

The Phonemic Features of and Attitudes toward
Southern U.S. English
Examining Individual Dialects and Their
Perception by University Students

Bachelor's thesis
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract Tämä tutkielma käsittelee amerikanenglannin murteita Yhdysvaltojen eteläisissä osavaltioissa. Tutkielma käsittelee pääasiassa sitä, millä tavalla yliopisto-opiskelijat reagoivat Amerikan Etelävaltioissa puhuttavaan englantiin. Tämän lisäksi tutkielmassa esitellään eteläisten osavaltioiden murrealueen yleisimmät erityispiirteet, esimerkiksi erilaiset tavat lausua sanoja verrattuna standardiin amerikanenglantiin. Tutkielmassa keskitytään analysoimaan amerikanenglantia käsittelevää kyselylomaketta, johon vastasi neljätoista yliopisto-opiskelijaa. Kyselylomakkeen vastatessaan opiskelijat kuuntelivat neljää Internetissä ollutta äänitiedostoa, joidenka puhujien murteet olivat seuraavilta alueilta: Teksas, Alabama ja Georgia. Heidän vastauksiensa analyysissä näytetään millä tavalla he reagoivat tämän murrealueeseen ja mitkä kyselylomakkeeseen kuuluvat murteet he katsoivat kuuluvan Amerikan Etelävaltioissa puhuttavaan englantiin. Analyysin keskeisenä osana ovat myös yliopisto-opiskelijoiden näkemykset siitä kuinka korkeasti koulutettuja tämän murrealueen murteet ovat. Tarkastelemalla Amerikan Etelävaltioiden englantia ja analysoimalla yliopisto-opiskelijoiden reaktioita tämän alueen murteisiin tutkielma antaa selkeän kokonaiskuvan Amerikan Etelävaltioiden englannista. Lukijalle näytetään myös että tämän murrealueen murteet vaihtelevat keskenään enemmän kuin yleisesti ajatellaan ja että niihin ei aina reagoita samalla tavalla riippuen niiden erityispiirteistä. Tutkielman tuloksissa saatiin selville että opiskelijat luokittelivat murteet korkeammin ja vähemmän koulutettuihin. He eivät nähneet jokaisen murteen kuuluvan samalle alueelle: muutaman vastaajan mielestä tietyt murteet olivat standardia amerikanenglantia. Heidän yliopistokoulutuksensa vaikutti myös heidän mielipiteisiinsä, mutta kyselylomakkeessa esitetyjä murteita ei nähty negatiivisena. Suurin osa vastaajista arveli kuitenkin oman englantinsa olevan erilainen verrattuna kyselylomakkeessa esitettyihin murteisiin.	
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Muita tietoja – Additional information Tutkielman lopussa sisällytettynä linkit Internet-sivustoon <i>The Speech Accent Archive</i> ja sen tarjoamiin äänitiedostoihin, joita käytettiin kyselylomakkeen yhteydessä.	

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APPENDIX

1. Introduction

Southern U.S. English has long been recognized, particularly in the United States, for its unique phonemic features, which cause it to stand out and sound distinct from other American dialects. Because of this, the contrast between Standard American English and Southern U.S. English (referred from here on as **SAE** [that is, *Southern American English*, not to be confused with *Standard American English*]) has been a popular topic, particularly in the media, where SAE has often been portrayed as less prestigious and non-standard than other American English dialects. Phonemic features that are present in some SAE dialects are commonly seen by the media as being a part of every SAE dialect, and thus the diversity of SAE dialects is often ignored.

According to the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), when the linguist Dennis Preston carried out a survey regarding people's beliefs about SAE in 1996, most of his respondents from Michigan, Indiana, and South Carolina recognized SAE as a notable variety of American English (PBS: 2013). However, his respondents from Indiana and Michigan also viewed SAE dialects as the most incorrect ones in American English. Even some of the respondents from South Carolina, which is further South than Michigan or Indiana (and thus phonetically closer to Southern dialects), considered SAE less proper. In addition, Labov et al. (2005: 239) point out that Americans who live further North often stigmatize the dialect of the people living further South as "Southern," and that while many Americans do not pay attention to other regional dialects, they seem to recognize Southern dialects more easily. These points illustrate how widespread the popular image of SAE as an uneducated dialect region is in the U.S., and how people focus a great deal on its phonemic features.

However, even though all the SAE dialects are often stereotypically grouped together, there is more variation to SAE than is generally thought. While it is true that certain features commonly appear in this dialect region, SAE dialects have also changed over time, and some phonemic features have become less prominent in many dialects. This means that a number of SAE dialects have become more similar to the mainstream Standard American English. These dialects are often received more positively, and in some cases, they are not even recognized as SAE dialects.

First, the study discusses previous research on Southern U.S. English and American English in general. After this, the most common features of Southern U.S. English will be discussed: this section mostly analyzes features that are also relevant to the audio clips provided with the questionnaire, but also mentions other phonemic features.

When these features have been established, I proceed to analyze the data that were gathered for this study: first, I introduce the audio clips and the features that were present in them, along with the reasons for why they were chosen for the study, then analyze the participants' answers to the questionnaire extensively. This discussion will reveal their perception toward SAE.

The analysis of the audio clips focuses on the features that were present in the clips themselves, which means that the dialects of Georgia, Texas, and Alabama will be analyzed only in relation to the content of the audio clips. In fact, discussing the detailed histories and developments of the dialects of Georgia, Texas, and Alabama individually would make this study more extensive than intended. However, the analysis of the audio clips gives sufficient information on which phonemic features of SAE are present in these specific speakers' dialects.

2. Research on Southern U.S English

Previous research on the subject of American dialects includes William Labov's work for the University of Pennsylvania. Labov's *The Organization of Dialect Diversity in North America*, an updated and enlarged online version of a presentation given at the **Fourth International Conference on Spoken Language Processing** at Philadelphia in 1996, is quoted in this study.

Labov has been particularly interested in showing the phonemic variation between different U.S. dialects. While not concentrating exclusively on SAE, much of Labov's work is still very relevant to the topic of this study: for example, he has discussed various mergers, some of which are very typical of SAE.

Along with Labov's *The Organization of Dialect Diversity in North America*, another source is cited extensively: *Atlas of North American English*. This source, which was originally published in 2005 and written by Labov, Ash, and Boberg, analyzes the common phonemic features of different American dialects. There are also various maps and diagrams featuring different phonemic features, which further illustrate the differences between the dialect areas. The chapter that is quoted in this study focuses on SAE and its most common phonemic features. Both *The Organization of Dialect Diversity in North America* and *Atlas of North American English* are referred to in order to give a comprehensive picture of some of the common features of SAE.

The Speech Accent Archive, a website designed by George Mason University, features a variety of different native and non-native English speakers' dialects, and this website has been created for the purpose of analyzing them. The speakers of the different audio clips on the website generally read the same text, and by comparing their different pronunciation, intonation, and so on, the differences between the dialects become clear. The website itself does not analyze the differences between the dialects and simply hosts them, although there are transcripts provided for some of the audio clips. The presence of these phonemic transcripts and their potential influence on the participants will be discussed in the conclusion of the study.

George Mason University permits using the audio clips featured on *The Speech Accent Archive* for academic research, so there are no copyright issues with the featured dialects presented in this study.

3. Common Features of Southern U.S. English

There are several different phonemic features that identify SAE and make it sound distinct from other American dialects. The purpose of this section is to show some of these features. Also, some of these features, such as *glide deletion* and the *pen/pin* merger, are present in the audio clips presented in the data section, so it is important to start by establishing what these phonemic features mean.

According to Labov (1996), the *pen/pin* merger is a common phonemic feature that is a part of many Southern U.S. English dialects. Speakers with this merger pronounce the short /e/ sound (*lend, head, bed*) before /m/ or /n/ as the short /ɪ/ (*will, in, it*). This means that word pairs such as *pen/pin* or *hem/him* become homonyms for Southern U.S. English speakers with the merger so that they pronounce both words of the pairs as /pɪn/ or /hɪm/ respectively. Other examples of words that are affected by this merger include *hen, den, Ben, stem, men*, and so on. Labov (1996) notes that this merger has also affected some of the vocabulary: Southern U.S. English speakers with the *pen/pin* merger commonly use the terms *safety pin* and *ink pen* to avoid confusing the identically pronounced words *pen* and *pin* in a conversation. The *pen/pin* merger is also listed by Labov et al. (2005: 239) as a phonemic feature that is a part of SAE.

According to Labov et al. (2005: 239), another noteworthy feature of Southern U.S. dialects is how the diphthong sound /aɪ/ often becomes a monophthong /a/ in words where it precedes a voiced segment, or when it is in a word-final position. This phenomenon is also known as the *glide deletion of /aɪ/* (referred in this study as “*glide deletion*”) (Labov et al., 2005: 243). In dialects with glide deletion, words such as *high* and *slide* are pronounced closer to [ha:] and [sla: d] instead of [haɪ] and [slaɪd]. This is one of the most recognized features of SAE, and it is a common stereotype that most SAE dialects have this phonemic feature. Labov et al. (2005: 244) feature a map which shows that glide deletion is much more frequent in the Southern U.S. and decreases, but does not completely disappear, in the more Northern areas.

There are also many Southern areas with exceptions to glide deletion: for example, in Texas, while glide deletion is present in some areas, there are also many areas where it is

only partial or not present at all (Labov et al. 2005: 244). The fact that this feature is not always present in Texas is also supported by the second (Lewisville, Texas) and fourth (Houston, Texas) audio clips in the data, where no glide deletion was present. In addition, Labov et al. (2005: 260) note that glide deletion is not widespread in Atlanta: only two out of five speakers are estimated to have it. In the first audio clip, which features a speaker from Atlanta, glide deletion is notably present.

In addition to glide deletion, there are noticeable glides in some Southern U.S. dialects. For example, as pointed out by Labov et al. (2005: 239), the /æ/ sound in the beginning of some words becomes /æj/ (also written as /æy/) when it precedes a sibilant or nasal sound, making a word such as *bang* [bæŋ] to be pronounced as [bæjŋ]. Furthermore, Labov et al. (2005:39) mention that as a part of *The Back Upglide Shift*, the /oh/ sound (also written as /ɔ:/) in the beginning of words such as *law* and *off* becomes /aw/ (also written as /aʊ/), meaning that some SAE speakers pronounce these words as /laʊ/ and /aʊf/ respectively.

4. Data Gathering Methods

In the data, I feature four audio clips that depict Southern U.S. English speakers. The participants of the data gathering are Finnish university students studying the English language, who answered a survey on their opinions on U.S. dialects.

The focus of the survey is on how the students perceive the four audio clips and what sorts of qualities they associate with them. For example, there is a list of adjectives from which the participants could choose the ones they considered to represent the English spoken in the clips. Analyzing the data, I aim to show further how Southern U.S. English is perceived by university students who themselves study academic English. Also, the data will show how recognizable particular features of SAE are to university students. In the questionnaire, the students mostly circled their answers, although they also had the choice to give additional comments later on.

As mentioned before, the audio clips that were featured with the survey are provided by *The Speech Accent Archive*, an educational site compiled by the George Mason University, which features various English dialects in the different audio clips. This site was more easily accessible than other sites that hosted similar features.

5. Analysis of the data

5.1 The Structure of the Survey

The data of this study consisted of four audio samples of SAE and an online survey that was answered by fourteen Finnish university students who study English. First, I discuss the structure and aims of the survey, then go on to further detail about the audio clips chosen for the survey, and finally analyze the answers and make conclusions about the participants' perception of the dialects and the effects of their university education on the answers of the survey.

When designing the survey, I structured and phrased it so that it did not explicitly mention that it was a survey related to SAE dialects, and instead titled it, "*Listening to American English Accents.*" The reason for this was that I wanted to examine if the participants of the survey could recognize the dialect region presented in the sound clips, and also to find out if they actually considered some of these dialects to belong to other dialect regions in the United States instead of them all being SAE dialects. If the survey had for example been titled, "*Listening to Southern U.S. English Accents,*" the participants might have viewed all of the dialects differently, and thus answered in a different way.

The survey consists of three major questions, the first of which is "*Which clips are described by the following adjectives in your opinion?*" The adjectives included with this question are "*standard,*" "*non-standard,*" "*positive,*" "*negative,*" "*highly educated,*" "*uneducated,*" "*serious-sounding,*" "*not serious,*" "*clear,*" "*unclear,*" and "*entertaining.*"

The aim of this question was to measure what kind of positive and negative qualities the participants of the survey associated with the dialects they listened to. Also, the adjectives “*highly educated*,” “*uneducated*,” “*standard*,” and “*non-standard*” are essential for determining what kind of education level the participants assigned for the various dialects. These four adjectives feature prominently in the discussion and analysis of the participants’ answers.

The second question is “*Do any of the clips have any of the following features?*” and the mentioned features are “*strange pronunciation*,” “*exaggerated pronunciation*,” “*unauthentic pronunciation*,” and “*dialectal pronunciation*.” Whereas the first question measures the participants’ perception of the dialects, this question was designed to directly gauge if the participants noticed any identifying phonemic features in the audio clips. Combined with the first question, the answers for the second question show both how the participants viewed the dialects and which features they noticed that likely influenced their view on them. The answers for question two consist of broader, more general categories instead of overly technical phonemic features that might not be familiar to the participants. This way, the question is more accessible and answering it is easier.

The third question (“*Do you agree with the following statements?*”) presents various statements (“*Some of the clips sound more educated than the other clips*,” “*You wouldn’t personally use this kind of English in an academic environment*,” “*The accents in the clips sound similar to each other*,” “*The English presented in some of the clips sounds familiar to you*,” “*The English you speak is different from the accents in the clips*,” and “*You have encountered accents that are similar to these in the media*”), and the participants can choose to agree or disagree with them, or choose “*unsure*.” Like the first question, this question measures the participants’ opinion on the clips that they listened to, but on a deeper level. Also, the purpose of the question is to have the participants compare the audio clips with each other, and to reflect on how familiar they are with SAE and how suitable they consider it for academic purposes. In addition, the question aims to show whether the participants view some of the clips in a different way or if they group them all in the same category. Finally, the influence of the media is also measured: if, for

example, most of the participants agreed with the statement “*You have encountered accents that are similar to these in the media,*” it would mean that they have been exposed to the media’s portrayal of SAE.

For the third question, I also allowed the participants to give additional comments on their choices by filling textboxes below the questions. This way, I could gain a better understanding of their views on SAE. Some of these replies will be discussed in the analysis of the data when they are relevant (e.g. in cases where multiple participants have similar comments regarding certain audio clips).

The survey was completely anonymous, which means that the participants’ answers are more likely to accurately reflect their real views on SAE than if their identities were known.

5.2. The Audio Clips

The clips provided by The Speech Accent Archive that were used with the survey feature various SAE dialects: one dialect from Alabama and Georgia, and two from different cities in Texas (Lewisville and Houston).

Clip 1 features a speaker (age 57, male) from Atlanta, Georgia. This speaker has a recognizable Southern dialect: the intonation makes it clear that the speaker belongs to the SAE dialect region and there are also some distinct phonemic features present, such as glide deletion (the word “*five*” is pronounced as [fa:v]) and the *pen/pin* merger (the first syllable of “*Wednesday*” is pronounced as [wɪn]). The Back Upglide Shift also occurs: words such as “*call*” and “*small*” are pronounced as [caʊl] and [smaʊl]. Out of all the dialects, this one is the easiest to identify as Southern since it has more distinctive phonemic features than the others, along with the intonation typical of many SAE dialects. I chose this dialect for the survey to measure how the participants reacted to a more noticeable Southern dialect.

Clip 2 features a speaker (age 20, male) from Lewisville, Texas. Notably, this speaker sounds much more neutral than the speaker of Clip 1, and there do not appear to be any

distinctly Southern phonemic features present in his speech: for example, unlike in Clip 1, there is no glide deletion present, and the *pen/pin* does not appear in this speaker's pronunciation of "Wednesday." In fact, the clip sounds closer to Standard American English. The reason why I included a more neutral dialect was because I wanted to see if the participants recognized it as a Southern dialect, and also to see how much their opinion differed from their opinion on Clip 1's more Southern-sounding dialect.

In Clip 3, the speaker (age 24, male) is from Anniston, Alabama. This clip does not have glide deletion like Clip 1 (*five* is pronounced as [faIv]), but the intonation is more Southern than in Clip 2. Like with Clip 1, the *pen/pin* merger occurs with the pronunciation of "Wednesday," which makes it sound different from Clip 2. In overall, Clip 3 does not have as many distinct phonemic features as Clip 1, but still has more of them than Clip 2. The reason for this dialect's inclusion was to see if the participants could distinguish between the different levels of Southern dialects: for example, if their views on the education levels of Clip 1, Clip 2, and Clip 3 differed.

The speaker of Clip 4 (age 20, female) is from Houston, Texas. While this clip does not feature glide deletion or the *pen/pin* merger, its intonation is less similar to Standard American English than the intonation of Clip 2. The reason why this clip was included in the survey was to test how the participants viewed two dialects that were in the same area (Texas) but still sounded different, and to see if they thought that the speakers of the two clips belonged to different dialect regions on the basis of how their dialects sounded like.

There are also other differences between the clips, such as the pronunciation of words such as "frog" and "from," but these are not specific features of SAE: instead, these different pronunciations occur with different American English speakers in general, and are not consistent with a single dialect region.

5.3. The Answers

With Clip 1 (Atlanta, Georgia), the participants' answers clearly showed that they had distinctive opinions of the speaker's dialect. 13 out of the 14 participants perceived Clip 1 to have dialectal pronunciation, and 11 participants marked the adjective "*non-standard*" as an accurate description for this dialect. Also, 8 participants considered Clip 1's dialect "*uneducated*," and 7 participants marked it as "*not serious*." In fact, this dialect was considered the most uneducated one out of all the audio clips: none of the participants chose the adjective "*highly educated*" as an attribute to Clip 1, unlike with the other clips (Clip 2: 7 / Clip 3: 6 / Clip 4: 1). On the other hand, fewer participants described the other clips as "*uneducated*" compared to Clip 1 (Clip 2: 0 / Clip 3: 0 / Clip 4: 4).

These numbers indicate that many of the participants viewed Clip 1 as a much less educated dialect than the others, which is supported by the fact that 9 participants agreed with the statement "*Some of the clips sound more educated than the other clips*." A valid interpretation of this answer is that many of the participants considered other dialects to sound more educated than Clip 1. However, the participants' answers also show that while many of them likely considered Clip 1's Georgia dialect less educated, the majority of them did not view it in a negative way: as many as 10 participants described the dialect as positive, while only 3 described it as negative.

To summarize, the data show that the participants could recognize the dialect region of Clip 1 as Southern, and also perceived the dialect as being less educated than others, but the majority of them did not have negative attitudes toward the dialect.

Clip 2, which featured a speaker from Lewisville, Texas, was viewed in a different way by the participants: for example, 13 participants considered the dialect standard, unlike Clip 1, which was only considered standard by 1 participant. Also, Clip 2 was considered the least non-standard one (Clip 1: 11/ Clip 2: 1/ Clip 3: 3/ Clip 4: 4), and none of the participants described Clip 2 as uneducated. Moreover, 7 participants agreed that the adjective "*highly educated*" described Clip 2 accurately.

Unlike with the first clip, few participants found dialectal pronunciation in Clip 2 (only 1). Also, while 4 people considered Clip 1 to have strange pronunciation, only 1 thought

the same for Clip 2. In addition, 5 people considered Clip 1 to have exaggerated pronunciation, while 2 people thought the same for Clip 2.

In the participants' own comments, some of them said that they considered Clip 2 to be the most educated one, and that they could use this type of English in an academic context. Also, a few participants mentioned that Clip 2's English was something they would hear in a news broadcast. One of the participants also compared Clip 1 and Clip 2 in his or her comments, identifying Clip 1 as a Southern and Clip 2 as a Midwestern dialect, even though both of the dialects were in fact Southern. The reason for this is likely that since Clip 2 lacks notable dialectal phonemic features, it is easy to consider it a Standard American English dialect, unlike Clip 1, where the Southern intonation and pronunciation are more recognizable

Clip 3 (Anniston, Alabama) was also considered more educated than Clip 1: 10 participants considered it standard and 6 participants thought it was highly educated, while no one considered it uneducated. Just like with Clip 2, when the participants wrote their own comments, they mentioned that Clip 3 sounded like the dialects spoken in news broadcasts. They also mentioned that Clip 2 and Clip 3 sounded more educated to them, and just like with Clip 2, they could see this type of English being used in an academic setting.

While it appears that Clip 3 was viewed as equally educated to Clip 2, the results of the survey indicate that it was still viewed as slightly less educated than Clip 2. For example, when comparing the number of participants who considered the clips standard (Clip 2: 13/ Clip 3: 10), non-standard (Clip 2: 1/ Clip 3: 3), or highly educated (Clip 2: 7/Clip 3: 6), it becomes clear that Clip 2 was considered slightly more educated than Clip 3. It is likely that more participants identified the dialect region of Clip 3 as Southern, which had some effect on their views about the education level of the speaker.

Clip 3 was also considered to contain strange pronunciation by 4 participants, the same amount as with Clip 1. On the other hand, as many as 6 participants thought that Clip 3 featured unauthentic pronunciation, a higher amount than for Clip 1 (i.e. 2). In addition, the number of participants who considered Clip 3 positive was lower than for the first two

clips (Clip 1: 10/ Clip 2: 12/ Clip 3: 8). Still, the fact that Clip 3 was perceived as quite highly educated by many participants could mean that some of them did not recognize the dialect region (or did not discover any notable phonemic features) and considered the dialect academically alright, or that they recognized the dialect and thought it had some exaggerated features, but did not think that Clip 3 in overall was too dialectal. As Clip 3 has an occurrence of the *pen/pin* merger, it is possible that it was viewed differently to Clip 2, which did not have this feature.

Clip 4, featuring a speaker from Houston, Texas, was notably viewed as being different from Clip 2 (Lewisville, Texas) by the participants: while Clip 2 was considered to be the most highly educated one, the participants viewed Clip 4 as a much less educated dialect. This is seen in their answers: only 1 participant agreed that the adjective “*highly educated*” described Clip 4’s dialect, which, when comparing the numbers for the other clips (Clip 1: 0/ Clip 2: 7/ Clip 3: 6), means that only Clip 1’s dialect was considered more uneducated than that of Clip 4’s. Also, Clip 1 and Clip 4 were the only clips where the participants agreed with the adjective “*uneducated*” (Clip 1: 8/ Clip 2: 0/ Clip 3: 0/ Clip 4: 4).

As many as 10 participants thought that Clip 4 featured exaggerated pronunciation, a higher number than the other clips had (Clip 1: 5/ Clip 2: 2/ Clip 3: 3). The number of people who considered Clip 4 to have dialectal pronunciation was also the second-highest out of all the clips (Clip 1: 13/ Clip 2: 1/ Clip 3: 3/ Clip 4: 5).

The different ratios between Clip 2 and Clip 4 show that a speaker’s dialect region is not as important a factor as his or her individual dialect, and that the dialects are received very differently by others depending on their phonemic features and intonation. In Clip 2’s case, the fact that the dialect resembles Standard American English gives it a more favorable reception, whereas with Clip 4, the more prominent dialectal features might make it seem less educated.

Unlike Clip 1, which was still considered “*positive*” by 10 participants despite also being viewed as uneducated, Clip 4 was considered “*positive*” by only 3 participants (Clip 1: 10/ Clip 2: 12/ Clip 3: 8/ Clip 4: 3). Furthermore, while none of the dialects were

described as “*negative*” by the majority of the participants, Clip 4 still had the highest number in this category (Clip 1: 3/ Clip 2: 1/ Clip 3: 2/ Clip 4: 4). Contrasting these numbers with the ratios for “*highly educated*” (Clip 1: 0/ Clip 2: 7/ Clip 3: 6/ Clip 4: 1) and “*uneducated*” (Clip 1: 8/ Clip 2: 0/ Clip 3: 0/ Clip 4: 4) gives no direct correlation between “*positive*”/“*negative*” and “*highly educated*”/“*uneducated*.” This makes it likely that the participants did not associate the adjective “*negative*” with low education level.

5.4 Conclusions on the Data

To summarize, the participants viewed some clips as more educated than the others: Clip 2 and Clip 3 were seen as the most educated ones, while Clip 1 was not considered very educated, and Clip 4 was perceived to be a more educated one than Clip 1, but still less educated than Clip 2 or Clip 3. It appears that to many participants, distinct Southern U.S. English features, such as notable glide deletion (/fa:v/ instead of /faIv/, Clip 1) made them consider the dialects less educated than if they featured phonemic features which were closer to Standard American English (Clip 2). In fact, some of the dialects (Clip 2 and Clip 3) were actually thought of as being Standard American English or Midwestern ones by the participants, as can be seen in their comments. Also, 8 participants disagreed with the statement “*The accents in the clips sound similar to each other,*” while only 2 people agreed, and 4 were unsure. These answers make it appear likely that many of the participants did not consider all of the dialects to belong to the same dialect region, or at least that they did not see similarities between all of the dialects.

Furthermore, the dialect region of the clips was not the decisive factor on the participants’ perception of their level of education, but the actual way the speakers of the clips spoke: there was a notable difference in the perception of the Texas dialects presented in Clip 2 and Clip 4. The fact that a dialect from Texas (which is often stereotyped as featuring the most noticeable SAE and considered uneducated by the media) received the largest number of positive answers for the categories “*standard*” and “*highly educated,*” whereas another Texas dialect received less positive answers for the same categories, clearly shows that SAE as a dialect region features many different speakers. Some of these

speakers might have a more distinct dialect with various phonemic features, while others might have one that does not appear to be noticeably different from Standard American English. Yet both dialects belong to the SAE dialect region, and qualify as “Southern dialects.” The popular stereotypes of SAE as uneducated in the media seem to solely focus on the dialects that have easily identifiable phonemic features while not taking into account the diversity of SAE dialects.

The participants’ being university students likely had an effect on the answers of the questionnaire: as they have likely had more overall exposure to the English language and have studied its features more, they are able to distinguish between the different dialects more easily than other Finnish people. However, since British English is often very prominent in an academic context in Finland, it is also possible that some of the participants’ answers reflect their personal English preferences: for example, as many as 10 participants agreed with the statement “*The English you speak is different from the accents in the clips,*” while only 1 disagreed and 3 were unsure. This number might be different if the participants of the survey had been native U.S. English speakers, and they might have reflected differently on the education level of some of the dialects. Still, the fact that only 1 participant agreed with the statement “*You wouldn’t personally use this kind of English in an academic environment,*” whereas 9 participants disagreed and 4 were unsure shows that the participants were not generally opposed to U.S. English regardless of their own personal preferences.

While the university students considered some of the dialects less educated, their general perception of them does not appear to be overly harsh, as is evidenced by the low amount of positive answers to the category “*negative*” (Clip 1: 3/ Clip 2: 1/ Clip 3: 2/ Clip 4: 4). This creates another possibility: that the participants’ university education, in fact, means that they are more open-minded about the different varieties of English, and do not therefore react overly negatively to dialects with distinct phonemic features.

The influence of the media was also clear in the participants’ answers, as all 14 of them agreed with the statements “*You have encountered accents that are similar to these in the media*” and “*The English presented in some of the clips sounds familiar to you.*” Since they have been influenced by the media, it is likely that the media’s portrayal of SAE has

affected their views on some of the dialects with more noticeable dialectal features to some degree. However, as mentioned above, their university education has likely had an equal influence on them.

It should be noted that *The Speech Accent Archive* had included phonemic transcripts for the first two audio clips (Atlanta, Georgia and Lewisville, Texas), which means that some of the participants' answers might have been slightly affected as a result. For example, it might have been easier for the participants to notice dialectal pronunciation in Clip 1 and the lack of it in Clip 2 due to the fact the transcript portrayed the speakers' pronunciation. On the other hand, looking at the results for the clips, it seems likely that the transcript did not in fact influence the participants' opinion greatly: for example, more participants found strange, exaggerated, and unauthentic pronunciation in Clip 4 (5/10/4 respectively), which did not feature a phonemic transcription, than in Clip 1 (4/5/2). This makes it clear that the participants could find specific phonemic features even without the help of a phonemic transcription, and thus, the results of the survey are accurate.

Even if the results were influenced by the transcripts, it should be noted that two of the three questions (“*Which clips are described by the following adjectives in your opinion?*” and “*Do you agree with the following statements?*”) had a greater focus on the participants' own views and their ability to actually listen to the audio clips to determine their qualities. For example, to determine how accurately adjectives such as “*positive,*” “*negative,*” “*highly educated,*” and “*uneducated*” described the audio clips, the participants needed to listen to the speakers' speech and form an opinion on it. In these cases, the participants' answers are more likely to reflect how the dialects sounded like to them personally, meaning that a phonemic transcript would not have influenced their views on the audio clips.

It should also be mentioned that the speakers' birthplaces were in fact mentioned on *The Speech Accent Archive's* website, albeit they were not highlighted prominently. The results of the study (such as the fact that the dialects were not considered similar by many participants, and that some of them described the dialects of Clip 2 and Clip 3 as Standard American English) make it very likely that this information was not noticed by the majority of the speakers, and they were not influenced by it.

To conclude, the results of the survey point out that while there are Southern U.S. dialects whose phonemic features are considered uneducated, there are also many that are viewed as highly educated. The perceived education level is largely dependent on the individual speaker's dialect and its phonemic features. It is true that speech with many noticeable phonemic features typical of SAE appears to be perceived as less educated than if there are not as many features present. However, not everyone connects low education level with negativity: the majority of the participants did not view the dialects that were considered less educated negatively. The results of the study also indicate that in general, the university students could distinguish between different dialects depending on their phonemic features, and did not perceive all of them as similar despite their shared dialect region. This proves that SAE, like many other dialect regions, is diverse and keeps developing and changing phonemically. In addition, its dialects are not uniform, but instead have varying phonemic features and intonation.

Further research into the topic of SAE and its reception is recommended. A larger scale study could involve even more participants: for example, students from different universities (and potentially from different countries), multiple demographics (including university students, linguists, native speakers, non-native speakers, and teachers), and people with different skill levels in English. Another possible area of research is observing the interactions between SAE speakers and other English speakers, and analyzing if or how the SAE speaker's dialect affects their interaction. A larger scale study could also research the history and development of one or multiple dialects extensively, and combine this research with surveys to discover how specific dialects are generally received by different people.

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Appendix

The Speech Accent Archive: <http://accent.gmu.edu/>

Clip 1: http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_language.php?function=detail&speakerid=83

Clip 2: http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_language.php?function=detail&speakerid=125

Clip 3: http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_language.php?function=detail&speakerid=1531

Clip 4: <http://accent.gmu.edu/searchsaa.php?function=detail&speakerid=1492>

The Questionnaire

Listening to American English Accents

Listen to the following audio clips (copy/paste the url on the address bar)

Clip 1 http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_language.php?function=detail&speakerid=83

Clip 2 <http://accent.gmu.edu/searchsaa.php?function=detail&speakerid=905>

Clip 3 http://accent.gmu.edu/browse_language.php?function=detail&speakerid=1531

Clip 4 <http://accent.gmu.edu/searchsaa.php?function=detail&speakerid=1492>

Which clips are described by the following adjectives in your opinion?


	Clip 1	Clip 2	Clip 3	Clip 4
Standard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-Standard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Positive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Highly Educated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uneducated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serious-sounding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not serious	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unclear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entertaining	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>


Do any of the clips have any of the following features?


	Clip 1	Clip 2	Clip 3	Clip 4
Strange pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exaggerated pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unauthentic pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dialectal pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you agree with the following statements? (You can give additional details on your answers below the questions if you need to)

	True	False	Unsure
1. The accents in the clips sound similar to each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Some of the clips sound more educated than the other clips	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The English presented in some of the clips sounds familiar to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The English you speak is different from the accents in the clips	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. You wouldn't personally use this kind of English in an academic environment (university courses, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. You have encountered accents that are similar to these in the media	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 