Ling 194
Regional dialects of English
Fall 2007

Term paper assignment

Choose an English variety (dialect or accent) that is (a) used in at least several films and/or television and/or radio productions and (b) depicted by actors who are not native speakers of the target variety.

Evaluate the depiction of this variety by each actor that uses it. Make reference to established documentation on the target variety, and to other dramatic productions using known native speakers of the same accent (i.e., where the actor is a native speaker of the target variety).

If possible, document each actor’s own regional background and native variety. Hypothesize the degree of difficulty each actor would encounter in depicting the target variety, with specific reference to phonological properties of the actor’s variety and the target variety.

Do the native and depicting actors accurately illustrate chain shifts, mergers (contextual and absolute), and distribution of lexical sets that help to define the target variety? Do they overdo the shibboleth? Be mindful of variation.

Timeline

    Step 1: a brief write-up outlining (a) your proposed target variety (b) the productions you intend to evaluate and (c) your native-speaker comparison examples. Due on or before Oct 19.

    Step 2: class presentation of your material during Week 10 (Dec 3 or 5).

    Step 3: hand in your paper, due Dec 7.

Additional guidelines

- Obtain a bare minimum of 2 depictions. 3 is better, and anything more is gravy.
- You may work in groups of 1 or 2. It is your choice.
- The depicting actors should clearly be attempting to portray the variety.
- Reality TV participants cannot be used as depictors, but could be used as native-speaker comparisons.
- Try to be precise about choosing exemplars of your target variety.
- You do not need to evaluate the social ramifications of the depiction.
- While different projects may cover the same target variety, they may not overlap in depictions or comparison speakers. First come first served: hand your proposal in early to guarantee your material.