

HOMEWORK 1

This assignment is due on 10/27/09 at the beginning of class.

The topic: Preston (2004:484)¹ argues for “two main dimensions of evaluation for language varieties” – social status (standardness) and group solidarity (friendliness), and suggests that Americans rate their variety high according to one, and low according to the other (standardness and friendliness being contradictory). In this way Americans use symbolic capital to garner one (and only one) kind of prestige – status (a.k.a. overt) prestige or solidarity (a.k.a. covert) prestige.

However, Preston’s analysis leaves several unanswered questions. First, are these two dimensions sufficient? Does everyone view their own speech as either standard or friendly, or do we need more dimensions of comparison? What might those dimensions be? Second, what about the states which were rated by the Michiganders as mostly standard, and by the Alabamans as mostly friendly, such as California? Is this a contradiction? Would Californians place themselves as intermediary, and what does this suggest about (Californians’) use of symbolic capital? Third, how do people’s perceptions of dialect/accentual difference correspond to dialectologists’ analyses of regional speech? How can we explain the differences between perception and reality?

Your task is to conduct a perceptual dialectology² study of regional variation in the U.S. which replicates and extends (!) Preston (2004)’s analysis in order to address these issues.

Your completed assignment should include:

- 10 completed perceptual dialectology maps of the U.S. (1 per person)
- 10 completed questionnaires (1 per person)
- A no-more-than-4-page, 1.5 spaced, typed paper which should include:
 - an introduction which frames the relevant questions and hypotheses
 - methodology (esp. how you chose your informants and what questions you asked them)
 - a summary of the important data
 - a discussion which answers the research questions and which either upholds or rejects the initial hypotheses
 - conclusions
 - references (if applicable)

Included in this packet are:

- These instructions
- 10 blank maps of the U.S.
- 1 copy of a modern regional dialectology map³

Instructions:

- Develop research questions (class exercise). Working in groups, narrow the questions given above into specific, testable hypotheses. You do not need to address every issue – a focused project is

¹ Preston, Dennis. 2004. “Language attitudes to speech.” In Edward Finegan and John Rickford, eds. *Language in the USA: Themes for the 21st Century*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 480-492.

² Dialectology is the study of (regional) dialects, i.e. of the different ways that people speak the same language in different regions. Perceptual dialectology is the study of people’s perceptions about regional dialects and the ways that these perceptions are systematically the same/different from the reality of how people speak.

³ This map was taken from Labov, William, Sharon Ash and Charles Boberg. 1997. *A national map of the regional dialects of American English*. Unpublished manuscript. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania. The map is based on telephone interviews with a representative sample of residents of the United States from which people’s speech patterns were analyzed. The isoglosses were determined based on clusters of vowel pronunciations (i.e. features of people’s accents). Isogloss = line on a dialect map which separates one region from another based on the speech of people in each area.

always preferable to an overly ambitious one. Most important is to find something interesting to you within the guidelines given above.

- Develop a methodology. Your methodology will have at least three parts: questionnaire, map instructions, and informant pool.
 - Your questionnaire should be formulated to gather data relevant to your research hypotheses. You may copy aspects of Preston's methodology or create your own, so long as the questionnaire will get the data you need. You will need 10 copies.
 - How do you want people to mark the map? Ranking each individual state? Separating regions where people speak differently? What criteria should they use for ranking? Do you want ranking only for language, or also for social attitudes? Etc. Formulate specific instructions.
 - You may choose your informants based on any criteria, but give your choice some thought since it will affect your research results. For your hypothesis do you need to compare Californians from different regions? Different ethnicities? Different ages? Do you need everyone to be a (relatively) homogenous group? Etc.
 - You may add other requirements as necessitated by your research question.
- Find 10 willing participants who meet your criteria for informant selection. **DO NOT FORCE ANYONE TO BE A PARTICIPANT AND DO NOT TRICK THEM. THIS IS CONSIDERED UNETHICAL.** Ask each person to complete your study.
- Analyze your results in a way which sheds light on your research questions. Decide if your research questions were upheld.
- Write a paper explaining and defending your conclusions. (See above for paper requirements).

A note on collaboration: You may collaborate on this project to a limited extent. With one or more classmates you may:

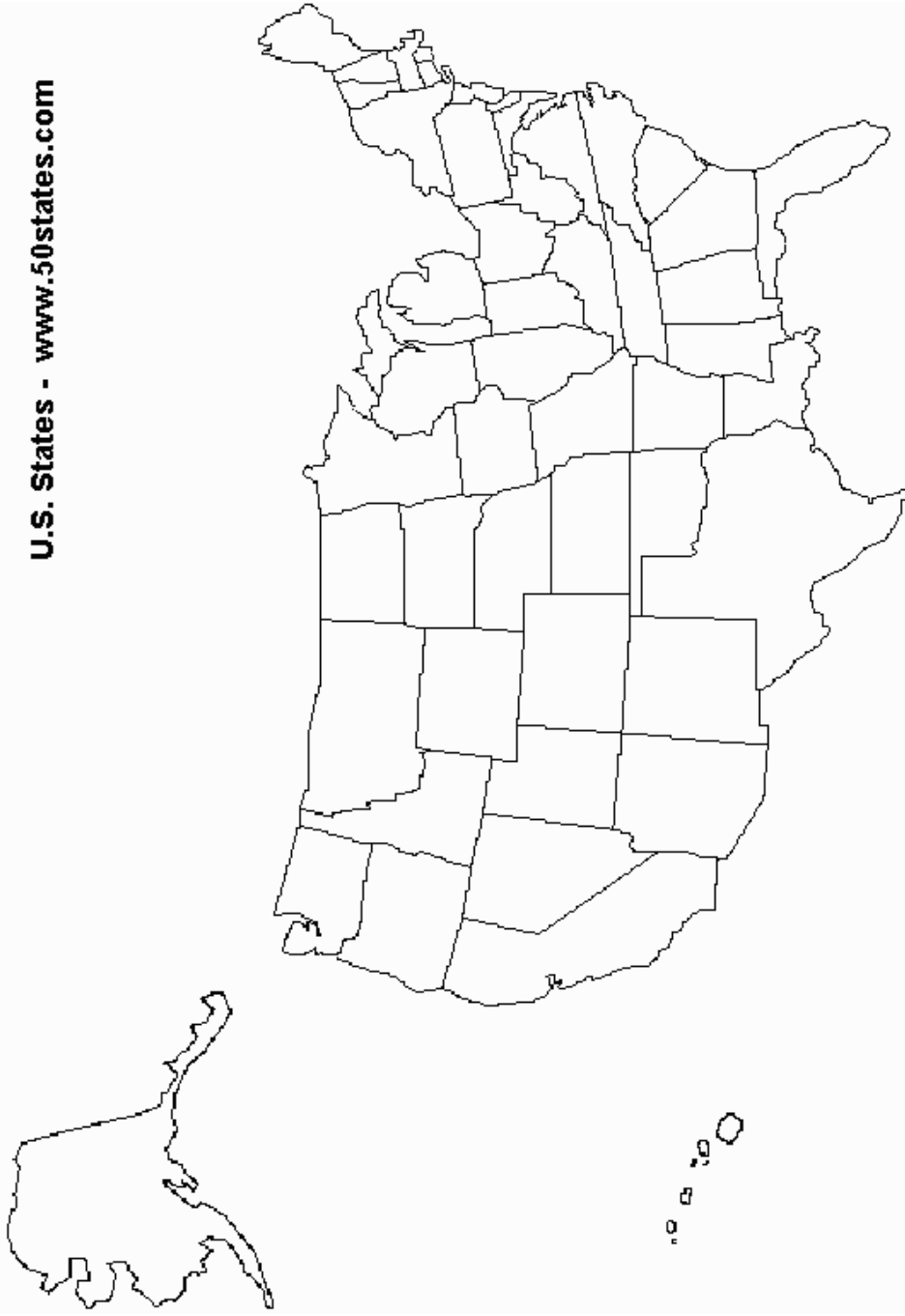
- develop research questions, hypotheses, questionnaires and other aspects of methodology
- pool your data (although there should still be 10 participants per researcher)
- discuss conclusions

You may NOT:

- write a joint paper
- share or receive parts of a written paper

Please include at the top of your paper the names of the people with whom you collaborated.

U.S. States - www.50states.com



Map 1. The urban dialect areas of the United States based on the acoustic analysis of the vowel systems of 240 Telsur informants

