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## Perceptual Dialectology of Tulsan Speakers of English

Andrew Carter

*University of Kentucky*, [a.chase@uky.edu](mailto:a.chase@uky.edu)

Author ORCID Identifier:

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7567-4179>

Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2023.296>

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Andrew Carter, Student

Dennis R. Preston, Major Professor

Kevin B. McGowan, Director of Graduate Studies

PERCEPTUAL DIALECTOLOGY OF  
TULSAN SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Linguistic Theory and Typology in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Andrew Chase Carter

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Dennis R. Preston, Professor of Linguistics

Lexington, Kentucky

2023

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<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-7567-4179>

## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### PERCEPTUAL DIALECTOLOGY OF TULSAN SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

The present study analyzes new interviews from fifteen Tulsan speakers of English and maps produced by draw-a-map tasks. The interviews and subsequent map tasks were conducted over the course of the winter of 2021 for the purpose of this thesis and have been analyzed for folk linguistic information about the perceptions of Tulsa and the rest of the state. The study finds that Tulsan speakers hold similar dialectal perceptions about both their own city and other locations as their fellow Oklahomans, and also provides evidence of a deteriorating faith among Tulsans in the existence of the northern-southern dialectal divide compared to the urban-rural dialectal divide.

**KEYWORDS:** Perceptual Dialectology, Southern Speech, Rural Speech, Oklahoma

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Andrew Chase Carter

*(Name of Student)*

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07/11/2023

Date

PERCEPTUAL DIALECTOLOGY OF  
TULSAN SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

By  
Andrew Chase Carter

Dr. Dennis R. Preston

---

Director of Thesis

Dr. Kevin B. McGowan

---

Director of Graduate Studies

07/11/2023

---

Date

## DEDICATION

To those who arrived, no matter where they arrived.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following thesis is an individual work, but that I completed it is a testament to the quality of support I received during the process. The gratitude that I feel is too profound to be accurately expressed by this page, and so I hope my terseness is indicative of the gravity of my feelings, as you all must know it is the truest to my spirit. Were I to type any more pleonastically, it simply would not be believable.

To my committee chair and members, who taught me to love my own research,

To the faculty at the University of Kentucky, who taught me how to conduct it,

To my colleagues in the program, who helped me survive it,

To my professors at the University of Oklahoma, who set me up to achieve it,

And to *Tha Crew* from Tulsa, who saw me through every semester of it,

Thank you.

In addition, I must acknowledge my wonderful respondents, who, in the midst of a global pandemic, provided bountiful in-person linguistic data out of the goodness of their characters. The research would, quite literally, have been impossible without their generous contributions. All mistakes following are my own.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview of Thesis

Oklahoma represents a linguistic borderland between three commonly-recognized dialectological regions: The South, The West (occasionally The Southwest), and The Midland (occasionally The Midwest). Maps of dialectal regions such as Labov et al. (2006)'s and Benson (2003)'s boundary representations often display borders that cross throughout Oklahoma, and which generally include Oklahoma's two major population centers, Tulsa and Oklahoma City, within the Midland or Midwest regions, contrasting with the rest of the state. Furthermore, Southard (1993) demonstrates elements of midwestern features in Oklahoma, and dialectological work from the Research On the Dialects of English in Oklahoma (RODEO, described in (Bakos 2013)) study indicates that Oklahomans from across the state associate these regions, and Tulsa in particular, with elements also associated with both urbanity (sophistication, speed, economic status) and midwestern speech (neutrality, clarity).

The present study analyzes new interviews from fifteen Tulsan speakers of English and maps produced by draw-a-map tasks. The interviews and subsequent map tasks were conducted over the course of the winter of 2021 for the purpose of this thesis and have been analyzed for folk linguistic information about the perceptions of Tulsa and the rest of the state. The study finds that Tulsan speakers hold similar dialectal perceptions about both their own city and other locations as their fellow Oklahomans, and also provides evidence of a deteriorating faith among Tulsans in the existence of the northern-southern dialectal divide compared to the urban-rural dialectal divide.

### 1.2 Overview of Structure

The structure of this work will be as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the original goals of the interview and map task project and explains their development into this thesis. It then contains a review of literature first regarding Oklahoman history and Oklahoma speech identity, and then second regarding the research relevant to the analysis of the presented data. Chapter 3 provides a description of the data gathering process. Chapter 4 briefly introduces each respondent and their respective map, and then presents, according to theme, various analyses and interpretations of the data. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes the thesis and suggests avenues for possible improvements as well as future research.

## CHAPTER 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 The Goals of This Project

There were three initial aims of this project. The primary goal was completely documentary in nature; by documenting Tulsan language attitudes, interview excerpts, and drawn maps, a slice of spatial, temporal, and perceptual information is retrieved and archived for use in future research, either my own or someone else's. The secondary goal was to compare and contrast the data with RODEO data in order to elicit both an urban vs. rural comparison, as well as a temporal comparison (RODEO's 2012 and 2013 vs. this project's 2021). For instance, do Tulsans draw the same shapes as RODEO respondents? Do they use similar language to describe themselves as RODEO respondents do to describe Tulsans? And are any changing trends in Oklahoma perceptual dialectology visible by comparing this nearly decade-long split? Finally, the tertiary goal was to analyze maps and interviews on their own basis through the lens of previous sociolinguistic and perceptual dialectological theory, as will be discussed in the literature review section. This tertiary goal eventually became the bulk of the project, and a majority of the thesis presented as follows will detail my analysis of the respondent data.

### 2.2 Oklahoma

Many places in the United States can claim to be linguistic borderlands, but Oklahoma in particular presents a unique case due to its recent and rapid settlement. In this section, I will give an overview of the history of Oklahoma and Tulsa in order to provide a background for the present study.

#### 2.2.1 The Settlement History of Oklahoma and Tulsa

Although Oklahoma is widely known as a state that is home to several indigenous tribes and reservations, many of these tribes are not native to the area. Following its purchase by the United States from France, much of Louisiana Territory became the destination of America's Indian Removal policy, and indigenous peoples from the northeast and Southeast woodlands were forcibly relocated into the territory for several decades.

As the territory was gradually converted into several states, including Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska, the area that would eventually become known as Oklahoma was continuously designated for the relocation of tribes. The most infamous of these relocations, the Trail of Tears, encompassed the removal of five nations, now known as the Five Tribes of Oklahoma, between 1830 and 1850. These tribes went on to occupy the Eastern portions of the area, which would come to be known as Indian Territory. At the pressure of white settlers who demanded the right to settle the area, it was split into western and eastern halves, respectively called Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory, in 1890. The western territory, which was rapidly inhabited by white settlers, was joined with the eastern Indian Territory in 1907 immediately prior to Oklahoma's statehood.

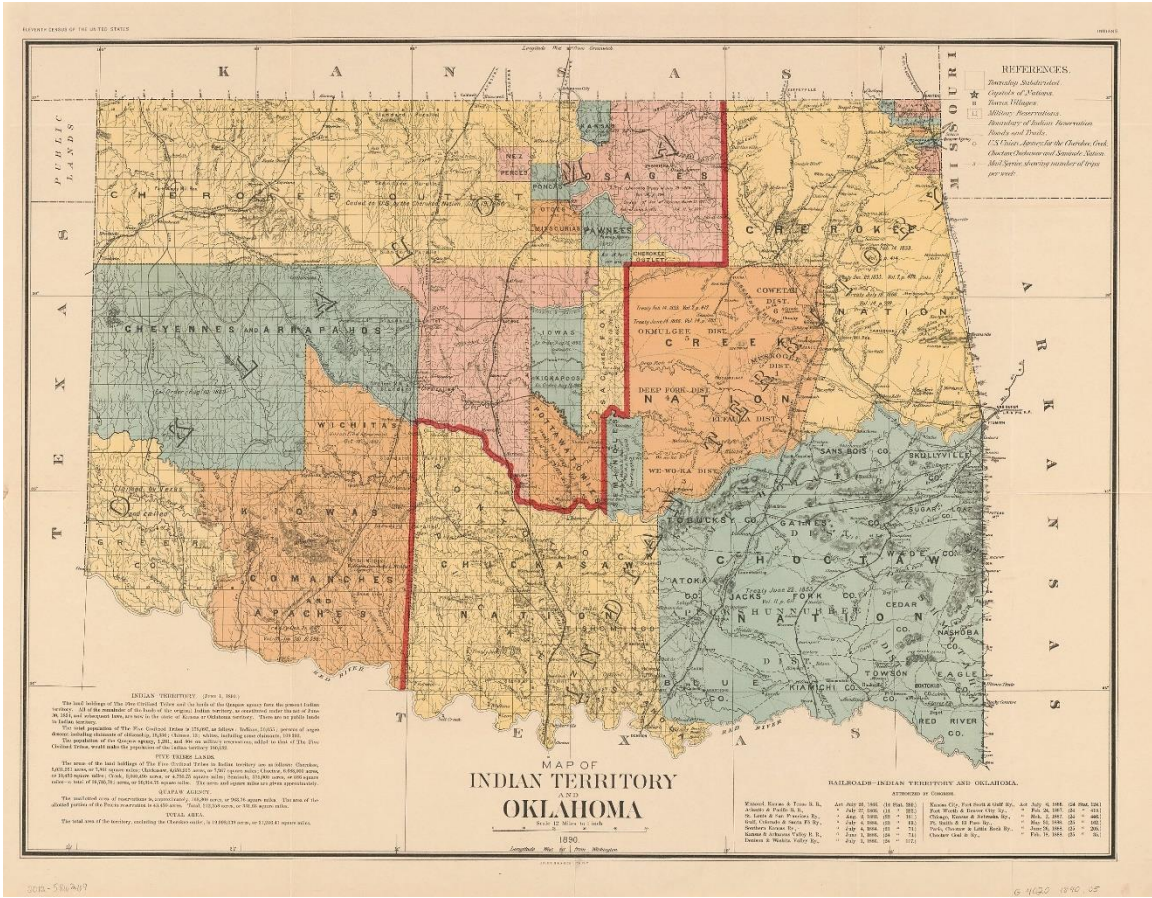


Figure 2-1 The Border of Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory in 1890 (Image Source: United States Bureau of the Census, on Wikipedia)

While Oklahoma City was founded in central Oklahoma in what was then known as the “Unassigned Lands” only a decade before statehood, Tulsa has always been a part of Indian Territory, as it was founded by Muscogee Creek survivors of Indian Removal in 1836, and consequently named “Tallasi”, or “Old Town”. Today, it still straddles three reservations: The Osage, Cherokee, and Creek nations. Due to the massive influx of migrants following the 1905 discovery of the Glen Pool oil reserve, Tulsa’s size grew rapidly during the early 20th century and a vast amount of wealth flowed into the city, and along with it, a deep connection to the oil industry.

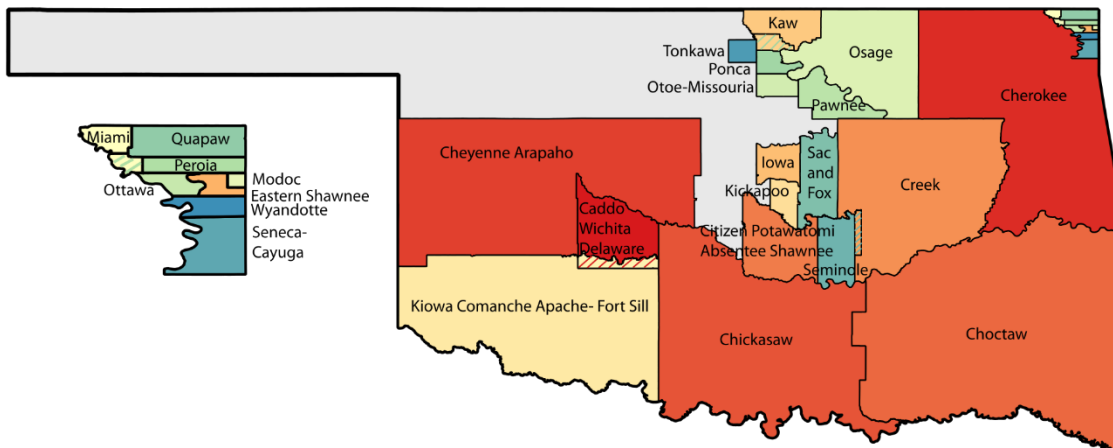


Figure 2-2 Map of Oklahoma Tribal Jurisdictions (Image source: Wikipedia)

During this time, Tulsa was also home to the Greenwood District, known contemporaneously as Black Wall Street, one of the largest concentrations of African American wealth and commerce in the United States at the time. In 1921, Black Wall Street was devastated during the Tulsa Race Massacre, and the economic status of the area still has not recovered to this day.

Tulsa is the second largest city in Oklahoma after Oklahoma City, and despite its location in what was Indian Territory a little over 100 years ago, is largely perceived by other Oklahomans to be relatively comparable to Oklahoma City in terms of speech patterns and styles, as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

### 2.2.2 Oklahoman Speech Identity

Oklahoma is at a crossroads of linguistic boundaries. Maps which chart the American dialectal regions such as the those featured in (Labov et al. 2006) frequently present a dip in the Midland section which excludes Tulsa and Oklahoma City from the South region. This reflects a reality in both dialectal perception and actual language production (Southard 1993). Thus, in order to understand the relationship between Tulsan speakers and their surroundings, we must first discuss the nature of southern and midwestern speech perceptions in America.



Figure 2-3 North American Dialects (Labov et al. 2006)

There exists a vast wealth of research into the nature of southern speech in America, describing each of which is beyond the scope of this project (Bounds et al. (2021), Chun (2018), Johnstone (1998)), but which thoroughly demonstrate the nature of southern speech as being associated with several qualities: among them, rurality, simplicity, kindness, stupidity, conservative politics, and associated terms of disparagement such as “hick”, “redneck” and “hillbilly”. These perceptions generally hold true in the Oklahoman perception of southern identity, both from RODEO data and the interviews conducted for this project. Nonetheless, as being southern is subject to negotiation, change, and regional specificity (Cramer (2013), Cramer and Preston (2018)), the methodology for the interviews for this project assumed that Tulsans did not inherently make these associations with southern identity, and, consequently, did not relate these stereotypes or associate them with any particular style until the participant did so first.

In contrast, midwestern speech has been documented to be perceived by Americans as “neutral” or “unmarked” (Carmichael 2016, Bonfiglio 2002) leading to a perpetuating myth that midwesterners “have no accent”. Participants in Carmichael’s research describe midwestern speech as sounding “like news anchors”, a direct contrast to respondent Andy in Hall-Lew and Stephens (2012)’s research, who describes his own country talk to be on the opposite end of the spectrum as the “CNN voice”. In general, these perceptions are deeply-held in the data gathered for this thesis, and as such, the Oklahoman perceptions of a “neutral midwestern” accent and a “marked southern” accent form a dichotomy which exists at the forefront of many respondent’s language ideologies.



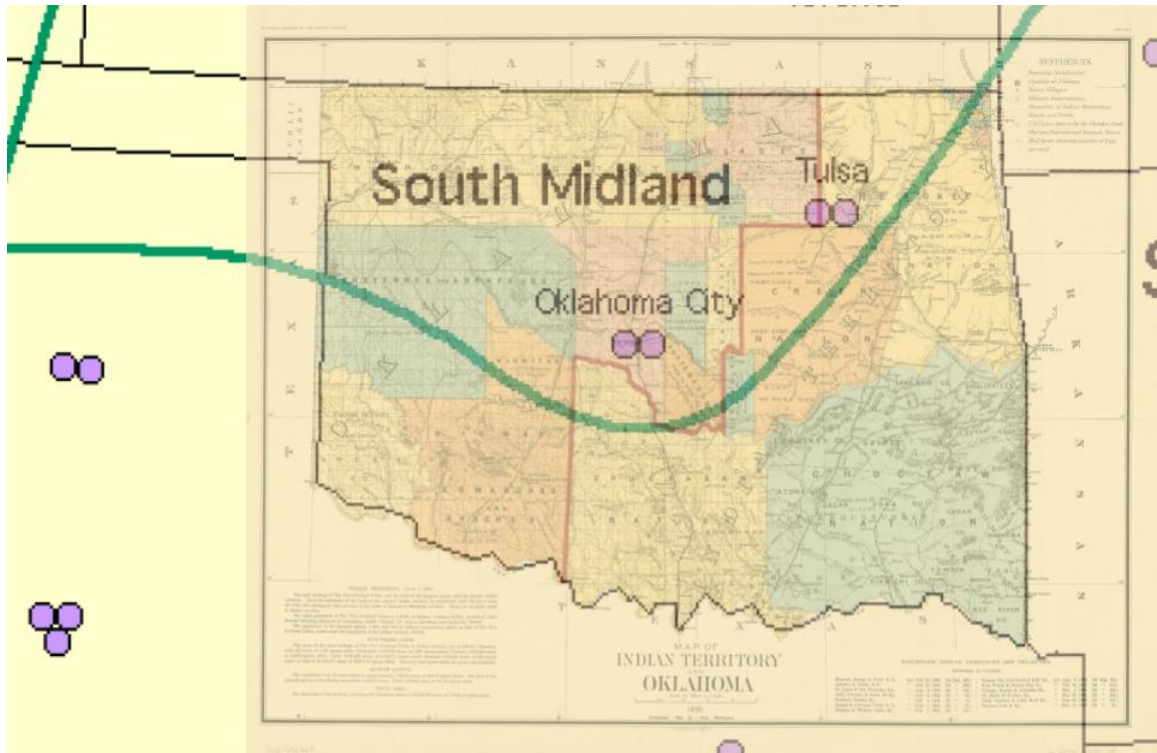


Figure 2-4 Indian Territory borders overlaid with Labov et al. (2006)

As a whole, Oklahoma’s speech patterns according to Southard (1993) can be vaguely partitioned down the historical line dividing Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory, as shown in Figure 2-4, which overlays Labov et al. (2006)’s dialectal map with the historical boundaries of the territories in 1890. This observation and the influence of the demographics on Oklahoma language production are well-documented (see (Tillery, Bailey, and Wikle 2004), (Bailey and Tillery 1996), and (Bailey (2001))) but are rarely reflected in folk knowledge of Oklahoma dialectology. While Oklahomans in the RODEO project occasionally note particularly southern-sounding communities along the Texoma border in Southern Oklahoma, or “Little Dixie” in Southeastern Oklahoma, the genealogy of these areas is almost never recognized. In other words, when questioned on the spatiality of dialects in Oklahoma, Oklahomans are exceptionally unlikely to draw a line down the middle of Oklahoma and ascribe a clean southern-midwestern split along the historical borders of Indian and Oklahoma territory, as would an historical linguist or phonetician.

Instead, Oklahomans have a tendency to perceive the southern-midwestern dichotomy as one of urbanity and rurality. This dichotomy is visible in perceptions of Tulsan speech, which has a reputation for being less southern (and consequently less everything-associated-with-southern-speech) than the rest of Oklahoma. Maps from the RODEO project frequently feature a label near Tulsa such as “no dialect”, “less twangy”, “less accent”, and occasionally “midwest”. This trend is displayed in the following figure from RODEO, a map drawn by Angel, a resident of Stillwater, Oklahoma:

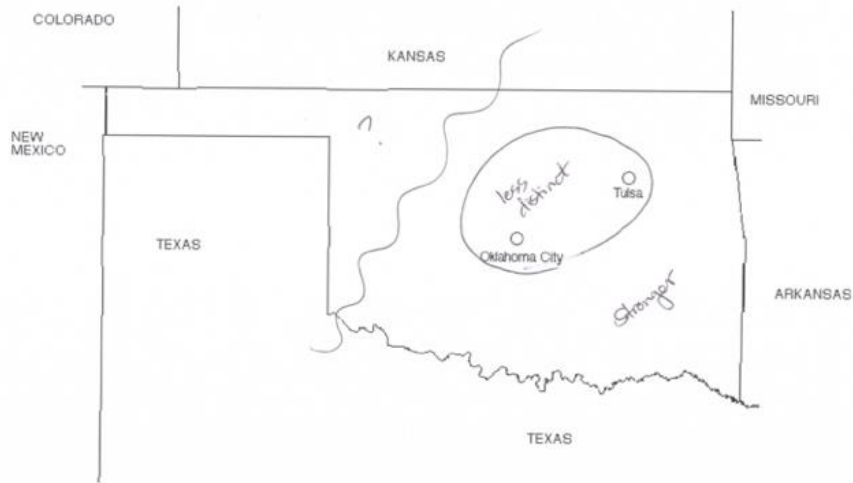


Figure 2-5 Angel's Map (RODEO)

The maps from the RODEO project are drawn by respondents from all over Oklahoma, but lack sufficient data from Tulsa, one of the state’s major population centers, and crucially, one of the most-highlighted and polarizing locations on Oklahoman dialectal attitude maps. Thus, while Oklahoman attitudes of Tulsan speech are well-documented, we have yet to see the other side of the coin; do Tulsans view their own speech through the same lens, and with the same qualities, as other Oklahomans view them? And do Tulsans hold similar language ideologies about the rest of the state to Oklahomans?

### 2.3 Theoretical Literature Review

This section of the literature review will focus on the history, application, and explanation of perceptual dialectology, and the sociolinguistic theory which informed the majority of the analyses for this project.

#### 2.3.1 Perceptual Dialectology

This project is a perceptual dialectological investigation of Tulsa and Oklahoma. As such, it is imperative to describe and identify what perceptual dialectology is, and how

it fits into the world of linguistic research. Briefly, perceptual dialectology is an academic tradition of uncovering folk linguistic knowledge through visual analysis of landscapes and perceptions. This can be accomplished through map analysis or interview analysis. In other words, to find out what people think about language, you must simply go out and ask them.

The earliest ventures into perceptual dialectology are typically accepted (Preston 2017) to be dialectological projects in the Netherlands and Japan (Rensink ([1955] 1999), Sibata ([1959] 1999)). While perceptual dialectological work can, and has, come in many forms, the variety employed by this project is the draw-a-map task introduced in Preston (1982). In this style of task, respondents are given a mostly (sometimes completely, as in the case of this particular project) unlabeled map of an area and are encouraged to label the map with their own intuitions about speaking styles. The goals of this manner of exercise are not only to elicit terminology (such as ‘hickish’, ‘neutral’, ‘sophisticated’, etc.) but also to visualize speech boundaries. For instance, do respondents draw boundaries which align with geographical features such as rivers or mountains as in (Cramer 2010)? Do they draw bubbles around speech communities perceived to be insular? And which elements of speech are the most important to delineate visually?

For example, in Figure 2-5, the respondent “Angel” drew a bubble shape around Oklahoma City and Tulsa, labeling them as “less distinct”; as the bubble is tightly constrained around the two major cities on the map, it is evident that Angel associates the cities with a “less distinct” accent than the rest of Oklahoma, but perhaps also extends this “less distinct”-ness to the areas directly near or surrounding the cities, such as Stroud, Chandler, and Norman. The absence of labels, too, is informative: Angel did not categorize areas with geographical terms such as hills or plains, nor use locational distinguishers such as “across the river” or “on the south side of the state”, and no distinguishing marks follow any major geographical features.

A second example from Preston (1996) (Figure 2-6) demonstrates more results of the draw-a-map task: the respondent closely circles California and labels it as “high class” and “stuck up”, producing a shape which vaguely conforms to state boundaries. In contrast, they label an entire region in the Southeastern United States as “southern talk” and “the worst English in America”, and another region encompassing West Texas, Southwest Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Eastern Arizona as “Hispanic Accent”, with both regions displaying little regard for state boundaries. These indicate an awareness of larger dialectal regions which the respondent finds homogenous and irrespective of individual state identity. Nonetheless, the respondent sees it important to pick out and circle both Chicago and Detroit for their unique speech profiles.

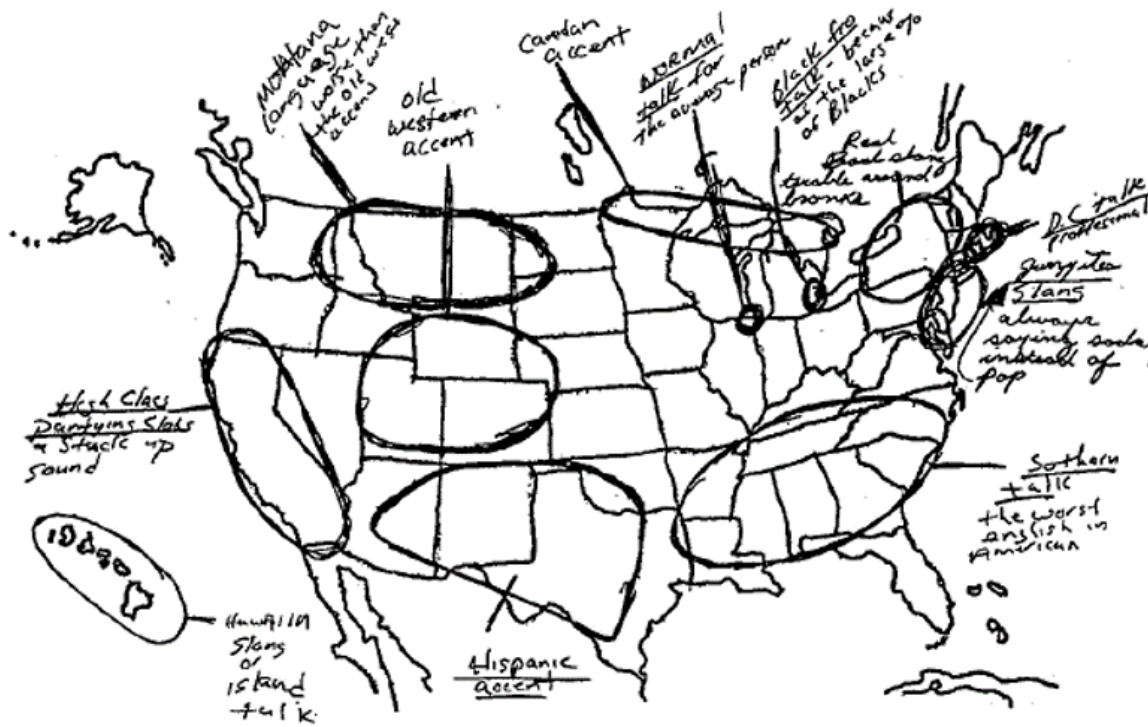


Figure 2-6 A Perceptual Dialectological Map Task Completed by a Chicago Native (Preston 1996)

In this way, the draw-a-map task reveals the most salient elements of perceptual dialectology in speakers’ minds by providing a visual representation of those aspects which are at the forefront of their imagination, and which aspects can be comfortably generalized, forgotten, or erased. However, dialectological terms such as “hick” or “country” that emerge from this project are not wholly unique to Oklahoma, and so in analyzing them, it is important to review previous linguistic research which has touched similar settings and situations.

### 2.3.2 Analytical Theory

The present study analyzes interview content on the basis of themes, perceptions, personae, and folk beliefs about dialectal areas and language ideology. This analysis is deeply, but not exclusively, influenced by Hall-Lew and Stephens (2012)’s analysis of “country talk”, both in terms of organizational structure and theoretical background. Consequently, it is worth reviewing the underpinning theoretical background to both Hall-Lew and Stephens’ work as well as this one.

Hall-Lew and Stephens’ 2012 study investigates interviews conducted in the Texoma area on the border between Oklahoma and Texas. Their findings indicate the creation of robust personae and indexical fields (described below) employed by the speakers in the area, both when constructing their own speech and the speech of outsiders. As these data are relevant to the present project not only in methodology but also in

location, they will serve as a point of comparison for the maps and interviews presented in this thesis.

The format of the discourse analysis takes the form of the “content-oriented discourse analysis” employed by Hall-Lew and Stephens (citing Preston 1994), in which responses are mostly reported in plain text, with relevant actions such as laughter or pausing noted in clerical additions. The interviews were mined for clear evidence of linguistic attitudes, and so analysis often takes place on the full sentence or phrase level as respondents relate their personal experiences. In contrast, more granular data such as phonetics are not examined in this analysis except for specific cases, such as in the case of accent imitations.

Eckert (2008)’s expansion on Silverstein (2003)’s orders of indexicality is foundational to analyzing the attitudinal expressions in this project; respondents frequently construct both what Eckert calls “indexical fields” and “personae” – matrices of qualities which are associated with each other to a degree which they can be used to index one another. For example, Hall-Lew and Stephens note that “country talk” in Texoma is associated with qualities that are both linguistic and quasi-linguistic: loud speech, stoic behavior, ruggedness and outdoorsmanship, and the cowboy persona, such that speaking “country talk” can encode these personality traits to listeners familiar with the local indexical field and personae. So too are respondents in the present study eager to associate certain speech patterns with elements of life not necessarily related to talking, including but not limited to occupation, age, lifestyle, wealth, and education.

Moreover, in the following data, these indexical fields are often inextricably linked to the relationship between urban life and rural life. In particular, just as Hall-Lew and Stephens’ respondents identified as rural speakers, strongly informing their language ideology, Tulsan speakers frequently adopt a metropolitan persona and reject rural personae. This tightened focus on identifying one’s self as an urbanite distinguished against rural folk is not without precedent: Evans (2016) questions the conclusions by previous work (Vanderbeck and Dunkley (2003), Lichter and Brown (2011)) which imply that the urban-rural dichotomy is becoming less salient for most speakers, and concludes that urban and rural indexical fields form two dichotomous elements of the “lay narrative” of Washingtonian speech communities. And while an Oklahoman might not define “country” in the same way as a Washingtonian, common threads of both country and metropolitan identifiers (further discussed in section 4.4.4.2) are visible in the responses of this project’s interviews.

It should be noted that respondents in this project frequently use geographical terms such as “southern”, “northern”, or “midwestern”, but it is fair to say that these terms are mostly not used in a strict geographical sense. Instead, they are used to position Tulsa and Oklahoma culturally and linguistically within the United States within the cultural, metaphorical spaces of “The South”, “The North”, and “The Midwest”. For example, interview respondents only infrequently placed great importance on the physical location (in terms of latitude and longitude) of Tulsa and Oklahoma when discussing southern, northern, and midwestern identity, and instead use these terms as ways of distinguishing between specific identities, such as Tulsan, Oklahoma Citian, Oklahoman, or Texan. In this way, southernness (and all elements bound within the indexical field attributed to southernness) is used as a point of contrast, can be negotiated and reimagined in order to convey a set of ideals and indexes that reflect life experience; as Cramer (2013) concludes:

“What people in Milwaukee call the South differs from what people in Louisville call the South, and so on.” This project’s analysis employs this perspective, and much like Cramer (2013) also utilizes the foundations of Agha’s (2003) enregisterment and Irvine and Gal’s (2000) recursivity to precisely report on and track these expressions. In other words, the labels that Tulsans in this study apply to all aspects of constructed personae, be they country, urban, midwestern, or southern reveal as much about the perceived enregisterment of their associated dialects as do direct statements about speech, and speakers who construct recursive patterns of language stigmatization exhibit critical information about their language attitudes.

In discussing folk perceptions of speech areas, particularly when it comes to Tulsans’ tendency to ignore, erase, or render utterly homogenous various geographical zones, this analysis also necessarily employs the deliberations on cultural prominence as investigated by Montgomery (2007). While the methodology between these studies differs, Montgomery’s efforts to uncover factors behind cultural awareness and the positioning of the north-south border of England has clear parallels to investigating how and why Tulsans position their own linguistic border, and can explain, for instance, why Tulsans seem reluctant to assign a strong linguistic persona to any singular small Oklahoman town, but can easily do so for, as an example, Texas.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Selection and Interview Conduct

Participants were selected through a snowball sample. I created a post through the status function on my personal facebook page describing the nature of the study and providing an email for contacting me, and encouraging readers to refer fellow respondents who may be interested to the post or to my contact information. The post specified that the target of the study was speakers of English who live, or had previously lived, near or in Tulsa. A few respondents were not interviewed and not included in this study: family members and close friends with whom I had previously discussed the nature of my research interests in casual conversation were not recorded.

Interviews were conducted at quiet locations chosen by the respondents. The location was usually, but not always, the respondent's home. All interviews were conducted in the winter of 2021, and so the ongoing pandemic was of concern to many participants. I wore a Kn95 mask over my mouth and nose and offered each participant the right to do so if they desired. If they invited me to remove my mask, I did so. I began each interview by providing consent forms and explaining the process of the interview, as well as showing the respondent my laptop and microphone. I reminded each participant that while I would be reporting on what they said and using the data in text form, the audio recordings themselves would remain accessible only to me, not to be published for public use. I then recorded demographic information: the history of their Tulsa residence, age, preferred gender identity, occupation, where their parents were originally from, and education level.

Once formalities were established, I began interviews with icebreakers about life in Tulsa, asking them to describe their favorite and least favorite things about life in the area, the weather, how their family came to Tulsa, or personal stories. This aspect of the interview was included in order to establish a rapport with the participants, as I deemed some level of comfort and casualness important for receiving honest labels on the map task. I then proceeded to hold a free-form conversation, working in questions about sociolinguistic qualities of Tulsan and Oklahoman speech wherever it seemed natural. My policy during conversation was to avoid mentioning any established linguistic research in order to not make respondents feel compelled to agree with whatever I said. Instead, I passively agreed with whatever they told me about their feelings on language, and took whatever facts they told me about the area at face value. I used phrases such as "that makes sense", "oh, that's true", and "yeah, I think that tracks" in order to avoid making participants double-guess their own intuitions, and if they expressed anxiety at using derogatory labels such as "redneck", I assured them that whatever came to their mind, offensive or inoffensive, was exactly what I was looking for, and that they need not feel guilty over using the terms most reasonable for them. Naturally, this was balanced against a strong principle of not coercing any information out of respondents that they were not interested in sharing of their own accord. When it became relevant, I presented the map task as a supplement to our conversation.

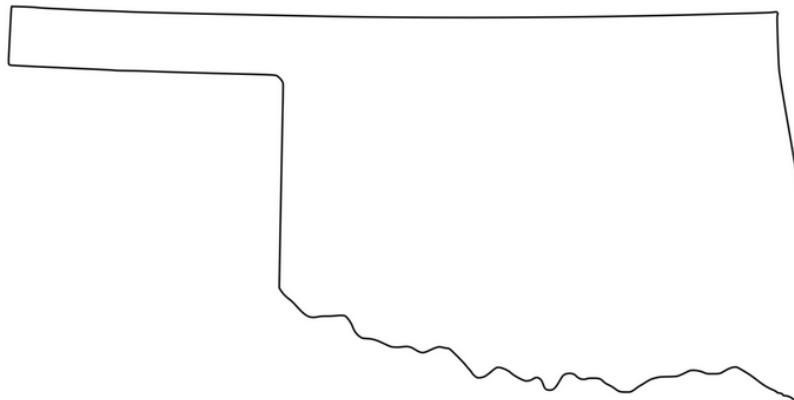
As Oklahoman perceptions of southernness, midwesternness, rurality, and urbanness are not necessarily unified, another crucial part of my interview conduct was to avoid linking any two key terms until the participant had first done so. In other words,

though it is established that speakers often associate southern identity with rurality (Hall-Lew and Stephens 2012, Evans 2016), I would not assume that a speaker’s impressions and stories about “being southern” necessarily encoded “being rural” until they made it clear that those concepts were linked. Similarly, I expressly refrained from drawing dichotomous boundaries in the opposite direction; if a speaker described a “southern accent”, I would not proceed as though this accent was necessarily non-urban unless the respondent first did so. The purpose of these policies was to elicit the most pure ideological connections and indexical fields from respondents without undue influence from conclusions drawn by previous linguistic research.

### 3.2 Map Task

The map was printed out on plain white paper and featured a blank outline of Oklahoma with instructions written below. No cities, neighboring states, or geographical features were labeled, so as to not affect which aspects of the Oklahoma landscape received the most attention from participants. The following instructions were visible on the paper, without quotation marks: “Instructions: People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.”

Below is the blank version of the map task, and the sheet that was given to respondents, printed on standard white printer paper.



**Instructions: People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.**

Figure 3-1 Map Task Sheet



I continued casual conversation about the regions of Oklahoma as each respondent drew and wrote, attempting to maintain a light and comfortable atmosphere in which the respondents could be honest about their areal speech perceptions. The exception to this was when a respondent was particularly engaged in making a highly detailed map, and was clearly giving it their full attention. In these cases, I did not attempt to chat with them while they worked unless they spoke to me first. When they were finished, we continued speaking about their feelings on the map and Oklahoman speech, as well as any outlying conversational topics.

### 3.3 Documentation and Presentation

Participant names were then randomized. In order to eliminate bias or identifying qualities in naming conventions, each participant's data entry was assigned a random number from 1-15 generated by a computer, then ordered accordingly. In ascending order, data entries were assigned a new name through the following process.

Entries were given alphabetical letter assignments in order (1:A, 2:B, 3:C, and so on). They were then assigned the most popular Oklahoman baby name of 2021 according to the United States Social Security Website ([ssa.gov](https://ssa.gov)) that aligned with their expressed gender identity. For instance, the lowest-number data entry was assigned the letter A. This particular participant identifies as female, and the most popular female A-name in Oklahoma in 2021 was Amelia.

Interviews were transcribed manually. As this study does not focus on intonation or phonetics, the transcription of these interviews highlights only the content of what is said, and not how it is said. IPA is used only when the speaker performs an accent or imitation that requires a relevant description to make their point clear to readers. Clerical comments and replacements made by me are in square brackets ([ ]). Speech is reported to the best of my ability to imitate it with as few clerical intrusions as possible. A hyphen (-) is used to indicate a respondent interrupting his or her self mid-speech, or when I am interrupted by the respondent. An ellipsis (...) following speech indicates that the speaker trailed off during their sentence. An ellipsis (...) occupying a full line between numbered lines of dialogue indicates that I have omitted adjacent speech. This is always in the interest of brevity, as the omitted speech includes side-stories, retractions, or otherwise information that is not pertinent to the point being made in the excerpt.

## CHAPTER 4. DATA AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Data Formatting Overview

The following section will provide close readings of the data collected for the purpose of this thesis, split into two sections. First, maps will be displayed in alphabetical order and respondents will be briefly introduced along with their maps. The maps will be followed by a table and series of statements which summarize the demographic information of the participants. In the second section, excerpts from interviews will be analyzed according to and organized by thematic relevance. Ages and occupations are described in present tense at the time of interviewing (winter 2021), not at the time of writing.

### 4.2 Maps and Respondents

#### 4.2.1 Amelia

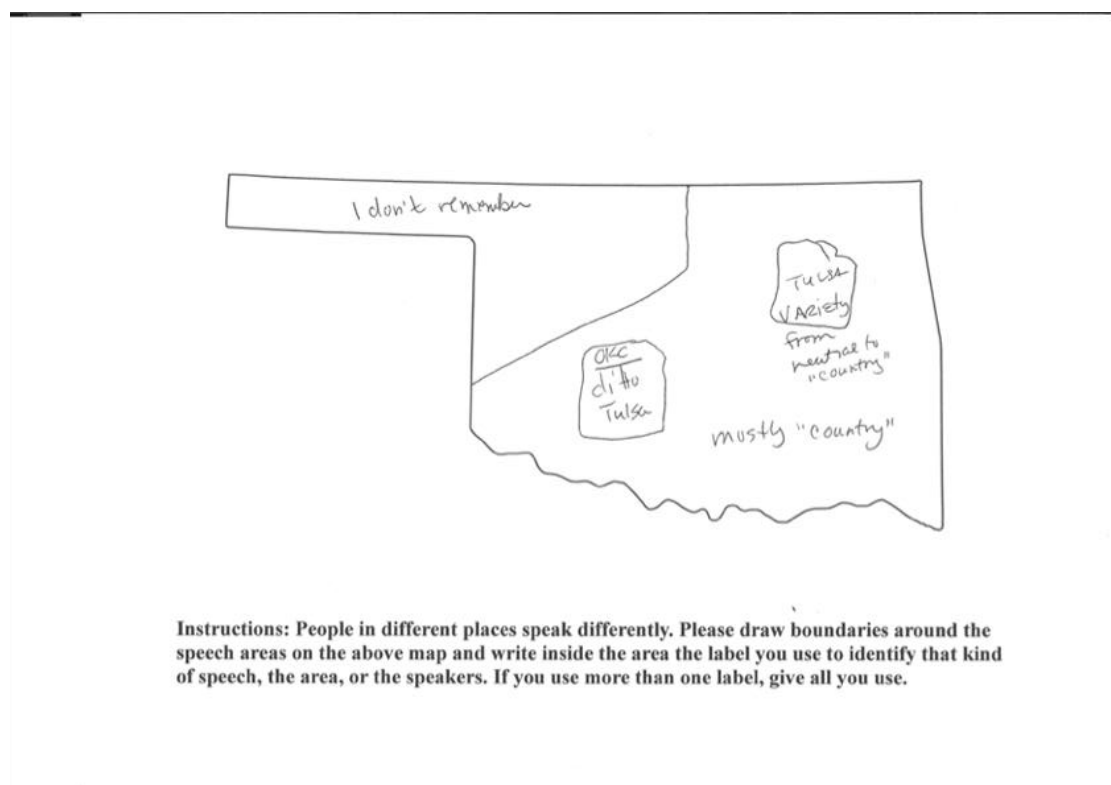


Figure 4-1 Amelia

Amelia is a 66 year old retired educator who has lived a majority of her life in Tulsa, but she claims that she “learned to talk” in Memphis. For her, the linguistic landscape is immediately and inextricably political: Amelia associates what she calls “country”

speakers with the Republican party and does not want to be mistaken for one of its members. She makes it clear that both Democrats and Republicans “say stupid things” and fully recognizes that it is unfair to assume country speakers will be conservative, but also acknowledges what she notes is the reality of living in Oklahoma, surrounded (she feels) by mostly conservatives.

#### 4.2.2 Benjamin

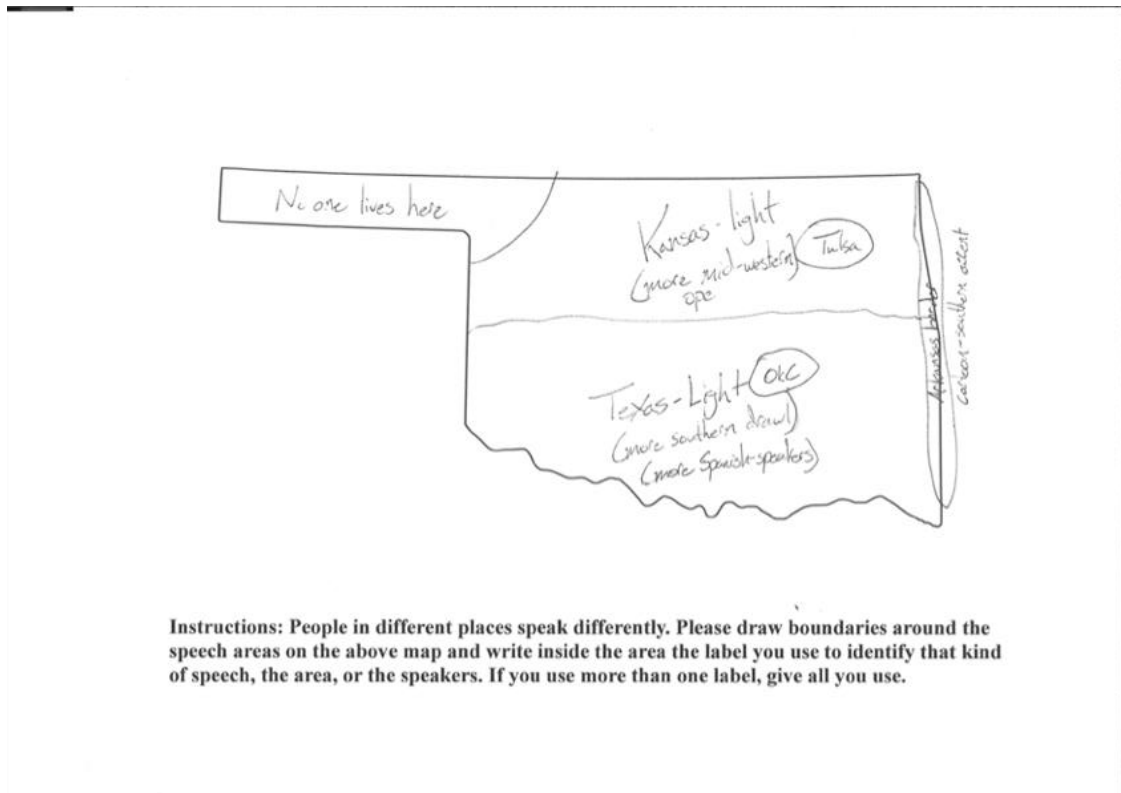


Figure 4-2 Benjamin

Benjamin is a 25 year old project management consultant who lived in Tulsa until first grade, but identifies his hometown as the nearby Oologah, where he and his family eventually moved, and where Benjamin went to high school. Benjamin sees Oklahoma as a state with what he describes as an “identity crisis” with regards to southern and midwestern identities. His map features a straight cleave through the state, separating it into “Kansas-lite” and “Texas-lite”.

4.2.3 Charlotte

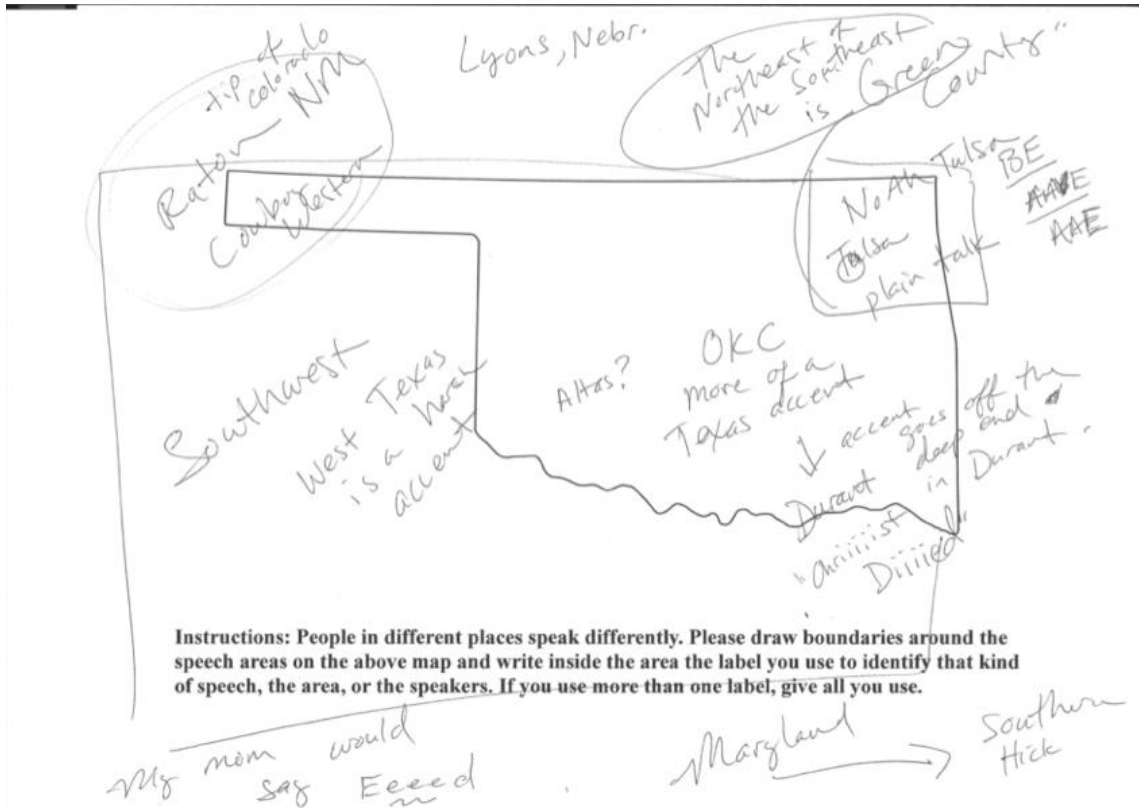
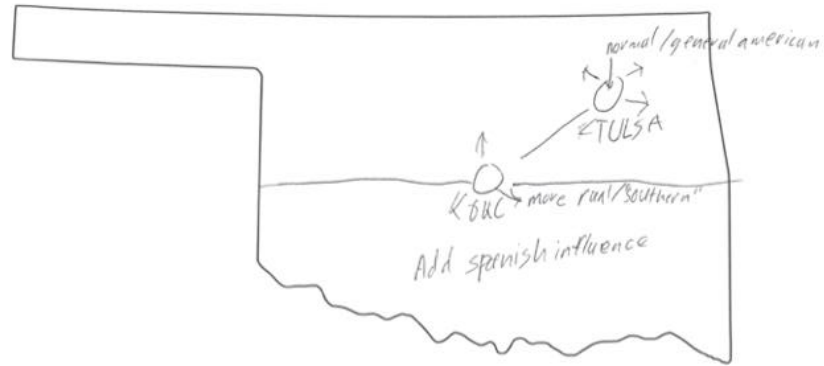


Figure 4-3 Charlotte

Charlotte is a 55 year old editor and tutor. Tulsa is a place with its own unique and important identity for Charlotte, as she has lived there her entire life (with the exception of college) and identifies strongly with the city. In her mind, Tulsa occupies a linguistic niche of both ‘plain talk’ within Oklahoma, as well as a hub for an idiosyncratic variety of African American English, particularly in North Tulsa, where she is originally from.

#### 4.2.4 David

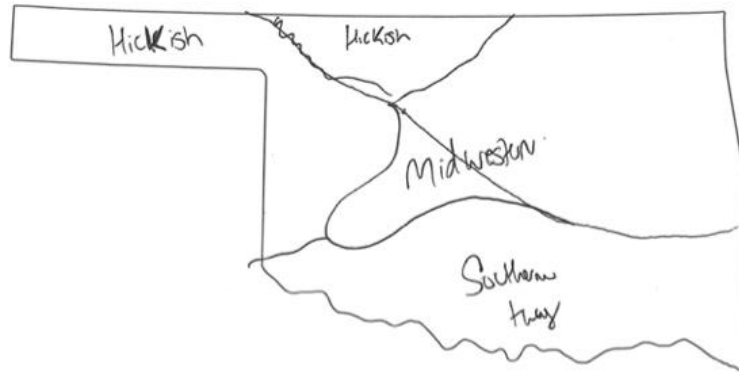


**Instructions:** People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.

Figure 4-4 David

David is a 27 year old mechanic from Tulsa with a vibrantly conscious awareness of speech identity. As a former member of the U.S. military, David has been to many places and has learned how to speak differently with different groups in order to index his identity more carefully. Moreover, the linguistic landscape that David sees is one full of conscious indexers like himself, where speakers are wrapped up in the northern-southern and urban-rural divides and construct linguistic identities in order to take their stances.

## 4.2.5 Elijah



Instructions: People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.

Figure 4-5 Elijah

Elijah is a 31 year old medical student and lifelong resident of Tulsa. Elijah identifies as a midwesterner through-and-through, and does not identify with southern identity at all. He considers Tulsa to be a diverse “melting pot” and champions this fact as one of the defining characteristics of the city.

## 4.2.6 Grayson

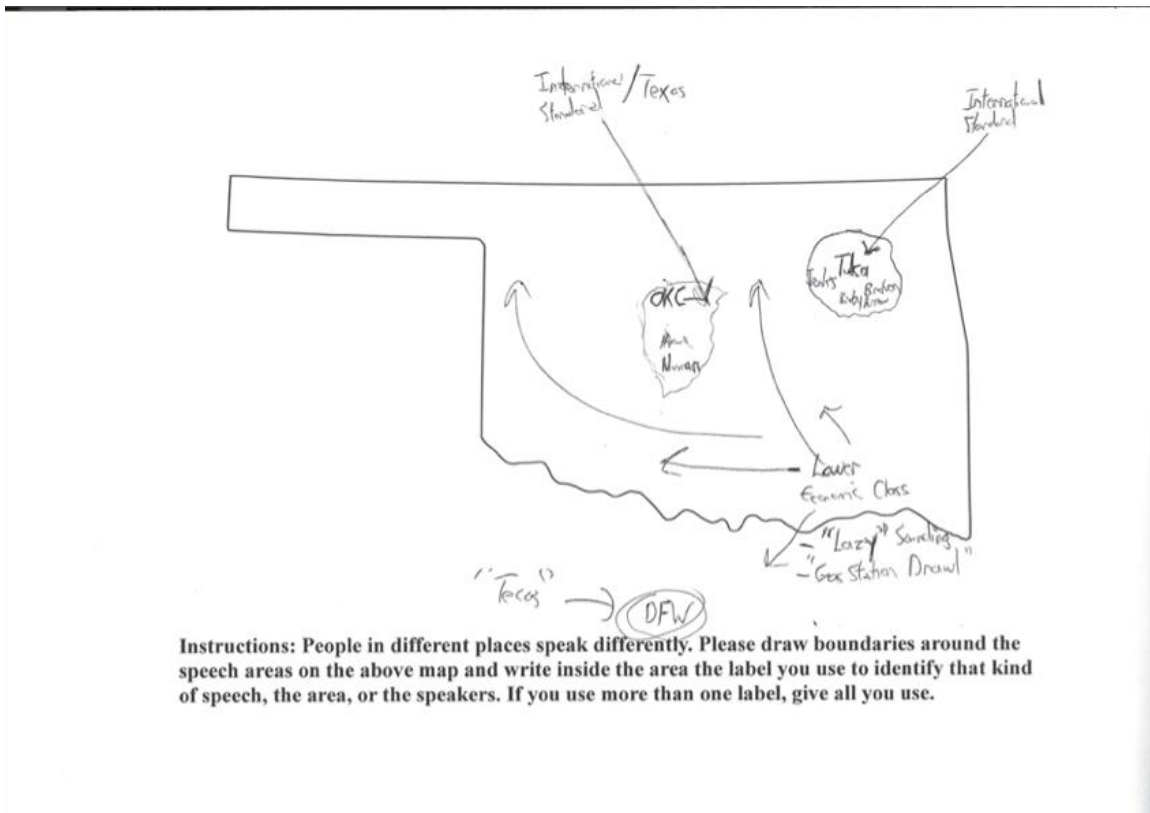


Figure 4-6 Grayson

Grayson is a 25 year old process engineer who has lived in Tulsa for most of his life. A well-traveled individual, Grayson has since renegotiated his opinions about the linguistic landscape of America based on what he has seen outside of Tulsa.

#### 4.2.7 Harper

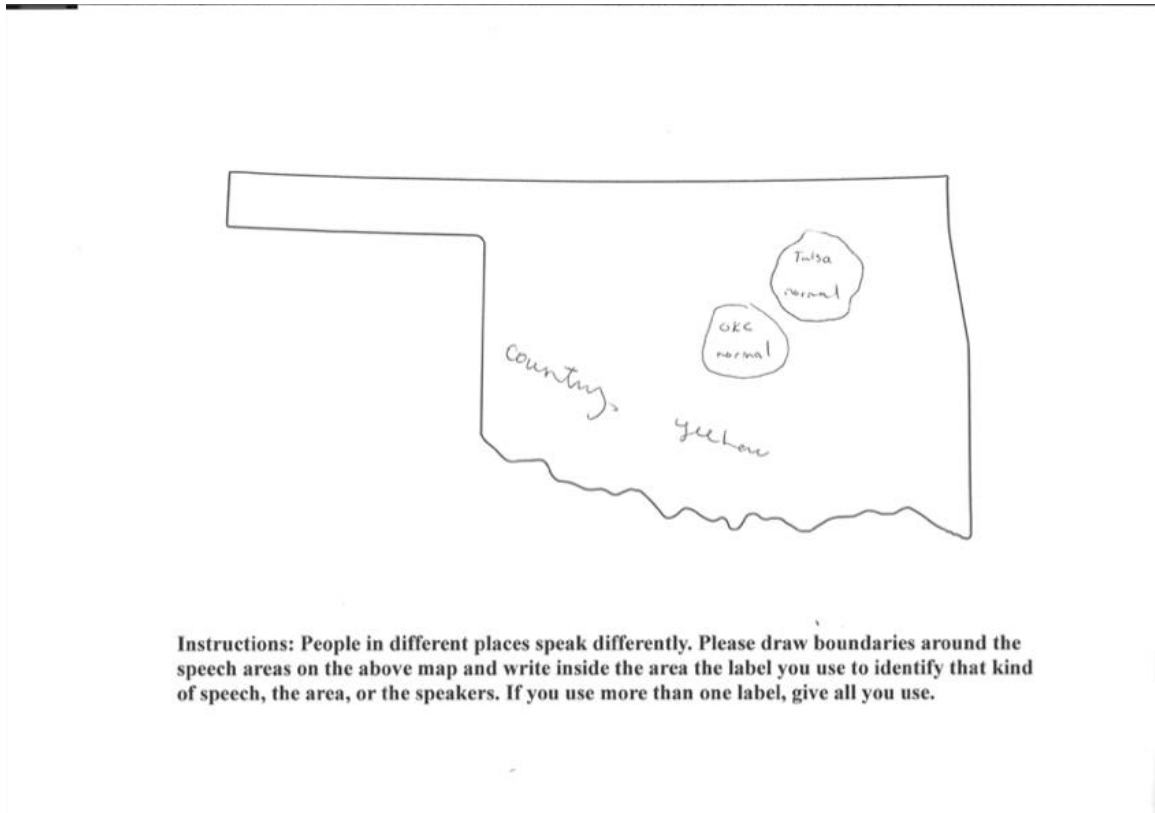


Figure 4-7 Harper

Harper is a 21 year old student of biology currently working in customer service. She is originally from Collinsville, a smaller town in Tulsa county, and has lived in Tulsa proper for around three years now. Harper's linguistic ideology and love-hate relationship with Oklahoma can be succinctly demonstrated by her own words: "I love Oklahoma, but sometimes you gotta make fun of some hillbillies."



## 4.2.8 Isabella

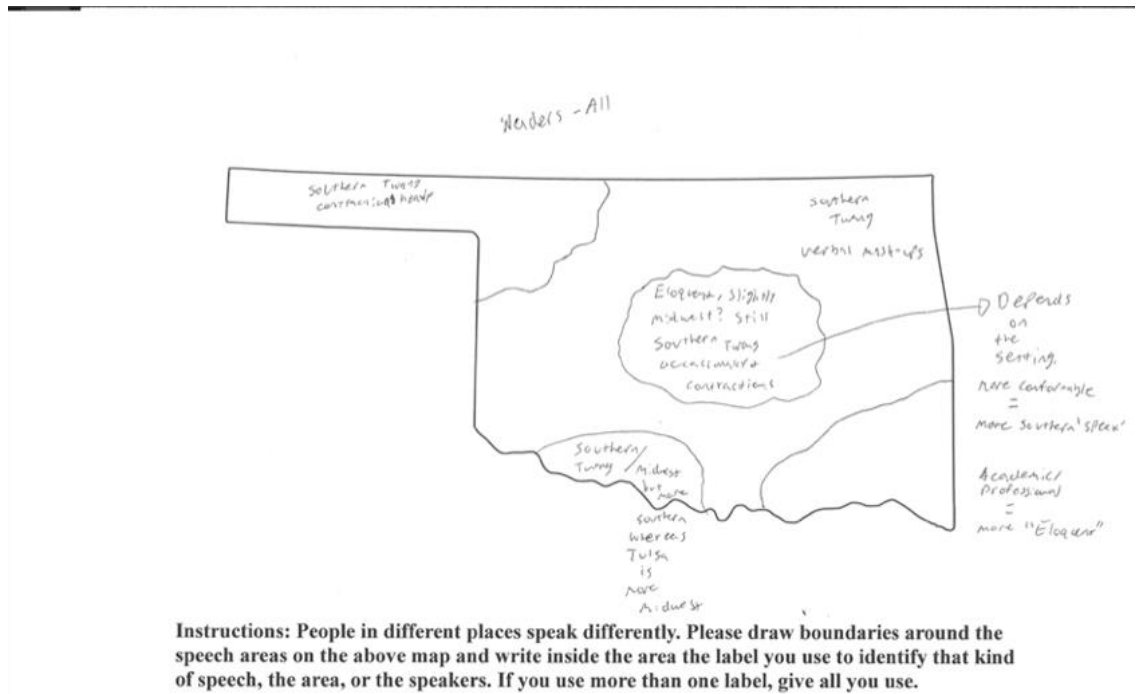


Figure 4-8 Isabella

Isabella is a 25 year old stay-at-home mom and author. Isabella sees Tulsa as a city which is trapped within a state with which it does not get along particularly well. Isabella was originally born in Wichita Falls, a city in Northern Texas that is close to the border with Oklahoma. She moved to Tulsa with her family while she was young, and now identifies as a Tulsan, but has several ties to Texas through her family and through travel. This has resulted in a strong awareness of language for Isabella, as she has both consciously and unconsciously molded herself to sound more like a Tulsan, and less like a Texan.

## 4.2.9 James

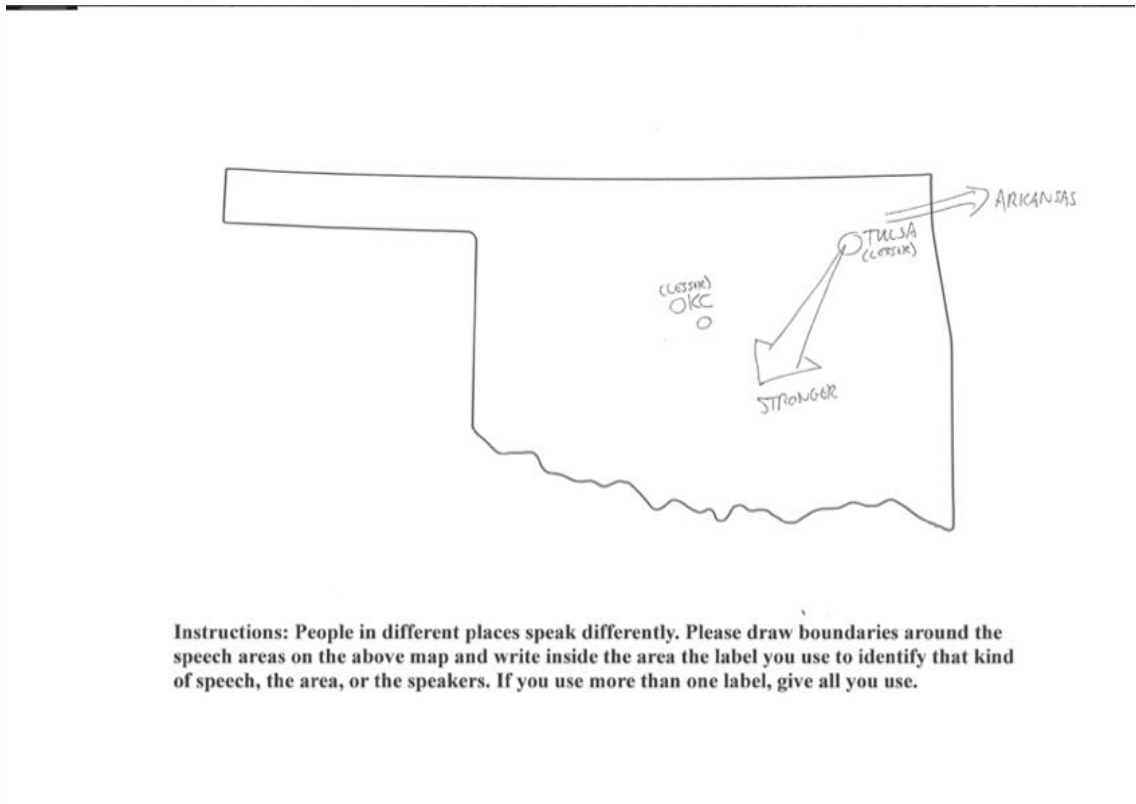
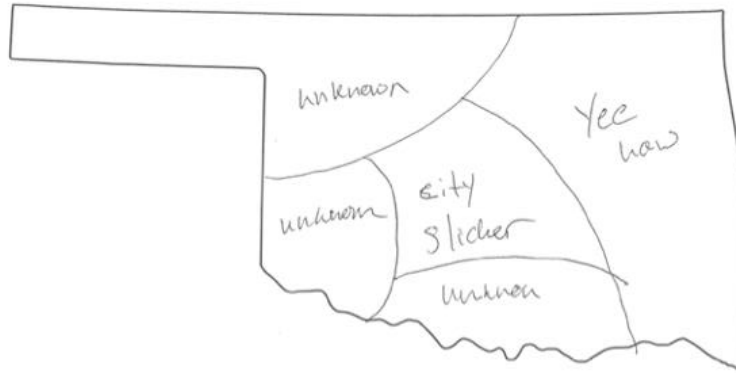


Figure 4-9 James

James is a 41 year old foreign service officer that has carefully and consciously curtailed his Oklahoman speech in order to sound more professional and neutral, partially for his career, and partially as a point of personal satisfaction. He is not ashamed to describe this process, and in fact is proud of his accomplishment.

## 4.2.10 Kinsley

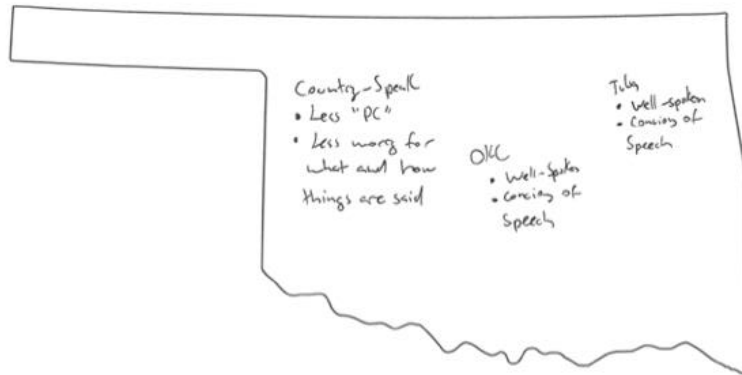


Instructions: People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.

Figure 4-10 Kinsley

Kinsley is a 23 year old tech assistant in an animal hospital from Skiatook, but now lives in Tulsa and identifies as a Tulsan. Having had experience in some of the smaller, more rural areas around Tulsa, she has formed distinct opinions about the effects of urban and rural life on speech.

## 4.2.11 Liam

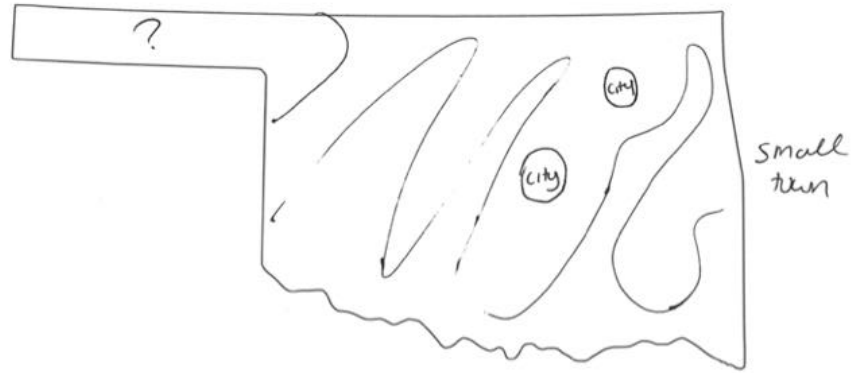


**Instructions:** People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.

Figure 4-11 Liam

Liam is a 26 year old engineer who has lived his entire life in Tulsa, aside from the four years he spent in Norman for college. Liam is not shy in stating that Tulsans are more “well-spoken” and sound more “intellectual”.

4.2.12 Mia

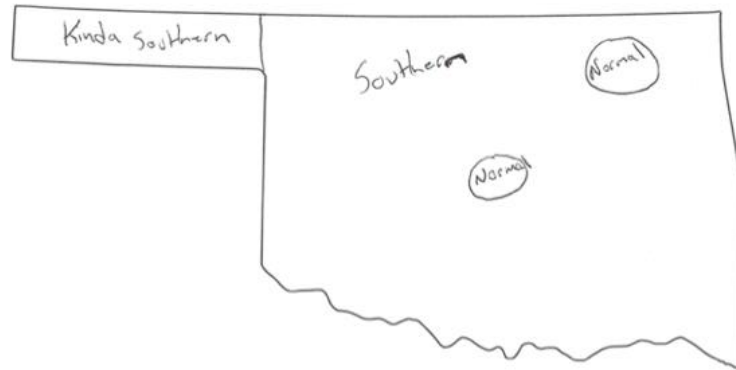


Instructions: People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.

Figure 4-12 Mia

Mia is a 31 year old physician's assistant who has lived her whole life in Tulsa, aside from the years she spent at college in Stillwater. Like some other respondents, Mia is frustrated with the political atmosphere in Oklahoma, as she identifies as a liberal, which she feels is in the political minority.

#### 4.2.13 Noah



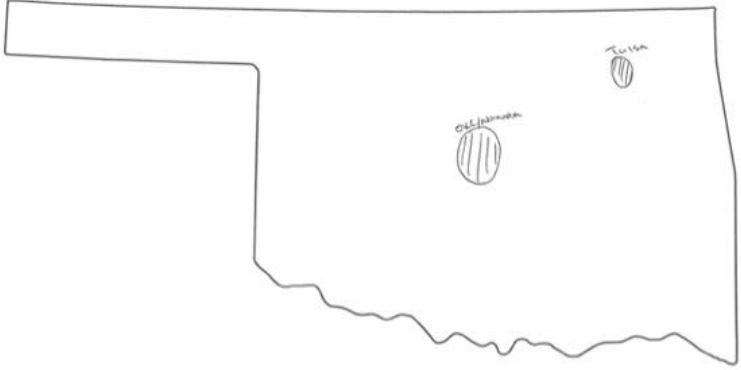
Instructions: People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.

Figure 4-13 Noah

Noah is a 21 year old in training to be a firefighter. He has lived in Oologah for most of his life, but has been to several places in Oklahoma. As he compares his experiences in different towns, Noah views the linguistic landscape as one that is determined by many factors, such as age, occupation, and location.

#### 4.2.14 Olivia

⦿ = urban accent (clearly spoken, more careful with grammar)  
white = rural (words may run together, often use "y'all" and "ain't", countryisms)

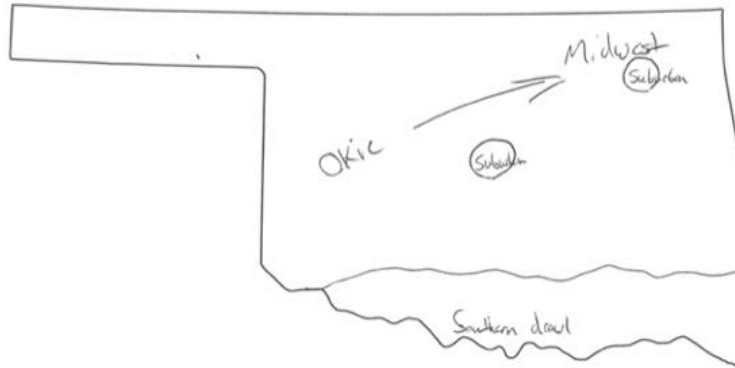


Instructions: People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.

Figure 4-14 Olivia

Olivia is a 21 year old student working toward becoming a medical doctor. She lived for a brief time during her early years in a small town in Northwest Oklahoma called Woodward, but has since lived in Tulsa and identifies now as Tulsan.

#### 4.2.15 Parker



Instructions: People in different places speak differently. Please draw boundaries around the speech areas on the above map and write inside the area the label you use to identify that kind of speech, the area, or the speakers. If you use more than one label, give all you use.

Figure 4-15 Parker

Parker is a 25 year old Tulsa native who works in I.T. and is learning computer science. He grew up in West Tulsa and associates the area with rurality, southernness, and country life, especially in comparison to the more affluent Jenks suburb in Southern Tulsa, with which he has familiarity from going to school there.

#### 4.3 Respondent Demographics

The respondents in this study ranged from age 21 at the youngest to 66 at the oldest. Each respondent identified as cisgendered. Each respondent was Caucasian. Respondents were not asked whether or not they were indigenous or enrolled in a federally recognized tribe. A table of the respondents' pseudonyms, ages, gender identity, and occupation is presented below.



Table 1 Respondent Demographics

<b>Speaker Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
<b>Amelia</b>	66	Female	Retired Teacher
<b>Benjamin</b>	35	Male	Project Management Consultant
<b>Charlotte</b>	55	Female	English Tutor
<b>David</b>	27	Male	Mechanic
<b>Elijah</b>	31	Male	Medical Student
<b>Grayson</b>	25	Male	Process Engineer
<b>Harper</b>	21	Female	Customer Service Representative
<b>Isabella</b>	25	Female	Stay at Home Mom and Author
<b>James</b>	41	Male	Foreign Service Officer
<b>Kinsley</b>	23	Female	Animal Hospital Tech Assistant
<b>Liam</b>	26	Male	Engineer
<b>Mia</b>	31	Female	Physician Assistant
<b>Noah</b>	21	Male	Entertainment
<b>Olivia</b>	23	Female	Medical Student
<b>Parker</b>	25	Male	IT

#### 4.4 Interview Analysis

The following sections consist of excerpts from interviews organized by theme. Analysis of maps according to theme follows the excerpts in each section.

##### 4.4.1 Southern-Rural Conflation

In this section, I investigate the tendency for respondents to associate rurality and southernness in Oklahoman speech patterns, and how these interlaced identities are leveraged to denote a distinctly non-Tulsan persona. Additionally, this section will highlight the role of occupation and economic status in the ‘southern’ indexical field of the respondents. I have combined these two elements because respondents universally

considered Oklahoma rurality to be associated with lower economic standing; their imagined rural persona is often a farmer or blue-collar worker, and never, for example, a wealthy landowner or member of a luxurious remote estate.

Initially, the main focus of the excerpts will be to demonstrate the respondents' clear association between rurality and southernness. Then, I will demonstrate the trend for respondents to show little faith in the physical, geographical north-south divide as a basis for determining southern identity and their strong belief that proximity to urban centers is the ultimate determiner for southern identity. Finally, I will explore the associated elements of this indexical field, such as age, occupation, and wealth.

#### 4.4.1.1 Southernness and Rurality

This subsection highlights the general disregard for geographical latitude in diagnosing southern speech in Oklahoma. Participants do not, for instance, say things such as “when you head east, you sound more eastern, and when you head north, you sound more northern” but clearly demonstrate the belief that southernness is acquired through an indexical field that is specific, but somewhat complicated, yet universally recognized by Tulsans.

The most basic and straightforward example of the collapsed southern-rural indexical field is from Kinsley, who identifies as southern, but “not redneck”. When asked about the difference between “redneck”, “country”, “southern”, and other similar terms, Kinsley elaborates:

(1) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)

- 1 Kinsley: I would say country and southern to me are the same.
- 2 Interviewer: Okay.
- 3 Kinsley: If people say country people I also think you know, southern people.
- 4 Interviewer: And that includes you and Tulsans? Southern, country?
- 5 Kinsley: Yes. I would say so.

Likewise, when pressed on what separates Tulsa from a smaller town, Grayson uses the same terminology:

(2) Grayson (25, Male, Engineer)

- 1 Interviewer: In the many ways that we communicate to each other, what tips you off that someone may not be from Tulsa, but may be from, uh, a smaller town?
- 2 Grayson: Where my mind goes first is more of a southern drawl. I don't think Tulsans really have a southern drawl.

And when asked about who has southern accents and where they live in Oklahoma, Olivia states that it likely has to do with rurality:

(3) Olivia (23, Female, Student)

- 1 Olivia: I can't think of anywhere that sounds super different unless you- I mean, if you point your finger on a map in Oklahoma you're probably not gonna hit a population-heavy area. It'll probably be someplace like Ada, or, I don't know, something. And people there might have a stronger accent. I suppose because it's more rural.

Pressing her on the difference between Tulsa and rural communities in Tulsa, I receive this deeper explanation on what makes somebody a southerner:

(4) Olivia (23, Female, Student)

- 1 Interviewer: Is Tulsa a southern place? Can you be a Tulsan without being a southerner? Or does being a Tulsan mean implicitly not being a southerner?
- 2 Olivia: No, I think you can be Tulsan and still be a southerner. Um, yeah, no, there's enough small towns around us that you could work and spend most of your time in Tulsa but still need to go home and- to your house in one of the Beggs or Mounds or something like that and still carry on whatever southern thing you identify as, like having a lot of land and livestock or something.

Interestingly, Olivia understands being southern to also encode a sense of small-town life, linking agricultural occupations such as "having a lot of land and livestock" and stating that this way of life is not incompatible with Tulsa due to commuting in and out of the city. But though she admits that a Tulsan can be a southerner, she makes it clear that in this case, one must implicitly live outside of Tulsa - "in one of the Beggs or Mounds or something" - for this to be likely, distancing the rural and southern persona from the geographical reality of the city.

The complicated relationship between the linguistic space of Tulsa and the linguistic space of "outside of Tulsa" is clarified when Olivia later invokes a linguistically charged persona of a Tulsan:

(5) Olivia (23, Female, Student)

- 1 Olivia: I feel like the average Tulsan drives a pickup but never uses it.
- 2 Interviewer: Okay. [Laughing]. Oh, never uses it for, like, pickup stuff?
- 3 Olivia: Yeah for pickup stuff. So they might wear cowboy hat and cowboy boots, but they don't like, step in the mud or like, wrangle horses or whatever. That kinda stuff would happen in Woodward.

This critical view of Tulsans indicates that Olivia is well-aware of some level of country veneer that is occupied by Tulsans, but not truly lived as it is in Woodward (or, implicitly, as she states earlier, "Beggs or Mounds or something"). She then explains how this persona would talk:

(6) Olivia (23, Female, Student)

- 1 Interviewer: This Tulsan with a pickup truck and the cowboy boots and cowboy hat... How do they talk? Do they talk like someone from Woodward, or do they talk differently?
- 2 Olivia: Tulsa is an interesting mishmash. Because I feel like it could be either...Like, there's people like my family who've lived here for a while. And we all speak- not as if we're from super rural Oklahoma.
- 3 Interviewer: How do y'all speak?
- 4 Olivia: Like- I'm not gonna say without an accent. Because I think everyone has an accent. But, we don't have any sort of southern drawl, we don't say a rapid phrase, uh, with the words clustered very far- er, very closely together.

Here, Olivia implies that Tulsans probably have some accent, but she does not feel confident in diagnosing most Tulsans with the stereotypical "southern drawl". At any rate, her answer is framed such that Tulsan speech is a sort of neutral default against which the "southern drawl" - implied to be "from super rural Oklahoma" - can be compared. This dichotomy, which places Tulsa as a semi-neutral calibration point against which a marked Oklahoma accent (by any name, be it "southern drawl", "country talk", or "yeehaw") is present in several other respondents' answers.

For example, in this response, David considers the speech patterns of the rest of Oklahoma and explains as follows:

(7) David (27, Male, Mechanic)

- 1 David: So, something I really noticed is that y- Tulsa- and Tulsans in general- have a, I think what I'll call a more neutral American accent.
- 2 Interviewer: Okay.
- 3 David: Whereas if you get into the more rural areas, you get a slightly more southern - what I would describe as a southern accent.  
...
- 4 David: And I think it's kinda funny, too, because I kinda grew up around both, you know, more of the rural speakers and the more city speakers, I guess.
- 5 Interviewer: City speakers?
- 6 David: City speakers. Uh, so- it's funny because I can kind of turn it on and off.
- 7 Interviewer: Oh yeah?
- 8 David: Absolutely
- 9 Interviewer: So you can do southern and-
- 10 David: Because I can- if I'm out- [Delilah]<sup>1</sup>'s mom lives out in the middle of nowhere outside [a small town in Oklahoma]. And, so, if I'm talking to some people out there, who are maybe people [Delilah] went to school with... [He begins to label the map].

---

<sup>1</sup> David's partner has been renamed to Delilah, and information about Delilah's life has been obfuscated, as they did not personally volunteer this information to me. Delilah was named according to the standard naming methodology for this project.

Here, David demonstrates that he perceives Tulsan speech as distinct from the rest of Oklahoma, and that he considers the rural-urban speech divide to be effectively fungible with the northern-southern divide. Noticeably, he qualifies his statement on the “southern accent” by catching himself and instead saying “what I would describe as a southern accent”. While I did not press him on this anxiety, it perhaps indicates an acknowledgement of the fact that David has encountered what he perceives as more legitimate southern accents from classically southern states such as Mississippi and Alabama in the army, and is reluctant to classify the Oklahoman accent along the same identity. At any rate, David expresses that as a Tulsan, he is comfortable with both what he calls “southern” speech and “neutral American” speech - but crucially, he distances southern speech spatially by localizing it to a place outside of Tulsa.

David makes it clear, however, that he thinks “The South” is growing more and more into a social construct with no basis in geography every day. When asked about whether he could define “The South”, he replies:

(8) David (27, Male, Mechanic)

- 1 David: I think that you could draw a really sharp line in 1865. And every day since then, it’s gotten a little bit blurrier. And so, then, so- you have areas where you may be really deep in the South, but if you’re in a city, you’re gonna be a lot less “in the South” than if you were to go twenty minutes outside of that city. So, I think you have a lot more divide between, uh, rural and urban than you do necessarily geographically.

This quote confirms that while David believes geographical identities such as southernness are real, they are first and foremost constructed along the lines of the urban-rural divide, whether or not the speakers realize it.

Of course, it is not only the perceived identity of southernness that is linked to rurality, but also the speech attitudes that come with it. Isabella uses the language of “southern” to describe the kinds of talk she hears around Oklahoma and Texas and which she herself speaks, but through her responses, she hints that one driving force behind this spectrum is based on the urban-rural divide:

(9) Isabella (25, Female, Writer)

- 1 Interviewer: Does a Tulsan sound different than an Oklahoma Citian?
- 2 Isabella: I don’t think... In that respect, but maybe in the sense of like, if you... Maybe this sounds weird, but like, going to, like, Coweta [a small suburb East of Tulsa] or something. You might- someone might sound a little different? Sound a little bit more... southern, I guess, I don’t know. Like, you’d hear them shortening things a lot more, I guess. Stuff like that. I’m trying to- like, stereotypical southern, you know, where you think it sounds uneducated but it’s really not uneducated, it’s just...
- 3 Interviewer: Yeah.
- 4 Isabella: You know.

- 5 Interviewer: What kind of places do they sound like that? More than  
Tulsa, I guess, since that's what we're talking about.
- 6 Isabella: I would say in a lot of like, the smaller, like, suburban areas.  
Like not really, um, metropolitan areas, I guess. If that makes sense.  
And I mean, that was kind of the same way in Texas, I feel like being in  
Wichita Falls and Henrietta, Texas, people could sound different than if  
you went to Austin, Texas. But I think that may also be because people  
will come from different places to live in the cities rather than the  
outskirts. So they'll be an influence, I guess.

Though she is equipped to talk about southern speech styles and trends, Isabella seems unprepared to differentiate the speech between a Tulsan and Oklahoma Citian, instead opting to describe the nature of southern speech as a product of proximity to “metropolitan areas”. Notably, Isabella does not link this phenomenon exclusively to Oklahoma, but acknowledges an aspect of universality (or, at the very least a truth about the local region) of southern speech: whether you are outside of Tulsa or outside of Austin, people talk more “southern” the further you get from the city.

In Mia's interview, she recalls that her parents chided her for speaking in an Oklahoma accent, which she describes as somewhere between “southern” and “midwestern” - but when discussing Grove, a small town in Northeast Oklahoma, she immediately identifies it as southern, indicating a robust association between rurality and southern speech, and offering no acknowledgement of the fact that Grove is physically north of Tulsa.

(10) Mia (31, Female, Healthcare)

- 1 Mia: I remember distinctly when I was growing up, [her parents] saying  
just because I'm from Oklahoma doesn't mean I have to talk like I was.
- 2 Interviewer: Wow.
- 3 Mia: So... [She laughs].
- 4 Interviewer: I'm curious. What does an Oklahoma accent sound like to  
people that are not from Oklahoma. Like what- I guess what region of  
the United States is it?
- 5 Mia: I think it really strikes between, like, southern and midwestern.
- 6 Interviewer: Mokay. What about the Grove accent? Is that...
- 7 Mia: More southern.

Likewise, Harper's replies make it clear that she views the entire linguistic spectrum of country and southern (which she describes as “yeehaw”) and what she calls “normal” as ultimately a function of the urban-rural divide:

(11) Harper (21, Female, Customer Service)

- 1 Harper: I would say maybe the more north that you get, that it [a yeehaw  
accent] would get less noticeable. Not that Kansas is better than us, but  
just because I would think that the closer down [she points south on the  
map] you get towards being country, but I'm sure it just depends on the  
- the urbanization of the area that you're in. So if you're in a super- a

city, seeing all kinds of people, so I would say these people [she points to Oklahoma City] probably talk normal.

Interestingly, it is possible to follow Harper's thought process as she describes her interpretation of the linguistic landscape. She initially invokes the idea of a southern vs. northern dichotomy in speech (and, crucially, she flatly associates southward movement with "being country"), but as she reflects on her perceptions of dialects, she interrupts herself to downplay the effects of geographical northerness and southernness in favor of "the urbanization of the area that you're in" as being the major determiner of speech variety. And, much like the other respondents, she perceives the non-southern, non-country speech of Oklahoma City and other urbanized areas to be "normal". It is of particular note that Harper has admittedly little-to-no personal experience in Oklahoma City, indicating that these feelings stem entirely from her extrapolation of the urban-rural speech paradigm.

#### 4.4.1.2 Occupation and Wealth as Indexing Tools

With the robust nature of the southern-country indexical field present in Tulsan language ideology, it is then not a far leap for speakers to associate "southern talk" with the economic aspects of rural life, whether that is wealth level or occupation. This is demonstrated in connections, acknowledgements, and imitations in the following excerpts.

Liam is not shy about saying that he has some level of southern accent despite the fact that he identifies as a Tulsan. Nonetheless, he still states that he believes Tulsans and Oklahoma Citians probably speak differently than other Oklahomans, and cites urbanization as a cause for this speculation:

(12) Liam (26, Male, Engineer)

1 Interviewer: I guess we can start with, like, do people in Tulsa talk like other Oklahomans?

2 Liam: I'm gonna say, in general, no. I mean, with the exception of maybe OKC, I mean, just because those are...

3 Interviewer: Yeah.

4 Liam: I mean, the obvious is that those are, like, urban areas, so, you're gonna have- I mean, you're going to, I think, trend towards a bit more like just a normalized, like speech pattern?

Liam initially considers the possibility that there is a specific 'Tulsa accent', but after a brief consideration, he clarifies that it is not that Tulsa is special, but rather than urbanites will naturally speak differently than rural Oklahomans. Notably, he uses the word "normalized", which indicates a sense of neutrality or the mixed nature of a diverse city. As I continue to ask him about what makes Oklahoma speech sound Oklahoman, Liam recalls a story about a martial arts instructor who commented on his speech, and that of other Oklahomans:

(13) Liam (26, Male, Engineer)

1 Liam: He pointed out that Oklahomans all say "big ol".

2 Interviewer: [Laughs]

- 3 Liam: Like, “that’s a big ol’ this”, “a big ol’ that”, and, I don’t know. He was so right. Like, he was so right. ‘Cuz I never considered myself- you know- “Oh, I’m not a country person, I don’t say country- and I don’t say ‘critters””, and you know, whatever else I might have associated with that. But I was like, but I definitely say “big ol’”, and like, that could apply to like, anything. Like, big ol’... [He puts on a strong accent] That’s a big ol’ piece of corn. [Laughs].

While Liam’s example of the usage of “big ol’” is humorous, it indicates a few key perceptions of the Oklahoman accent. In addition to calling the phrase “country”, Liam’s initial example from the top of his head refers to corn, an agricultural product, demonstrating a link in his idea of a country speaker to rural professions and lifestyles. This is similarly reflected in the fact that “critters” can be interpreted as country speech, as the fact that he does not say it encodes for him a sense of non-country-ness. Nonetheless, Liam is particularly comfortable with the phrase and does not deny his usage of it, nor express any anxiety at the fact that he does, despite the fact that his impression of a country accent demonstrates that “big ol’” maintains a relation to an accent with which he does not normally speak.

Following up on this fact, he explains that despite the sparse elements of “country” in his speech, he speaks relatively less like a southerner than other Oklahomans:

(14) Liam (26, Male, Engineer)

- 1 Liam: I speak less southerly than other people I work with and know, so relatively, I feel like...
- 2 Interviewer: Are they from Tulsa?
- 3 Liam: Um, I’d say most of them probably not, most of them are probably from like, smaller towns in Oklahoma. You know, Western Oklahoma or wherever it might be. Um, one guy I know that comes to mind is from Arkansas. He’s got a, you know, thick- [he begins to do an impression] thick Arkansas accent- [he stops] I’m not good at accents, but...

In this sense, Liam exhibits fractal recursivity by indicating that while Tulsa may have southern qualities, it is speakers from the surrounding “smaller towns” who have “thick accents”. Notably, his inclusion of Western Oklahoma as a region that would talk more “southerly” indicates that pure north-south directionality is not an important distinguishing factor in speech for Liam compared to urbanity.

In considering what makes some Oklahoma speakers sound different from others, Noah gives his own explanation, which is even more deeply rooted in occupation, but also age:

(15) Noah (21, Male, Entertainment)

- 1 Noah: I’d say the biggest difference, um, in like, speakers that I’ve picked up, for the most part is like, older people. People like, around like the boomer generation. [He laughs].
- 2 Interviewer: [Laughing] Uh-huh.



- 3 Noah: For the most part, they seem to be the ones who like, uh- to talk  
the most different. To have like the strongest type of accents.
- 4 Interviewer: And what kind of accent is the boomer accent? Do you  
feel- like, around here.
- 5 Noah: Around here, it's like- it's very- it's generally like, very deep  
and gruff, and it's- it's a lot of, uh, a lot of y'all's, and you know, that  
type of thing. They do tend to have like more of a southern, uh, accent.

Noah suggests that older people – specifically, baby boomers – have the “strongest accents”. He calls the accent “southern” and cites “y’all” as a telling feature. Following up, he explains his own usage of the word.

(16) Noah (21, Male, Entertainment)

- 1 Interviewer: Do you say y'all?
- 2 Noah: I- it's funny. Because the more I'm around people who, like,  
speak like that, the more I start to hear myself like, coming into that.

Evidently, it is not particularly natural for Noah to use “y'all”, and he demonstrably associates it with an age group with which he does not identify. Yet, he admits that the more he is exposed to it, the more he says it. Noah continues to describe his association between age, occupation, and accent:

(17) Noah (21, Male, Entertainment)

- 1 Noah: So actually, I worked with the milkman for- for over a year  
now. And uh, he's you know, a farmer and stuff like that. So, uh, you  
know, we're around a lot of really small stores and stuff like that, kind  
of out in the middle of nowhere, and so, like, you know, it's a lot more  
prevalent with them. But they- like I said, they tend to be older, for the  
most part, so. When they talk like that, I'm not super surprised.

Noah seems to be constructing an indexical field of the Oklahoma accent, which encodes age and occupation, but also rurality (“out in the middle of nowhere”), and that he is not surprised when someone that ticks each of these boxes speaks in a thick accent. Noah elaborates further by explaining the stereotypes that he believes exist in smaller towns:

(18) Noah (21, Male, Entertainment)

- 1 Noah: I honestly feel like it's more about, like, occupation almost. I  
feel like- I know a lot of farmers and stuff like that from that area, and  
people who are like, blue collar workers. Um, and I think- I think it's  
because they're surrounded by a lot of people who are, you know, talk  
like that. I think that's just like the norm. And so, you know it's- it's  
very common to see somebody, you know, in like a cowboy getup  
because they've been working on their farm all day, and you're not  
gonna be surprised when they have a strong southern drawl.
- 2 Interviewer: Okay. So-

- 3 Noah: ...Is kind of the way I look at it. I look at it as more of an occupation thing, and like, you know, you're gonna find a lot more farmers in little town Oologah and little town Collinsville than you are in Tulsa. From my experience.
- 4 Interviewer: So, the strongest accents in Oklahoma, you feel, are southern accents?
- 5 Noah: Yes. For sure.

In other words, the urban-rural divide plays a strong part in Noah's perception of the linguistic landscape, but that divide itself seems to be incidental to the fact that there are more farmers in rural areas and fewer in urban areas. Importantly, Noah refers to this as a "southern drawl" and not something like "country talk" or "rural talk"; it is clear that the elements that make one's speech sound "southern" have little to do with latitudinal geography and everything to do with the indexical field and persona conjured by Noah.

Noah's experiences and beliefs are mirrored almost exactly by Parker's. When discussing words that make one sound "country" or unprofessional, he gives an example of his grandparents saying the word "warsh", and that it comes across as particularly "Okie". Following up, he describes what it means to hear the word "warsh":

(19) Parker (25, Male, IT)

- 1 Interviewer: I'm wondering, what does "warsh" mean to you? In terms of like, if someone says "warsh", what can you intuit about them? In terms of- maybe like age, or-
- 2 Parker: Definitely an older generation. Not necess- probably someone who hasn't grown up- didn't grow up in a- in or around Tulsa, or even maybe around OKC. They tended to be- like my grandparents or even my friends, who's grandparents had the same pronunciation were usually small town, blue collar workers, construction workers, HVAC guys.

Much like Noah, Parker associates what he terms "Okie" speech not just with southernness, but also "small town" and "blue collar" work. That Oklahoma City is mentioned as a place one would not find "warsh" indicates once more that this persona is tied to rurality. The Tulsan language ideology's conflation of southernness and country is then exemplified by Parker's feelings on how regionality plays into Oklahoma accents:

(20) Parker (25, Male, IT)

- 1 Parker: Some of that comes down to, like- well, probably uh, more class than necessarily region.
- 2 Interviewer: Yeah.
- 3 Parker: It's interesting you can go- even to Sand Springs and you can- you can hear a lot of people speaking in dialects like that.

A more concise example is Kinsley's description of the way people speak in Avant, a town north of Tulsa. Having previously given Avant as an example of a typical small, poor, and rural town within Oklahoma, she elaborates:

- (21) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)
- 1 Interviewer: How would you id- define the uh, the accent you were just talking about from like the more poor- rural community?
  - 2 Kinsley: I would say a lot more southern, um, uh, definitely a lot more curse words. [She laughs]. You know, gotta make up for the lack of vocabulary. Um, I don't know any other way to put it, but more redneck.

Although she displays a slight sense of anxiety in using the term “redneck”, the fact that Kinsley links this strong “more southern” accent with being uneducated and having some level of poverty is not surprising, given the other responses in this study. It is also important to note that Kinsley is familiar with Avant, and likely knows that it is, geographically speaking, north of Tulsa, but this does not affect her decision to call the manner of speaking found there “a lot more southern”.

When asked about his own speech, and whether he talks without a drawl as he describes Tulsans, Grayson candidly describes himself as speaking neutrally, citing the fact that people generally cannot identify where he is from based on the way he speaks:

- (22) Grayson (25, Male, Engineer)
- 1 Grayson: No one's ever been like “woah, where are you from?” Well, people can tell if I'm like, not from there. But people aren't like: “Oh, you're from Tulsa!” Or “Oh, you're from”- like, they can't really pick out where I'm from. They just know that I'm not from there. Like, I was in- for a summer, I was in South Dakota, and those people have, you know, more of the [he does an impression with raised vowels]: “oh, Dakota” thing. And I clearly didn't sound like that.  
...
  - 2 Interviewer: So then, don't let me put words in your mouth, but do you think that you talk pretty neutrally? In terms of accent?
  - 3 Grayson: I think so. Because when I listen to um, television or, you know, people who talk on T.V. I feel like I sound like them. So- I get the sense that there's sort of an international way to pronounce [sic] things, and I feel like I'm in line with the international standard.
  - 4 Interviewer: So, do you think the average Tulsan is just as neutral as you? Or less neutral, or more neutral? How does the average Tulsan sound?
  - 5 Grayson: I think they typically sound pretty neutral. Although I think that you're going to find a distinction between um, economic status. So, people who are less wealthy are going to have, um, different accents. And so I guess the best way I could describe that is more of like a [he pauses] let's see if I can think of an example. 'Cuz I ran into a, uh, I ran into an auto parts place. And there was, you know, just a young clerk, probably like one of his first jobs. So, he was- he had more of like a- I don't know if it's really an accent, but it is just kind

of a more of a- maybe it's less- I- without being mean, it sounds more lazy.

In his description of the “lazy” accent, Grayson demonstrates a deep level of anxiety in describing the clerk’s accent with such a harsh-sounding label, and makes it clear that he knows it is not indicative of any true qualities, but instead just a linguistic stereotype. Nonetheless, whereas others tend to credit Tulsa’s variety of accents to southernness, diversity, or surrounding country communities, Grayson exhibits a greater awareness of socioeconomic factors in speech, which, in his mind, seem to account for the spectrum of accents found in Tulsa. In other words, though Grayson’s interpretation of Tulsa is one that ostensibly holds a neutral accent, a stronger accent can be found in Tulsa if the correct conditions are fulfilled: in this case, some level of lower economic standing. He then clarifies in a followup statement:

(23) Grayson (25, Male, Engineer)

- 1 Interviewer: Is that a kind of thing you feel like you’ve heard just once in Tulsa? Or is that a-
- 2 [He nods].
- 3 Interviewer: Okay.
- 4 Grayson: Yes. So this is something that I have heard, um- and that’s where I get the generalization that if you’re middle- or upper-class you have this, um, international pronunciation, but if you’re lower class, um, which- that kind of lines up with, I feel like people who are working at a gas station. So even when I was referring to people in smaller cities, generally they are less economically well off, if you work in a gas station you probably aren’t as well off.

Grayson’s interpretation of the strong, “less economically well off” accent is demonstrably linked with the concept of “country”, as he directly associates lower wealth with “smaller cities” and “gas stations” in this statement.

Finally, Grayson’s determination that Tulsa has a way of speaking that matches the “international standard” is in line with an anecdote given by David about what it means to sound “normal”:

(24) David (27, Male, Mechanic)

- 1 Interviewer: What’s- what’s the descriptor for them [Tulsa and Oklahoma City], do you feel?
- 2 David: [He sighs and pauses in thought] I would say that- okay, so, something that I kinda picked up on, uh, is - whenever I was in the army - you could tell that - like, when I was in basic training and I was mostly around everybody new, everybody had their own regional dialects. And as you talked to people who had more and more years in the army, where you kinda have just a mash of people from all over, and they do not - you know, where you’re from does not determine what units you’re in or anything; everybody’s intermingled. And so, the longer you’re in that environment, the more those - it kinda

becomes this homogenous sort of, like - I wanna say almost bland dialect. That you'll hear within the army, especially as you get to more seniority. So I think that there is kind of a standard universal - or like, kind of a standard American baseline accent that things branch off from. To some degree. If that- that's kind of my way of looking at it.

3 Interviewer: So like a blended up-

4 David: Yeah. So if you took all of America's accents and kinda just blended them together, you could find, like, a normal accent. Uh, that might not be "normal", or the highest percentage- like it might not be the majority of people speaking with that kind of accent, but you can kind of find a normal. And I think Tulsa and OKC, you get closer to normal.

While David does not outright say that Tulsa and Oklahoma City have perfectly neutral accents, he paints a vibrant spectrum of language which is, on one end, localized and marked (irrespective of specifically where it is from) and on the other end, unlocalizable, "bland", and "normal" - and he believes that on this spectrum, Tulsa is less localizable.

#### 4.4.1.3 Politics as an Indexing Tool

Just as the respondents in this study were comfortable using economic status to index the aforementioned conflated southern-country persona, they were prone to using political standing and general ideology to do the same. In other words, as these responses will demonstrate, a Tulsan can use a strong southern accent to encode a country persona, which encodes rural life, which encodes economic standing, and any of which can also be used to encode political affiliation.

As indicated on her map, Amelia perceives Oklahoma speakers to be largely on a spectrum of "neutral" to "country", with Tulsa and Oklahoma City speakers occupying the neutral end, and rural speakers occupying the country end, but notes that both environments have a mix of speech types. She imagines people of her political persuasion to have the "neutral" accent, and is pleasantly surprised when she recounts the story of a man at a trailer park who spoke with an accent that could be described as "southern" or "country", two terms which she has already conflated:

(25) Amelia (66, Female, Education)

1 Interviewer: If somebody starts speaking with a very strong southern accent, like a 'they're not from Tulsa, they're not from OKC, but they're from the 'Mostly "Country"' [gesturing to her map] that you have mentioned here, um, do you have a hunch as to what side of the aisle they may fall on?

2 Amelia: I think I do, but, uh, we had an interesting thing happen a couple of weeks ago.

3 [Amelia describes visiting the trailer park her sister lived at].

4 Amelia: So, we're down there with our Biden stickers on our cars and everything, [she laughs] so, we're talking with her neighbor who is a really old guy. [She pauses for a few moments]. And all of the sudden

he says “well, thank goodness for Joe Biden!” And we were both just like, what? And I’m sure most, you know, most of the people there might not have felt that way, but it- so, it was like- it was just a really good...

5 Interviewer: It was surprising to you.

6 Amelia: Yeah! It was,

7 Interviewer: Okay.

8 Amelia: It just surprised and gratified us, we were like, thank you, [his name]!

To this end, Amelia uses neutral speech as a tool for indexing a rejection of wide field of qualities; chief among them is the conservative political ideology she presupposed in this excerpt. The fact that Amelia associates the trailer park resident’s accent with both rurality and southernness, and the fact that she then goes on to speculate that “most of the people there might not have felt that way” confirms that conservative political ideology is wrapped up in the indexical field that Amelia interprets for “country” speakers.

Much like Amelia, David presents a strong association between political beliefs and accent types. His map indicates “more rural/”southern”” with “southern” curiously bounded by quotation marks, as if to indicate dubiousness. When asked about this, David provided another pensive response:

(26) David (27, Male, Mechanic)

1 Interviewer: When we talk about north and South in America, a specific image comes to mind. Like, “The North” and “The South”.

2 David: Yeah.

3 Interviewer: Do you think this line [pointing to his map] maps onto that North and South? Or would the North and South line be somewhere else?

4 David: I think the North and South line- I think that Oklahoma is an interesting blending point between where you have like, your southwestern, and, uh, Spanish speaking kind of influence, uh, you have like, a midwestern influence you get more from I guess, like, uh, Kansas, Nebraska type of thing? Working your way up, it kinda becomes more your midwest. And then, I think what you see a lot of times, is especially from people in more rural areas, they work towards like a deep south thing, and they can have a more deep connection with- I guess, how do I put this? The more conservative- they identify more with “The South.” [He emphasizes these two words and gestures with air quotes.]

By discussing identity and conservative politics, David indicates that he does indeed create strong linguistic personae of Oklahoman speech. This persona, which he mentions is “especially from people in more rural areas”, is not only associated with the “deep south” but also conservative. In this way, David forgoes any attempts to identify “The South” by latitudinal means, instead outright expressing the complex indexical field that defines the

southern persona: a politically conservative person who talks “country” and likely lives in a rural area.

Finally, as with other respondents, James speaks on the politics of Oklahoma and the South, claiming that if he is a southerner, he is a “bad southerner” due to his beliefs.

(27) James (41, Male, Government)

1 Interviewer: Do you identify with the South?

2 James: [He laughs]. If I do, I’m a bad southerner.

Ultimately, it is my own speculation that he means that his beliefs are unaligned with Republican conservatism, as our conversation up to this point made it clear that, like Amelia, he felt as though Tulsa was surrounded by conservatives in rural Oklahoma. However, I did not press him to explain his political positions.

#### 4.4.1.4 Map Analysis

The maps feature the word “southern” frequently, but not always in the context of explicitly rural areas. Benjamin’s map notes that the southern half of Oklahoma is “Texas-Light” and that the Eastern border with Arkansas has a “cartoon-southern accent”, which he explained was intended to convey that the accent sounds exaggerated, as though it were a character in a cartoon. This is one of the few times that Southeastern Oklahoma, known by some as Little Dixie, is acknowledged as a linguistic area by the Tulsa speakers in this study.

Much like Benjamin, Charlotte describes the southern portion of Oklahoma as “Texas accent”, and David writes “more rural/’southern””, suggesting the dubiousness noted above, but confirming that southernness and rurality are part of the same persona for David. Elijah notes the area around Texoma to have a “southern twang”, which is unsurprising since Hall-Lew and Stephens’ respondents from Texoma describe themselves similarly. Similarly, Parker’s map features the label “southern drawl” along a fairly narrowly demarcated Texoma, indicating some confidence in the southern nature of the area.

Isabella uses the term “southern twang” as well, but to describe all rural areas of the state, including the panhandle and Tulsa, though she notes that Tulsa is more “eloquent” and “midwest”. Noah as well marks all of Oklahoma outside of Tulsa and Oklahoma City as “southern”, though the panhandle is labeled “Kinda southern”, acknowledging the weaker southern influence that is to be expected.

Despite common usage of “southern” in discussing rural speech, however, none of the other maps (even those which are clearly constructed along similar ideological and perceptual lines) feature the term “southern” a single time, perhaps indicating that other terms such as “country” or “hick”, “yeehaw”, and “stronger” might be more prominent descriptors in the Tulsan’s imagined persona of the rural speaker.

#### 4.4.2 Rural as Homogenized; Tulsa as Diverse

In this section, I will highlight the tendency for respondents to not just index rurality through southern qualities, but to specifically the nature of rurality as homogenized. Overwhelmingly, respondents described rural accents with a level of sameness that indicates little faith in the distinguishability of different rural regions (e.g. Western rural Oklahoma, Southeastern rural Oklahoma) in favor of one monolithic “rural accent”. Of course, as previously established, this is also the “southern” accent. In a fashion that is somewhat contradictory to the fact that Tulsa is usually described as “neutral” or “standard”, however, the city is also usually acknowledged to be a place of linguistic diversity, where, unlike in rural areas, people can sound highly different from one another.

It is evident that the urban-rural divide plays a significant part in Benjamin’s map, which features bubbles around both Tulsa and Oklahoma City - a fact which he believes is not unique to Oklahoma, but instead an observable trend throughout the nation. When discussion the fact that Tulsa falls into the upper portion and Oklahoma City in the lower, Benjamin answered as follows:

- (28) Benjamin (25, Male, Management)
- 1 Benjamin: I think that, um, there’s no real correlation between which half they’re in. Cities are so separate, so different, like they’re very- they’re very confidently in their own bubbles.
  - 2 Interviewer: They’re like, more like each other than they are, like...? [gesturing to the surrounding area on the map].
  - 3 Benjamin: Yeah. Yes.

And this awareness of urban-rural differences is made clear when he talks about accents, and how this divide is true “wherever you go”:

- (29) Benjamin (25, Male, Management)
- 1 Interviewer: Did you ever notice a different way that people talked in Tulsa, versus Collinsville, versus Oologah, versus anywhere else you’ve lived? Or, have you always felt that you’ve just sort of blended in, accent-wise?
  - 2 Benjamin: Um, the further you get from the... The metropolitan areas, the more likely you are to come across people who have thick accents. That feels like something that happens wherever you go. But yeah, I’d say that in Oologah, you- like, the people that I went to school- to high school with, and stuff, probably in my mind because of the internet, like, um, most of them don’t have super thick accents, but a higher percentage of them do, than a place like Tulsa.

This perception makes it clear that Benjamin does not view the southern-rural accent as a unique Oklahoman situation, but that it is a natural consequence of his presupposed language ideology, which demands that accents further away from dense urban centers are stronger and less neutral.



This sentiment is echoed when Parker explains that living out in West Tulsa has helped his geographical knowledge of Oklahoma, but that he still is not too familiar with smaller speech communities. In a display of dialectological awareness, Parker muses that Tulsans are likely ignorant of smaller dialectal regions in Oklahoma, contributing to their labeling of the rest of the state as homogenous:

(30) Parker (25, Male, IT)

- 1 Parker: I feel like you either- you either live out in the sticks and you know every small podunk town outside of Tulsa, or you live in Tulsa, and you know like, all the surrounding areas and then everything's- you're in a black hole.

In fact, Parker's speculation is correct, as many respondents in this study are unable to distinguish specific dialectal or town-based regions. Generally, they will know a small number of communities with which they have a personal connection, but that town will then serve as a blueprint for the Tulsan's perception of the rest of rural Oklahoma, as demonstrated by Kinsley's replies:

(31) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)

- 1 Interviewer: Can you think of any place in Oklahoma where that's [people talking like Tulsans] definitely not the case?
- 2 Kinsley: Um, I would say maybe Avant, I feel like it's a smaller community, so they all talk similar. It's also [she pauses for a while] poorer there, so I feel like there's less education, less bigger vocabulary, if that makes sense.

Similarly, when asked to determine the difference between neutral and strong accents, James defaults to describing the accent as a matter of rurality:

(32) James (41, Male, Government)

- 1 Interviewer: Do you feel like you can identify a Tulsa accent? Or do you think it's just-
- 2 James: I think it's more a matter of degree. Um, I can- I feel like, if you had someone who is speaking to me who is using an Oklahoma accent, I feel like I would be inclined to believe that someone with a very thick Oklahoma accent is either from a very rural location or perhaps from somewhere southwest of here. But it's- it's not, to me it doesn't sound distinct, it just sounds more pronounced.

By "doesn't sound distinct, it just sounds more pronounced", James is referring to his perception that no one rural area of Oklahoma stands out in particular against the others. Rather, the magnitude of the Oklahoma accent is simply increased the further one gets from Tulsa. In addition to these statements, James later clarifies his beliefs:

(33) James (41, Male, Government)

1 James: Basically, like I said, when I'm in- when I'm in urban areas, so you know, um, when I'm in Tulsa here, um, it's less pronounced to my ears in general. As I get outside of urban areas, and like I said, to my thinking, and I don't know how accurate this is because I haven't paid that much attention but to my thinking, it feels like the farther you go out, kind of this way [he draws the arrow pointing southwest], the stronger it gets.

2 Interviewer: Interesting.

3 James: Although, you know, when you go out into rural areas in general, it gets stronger.

...

4 James: And I don't recall- being in Oklahoma City, I've been to Oklahoma City several times over the years, I don't recall thinking of them as having a particularly strong accent, so to me, in my mind, it may just be more of a rural thing, as you get farther and farther away from the major cities.

These statements indicate that (although James refrains from labeling the accent anything specifying other than "strong") that it falls along rural lines, and increases with rurality, but otherwise is not associated with any specific center of speech in Oklahoma that would distinguish the area.

Along the same lines, when talking about the speech of communities outside of Tulsa in Oklahoma, Mia mentions that she has had experience in Grove, a small town in Northeast Oklahoma:

(34) Mia (31, Female, Healthcare)

1 Interviewer: Do you talk a lot to the people in Grove? Do they sound any different than the people in Tulsa?

2 Mia: They sound- yeah, I mean, I wouldn't say it's specific to Grove. I would say more small-town Oklahoma that sounds different than Tulsa.

3 Interviewer: Ah, okay. So they've got just like, a- they've got a way of speaking that is representative of just like, any small town in Oklahoma?

4 Mia: Yeah.

5 Interviewer: Okay. And you feel that's different than the Tulsa way of speaking.

6 Mia: I certainly- you hear it in Tulsa occasionally.

7 Interviewer: Okay.

8 Mia: But it's like, everybody in a small town has that, like, little bit of drawl, little bit more "y'all", little bit more "ain't", that stuff.

9 Interviewer: Do you say "y'all"?

10 Mia: Yes. Only ironically. Mostly.

Although Mia acknowledges that that the “small town” accent is sometimes heard in Tulsa, this only reinforces the idea that Tulsa is imagined as a place where many kinds of accents can be heard, in comparison to “everybody in a small town”, as Mia puts it, who speaks with the popularly imagined southern accent.

One factor that seems to play into this perception is the idea that Tulsa is a place with a great deal of diversity, particularly when compared to the rest of Oklahoma. When discussing smaller towns, Harper expresses exactly this:

- (35) Harper (21, Female, Customer Service)
- 1 Interviewer: Do people in Collinsville sound any different than they do in Tulsa to you?
  - 2 Harper: No, they’re just a bunch of rednecks. Like, the way that they talk - the sounding of it isn’t different, I think. Well, I think some people in Tulsa might talk different, only because of the diversity that’s there. Because there’s not...
  - 3 Interviewer: ...There’s a lot of people in Tulsa.
  - 4 Harper: Right. And it’s not all people from Oklahoma. So, there’s people with all kinds of speaking.

Her description of Tulsa’s linguistic diversity is in line with her display of an appreciation for one of Tulsa’s overall diversity in other aspects:

- (36) Harper (21, Female, Customer Service)
- 1 Interviewer: So, what’s the best or worst part about living in Tulsa?
  - 2 Harper: Hmm. The best part is getting to see all of the new things. So, Collinsville is a really small town. We have absolutely nothing. So moving to Tulsa was really exciting, I got to meet all kinds of new people, see all kinds of stuff I’d have never seen, I’d never actually lived in a big city, so it was nice getting to see the diversity of everything that’s here. It’s really impressive to me because Oklahoma is... Oklahoma. [She laughs]. So you wouldn’t expect there to be so many different kinds of people in the world, but it was super exciting, it opened my eyes to all the people.

This response represents the typical perception of Tulsa as a place that is distinguished from the rest of Oklahoma by its diversity in population. Notably, Harper lightly denigrates Oklahoma’s otherwise homogeneous reputation through the phrase “Oklahoma is... Oklahoma.” The perception that Tulsa is an economic anchor and, as a result, contains a strong level of diversity, is not only relegated to language perception, as Benjamin shares the same perception of Tulsa’s city identity:

- (37) Benjamin (25, Male, Management)
- 1 Benjamin: Tulsa feels different. Yeah. Because- because they have skyscrapers. And it feels - whenever I’m in the city - and this is gonna be biased just because I went to college in Norman - but whenever I’m in Tulsa, I don’t feel like I’m in a college town. Whereas Norman feels

pretty dominated by the college campus... Tulsa feels like it's got something else driving the life of the city, whereas Norman feels built around the college.

Parker elaborates further on this same intuition, highlighting the economic factors that draw people into Tulsa as a point of comparison for why rural areas have stronger accents:

(38) Parker (25, Male, IT)

- 1 Parker: So, from my experience, which at least in Oklahoma, I've been to a lot of the surrounding areas, um, you tend to have- you tend to have a thicker Okie accent, the further you get from Tulsa or OKC. Those are really the hubs. Pretty much anywhere with an airport, you tend to have a lot- a lot more influences from other places. I'm kinda surprised at how- how many people come here to Tulsa from other states or other countries, even for work.

Finally, while drawing his map, Grayson engages in an analysis of rural accent homogeneity, again ascribing it to socioeconomic factors:

(39) Grayson (25, Male, Engineer)

- 1 Grayson: It really just comes down to a class division, in my- from my experience, because there's like, a wealthy Texas accent, you know, big Texas- and then there's lower economic class, which I think is more homogenized whether you're in Oklahoma, you're in like a less wealthy place around Tulsa, or whether you're in a less wealthy place near Texas, that sort of blends in. So I would almost describe this whole area [he gestures to the rural portion of his map], even like seeping into Texas, so, um, I would call this, um, I don't have an eloquent way to say it but I just have to call it, like the lower economic class. And the word I used to describe it was "lazy", which is not to be a slight. But just lazy-sounding.

In this excerpt, Grayson outright states that regardless of state boundaries, the "lazy"-sounding accent is homogenous across all rural regions. The tie-in to economic status solidifies this perception of rural Oklahoman speech as a homogenous speech that maps onto the well-documented rural persona and indexical field created by the participants.

A common thread between the interviews is the perception that Tulsa (and often alongside it, Oklahoma City) has a distinct character which keeps it isolated to some degree from the rest of the state. This is rarely absolute - for example, most respondents do not believe that Oklahomanness stops immediately at the border of Tulsa. Yet there is also a popular imagining of a bubble around the city, crystallizing the perception that it is somehow "protected" from the rest of Oklahoma. This is generally represented in maps as a physical line drawn around Tulsa to distinguish it from its surroundings, and in linguistic descriptions generally surfaces as a simple acknowledgement that Tulsans speak differently.

#### 4.4.2.1 Map Analysis

With regards to the map tasks, specific features singling out Tulsa (and occasionally Oklahoma City) are overwhelmingly the norm, with only three maps (Elijah, Isabella, and Kinsley) of the fifteen not specifically indicating Tulsa with a bubble or dot. However, even on these three maps, shapes are drawn to indicate the general area of both cities: Elijah and Isabella describe them as “midwestern” and Kinsley describes them as “City-slicker”. It should be noted that, with each map, Tulsa and Oklahoma City were always the first locations drawn and described. Given that, in map-drawing tasks, respondents tend to begin the task by drawing the most stigmatized speech areas, (Cramer (2016), referencing Preston (1999)) the fact that Tulsans consistently did the opposite is interesting. This could be attributed to the fact that Tulsa is the home of each of the respondents, but this does not account for the fact that Oklahoma City was almost always also drawn immediately following Tulsa, even by participants who had never been there. It is perhaps due to the homogenous, undefinable nature of rural Oklahoma that this is the case, as Tulsans may be unequipped to describe where “rural” is spoken until they have first delineated where it is not spoken: the cities.

Boundaries delineating specific rural areas are not extremely rare, but they are uncommon. Five of the fifteen maps make no attempt whatsoever to distinguish a single dialectal zone outside of Tulsa and Oklahoma City; if we extend these parameters to allow only acknowledgement of the panhandle, if even to say “I don’t know” or “No one lives here”, that number becomes eight. This indicates that over half of the respondents were comfortable diagnosing only two essential dialects on maps of Oklahoma: city, and not-city.

Interestingly, almost no comments recognizing Tulsa’s diversity are demonstrable through the map tasks. Only Charlotte acknowledged<sup>2</sup> “North Tulsa BE/AAVE/AAE”, and despite many respondents describing Tulsa as a diverse city where all kinds of accents can be heard, this is not presented on most maps. Instead, Tulsa and Oklahoma City frequently receive labels such as “midwestern”, “normal”, or, in the case of Parker’s map, “suburban”. Curiously, of the twelve maps that drew specific, tight bubbles or dots indicating the two cities, ten maps gave Tulsa and Oklahoma City the exact same label (or left them unlabeled or used the term “ditto”) no matter what the actual descriptor was. Only two of these twelve (Charlotte and Grayson) indicated any difference in the cities’ speech, and they both compared it to Texan speech. This portrayal of city speech with a homogeneous quality is not reflective of the interview data. However, it is possible that the small physical scale of the maps does not invite participants to subdivide cities with much precision.

In contrast, the overwhelming homogeneity of rural areas is reflective of attitudes. Harper’s map simply refers to the entirety of rural Oklahoma with the terms “country” and “yeehaw”. James’ map portrays the rural areas with the word “stronger” and no further demarcation. Likewise, Liam’s map contains one set of twin identical descriptors for Tulsa

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<sup>2</sup> Charlotte, as a professional in the field of English language education, was familiar with the term “BE” in reference to black English, but inquired as to what the most widely accepted term in academic linguistic jargon was. Although it was my general policy to refrain from “talking linguistics” to avoid priming respondents, I determined that in this case, it was better to simply be open with her inquiry in order to help facilitate an honest and comfortable map task process. In the name of keeping things uncomplicated, I told her that some linguists use “AAVE” and some use “AAE”.

and Oklahoma City, and a third label called “country-speak” which describes the entirety of the rest of the state. Olivia’s map has the same characteristics, describing the entirety of non-Tulsa, non-Oklahoma City Oklahoma as “rural” and prone to using “countryisms”.

#### 4.4.3 Positioning Oklahoma

In this section, I analyze the statements that Tulsans present when they discuss the regionality of Oklahoma. Critically, every single respondent had already independently and prior to this project considered the question of whether Oklahoma is southern, midwestern, or western, indicating that this question is one of cultural prominence.

Benjamin insists that, despite Oklahomans viewing Texas as their “older brother” and themselves as “honorary southerners” Oklahoma is for the most part not southern, claiming that Oklahomans’ tendency to say “ope” makes them firmly midwestern:

(40) Benjamin (25, Male, Management)

- 1 Benjamin: Well, that’s how you know. That’s how I convinced people in Wisconsin! Whenever they’re like [he imitates a Wisconsin accent]: Oklahoma’s in The South!” I’m like: “Uh, we say ope.” And they’re like: “Really? You do?”
- 2 Interviewer: So, do you think Oklahoma is in The South? Or is that just like, Wisconsiner nonsense?
- 3 Benjamin: I tell everybody that I meet that doesn’t know much about Oklahoma that Oklahoma is off-brand Texas. And that we have, uh, like, um an identity crisis. And if you’re in the s- like, if you’re in the proper South, like if you’re in southern Texas, like they’re gonna say Oklahoma’s The Midwest. And if you’re in The North - like, if you’re in the Northern Midwest, they’re gonna say Oklahoma’s part of The South.

Much like Benjamin, Mia also identifies “ope” as an element of midwestern speech, and also admits to using it frequently, but she distinguishes her own speech from “the hyper-midwestern accent of, like, Minnesota.” When asked to determine where Oklahoma is located linguistically, she confirms that it is more midwestern, but not all the way:

(41) Mia (31, Female, Healthcare)

- 1 Interviewer: If we were to put “southern accent” and “midwestern accent” at opposite ends of the spectrum, where do you think Tulsa is on that spectrum?
- 2 Mia: So, I’d put it slightly more toward midwest than south.
- 3 Interviewer: Really.
- 4 Mia: Yeah not dead center. Probably more midwestern than southern, but not - not fully midwestern.

David’s perspective on this matter is summed up by the example he gives of Pennsylvania, which he believes probably has “the most Confederate flags per person”:

(42) David (27, Male, Mechanic)

1 David: I feel like Pennsylvania almost feels like they kinda have to like reb- they're more rural than most of the northern states around them. And therefore they have to rebel that much harder against the politics.

2 Interviewer: Like, they compensate?

3 David: Yeah, they overcompensate.

...

4 David: I think a lot of the people that live in rural Oklahoma want to be part of The South. But Oklahoma wasn't part of The South when the war happened, so they're starting off by stating- they're kind of like Pennsylvania. They're overcompensating to some degree. And then Tulsa then has to compensate the opposite way by leaning so much harder into the blue.

David ascribes an historical justification for Oklahoma's linguistic persona, and proceeds a level deeper by explaining that Tulsa's reaction "into the blue" (almost certainly referencing the color schemes, blue and red, of the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States) is one of rejection from rural Oklahoma's collective persona. In other words, when pressed to create a persona for Tulsa, David's attempt to do so is one not based on Tulsa's intrinsic elements but those which it avoids; a Tulsan is somebody who wants to be seen as un-Oklahoman, and this can be indexed through political affiliation or geographical association. Moreover, David's feelings of Tulsan speech are crystallized in his following statements about placing Oklahoma in The South or The Midwest:

(43) David (27, Male, Mechanic)

1 David: I feel like, I- as a Tulsan, I'm kind of stuck in an awkward position where you can't necessarily say- geographically if you are midwestern or from the South, there's no hard line there. So, what else do you look at? The culture? There's a kind of a blend there. Language? There's kind of a blend there. Everywhere you look, you can't really define - I don't think you can define Tulsa as being one distinct geographical region.

Here, David uses the language of homogeneity that others might use to describe rural Oklahoma, but in a different sense. In his mind, homogeneity is an environment that results from diversity of "regional dialects" and he implies that the same is true for Tulsa and Oklahoma City. He describes Tulsa as having a "blend" in terms of both culture and language, thus making it impossible to classify it in one specific way. In this sense, David's linguistic persona of a Tulsan is weak, unpredictable, and hard to construct, as there are not strong, localized elements of either southernness or midwesternness from which it can be fed.

In contrast, Charlotte seems to perceive Oklahoma, and as a consequence, Tulsa, as speakers of southern English, herself included. When describing her brother's tendency to mirror accents, she notes that he does not use his southern accent with her, but that this does not necessarily mean she is not southern:

(44) Charlotte (55, Female, Education)

1 Charlotte: I can hear his accent change depending on who he's talking to. Because he'll do the mirroring. And he can sound very southern, Oklahoma, Texan, but that's not how he talks when he speaks to me.

2 Interviewer: Do you think of yourself as southern?

3 Charlotte: I do. I think. I've just been here for so long since I graduated from college, and I think I'm more entrenched. I sound southern. I also think of myself as being strongly influenced by my experience in [she pauses] voluntarily integrated middle school / high school. And that- you know, black people in Oakland don't talk the way black people in Tulsa do. And so, I can't talk the way people in Oakland do. But I can slip into the way people speak if you're raised in Tulsa and you're black. I can slip right into that, and that affects even my white talk, you know.

In this excerpt, Charlotte elaborates on her Tulsan speech identity by exploring a space between that of the country talker and someone from a diverse linguistic space. She initially indicates a key association in that she clusters together “southern, Oklahoma, Texan” as one linguistic identity. And instead of associating herself with African American speech elsewhere in the country, such as Oakland, she states that her upbringing in North Tulsa presents an idiosyncratic type of speech that affects “even [her] white talk”. This acknowledges Charlotte’s perception of Tulsa as a diverse, metropolitan space which can be distinguished from southernness by virtue of said diversity; in other words, Charlotte does not portray her North Tulsan African American-influenced speech to be an element of southernness, but instead a separate element which, when combined with her incidental southernness, results in her speaking like a Tulsan. This is exemplified in a second anecdote she gives, further distinguishing the two:

(45) Charlotte (55, Female, Education)

1 Charlotte: In middle school, girls I was friends with would make fun of me. Like right to my face, and say [she continues in an exaggerated accent]: “Oh. My. Gawd. Really.” Black girls I was friends with. And we'd go back and forth like that. And laugh about it.

2 Interviewer: Doing a white voice?

3 Charlotte: Yeah. Oh yeah. We could do- you could just- they would talk white to me right to my face. But they were definitely making fun of me. But I know if I get off of a subway and ask someone for directions in New York City, they think I'm sou- s- from The South.

Thus, despite her expertise with Tulsa’s diverse linguistic landscape, Charlotte acknowledges that southernness is an inextricable element to Tulsan speech which would show through in a place such as New York City.

Like Charlotte, Harper claims that she imagines Oklahoma as a state full of southerners. However, unlike Charlotte, Harper claims that local accents do not appear to



support that perception, as hearing other southern accents has given her a point of comparison:

(46) Harper (21, Female, Customer Service)

- 1 Interviewer: Do you expect or not expect Oklahomans to be southern?
- 2 Harper: I do. I definitely- surprisingly, like, just from the accent part of it, Oklahomans have surprised me with how normal- well, to be fair, I grew up here, so. How normal I think they sound, but like, I have a friend in North Carolina, and he sounds like he could have come straight out of Texas. Like, he has the- what you would think is- is the normal, Oklahoma accent. Like the yeehaw, super cowboy accent. That- you know, super thick, southern drawl.

At any rate, while Harper has an idea of the Oklahoman accent being a “yeehaw, super cowboy accent”, she nonetheless is surprised by how “normal” Oklahomans speak compared to other locations in the United States, perhaps perceived as more southern.

#### 4.4.3.1 Map Analysis

Two maps (Benjamin and David) draw a line directly down the middle horizontal of Oklahoma, dividing into a more neutral/unmarked northern half and a country/marked southern half. Benjamin uses the terms “Kansas-light” and “more mid-western” to describe the northern half, and “Texas-light”, “more southern drawl”, and “more Spanish-speakers” to describe the southern half. Similarly, David describes the northern half with the terms “normal/general American”, while he describes the southern half with “more rural/’southern” and “add Spanish influence”. These features are remarkably similar to one another, especially considering there is no natural formation (such as a river, mountain range, or valley), historical settlement line, or political boundary that divides or has ever divided Oklahoma in this specific way.

It is my speculation, consequently, that these boundaries are not to be taken literally, but to indicate a gradient of midwesternness and southernness that pervades the entire state; the assumption of this gradient is that when one moves further south, they will generally experience more country talk. Furthermore, it is unsurprising given the interview data and previous research on perceived midwestern neutrality (Carmichael 2016, Bonfiglio 2002) that David’s example portrays the northern half as unmarked, with the terms “normal”, “general American”, and Benjamin’s portrays it as entirely midwestern with the term “Kansas-light”. It is likely that both maps are referencing different sides of the same indexically-charged coin. In fact, while labeling his map, Noah describes this exact perception:

(47) Noah (21, Male, Entertainment)

- 1 Noah: I’ll call, like- I’ll call what I think of as, like- [he laughs] a normal, like Midwestern kind of, like speech pattern. I’ll just call that, like “normal”.

It is also fascinating that both maps mention the influence of Spanish language, as no other maps in the data set mention it. However, given the fact that Benjamin acknowledges Texan influence on the southern half of Oklahoma, and given the previously explored association between Oklahoma City and Texas in Charlotte and Grayson's maps, it is possible that the Spanish language acknowledgement comes bundled with the Texas association, perhaps even linkable to the southern/country/Texoma indexical field posited by maps such as Elijah's and Parker's. However, when describing the influence of Texas on Oklahoman speech, Parker phrases it in this way:

(48) Parker (25, Male, IT)

1 Parker: The further South you go, the closer you get to Texas, it seems a little bit- if I was to use a descriptor, I'd say more honkey-tonk. Or maybe a little bit more Toby Keith, you know?

In other words, he does not seem to acknowledge any of the Spanish influence that Benjamin and David noted. It is possible that, while Tulsans are aware of both streams of Texan culture near the border, they distinguish them as separate and simultaneous entities.

Texas was a consistent and unavoidable topic of conversation. Eight of the fifteen participants mentioned Texas in their description of Oklahoma, and, moreover, had already thought deeply and independently prior to the interview of what the relationship between Texas and Oklahoma was in terms of culture, although usually not in terms of speech. Nonetheless, the contrast between participants' ability to construct a Texan linguistic persona and a Tulsan linguistic persona was drastic.

All of Benjamin and David's (and, to a lesser extent, Charlotte and Grayson's) portrayal of macro-effects (The North vs. The South, the influence of surrounding states, particularly Texas) suggests a weakness in the spatial perception of Oklahoma. It seems that, while Texas is "its own kind of southern" (Hall-Lew and Stephens (2012), Lippi-Green (1997:203), Preston (1989)), Tulsans struggle to construct a defined linguistic persona for themselves unless it is constructed through negative comparisons, and they likewise struggle to carve out distinct regions of the state in favor of yielding to a larger, familiar paradigm, such as the easy-to-grasp idea of The American North and The American South. In other words, while a Texan linguistic persona exists and exudes its own cultural elements, a Tulsan linguistic persona must be constructed on the fly by taking away things that Tulsans are not: Tulsans do not see themselves as entirely southern or country like the rest of Oklahoma, but they certainly do not see themselves as a large, world-class city either. Some Tulsans are comfortable with definitively stating that they are midwestern, some are sure that they are southern, and others believe it is an open debate. Nonetheless, this results in a weaker linguistic persona.

With regards to the question of whether Oklahoma is southern or midwestern, Tulsans are unconvinced and nonunanimous on the geographical categorization of their state. Participants trend toward classifying Oklahoma as either southern, western, or midwestern, and as a result of the aforementioned Oklahoma-Tulsa divide, are keen to classify Tulsa as un-southern. For some participants, southernness, westernness, rurality and country blend together and sufficiently describe Oklahoma. And for some participants, Oklahoma is one, and not the others. In accordance, participants frequently describe Tulsa as a midwestern city within a southern or western state. This association with

midwesternness and the association between midwesternness and neutral accents results in “neutral” being a common descriptor for Tulsa and a useful contrast to the “Country” and “cowboy” labels in rural Oklahoma, even when participants elsewhere describe the city as diverse.

Nonetheless, it is usually clear that while respondents may use any number of terms (hillbilly, southern, redneck, country, rural) they tend to reveal that it is the urban-rural divide which fuels this perception, and not a geographical one. In other words, many respondents use the language of “southern speakers” but eventually describe a “southern speaker” as someone who lives in a rural area, regardless of geographical position. countryisms”.

#### 4.4.4 Miscellaneous Ideology

In this section, I analyze miscellaneous statements which are not strictly aligned with any of the main thrusts of this project’s analysis, but which are steeped in language ideology and so for the benefit of future analysis, should be presented. occupation, and wealth.

##### 4.4.4.1 Perception of the Rural Persona

Tulsans in this study tended to compare themselves strongly to surrounding areas of Oklahoma and interpret their own speech as neutral or accentless by comparison. In a trend reminiscent of fractal recursivity, they also often generate a strongly country persona that contains the entire indexical field of all country-southern associations against which to compare themselves as Tulsans. Even if others have in the past told them that they had an accent, they generally chose to not believe it; Kinsley recounts a story of people in Florida considering her to sound southern:

(49) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)

- 1 Kinsley: When I went to Florida, a lot of people in Florida thought I had a very thick, um, southern accent. Which, I don’t find myself to have a very thick...
- 2 Interviewer: People in Florida thought that?
- 3 Kinsley: Yes!
- 4 Interviewer: Interesting.
- 5 Kinsley: I know. And I’ve only been to Orlando in Florida, so I don’t know if it was just- ‘cuz, you know, in the swamps they are pretty... [She pauses]. Redneck, I would say. I would say people from around here did tease me when I was younger because, uh, my family says “warshing” machine, instead of “washing” machine.
- 5 Interviewer: Ah. And which do you say nowadays?
- 6 Kinsley: Probably “warshing” machine, yeah.

In this excerpt, Kinsley solidifies that she associates rurality, southernness, and the “redneck” linguistic persona, but rejects those elements as some which are inapplicable to

her. However, she also indicates that “warsh” is a work which particularly indicates her and her family as linguistically stigmatized. She states that this is indeed a southern way of speaking:

- (50) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)
- 1 Interviewer: What identity do you associate that with?
  - 2 Kinsley: I would say- southern, yeah. [She laughs].

This southern persona becomes more fleshed out as Kinsley continues. Contrary to her original insistence that Skiatook (a rural area outside of Tulsa, as well as her hometown) and Tulsa sound the same, however, Kinsley eventually (perhaps as she grows more comfortable in the interview) begins to distinguish between Tulsa and Skiatook:

- (51) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)
- 1 Interviewer: So, would you consider Tulsa to be like a southern language community? Or Skiatook maybe, or what?
  - 2 Kinsley: Skiatook for sure. Um, Tulsa may be a little different, I think it’s just the less country people, if that makes sense. But, I would still say we have a southern accent.

Here, Kinsley indicates that both communities sound southern, but that because there are “less country people”, likely in reference to Tulsa’s urbanity, Tulsa occupies a weaker southern identity in the linguistic landscape. Naturally, this opens the question of whether Kinsley herself and other Tulsa speakers are southern, which she clarifies later:

- (52) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)
- 1 Kinsley: I personally don’t think I have an accent. Have I heard people in Tulsa that have an accent? Yes, like very southern-good old boy-yeehaw. [She laughs]. I don’t know what else to say.
  - 2 [Someone from elsewhere in the home shouts: “into their lifted trucks!”]<sup>3</sup>
  - 3 Kinsley: Yeah! [She laughs again].

Kinsley clearly has a strong sense of persona for the type of Tulsan which has a southern accent; she imagines this person with the “good old boy” and “yeehaw” qualities. It should be noted that her phrasing implies that while she implies that she and most Tulsans do not speak with a southern accent, the certain persona she has imagined does.

Moreover, Harper echoes the same qualities by claiming that, even though she is a Tulsan, the nature of being Oklahoman entails certain speech elements are unavoidable. She provides an example of what she believes are typical Oklahoman linguistic quirks, insisting that is not just through “sound” (presumably, her accent) but primarily through word choice that this shines through:

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<sup>3</sup> As this person was not the subject of the interview, I do not elaborate on their identity or relationship to Kinsley.

(53) Harper (21, Female, Customer Service)

- 1 Harper: I went through speech therapy, I wasn't able to say my 'R's right, so now I sound a little bit crazy when I talk, but most people just think it's an accent. So. I'd say I probably don't sound like a normal Oklahoma person. But the way that I speak? Probably. I'm the type of person that says "y'all", "gonna", "warshrag", normal Oklahoma sayings.

Notably, she cites "warshrag" as an example along the same lines as "y'all" and "gonna" as something that a "normal Oklahoma person" would say. "Warsh", of course, was previously cited by both Parker and Kinsley in the same context, indicating that it may be a key phrase in identifying the southern-country-rural indexical field and persona imagined by Tulsans.

However, while the southern-rural-country persona constructions visible in this study are usually similar to one another, they are not always identical. Although Charlotte admits that she talks slightly Southern as a result of being a Tulsan, she still has strong linguistic judgements about other commonly-associated accents that do not align perfectly with Kinsley's:

(54) Charlotte (55, Female, Education)

- 1 Charlotte: When I met people from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, I was envious of their southern accent, because I thought that it sounded a lot more appealing than my southern accent.
- 2 Interviewer: Really.
- 3 Charlotte: And I don't like the West Texas southern accent.
- 4 Interviewer: When you say more appealing, like um, it's more southern? Or less southern? Or what does that entail?
- 5 Charlotte: Not as harsh.

Initially, it is not clear what Charlotte means by "not as harsh" in reference to her own southern accent. However, she elaborates on this sentiment when discussing Northwest Oklahoma:

(55) Charlotte (55, Female, Education)

- 1 Charlotte: That area [the Oklahoma Panhandle and Colorado] really intrigues me because people seem really cowboyish. Western. And I [she pauses] I'd say that's how I'd characterize West Texas. Is just-the- West Texas is a harsh accent. And also, when I was talking about states that are north of us, but are very southern, I think of Maryland. And I think there's a huge- what I would call hick, hillbilly, other- you know, cornfed, derogatory names- people from Maryland.

Although respondents in this study typically looked down on strong southern accents, it seems that Charlotte actually does not associate stereotypical southern speech from places like Virginia and North Carolina with the same "harsh" sound and "cowboyish" persona that she does with West Texas and West Oklahoma accents. Nonetheless, she

exhibits a clear example of southern-rural conflation by talking about Maryland, a place which she considers southern but which is, literally speaking, north of Oklahoma. Elaborating, she says:

(56) Charlotte (55, Female, Education)

- 1 Charlotte: Oh, I find their politics and the way they speak to just be very hick. That's all I can say. Unless you're close to D.C.

She clarifies that “hick” includes not only their language, but their politics, solidifying the indexical field identified for previous Tulsans in the study that encompasses a rural, country-talking, southern-identifying conservative person - or as Kinsley puts it, “very southern-good old boy-yeehaw”. While it is not transparently obvious that Charlotte means conservative and/or Republican politics in her statement, based on my conversation with her and my own intuition I am confident this is the case.

As Kinsley's map features “yee haw” along the east of Oklahoma and including the general Tulsa area, I softly prodded as to the nature of “yee haw” to see if she considered Tulsa to be in this group. Even when comparing her speech to Oklahoma Citian speech, Kinsley feels the same way as above:

(57) Kinsley (55, Female, Education)

- 1 Interviewer: What is a yeehaw speaker?  
2 Kinsley: Um, I would say someone with more of a country, redneck background. They just tend to have their own words for things.  
3 Interviewer: Do you associate that with Tulsa?  
4 Kinsley: Less with Tulsa, more with Skiatook.  
5 Interviewer: Okay. If we were to compare Tulsa and Oklahoma City, though?  
6 Kinsley: I would say Oklahoma City- how do I say this- maybe more-more ghetto? If that makes sense?  
...  
7 Kinsley: And this- like, the Oklahoma City area they definitely [she sighs] have more of like, a city slicker- that's the only thing I can think of. Just less rural.  
...  
8 Kinsley: Tulsa, I would say we're a little bit more country than them, but I would definitely say that we're- how do I put this- I would say OKC, they're- the way they talk is more ghetto, little less country, um and Tulsa I feel like, I don't have the word to explain this, but people here talk more clearly, if that makes sense. They have a better vocabulary when explaining things.

This description of Oklahoma City is perplexing because it is the only one in the series to attribute elements of urbanity and city-ness to Oklahoma City at a stronger level than that of Tulsa. Of course, in reality, Oklahoma City has a larger population and a larger GDP than Tulsa, so such a judgment would not be without basis, but this fact does not usually manifest as comments about Oklahoma City speech as being more urban or

“ghetto”, as Kinsley puts it. In fact, maps such as Charlotte’s and Grayson’s indicate that Oklahoma City speech is more Texan than Tulsa’s is, which, combined with the established Southern persona of Texan speech, should indicate the opposite.

Nonetheless, there is no ambiguity with what Kinsley means; she states outright that she believes Tulsans speak more “country” than Oklahoma Citians, but also notes the qualities “talk more clearly” and “better vocabulary” as aspects of Tulsan speech. The latter of these descriptors is of particular note because, as quoted above, Kinsley differentiates Avant from Tulsa by the fact that the more “redneck” and “poor” Avant has “less education, less bigger vocabulary” due to being country. Thus, Kinsley paints a highly specific picture of Tulsa as a place where people speak clearly and eloquently as a consequence of the fact that they are “a little more country” and not “ghetto” like Oklahoma City.

#### 4.4.4.2 Perception of the Urban Persona

While not directly related to speech, respondents maintain a specific image of Tulsa that likely plays into their judgments of Tulsa as a place of neutral accent. This image positions Tulsa as a diverse metropolitan oasis and economic engine in an otherwise dull and homogenous Oklahoma. In this subsection, I analyze examples of Tulsans reflecting on what it means for Tulsa to be a city, as opposed to a small town. For example, when asked to describe the elements of Tulsa that he likes, Elijah immediately opened with Tulsa’s apparent diversity:

(58) Elijah (31, Male, Student)

- 1 Elijah: I really feel like the best part of living in Tulsa is that it’s got a very good diversity, amongst, uh, whole different populations. I mean there’s like a German church here, a Japanese church, I mean, like, different cultures and societies all blended together. Um, it’s just really cool, it seems like you can get a whole- different kinds of food and uh, they really have a good- good sense of just uh, collective culture, I guess. [He laughs].

Likewise, when asked to describe the nature of Tulsa, David describes it as “progressive for Oklahoma standards”:

(59) David (27, Male, Mechanic)

- 1 David: That’s one thing I find about Tulsa, is that - it seems like it attracts a lot of people who are looking for somewhere that is both a developed city, in the sense that there are things to do here, uh, it is progressive for Oklahoma standards, but it also doesn’t have the high cost of living and the sort of, uh, the sort of traffic and all that that you get in really big cities. It’s kind of a nice compromise between a really big city and a, you know, a smaller community where you don’t really have as much to do.

For David, Tulsa exists somewhere on a spectrum between rural Oklahoma and a “really big” city, which his description implicitly links to a sense of “progressiveness”,

with the rest of Oklahoma being less-so than Tulsa. When the topic is turned back to rural environments, Elijah has this to say:

(60) Elijah (31, Male, Student)

1 Elijah: Uh, when you get to more of like, rural- rural environments, it tends to kinda get more country, more twangy.

2 Interviewer: Okay.

3 Elijah: And “twangy”, I don’t even know if that’s the right word to describe what I hear. But, it just tends to be a lot more pronounced. But uh, whenever you get into more densely populated areas, like Tulsa and the metro areas, like Tulsa and Oklahoma City, I don’t hear it as much. Everyone tends to have just like, a generic speech pattern, I feel like.

There is little-to-no southern-midwestern divide in Elijah’s initial description of Oklahoma. Instead, he analyzes it solely through the lens of rurality and urbanity. Nonetheless, he identifies strongly with Tulsan speech and culture, closing with the following statement:

(61) Elijah (31, Male, Student)

1 Elijah: I feel like Tulsa is cool. Um, and we have our own little cool speech pattern here, because we have this like, weird “intertwang”. Intertwine between the twang and the midwestern, um, and then like, just kind of a melting pot here.

This statement highlights the metropolitan aspect of Tulsa, implicitly setting it apart from the more rural, homogenous areas of the state, while also acknowledging that Tulsa is necessarily situated within The South, resulting in a “intertwine between the twang and the midwestern”. Notably, it also situates “midwestern” and “twang” as opposite features, hearkening back to the underlying assumption that midwestern speech tends to occupy a neutral role in contrast to southern speech’s strong, marked role in Tulsan language ideology.

When asked about how people speak in Tulsa, Grayson is open about how he thinks Tulsans are perceived not just by himself, but by outsiders:

(62) Grayson (25, Male, Engineer)

1 Grayson: So, people in Tulsa, they are, um, so there are stereotypes about like, what the South is, like southern hospitality. I have personally been in um, states like Louisiana, where southern hospitality is like, really uh, apparent. I’d say that is less so of like a Tulsa stereotype, because they are- I feel like Tulsa is less South than someone from like, Louisiana, but there’s still a little bit of that, like, country association.

As he imagines a Tulsan, Grayson’s immediate thought process is to compare it to a classically southern state, by stating that it is “less south” but still “country”. This phrasing



partially links “country” and “southern”, but it also distinguishes them. It seems that while Grayson is comfortable calling Tulsa “country”, and while his mind immediately turns to southernness when imagining it, a part of the way he sees the wider cultural landscape of the United States convinces him to designate Louisiana to be a genuine southern state as compared to Oklahoma, which is implicitly not.

(63) Grayson (25, Male, Engineer)

- 1 Grayson: I don’t have the proper words to describe what it is, but maybe it’s in terms of how they- like the intonation on things, maybe it’s a little bit sharper, like they’re trying to raise the vowels a little bit. [He does an impression of a southern woman]: “Hi there, welcome in!”

Grayson’s description of southern drawls links Tulsa with a greater linguistic neutrality as compared to those from smaller towns, and also links southernness more directly with rurality. Additionally, the persona he conjures in his impression seems to be linked to the example he previously gave regarding “southern hospitality” as being a key element to southern identity. This suggests that smaller towns exist in a highly similar linguistic and cultural landscape as Louisiana (and consequently, southernness) for Grayson.

However, it is also critical to note that Grayson indicates that this paradigm is not global, but instead an aspect unique to Oklahoma (or perhaps merely the local region). Specifically, returning to the example of Louisiana as a classical southern state, he continues:

(64) Grayson (25, Male, Engineer)

- 1 Grayson: I will speak to my experience when I work in Louisiana sometimes. There, it’s not just lower class- it’s people who have very good jobs. They have this-
- 2 Interviewer: Everybody talks like that?
- 3 Grayson: Yeah. In Louisi- yeah. So, in Louisiana, it’s- it’s not qu- it’s almost like that lazy accent, but it’s a little bit different, where it sounds slightly more enthusiastic. And maybe that just gets into the personality of the people I was talking to. But it’s like- um, so instead of saying “oil” it’s like “oll”. It just sounds like words are more “marbled” or “rounded” down there. So like, [he does an impression] “whatcha gonna be doin’ after work today?” So like, instead of “worked” it’s “worked” [he emphasizes the /o/ vowel].

In this excerpt, we receive confirmation that the accent Grayson associates with lower wealth, rurality, and markedness is indeed also perceived as southern to him, as he indicates that, while “a little bit different”, “it’s not just lower class” that talks this way in Louisiana. For Grayson, this is a critically defining element that separates a truly southern place like Louisiana from a borderland such as Oklahoma.

#### 4.4.4.3 Self-Ridicule and Self-Acceptance

In this subsection, I analyze the linguistic attitudes of Tulsans who, rather than deny their own southern tendencies, acknowledge them or claim to have excised them or to be currently working on excising them. For instance, despite her tendency to say “y’all”, Harper admits that she and her friends (who also use the word) make fun of each other constantly for saying it:

(65) Harper (21, Female, Customer Service)

- 1 Interviewer: Can I ask why y’all- [laughing] why y’all laugh at each other for saying “y’all”?
- 2 Harper: I think it’s just a very... When someone says “y’all” you’re immediately like: [she whispers and gestures as though she is gossiping behind someone’s back] “they’re from a South state”. Like, if I heard someone say “y’all” I’d be like: “you’re from Oklahoma.” Or “you’re from Texas.” Or somewhere crazy that says “y’all” because that’s what we expect southerners to sound like. So, I think, uh, most of the reason we’ll make fun of each other or joke about it is because that’s such a southerner thing for us to do.

This statement confirms that Harper’s perception of Oklahoman speech is one that acknowledges its stigmatization, but also links it to southernness. Yet it also displays a mix of security and insecurity in that, while she and her friends are comfortable with “y’all”, they engage in stigmatizing it themselves amongst each other. She also speculates that she uses it more often when texting or typing than when speaking, but does not have any intuition as to why. This language ideology – perhaps best labeled as a stereotypical Tulsan language ideology – is summed up by the following quote from Harper on how it feels to live in Oklahoma: “I love Oklahoma, but sometimes you gotta make fun of some hillbillies.”

In a similar vein, Charlotte admits there are aspects of southern speech which she exhibits that she is not proud of:

(66) Charlotte (55, Female, Education)

- 1 Charlotte: But when I do travel, in general when I was a kid as well, people would say: “Oh, I would never guess you were from Oklahoma” but I know I speak like a Tulsan. And [she pauses] I can hear it. Like, I’ll say “yer” instead of “your”.
- ...
- 2 Charlotte: Like, around here- and I- I cringe when I hear myself say this: “yer” instead of “your”.
- ...
- 3 Charlotte: It’s so [she vocalizes the spelling of the word] “y-e-r”. And it seems absurd to me, but I say it every hour.

Curiously, Charlotte frames this acknowledgement as an aspect of Tulsan speech; whereas most respondents presented the perspective that sounding like a Tulsan entailed not sounding like an Oklahoman, Charlotte places Tulsa front and center as the guilty party

in delivering her pronunciation of the word “your”, which she states she cringes upon hearing.

Although similar, Amelia’s perspective is different in that while she strives for a neutral manner of speaking, she does not particularly regret that she has an accent that reflects her upbringing:

(67) Amelia (66, Female, Education)

- 1 Interviewer: Do you identify positively with- with that, um, with [her self-described ‘southern accent’]? I mean, is it something you feel proud of? Or is it just a neutral- you don’t care about it?
- 2 Amelia: Um, I’m proud that I can still revert to that accent, and- when I’m playing around and joking, but no, I’d rather have a neutral accent, and I strive for that but I know I don’t always achieve it.

Thus, Amelia does not show any particular shame or insecurity about her accent, but she does stipulate, through the use of the word “revert”, that she considers herself to no longer speech in such a way. Unlike Amelia, however, James is confident that he has successfully and completely removed elements of southern speech from his manner of speaking:

(68) James (41, Male, Government)

- 1 James: I got a little ribbing when I went away to college [in Cleveland] around 19 years old for having an Oklahoma accent, but when I came back from college I definitely did not speak like a local anymore. [He laughs].
- 2 Interviewer: I’m curious. What does a local speak like? Rather- how did you speak when you went off to college and got a ribbing for talking like an Oklahoman?
- 3 James: Well, um, there were certain sound behaviors, the big one is um, the-the short ‘e’ sound, that I actually kind of had to learn to do. I did not do it very much when I went away to Ohio.
- 4 Interviewer: What kinda words is that in?
- 5 James: [Clearly and deliberately] Pen.
- 6 Interviewer: Oh.
- 7 James: Yeah. Ca- It came out [stressed] “pin”.
- 8 Interviewer: Yeah, so pin and pen are different things for you, I’m guessing?
- 9 James: Yeah. Yeah. Um, and there were also quite a few, um, idiomatic phrases which I used from growing up here, that people in Ohio did not recognize and thought sounded very funny.

James does not offer any of the idiomatic phrases that Ohioans did not recognize. However, his description of the famous pin-pen merger indicates that he has a non-trivial knowledge of dialectology in the United States. It is notable that he does not outright call this “southern”, “country”, “yeehaw”, or any other common labels, but instead merely

refers to it as “an Oklahoma accent”. As we continue discussing Oklahoma words and phrases, James clarifies that he no longer says “y’all”:

(69) James (41, Male, Government)

- 1 Interviewer: Do you, right now, in the year 2021, say “Y’all”?
- 2 James: Eh, mostly jokingly. [He laughs].
- 3 Interviewer: Do you think you would have before you went to Ohio?
- 4 James: Yeah.
- 5 Interviewer: But nowadays, it’s like- uh, too Oklahoman, or?
- 6 James: It- it’s just- it’s not, like I said, I focused certain behaviors out of my speech patterns, and that was one of the- my word selection is different than it used to be. Like I used to say “talk” a lot more than I used to say “speak”.
- 7 Interviewer: Ah, okay.
- 8 James: Things like that. I engineered certain words out of my regular vocabulary.
- 9 Interviewer: And this was like, a conscious expulsion of-
- 10 James: It was, and part of it was to normalize my speech, and part of it was because I was doing a lot of communication in academic circles, and I wanted to sound a little more academic. [He laughs].

This indicates that James has an intense feeling that Oklahoma speech is stigmatized, and that it is not just phonetic aspects of speech, but also lexical choices; it is possible that James is referring to “talk” in the nonstandard usage of “she talks very good Spanish”, wherein replacing it with “speak” would be less marked in the academic circles he references. He uses the phrase “normalize”, indicating that he believes, to a degree, in a “normal” way of speaking, which he is moving toward.

James’ belief that his original accent is detrimental to a professional career is not one that he alone holds; while describing his theory on the socioeconomic and demographic factors of country accents, Noah takes a moment to clarify that he thinks having a strong Oklahoman accent is bad for job prospects, even in-state:

(70) Noah (21, Male, Entertainment)

- 1 Noah: Tulsa and Oklahoma City... I feel like, like I said before: I think a lot of it has to do with, like, occupation, and I think that more people living in city areas probably, um, are more employed based on communication skills, almost, and so, like, you’re not- I don’t know if you’re gonna be more or less likely to be hired, like- but you’re probably gonna be more like, likely to succeed at a job where communication is more important than somebody who’s like raised as a third generation farmer or something like that.

Yet not all Tulsan speakers are prepared to loathe the country accent. Isabella, having grown up in Texas, offers a different perspective on how Tulsan speech sounds compared to Texan speech, and how she feels about her accent having changed:

- (71) Isabella (25, Female, Writer)
- 1 Interviewer: When you moved up here, did you feel like you talked the same as everybody around here? Or did you talk different?
- 2 Isabella: I felt like I talked the same, but I was told I had an accent. I remember that distinctly because I thought it was very weird.
- 3 Interviewer: And- how- was this just, like, immediately after you moved to Tulsa, people told you that?
- 4 Isabella: Yeah. It was like within the first year of me being here. I remember, I was on the playground, and it was someone in like the grade below us, so I was either in 8th grade and they were in 7th grade or I was in 7th grade and they were 6th grade, um, but they were like: “Oh yeah, I think this guy likes you because of your accent!” And I was like: “Wait, what?”
- 5 Interviewer: [Laughing].
- 6 Isabella: “Accent!?” [She laughs]. “I’m sorry, what? What are you talking about?” But funnily enough, once I’d lived here for awhile, and I went back, to like, visit family and stuff, for like, see my cousin in plays, I would hear people in the audience and they had like a very strong [she pauses] twang? And I started thinking, like, did I have that?
- ...
- 7 Isabella: Whenever I’d go back there, and uh, I’d watch my cousin do plays, I’d hear people. You know, we’re taking our seats, and it’s just like- you know, you hear the very stereotypical southern talk, and I’m just like: “Did I sound like that?” [she laughs]
- 8 Interviewer: [Laughing].
- 9 Isabella: “Did we all just sound like this and I didn’t notice? [She laughs].

When asked if she thinks she still talks with an accent after having lived in Tulsa, Isabella stated that she “probably” does, and admits to still having a “southern” influence, but that life in Tulsa has made her sound more articulate, though she is reluctant to phrase it this way:

- (72) Isabella (25, Female, Writer)
- 1 Isabella: I definitely still have that kind of southern influence on some things. I’ll leave, like, the ‘g’ off, or whatever, you know.
- 2 Interviewer: Do you feel like that- that being in Tulsa has changed how you talk?
- 3 Isabella: I think so.
- 4 Interviewer: In what way?
- 5 Isabella: Um, I don’t wanna say I’m more articulate [she starts to laugh] I don’t think that’s the best way to put it. [She proceeds in a sarcastic tone] “In Texas, I wasn’t articulate at all, and then I became educated in Oklahoma!” [She laughs again].

Isabella's reaction solidifies the fact that she understands the meta-positioning of southernness as low-prestige and is consciously trying to work against it. While she recognizes that Tulsan speech ideology and patterns have influenced her, she is also cognizant of the perceptual stereotypes of country talk, and refuses to simply refer to her new speech as "more articulate", while simultaneously acknowledging that it is a good, if blunt, way to describe it.

Finally, not every respondent had negative perceptions about "y'all". Although Kinsley insisted that she did not seem to have an accent, she did admit to saying "y'all":

- (73) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)  
1 Interviewer: Do you say "y'all"?  
2 Kinsley: [She laughs] Yeah.

Following this, I ask her what she thinks of someone who refuses to say "y'all", to which she gives an emblematic reply in the form of imitation, while maintaining a clear awareness of southern folk dialectology:

- (74) Kinsley (23, Female, Veterinary)  
1 Kinsley: [In a thick southern accent unlike how she spoke for most of the conversation] You ain't from here, are ya? [She laughs].

Nearly every respondent associated Tulsan speech with the highest level of prestige, wealth, class, and education within Oklahoma, even when compared to Oklahoma City. The only exception is Kinsley, who associated Oklahoma City speech with the term "ghetto" and that Tulsans' slight country influence made them sound different. Of the fourteen participants that were not Kinsley, eleven considered the two cities to be essentially equivalent, with three respondents suggesting that Oklahoma City was slightly more southern or Texan than Tulsa. No respondent indicated that Oklahoma City was exceptionally country, however, and it remained a powerful contrast against the rural "black hole" that surrounds both it and Tulsa.

#### 4.4.5 History, Demographics, and Erasure

In this section, I analyze the degree to which the respondents recognized historical, ethnic, and demographic trends when conducting folk dialectology, and to what extent these factors were ignored or erased.

##### 4.4.5.1 Race

When trying to describe the Tulsa accent, it is not uncommon for participants to invoke the idea of a "blend" as David does in Example (43). Likewise, Amelia invokes this same diversity:

(75) Amelia (66, Female, Education)

- 1 Amelia: In Tulsa, um, I just hear all different kinds. I can't really say there's one that's 'Tulsa' for me.
- 2 Interviewer: Okay. Um, so, what- how would you describe the range of accents you can hear in Tulsa?
- 3 Amelia: Some are, um, what I would call southern, leaving off the ends of words, and, um, kind of... pronouncing words - I'm trying to think of an example.
- 4 Interviewer: Mhm.
- 5 Amelia: "I'm gonna go" or whatever. And then, um, obviously there's a lot- some people speak black dialect.
- 6 Interviewer: Yeah.
- 7 Amelia: And I've heard - I don't notice this but like when I worked at [a local school] looking back, I know that a whole lot of people spoke real neutrally. You know, [faculty member] is from California. I know he speaks pretty neutrally, or at least I think he does.

The two most prominent dialects for Amelia that identify Tulsa are the "southern" manner of speaking and the "black dialect". This is among the rare (perhaps because all fifteen respondents were white) instances where racial minority speech is acknowledged as a part of the folk dialectology of Tulsa. A similar acknowledgement is made by James:

(76) James (41, Male, Government)

- 1 James: And also, you know, working Tulsa in the police department, I came across people in all sorts of socioeconomic groups, and there are a lot of people in Oklahoma who also speak something very different from what I consider Oklahoma twang, particularly when you're up into, uh, well, there's the uh, ethnic Central and Latin American...
- 2 Interviewer: Right.
- 3 James: ...People who live mostly in the Northeast side of Tulsa. They obviously have a strong influence from that because they're not native English speakers, but you also notice some differences when you go up into, uh, into African American areas.

Respondents only occasionally mentioned race in their descriptions of Oklahoma speech, and when they did, had little to say other than a brief acknowledgement that they had a hand in making up the "Tulsa dialect". It was common, however, for respondents to mention Tulsa's diversity in a shrouded description with terms such as "all kinds" or "international standard", as described in Example (22). Nonetheless, the distinct dearth of ethnic acknowledgement is worth investigating. As of the 2010 United States census, Tulsa's population was around 15% African American and 15% Hispanic, both approximately double the state's averages for both ethnic groups. What's more, James is the only speaker to directly cite Central and Latin American language as a specific aspect of Tulsan speech; if other respondents acknowledged Spanish-language influence, it was always in the context of describing the entire state, the entire Southwest region, or the region of Texoma and/or the southern half of Oklahoma, and never in reference to Tulsa

itself. In perfect contrast, African American English was only ever directly cited as an aspect of Tulsan speech, and never in the context of the entire state.

Respondents never directly invoked historical justifications for dialectal differences, aside from David's assertion that Oklahoma's non-southern status is due to its lack of statehood during the American Civil War in Example (42). For instance, no respondent filled out their map by drawing a line down the historical Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory border and said "people talk southern in the East and midwestern in the West, because the eastern half was Indian Territory and the western half was Oklahoma Territory!", and of course, they did not cite, for instance, Southard or Bailey or make guesses about demographic history trends of Oklahoma. Consequently, there was likewise never a comment to the tune of "Of course, Western Oklahoma talks more white than Eastern Oklahoma, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City."

However, I speculate that this fact is not borne out of ignorance of Oklahoman history; Tulsans tend to be aware of the ethnic makeup their city, as well as the history and effects of both Black Wall Street during its heyday, and the Tulsa Race Massacre. In fact, it is my suspicion that a survey such as the one completed for this project asking Tulsans to draw dialect boundaries for Tulsa, rather than Oklahoma, would demonstrate a high level of awareness of where white, black, and Latin American speakers of English generally live within the city as Amelia, Charlotte, and James are able to describe in their interviews. Curiously, these respondents were the oldest in the sample, and the only respondents over forty years of age. It is possible that all younger respondents were either unable or unwilling to directly reference race in their answers.

Likewise, most Tulsans are quite familiar with the settlement history of Oklahoma and are familiar with the fact that Oklahoma has a proportionally large Native American presence. Nonetheless, these elements are shockingly absent from linguistic attitude analysis of the state in its entirety. We do not see, for instance, a drawn map with a boundary on the East of Oklahoma that says "Native accents".

#### 4.4.5.2 The Panhandle

The Oklahoman Panhandle was the target of the most frequent instance of what I will call acknowledged erasure. By this, I mean that, as opposed to the racial erasure described above wherein respondents neglected to acknowledge their existence, respondents frequently singled out the panhandle as a place where "no one lives" or a place of mystery and emptiness, usually in a tongue-in-cheek manner. This is most visible by observing the map tasks: of the fifteen respondents, seven (Amelia, Benjamin, Charlotte, Isabella, Kinsley, Mia, Noah) clearly delineated the panhandle as a distinct region, and of those, only three were able to describe it, while the other four consciously acknowledged it as "unknown", "?", or "no one lives here". It is interesting to note, however, that despite the panhandle's famous unknownness, it is among the most significantly demarcated regions in the study. Aside from the two cities of Tulsa and Oklahoma City, the panhandle is the most-drawn feature on the map tasks, and even maps such as Mia's and Noah's, which are otherwise divided uncomplicatedly into the basic "two cities vs. rural" dichotomy, the panhandle is acknowledged, although rarely is anything of note said about it.

Only two respondents make strong claims about the panhandle. The first is Noah, who labels the region as "kinda southern" in comparison to the rest of rural Oklahoma



(labeled “southern”), which implies recognition of the West Oklahoma - East Oklahoma split that Southard (1993) identifies. The second is Charlotte, who identifies the area with Colorado and Raton, New Mexico, calling the area “cowboy western”. Given that the panhandle, as the last-settled and most sparsely-populated frontier of Oklahoma Territory, fits the stereotypical historical profile of cowboy country, this perception is not particularly surprising, yet it still was not common. It is perhaps only due to Noah and Charlotte’s own personal experiences and travels that they hold this perception, as even participants who acknowledged the panhandle certainly never described it in the detail offered by Charlotte.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

In these interviews, Tulsans show an awareness of dialectal perception that is strongly aligned with previous research into Oklahoman language attitudes, only on the “other side of the fence”. In other words, they perceive themselves and their speech much like how other Oklahomans perceive them, based on the results of the RODEO project. The interviews also yielded a surprising amount of cognizance regarding the borderland status of Oklahoma, as participants were mostly prepared to discuss Tulsa and Oklahoma’s question of southernness – an “identity crisis” as Benjamin puts it – both in terms of culture and speech, and answers to the question varied greatly.

Overall, the data show a strong favor for collapsing the identities of “rural speaker” and “southern speaker” into one unified entity. Respondents were eager to outright say that these two were the same thing, and even attribute counter-evidence (such as southern-sounding speakers in Tulsa) to mobility or economic migration. Nonetheless, opinion was not unified. Some speakers, such as Charlotte and James, considered Tulsa speech to be accented in some way, although they still ceded that it was consistently stronger in rural areas.

Rural Oklahoma is treated as a homogenous region. For instance, respondents did not answer “you can hear just about any type of accent out in the country”, but rather were confident that, from past experiences, they had a strong idea of what a rural Oklahoman would sound like, no matter where this person was from. Only rarely did respondents exhibit confidence in dissecting rural Oklahoman dialectal regions. In contrast, the Tulsan linguistic persona was never agreed-upon by a majority of respondents. Tulsa was described by some as a place where people talk “neutral”, by some as a place where people talk “country”, and by some as a place where you can hear “all kinds”. It is perhaps all we can say to say that, certainly, the Tulsan linguistic persona is weak and ill-defined in folk knowledge.

Finally, folk knowledge of dialectal regions seems to have only a minor basis in phonetic and historical reality. Some respondents had a general, if vague, idea that Western Oklahoma features midwestern elements of speech, but this was usually interpreted with terms such as “cowboy” or “kinda southern”. Tulsans did not place much emphasis on historical justification, and, especially in the case of younger respondents, instead favored macro-level explanations that were applicable to other parts of the country, such as the urban-rural paradigm, or a wealth disparity paradigm. Although my intuition is that Tulsans are not ignorant of the racial makeup of Oklahoma, it is telling that this aspect of Oklahoman dialectology is almost entirely erased in their descriptions.

Naturally, this study was limited in a few key ways. Two cascading and compounding factors were the COVID-19 pandemic and a short amount of time available in Tulsa for administering interviews. As the nature of this study necessitated in-person map tasks, and because I had only the time when I was able to be away from Lexington, Kentucky, these two factors greatly inhibited the efficacy of the snowball sampling method for interview participants. Roughly half of the respondents knew of me directly in some way, as they were able to access my original social media post. The other half were recommended to me, and are therefore only one degree removed from my own social environment. There were no doubly removed participants in this study, and as a result, the

results likely failed to escape the effects of my own personal demographic bias. One particularly visible aspect of this limited sampling is that all 15 of the respondents were white and cisgendered, and although a decent age range was represented, most were young adults. Tulsa has a large black population and Hispanic population, and perceptions of Oklahoman speech from these communities would be valuable.

While perceptions of Oklahoman speech seem well-documented, they are still not well-explained. Tulsans seem unable to answer where different dialect regions in rural Oklahoma are located, but what about ethnic groups? For instance, does the average Oklahoman know that most Native Americans live in Eastern Oklahoma? And, if they did, would this affect their linguistic landscape perceptions? A study similar to Montgomery (2007) with focused attention to cultural prominence and salience may reveal the factors that make, say, the Texan linguistic persona so easily-identifiable, but not the Tulsan. Similarly, while unconventional, a study tightly focused on marketing and commodification of Oklahoman speech may yield relevant results. For instance, the variety of iconizations investigated by Remlinger (2009) and Johnstone (2009) serve as real-world examples of commodification and dialectal awareness that Tulsans seem to not exhibit. Picking at this discrepancy is sure to result in answers.

An obvious avenue for expansion of the present project would be to digitize a greater volume of map tasks. A pool of respondents which is both wider and deeper would provide more demographic data, more variance in personal experiences, and, most importantly, statistically significant data which could be analyzed with ArcGIS or like software in order to detect macro-level trends of perception. Secondly, a focus on Native American perceptions of Oklahoma dialectology would likely yield an interesting comparison to these data, as my suspicion is that Native Americans in Oklahoma are more likely to include an historical justification in their imagined linguistic landscapes than the respondents in this study. These data would also likely vary in indexical perception; for instance, do they subscribe to the same southern-rural collapse of identities? Do they consider Tulsa and Oklahoma City to sound the same? Do Eastern Oklahoma, Texoma, and the Oklahoma Panhandle sound homogenously “country”?

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## VITA

Andrew Chase Carter was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and in Japanese at the University of Oklahoma in 2019. Over the past three years, he has served as a teaching assistant at the University of Kentucky and as the assistant editor to the *Journal of Linguistic Geography*. Upon publication of this thesis, he will graduate with a Master of Arts degree in Linguistic Theory and Typology from the University of Kentucky.