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## Perceptual dialectology: Trends and prospects

With apologies to the Lone Ranger, I invite you to return with me to those thrilling days of yesteryear when dialectology was not a sub-branch of studies of exotica — not a collection of the odd noises, quaint words, and curious constructions of the rural and uneducated (usually clad in colorful garb and accompanied by at least one loyal animal). Instead let us recall that in its earliest day dialectology was the proving ground for the study of general linguistics, particularly the study of language change, or historical linguistics, itself the foundation of much early general linguistic scholarship.

I will not elaborate here the idea that ordinary or what I have called *production* dialectology deserves such a place, although I believe that to be true. Instead, I will ask you to consider also the importance of a *perceptual* (or misleadingly named *folk*) dialectology to theories of language variation and change.

What we believe about language, the venues and statuses of varieties, and other linguistic (and metalinguistic) concerns, whether consciously or unconsciously acted upon, have not only considerable influence on what we choose to produce but also an equal bearing on what we perceive, a prerequisite for the input necessary to language change.

I will explore this correlation, i.e., the one between attitudinal or language regard phenomena and the actual production and perception of linguistic units, by making particular use of perceptual dialectological data, either as directly involved in this correlation or as explanatory for other experimental and/or observational evidence. In doing so, I will touch on some newer technological advances that have considerably enhanced the study of variety perception.