The Story of "Bubbler"

Ask people in Wisconsin what they associate with Wisconsin English, and one of the first answers you'll get is "bubblers" in reference to a water fountain or "water fountain" or a "drinking fountain".

We're using maps to tell stories about language over space. We conducted a survey of **118** participants and gathered over **7700** points mostly from Wisconsin. This place focuses specifically on Wisconsin participant answers.

Though we had participants from all over the world, we had a large number from across the Midwest and Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Let's take a look at what participants in both the new Midwest and Wisconsin came from.

Number of Participants in Each Wisconsin Zip Code

So what did participants think of Wisconsin English? What is, English characterized as being from Wisconsin? Do we reason or another, either because of a phonetic, morphological, lexical (word choice), or syntactic (sentence structure) difference? Or, is it just a vibe?

Frisk, A Dictionary of Wisconsin Folk Speech, Phrase and Pronunciation by the Wisconsin Company, The Dictionary of American Regional English only on "bubbler" describes it as:

"A drinking fountain; now very outdoors; only the valve which caused the water to bubble is such a fountain. North, North Midland, esp Hwy Wisconsin"

Let's look at an results from two questions: familiarity with a word and the word on the one hand and attitudes toward it on the other.

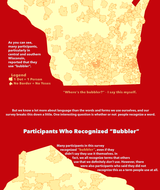
The Data on "Bubbler"

Participants Who Personally Say "Bubbler"

As you can see, participants who identified as Wisconsin English speakers mostly **agreed that they say "bubbler"**.

But we know a lot more about language than the words and forms we use anyone, and our survey broaden this shows a little. Sociolinguistic questions whether or not people recognize a word.

Participants Who Recognized "Bubbler"



Whether they said "bubbler" or not, if participants recognized it, we wanted to know how close they came to the term. So, we asked where they heard it and what they associated with.

Participants Who Heard "Bubbler" Where They Live

Interestingly, in some cases fewer participants knew people who say "bubbler" and in other cases more participants said they personally have people where they lived who say it than said they generally heard it where they lived.

Participants Who Connect People Where They Live Who Say "Bubbler"

Because hearing something is a prerequisite to being able to connect people who live where you live to people who say "bubbler", we wanted to see if there was any correlation between these two activities. Yes, we did asked people if they heard it where they lived and if they connected it to "bubbler."

Participants Who Have Friends Who Say "Bubbler"

Because people often stated some in spoken when they said "bubbler" they said it with a "bubbler" and people who say "bubbler" and again, we wanted to see if there was a correlation between these two distributions.

The people who come to our public talks on Wisconsin English are very interested in dialect. So, we wanted to know what social meaning "bubbler" carries. Do people really think of this word as a "Wisconsin" or "Midwestern" or "Northern" word?

Participants Who Associate "Bubbler" with Wisconsin Speech

We also wanted to see how people rate "bubbler" in terms of pleasantness. Does often been grouped with "Urban" and "Local" and we were interested in how participants associated with "bubbler."

Participants Who Associate "Bubbler" with Urban Areas

So what does it all mean? We'll leave most of the interpretation up to you, but note a few key takeaways. First, for Wisconsin participants, "bubbler" is a word that is very much in use and well-known. Many participants reported using the term themselves or knowing people who say it. Though it is very "Wisconsin", participants do not seem to find it "proper." Usage and attitude are different. Finally, "bubbler" and other language are connected to place and people. Language is more deeply is key to understanding language and culture.

What did you find interesting about these results?

What would you like to know more about?