Language Diversity in Michigan and Ohio

TOWARDS TWO STATE LINGUISTIC PROFILES

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Introduction

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Compared to such states as Florida, Texas, Arizona, or New Mexico, all in the southern tier of the United States, or "melting pot" states like California or New York (especially around New York City), northern states such as Ohio or Michigan seem to be overwhelmingly monolingual, with English as the primary language.

Indeed, beside such informal evidence as the general public belief that this is so, this observation can be supported by several other indicators as well:

- The business of each state is conducted in English.
- English is medium of instruction at the state universities.
- In both states English is legislated as such via the need for foreign Graduate Teaching Associates at state universities to be certified with regard to their use of English before they can teach classes.
- In Ohio at least, legislation to recognize English as the official language of the state, while to date unsuccessful, has not stirred the public controversy that similar bills have in other states, presumably because language rights are not a significant political issue, one way or the other.

Moreover, there is the quantitative data provided by the 2000 United States Census, which shows that, of the total population of 10,599,968 people in Ohio over the age of five, there are only 648,493 (6.1%) who speak a language other than English at home, and, in Michigan, with a population (again, age five and older) of 9,268,782, there are only 781,381 (8.4%). In comparison, for example, California has eight million speakers of Spanish and even 625,000 speakers of Tagalog (a Philippine language), nearly as many speakers of that one language alone as there are speakers of all languages other than English in either Michigan or Ohio. New York has five million persons who speak a language other than English, one half of whom speak Spanish.
Nevertheless, both historically and in terms of the current population, there has been and still is considerable linguistic diversity in these states. The earliest (i.e., American Indian) inhabitants of the area were obviously non-English speakers, and their legacy is still in evidence in various place names around Ohio, e.g., Cuyahoga, Geauga, Miami, Maumee, and others, and one dead language (Miami) is now actually revived as a first or native language for one family. In Michigan, there are not only many such place names, but also numerous Native American language speakers, particularly of Ojibway.

Early European settlers included non-English speakers in both states, e.g., German speakers from the Palatinate region of southern Germany, particularly in Ohio, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was significant immigration from Central and Eastern Europe, bringing many Slavic (e.g., Czech, Macedonian, Slovak, and Slovene) speakers, as well as Hungarian, Romanian, and Yiddish speakers to both states. At the same time, many Southern Europeans, speakers of Italian and Greek, came to both states, especially the northeastern part of Ohio and the southeastern part of Michigan. In the latter part of twentieth century, there has been an influx of Spanish speakers, e.g., from Mexico and Puerto Rico, now representing the largest non-English population in both states (213,147 speakers in Ohio and 246,688 in Michigan, nearly doubling the figure for both states from the 1990 Census). Speakers from Southeast Asia, e.g., Hmong and Lao, to name just a few of the languages, are now represented in these two states, and there has been a large influx of French Creole speakers from Haiti. Michigan (especially in the Dearborn area around Detroit) has one of the largest Arabic-speaking communities outside the Middle East, and Columbus has the second-largest concentration of Somali speakers as of 2000.

The data available to date, however, reveals some of this diversity, but it misses much about the range of language use in the states. For instance, the 2000 U.S. Census shows the figures in Table 1 for the use of languages in the home for which there are more than 25,000 speakers. These raw numbers leave much of great importance out of the picture. In fact, the 2000 Census asked only the following three questions pertaining to language: “Does this person speak a language other than English at home? What is this language? How well does this person speak English (very well, well, not well, not at all)?”

The answers to such questions provide only quantitative data and are collected with specific legislative purposes in mind. Much is left out
even of the quantitative results, to say nothing about the qualitative side
of language use: how the language is used, who speaks it (e.g., family,
males or females, older or younger persons), how well it is spoken and/or
understood, under what conditions the language is spoken, to whom the
language is spoken by its users, what social contexts are more likely to
lead to the use of a language other than English (e.g., religious
gatherings, ethnic festivals), what role language use plays in ethnic
identification and the shaping of ethnic identity, especially among
younger speakers, what efforts are being made to maintain or actively
eliminate use of the language, and the like. These qualitatively oriented
questions are essential to a sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic determi-
ation of what it means—to the individual speaker and to the
community—to be “a speaker of a language other than English” in Ohio
and Michigan; these issues thus focus more on what might be called an
“ethnography of speaking” (in the sense of Hymes 1972) in non-English
communities in these two states.

Not surprisingly, the greatest linguistic diversity in both states is to be
found in their urban areas (though groups such as the “Pennsylvania
Dutch” (= German) speakers of Holmes County, Ohio and Dutch
speakers in rural Western Michigan show that the diversity is not just in
cities). The greater Cleveland area, for instance, is home to the largest
Slovak Fraternal Union in the country, to a Slovenian newspaper, to two
Russian newspapers, to a Czech radio station, to a Romanian Ethnic Art
Museum, and the like, all of which are associated with communities in
which the active use of the relevant languages is to be found. In Colum-
bus, the Greek community supports a large Greek Orthodox Church (the
Annunciation Church), and the Macedonian community supports its own church (St. Mary’s), and similar evidence of linguistic diversity is to be found in Akron, Toledo, and Cincinnati. Admittedly, the diversity is not great in terms of numbers, in that the Ohio city ranking highest nationally in percentage of speakers of a language other than English is Cleveland at fortieth (with Toledo at fifty-sixth, Columbus at sixtynsecond, Akron at sixty-fourth, and Cincinnati at sixty-seventh), but its existence cannot be denied, and thus it merits investigation beyond the numbers provided by the necessarily very limited scope of the Census.

In Michigan, the state’s large Spanish-speaking communities focus on linguistic and ethnic pride at an annual Cesar Chavez dinner in the state capital, and the large Arabic-speaking communities in Detroit have fashioned very effective bilingual education programs in the public schools, where the issue seems to have been less politicized than in predominantly Spanish-speaking areas such as California and Texas. Polish is still common on the street and in shops and restaurants in Hamtramck, Michigan, a separate political enclave surrounded by Detroit, where Polish has been given a recent boost by immigration following the political changes in Poland in the early years of the decade of the 1990s. In addition, Native American languages are now taught at several of the state’s institutions of higher education, most recently at Michigan State University, where Ojibway has been added to the list of Less-Commonly-Taught-Languages (or “LCTLs”), further evidence that linguistic diversity in Michigan has academic as well as popular support. Many students in these LCTL classes are “heritage learners”, students who have not acquired the language of their parents and grandparents at home but are now eager to do so.

However, the linguistic diversity of these two states is not restricted just to speakers of languages other than English, for even among Michigan and Ohio’s English speakers, there is considerable dialect diversity. Oddly, this may be even more surprising to some than the diversity of languages. After all, Michigan and Ohio are “Midwestern”, where there are supposed to be no dialects—just plain old American English. Not only are there significant numbers of speakers of African American English, particularly in both states’ urban areas, but it is also the case that three of the four main zones of American English—Northern, North Midland, and South Midland—are all represented in Ohio. The northern urban areas of Ohio show greater linguistic affinities with other large northeastern cities, e.g., New York, Rochester, Buffalo, and Detroit; Cin-
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Cincinnati shows more Midland and South Midland affinities, with an over-
lay of influence from the long-standing German population in the area;
and Columbus is also generally North Midland but with considerable
mixing from different dialect zones, including the South Midland areas
of Appalachia, as the city has grown in the past fifty years and attracted
population from all over the state. In fact, the capital has undergone a
pattern of linguistic urbanization similar to that seen in Brasilia (Borton-

In contrast to this English diversity in Ohio, one might assume that
Michigan is simply a Northern American English dialect area, but even
that would be far from the truth. In addition to the state's large popula-
tion of African American English speakers, particularly in Detroit, there
are interesting influences throughout the state. The Canadian (Ontario)
diphthongs in words such as “nice” and “house” (the latter often
inaccurately mimicked as “hoose” by speakers close to the border with
Canada) have made significant inroads into those parts of Michigan that
border Canada, all along its eastern border, and into the Upper Peninsula.
The influence of other languages on local Michigan Engishes can also
be seen. Although it is fading, there has been a Dutch-influenced English
in western Michigan for many years, and, still prominent in the Upper
Peninsula is a Finnish and Germanic Scandinavian-influenced English.
One feature of this influence, the pronunciation of the “th” in such words
as “the” as a “d”, has found its way into popular culture. There are
license plates which honor “Da UP” and a popular band called “Da
Yoopers”.

By far the most distinctive feature of Michigan English, however, is a
massive change in the pronunciation of several of its vowels, known to
linguists as the “Northern Cities Chain Shift”. In this change in pro-
nunciation, which is sweeping through a large northern tier of US cities
(Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Flint, Lansing, Grand
Rapids, Chicago, and Milwaukee), the vowel of “cat” sounds like “ket”
or even “kit”; the vowel of “cot” sounds like “cat”, and the vowel of
“caught” sounds like “cot”; and the vowel of “ket” sounds like either
“cat” or “cut” (interestingly divided by social status). There is very
strong evidence that this vowel change is not influencing Ohio English
south of the Cleveland (and perhaps marginally Toledo) area (see Hart-
man Keiser et al. 1997), but it is moving northward throughout Michi-
gan, and speakers in rural and small-town areas of the Lower Peninsula
are adopting it (e.g., Ito 1999).
Perhaps even more important than the change itself are two related facts. First, since speakers in Michigan believe that their English is "standard" (e.g., Preston 1996), they do not themselves perceive the shift going on around them (or even in their own mouths). Second, the change is most advanced and led by higher-status speakers; it is not, therefore, a slangy or nonstandard version of English that will go away as speakers get formal schooling; it is, in fact, the wave of the future for Michigan English.

In the face of such data from previous research and the obvious questions raised by such data, we came up with the idea of documenting the linguistic diversity in these states and using this attempt as a model for profiles of all fifty states. We note that this is something that has not been done for any state except Montana (Beltramo 1981), although Fishman, Cooper, and Ma (1971) have profiled some of the diversity of New York City. We stress that we see this not just as a vehicle for gathering statistics (building on the Census data) but as an opportunity for addressing some serious research questions in sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, language contact, dialect borrowing and change, and the like. Additionally, we see it as an opportunity to distill this information for interested citizens. There is perhaps no greater mismatch today between scientific information and public perception than in the general area of linguistics, but, interestingly, the public's concern for and interest in language, even as evidenced in nearly every media venue, are enormous.

Accordingly, the conference from which these papers were drawn was intended as a launching pad for a larger State Linguistic Profile project which is still in progress. We invited a variety of scholars from the two states and heard survey reports on the status of particular languages and speech communities in Ohio and Michigan, research reports highlighting how the findings of these investigations can enlighten the general public, presentations concerning methods to be used in studying these speech communities, and specific discussion of varieties of English in these states. The conference, held May 11-13, 2001, in Columbus, was sponsored by The Institute For Collaborative Research and Public Humanities of The Ohio State University and The Center for Great Lakes Culture of Michigan State University and further supported by the following units of The Ohio State University: Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, Department of English, The Foreign Language Center, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Heritage Language Studies, Department of Linguistics, Department of Near
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Eastern Languages and Cultures, Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Literatures, and Department of Spanish and Portuguese. The presentations made were as follows:

Session 1: Introduction: The general goals of a State Linguistic Profile
Brian D. Joseph (The Ohio State University) and Dennis R. Preston, (Michigan State University)

Session 2: Field Reports on Various Languages I
Panayiotis Pappas (The Ohio State University) on Greek in Columbus
Terrell Morgan (The Ohio State University) on Spanish in Ohio
Bartek Plichta (Michigan State University) on Polish in Hamtramck

Session 3: Field Reports on Various Languages II
Charlotte Schaengold (The Ohio State University) on Yiddish in Cincinnati
John Greppin (Cleveland State University) on Armenian in Cleveland
Christine Evenson & Chuck Gramly (Columbus State Community College) on ASL in Columbus

Session 4: Surveys of languages and language groups with a geographically broader range
John Nichols (University of Manitoba) on Native American languages in the Midwest
Aleya Rouchdy (Wayne State University) on Arabic in the Midwest
Martha Ratliff (Wayne State University) on Southeast Asian Languages in the Midwest

Session 5: Methods I
Jeffrey Holdeman (The Ohio State University) on researching Slavic languages in Erie, PA
Miklos Kontra (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) on fieldwork on Hungarian in the Midwest

Session 6: Methods II
Neil Jacobs (The Ohio State University) on the use of theater, recordings, comedy, etc. in the study of immigrant languages
Sachie Miyazaki (Michigan State University) on Japanese children’s acquisition of English

Session 7: Research Findings I
Michelle Ramos-Pelliccia (The Ohio State University) on Spanish in Lorain, OH
Pekka Hirvonen (University of Joensuu—Finland) on Finnish in the Upper Midwest

Session 8: Research Findings II
Jaap van Marle (Free University—Amsterdam) on Dutch in Michigan
Steven Hartman Keiser (The Ohio State University) on Pennsylvania German in Ohio

Session 9
Amy Shuman (The Ohio State University) and Norma Mendoza-Denton (University of Arizona) on the importance of heritage language study in the Midwest

Session 10: Varieties of English in Michigan and Ohio
Beverly Flamigan (Ohio University) on Ohio English dialect geography
Erica Benson (Michigan State University) on the perceptual dialect areas of Ohio
Nancy Niedzielski (Rice University) on Michigan dialect geography and attitudes
Betsy Evans (Michigan State University) on Appalachian speech in the Midwest
Jamila Jones (Michigan State University) on African American Language in Michigan

Session 11: Panel discussion on the study of varieties of English in Michigan and Ohio
Discussants Kirk Hazen (West Virginia University), Terry Irons (Morehead State University), and Beth Lee Simon (Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne)

Session 12: Where do we go from here?
Brian D. Joseph and Dennis R. Preston, Summation and general discussion
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Not all the papers presented at this conference are included here, but a good selection is, and that selection is representative of the various approaches to state linguistic information outlined above. In the following pages, for example, the sociology of language, that is, accounts of how many speakers there are, what they do with their language(s), and the general ecological and environmental concerns surrounding the languages and their use, is given particular prominence in Evenson and Gramly’s description of American Sign Language in Columbus, Greppin’s comments on Armenian in the Cleveland area, Hirvonen’s characterization of Finnish in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and other parts of the upper Midwest, Pappas’s account of Greek in Columbus, Ratliff’s survey of Southeast Asian languages in both states, Schaengold’s personal as well as descriptive remarks on Yiddish in Cincinnati, Simon’s presentation on the use of ethnic terms in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, van Marle’s study of Dutch in western Michigan, Ramos-Pellicia’s study of Spanish in northeastern Ohio, and Hartman-Keiser’s work on the German of religious groups in Ohio. Many of these chapters, however, also include comments on structural details of the language under consideration particularly the last two.

More detailed comments on the structural characteristics of language, particularly pronunciation, can be found in Evans’s and Jones’s descriptions of the degree to which Appalachian and African American speakers (respectively) participate in the Northern Cities Chain Shift, and Miyazaki’s account of Japanese children’s acquisition (or non-acquisition) of local Michigan pronunciation adds an interesting look at short-term immigrant populations. The distribution and perception of regional dialects in Ohio is the principal concern of Benson, Flanigan, and Irons.

Some readers may be disappointed not to find a comprehensive study of English and other languages in Michigan and Ohio in these pages. The truth is, we don’t know enough yet to make such a presentation, and, even if we had all the data available to us, we would not package it as we have this collection. It would be presented in another way to linguistic scholars, and it would be presented in yet another way to public school children and young adults. Our intent in this collection, as we note in the Preface, is to allow the interested but not linguistically trained reader to have a look at the variety of research efforts that form the background to any account of the language diversity in any state. We hope these exemplary pieces from Michigan and Ohio help satisfy that general
curiosity, and, in the case of individual pieces of research, answer specific questions. We plan to press on with the collection and dissemination of the linguistic information that makes up the language profile of a state. We would like to thank all those who participated in the conference and those who contributed to this volume; thanks also go to Hope Dawson, for her work in preparing this volume for publication.

References:
HARTMAN KEISER, STEVEN; FRANS HINSKENS; BETTINA MIGGE; and ELIZABETH STRAND. 1997. The Northern Cities Shift in the heartland? A study of radio speech in Columbus, Ohio. Papers from the linguistics laboratory (Ohio State University working papers in linguistics 50), ed. by Kimberly Ainsworth-Darnell and Mariapaola D’Imperio, 41–68. Columbus: The Ohio State University Department of Linguistics.