The *Dictionary of American Regional English*: a Report on its Making and Completion

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Abstract
The *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)* is a project that has been on-going since the mid-1960's in the United States and is nearing completion. The last text volume is scheduled to appear in 2009. This paper briefly describes its history, including methodology and content, as well as its present state and plans for its completion and future.

1 Introduction

Although American English is remarkably homogeneous considering the tremendous size of the country, there are still many thousands of differences that characterize the various dialect regions of the United States. It is these differences that the *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)* records. Volume I, including extensive introductory matter and the letters A-C, was published in 1985, volume II (D-H) came out in 1991, volume III (I-O) in 1996, and volume IV (P-Sk) in 2002. Volume V, containing the remainder of the alphabet, is presently scheduled for publication in 2009. This will be followed by a volume including the bibliography, additional maps, and responses to our questionnaire by question, among other items.

2 Purpose

The *Dictionary of American Regional English* does not prescribe how Americans should speak or describe the "standard" language, the language Americans normally use. It documents instead the forms of English not found everywhere in the United States, namely words, phrases, grammatical forms, and pronunciations that vary from one region to another, ones we learn not at school but at home, ones that are not part of our written but of our oral culture. Included are words and phrases which are used in a single city (e.g. the entry **krewe** "a private social club that sponsors festivities such as parades and balls at **Mardi Gras 1**" used in New Orleans, Louisiana), a single state (**Old Billy** "Old Scratch; the devil; a hobgob-

lin" used in Kentucky), or regions of a few, several, or many states (**gesundheit** "used as an expression of good will toward one who has sneezed" which *DARE* labels as **widespread, but chiefly North, North Midland, West**; **oil** with its pronunciation of |ɔ(r)l| in the Midlands). We also include terms which are folk usage or folk speech but do not show regionality (**beat the Dutch** "to be surprising or astonishing; to be exasperating;" **kite** "to move or go quickly or energetically; to hurry").

3 Beginnings and Development

The American Dialect Society was founded in 1889, a main raison d'être being to create a dialect dictionary of English as spoken in the United States, what Joseph Wright was doing for England at the time with his *English Dialect Dictionary*. Word lists were collected and published by the ADS but not much else was done for many years. In the late 1940's, Professor Frederic Cassidy carried out a pilot project in Wisconsin, testing a questionnaire which he had compiled from all of the published word lists, and after some fine-tuning he published his results in an ADS journal in 1953. In 1962 he somewhat impatiently read a paper at the annual meeting, entitiled "The ADS Dictionary – How Soon?" (Cassidy 1963). He was soon after that given the position of editor-in-chief of the dictionary.

Work began on the project. Between 1965 and 1970 a group of 80 fieldworkers, graduate students and a few professors, were sent to selected communities to interview people who had lived there their entire lives. They concentrated on finding older people to interview in order to capture older or old-fashioned words which might be disappearing from the language, but they also interviewed younger informants, so we could analyze our findings by age groups, as well as by gender, race, community size, amount of formal education, and of course by region, thus demonstrating the state of our language during this time period and how our language has changed and is continuing to change. (Overall, 66% of *DARE* informants were 60 years of age or older; 24% were aged 40-59; and 10% were 18-39.) The questionnaire with its set questions, well over 1600 of them, covered many areas of life, such as transportation, weather, relationships, fishing and hunting, health and disease, mental actions, wildflowers and weeds, and entertainments and celebrations. One thousand and two questionnaires were completed with the help of 2,777 informants, their responses forming what came to be known in-house as the Data Summary. A mainframe computer was used to allow us access to the responses, both alphabetically and with the help of a mapping program. Figure 1 below shows the stylized map used by *DARE*; when all locations where questionnaires were completed are indicated, almost all space is filled with dots. The states retain their relative positions (although not their sizes) to each other, with Hawaii and Alaska being tacked on to the West Coast, lower left and upper left respectively. There were at least two questionnaires completed in each state, but over eighty were completed in, for example, New York; the number depended on population (based on the 1960 census) and the settlement history of the states. Such maps are contained within the columns of dictionary text to demonstrate the regionality of certain entries, as exemplified in Figure 2 below (**Adam's housecat**).

While the interviewing was proceeding, at the offices at the University of Wisconsin-Madison regional novels, diaries, donated unpublished collections, materials of the ADS and

Linguistic Atlas projects, and newspapers and audiotapes sent back by the fieldworkers were being read and listened to to create a database of words and phrases to augment the findings of the questionnaires. The Main File was the result, an alphabetical listing of these terms with their sources, written in Fielddata; this is the second part of the foundation of the *Dictionary*. More can be found on the methodology of the *DARE* project and its computer use through the 1980's, from mainframes to personal computers, in von Schneidemesser (1988, 1990). What has been described here is very brief.
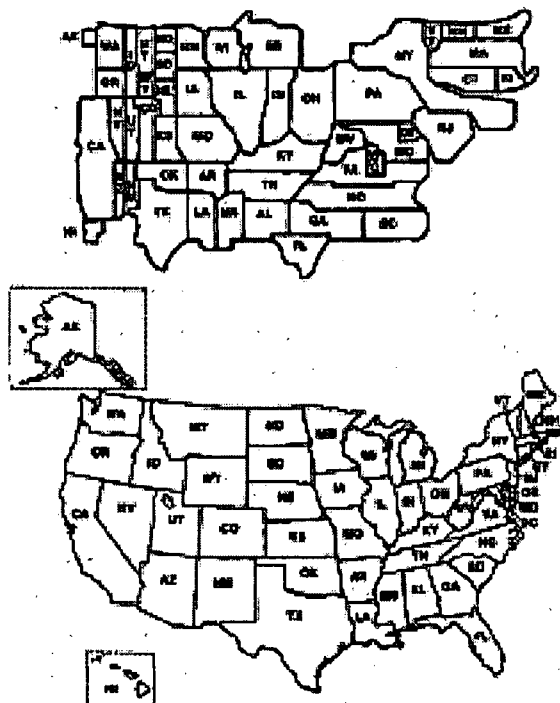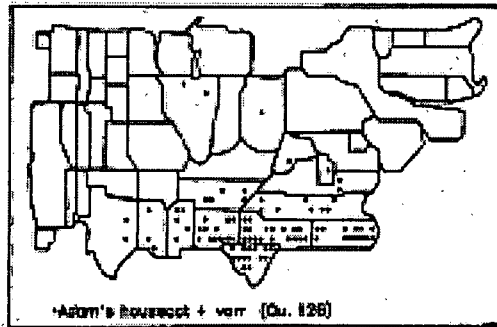
Figure 1. The DARE map of the United States with a conventional map for comparison

This two-fold foundation is what gives *DARE* its reputation of providing not only a synchronic look at the language, a snapshot of American English as it was used throughout the United States in the late 1960's, but also a diachronic look, in its role as a historical dictionary. The history of each word or phrase entered in *DARE* is provided by inclusion of the earliest known citation of its use and further citations down to the present day or as late as

usage can be found. Enough citations are included to insure representation of a term's regional usage and its variant forms as well. Every citation taken from a written source is checked for accuracy in the original source; if this is not possible attribution is added indicating the secondary source from which we obtained the citation. See the entry **line tree**, Figure 3, citation 1832 for an example: this citation is attributed to the *Dictionary of American English*, since we were not able to verify its accuracy.

Figure 2. Entry Adam's housecat

As a demonstration of a simple *DARE* entry with a map, consider Figure 2. As mentioned, *DARE* maps are contained within the columns of dictionary text. At the time of Volume I publication (1985), the only evidence other than from the *DARE* questionnaires for **Adam's housecat** was a citation from the American Dialect Society's *Dialect Notes,* from a collected word list, mentioned earlier. Only the responses from the *DARE* questionnaires are shown on the map; while other citation material is contained in the entry, it is never included on maps. And many entries do not contain questionnaire responses (see **line tree**, Figure 3, below); the 1600-plus questions in the questionnaire do not begin to cover the whole of our language. In the first volume, of 13,978 headwords and senses, 5,770 of 40,452 citations, or 14% of the total number of citations, represent *DARE* questionnaire material; these citations from the *DARE* questionnaires are in 41% of all Volume I headwords and senses.

The **Adam's housecat** entry demonstrates other *DARE* features: all known spellings and variants are included (here, *Adam's cat* and *Adam's house*); definitions may be stated in terms of other entries to show synonymous terms (here, =**Adam's off-ox 1** as definition); many of the entries, as is this one, are based mainly on oral evidence; and *DARE* can show significant statistics or absolute numbers of usage in its citations not only for amount of formal education of informants as in this entry, but also for gender, race, size of community, and age. Here it is noted in the *DARE* citation that many more informants than expected with less than high school education used this term.

line tree n[1]

A tree serving as a boundary marker or located on a property line.

1743 in 1882 *Documents Colonial & Post-Revol. Hist. NJ* 6.161, Left the Line Trees be markt with Your Notches on two Sides where the Line cuts them. 1832 *Louisville Directory* 107 *(DAE)*, The practice of blocking out the chops on the corner and line trees of surveys has been universally adopted. 1899 (1912) Green *VA Folk-Speech* 263, *Line-tree* . . Certain trees standing on the boundaries between tracts of lands are chopped every few years, and kept to mark metes and bounds. They are chopped every three years by "possessioners" appointed by the court. 1917 Kephart *Camping & Woodcraft* 2.66, Starting from an established corner, all trees that stand directly on the line of survey have two chops or notches cut on each side of them, without any other marks whatever. These are called "sight trees" or "line trees" (sometimes "fore and aft trees"). 1948 [see long forty]. 1959 McCulloch *Woods Words* 107 Pacific NW, *Line tree*—A tree smack on a survey line. 1975 Gould *ME Lingo* 164, *Line tree*—A tree growing precisely on the common land line of two owners. When one owner cuts lumber and the other doesn't, the usual practice is to start at one corner and take every second line tree as it comes. But regrettable mistakes occur, and many a man has found that his neighbor cut off and left no line trees at all. You can go to law about it. 1976 Ryland *Richmond Co. VA* 373, *Line-tree*—boundary tree kept to mark lines between neighboring properties.

Figure 3. Entry line tree

An example of the variety of spellings which might occur in an entry headsection is provided at the entry **osnaburg** "a thick, course fabric, originally made of linen but now usually of cotton," dating back to 1660: listed in the headsection are *ansenberg, ausenberg, aznaburgh, eizenburg, orsanberg, orsenberg,* followed by the comment "for addit varr see quots," indicating that there was such a large number of variant spellings that only a selection of them were listed in the headsection; more can be found within the citations. From each of these variants, labeled pronunciation spellings, whether in the headsection or just in the citations, there will be a cross-reference from the spelling back to the actual entry **osnaburg**, e.g. "**ansenberg** See **osnaburg**".

Note that in the entry **line tree,** Figure 3 above, from Volume III, there is no *DARE* questionnaire evidence, as mentioned above, nor is there a regional label, yet this is definitely a term which DARE includes, an example of folk usage. Other features of *DARE* can also be seen. There is no etymology; *DARE* includes an etymology in those cases where we can add something beyond the knowledge in other dictionaries, or to draw attention to certain information. If a citation is used for more than one entry it may be referred to instead of repeated, as is the 1948 citation: only the date is listed here; the short-title with the full text of the citation is under the entry **long forty.**

4 Present and Future

DARE's format or style sheet has changed little in the course of its five text volumes. Its use of computers, on the other hand, has changed dramatically. As mentioned, *DARE* starting in the mid-1960's, the days of large mainframe computers. To focus on but one aspect of production as an example, final copy map output for Volume I was picked up on a continuous roll of paper at the University computing center and cut to size before sending the paper copies to our publisher. For Volumes II and III paper copies of maps were made on an in-house plotter. For Volume IV maps were created and sent to the publisher as postscript files.

We are now in the process of converting to the ability to edit in an XML environment. Most of the text from the first four volumes has been converted to XML; outstanding is the correction of text elements which converted incorrectly and the addition of certain specs to the DTD to allow for unusual and infrequent format items. The decision was made to continue Volume V editing as it was done for Volume IV, since entries, even ones from the same section of the alphabet, are at many different stages of editing, due to natural science entries and general entries being assigned to "science" and "general" editors, and to the procedures, involving several staff members, which have been developed for the flow of entries.

But not just our use of computer technology to produce text has changed; the world of technology and all it has to offer us has also been revolutionized in the last several years. We undertook a pilot project in 2004 to see what the benefits would be of making use of the many websites of digitized books, magazines, newspapers, and other sources which have sprung up. Twenty-eight terms from Volume I were searched by two students on a dozen websites; antedates were found for fifteen (54%), mostly ranging from ten to sixty years earlier, with the most extreme update being 114 years earlier; and postdates were found for twenty (71%), thus greatly expanding the history of these words and phrases and helping define regionality and extent and frequency of usage. Such websites as Newspaperarchive, Google, LexisNexis, ProQuest, and both the Cornell University and the University of Michigan Making of America sites can provide us with a wealth of citations. (For further information see Hall and von Schneidemesser forthcoming, and von Schneidemesser 2006.) The abundance of additional information obtained was so rich that we felt compelled to carry out such searching for entries already edited for Volume V. We now have a half-time project assistant, a graduate student in English, who is doing this. It must be added that this is a very time-consuming undertaking. While the editors now routinely search some of these sites in the course of editing, there is simply no slack, not enough time, for them to go back to al-

ready-completed entries. We have also started working with colleagues at other universities who are undertaking projects with their students to help us update entries from already published volumes while teaching the students about lexicography and language usage and change.

When the process of correction of the XML version of our text is completed, and when the text of Volume V is ready for publication and converted to XML as well, our publisher, Harvard University Press (who holds the rights to all forms of spin-off editions of our text), will be in an excellent position to quickly produce a searchable on-line or CD-ROM version of *DARE* for public use. Our files are full of information of which we became aware too late for publication in the present volumes. After completion of Volumes V and VI, our plans are to incorporate this material into the completed text, and to continue to update. We are excited about the possibilities which await.

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