DIALECTOLOGY

The systematic study of regional dialects is known variously as *dialectology*, *dialect geography*, or *linguistic geography*; but these terms are not exact equivalents. In particular, the latter terms suggest a much wider regional scope for the subject. Dialect specialists who spend their lives researching the local usage of a single Yorkshire village can hardly be called 'linguistic geographers', though they are certainly 'dialectologists'. By contrast, the 'geographer' designation would be quite appropriate for anyone involved in plotting the distribution of forms over a large area, such as Scotland, or the eastern United States.

There is another difference between these terms. Traditionally, dialectology has been the study of regional dialects, and for many people that is still its main focus. But in recent years, dialectologists have been paying more attention to social as well as geographical space, in order to explain the extent of language variation (§§9–10). Factors such as age, sex, social class, and ethnic group are now seen as critical, alongside factors of a purely regional kind.

But whatever the approach, the contemporary fascination with dialects seems no less than that shown by previous generations. Radio programmes on dialect variations are popular in several countries, and compilations of dialect data continue to be produced in the form of grammars, dictionaries, folk-lore collections, and guides to usage. Local dialect societies thrive in many parts of the world. Dialects continue to be seen as a major source of information about contemporary popular culture and its historical background; and dialect variation forms part of the study of change (§54).

Probably the most important application of dialectology these days is in education, where the development of dialect 'awareness' in children is widely recognized as a way of getting them to see the heterogeneity of contemporary society, and their place within it (§§44, 61). Teachers are often faced with a conflict between the child's spontaneous use of dialect forms and the need to instil a command of the standard language, especially in writing. The conflict can be resolved only by developing in children a sense of the relationships between the two kinds of language, so that the value of both can be better appreciated. There needs to be an awareness of the history, structure, and function of present-day dialects – and this is what dialectology can provide.

THE HISTORY OF REGIONAL DIALECTOLOGY

While there has been sporadic interest in regional dialects for centuries, the first large-scale systematic studies, in Germany and France, did not take place until the end of the 19th century. In 1876, Georg Wenker (1852–1911) began sending out questionnaires to all the school districts in the German Empire. It took him ten years to contact nearly 50,000 local teachers, who were asked to provide equivalents for 40 sentences in the local dialect. An enormous amount of data was received, and this led to the publication in 1881 of the first linguistic atlas, *Sprachatlas des Deutschen Reichs*. A larger series of works, based on Wenker's files, appeared between 1926 and 1956; but even today, much of the original material has not been published.

The postal questionnaire method enables a large amount of data to be accumulated in a relatively short time, but it has several limitations – chiefly that dialect pronunciations cannot be accurately recorded. The alternative, to send out trained field workers to observe and record the dialect forms, was first used in the linguistic survey of France, which began in 1896. The director, Jules Gilliéron (1854–1926), appointed Edmond Edmont (1849–1926) – a grocer with a very sharp ear for phonetic differences – to do the field work. For four years, Edmont went around France on a bicycle, conducting interviews with 700 informants using a specially devised questionnaire of nearly 2,000 items. The *Atlas linguistique de la France* was subsequently published in 13 volumes between 1902 and 1910. It stands as the most influential work in the history of dialectology.

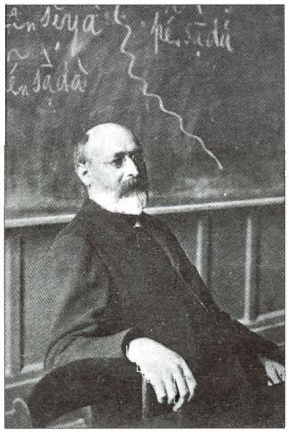
In the first half of this century, major projects were initiated in many parts of Europe, such as Romania, Italy, Holland, Spain, and Denmark, and there have been several impressive publications. In due course the large-scale dialect surveys of the United States and England began (p. 30). A great deal of dialect work has also been undertaken in Japan and China, as well as in parts of Africa, Australia, Canada, and South America. In some countries, even, surveys leading to a 'second generation' of linguistic atlases have begun. Direct interviewing and postal questionnaires continue to be used today, as does the tradition of presenting the linguistic material in the form of maps; and in recent years, dialectology has benefited enormously from the development of techniques using tape recorders. The field is also now being influenced by the electronic revolution, with computers helping to 'crunch' the data provided by questionnaires, and making large databases of regional variants more available, accessible, and analysable – and even more visible, using computer graphic techniques.

However, nowadays there are fewer big regional dialect projects, and some of those that have begun may never be completed. This is mainly because of the large costs involved in collecting, analysing, and publishing dialect data; but it is also partly because of the new direction dialect studies have taken. Younger scholars are these days more likely to be attracted by the sociolinguistically inspired approaches that developed in the 1970s. with their focus on social factors, and on urban rather than on rural dialects (p. 32).

THE EARLIEST USE OF DIALECTOLOGY?

Then Gilead cut Ephraim off from the fords of the Jordan, and whenever an Ephraimite fugitive said 'Let me cross', the men of Gilead asked him, 'Are you an Ephraimite?'. If he answered 'No', they said, 'Then say "Shibboleth".' He would say 'Sibboleth', since he could not pronounce the word correctly. Thereupon they seized and slaughtered him by the fords of the Jordan.
(Judges XII, 4–6)

The Ephraimites were betrayed by their regional pronunciation. As a result of this story, *shibboleth*, which then meant 'ear of corn' or 'flowing stream', has in modern use come to mean 'distinguishing mark' or 'criterion'.



Jules Gillieron (1854–1926)

THE FARM

THE FARMSTEAD

Show an aerial photograph of a farmstead and surrounding fields @.

1 ... these? **Fields**
2 ... this? **Farmstead.**
3 ... this? **Farmyard.**
4 ... this? **Stackyard.**
... the various buildings?

If necessary, ask the relevant question below.

5 ... the place where you keep pigs? **Pigsty.**–April 1953, *the animals that go* (*i. grunting*) replaced *pigs.*
6 ... the place where you keep hens? **Henhouse.**–April 1953, *the birds that lay eggs for you* replaced *hens.*
7 ... *the place where you keep pigeons?* **Dovecote.**–April 1953, *the birds that go (i. cooing)* replaced *pigeons.*
8 ... the place where you keep cows? **Cowhouse.**–April 1953, *the animals that give you milk* replaced *your cows.*
9 ... the yard in which cattle are kept, especially during the winter, for fattening, and for producing dung? **Straw-yard.** (Verify the kind of cattle and the purpose).
10 ... the small enclosed piece of pasture near the farmhouse, the place where you might put a cow or a pony that's none too well? **Paddock.**
11 What's the **barn** for and where is it?

COW-HOUSE

Q. *What do you call the place where you keep your cows?* – April 1953, *the animals that give you milk* replaced *your cows.*

Rr. BEEF-HOUSE (COW-)BYRE, COW-HOLE/HOUSE/HULL/SHADE/SHED, LATHE, MISTALL, SHIPPON

1 Nb 1 baɪɔᵏ 2 baɪɔᵏ [baɪɔᵏmən¹ *byre-man* (= *cowman*) I.2.3] 3 ku:baɪɔᵏ 4–5 baɪɔᵏ 6 baɪəᵏ 7 baɪɔᵏ, ○□baɪɔᵏz¹ 8 baɪɔᵏ 9 baɪə

2 Cu 1 baɪər 2 baɪər 3 baɪə, ku:əs 4 baɪə, ○□baɪəz¹ 5 ku:baɪəɹ 6 baɪə, kᵊu:əs ["old name"]

3 Du 1 ku:baɪɔᵏ, ○ku:ʃɪəd̬³ 2 bɛ̤ɪəᵏ 3 baɪər 4–5 baɪə 6 baɪə ○□baɪəz¹

4 We 1 baɪəɹ, ○baɪə¹ 2–3 baɪə 4 ʃɷpm

5 La 1–3 ʃɷpm 4 ʃɪpn, ○ʃɷpn¹ 5 ʃɪpn 6 ʃɪpm, ʃɷpm ["older"], ○ʃɪpən¹ III.11.3, ○□ʃɪpmz¹ 7 ʃɪpn, ○□ʃɪpənz¹ 8–9 ʃɪpn 10 ʃɪpən 11 ʃɪppɷn 12 ʃɪpɷn, ○ʃɷpɷn¹ 13 ʃɪpən, ○ʃɪpɪn² 14 ʃɪpɷn

QUESTIONNAIRES

In a large dialect survey, there will be many informants and several investigators. One way of ensuring that the results of all the interviews will be comparable, while also saving a great deal of time, is through the use of questionnaires. On the other hand, unless the questions are particularly ingenious, the responses will lack the spontaneity of informal speech. Results thus have to be interpreted with caution.

Opposite is an extract from the questionnaire used in the English Dialect Survey (p. 30). The dots at the beginning of each line stand for 'What do you call ...', *i* = imitate. The second extract illustrates the depth of phonetic detail recorded by the field workers. Abbreviations after each number stand for the different northern counties of England.

PAUSY, *adj.* n.Lin.[1] [**po̤·zi.**] Slightly intoxicated. Slightly the worse for drink; said of persons who combine an amiable desire to impart information with an incapacity to call to mind all the necessary words. 'Drunk ! naw he was n't what you'd call drunk, nobbud he was pausy like.'

PAUT, *v.* and *sb.* Sc. Nhb. Dur. Lakel. Yks. Lan. Chs. Der. Not. Lin. Wor. Suf. Also written **pawt** Sc. Lakel.[2] Cum.[14] n.Yks.[2] e.Yks.[1] m.Yks.[1] w.Yks. ne.Lan.[1] Der.[1] Not.[13] n.Lin.[1] sw.Lin.[1]; **pawte** w.Yks.; port w.Yks. Not.[3]; and in forms **paat** Cai.[1] Nhb.[1] Cum.[14]; **paout** se.Wor.[1]; **pout** Sc. (JAM.) N.Cy.[1] s.Wor.; **powt** Sc. (JAM.) Bnff.[1] n.Cy Suf.[1] [**pō̤t, po̤ɔt, pāt.**] 1. *v.* To poke or push with the hand or a stick; to stir up; to paw, handle, or finger things. Cf. **pote.**

Sc. To search with a rod or stick in water, or in a dark or confined place. To make a noise when searching or poking in water (JAM.). **n.Cy.** GROSE (1790). **Nhb.**[1] Divent paat on wi'd, or ye'll spoil'd. **Cum.** Children pawt when they make repeated attempts to get things with their hands (E.W.P); **Cum.**[4] A dog pawts at the door when it wants to get in, and children pawt when they make repeated attempts to get hold of things with their hands. **n.Yks.**[1]; **n.Yks.**[2] Kneading with the fingers into a soft mass. **n.Lin.** SUTTON *Wds.* (1881); **n.Lin.**[1] I wish we hed n't noä cats, really, thaay're alus pawtin' at one, when one's gettin' one's meät. **sw.Lin.**[1] Some lasses are always pawting things about they've no business with. **s.Wor.** To beat down apples, PORSON *Quaint Wds.* (1875) 15.

Hence (1) **Pouting,** *vbl. sb.* the practice of spearing salmon ; also used *attrib.* ; (2) **Pout-net,** *sb.* a net fastened

An extract from the *English Dialect Dictionary*
Joseph Wright (1855–1930), published this dictionary in six volumes between 1898 and 1905; it contained 100,000 entries. Wright was largely self-taught, and did not learn to read until he was a teenager – a fact that may have been an advantage to him in his later studies, as his early awareness of dialect differences would not have been influenced by the forms of the standard written language.

FROM STRINE TO SCOUSE

The contrast between regional dialect and standard English usage has been a source of humour the world over. In *Let Stalk Strine* (1965). Afferbeck Lauder (said to be Professor of Strine Studies at the University of Sinny) uses standard spellings to represent the popular impression of an Australian accent, with bizarre results:

Egg Nishner: A mechanical device for cooling and purifying the air of a room.
Jezz: Articles of furniture. As in: 'Set the tible, love, and get a coupler jezz'.
Money: The day following Sunny. (Sunny, Money, Chewsdy, Wensdy, Thursdy, Fridy, Sairdy.)
Scone: A meteorological term. As in: 'Scona rine'.
Sly Drool: An instrument used by engineers for discovering Kew brutes and for making other calculations.
Tiger: Imperative mood of the verb to take. As in: 'Tiger look at this, Reg...'
X. The twenty-fourth letter of the Strine alphabet; also plural of egg; also a tool for chopping wood.

Some of the colloquial pronunciations here are found in many dialects. For example, *Gissa* ('Please give me ...') is a feature of Strine, but it is also well known in Liverpool, as can be seen from the section on 'Forms of Address' in *Lern Yerself Scouse* (1966), by Frank Shaw, Fritz Spiegl, and Stan Kelly (whose standard English translations are given in parentheses):

Ullo dur! ('Greetings; I am pleased to make your acquaintance.')
Gisalite ('Could you oblige me with a match, please?')
Ay-ay ('I say!')
La ('I say, young man.')
Ere, tatty-head! ('I say, young woman!')

In the Appendix to this work, selected verses from *The Rubáiyat of Omár Khayyám* are translated into Scouse by Stan Kelly:

Gerrup dere La! De knocker-up sleeps light;
Dawn taps yer winder, ends anudder night;
And Lo! de dog-eared moggies from next-door
Tear up de jigger fer an early fight.

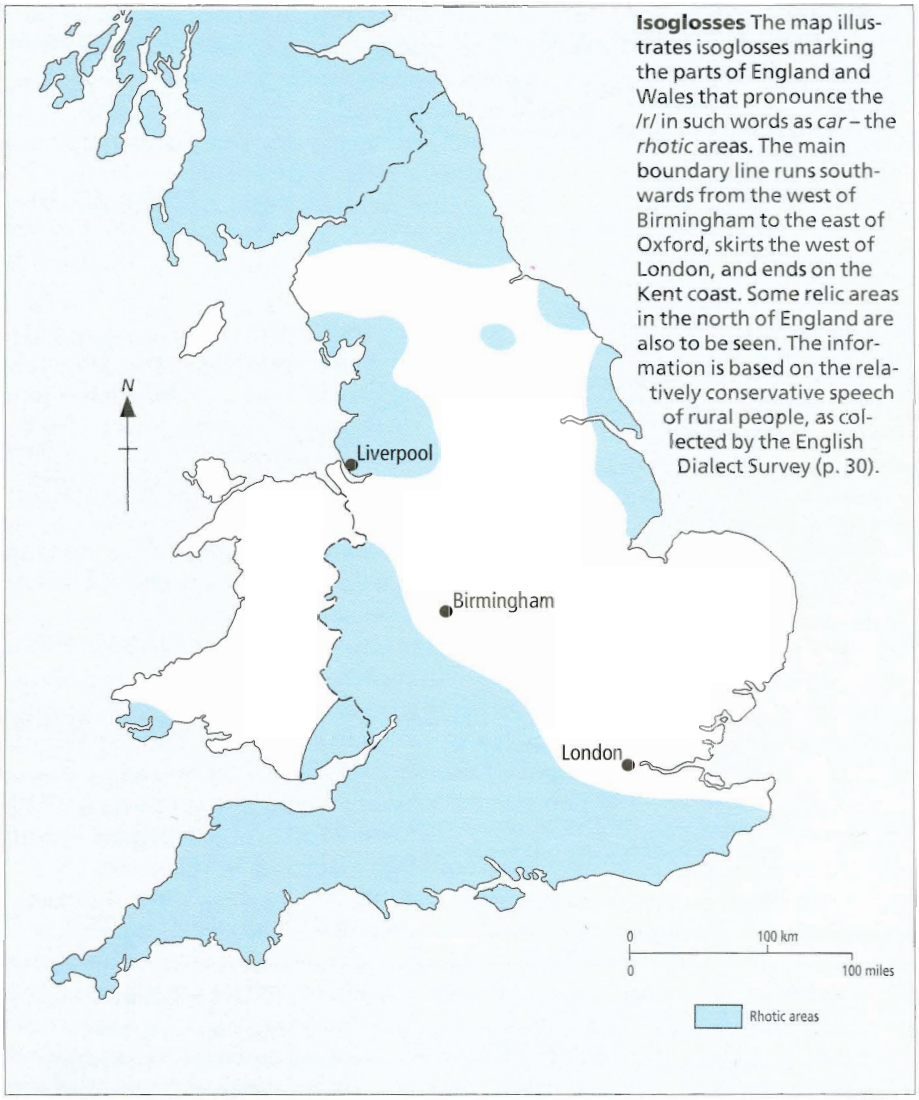
LINES ON MAPS

Once the speech of dialect informants has been collected, it is analysed, and the important features are marked on a map of the area in which the informants live. When several points on the map have been located, it is then possible to see whether there is a pattern in the way these features are used. The usual way of identifying dialect patterns is to draw lines around the places where the people use a linguistic feature in the same way. These boundary lines are known as *isoglosses*. For example, one famous isogloss runs across England, from the Severn to the Wash: it distinguishes northern speakers who pronounce a rounded *u* /ʊ/ in words like *cup* from southern speakers who keep the vowel open and unrounded, /ʌ/. A series of lexical isoglosses, identifying various words for *snack*, is illustrated on p. 30.

When isoglosses were first introduced (in 1892), it was expected that they would provide a clear method for identifying dialect areas. Because people from a particular part of a country 'speak in the same way', it was assumed that the isoglosses for many linguistic features would coincide, and form a neat 'bundle', demarcating one dialect from another. However, early dialectology studies soon discovered that the reality was very different. Isoglosses criss-crossed maps in all directions, and very few actually coincided. There seemed to be no clear dialect boundaries at all – a finding which made some scholars go so far as to argue that the whole idea of a dialect was meaningless.

In due course, however, supplementary notions were developed to make sense of the data. It was noted that, while isoglosses rarely coincided, they did often run in the same general direction. Some areas, called *focal areas*, were seen to be relatively homogeneous, containing few isoglosses. Where focal areas merged, there was a great deal of linguistic variation, with many isoglosses present: these became known as *transition areas*. Often, a feature might be left isolated, as a result of linguistic change affecting the areas around it: these 'islands' of more conservative usage were called *relic areas*.

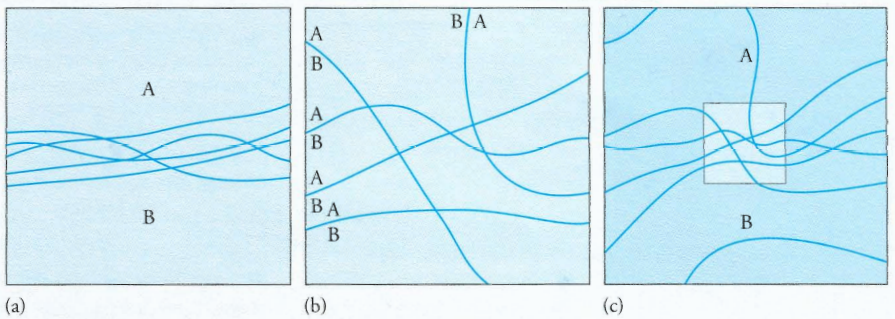
Dialectologists have mixed feelings about isoglosses. There is often too much variability in the way a linguistic feature is used for the data to be easily summarized in a single isogloss. Also, the relative significance of different isoglosses remains to be interpreted. Some isoglosses mark distinctions that are considered to be more important than others (such as the contrast between short and long *a* in words like *bath* in British English, which has long been the focus of special comment). Isoglosses are an important visual guide, but they need to be supplemented by other criteria if they are to display, and not to obscure, the true complexity of regional variation.



Isoglosses The map illustrates isoglosses marking the parts of England and Wales that pronounce the /r/ in such words as *car* – the *rhotic* areas. The main boundary line runs southwards from the west of Birmingham to the east of Oxford, skirts the west of London, and ends on the Kent coast. Some relic areas in the north of England are also to be seen. The information is based on the relatively conservative speech of rural people, as collected by the English Dialect Survey (p. 30).

The main kinds of isogloss

Term	Separates	Examples
isolex	lexical items	*nunch* vs *luncheon* (p. 30)
isomorph	morphological features	*dived* vs *dove*
isophone	phonological features	*put*/pʊt/ vs /pʌt/
isoseme	semantic features	*dinner* (mid-day meal) vs (evening meal)



The expectation Isoglosses will form neat bundles, demarcating dialect A from dialect B.

The reality Isoglosses criss-cross an area, with no clear boundary between A and B.

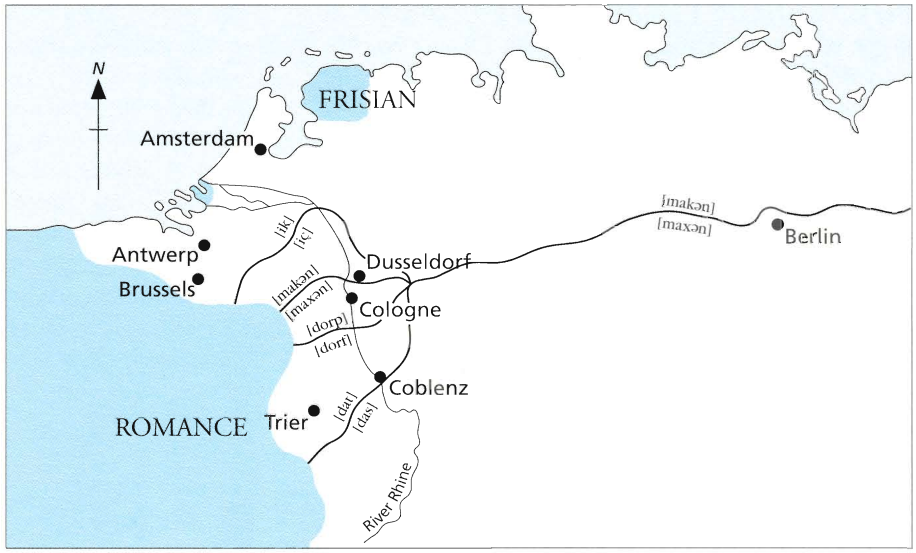
Focal and transitional On a larger scale, the isoglosses are seen to constitute a transitional area between the focal areas A and B.

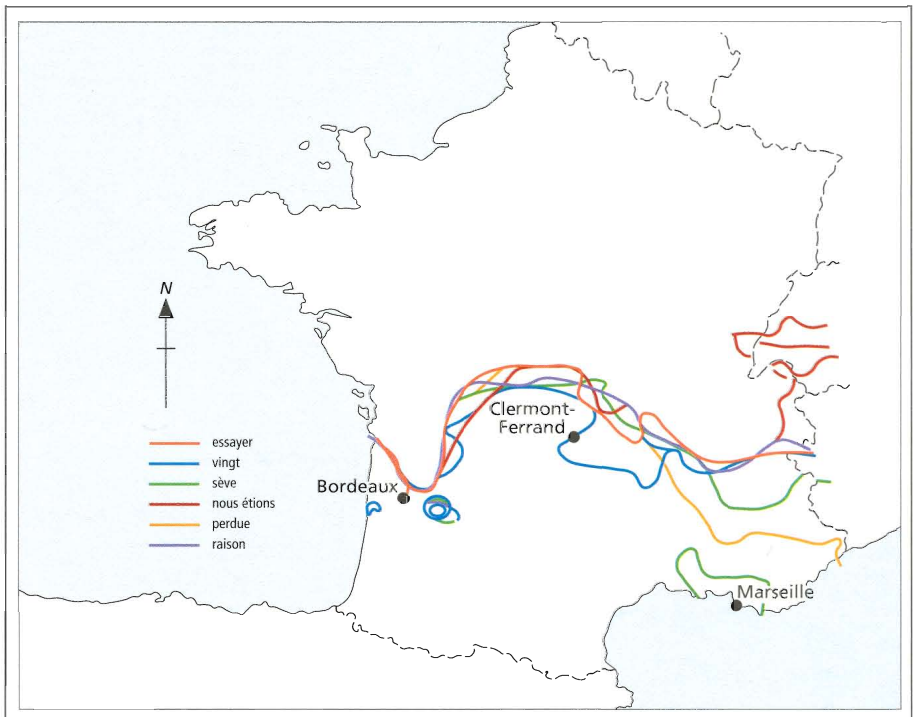
THE RHENISH FAN

One of the best examples of the way isoglosses fail to group themselves into bundles is in northern Europe. A set of isoglosses runs east–west across Germany and Holland, separating Low German, in the north, from High German, in the south. They reflect the different ways in which these dialects have developed the voiceless plosive consonants of Indo-European (p. 330). In Low German, the sounds have remained plosives (/p, t, k/); but in High German, these have generally become fricatives. For example, 'village' is [dorp] in the north, [dorf] in the south; 'that' is [dat], as opposed to [das]; 'make' and 'I' are [makən] and [ik] respectively, rather than [maxən] and [iç].

The map shows the location of the isoglosses that distinguish these words. Through most of Germany, they are close together, displaying only minor variations; but where they meet the River Rhine, the isoglosses move in quite different directions, in a pattern that resembles the folds in a fan. It thus becomes impossible to make simple generalizations about dialect differences in this area. A speaker in a village near Cologne, for example, would say [iç] and [maxən], as in High German, but say [dorp] and [dat], as in Low German.

What accounts for the Rhenish fan? It has been suggested that several of the linguistic features could be explained with reference to certain facts of social history. For example, the area between the [dorp/dorf] and [dat/das] isoglosses was coextensive with the old diocese of Trier; the area immediately north was coextensive with the old diocese of Cologne. The linguistic innovations seem to have spread along the Rhine from southern Germany to the cities, and then 'fanned out' throughout the administrative areas these cities controlled. Rural speakers were naturally influenced most by the speech of their own capital cities, and political and linguistic boundaries gradually came to coincide. (After L. Bloomfield, 1933.)





The two halves of France
One of the main findings of the *Atlas linguistique de la France* (p. 26) was the bundle of isoglosses that runs across France from east to west, dividing the country into two major dialect areas. The areas are traditionally known as *langue d'oil* (in the north) and *langue d'oc* (in the south) – names based in the words for 'yes' current in these areas during the 13th century, when the division was first recognized. The map shows six items that are used differently on either side of an isogloss (J. K. Chambers & P. Trudgill, 1980, p. 111).

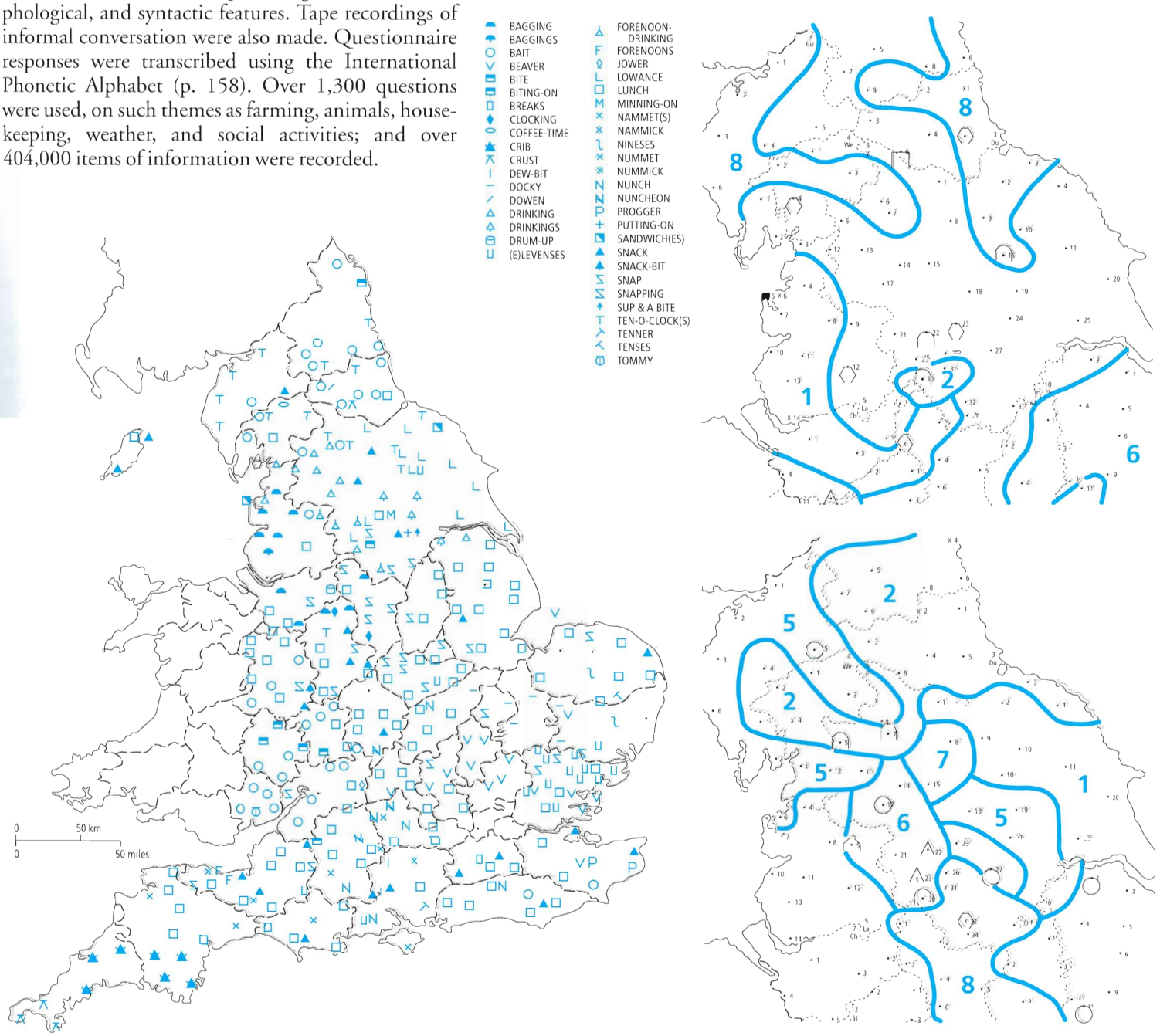
The distinction corresponds to several important social and cultural differences, some of which can still be observed today. For example, to the south of the isogloss bundle (roughly where the Provençal region begins), a biennial (as opposed to a triennial) method of crop rotation is traditionally used. A different legal system existed until the early 19th century, using a written code inspired by Roman traditions. And there is a major difference in architectural style, the roofs being generally flat, and not steeply pitched (as they are to the north of the bundle). Such clear correlations between language and cultural identity illustrate the way in which dialect studies form an important part of the study of social history.

THE LINGUISTIC ATLAS OF ENGLAND

Three of the maps from the English Dialect Survey, carried out by Harold Orton (1898–1975) and Eugene Dieth (1893–1956), are illustrated here. The field survey was undertaken between 1950 and 1961 in 313 localities throughout England. The localities were usually not more than 15 miles apart, and generally consisted of villages with a fairly stable population. The informants were natives of the locality, mainly male agricultural workers, with good mouths, teeth, and hearing, and over 60 years of age.

The principal method was a questionnaire that elicited information about phonological, lexical, morphological, and syntactic features. Tape recordings of informal conversation were also made. Questionnaire responses were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (p. 158). Over 1,300 questions were used, on such themes as farming, animals, housekeeping, weather, and social activities; and over 404,000 items of information were recorded.

Between 1962 and 1971 the basic material of the survey was published in an introduction and four separate volumes; in 1977 the *Linguistic Atlas of England* was published, containing an interpretation of a selection of the data. The maps below provide an example of the Survey's basic material for the item *snack* and two interpretive maps, based on this material. The first map is a display of all the responses obtained, which are listed in the top right-hand corner. The other maps pick out various trends in usage, and are a considerable simplification. (After H. Orton, S. Sanderson & J. Widdowson, 1978.)

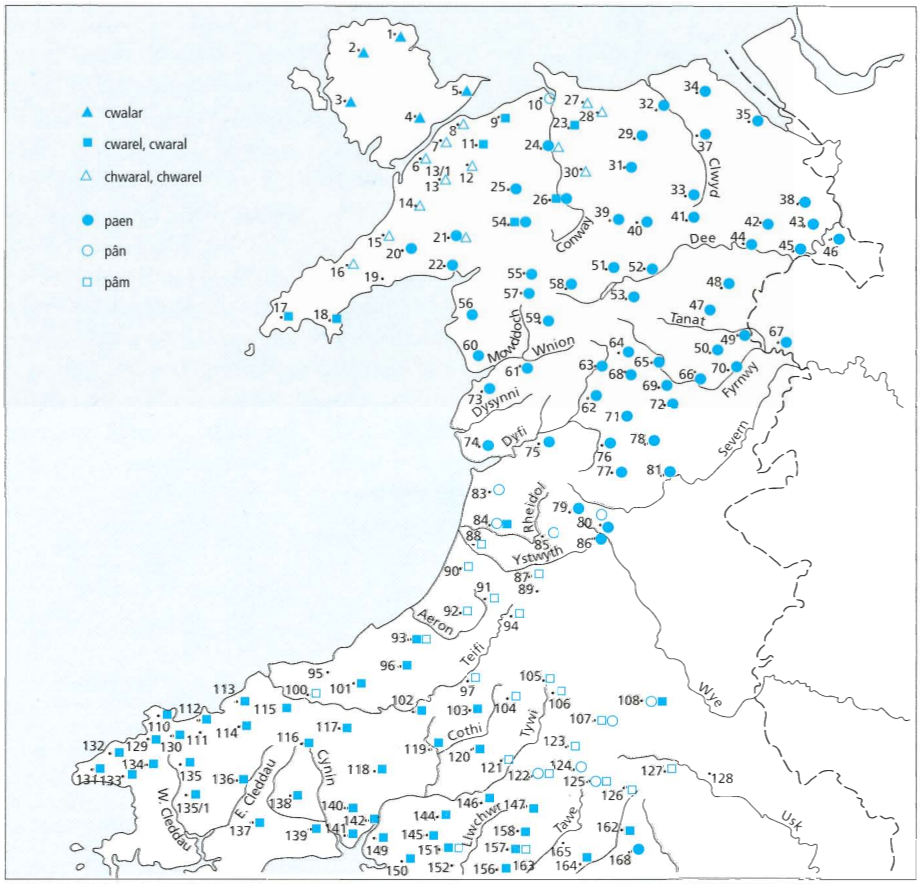


THE LINGUISTIC GEOGRAPHY OF WALES

One of the most recent dialect surveys was carried out in Wales in the 1960s under the direction of Alan R. Thomas (1935–) and published in 1973. It was based on 180 points of enquiry in the Welsh-speaking areas, the localities being selected on the basis of their position relative to the physical geography of the country and to the main communication routes.

The survey was based on a postal questionnaire, with questions using both Welsh and English. There were over 500 questions, which dealt largely with domestic, rural, and farming vocabulary; about 130,000 responses were received. The questionnaire was sent to a person of educated background, who supervised its completion by local informants, using spelling that reflected regional pronunciation. Informants were of the older generation, with little formal education, and had spent no prolonged periods away from their native area.

The main part of the atlas discusses the distribution of regional words for around 400 items, on the basis of which the main Welsh speech areas are drawn up. The illustration (right) shows the distribution of Welsh words for *pane of glass*, an item in which two distinct patterns of use can be clearly seen: *paen* and its variants in the north-east and the midlands, *cwalar* and its variants in most other places. (After A. R. Thomas, 1973.)



THE LINGUISTIC ATLAS OF THE UNITED STATES

This survey began in 1931, under the direction of Hans Kurath (1891–1992), as part of an ambitious programme to establish a linguistic atlas of the United States and Canada. The region was divided into survey areas, and the first atlas to appear, dealing with New England, was published in 1939–43. The project is ongoing, with informant interviews complete in many areas, but the amount of work involved means that publication is a slow and irregular process.

The illustration (right) is taken from Kurath's *Word Geography of the Eastern United States* (1949) – a survey area that included the coastal Atlantic states from Maine to Georgia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and eastern Ohio. Dialectologists went to nearly every county in these states and interviewed two people in each – one older-generation and unschooled, the other a member of the middle class with some degree of education. In the larger cities, people with a more cultured background were also interviewed. All were natives of their area, and had not moved much outside it. Interviewers spent from 10 to 15 hours with each informant, dealing with over 1,000 points of usage. More than 1,200 people were interviewed, and information was obtained about the diffusion of around 400 regional expressions for domestic and agricultural items.

The map records the distribution of words for *dragonfly*.