

Linguistic insecurity forty years later

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Abstract

This article reviews the Index of Linguistic Insecurity (ILI) as carried out for New York City in Labov (1966) and for Winnipeg in Owens and Baker (1984) and compares both to surveys done in southeastern Michigan in 2005, 2006, and 2007. The Michigan results, in spite of the apparent linguistic security there determined in earlier studies, reveal an even stronger insecurity than that reported for New York City. The article concludes that regional security does not imply personal security and shows a predominance of prescriptivist norms for the items surveyed in the Michigan studies as well as a higher incidence of insecurity for items that have poorly established community norms. The idea of linguistic insecurity as established in earlier studies is challenged by proposing instead a principle based on one's fear of a personal inability to carry out a linguistic task.

Keywords

Linguistic insecurity, prescriptivism, pronunciation norms, linguistic repertoire, language ideology, language attitudes, folk linguistics

What is linguistic insecurity?

Speakers' feeling that the variety they use is somehow inferior, ugly or bad (Meyerhoff 2006:292).

Who has it?

... [T]hose who adopt a standard of correctness which is imposed from without, and from beyond the group which helped form their native speech pattern, are bound to show signs of linguistic insecurity (Labov 1966:332).

Where does it come from?

The belief that... “[t]he language of a socially subordinate group is linguistically deficient...” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2006:398) or that there is “...a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class (Lippi-Green 1997:64).

How have we studied it?

The Index of Linguistic Insecurity (ILI), surely the most direct measure of this phenomenon, was devised by William Labov and calculated for New York City (NYC) in his 1966 study; it concluded that New Yorkers, especially lower middle-class New Yorkers were very insecure. A comparable investigation was completed roughly 20 years

later in Winnipeg (WPEG) and found that Winnipeggers were more secure than New Yorkers (Owens and Baker 1984) but that the social class distribution was roughly the same. About twenty more years later (2005, 2006, 2007), undergraduates at a large Michigan (USA) university were given comparable tasks; the results of all those studies are reported here and compared.¹

Although all these studies used alternative pronunciations to uncover speaker self-assurance, I will further show that the prescriptive status of the test items, the phonological/phonetic facts involved, and the surrounding language ideologies must also be taken into consideration for a reliable assessment. Finally, I reconsider the notion “insecurity” itself.

Background

In the NYC ILI Labov (1966) asked respondents which of two forms was correct and which they used (333), e.g., [ɔftən] versus [ɔfn] (*often*). He tallied as cases of linguistic insecurity those cases in which a respondent said they did not personally use the one they judged correct (333). In his analysis, Labov regarded a 0 score as “no insecurity,” 1 to 2 as “mild,” 3-7 as “moderate and 8 and above as “heavy.” Table 1 lists the pairs that were presented and their alternative pronunciations (429-430).

Table 1. Alternative pronunciations of the 18 items presented in Labov’s ILI (1966: 429-430)

Items	Alternatives	Items	Alternatives
catch	kætʃ/ketʃ	new	nju/nu
diapers	daɪəpɪz/daɪpɪz	because	bɪkəz/bɪkəs
often	ɔfn/ɔftn	half	hæf/haf
garage	gəɪɑz/gəɪɑdʒ	tomato	təmeɪtəʊ/təmatəʊ
humorous	hjuməəs/juməəs	aunt	ænt/ant
length	lɛŋθ/lɛnθ	vase	veɪs/vəz
February	fɛbɹuɛ.ri/fɛbjʊɛ.ri	tune	tun/tjun
ketchup	kætʃəp/ketʃəp	avenue	ævənu/ævənju
escalator	ɛskəleɪtɪ/ɛskjuleɪtɪ	Joseph	ʒəʊsɪf/ʒəʊzɪf

These items do not replicate Labov’s work on production, as in his Self Evaluation Test (SV), an alternative means of determining what he called *latent insecurity* (1966: 334, and see below); in most cases, they also do not address specific elements of NYC speech, with the possible exception of the voicing concerns in *because* and *Joseph* and the [h] loss in *humorous*. They are instead mostly a collection of prescriptivist shibboleths, and a web search shows that *avenue*, *February*, *catch*, *diapers*, *often*, *tomato*, *vase*, *arctic*, *aunt*, *because*, and the h-loss in such items as *humorous* are still matters that should concern those who do not want, as one site advised, to use “mispronunciations that make you sound stupid” (Bowers 2008).

As in Labov’s studies of actual use, which showed that the lower middle class was most likely to hypercorrect, often using more of the local prestige norms than even the upper middle class (Labov 1966: 324-325), the results of this survey indicate that the lower middle class is the one most beset with insecurity; 685 said they used 3 or more incorrect forms (i.e., “moderate” to “heavy” insecurity); in contrast, only 31% of lower working, 29% of upper working, and 10% of upper middle class respondents had such high levels.

Labov also reports average scores for women (3.6) and men (2.4), confirming the hypothesis based on his usage data that women would show greater linguistic insecurity (335). He also reports the highest insecurity for Italians (3.8) and the lowest for African Americans (1.3), with Jews in a middle position (2.4), but he is unable to account for that pattern, and ethnicity will not be considered further here (335).

The overall rate for all classes combined in the NYC study is shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Overall percentage and number of New York respondents who fit into the four levels of insecurity (derived from Labov 1966: 334)

Insecurity	ILI	% & # of respondents
None	0	36% (26)
Mild	1-2	27% (20)
Moderate	3-7	29% (21)
High	8-13	8% (6)
	Total	100% (73)

Reporting on interviews with local speakers, Labov notes that “The term ‘linguistic self-hatred’ is not too extreme to refer to the situation which emerges from the interviews” (344); he concludes as follows:

This chapter [i.e., Chapter 12] developed one of the primary elements in the underlying structure of the New York City speech community: a profound linguistic insecurity. The lower middle class is the most seriously affected by this tendency, but all classes show this trait to a greater or lesser degree. (Labov 1966:336)

Owens and Baker (1984) replicated the ILI in WPEG, and supplemented it with a Canadian Index of Linguistic Insecurity (CILI), an additional 22 items selected from an earlier study of variable pronunciations in Canada (Scargill 1974) (Table 3).

Table 3. The twenty-two items of the CILI and their alternative pronunciations (Owens and Baker 1984:343)

Items	Alternatives	Items	Alternatives
lever	lɛv.ɪ/liv.ɪ	student	studənt/stjudənt
apricot	æprɪkət/eɪprɪkət/	schedule	skɛdʒul/ʃɛdʒul
anti-	ænti/æntaɪ	genuine	dʒɛnjʊm/dʒɛnjʊaɪn
arctic	ɑɪktɪk/ɑɪtk	bury	bɛ.ɪ/bʌ.ɪ
caramel	kæ.rəml/kæ.ɪml	butter	bʌ.ɪ/bʌ.tɪ
either	ið.ɪ/aɪð.ɪ	lieutenant	lɛftənənt/lutənənt
route	.rut/.ɹaʊt	leisure	li.zɪ/lɛ.zɪ
almond	ɑmənd/ɑlmənd	missile	mɪsl/mɪsaɪl
congratulate	kɔŋgrætʃʊleɪt/kɔŋgrædʒʊleɪt	film	fɪləm/fɪlm
ration	.ɹæʃn/.ɹeɪʃn	progress	prʌɒgrɛs/pragrɛs
cot	kət/kɒt	whine	wɑɪn/ʌaɪn

Owens and Baker justified their use of the ILI by stating that the United States has an “... overpowering cultural influence ... on Canadians” and that, therefore, “Canadians are part of the North American linguistic community and can identify the class distinctions associated with the variable pronunciations of Labov’s list” (340). Many of the additional items on the CILI appear to be based on the encroachment of US norms (e.g., *lever*, *either*).

Owens and Baker changed the numeric range of the 4 levels of insecurity for both tests, but only slightly. Their overall results for the WPEG ILI and the CILI are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Results of the 18-item ILI presented to WPEGers (Owens and Baker 1984:344)

Insecurity	ILI	Percent and number of respondents
None	0	49% (39)
Mild	1-2	20% (16)
Moderate	3-5	21% (17)
High	6+	10% (8)
	Total	100% (80)

Table 5. Results of the 22-item CILI presented to WPEGers (Owens and Baker 1984:344)

Insecurity	CILI	Percent and number of respondents
None	0	49% (39)
Mild	1-3	21% (17)
Moderate	4-8	21% (17)
High	9+	9% (7)
	Total	100% (80)

The distribution of scores for the two WPEG tests is positively correlated; 71% of the respondents belonged to the same ILI and CILI category (Owens and Baker

1984:346). The major contrast with Labov’s findings is that WPEGers are less insecure than New Yorkers (Table 6), who have 37% moderate and heavy insecurity combined compared to WPEGers 31% and 30%; WPEGers have 69% and 70% no and mild insecurity combined compared to New Yorkers’ 63%.

Table 6. Percentages of New Yorkers and WPEGers who fit into the four levels of insecurity of the WPEG ILI and CILI tests (see Tables 3, 5, and 6)

Insecurity	NYC ILI	%	WPEG ILI	%	CILI	%
None	0	36	0	49	0	49
Mild	1-2	27	1-2	20	1-3	21
Moderate	3-7	29	3-5	21	4-8	21
Heavy	8+	8	6+	10	9+	9

Owens and Baker also confirm the considerable contribution to insecurity by the lower middle class, although consideration of the upper middle class pattern, which has only 5 respondents in the Canadian and 10 in NYC, should be made with caution. This study will not deal with class distinctions, and the details of those findings are not reported here.

WPEG results also show that female insecurity scores are higher: WPEG ILI female=2.23, male=1.40; CILI female=2.69, male=1.72. The CILI scores are weighted by .818 to account for the different number of items, but the sex differences in both WPEG studies fail to reach statistical significance. Owens and Baker also display the contribution of individual items to both indexes. Tables 7 and 8 show these figures.

Table 7. Itemized percentages of use, based on left and right “Alternatives” and, in the last column, the claim that personal use was incorrect, for the 18 WPEG ILI items (derived from Owens and Baker 1984:342 (Table 3) and 345 (Table 6))

Items	% use	Alternatives	% use	% admitted incorrect
half	99	hæf/haf	1	2.5
humorous	99	hjuməəs/juməəs	1	2.5
length	96	lɛŋθ/lɛnθ	4	1.3
catch	93	kætʃ/ketʃ	7	3.8
tomato	93	təmeɪtʌʊ/təmatʌʊ	7	10
aunt	93	ænt/ant	7	11.3
escalator	92	ɛskəleɪtɪ/ɛskjuleɪtɪ	8	6.3
Joseph	91	ʤʌʊsɪf/ʤʌʊzɪf	9	2.5
diapers	86	daɪpɪz/daɪəpɪz	14	13.8
avenue	85	ævənju/ævənu	15	5
ketchup	79	kɛtʃəp/kætʃəp	21	8.8
because	77	bɪkəʊz/bɪkəs	23	12.5
new	59	nu/nju	41	18.8
often	56	ɔftn/ɔfn	44	22.5
garage	56	gəɪɑdʒ/gəɪɑʒ	44	8.8
vase	54	vɑz/veɪz	46	18.8
February	52	fɛbjueɪi/fɛbru.eɪi	48	25
tune	51	tun/tjun	49	17.5

Table 8. Itemized percentages of use, based on left and right “Alternatives” and, in the last column, the claim that personal use was incorrect, for the 22 CILI items (derived from Owens and Baker 1984:343 (Table 4) and 345 (Table 7))

Items	% use	Alternatives	% use	% admitted incorrect
ration	95	ɹæʃn/ɹeɪʃn	5	1.3
cot	90	kɑt/kɒt	10	1.3
missile	80	mɪsl/mɪsaɪl	20	18.8
apricot	79	æprɪkɑt/eɪprɪkɑt/	21	13.8
route	77	ɹu:t/ɹaʊt	23	12.5
lieutenant	77	lutenənt/leɪtənənt	23	7.5
film	77	fɪlm/fɪləm	23	7.5
congratulate	76	kɒŋgrætʃʊleɪt/kɒŋgrædzʊleɪt	24	10
lever	76	lɪvɹ/leɪvɹ	24	11.3
student	74	studənt/stjudənt	26	18.8
bury	73	bɛɹɪ/bʌɹɪ	27	21.3
leisure	72	li:zɹ/leɜ:zɹ	28	8.8
schedule	71	skɛdʒʊl/ʃɛdʒʊl	29	15
genuine	70	dʒɛnjʊɪm/dʒɛnjʊəɪn	30	12.5
either	66	ɪðɹ/əɪðɹ	34	12.5
whine	65	wɑɪn/maɪn	35	12.5
anti-	61	æntɹ/æntaɹ	39	11.3

caramel	59	kæ.rəml/kæ.ɪml	41	16.3
butter	56	bʌtɪ/bʌtɪ	44	15
progress	56	pɹɒʊɡres/prəɡres	44	13.8
arctic	55	ɑɪtɪk/ɑɪktɪk	45	17.5
almond	54	ɑmənd/ɑlmənd	46	15

The range of admitted incorrect scores for both WPEG studies is from 1.3% (*length*, *ration*, and *cot*) to 25% (*February*). If this range (23.7) is cut into four equal groups (intervals of 5.93), the following scale for each item's contribution to insecurity results: 1-6=weak, 7-12=mild, 13-18=moderate, and 19-25=heavy. Table 9 shows the items grouped in this way:

Table 9. WPEG ILI and CILI items assigned 4 insecurity categories (derived from Owens and Baker 1984:345, Tables 6 and 7)

Weak 1-6	half, humorous, length, catch, escalator, Joseph, avenue, ration, cot
Mild 7-12	tomato, aunt, ketchup, garage, lieutenant, film, congratulate, lever, leisure, anti-
Moderate 13-18	diapers, because, tune, apricot, route, schedule, genuine, either, whine, caramel, butter, progress, arctic, almond
Heavy 19-25	new, often, vase, February, missile, student, bury

Owens and Baker conclude that spelling pronunciations are important contributors, although this cannot be directly derived from their data since their *admitted incorrect*

category, like Labov's, does not indicate which alternative this admission was a response to. For example, one might conclude, with regard to *often*, that the 22.5% (18) who said they did not use the correct form were mostly ones from the 44% (35) who said they used [ɔfn]. A similar interpretation might apply to *February*, *diapers*, *arctic*, and *caramel*, and perhaps *whine*, the last four all members of the "moderate" insecurity category. On the other hand, if Canadian usage assessments done some time ago are still valid, the spelling pronunciation of *almond* is dispreferred (e.g., Warkentyne 1971:198).

The remaining heavy and moderate items seem to focus on conservative Canadian (often English English) norms. Three (*new*, *tune*, and *student*) have to do with the presence of [j], a form almost completely gone from US English (Labov et al. 2006:54). Four — *missile*, *schedule*, *progress*, and *butter* — show Canadian and English English norms that differ from US ones, but the source of the insecurity is not always clear. Two — *progress* and *butter* — show considerable variation in use (56% for the [ʌʊ] and [t] forms), and, as will be shown below, such divided usage can trigger insecurity in either direction, although it seems likely that the greatest insecurity would have been shown by those who said they used the [ɑ] and flapped forms respectively and regarded the more English English ones correct. On the other hand, 80% (64) of the respondents said they used [mɪsl] as opposed to English English [mɪsɪl], and 71% (57) indicated use of the US [sk] form of *schedule*, reflecting much less divided usage than for *progress* and *butter*, but the interpretation may be the same — moderate or heavy insecurity on the basis of a failure to use the Canadian (or English English) conservative norm.

Owens and Baker (343) also note a trend towards US usage in the pronunciation of *vase* as [veɪz], but they are surely wrong. The most common US pronunciation is

[veɪz], and the alternatives presented by Labov (see Table 1) were [veɪz] and [væz]. In this case, the source of insecurity would appear to result from the tension between the Canadian form [veɪz] and the English English form [væz].

An interesting high insecurity item is *bury*. The merger of stressed /ɛ/ and /ʌ/ (to /ʌ/) before intervocalic /r/ is a feature of Philadelphia-region US English (Labov et al. 2006: 56-57), but there it is true of all /ɛr/ words, regardless of the orthography (i.e., it is as true of *merry* as it is of *bury*). This is not the case in Canada; this shift to /ʌ/ is limited to the lexical item *bury* and may, therefore, be listed with those that are spelling pronunciations (making all heavy insecurity a result of this fact). Owens and Baker do not comment on this form, and only 27% (22) attested that they used [bʌɹi], but the insecurity percentage is 21.3 (17), third highest for both scales. This pronunciation may have become a stereotype among Canadians, perhaps indicating old-fashioned and rural speech (J. K. Chambers, personal communication, 2010).

The Michigan Studies

Surveys done in 2005, 2006, and 2007 in Michigan, more than twenty years after the WPEG studies, used some items from the ILI and CILI, and a few new ones. Table 10 lists the items and their alternatives; the lists will be referred to as the 2005, 2006, and 2007 Michigan Index of Linguistic Insecurity (MILI).

Table 10. The items presented in the MILI and the alternative pronunciations; respondent Ns are 2005=72, 2006=121, and 2007=766; total N=959.

2007 (n=21)	2006 (n=27)	2005 (n=23)	alternatives
catch	catch	catch	kætʃ/ketʃ
diapers	diapers	diapers	daɪəpɪz/daɪpɪz/
often	often	often	ɔfn/ɔftn
garage	garage	garage	gəɹɑʒ/gəɹɑdʒ
humorous	humorous	humorous	hjuməəs/juməəs
length	length	length	lɛŋθ/lɛnθ
February	February	February	fɛb.ru.ɛ.i/fɛbjue.i
ketchup	ketchup	ketchup	kætsəp/ketʃəp
escalator	escalator	escalator	ɛskələɪtɪ/ɛskjuleɪtɪ
new	new	new	nju/nu
because	because	because	bɪkəʒ/bɪkʌz
lever	lever	lever	lɛvɪ/livɪ
apricot	apricot	apricot	æprɪkət/eɪprɪkət/
anti-	anti-	anti-	ænti/æntaɪ
arctic	arctic	arctic	ɑktɪk/ɑrtɪk
caramel	caramel	caramel	kɛɹəml/kɑɹəml
either	either	either	iðɪ/ɑɪðɪ
route	route	route	ɹu:t/ɹɑʊt
almond	almond	almond	ɑlmənd/ælmənd
congratulate	congratulate	congratulate	kəŋg.ræt.juleɪt/kəŋg.rædʒuleɪt

ration	ration	ration	ɹæʃn/ɹeɪʃn
	milk	milk	mɪlk/mɛlk
	band	band	bænd/bɛnd
	beg		bɛg/bʌg
	caught		kɔt/kat
	net		nɛt/næt
	cot		kat/kat

The 2007 form contained 21 items from the ILI and CILI. Deleted from the ILI were some stereotypes (e.g., *vase*) and from the CILI ones reflecting concerns limited to Canadian English (e.g., *lieutenant*). Two additional items used in 2005 looked at a Michigan shibboleth ([mɛlk] for *milk*)² and at one item intended to assess sensitivity to the Northern Cities Shift (NCS) — the raising and fronting of [æ] to [ɛ] ([bænd/bɛnd]). The 2006 form contained all those and 4 additional NCS items: *beg*, to reflect the backing of [ɛ] to [ʌ]; *caught* to reflect the lowering and fronting of [ɔ] in the direction of [ɑ]; *net*, to reflect the lowering of [ɛ] to [æ], and *cot*, to reflect the fronting of [ɑ] in the direction of [æ]. This last item is also included in the CILI, but there it contrasts [ɑ] and [ɒ], the latter an English English variant (see Table 3). Four other minor modifications of the targeted alternatives should be noted:

1) In the ILI the opposition [kɛtʃəp/kætʃəp] (vowel only) was studied; in the MILI it is [kɛtʃəp/kætsəp] (vowel and consonant).

2) In the ILI the opposition [kæ.ɹəmɪl/kæ.ɹɪmɪl] (number of syllables only) was studied; in the MILI it is [kɛ.ɹəmɪl/kɑ.ɹəmɪl] (vowel only).

3) In the CILI the opposition [kəŋgɹætʃələɪt/kəŋgɹædzələɪt] ([tʃ] versus [dʒ], voicing of affricate only) was studied; in the MILI it is [kəŋgɹætʃuləɪt/kəŋgɹædzuləɪt] ([tʃu] versus [dʒu], voicing and affrication; it is also the case that in the CILI the vowel is assumed to be [ɔ] but in the MILI that it is [u].

4) In the ILI for *almond*, the presence or absence of /l/ was studied; in the MILI it is the vowel alternative [ɑ] or [æ].

These very few changes should not interfere with overall comparisons of the ILI (NYC and WPEG) and the CILI with the MILI.

Michigan should be prime territory for this sort of investigation since all earlier work of both a quantitative (e.g., Preston 1996) and qualitative (e.g., Niedzielski and Preston 2003) nature has pointed to considerable security. Richard W. Bailey recalls this from his school days:

In my own case, the elite suburb of Detroit in which I grew up thrived on a certain smugness about its place in American life. My eleventh-grade class, I recall, was told of its good fortune because — unlike others — no one in our room spoke a “dialect.” (Bailey 1973:385)

Even lower status Detroit area speakers agree: “If you have such a thing as called Standard English other than Textbook English it would probably be the language that you’re hearing right now” (Niedzielski and Preston 2003:99).

The methodology and demographics of the MILI differed from the ILI and CILI in the following ways:

1) Instead of presenting auditory stimuli of the alternatives, they were presented in writing, with respellings or rhyming forms to indicate the choices. For example, *ration* was presented as follows:

ration A has an “a” that sounds like the “a” in “rat”³
 B has an “a” that sounds like the “a” in “rate”

Since student fieldworkers carried out the project, it was not advisable to have them pronounce the alternatives nor practical to equip them all with recorded versions to play for the respondents. It is impossible to assess exactly what influence this difference in mode of presentation had on the outcome; there was little or no reported objection from the respondents that they did not understand what was expected of them, and the failure of spelling to have any observable influence on their responses makes it seem that this procedure was a valid one. The entire test (illustrating the items used in all three MILI studies) is given in the Appendix.

2) Although the respondents were all local (Michigan) young adults, there was no practical possibility of measuring their social status. All were undergraduate, university-enrolled persons, and only their sex was determined. Since items added to the 2005 and 2006 MILI studies targeted specific Michigan concerns, in the following comparisons I will use only the 21 items listed in Table 10 for the 2007 data, although I will pool the data for these 21 items from all three MILI studies (as the “CORE” data). I will comment

on Michigan specific items separately below. Table 11 shows the overall results and results by sex (Female = 484, Male = 474) for insecurity for the 21 items.

Table 11. Overall scores and scores by sex (21 MILI CORE items, 959 respondents). (Totals are reduced by missing data [items not rated] and sex totals by 1 respondent in the 2007 MILI who did not indicate sex.) Female (15%) versus male (13%) insecurity proportions are significantly different: Yates Corrected chi-square = 13.508, 1 df, $p = 0.0002$); average female/male insecurity difference is significant in a two-tailed t-test ($p = 0.036$).

	Female	Male	Overall
Total Insecure	1,554 (15%)	1,339 (13%)	2,893 (14%)
Total Secure	8,595 (85%)	8,594 (87%)	17,189 (86%)
Total	10,149	9,933	20,082
Average Insecure	3.211	2.829	

As in both Labov and Owens and Baker, the sex difference suggests greater insecurity for women.

The most straightforward way make the overall results of the MILI more comparable to the earlier research efforts in NYC and WPEG is to calculate the number of individuals who scored 0, 1, 2, etc... for insecurity (i.e., those who said they did not use the form they selected as correct). Table 12 shows these results.

Table 12. MILI CORE (21 items) scores and number and percentage of respondents who fell into each category (*Total percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.)

MILI score	# of respondents	% of respondents
0	283	29.5%
1	78	8.0%
2	110	11.5%
3	103	10.5%
4	106	11.0%
5	87	9.5%
6	74	7.5%
7	41	4.5%
8	33	3.5%
9	20	2.0%
10	14	1.5%
11	6	0.5%
12	2	0.0%
13	1	0.0%
16	1	0.0%
Totals	959	*99%

Tables 13-15 compare the MILI CORE results to the NYC and WPEG score distributions with the groupings used in those previous studies.

Table 13. Comparison of the MILI CORE to the NYC ILI based on the NYC scale; chi-square = 6.11, 3 df, p = 0.106

Insecurity	NYC ILI scale	MILI CORE	NYC ILI
None	0	29.5% (283)	36% (26)
Mild	1-2	19.5% (188)	27% (20)
Moderate	3-7	43% (411)	29% (21)
Heavy	8-13 (16)	8% (77)	8% (6)
	Total	100% (959)	100% (73)

The Michigan score distribution is not significantly different from the NYC one.

Table 14. Comparison of the MILI CORE to the WPEG ILI results based on the WPEG ILI scale; chi-square = 14.9, 3 df, p = 0.002

Insecurity	WPEG ILI scale	MILI CORE	WPEG
None	0	29.5% (283)	49% (39)
Mild	1-2	19.5% (188)	20% (16)
Moderate	3-5	31% (296)	21% (17)
Heavy	6+	20% (192)	10% (8)
	Total	100% (959)	100% (80)

Table 15. Comparison of the MILI CORE to the WPEG CILI results based on the WPEG CILI scale; chi-square = 17.9, 3 df, p = 0.0009

Insecurity	WPEG CILI scale	MILI CORE	WPEG CILI
None	0	29.5% (283)	49% (39)
Mild	1-3	30.5% (291)	21% (17)
Moderate	4-8	35.5% (341)	21% (17)
Heavy	9+	4.5% (44)	9% (7)
	Total	100% (959)	100% (80)

Tables 14 and 15 show that the MILI CORE results differ significantly from both WPEG ILI and WPEG CILI, and the direction of the difference is obvious: the Michiganders are more insecure.

How can Michiganders be more like the linguistically prejudiced-against and self-incriminating New Yorkers than the linguistically contented WPEGers. Before discussing why secure Michiganders respond this way, a few other comparisons can be made.

The MILI studies and both WPEG studies permit a more careful investigation of individual items. First, I will compare the items of the MILI CORE studies with those that overlap the 2 WPEG studies, looking at the rank-order of intensity of insecurity for each item. Second, I will look at the MILI items independently to assess their degree of influence. Table 16 compares the percentage of insecurity for the 21 items shared by the MILI CORE and the WPEG ILI and CILI.

Table 16. Insecurity percentages for items shared by MILI and WPEG (both studies; see Tables 7 and 8; ranks based on MILI scores; missing ranks are for items unique to MILI; see Table 17) (Rank difference, Spearman $r=.4979$, $t=2.5$, $df=19$, $p=.02174$) (V = vowel difference, C = consonant difference, S = segment presence; *in 2 cases there is syllable loss: *caramel* in WPEG, and *diapers* in both.)

Item	MILI% insecure, rank, and source	WPEG % insecure, rank and source
because	36.64 (1)-V	12.5 (10)-C
February	30.55 (2)-S	25.0 (1)-S
arctic	27.14 (3)-S	17.5 (4)-S
caramel	26.51 (4)-V	16.3 (5)-*S
congratulate	25.21 (5)-C,S	10.0 (14)-C
often	20.46 (6)-S	22.5 (2)-S
catch	18.46 (7)-V	3.8 (18)-V
either	16.84 (8)-V	12.5 (10)-V
route	14.70 (9)-V	12.5 (10)-V
garage	12.51 (10)-C	8.8 (15.5)-C
anti-	9.53 (11)-V	11.3 (12.5)-V
new	8.56 (12)-S	18.8 (3)-S
apricot	8.16 (13)-V	13.8 (7.5)-V
escalator	7.21 (15)-S	6.3 (17)-S
length	7.20 (16)-C	1.3 (20.5)-C
ketchup	7.10 (17)-V,C	8.8 (15.5)-C

lever	6.79 (18)-V	11.3 (12.5)-V
almond	5.96 (19)-V	15.0 (6)-S
diapers	5.64 (20)-*S	13.8 (7.5)-*S
ration	4.72 (21)-V	1.3 (20.5)-V
humorous	2.92 (24)-S	2.5 (19)-S

The Spearman rank correlation is significant ($p=.02174$), suggesting that there is general agreement between the MILI and WPEG measures on items that contribute most to linguistic insecurity. It is important to remember, however, that *because*, highest ranked in the MILI, was different in the two studies. The MILI looked at vowel variance ([ɔ] versus [ʌ]), while the WPEG investigators copied Labov's focus on the voicing of the final consonant; the MILI vowel variation appears to have been more salient. The MILI looked at voicing and affrication in [kəŋg.ræt.juleɪt] versus [kəŋg.rædʒulɛɪt]; the WPEG study also looked at voicing but assumed affrication in both. The MILI looked at vowel differences in *caramel* ([ɛ] versus [ɑ]), while WPEG looked only at syllable loss (and assumed the vowel [æ] in both)⁴, but, in spite of this different focus, the rankings were very similar (4th and 5th). Finally, the MILI looked at the vowel variation in *almond* ([ɑ(l)mənd] versus [æ(l)mənd]), but /l/ presence or absence was not studied, although that was the target in the WPEG. The /l/ factor caused rather more concern (MILI rank 19, WPEG rank 6).

Putting aside all these, although I need not have done so with *caramel*, the top ranked items in both lists are *February* (1st and 2nd), *arctic* (3rd and 4th), and *often* (6th and 2nd). These rankings might seem to confirm Owens and Baker's notion that spelling

pronunciations (or avoidance of them) are a major source of insecurity among their respondents, particularly if *almond* is included (ranked 6th in the WPEG list). The top 7 items in the WPEG studies are all marked “S” (“segment deletion”); the top 4 are deletions of consonants, and the 5th (*caramel*) is a vowel deletion that also results in syllable deletion. In contrast, the MILI list is not dominated by “S.” The top item is the vowel quality of *because*; the 4th ranked item is *caramel*, studied in MILI for vowel quality only; the 5th ranked item is *congratulate*, studied in MILI for both consonant voicing and segment type (stop+glide versus affricate), and the 7th ranked item is *catch*, another case of vowel quality. Although the two lists correlate overall, spelling pronunciations seem to play a smaller role in MILI. Other items that were at rather different ranks (i.e., greater than 5) were *garage* (MILI 10, WPEG 15.5), *new* (MILI 12, WPEG 3), *apricot* (MILI 13, WPEG 7.5), *length* (MILI 14.5, WPEG 20.5)⁵, and *diapers* (MILI 19, WPEG 7.5).

Since the 2005 and 2006 MILI included a few items not used in the WPEG or NYC studies (*milk*, *band*, *beg*, *caught*, *net*) and one item (*cot*) shared between the 2005 and 2006 MILIs but only the CILI, it is possible that those scores might have contributed to the overall scores in some important way. They did, but in general it was to greater security.

Table 17. Items in MILI 2005 and 2006 not shared with MILI 2007.

Item	MILI % insecure, rank, and source
milk	7.33 (14)-V
band	3.70 (23)-V
beg	1.67 (25)-V
net	0.00 (27)-V
caught	4.13 (22)-V
cot	0.83 (26)-V

Table 17 shows the results for these 6 items and calculates their ranks on the basis of where they would have fallen in the ranking of shared items shown in Table 16. Only the [mɛlk] pronunciation of *milk*, a local stereotype, enters the ranking of items above the very bottom tier, and only Michigander security in their pronunciation of *humorous* (i.e., without [h] deletion), ranks below any of these 6 items. Since, excluding *milk*, they were all intended to survey insecurity associated with NCS pronunciations, it is no surprise that they failed. Neither Preston (1997, with written stimuli) nor Niedzielski (1999, with auditory stimuli) were able to awaken recognition of the NCS in their respondents. The NCS is clearly change from below conscious awareness (e.g., Labov 2001:285), although this does not mean that sensitivity to its norms might not surface in certain sorts of investigations; these NCS items had to be represented in respellings that really did not capture the phonetic details of the shift, and these items were perhaps not successfully investigated in this mode.

Table 18. All MILI items, showing the % of respondents who said that the “Norm” alternative was correct (Column 4), the % of overall insecurity (Column 5), and the % whose insecurity was based on their failure to use the “Norm” (Column 6)

1. Item	2. Norm	3. Non-norm	4. Norm agreement	5. Overall insecurity	6. Norm Insecurity
cot	kat	kæt	92.56	0.83	0.00
humorous	hjumɜəs	jumɜəs	92.07	2.92	53.57
beg	bɛg	bʌg	91.67	1.67	0.00
ketchup	kɛʃəp	kætsəp	91.54	7.10	22.06
diapers	dɑɪpɪz	dɑɪəpɪz	90.81	5.64	9.26
milk	mɪlk	mɛlk	90.05	7.33	100.00
lever	lɛvɪ	livɪ	89.34	6.79	52.31
net	nɛt	næt	89.26	0.00	0.00
ration	ɹæʃn	ɹɛʃn	84.24	4.73	46.67
band	bænd	bɛnd	82.54	3.70	14.29
apricot	æprɪkət	eɪprɪkət	81.59	8.16	37.18
length	lɛŋθ	lɛnθ	81.32	7.20	69.57
escalator	ɛskəleɪtɪ	ɛskjuleɪtɪ	80.98	7.21	47.83
anti-	æntaɪ	ænti	78.74	9.53	41.76
new	nu	nju	75.47	8.56	32.93
almond	ɑlmənd	ælmənd	70.92	5.96	45.61
catch	kɛʃ	kætʃ	67.36	18.46	10.17

often	ɔfn̩	ɔfn̩	66.81	20.46	62.24
arctic	ɑktɪk	ɑtɪk	65.87	27.14	84.62
route	ɹaʊt	ɹut	63.71	14.70	39.01
either	iðɪ	aɪðɪ	63.39	16.84	21.12
garage	gəɹɑdʒ	gəɹɑʒ	60.69	12.51	46.67
congratulate	kɒŋɡrædʒuleɪt	kɒŋɡrætjuleɪt	59.94	25.21	12.45
February	fɛbjʊeɪrɪ	fɛbɹueɪrɪ	58.81	30.55	12.63
caramel	kɑɹəml̩	kɛɹəml̩	55.85	26.51	14.57
because	bɪkɒz	bɪkɔz	53.55	36.64	10.26
caught	kɔt	kæt	52.07	4.13	80.00

Since, unlike the NYC and WPEG studies, The MILI studies correlate insecurity with which variant of an item was called correct, I can investigate those tendencies in more detail. In Table 18, Column 2 (“Norm”) shows which form was identified as correct by the majority of the respondents and Column 3 the form not so chosen (i.e., the “Non-norm”). Column 4 shows the degree of respondent agreement on the “Norm” of Column 2, the basis of the ordering of this table (the “Norm Agreement”), and the degree to which each item contributed to overall insecurity is shown in Column 5. In Column 6, the percentage of respondents who were insecure because they did not use the form in column 2 (the “Norm”) is shown (and, by inference, the remaining percentage identifies those who said the “Non-norm” was correct and were insecure because of their use of the “Norm”). In the first row, for example, 92.56 percent of the respondents (Column 4) believed that the [kæt] form of *cat* was correct, but fewer than one percent (0.83) were

insecure with regard to this item overall (Column 5). Of that small proportion who were insecure, however, all the insecurity arose from a failure to use the “Non-norm” as indicated by the 0.00% who were insecure because of a failure to use the “Norm,” the basis for the calculation of Column 6. In what follows, I will refer to these results as *norm agreement* (i.e., the degree of agreement on the majority variant), *insecurity*, (the overall percentage of insecurity caused by this item), and *norm insecurity* (i.e., the degree to which insecurity was caused by a failure to use the norm).

Prescriptivists will be sorry to learn that Michiganders prefer the bisyllabic pronunciation of *diapers*; the form [kɛʃəp] also carries the day over [kætsəp], which some respondents said sounded “prissy” or completely unfamiliar. It is surprising, however, to see in such an overt task the forms [kɛʃ], [gəɪɪdʒ], [kəŋɡɪædʒuleɪt], and [fɛbjueɪi] preferred as community norms, although they are all below the 70% level of norm agreement. In contrast to *February*, the forms [ɔftn] and [ɑktɪk] showed a preference for the spelling pronunciations, but the slight preference for [bɪkʌz] goes against this trend, although spelling pronunciation with regard to vowels puts one in less secure territory. In general, these Michigan respondents display considerable variability in their norm agreement, with 6 cases even below the 60% level (*congratulate, February, caramel, because, caught*). They are also somewhat mixed in their norm bases; in *arctic* they agree with older, prescriptivist standards, but in many cases, their norm preferences point to newer ones (*garage, February, because, congratulate, diapers, catch*).

Figure 1 shows a scatter plot of norm agreement and insecurity, and, not surprisingly, there is an inverse correlation between the two: the greater the norm agreement, the less insecurity. Item #2 for example (*humorous*) has over 90% agreement

that the norm is [hj], not [j], and fewer than three percent of the respondents show any insecurity for this item. Item #26, however, shows that only 53.55 percent agree that the norm is [bɪkʌz], and it is the largest contributor to insecurity (36.64%).

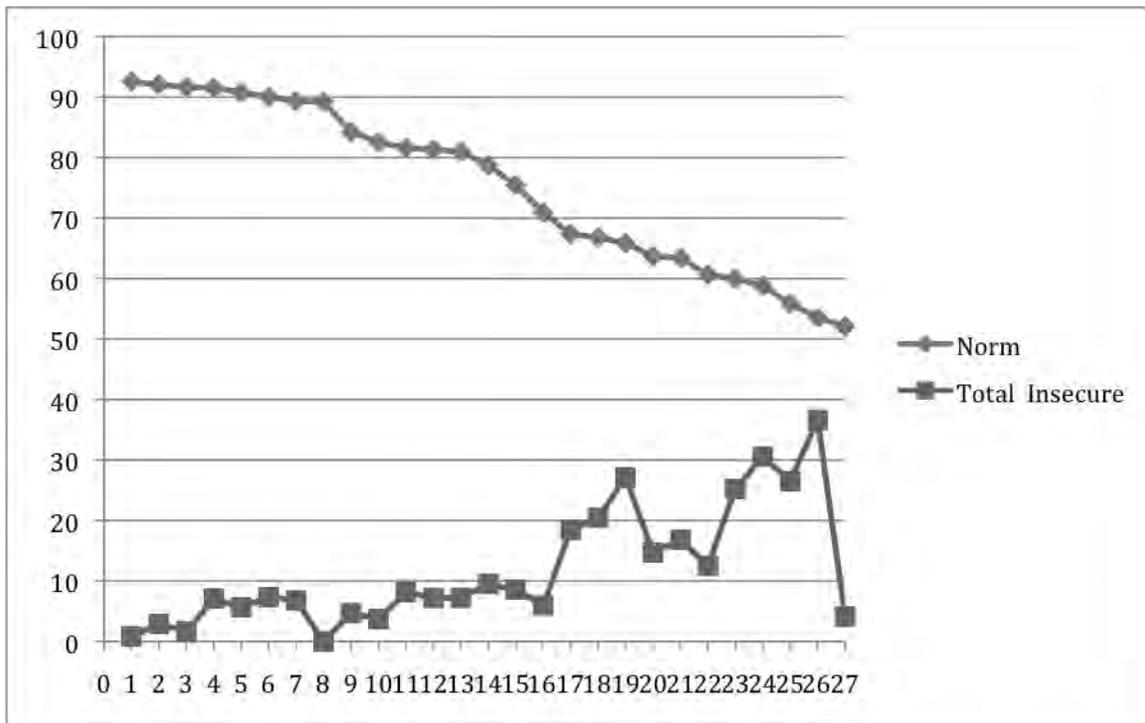


Figure 1. Scatter plot of “Norm Agreement” and “Insecurity” (Pearson Product Moment correlation $r = -.7627929$, 25df, $p < 0.01$)

Item 27 (*caught*) deserves mention since it is considerably outside the trend line. Only slightly more than 50% of the respondents agree that [kɒt] is the norm, but, unlike all the other poorly-agreed on norm items, it contributes almost nothing to insecurity. The answer to this anomaly lies, I believe, in its perceptual position in the Northern Cities Shift (and perhaps English in general). One standard story of the NCS is that /æ/ (*hat*) has fronted and raised, leaving behind a space into which /ɑ/ (*hot*) has moved; this leaves

another space, and, in drag-chain fashion, /ɔ/ moves in (Labov et al. 2006:190-191). In a presentation of single-word items for phoneme recognition to young, European American southeastern Michigan respondents who could be expected to be advanced in the shift, Preston (2010a: 249) shows that, with the exception of an /ɛ/ vowel realized as /ʌ/, the respondents were least accurate in recognizing shifted /ɔ/; in 142 opportunities to identify it, exactly half (71) were misclassified as /ʌ/. The vowel in *cot*, however, is at the same end of the insecurity scale but the opposite end of the norm scale, suggesting that the Northern Cities Shift influence on perception of /ɑ/ was nil, and, indeed, Preston 2010a (249) reports on only thirteen mishearings of shifted /ɑ/ as /æ/. The historical status of the /ɔ/ vowel is undoubtedly a major factor in this confusion, and other studies (e.g., Peterson and Barney 1950) show difficulty in this territory as well. As noted above, however, respelling is not the optimal way to measure sensitivity to these NCS items.

At the top of the Norm Agreement group (Column 4 in Table 18), I have already discussed *cot*, a potential for influence by the Northern Cities Shift that was not realized. The next item, *humorous*, showed strong agreement on the [hj] onset as the local norm, and the alternative pronunciation was perhaps not familiar to many respondents, although the loss of [h] in some local words (e.g., *Huron River*) is common among older, rural, and less well-educated speakers. The [ɛ] form of *beg* is clearly the norm, and it caused little insecurity, another failure of a Northern Cities Shift item to influence these judgments, as was *net* a little farther down the scale.

The [mɪlk] variant of *milk* is also the community norm but triggered insecurity in only 7.3% of respondents. Since the [mɛlk] pronunciation is a local negative stereotype, it is not surprising that very few respondents reported using it, but that all who did were

insecure. That is, of the few (7.3%) who exhibited any insecurity, all were insecure because they used [mɛlk] (the 100% of Column 6, Table 18). I have already mentioned that Michiganders prefer the bisyllabic pronunciation of *diapers*, and it also rouses little insecurity; [kɛʃəp] is the same.

The items at the 80% to 89% level of norm agreement (*lever, net, ration, band, apricot, length, and escalator*) are, like those at the higher level, ones that caused little insecurity, and even at the 70% to 79% level of norm agreement, the items *anti-, new,* and *almond* are not very different from those listed just above, although *anti-* approaches 10%, the highest insecurity rate of any item yet commented on.

Things are very different at the next level down (60% to 69% norm agreement); the lowest norm agreement ranked item in this group, *garage*, provoked 12.51% insecurity. Even more dramatically, *often* triggered 20.5% insecurity (6th highest in insecurity overall). These items, however, confirm the fact that insecurity is linked to uncertainty. For example, although the majority of insecure respondents agreed that, for example, the [ɹaʊt] pronunciation for *route* was correct, we may infer from the “Norm Insecurity” scale of Table 18 (Column 6) that about 60% of those who were insecure felt that [ɹut] was the correct form and that they did not use it. In other words, they were insecure in spite of their use of the norm — not a well-agreed on one.

At the bottom of the norm agreement scale (50% - 59% in Table 18), the leader in insecurity is *because* (36.64%). Although slightly over half the respondents identified the [ʌ] form as correct, the community norm was not the cause of the considerable insecurity. The Norm Insecurity scale shows that only 10.26 percent of the respondents who were insecure based their insecurity on the community norm; the extensive *because* insecurity

was overwhelmingly based on the failure to use the [bɪkɔz] pronunciation (89.74%), the form that lost the norm agreement contest.

To look at norm, insecurity, and source of insecurity simultaneously, I will use a three-way feature system for the details in Table 18: for *norm*, items from 52.07 (the low) to 72.315 will be classified as *low* and items from 72.315 to 92.56 (the maximum) as *high*. For *overall insecurity*, items from 0.00 (the minimum) to 18.32 will be classified as *low* and those from 18.33 to 36.64 (the maximum) will be classified as *high*. For *norm insecurity* (i.e., insecurity based on a respondent's saying they do not use the norm), items from 0.00 to 49.99 will be marked -, and items from 50.00 to 100.00 will be marked +. That yields the following table:

Table 19: All MILI items classified as high or low overall *insecurity* and *norm agreement*; + identifies insecurity based on failure to use the community norm; - indicates insecurity based on the use of that norm.

	High Overall Insecurity	Low Overall Insecurity
High Norm Agreement		+humorous +milk +lever +length -escalator -cot -beg -ration -ketchup -apricot -diapers -band -anti- -new -net
Low Norm Agreement	+often +arctic -catch -congratulate -February -caramel -because	+caught -route -either -garage -almond

As Figure 1 suggests, there should be no High Insecurity/High Norm Agreement items, and the upper left box of Table 19 is empty, but there is considerable diversity of affect among the remaining words submitted in the MILI. I have little doubt that similar diversity would be found among the NYC words, and some of this diversity is documented for the WPEG studies in Tables 7 and 8.

The most productive territory is Low Insecurity and High Norm Agreement in the upper right of Table 19. The four + items, those that cause some insecurity, however little, are those that fail to use the community norm: [mɛlk] is a local stereotype, an alveolar /n/ in *length* is nonstandard throughout the US, and the loss of [j] in *humorous* is not widespread in Michigan and may be lexical where it does occur. The little insecurity in the pronunciation of *lever* appears to come from a failure to use the community norm, and the pronunciation with [i] is not common at all in the area.

The larger minus group in the same area is more interesting since the small amount of insecurity here arises in opposition to the norm (i.e., people are insecure because they say they use the community norm and believe the alternative is correct). All the items added to the MILI list to test any insecurity rising from Northern Cities Shift influence (*cot*, *beg*, *net*, and *band*) are in this territory — high norm agreement (on the non-shifted form as correct) and little or even no insecurity. This is consistent with the change-from-below status of the shift and with previous studies that indicate local unawareness of the shift's existence (e.g., Preston 1997, Niedzielski 1999). The other items (*escalator*, *ration*, *ketchup*, *apricot*, *diapers*, *anti-*, *new*) are items for which a small number of respondents felt that the majority norm was incorrect but that they were users of it. Several of them involve their apparent regard for very conservative and/or spelling

pronunciations (*new, ketchup, diapers, anti-*). The item *net* has low insecurity and high norm agreement.

The next most productive area is that for items that were low in norm agreement but high in promoting insecurity, the lower left of Table 19. Only two items, *arctic* and *often*, caused considerable insecurity based on the weak majority norms. More interestingly, the –Norm Agreement items are all ones that caused considerable insecurity, but, again, the source of the insecurity was based on the opposite norm. Since there was weak agreement on the norms in this area, perhaps not so much should be made of the distinction, and one may point to the norm disagreement as the major source of the insecurity. Nevertheless, that the majority of those who were insecure based their insecurity on the more conservative pronunciations of these five words suggests that considerable prescriptivist norm pressure exists even among these younger speakers.

In short, the two most likely outcomes are the two most populated areas in Table 19. Items about which there is considerable norm agreement cause little insecurity (the upper right) and items about which there is little norm agreement cause greater insecurity (the lower left). What about the mysterious lower right?

These five items (*caught, route, either, garage, almond*) caused little insecurity even though there was weak norm agreement. This is a surprising result, for a good sociolinguistic rule of thumb is that when two forms are in competition, the variants will take on social meaning. These items apparently do not awaken divergent social meanings; the weak norm agreement alone does not indicate that, but coupled with the low level of insecurity assigned these items, we find that is the case. The exceptional case of *caught* has already been discussed.

For weak norm agreement items, some have social meaning and may give rise to insecurity, but others do not. In the first case, this means that some respondents might choose one form for more formal or monitored usage while others would choose the alternate, failing to yield the unidirectional pattern given as proof of the uniformity of a speech community's norms (Labov 1972: Chapter 8). In the second, some items appear to have socially neutral variants, a confusing case for sociolinguists.

To summarize, the items in the upper right of Table 19 are ones that result in little insecurity and show a decided preference for one form or the other as standard in the speech community. The few people who go against the norm for some items do not increase insecurity in any interesting way. This set includes both items whose alternatives are not consciously known in the speech community (e.g., such Northern Cities Shift items as *cot*) and others that are stereotypes (e.g., the [ɛ] pronunciation of milk).

The lower left items in Table 19 all contribute to insecurity, perhaps mainly on the basis of norm disagreement in the speech community. Unlike the first group, these are all community stereotypes, and the focus of the stereotypicality is on correctness, and this appears to be the major source of insecurity in the MILI studies and, I suspect, the others as well.

The lower right items of Table 19 are, with the exception of *caught* (discussed above), community stereotypes, but, unlike the lower left group, the focus is on variability rather than correctness. Discussions of *route*, for example, do not stem from attempts to reach some decision about correctness.

Since no ILI studies investigate empirically any stylistic differences in the alternatives presented and I have no social status characteristics available for this study, I can go no further.

Conclusions

Surprisingly, Michiganders equal or even outstrip New Yorkers in their insecurity. Any prediction that respondents who lived in areas where they felt their local variety was correct would be linguistically secure was flawed. What went wrong? Perhaps such local correctness may impose considerable obligations to behave correctly as individuals. In their assessment of their own speech, particularly concerning items for which they have neither prescriptive nor community norm guidance, they display an insecurity as great as those New Yorkers, who find their home area nonstandard. Perhaps there are those who find both their own speech and their own region correct; Hartley's work in Oregon (1999) suggests it might be such a place, but specific work on insecurity has not been done there.

I suggest, therefore, a more careful distinction among insecurities. There are those who find their region (or group) incorrect and apparently extend that to personal insecurity (e.g., NYC respondents); there are those who find their own region (or group) relatively correct and extend that to their personal security (e.g., WPEGers), but there are also those who find their own area correct (perhaps even considerably so) but may find their individual performances lacking, particularly when local norms do not guide them. These last may be those who have considerably more invested in what Lippi-Green calls the "standard language ideology" (1997), the belief that some varieties are more correct than others. Michiganders certainly belong to this group, for they do not hesitate calling

Michigan English the most correct in the US when asked to rank varieties on this dimension (by US states) (Preston 1996). On the other hand, they seem to have much less invested in other forms of prestige. When asked to rate the local area and the usually prejudiced-against US South, Michiganders found the South to be superior to their own speech on such dimensions as *casual*, *friendly*, *down-to-earth*, and *polite* (Preston 1999:366). US Southerners, however, show a much greater investment in such solidarity dimensions when asked where “pleasant” and “correct” English are spoken, unfailingly identifying their own locale as the site of the most pleasant speech (e.g., Preston 1996). I conclude that they are somewhat less invested in a standard language ideology, and a look at their linguistic insecurity would be very interesting but poses a problem.

All the ILI work reviewed here presupposes a unidimensionality based on what Trudgill (1972) would call overt prestige or the correctness norm basis for insecurity noted in the quotations at the beginning of this article. I believe we should be more careful in determining what specific ideological factors are at work and how they impact individual tasks, performances, and even individual items presented for evaluation as we carry out such research. I specifically urge distinguishing between regional (or group) and personal insecurity. In the earlier work on Michigan correctness and pleasantness, for example, African-American Michiganders, whose own speech variety may be discriminated against, rated Michigan speech as even more correct than their European American counterparts did (Niedzielski and Preston 2003:75). They were obviously participating in the standard language ideology of the area, one that would have included disparagement of African American Vernacular English.

I am also concerned with the either-or division of both status (overt) and solidarity (covert) prestige. Let me comment on just one upshot of this concern — the superstandard.

Standard American English, in the *informal* sense, or the informal standard form of any language, must be distinguished not only from substandard forms but also from superstandard forms. There is general agreement about what forms of language are preferred above others within a language community, even when the preferred forms are not used. It is typical for people to be slightly schizophrenic about their use of language. They acknowledge that some aspects of their language use are not “correct”: they can tell you what the “correct” form is, but they never actually adopt it. At an emotional level, these admittedly correct forms are rejected by some speakers because they are *too* correct. These speakers do not adopt such forms and at unguarded moments will even make negative value judgments about speakers who use them, not because these forms are “bad English” or because the speakers who use them are considered uneducated, but because the forms are “too snooty” or “too high-falutin’.”

(Wolfram and Fasold 1974:19)

Although I believe I have shown in both the WPEG and MILI surveys that Wolfram and Fasold exaggerate a bit when they say that “There is general agreement about what forms of language are preferred above others within a language community...,” there is other

evidence to support their notion of a superstandard. In many of the dialect map-drawing tasks assigned Michigan respondents in earlier research, results such as those shown in Figure 2 emerged.

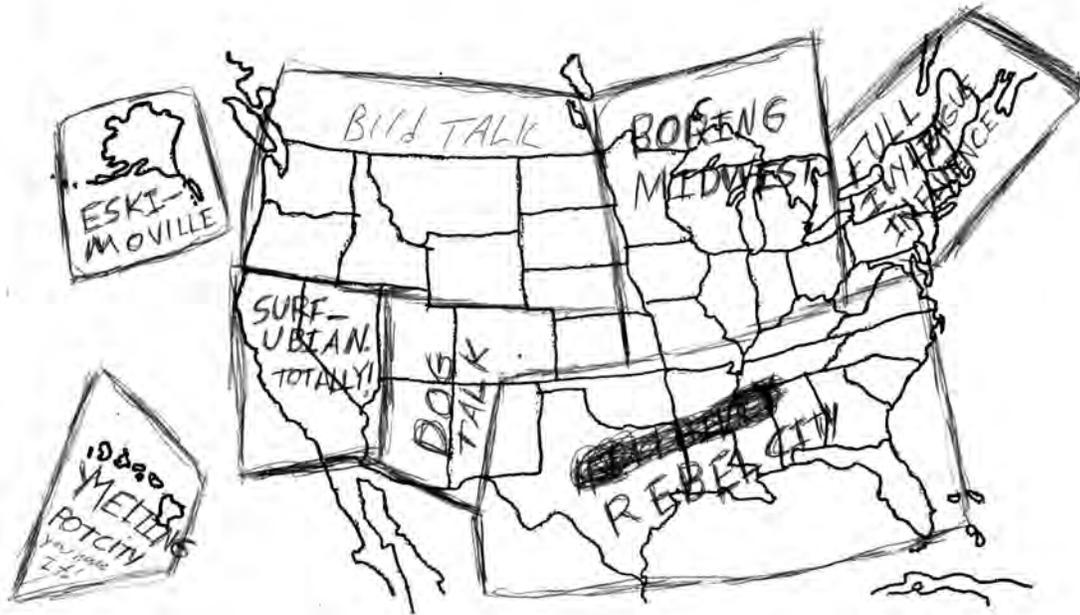


Figure 2. Hand-drawn map of US dialects by a Michigan respondent (Hartley and Preston 1999:224).

The home site (Michigan) has the character that those who would hope their correct but not too correct language would have — boring, but the entire Northeast, for this respondent, shows “FULL IVY LEAGUE INFLUENCE.” Many other such maps from Michigan identify the home area as “normal” but New England as “proper” or even “British English,” fairly good indications that the language may be just a bit too good there.

If this populist aspect of US language regard is true, and I believe it is, perhaps there is no insecurity at all in a respondent who tells us that [vaz] is correct but that they say [veis]. Perhaps many of the highly-ranked MILI sources of insecurity (e.g., *February*, *arctic*, *caramel*) have this character; their fancier pronunciations are correct only in the superstandard sense, and their alternatives are normal, hardly a source of insecurity.

The underlying strategy of ILI-inspired research is not wrong if we take the view that sociocultural prescription surrounding language is a primary contributor to insecurity, and much social psychological, sociolinguistic, ethnographic, language ideological, folk linguistic, and perceptual dialectological research would confirm that. But I also believe that research methodologies that focus primarily on such niceties, as the above analysis shows all three studies have done, may miss opportunities for the discovery and cultural weighting of other kinds of linguistic misgivings. I prefer the following definition (at least for the “what is it” and “who has it” questions posed at the beginning):

Linguistic insecurity arises when one feels that they do not have the ability to perform the linguistic job they want to do.

From this perspective, insecurity ranges from lacking any skills at all in a foreign language all the way to slight misgivings that one did not properly assess a situation in terms of the face or identity that they meant to project in their contribution and therefore failed to match items from their repertoire to that instance of performance. This definition allows us to think about ways of assessing speakers’ worries about their abilities to

perform in any way that would satisfy their identity construction of the moment. One may go on to imagine a long list of linguistic inabilities, not only those that are not a part of our repertoires but also imagined or real failures of our ability to select correctly from those that are solidly in our repertoires. Fear of public speaking is well known, but for those of us more interested in the daily stuff of language in public life, it is rather fear of speaking in public that might characterize linguistic insecurity.

To conclude, I believe that measures of linguistic security, however quick and dirty they may seem, form an important part of the investigation of language regard (e.g., Preston 2010b), but they are surely qualified by at least the following conditions:

1) They should not presuppose that regional (or group) (in)security will be reflected in personal (in)security.⁶ Different speech communities (or sub-speech communities) may reveal different patterns.

2) They need to be correlated with qualitative measures of regional or group security such as ethnographic interview techniques (e.g., Labov 1966: Chapter 13, Niedzielski and Preston 2003:97-126). In fact, Labov's category "stereotype" (e.g., 1972: 248) can be determined in only this way.

3) Individual items submitted for judgment should be carefully accounted for in terms of the sort of (in)security each triggers (e.g., Graff et al., 1986; *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 18,1, 1999; Plichta and Preston 2005; Preston and Niedzielski 2010).

4) The manner of presentation (setting, task, etc...) will have an important influence on the regard assessments made by respondents, including the growing concern with explicit versus implicit judgments (e.g., Bassili and Brown 2005), which has already

found particular expression in work on language attitudes to varieties of Danish (e.g., Kristiansen 2009) and phonological features of Texas (USA) speech (e.g., Koops et al. 2008), although earlier research was also conducted in which such overtly conscious measures as the ILI were not used (e.g., Labov's Self Evaluation Test [1966: 315-332], Trudgill's study of covert prestige in male responses in self-evaluation [1972], and Niedzielski's study of self-awareness of the NCS among southeastern Michigan respondents [1999]).

Until recently, the majority of our investigations in quantitative sociolinguistics has been of phonetic, phonological, and morphophonological factors, but, however carefully contextualized, we may have missed in some cases the important contribution of the lexical items themselves and therefore the need for finer distinctions among the types of linguistic units that play a role in language variation and change. Perhaps we need not incorporate the dictum "chaque mot a son histoire," but we would do well to pay attention to the status of the phonetic realization of the vocabulary in our sociolinguistic work. Recent work has already, for example, focused on status frequency in variation and change. Finally, I believe that, as in many areas of the social sciences, a variety of approaches will reveal a more complex but also more interpretable picture (Preston 2010b).

Notes

- 1 Only quantitative surveys of American English insecurity are studied here; qualitative studies have been done (e.g., Niedzielski and Preston 2003), and studies have been done in other language areas, perhaps most notably French (e.g., Francard 1993). Words have also played a very important part in recent European investigations of attitudes to the use of English vocabulary in local languages (e.g., Sandøy 2009).

- 2 The NCS also involves a lowering and backing of [ɪ] in the direction of [ɛ], but that is a quite unconscious fact, while the [ɛ] pronunciation of *milk* and *pillow* are known stereotypes and are more likely due to a combination of word frequency and the backing effect of /l/ on the F2 of vowels.

- 3 Some who know the NCS may suspect that the well-known raising of [æ] might cause *rat* to be heard with a much higher vowel and therefore be in less contrast with *rate* than the test intended. When [æ] raises, however, it often develops a centering or schwa-like offglide, contrasting with the rising glide of [eɪ]. More importantly, experiments in which stimuli have been presented in writing (e.g., Preston 1997) and in speech (e.g., Preston 2010a, Niedzielski 1999) show that Michigan respondents do not recognize or respond to elements of the NCS.

- 4 This could not be done in the MILI investigations since [e], [ɛ], and [æ] are all neutralized (to [ɛ]) before tautosyllabic [ɪ] in this part of the US.

5 I have classified *length* in Table 21 as “C” (consonant difference), but the folk characterization of the difference is that the alveolar form results from “dropping one’s ‘g’,” but I will not list all such possibilities. For example, the [j] loss in such items as *new* might also be characterized as vocalic (as the first element of a diphthong) rather than consonantal.

6 This is not a new idea; Meyerhoff and Niedzielski (1994) outline the distinction, and Niedzielski (2010) refines it to include the sort of filter that is needed to deter awareness of local practice — exactly what is needed for the NCS.

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Michigan Pronunciation

Please help us with this study of how words are pronounced in Michigan.

1) First, what is your sex: (a) female (b) male

For the remaining questions, please indicate for the following words whether

- a) the A pronunciation is correct, and I usually pronounce it that way
- b) the B pronunciation is correct, and I usually pronounce it that way
- c) the A pronunciation is correct, but I usually pronounce it as in B
- d) the B pronunciation is correct, but I usually pronounce it as in A

Let's try a sample

vase A rhymes with "Oz"
 B rhymes with "place"

If you believe that the pronunciation of "vase" which is correct is the one which rhymes with "Oz" and if that is the way you usually say it, you would blacken an "a" on your op-scan form.

If you believe that that pronunciation is correct but that you usually pronounce it to rhyme with "place," you would darken a "c."

And so on. Check with the fieldworker to be sure you understand these instructions.

2) catch A rhymes with "batch"
 B rhymes with "fetch"

- 3) diapers A has three syllables — die - uh -purrs
 B has two syllables — die - purrs
- 4) often A is pronounced without a “t”
 B is pronounced with a “t”
- 5) garage A ends in a sound which sounds like the “s” in “measure”
 B ends in a sound which sounds like the last sound in “badge”
- 6) humorous A begins with an “h” sound followed by a “y” sound
 B begins with a “y” sound
- 7) length A has a “g” sound in it
 B has no “g” sound in it; sounds like “lenth”
- 8) February A is pronounced with the first “r” sounded — “feb - roo - airy”
 B is pronounced with the first “r” silent — “feb - you - airy”
- 9) ketchup A sounds like “cat + sup”
 B sounds like “ketch + up”
- 10) escalator A has a second syllable that sounds like the “cu” of “cut”
 B has a second syllable that sounds like “cue”
- 11) new A sounds like it has a “y” in it — “nyoo”
 B sounds like it has no “y” in it — “noo”

- 22) ration A has an “a” that sounds like the “a” in “rat”
 B has an “a” that sounds like the “a” in “rate”
- 23) milk A has an “i” that sounds like the “i” in “mitt”
 B has an “i” that sounds like the “e” in “melt”
- 24) band A has an “a” that sounds like the “e” in “bend”
 B has an “a” that sounds like the “a” in “black”
- 25) beg A has an “e” that sounds like the vowel of “sweat”
 B has an “e” that sounds like the vowel of “but”
- 26) caught A has a vowel that sounds like the vowel of “moth”
 B has a vowel that sounds like the vowel of “hot”
- 27) net A has a vowel that sounds like the vowel of “gnat”
 B has a vowel that sounds like the vowel of “sweat”
- 28) cot A has a vowel that sounds like the vowel of “gnat”
 B has a vowel that sounds like the vowel of “not”

Bio

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