

Embracing Disparate Voices: Teaching American English Dialect Variation in HEL using DARE

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Recommended Resources

Lesson 1a: Discover evidence of historical language variation and change through *DARE* interview data

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- **identify linguistic evidence of historic variation of English within the *DARE* audio interview data;**
- **trace the migration patterns of linguistic variation to settlement patterns over space and time; and,**
- **compose and deliver a linguistic argument in both written and oral forms.**

Educator's note: Background information

The Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)

DARE is a six-volume reference work that records the regional and folk language of the United States. Its contents, consisting of over 60,000 headwords, sentences, and phrases, are based both on fieldwork conducted between 1965 and 1970 and on written sources from the eighteenth century to the present.

The audio data

From 1965-1970, fieldworkers went out across the US to interview people in 1000 communities in order to capture the lexical, pronunciation, and syntactic variation of the United States. Fieldworkers initiated their conversations with regional informants using the *DARE* Questionnaire (QR), which begins with the neutral subject of time in order to allay possible suspicions of some hidden purpose on the part of the investigator. The topics of questions spanned lexical items for weather and topography, houses, furniture, and household utensils; and then to words for dishes, foods, vegetables, and fruits. The questions continue to more abstract topics: honesty and dishonesty, beliefs, emotions, relationships among people, manner of action or being, and so on—41 categories in all with a total of 1847 questions. In all, 1002 QRs were completed in as many communities. Most of the questions seek to establish the regional or local

name for a single object or idea. The QR responses make up the majority of the written dictionary.

The fieldworkers were also required to make a tape recording of each chief informant from each community speaking freely for twenty minutes or more—preferably on a familiar topic so that the speech would be relaxed and normal. It is from these unpublished 1843 audiotapes that we choose selections that provide the linguistic evidence of historic settlement patterns: syntax, pronunciation, and lexical variation. In the end, the fieldworkers talked to a total of 2777 informants, including 1368 men and 1409 women, ranging in age from about 18 to over 90.

Editing of *DARE* began in 1975 with Volume I (Introduction and A-C) being published by Harvard University Press in the fall of 1985. Volume II (D-H) followed in 1991, Volume III (I-O) was published in 1996, and Volume IV (P-Sk) appeared in 2002. Volume V (Si-Z), which includes a bibliography, was published in 2012, with a supplementary Volume VI (including responses to the *DARE* questionnaire, a cumulative index to the regional, social, and etymological labels used in *DARE*, and sets of contrastive maps) published in 2013. Later that year, an electronic edition *Digital DARE*, was launched.

Sample Lesson Prompt

In the first activity, your group (3-4 students) is given an audio clip that illustrates a residual linguistic feature traceable to a historic settlement pattern. You are provided the demographic information for the speaker represented in the clip: sex, age, education level, occupation, and geographic location. With this data, the group must conduct linguistic research on their feature, trace its origin and journey to the geographic and chronological location of its speaker, and present a cogent argument in both oral and written form. Your team efforts will culminate in both a public presentation and a formal linguistic research paper.

For example, one dialect piece of audio evidence from the DARE interviews presents a speaker using *a-prefixing*:

“That’s the only way you knowed where you was *a-goin*” (audio clip 1a).

The demographic information for this speaker is as follows:

Sex: M

Age: 69 in 1966

DOB: 1897

Race: Caucasian

Education level: elementary

Occupation: farmer

Location: OK, rural

You must then consult primary research sources to trace *a-prefixing* to the speaker’s place and time. With each group serving as an expert on their dialect feature, this activity culminates in two primary assignments: a public presentation on this dialect feature into present-day American speech and a collaborative research paper.

Two other examples of residual historic linguistic variation included are provided.

Positive anymore

“Most of the work *anymore* is done by power” (audio clip 1b).

Sex: F

Age: Middle-aged (exact age unknown)

DOB: unknown

Race: Caucasian

Education level: little (exact education attainment unknown)

Occupation: farmwoman

Location: North Carolina, rural

Double modals

“They *might could* tell you where you get the whiskey” (audio clip 1c).

Sex: M

Age: 92 in 1967

DOB: 1875

Race: Caucasian

Education level: high school

Location: Texas, small city

Task 1b: Digital sleuthing, or discovering an informant’s place in time and geography through language use

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- experience *Digital DARE* as a data source for linguistic variation and change, through the 100 free sample entries;
- engage in forensic linguistic analysis by tracking the location or possible locations of informants using their language or linguistic identity, with the help of the iconic DARE maps; and,
- conduct research on the origin of distinctive linguistic items that identify the informant.

Educator’s note: Background information

The iconic DARE maps

DARE signature maps use population density rather than geographical area to geographically represent distribution of words. This makes the shape and size of the individual states distorted, (see Figure 1 below). Key to the usefulness of these maps is where the linguistic features and lexical descriptions occur and where these features overlap when communities border each other.

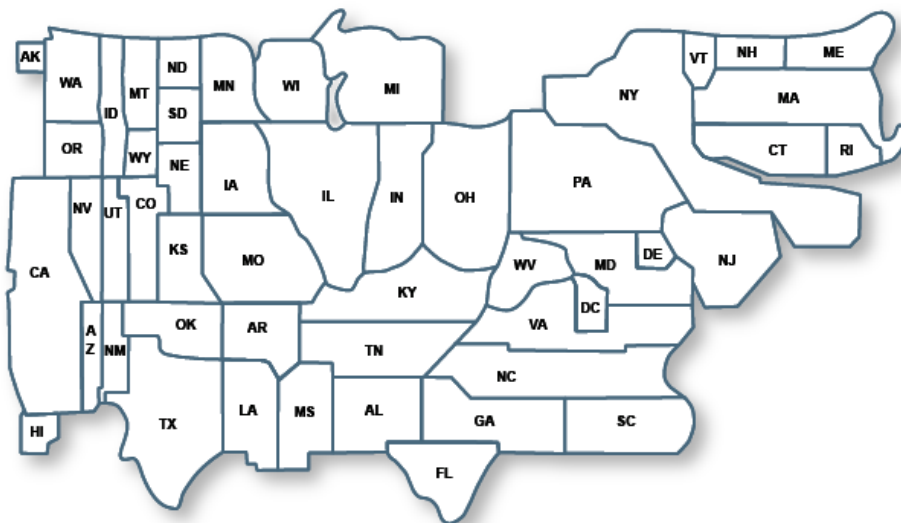


Figure 1: DARE map adjusted to represent population density instead of land area.

Digital DARE's one hundred free entries

100 representative dictionary entries are available in full to all visitors at
<http://www.daredictionary.com/page/100sampleentries>

Complete access to all entries requires an institutional or individual subscription; for more information see the link below:
<http://www.daredictionary.com/page/how-to-subscribe>

Sample Lesson Prompt

Using the 100 sample words on the publically accessible *Digital DARE* site, determine the possible locations of the informants described below:

- (1) Richard is an elderly man who complained of having the *mulligrubs* after seeing hundreds of *tobacco spitters* in the *garden house*. Where does he reside?
- (2) Where does Sara live? She *whanged* a wrap for her child's *goozle*, so that the little boy would be comforted while he was ill, and then she played the *French harp* until the child went to sleep.

In your formal write up, conduct both etymological research and historical settlement patterns on the identifying words. Your analysis should be fully supported using the *DARE* maps, *DARE* or other dictionary evidence, and primary linguistic research.

Lesson 1c: Discovering language change through *Digital DARE* and other dictionaries

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- **learn the various parts of a dictionary entry and understand how differences among dictionaries contribute to their overall purpose(s);**

- **identify evidence—textural and audio—within both print and online formats of *DARE* as well as other dictionaries that provide evidence of language change, in general, and historical changes within English discussed throughout this course; and,**
- **compose an argument supported by linguistic evidence for semantic changes through time and space.**

Educator’s note: Background Information

Dictionaries and DARE

What one often considers the ‘dictionary’ is a reference source that includes all of the words in Standard English with definitions of what those words mean, as well as standard pronunciations and parts of speech. This source is often taken to be the authority on language and if a word is not in the ‘dictionary’ then it must not be a real word. If a particular pronunciation is not in the ‘dictionary’ then it is thought not correct. These are more prescriptive views of language and use. There are, however, many different kinds of dictionaries. There are dictionaries that only include slang, dictionaries for different languages, and dictionaries for more specialized uses like law or medicine. Both print *DARE* and *Digital DARE* serve as depositories for words in regional English that are not standard. As such, they capture regional varieties that have links to historical settlement patterns that are still in use. Because *DARE* bases its entries on spoken English rather than written English, it purposely captures variations in pronunciation patterns linked to historical and social patterns. Additionally, since the data are transcribed from informant conversations, syntactic variation may also be documented.

Sample Lesson Prompt

You will look at a single entry across various dictionaries and document the evidence for language change that is “seeable” within a single generation. Specifically, you will look to see how a single word has changed its meaning and, possibly, its grammatical class, through time. You will document the evidence and compose an argument for the changes captured through the dictionary entries.

(We provide access to the online Oxford English Dictionary, full access to the online *Digital DARE*, the print version of *DARE*, as well as numerous other dictionaries—print and online. Available dictionary resources will vary by institute.)

You may choose from the following words (a sample list is provided here):

mango

wink

ditch

Vocabulary: As you look for evidence using the various dictionaries, begin to develop a working vocabulary of linguistic terms that are used to negotiate entries.

Vocabulary
<i>Dialect:</i> <i>Standard Dialect:</i> <i>Nonstandard Dialect:</i> <i>Headword:</i> <i>Part-of-speech abbreviation:</i> <i>Variant form:</i> <i>Etymology:</i> <i>Regional label:</i> <i>Social label:</i> <i>Definition:</i>

As you trace the semantic and/or grammatical classifications through the lexical entries, create both a timeline and a geographic map of this word that captures both its entry into the American lexicon as well its changes within regional American Englishes.

The following is a sample list of various dictionaries to consult:

Computer Desktop Encyclopedia

<http://www.computerlanguage.com/>

Provides concise, user-friendly, current technical definitions. Contains over 30,000 terms.

Dictionary of American Regional English—University of Wisconsin-Madison

<http://dare.wisc.edu>

Includes DARE maps, audio samples, photos, and historical information.

Dictionary of American Regional English—Oxford University Press

<http://www.daredictionary.com>

Provides one hundred free entries from *DARE*, the full questionnaire, and background information.

Lexicool

<http://www.lexicool.com/>

Provides a directory of all of the online dictionaries available for a given language.

One Look

<http://www.onelook.com>

Searches more than one thousand online English dictionaries and provides the links to definitions.

Worknik

<https://www.wordnik.com>

Provides definitions from multiple sources including dictionary entries as well as

examples of words within print and electronic contexts. Ranks sources by usefulness in understanding the meaning of a particular word. Encourages member contributions to meanings and sources of words.

YourDictionary

<http://www.yourdictionary.com>

Provides easy to understand definitions and links to dictionary entries from other major dictionaries for comparison.

Recommended Resources

- Abrams, Kelly D. and Trini Stickle. *Discovering Dare*, 2017, <https://discoveringdare.wordpress.com>.
- Blake, Norman Francis, Roger Lass, and Robert W. Burchfield. *The Cambridge History of the English Language*. Vol. 6. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Fromkin, Victoria and Robert Rodman. *An Introduction to Language*. 6th ed. Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998.
- DARE. The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017, <http://dare.wisc.edu/>.
- DARE interviews. Fieldwork Recordings—Dictionary of American Regional English, 2017, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/AmerLangs>.
- Labov, William, Sharon Ash, and Charles Boberg. *The Atlas of North American English: Phonetics, Phonology and Sound Change*. Walter de Gruyter, 2005.
- Lucht, Felecia. "Older Immigrant Languages." *Wisconsin Talk: Linguistic Diversity in the Badger State*, edited by Thomas Purnell, Eric Raimy, and Joseph Salmons. University of Wisconsin Press, 2013, pp. 26-36.
- Macaulay, Ronald. "Regional Dialects and Social Class." *Language: Introductory Readings*. 7th ed., edited by Virginia P. Clark., Paul A. Eschholz, Alfred F. Rosa, and Beth Lee Simons. St. Martin's Press, 2008, pp. 383-397.
- Wolfram, Walt and Natalie Schilling-Estes. "Standards and Vernaculars." *Language: Introductory Readings* 7th ed., edited by Virginia P. Clark, Paul A. Escholtz, Alfred F. Rosa, and Beth Lee Simon. Bedford/St. Martens, 2008, pp. 398-409.