"Texas – It's Like a Whole Nuther Country": Mapping Texans' Perceptions of Dialect Variation in the Lone Star State

Patricia Cukor-Avila
University of North Texas

Lisa Jeon
University of North Texas

Patricia C. Rector
University of North Texas

Chetan Tiwari
University of North Texas

Zak Shelton
University of North Texas

1. Introduction

Dialect geographers have long been concerned with identifying and mapping dialect boundaries and describing linguistic differences within these boundaries. This research focuses primarily on production – fieldworkers record the linguistic features that are used regularly (or historically) among members of a community. The observed phonetic, morphosyntactic, and/or lexical differences are then superimposed on maps so that researchers can draw linguistic isoglosses to indicate dialect differences. This work has led to various linguistic atlases about English in the United States. A few notable examples are the *Linguistic Atlas of New England*, the *Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States*, the *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States*, and the *Atlas of North American English*.

More recently, dialect geography research has begun to focus on documenting "perceived" dialect differences, i.e., where people believe dialect boundaries to exist along with their perceptions of language variation within those boundaries. This subfield of sociolinguistics, known as perceptual dialectology, explores non-linguists' perceptions of

language variation and the ideology associated with the perceived variation (Hartley and Preston, 1999; Lippi-Green, 2012). One method perceptual dialectologists use to tap into perceived language variation and language ideology is the "draw-a-map" task (Preston, 1989). In this task, respondents are given a map of a specific geographic area (e.g., region, state, or country) and asked to draw lines or boundaries (polygons) on the map that identify locations where they think people speak differently. They are then asked to provide labels and a description (their perception) of the speech in each of these areas. The present study adapts this methodology to analyze perceived dialect boundaries and language variation within the state of Texas.

Since Preston's initial study using the "draw-a-map" task, several other studies have used the same methodology to investigate "folk beliefs" about language variation both in the United States as a whole and in individual states. Fought (2002) gathered data from native Californians to study both their perceptions of speech in the U.S. and within the state of California. She surveyed 112 university students in Santa Barbara who completed a draw-a-map task on a U.S. map. Her results support Preston's earlier findings that respondents' mental maps correspond closely to linguistic stereotypes about the U.S. In addition, her data support later findings that suggest speech in the northern U.S. is generally perceived as more prestigious than speech in the south (Preston, 1996).

Bucholtz et al. (2007) also used the draw-a-map task to investigate perceptual dialect boundaries and language ideologies in California. With data from 703 students native to California, they examined the most frequently labeled regions, the social/linguistic labels applied to them, and the correlations between the most common labels and respondent ethnicity. Their analysis suggests that while respondents perceive language variation along a northern/southern California split, they more often associated these differences with social groups, language (e.g., English versus Spanish), and slang use.

Most relevant to the present study is the work done by Evans (2011) in the state of Washington. Using an adaptation of Preston's "draw-a-map" method, Evans collected hand-drawn maps primarily from university students in two areas of the state. Through a process of "content analysis" (Garrett, Williams, & Evans, 2005) she identified twenty perceptual labels about speech in Washington, and using the geographical information system ArcGIS, she created heat maps as a visual representation of the overlap of these labels to illustrate the perceived dialect regions. Evans' overall conclusion suggests a perceptual linguistic divide separating eastern Washington from the rest of the state.

Previous studies using draw-a-map tasks of the U.S. (Preston, 1989, 1996; Fought, 2002; Hartley, 2005), found that many respondents identified Texas as its own dialect region. Although people living outside the state may perceive all Texans to sound the same, it seems plausible that—similar to Californians—Texans' opinions of their speech would vary. Thus, following the methods in Preston (1989), Bucholtz et al. (2007), and Evans (2011), the present study is designed to explore this variation.[1]

2. Methodology

2.1 Fieldwork

In order to tap into the dialect perceptions of Texans of various ages and backgrounds we collected hand-drawn maps from people living in major urban areas and their surrounding rural communities (Figure 1). Our fieldwork sites included malls, restaurants,

[1] A pilot study for this project was done in fall 2011 by students at the Univ. of North Texas enrolled in LING 4010 "English Language in America." We would like to give special thanks to Dennis Preston who has consulted with us at each phase of the project as we developed our field methods and interpreted our maps.

bars, hotel lobbies, university campuses, stores, gas stations, and historical sites (e.g., the Capitol Building in Austin and the statue of Sam Houston in Huntsville). Respondents were randomly approached, given a map, and instructed to indicate places where they thought people in Texas sounded different, and next, to label those areas or write down what they would call that way of talking. Once they were finished we asked them to fill out demographic questions listed on the reverse side of the map.[2]

Using this technique we collected 402 maps; however, thirty-five maps had ambiguous demographic information or were not drawn on so they had to be discarded. This left a total of 367 maps from 182 females and 184 males between the ages of 18-87 for the analysis (see Tables 1 and 2).[3]

Figure 1. Fieldwork sites
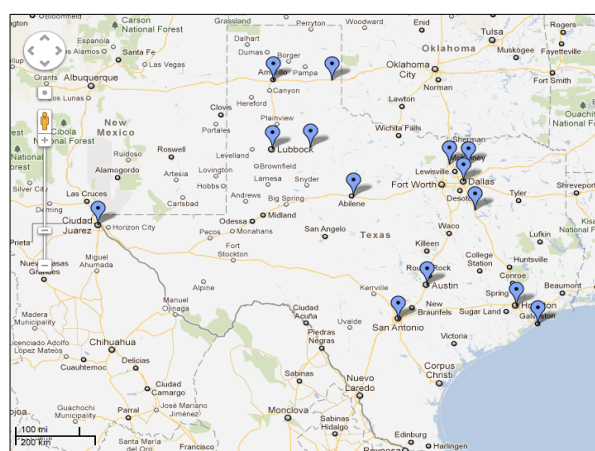
Except for Lameli et al. (2008) and Jeon (2011), perceptual dialectologists have not analyzed differences between survey instruments or accounted for the effect that geo-spatial components on maps have on cultural organization of folk knowledge. In order to investigate these differences in Texas, we conducted a pilot study in fall 2011 using five maps, each with distinct information: major cities (indicated by small dots); major cities and highways; counties; 7 major geographic regions; and none (outline of the state only). A preliminary qualitative analysis of the data from each of these maps suggests that map type may influence how the respondents indicate perceived dialect areas. For example, we noted that maps with major cities might have distracted respondents because most indicated only those cities as dialect areas, whereas maps with counties seemed to provide too much information and may have confused respondents (there are 254 counties in Texas so the maps were very busy). In this study we present the first stage of our analysis of the perceptual data collected with just the outline and region maps[4] – an example of each hand-drawn map is shown in Figure 2.

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[2] The nine demographic questions included year born, sex, ethnicity, educational background, first language, time lived in Texas, place lived in the longest, self-identification as Texan, and self-identification as urban, rural, or suburban. The correlation between these demographic factors and the perceptual data is a topic of future analysis.

[3] One respondent left the "male/female" question blank.

[4] We are currently conducting a quantitative analysis of these data for the effect of map type.

Table 1. Total respondents by year of birth

Year of Birth	# of Respondents	% of Total
1925-1962	72	19.60%
1963-1982	124	33.80%
1983-1994	186	46.30%
Unknown	1	<1%
Total	**367**	

Table 2. Total respondents by self-reported ethnicity

Ethnicity	# of Respondents	% of Total
White/Caucasian	204	55.6%
African American	31	8.4%
Hispanic	85	23.3%
Asian	5	1.4%
Native American	5	1.4%
Mixed	22	6.0%
Other	6	1.6%
Unknown	9	2.5%
Total	**367**	

Figure 2. Two respondents' hand-drawn outline (left) and geographic region (right) maps
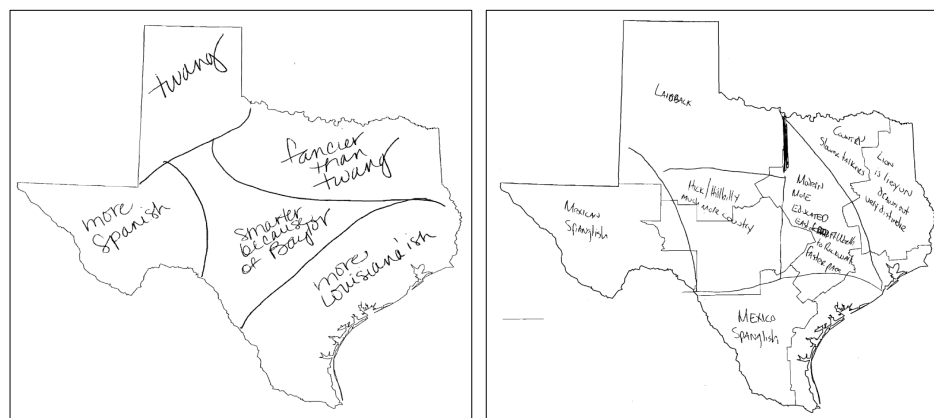
Female b. 1963; Amarillo   Male b. 1950; Rockwall

2.2 Data Coding: Geographic Region

Each map was coded for geographic region(s) included in the polygons respondents drew representing their perceived dialect boundaries (Regions 1-7 in Table 3 below). Region 8 was added to account for respondents who circled the entire border with Mexico as a dialect region. As Figure 2 shows, respondents given the outline map often divided it into (perceived) dialect regions rather than just labeling those areas, and those given the region map often disregarded the printed geographic boundaries and drew in their own lines to indicate the dialect regions. Following Bucholtz et al. (2007), areas identified by respondents that significantly overlapped with more than one geographic region were coded as both (or all) regions as appropriate. For instance, if a respondent circled an area that included the Panhandle as well as the El Paso area, it was coded as both Panhandle

(Region 1) and Big Bend West (Region 2). This is reflected in Table 3 under the number of times a region was included in a polygon.

Table 3. Distribution of perceived dialect regions in Texas
(adapted from window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/parks/overview.html)

Region Code	Region Name	# of Times Included in a Polygon
Region 1	Panhandle Plains	334
Region 2	Big Bend West	273
Region 3	Hill Country	211
Region 4	Piney Woods	200
Region 5	North Central	307
Region 6	South/Valley	207
Region 7	Gulf Coast	125
Region 8	Border	51
Total		**1,708**

2.3 Data Coding: Perceptual Labels

All perceptual labels written on the maps or associated with polygons were entered into a spreadsheet and subsequently put into perceptual categories. Labels that were semantically related were included in the same perceptual category: for example, *sounds flat*, *more drawn out*, *mumble*, *chopped*, *clipped*, *slur*, *nasal*, *stutter*, *lisp*, were all coded as *Pronunciation*. This paper will discuss and compare the six most identified of the twenty-five categories we identified: *Spanish*, *Spanglish*, *Drawl*, *Twang, Country*, and *Normal*.

2.4 ArcGIS Analysis

Similar to Evans (2011), the present study uses the tools in ArcGIS 10.0 to create digital representations of respondents' mental maps. The benefit of using ArcGIS for perceptual dialectology is its capability to layer linguistic features and aggregate them on a map, producing maps where areas of greater color intensity represent higher concentrations of certain labels (Montgomery and Stoeckle, under review; Evans, 2011). First, each of the 367 hand-drawn maps was digitized and geo-referenced with a geographic coordinate system of Texas. Next, all polygons were traced onto the geo-referenced image. During this process, polygons are linked with the region and perceptual codes as well as respondents' demographic information in an attribute table. In the following step, called "spatial analysis," areas where polygons have a "union" are highlighted and an aggregate count is calculated. Queries about demographic and perceptual features can then be run in a statistical program designed for use with ArcGIS called PostGIS. Finally, composite heat maps can be generated, showing areas where the linguistic feature of interest is most and least identified by respondents. The maps in Figure 3 and Figures 5-9 are the outcome of this type of analysis.

3. Results

3.1 Spanish and Spanglish

Spanish and *Spanglish* were the most frequent perceptual labels assigned to polygons by respondents—70% of all respondents identified an area with one or both of these labels. Key words used to code a feature *Spanish* included *Spanish*, *Hispanic*, *Mexico*,

Español, and *Mex*. Key words used to code a feature *Spanglish* included *Spanglish*, *Tejano, Tex-Mex, Latino, Texican*, and *Chicano*. A qualitative analysis of the maps in Figure 3 suggest that (1) there is only a slight difference between the outline and region maps; (2) there is little perceptual distinction between *Spanish* and *Spanglish*, and (3) as we hypothesized, Texas speech in the El Paso region, south Texas, and the border areas with Mexico are associated the most with some degree of Spanish influence.

Figure 3. Outline (left) and region (right) composite maps of *Spanish* and *Spanglish*
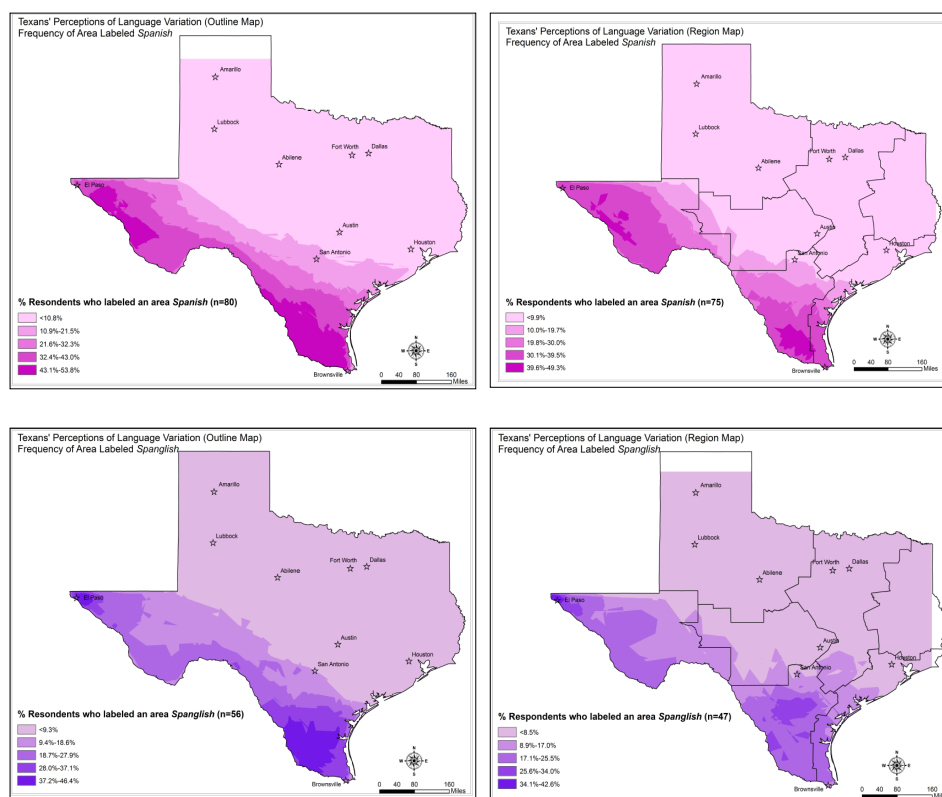
3.2 Drawl vs. Twang

The impression in the U.S. that Texas is both southern and western (Johnstone, 2003: 199-200) has been noted in previous dialectology studies (c.f. Carver, 1987; Lance, 1994; Labov, Ash, & Boberg, 2006)[5] and is also reflected in the perceptual data from Texas. Over a third of respondents commented about this "split identity" on their maps, indicating that Texans both *drawl* (southern) and *twang* (western). Both of these terms refer to pronunciation—*drawl* denotes long vowels and/or diphthongs and is often paired with "southern" (Dorrill, 2003:123-24), and the onomatopoetic term *twang* (from the sound of a plucked string) refers to the manner of the speech sound, e.g., nasal, and is often paired with "western." We suspected that respondents' mental maps would distinguish geographic regions in the state where people drawl and twang. Contrary to our initial

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[5] Although Preston (1996) finds that people's mental maps don't include Texas as a southern or western state, but rather single it out as a separate speech area.

hypothesis, however, the perceived dialect boundaries of *Drawl* and *Twang* were not as clear-cut as those for *Spanish* and *Spanglish*. The comments on the hand-drawn maps in Figure 4 are typical of many of the maps we collected and lend support to the stereotype that Texans drawl in the Panhandle and Big Bend West and twang in the east and Piney Woods. However, Texans also perceive speech in the Panhandle as very "twangy," and many respondents commented that people drawl across the Hill County and along the Gulf coast region from north of Houston down into the upper Valley. This is echoed in the labels that often coupled/associated *Drawl* and *Twang* with various geographic regions and cities in Texas, e.g., *east TX twang*, *east TX drawl*, *Dennison drawl*, *Tyler drawl*, *Amarillo twang*, *west TX drawl*, *Houston twang*, *Ft. Worth twang*, *Hispanic twang* and *Panhandle drawl*.[6] In addition, the data suggest that *Drawl* and *Twang* are rarely associated with speech in El Paso and south Texas, where *Spanish*/*Spanglish* influence is greatest. The composite heat maps in Figures 5 and 6 illustrate these observations.[7]

Figure 4. Hand-drawn maps showing *drawl* and *twang*

male b. 1950; Dallas   male b. 1961; Houston
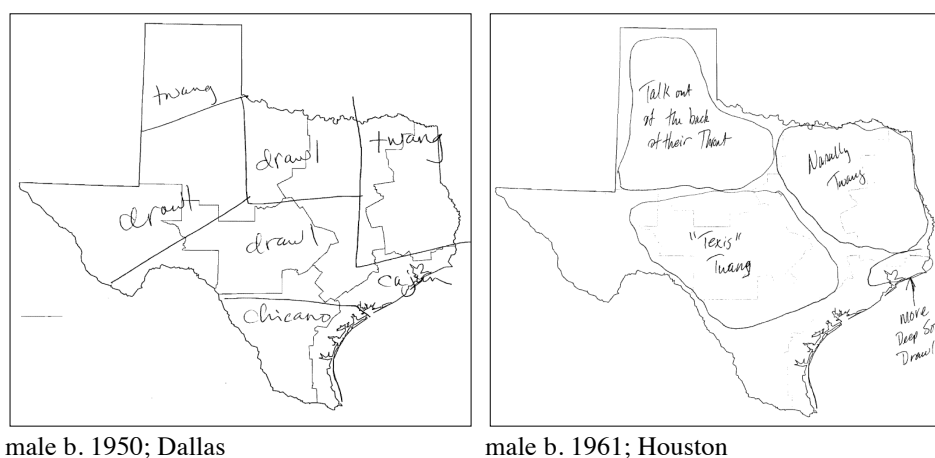
3.3 Country (Hick and Redneck)

The number of times respondents labeled areas as *hick* or *redneck* was relatively low, and since these labels were assigned to similar geographic regions and in roughly equal proportions as *country* and its associated keywords (e.g., *good ol' boy*, *howdy*, *rural*, *farmer*, *boots an' jeans*), they were subsumed under the category *Country* when generating the composite heat map. Figure 7 suggests that both outline and region map respondents perceive the most country-sounding speech to be in the Panhandle (especially in and around Amarillo) and in East Texas. Similar to *Drawl* and *Twang*, *Country* is not associated with south Texas, especially in areas near the Mexico border—this is where *Spanish*/*Spanglish* is dominant. *Country* is also not associated with major cities outside of the Panhandle, including Dallas/Fort Worth and south to Austin, where respondents perceive "normal Texas speech" is spoken (see Figure 8).

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[6] The more generic labels *southern drawl*, *southern twang*, and *western drawl* were also very common.

[7] Note that the outline and region maps are similar for *drawl* but appear to be different for *twang*. This could be an artifact of the low number of respondents who labeled *twang* on the region map and warrants further analysis.

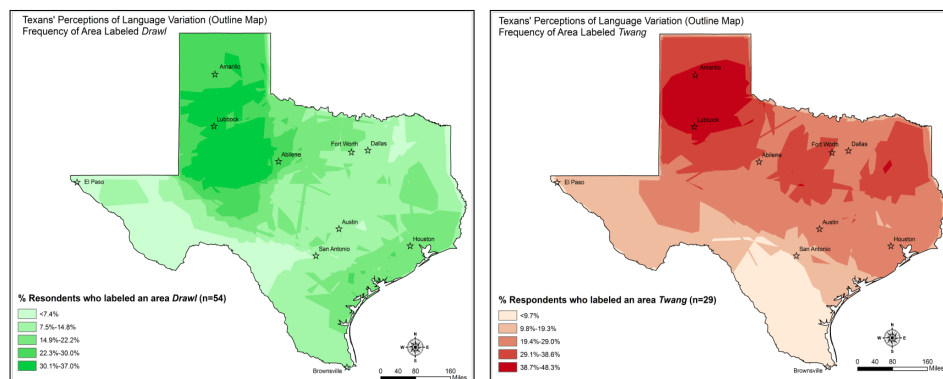Figure 5. Outline composite maps of *Drawl* (left) and *Twang* (right)

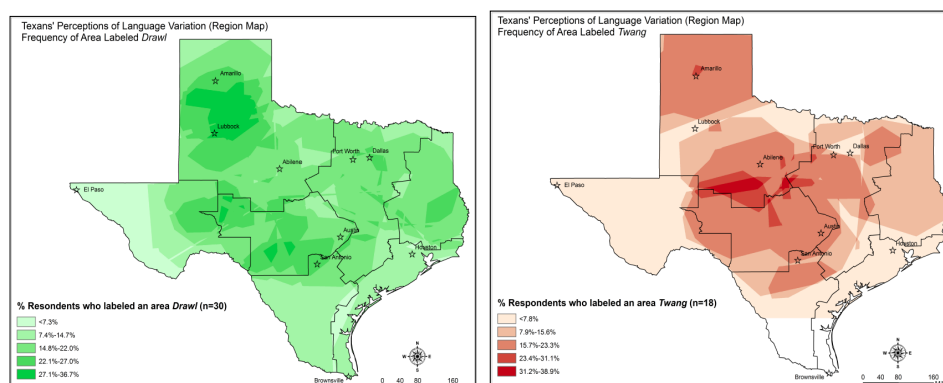Figure 6. Region composite maps of *Drawl* (left) and *Twang* (right)
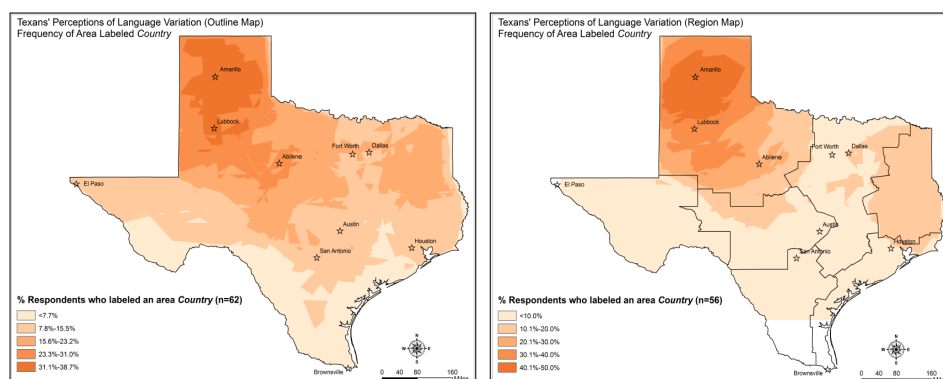

Figure 7. Outline (left) and region (right) composite maps with the label *Country*


3.4 Where is "Normal Texan" Spoken?

Texas speech is rarely (if ever) perceived as "standard" or "correct" by non-Texans (cf. Preston, 1996; Fought, 2002). Texans, however, appear to have a clear idea about

what "educated" or "proper" Texas English is and where it is spoken. Those respondents identified areas on their maps and labeled them *proper, average, well-spoken, neutral, correct, educated, no accent, no slang, the norm, business-like, government standard, perfect, clear*, and *regular*, all of which we subsumed under the category *Normal*.

Qualitatively, the outline and region composite heat maps for *Normal* shown in Figure 8 are very similar, with both maps showing that "normal Texas speech" is perceived to be spoken by people who live in the North/Central region, especially around the Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex, and along a southern corridor to Austin. A small number of respondents who lived outside of this "normal region" commented that "normal" was where they were from (cf. Preston, 1996)—this accounts for the 8% who circled areas in the Panhandle, El Paso, and in south Texas and wrote, "*normal TX accent. I'm from here so I'm sure I'm biased*." Finally, if we compare the heat maps for *Normal* with those for *Country* (Fig. 7) and also *Drawl* and *Twang* (Figs. 5, 6) we see that Texans have a clear perception of who sounds "normal" and where they live: "normal Texas speech" is heard primarily in urban and suburban north and central Texas, it's not spoken by hicks, rednecks, or people living in rural areas (as one respondent said, "*It doesn't sound country*), and its speakers don't drawl or twang.

Figure 8. Outline (left) and region (right) composite maps of *Normal*
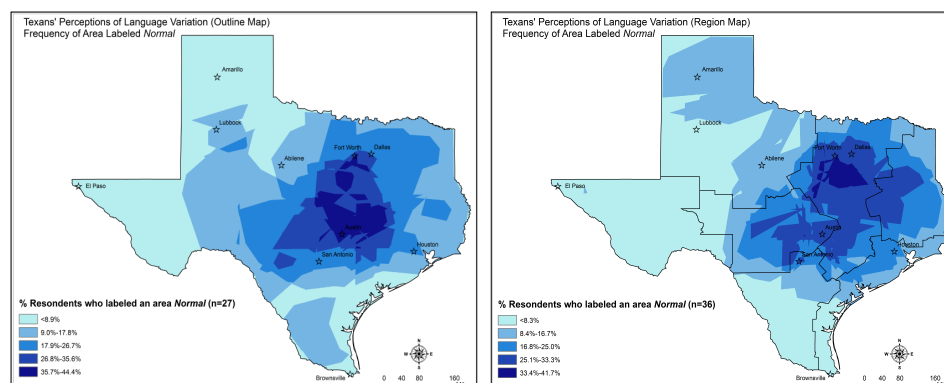
4. Conclusion

Pickup trucks, cowboy boots, big belt buckles, horses, ranches, oil wells—these are the accouterments of the prototypical Texan, the Texans who we see portrayed in film, on TV, and in print. Of course we recognize that these are stereotypes, but people's perceptions about speech are often influenced by stereotypes (Lippi-Green, 2012). While some of our findings were not surprising (e.g., the prevalence of *Spanish/Spanglish*), others, such as the relationship between *Country*, *Drawl*, and *Twang*, warrant further analysis, as does another frequent perceptual label, *Southern*, that was not included in this discussion. The present study, which taps into Texans' impressions of their own way of talking from a geo-spatial perspective (cf. Johnstone, 2010) contributes to the growing body of perceptual dialectology and language attitude research at the local level (cf. Evans, 2011). The results echo the findings about California (Bucholtz et al., 2007) and Washington (Evans, 2011), suggesting that Texans do not view themselves as a homogeneous speech community, nor do they consider Texas to be the land of cowboys and hillbillies where everyone drawls and twangs and says "*Howdy yall!*"

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Patricia Cukor-Avila (pcavila@unt.edu); Lisa Jeon (lisa.jeon@unt.edu); Patricia C. Rector (pcrector86@gmail.com); Zak Shelton (zakshelton@gmail.com)—Dept. of Linguistics and Technical Communication, University of North Texas, Denton, TX 76203-5017
Chetan Tiwari (chetan.tiwari@unt.edu)—Dept. of Geography, University of North Texas, Denton, TX 76203-5017