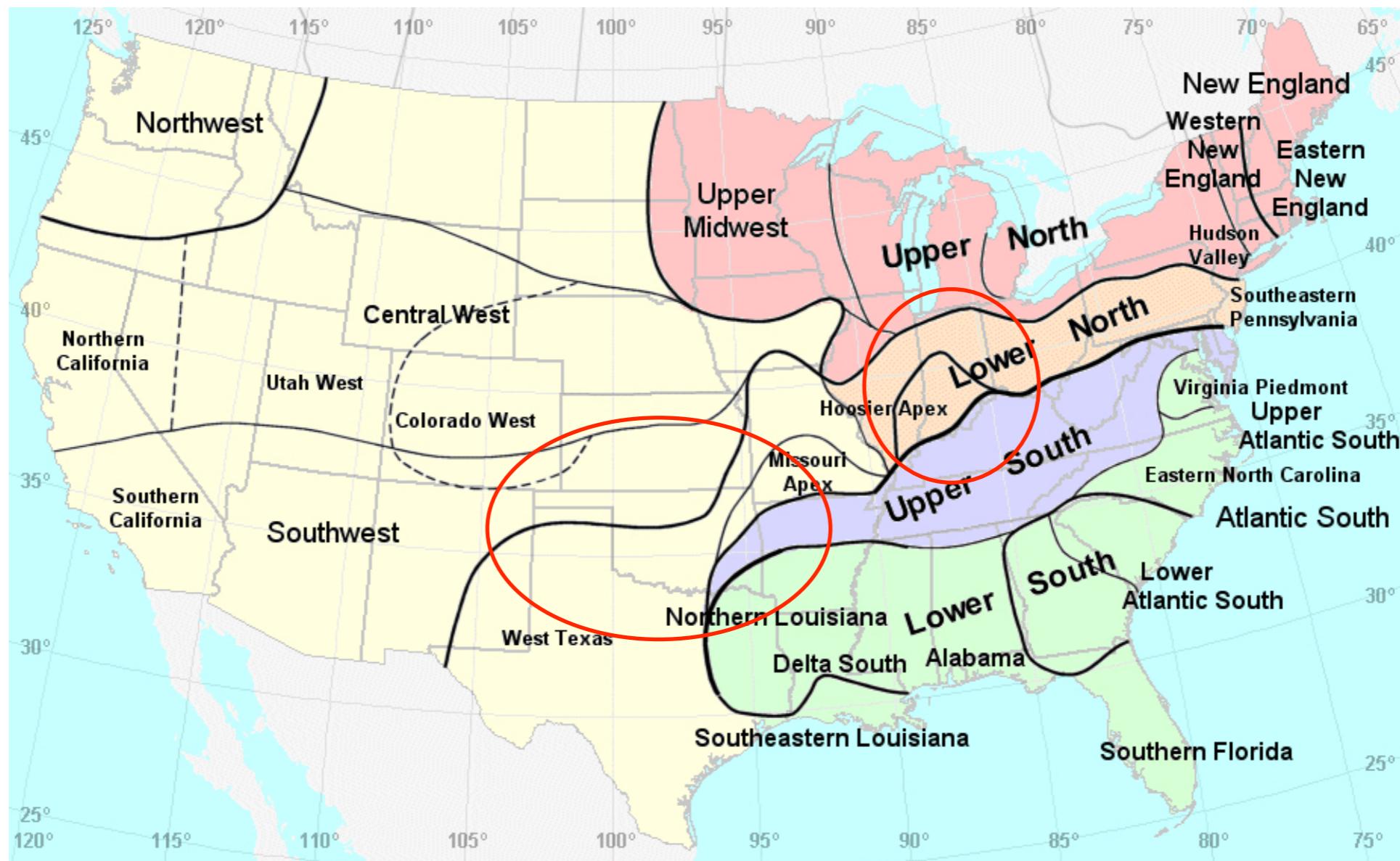
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On the periphery



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On the periphery



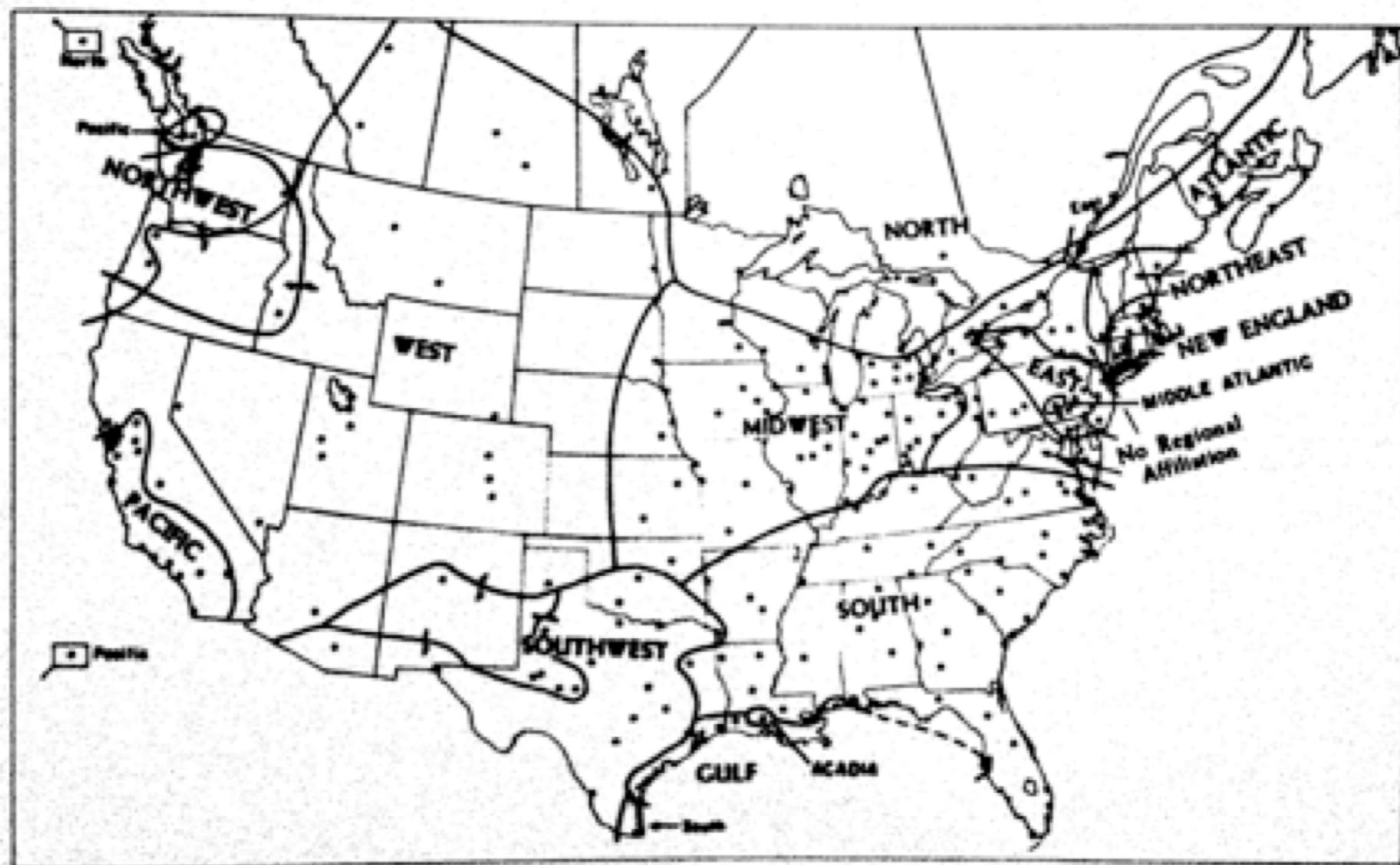
Carver, 1987

On the periphery



Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2005

On the periphery



Popular regions of North America based on telephone book data (Rooney et al. 1982)



Oklahoma: Settlement

- Major settlement in eastern half by Indian tribes from southern states following the Indian Removal Act of 1830
- Western half settled by land run and lottery beginning in 1889
 - Most settlers from Lower Midwest, Upper South, and Texas & Lower South (Southard 1993)

Oklahoma: Settlement

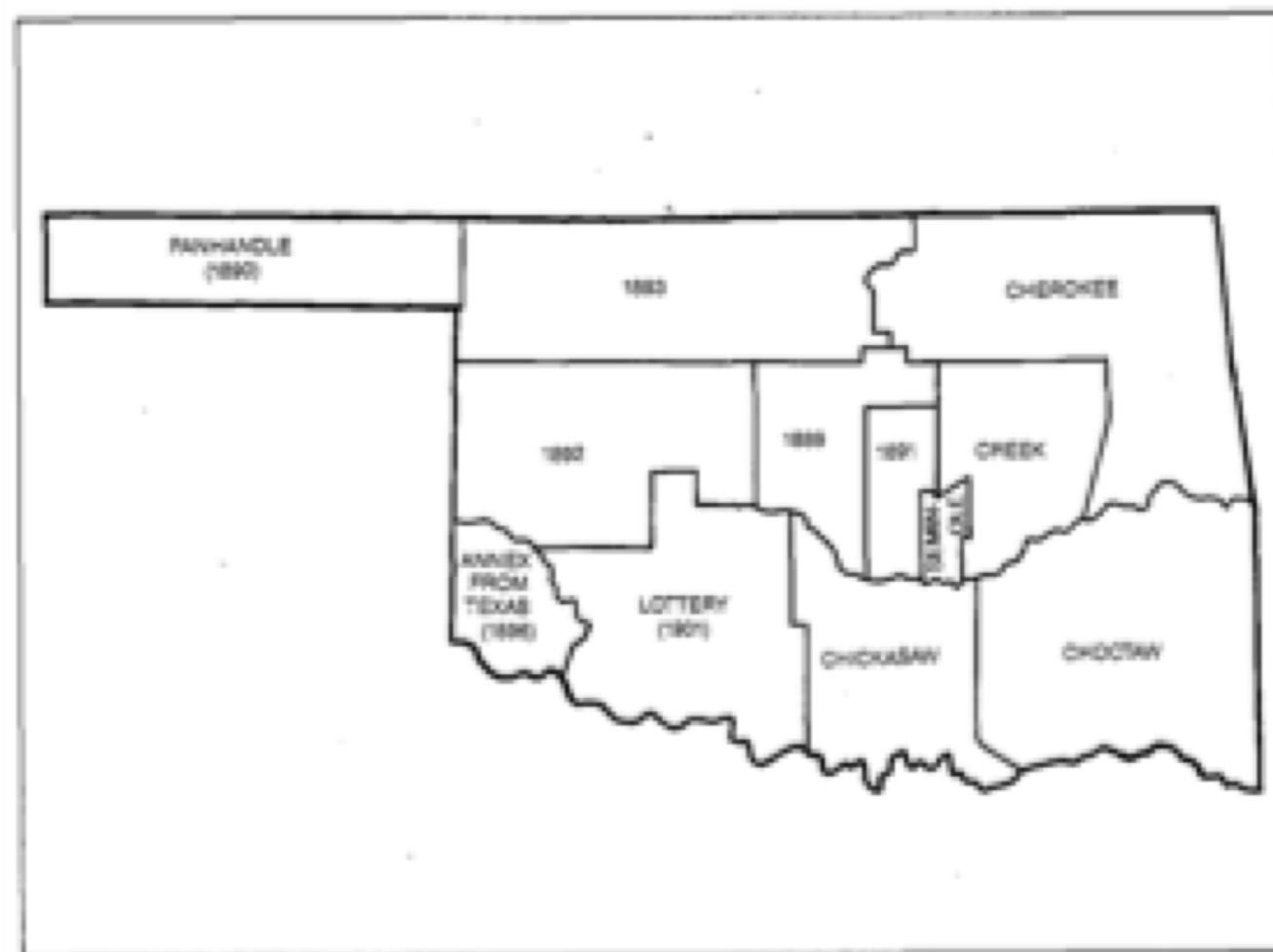


Map of Oklahoma and Indian Territories prior to 1889
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Okterritory.png>)



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Oklahoma: Settlement



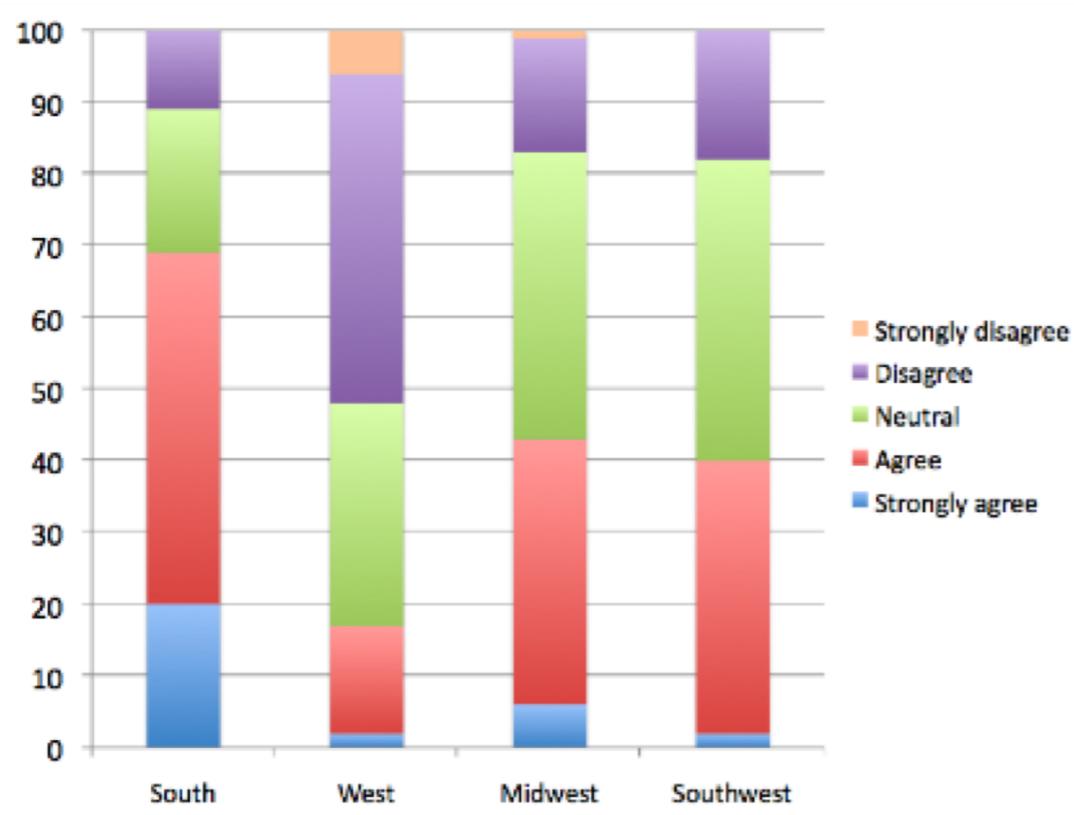
Oklahoma land divisions prior to 1907 (from Southard 1993)



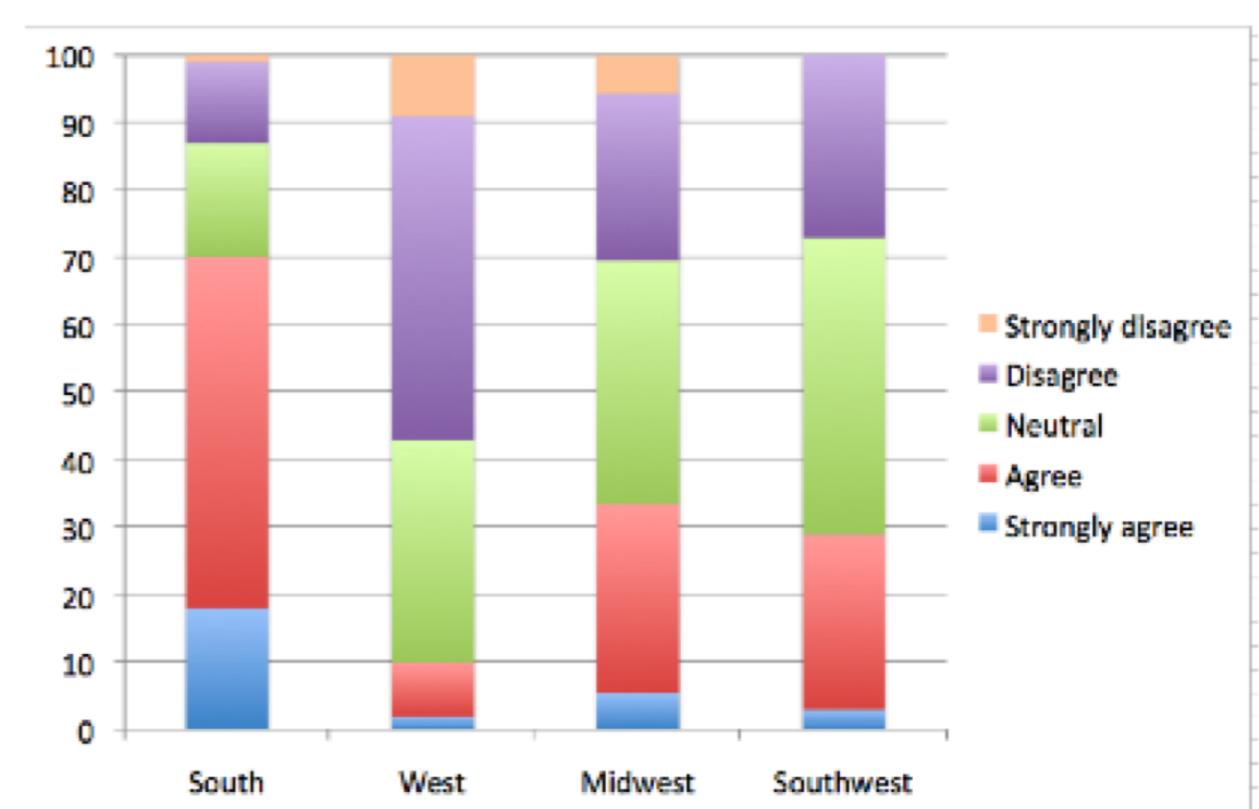
Oklahoma: Regional orientation

- Bakos (2013)
- 61 undergraduates
- Students in composition course at Oklahoma State University
- “Oklahomans are a lot like people from the Midwest (West, South, Southwest)”
- “Oklahomans speak like people from the Midwest (West, South, Southwest)”

Oklahoma: Regional orientation



"Oklahomans are a lot like people from the Midwest (West, South, Southwest)."



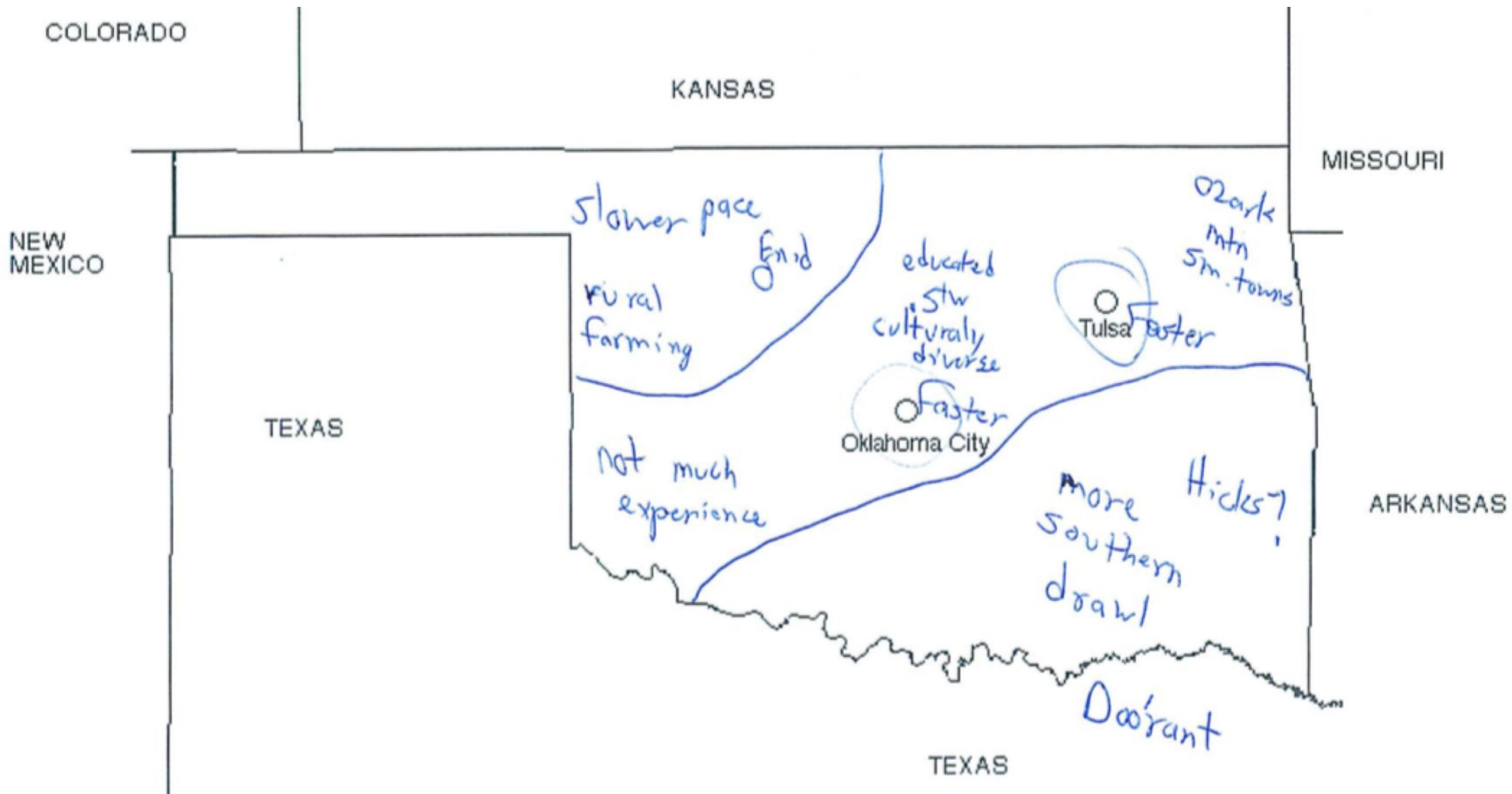
"Oklahomans speak like people from the Midwest (West, South, Southwest)."

(Bakos 2013)



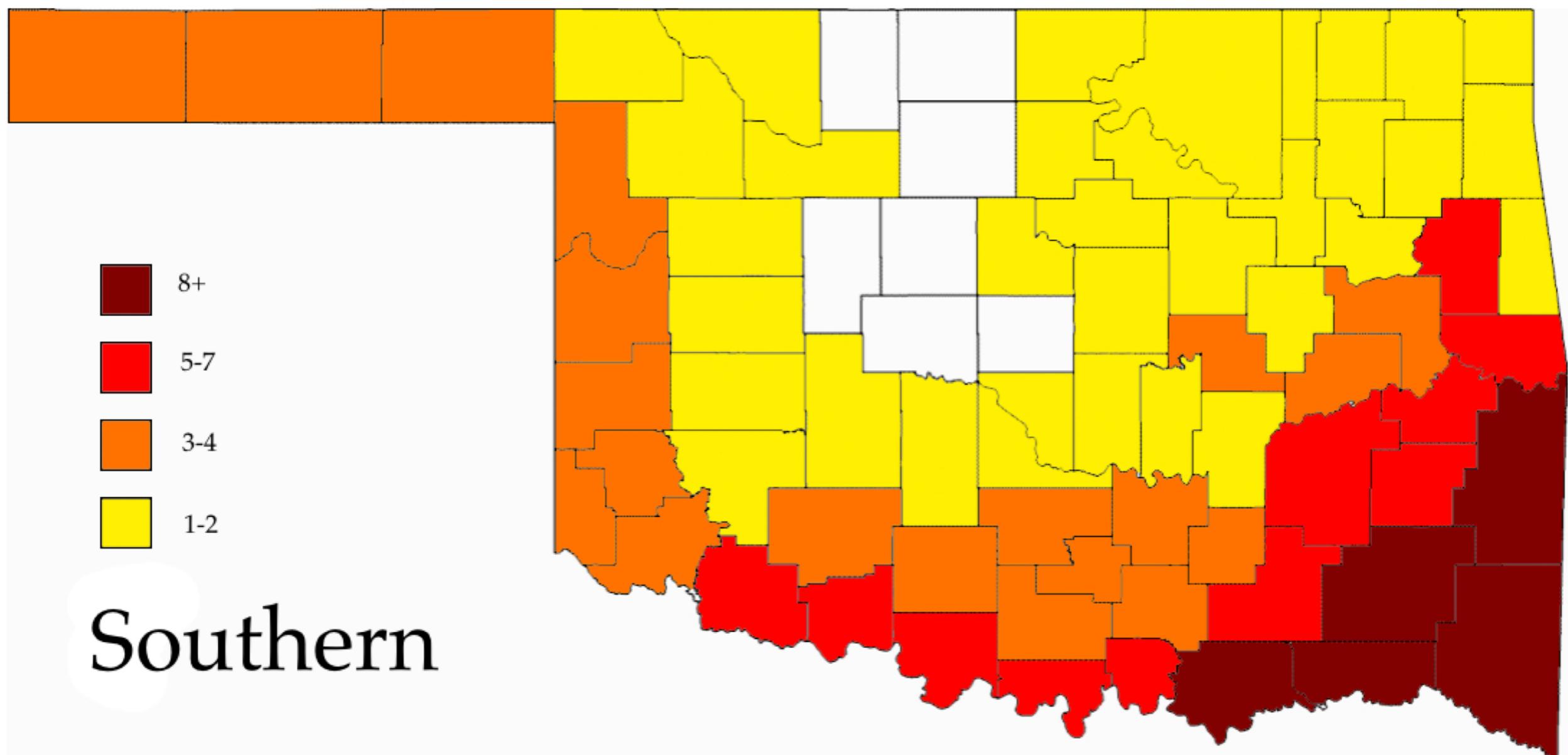
Oklahoma: Where is Southern

- RODEO (2009-2015)
 - 88 maps (draw-a-map task; Preston 1989)
 - Fairly even distribution of age, gender, and hometown size
-
1. “Draw a line around places where you think people’s English sounds different”
 2. “Next, write down what you’d call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what’s different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?)”



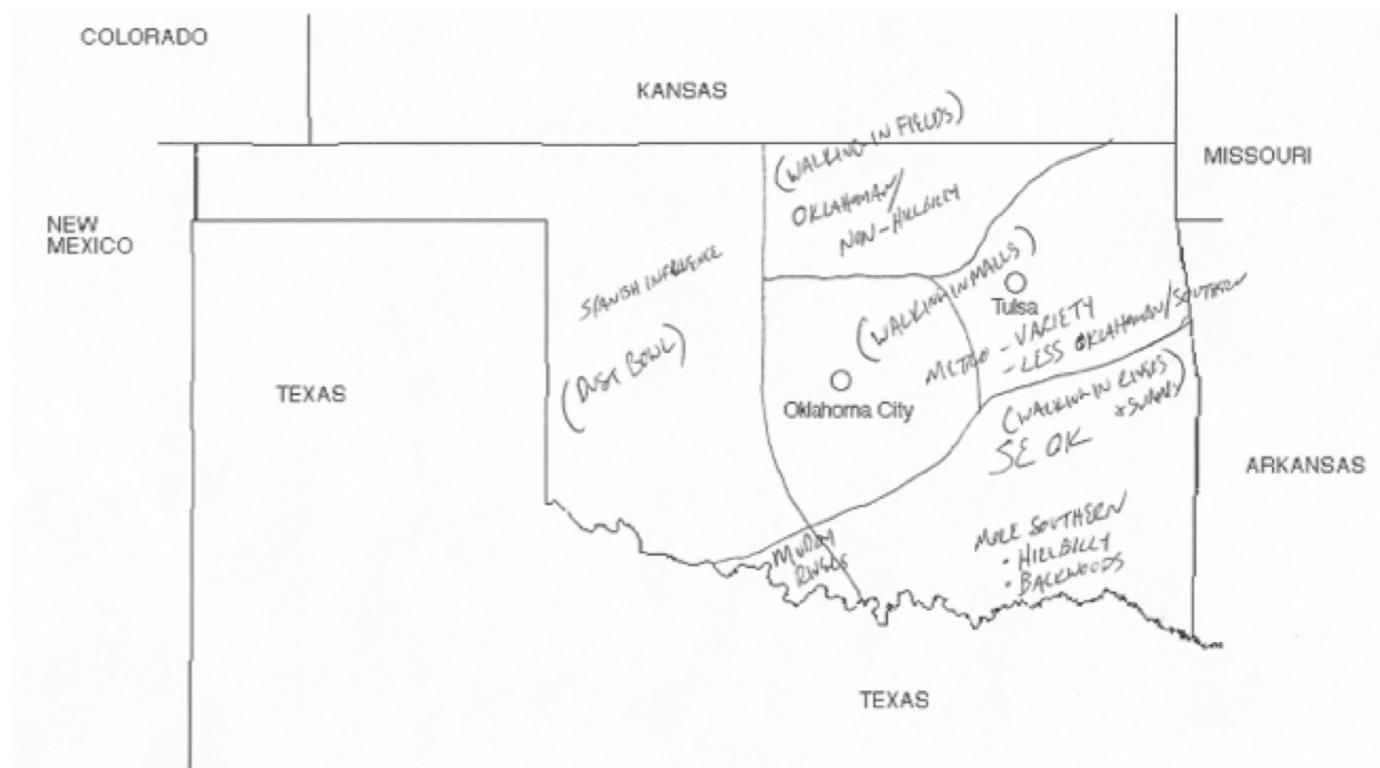


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Oklahoma: How is Southern described

- “Southern” mentioned 33 times
- Sole label (10 times)
- **Speech**
 - “drawl” (6 times)
 - “accent” (3 times)
- **State**
 - “Texas” (4 times)
 - “Arkansas” (2 times)
- **People**
 - “hick” (2), “country” (2),
“cowboy” (1), “farmer” (1),
“backwoods” (1), “white” (1)





Oklahoma: Two kinds of Southern

- “Little Dixie”
 - “Arkansas” (4)
 - “twang” (4), “drawl” (3)
 - “hick” (4), “redneck” (2),
“uneducated” (2), “hillbilly”
(1), “backwoods” (1)

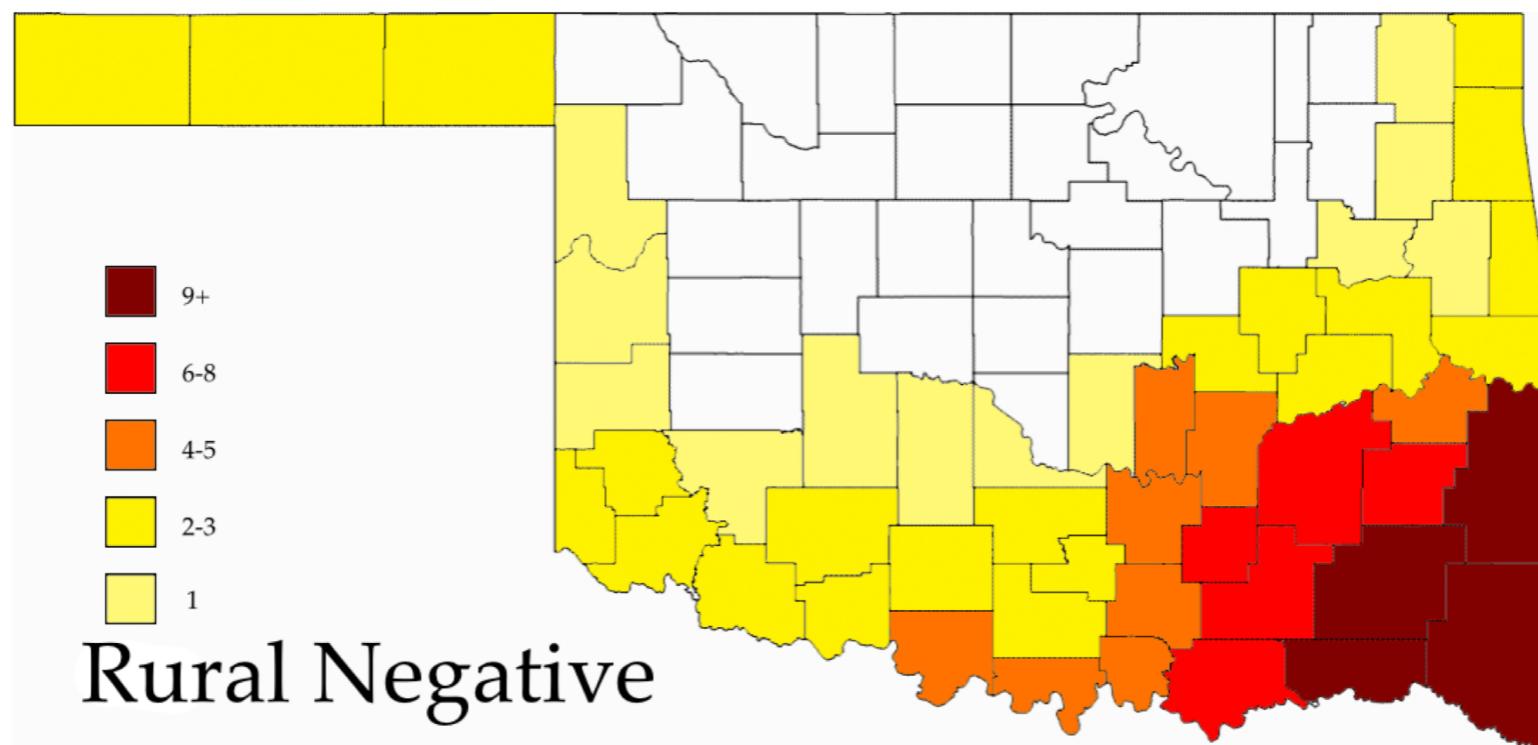
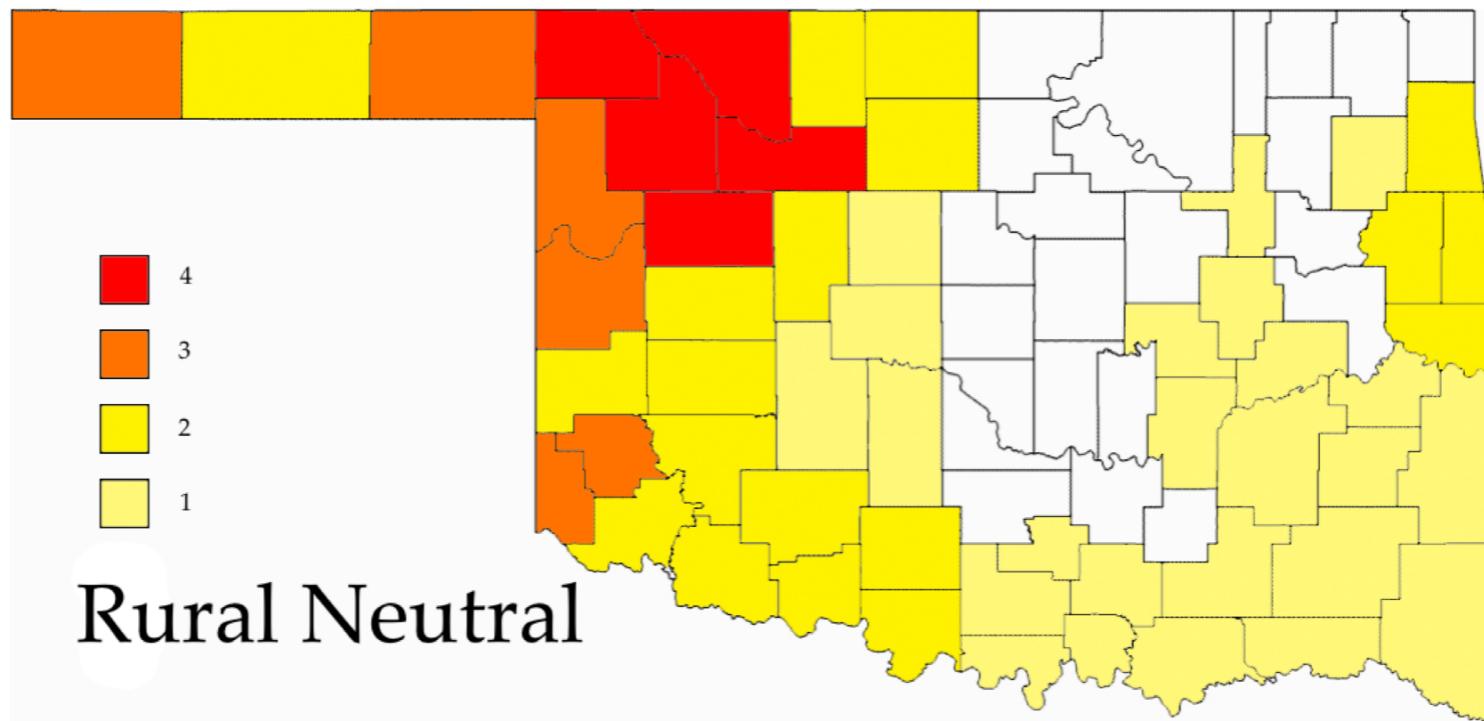


Oklahoma: Two kinds of Southern

- “Little Dixie”
 - “Arkansas” (4)
 - “twang” (4), “drawl” (3)
 - “hick” (4), “redneck” (2), “uneducated” (2), “hillbilly” (1), “backwoods” (1)
- **Texas Southern**
 - “Texas” (7)
 - “twang” (5), “drawl” (3)
 - “hick”, “rural”, “cowboy”
 - Not used: “redneck”, “country”, “uneducated”



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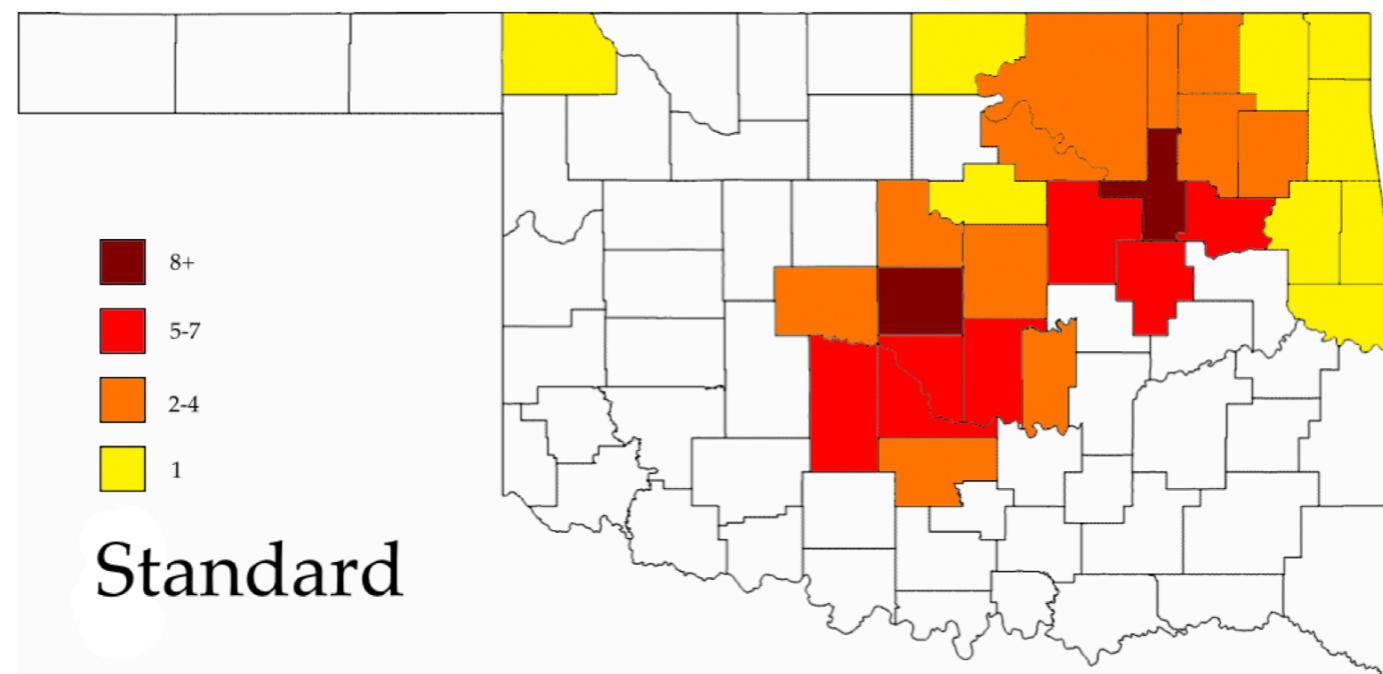




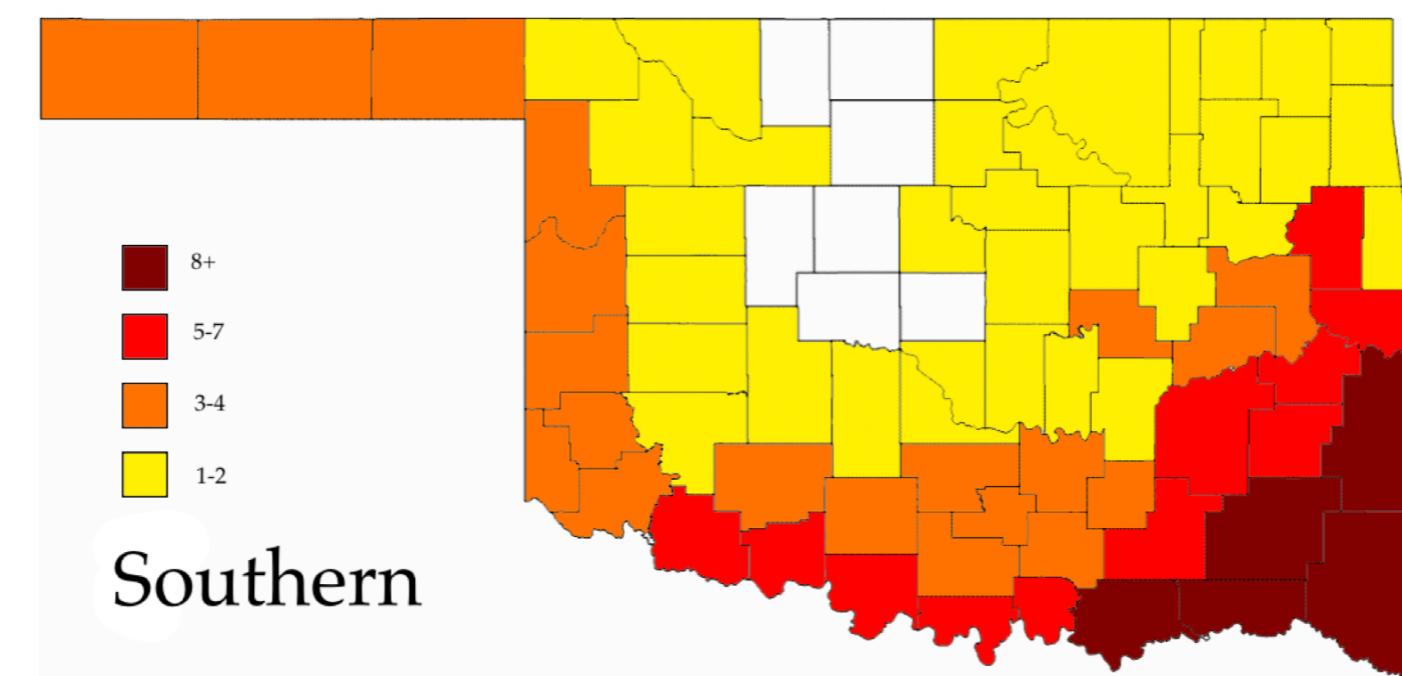
Oklahoma: Southernness in context

- What other regions are indicated?
- The cities: Oklahoma City and Tulsa
 - "standard", "faster", "less distinct", "educated", "proper", "formal", "no accent"
 - "less twang", "less accent", "not as much drawl", "not so 'rural/country' sounding"
 - Implication: even though the urban centers are the seat of the standard, the standard may include "twang", "drawl", and "country" features

Oklahoma: Southernness in context



Standard



Southern



Oklahoma: Summary

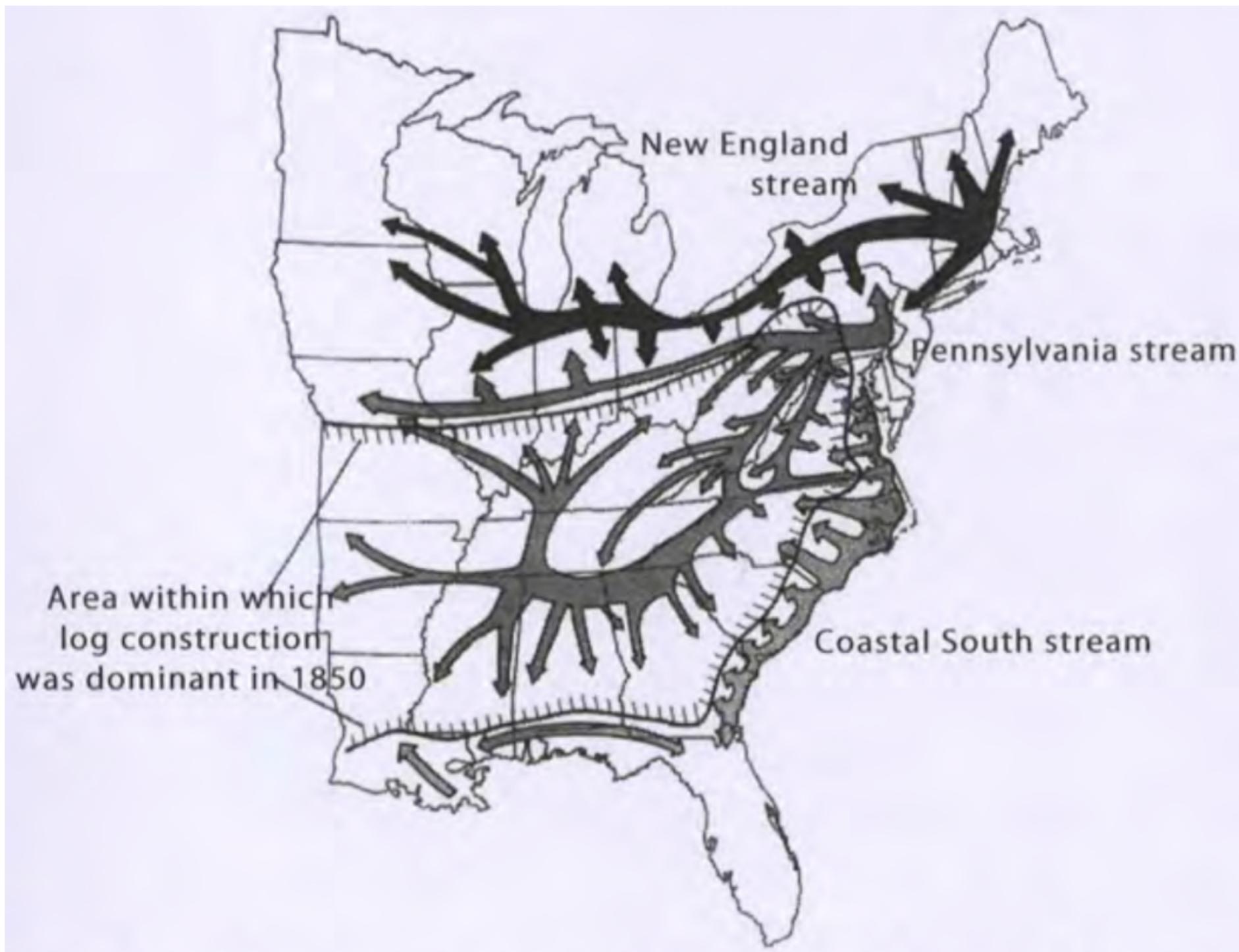
- Oklahomans have a conflicted regional affiliation but lean toward the South more than Midwest
- Two major perceived dialect regions: Southern, The Cities
- Southern region is subdivided
 - Little Dixie: negative attitudes
 - Texas Southern: neutral attitudes
- The Cities
 - Standard, but...
 - Still some “twang”, “drawl”, and “country”



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Indiana: Settlement

Indiana: Settlement

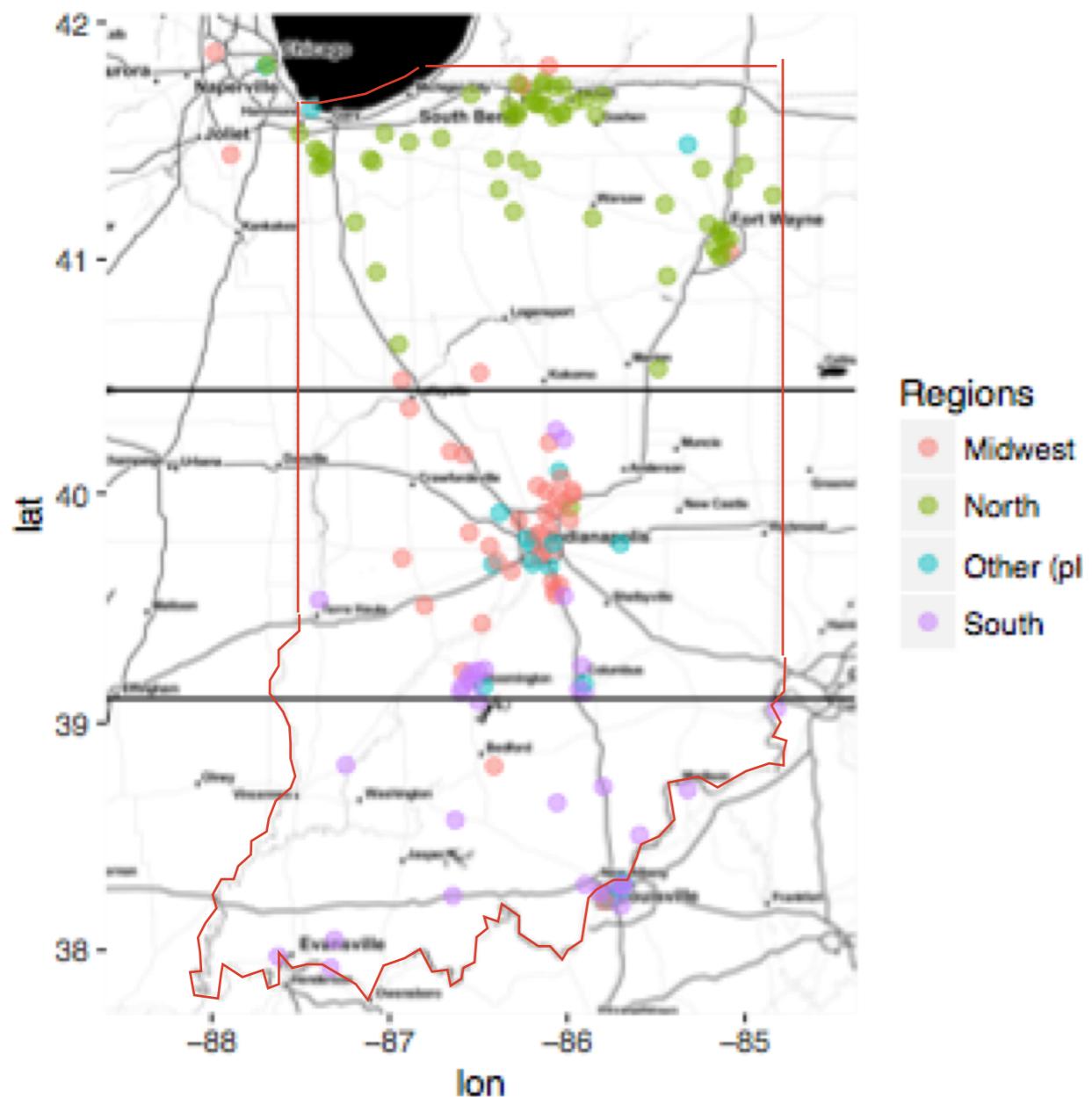




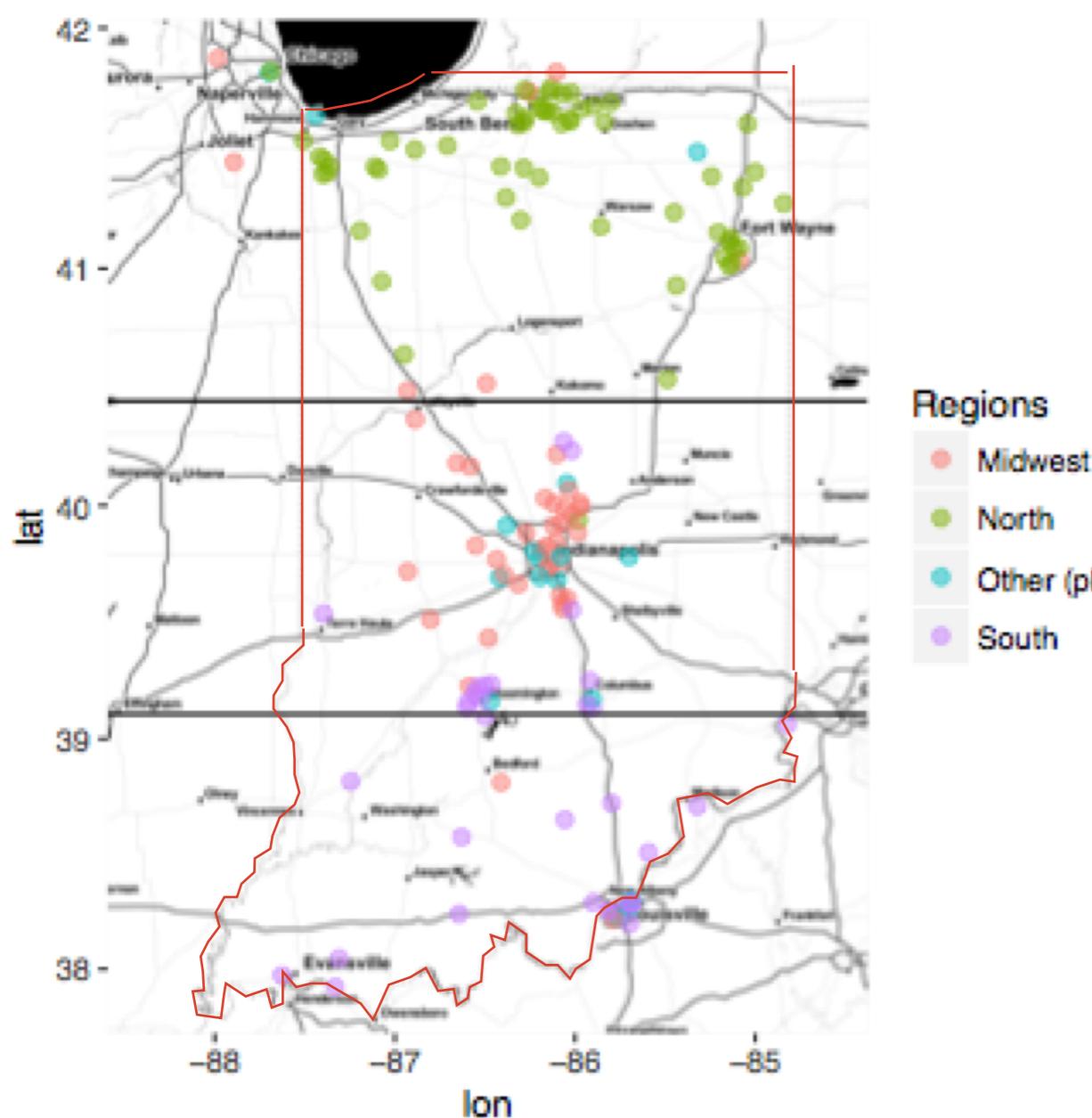
Indiana: Regional orientation

- 163 undergraduates
- Students in public speaking course
- Indiana University: Bloomington and South Bend (in the north)
- “What part of Indiana are you from?”
- “What accent do you usually speak with?”

Indiana: Regional orientation

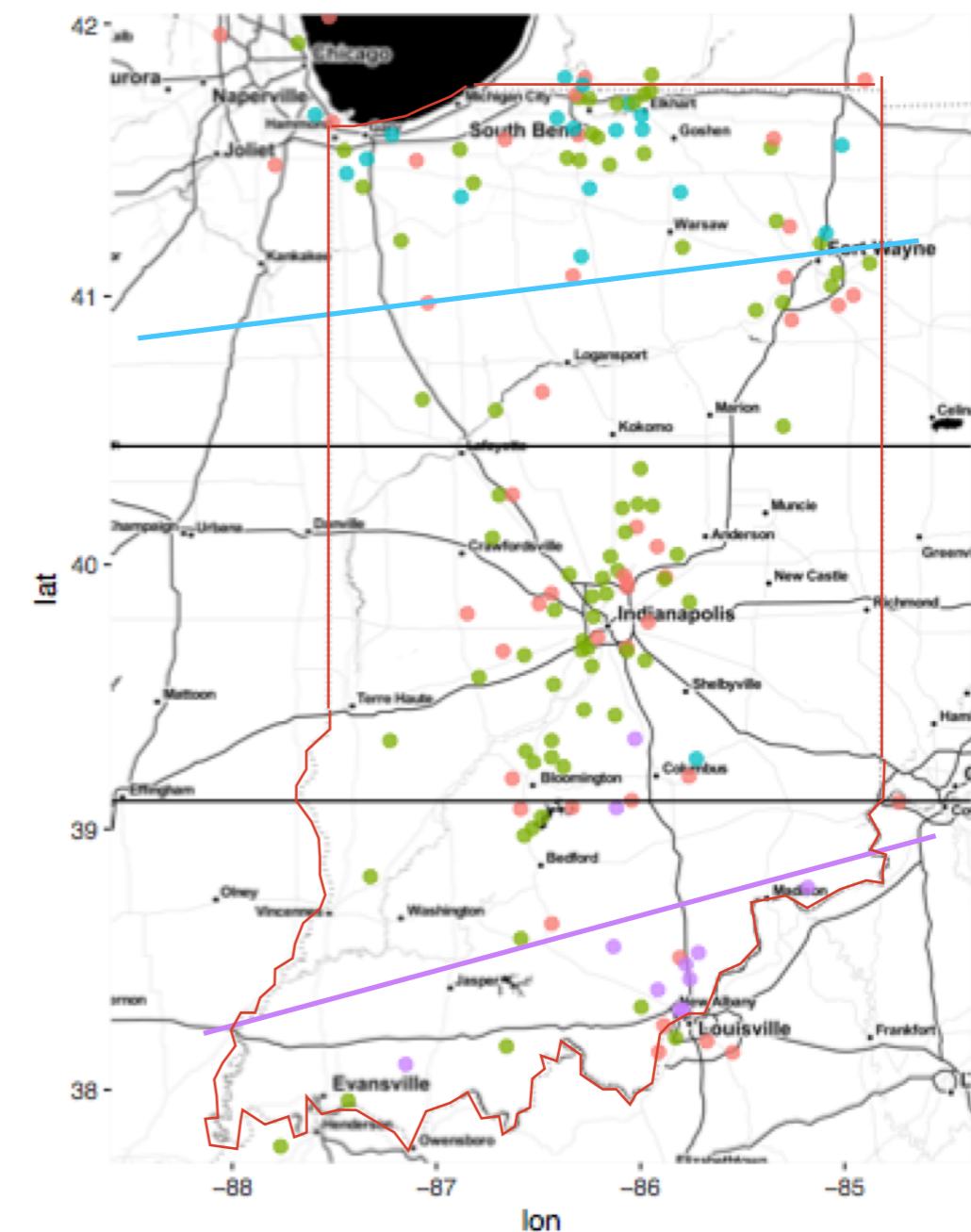


Indiana: Regional orientation



Regions

- Midwest
- North
- Other (pl)
- South



Usual Accent ● Midwestern ● Neutral ● Northern ● Southern



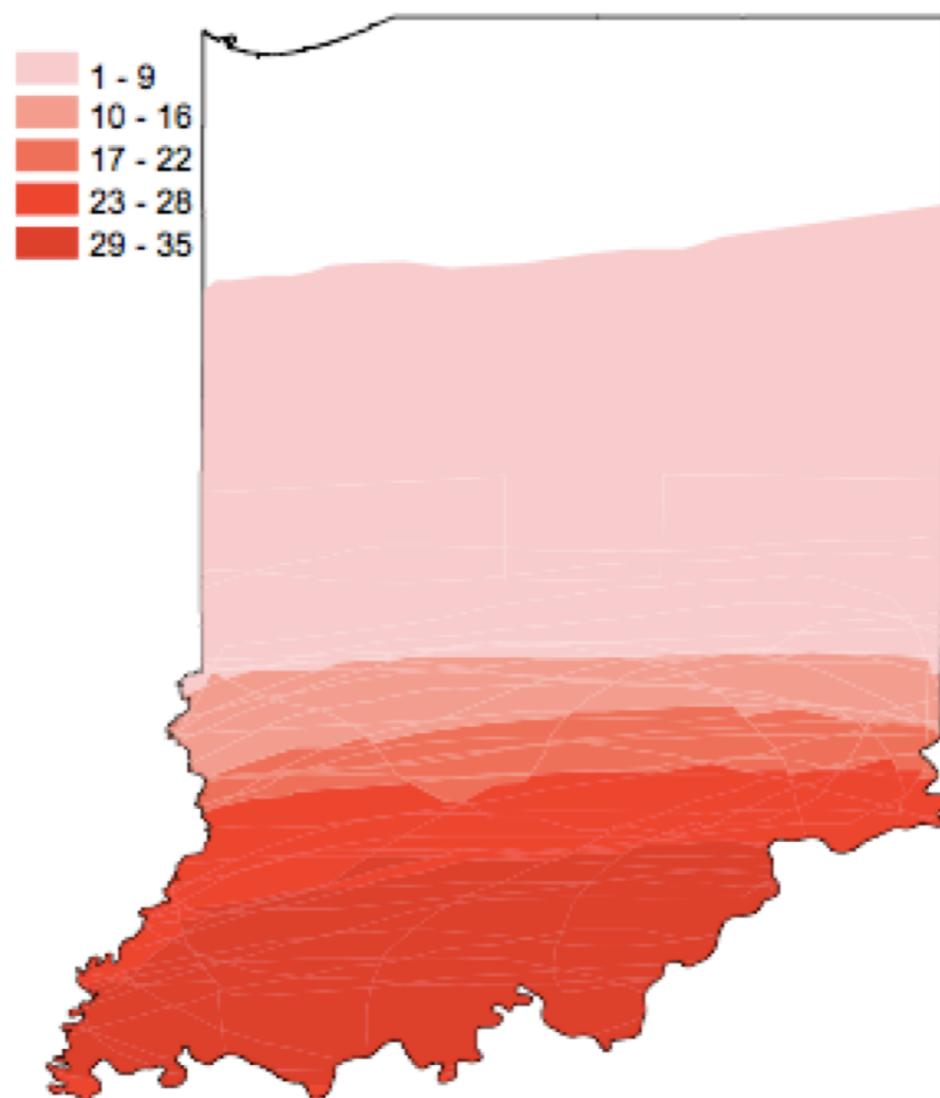
Indiana: Where is Southern

- Various environments (2013-2016)
 - 68 maps (draw-a-map task; Preston 1989)
 - All natives of Indiana
-
1. “Draw a line around places where you think people’s English sounds different”
 2. “Next, write down what you’d call that way of talking, if you can think of a label for it. Give an example of what’s different there (is it a word or pronunciation they use? Or a special way of talking?)”



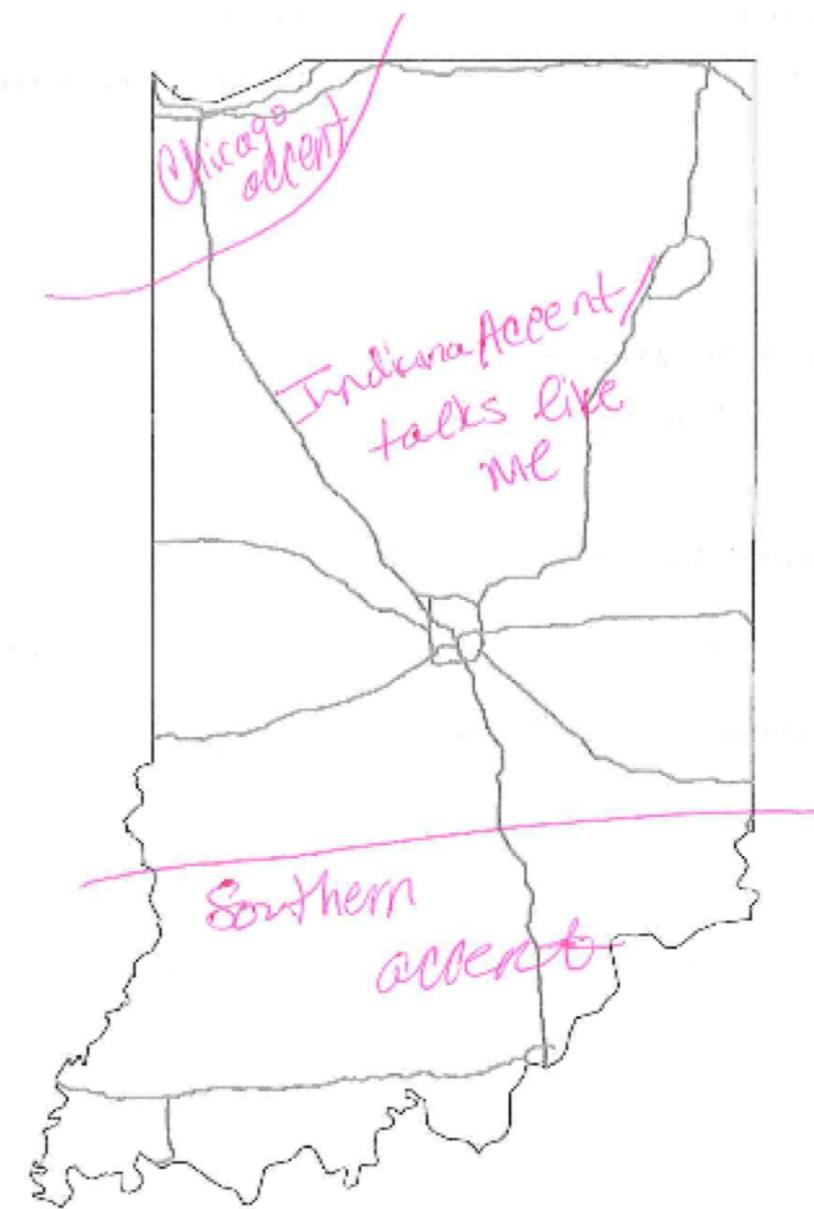
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Indiana: Where is Southern



Indiana: How is Southern described

- “Southern” mentioned 37 times
- Sole label (12 times)
- **Speech**
 - “twang” (12 times)
 - “drawl” (8 times)
 - “accent” (8 times)
- **State/Region**
 - “Kentucky” (12 times)
 - “Appalachian” (3 times)
- **People**
 - "redneck" (2), "hick" (1),
"backwoodsy" (1)

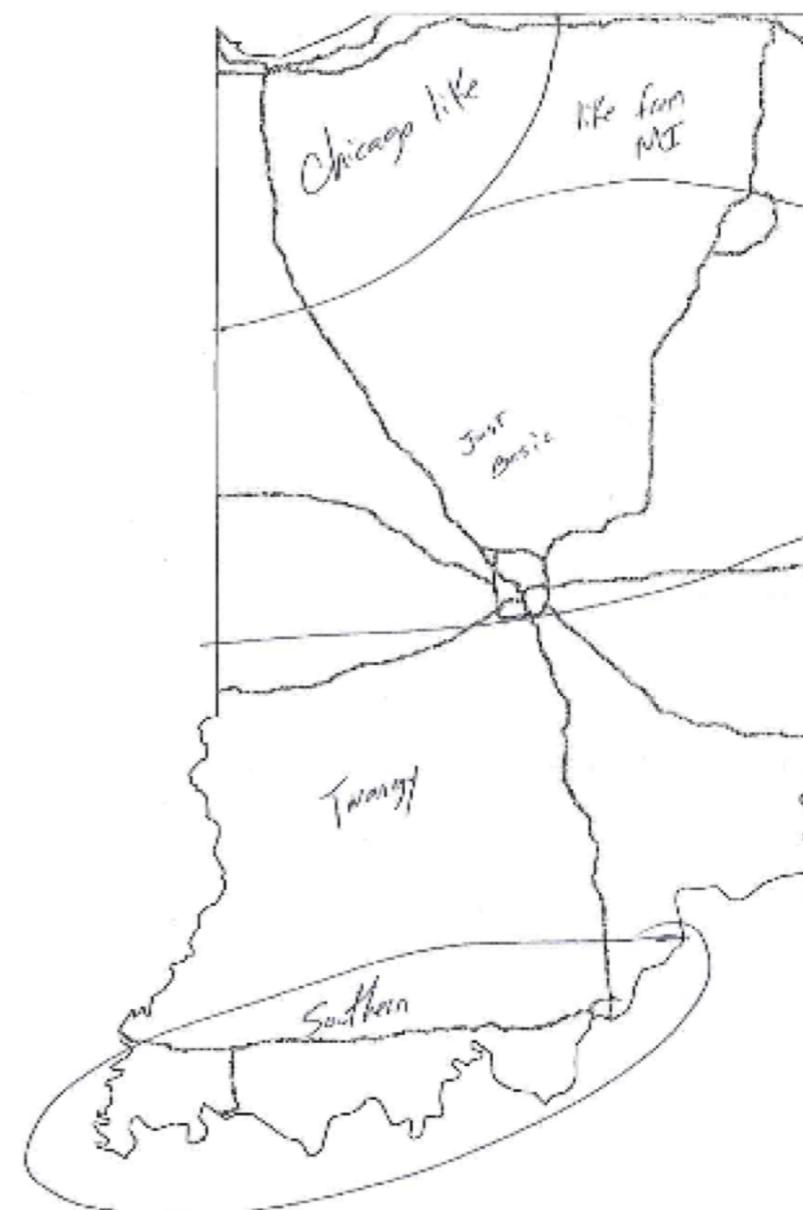
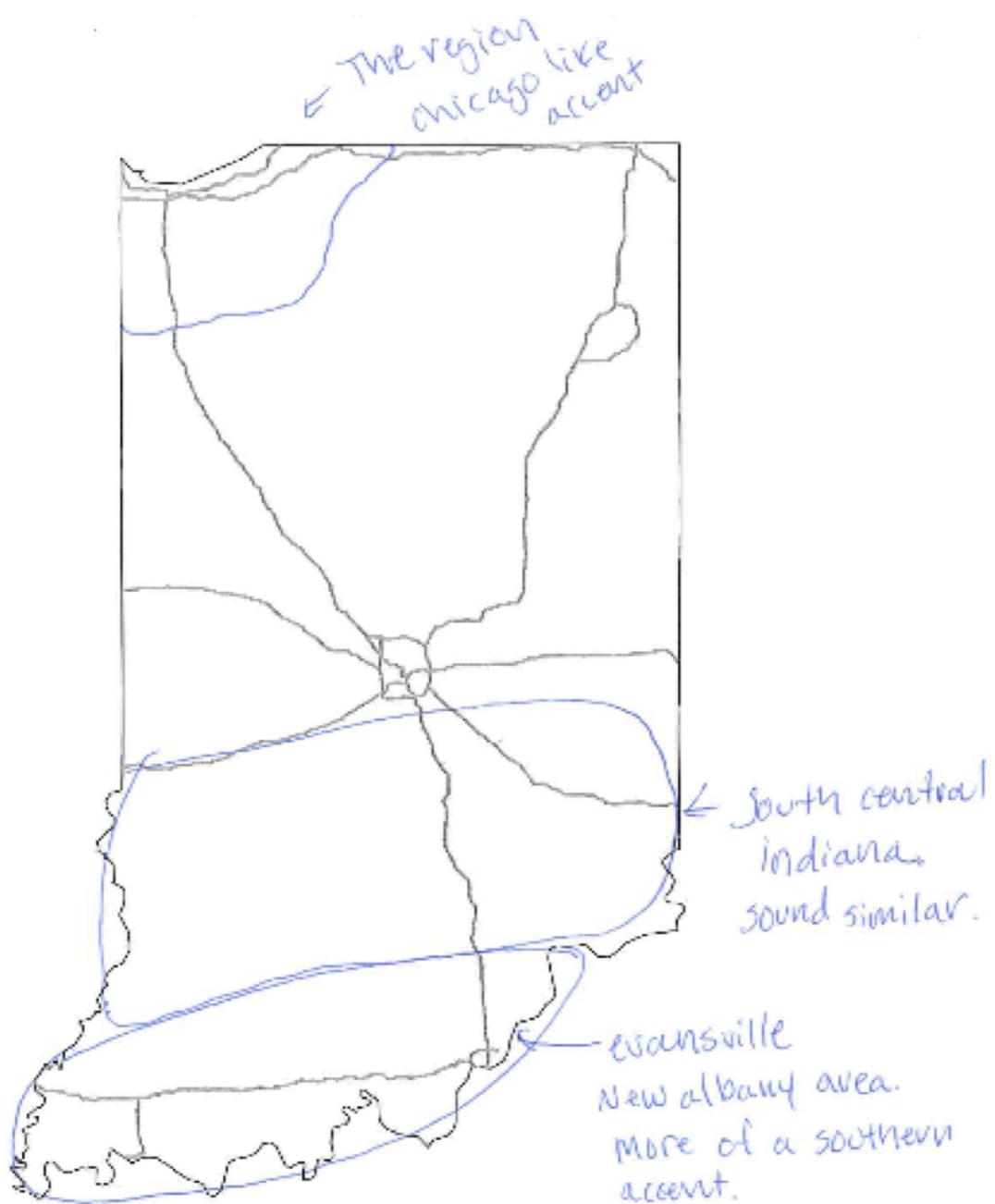




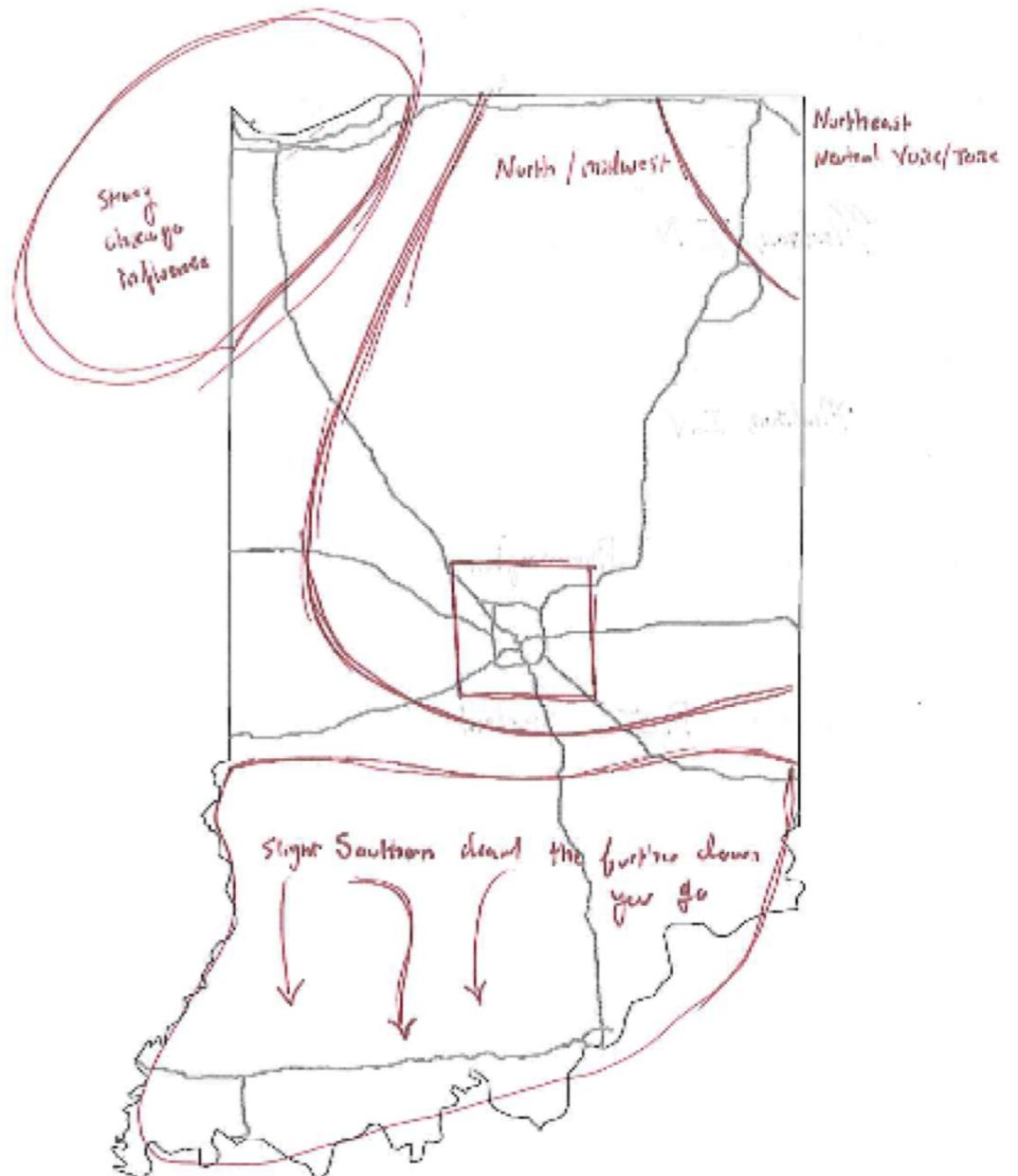
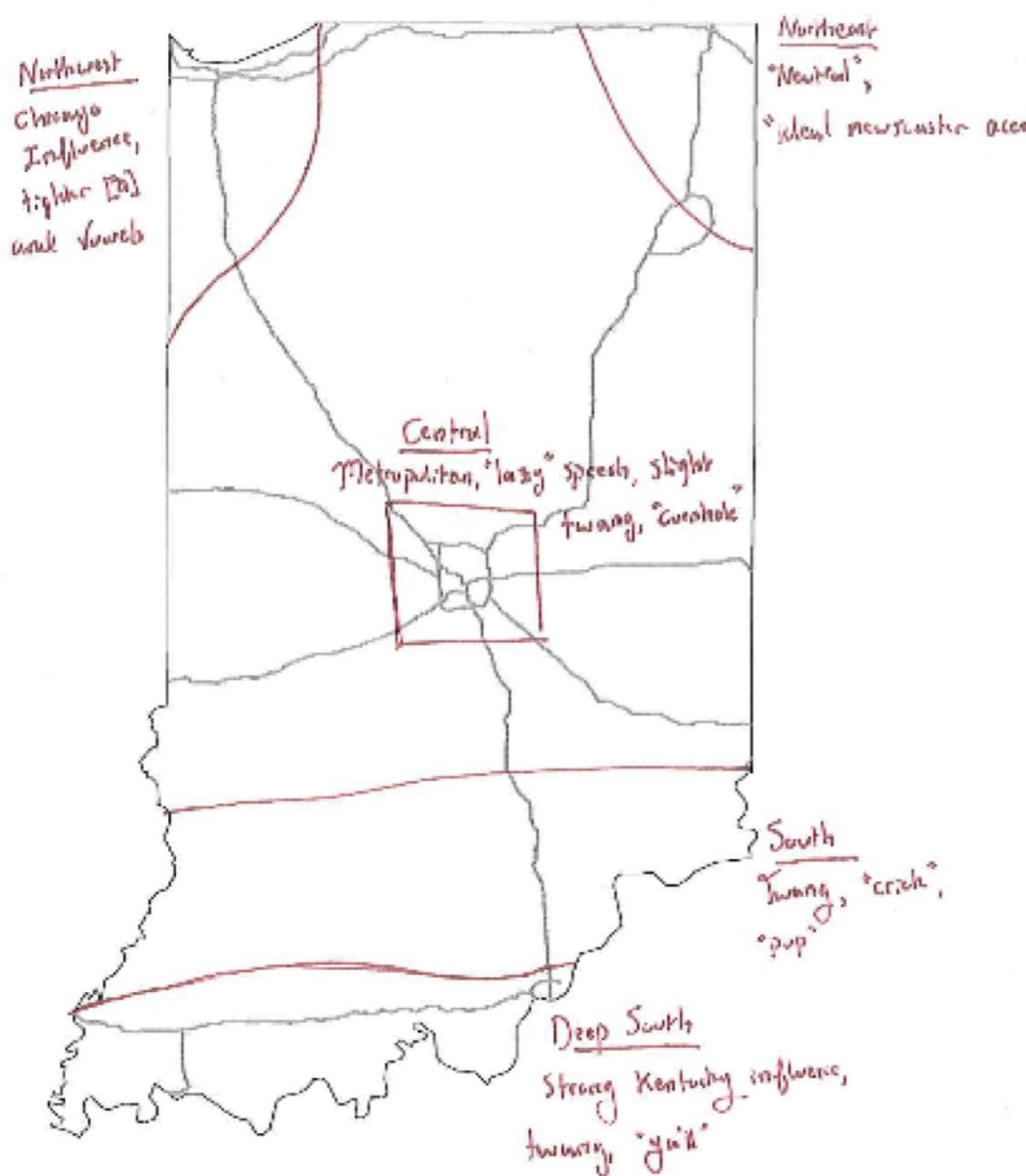
Indiana: Two tiers of Southern?

- Some maps draw a large southern region greater than one-third of the state
- Others draw a smaller southern region closer to the border
- 4 maps indicate both

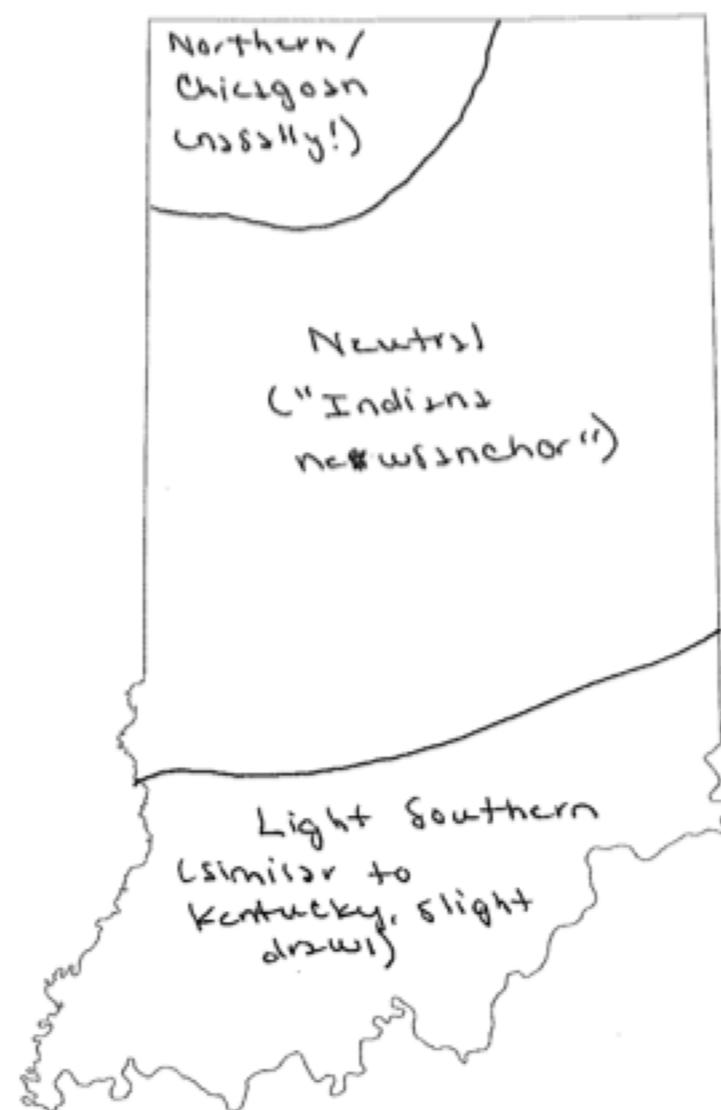
Indiana: Two tiers of Southern?



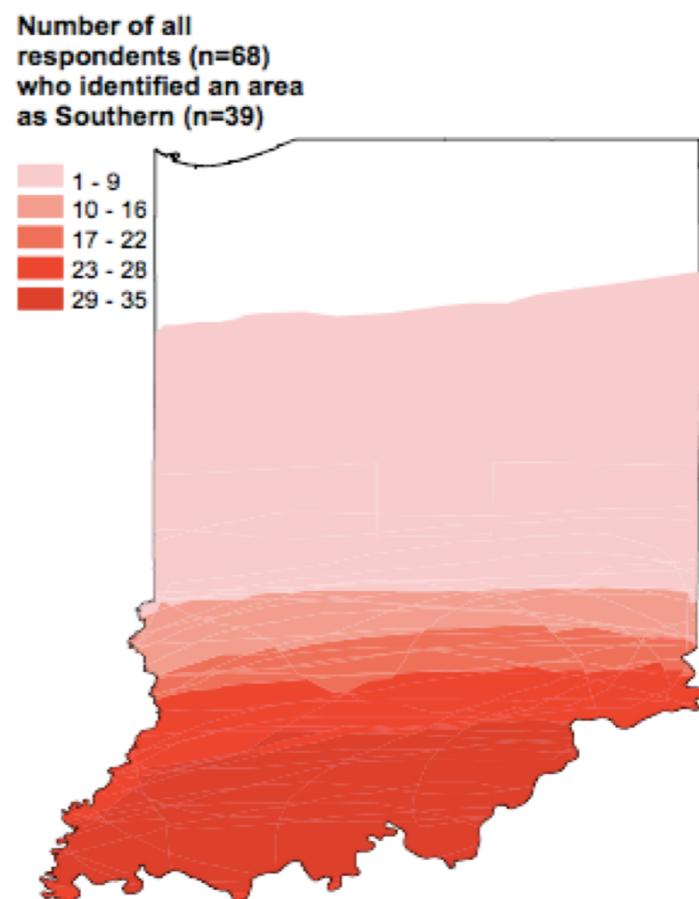
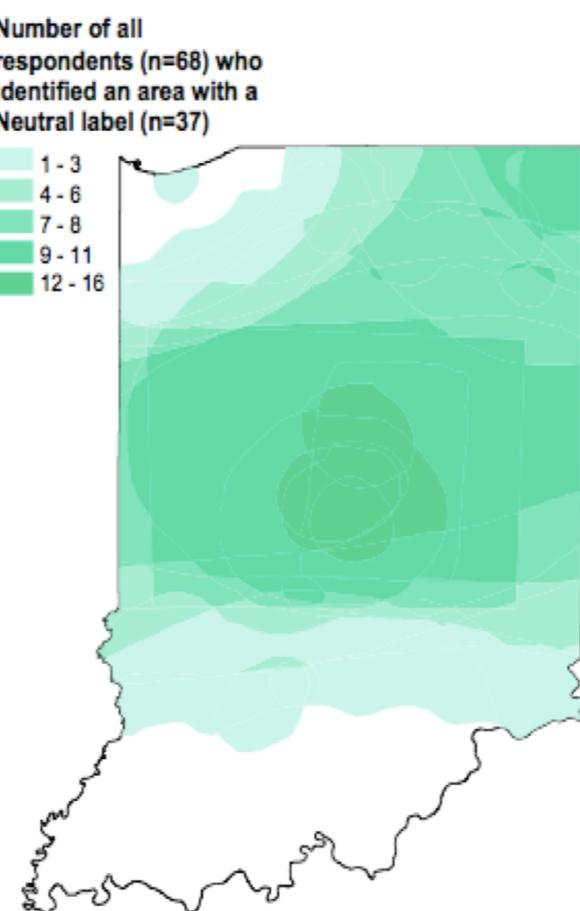
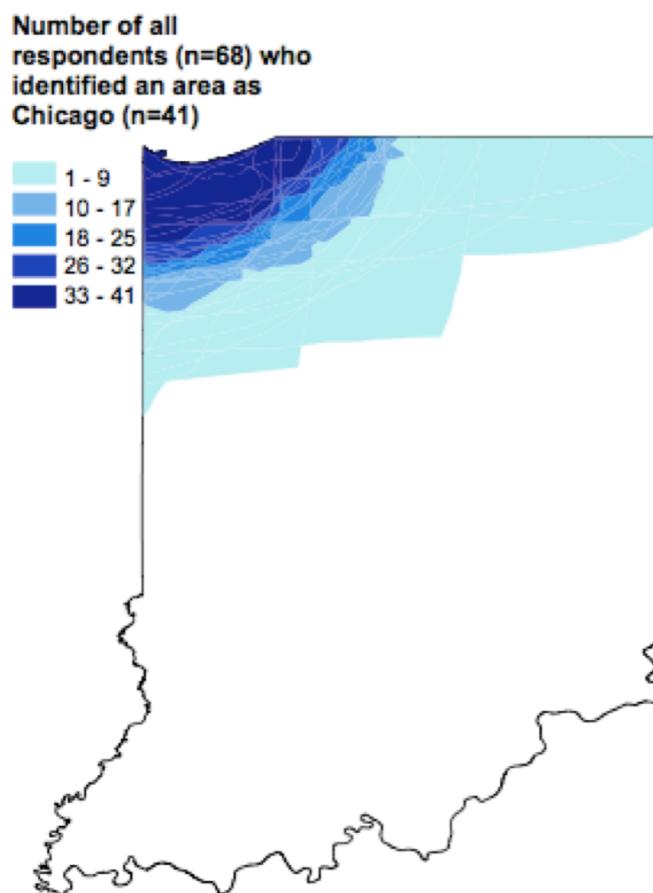
Indiana: Two tiers of Southern?



Indiana: Southerness in context



Indiana: Southernness in context





Indiana: Summary

- Hoosiers in the southern half of the state have a conflicted regional identity
 - Even if they say they live in the south, they only identify with the southern dialect if they are from near the border
- Three major perceived dialect regions: Chicago/North, Neutral (Central), South
- The South appears two-tiered, but only because of how people represent a perceived continuum of southerness
- The Chicago/North region is positively defined
- The Neutral (Central) region represents the standard, the absence of Chicago/North and South features



Comparing perceptions of Southerness

- Oklahomans and Hoosiers acknowledge specific southern regions in their states
- Southerness is not monolithic in either state
 - **Hoosiers** see southerness as gradient
 - Closer to Kentucky is more southern
 - Southern ends where neutral begins
 - **Oklahomans** recognize two varieties of southern
 - “Little Dixie” is associated with negative attitudes
 - Texas Southern is associated with neutral attitudes
 - The standard dialect may include southern features

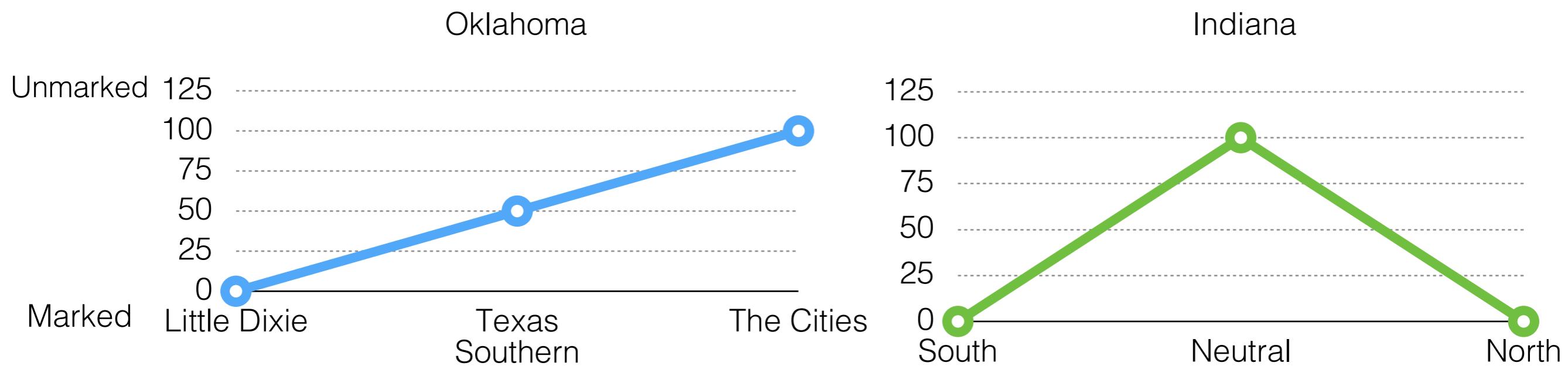


Comparing perceptions of Southerness

- Oklahomans embrace southerness more than Hoosiers
- **Suggestion:** This is not random but a feature of the perceptual categories of each state
- Oklahomans have two major distinctions that form a continuum from the marked Little Dixie (negative rural) to the unmarked urban standard with Texas Southern (neutral rural) at the midpoint
- Hoosiers have three major distinctions that also form a continuum from the marked south to the marked north with the unmarked neutral at the midpoint

Comparing perceptions of Southernness

- A completely “neutral” standard is possible for Hoosiers because the threshold is lower due to contrast with two marked varieties
- An unmarked standard is more elusive for Oklahomans since the midpoint is marked and the threshold for non-southern is higher





Conclusion

- Southernness is not conceived of as monolithic in transition zones
- Local factors contribute to varied perceptions of southernness
 - Early settlement history
 - Current affiliation with/attitudes toward southernness
 - The presence of other marked varieties
- Future work should attempt to identify some linguistic consequences of this perceptual variation
 - The role of personal orientation toward region
 - The role of awareness of other varieties in the region



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Thank you