

Another Possible Paper Topic: Dialect Imitation

Find a speaker who can imitate another dialect of her language. Your goal is to analyze your speaker's

There are three areas to look at.

1) **Allophone-to-allophone mapping**. This can be treated with rules. For instance, an American imitating Standard British speech might apply a rule of the type:

Diphthong Fronting

$\overline{ou} \rightarrow \overline{eu}$

You can test for this with words like *tone*, *ghost*, etc.

2) **Wipeout of Distinctions**. Due to historical changes, one dialect often has one phoneme where another dialect has two. Thus, *bother* and *father* don't rhyme in British English; they are [^hbɒðə] and [^hfɑðə]; the distinction was lost historically in most American dialects.

Wipeout of distinctions can be treated with rules, too, as follows:

/ɒ/ Unrounding

$/ɒ/ \rightarrow [-\text{round}]$

Here is a guess: it is harder for imitators to apply “dialect conversion” rules when the rules wipe out a distinction.

3) **Trying to Recover the Irrecoverable**. Now consider a case where the consultant speaks a dialect in which a distinction has been historically wiped out, and it trying to imitate a dialect that has retained the distinction. Here, you *can't write a rule*—how, for instance, could an American know that her [bɒðə] is supposed to be [^hbɒðə] but that her [^hfɑðə] is supposed to be [^hfɑðə]? This information is irrecoverable from the data of American English. Presumably, a successful accent imitator must actually memorize the target words, or else figure out a strategy involving spelling.

Note that often there are “recoverability traps” going in both directions. Thus British speakers must rely on memorization or spelling to render American *beer* vs. *idea* correctly (these words rhyme in most British dialects).

How to proceed: First, learn all you can about the phonology of the two dialects. Then, I suggest you write about a page of sample material for your consultant to read. Cram it full of test words involving all three possibilities listed above (“My father was always bothered by the tone of ...”). Have your speaker read it once (or multiple times, if time available). Transcribe the target words, analyze how your speaker does accent imitation (writing rules where possible), and report what you found.

Other well-known dialect differences:

- /s-θ/ vs. /s/ and /ʎ-j/ vs. /j/ in Continental vs. New World Spanish

- /a-ɑ/ vs. /a/ in Quebec vs. continental French;
- /ɛ-æ/ vs. /ɛ/, /V:-V/ vs. /V/ in Korean dialects
- /eεoo/ vs. /eo/ in Italian dialects.