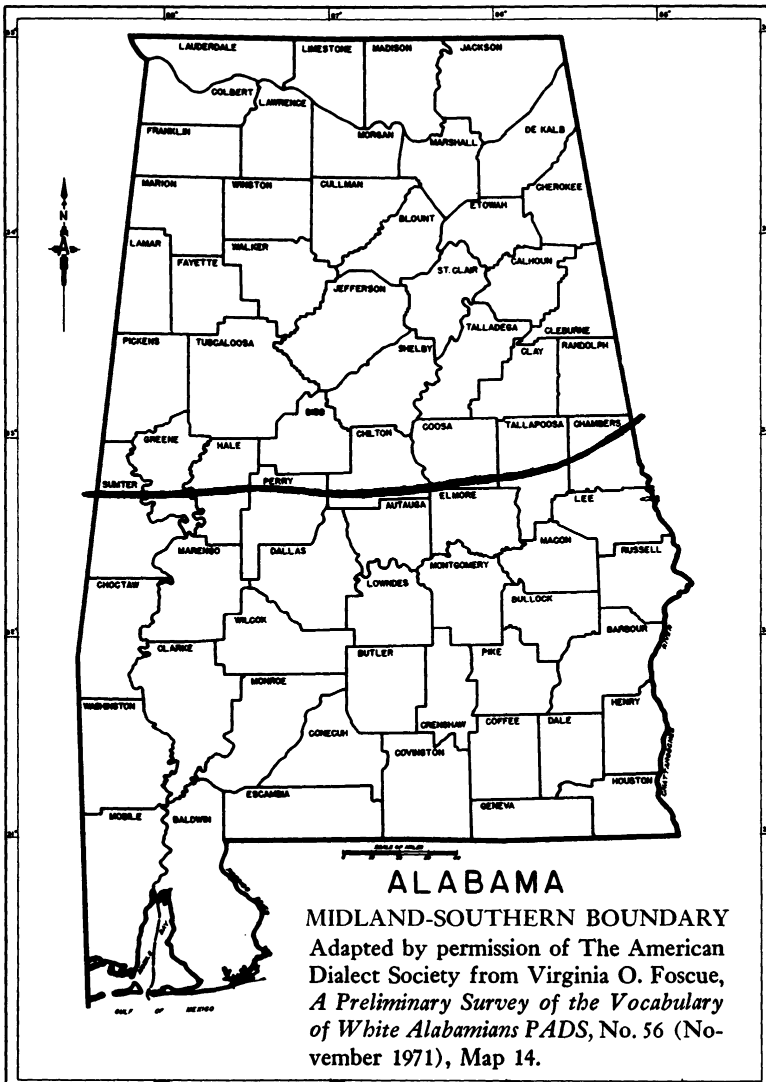
1 BACKGROUND AND METHOD

Background. The lexical and phonological responses for this study of the speech of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama (located in West Central Alabama) were obtained by interviews which employed the questionnaire and methodology of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada; twenty-seven residents of the county were used as informants. Preliminary surveys of lexical usage in Alabama have indicated that the major dialect influences on the speech of the state are from the South and the South Midland, with Southern features predominating in the southern portion of the state and South Midland features predominating in the northern portion. Virginia O. Foscue follows Gordon R. Wood in proposing a boundary that extends across the central part of the state to the south of Tuscaloosa County (Map).[1] This boundary includes the county in the South Midland speech area, but in such proximity to that boundary as to indicate dialect mixture.

Tuscaloosa County was created in 1818 from lands resulting from the Indian cessions of 1814 and 1816. The early economic development of the county was based on agriculture, especially the growth of cotton, but soil conditions did not permit it to attain the productivity of the Tennessee Valley area in North Alabama or of the Black Belt area of South Alabama, nor were they appropriate to the creation of large farms or plantations as in these other areas of the state. However, the location in the county of the Black Warrior River gave the county certain trade advantages by providing access for the shipment of cotton to the port of Mobile on the Gulf of Mexico. Located at the head of navigation, the City of Tuscaloosa served as a trade center for the surrounding West Central Alabama counties, and with the completion of the Huntsville Road into the Tennessee Valley, the city became an important trade link between the rich cotton-producing counties of North and South Alabama. Because of its central location, the state capital was located there in 1826 (until 1846, when the capital was moved to Montgomery following a further shift in wealth to the Black Belt region of the state), and the University of Alabama was established there in 1831. In recent years, however, with the decline of cotton as an important agricultural product, the county has turned to manufacturing which can exploit the natural resources provided by the river and



ALABAMA

MIDLAND-SOUTHERN BOUNDARY

Adapted by permission of The American Dialect Society from Virginia O. Foscue, *A Preliminary Survey of the Vocabulary of White Alabamians PADS*, No. 56 (November 1971), Map 14.

by the coal deposits in the northeastern section of the county. But the population has continued to concentrate in the central part of the county around the City of Tuscaloosa so that in 1960 seventy percent of the county population of 109,047 was located in the Tuscaloosa Urban Area.

Settlement in the county occurred after the settlement of North and South Alabama and was derived, in part, from these sections as the less successful farmers and merchants were forced into the poorer central region by the competition for land. The northern counties of the Tennessee Valley provided most of these settlers, especially after the opening of the Huntsville Road. Later settlers also entered the county along this route as they pushed south in search of farm land when they found the more suitable land of the North Alabama counties already occupied. In time, settlers from particular states came to dominate in particular sections of Alabama: the Georgians in the southern section; the Tennesseans in the northern section; and the Carolinians and Virginians in the central section.[2] However, within these regions large populations from other states were also present, especially in the central counties. The 1850 Census for Tuscaloosa County shows that while the Carolina-Virginia bloc consisted of fifty-six percent of the non-native population, the Georgia natives formed an important minority of twenty-two percent and the Tennessee natives accounted for ten percent.[3]

Since the settlement of the county, the white population has been predominantly native American; the foreign-born population, largely Irish and English, has constituted a negligible minority (.3 percent in 1960). The importance of agriculture to the economy of the county in its early days is indicated by the gradual increase of the Negro population in the period preceding the Civil War to the point that Negroes accounted for forty-four percent of the population in 1860; however, since the Civil War the relative size of the Negro population has declined to twenty-nine percent in 1960.

Method. The questionnaire used in this study is based on the Short Work Sheets of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, revised by E. Bagby Atwood for the South Central States.[4] In adapting it for Tuscaloosa County, I deleted a few items peculiar to the Southwestern States and added a number of phononogical and lexical items which have been found to have significant distribution in the Southern and the South Midland dialects.[5] The resulting questionnaire contained approximately seven hundred questions.

The interviews were conducted at the homes of the informants (except that informant 6 was interviewed at the home of her employer, during the employer's absence, and informant 25 was interviewed at the home of her daughter). They were recorded on magnetic tape, and although random notations of the phonology, lexicon, and attitudes of the informants were made during the course of the interviews, most of the information was taken from the tapes later. Conversation was encouraged and, when possible, the responses are derived from that source rather than from the systematic questioning used to elicit the desired expressions.

In selecting the informants, I sought native-born, long-time residents of the county who conformed closely to the categories established for the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, in which A represents old-fashioned speakers and B younger speakers, and in which I represents grammar school education, II high school education, and III college education.[6] According to this method, the twenty-seven informants are distributed through the following categories: IA, eight; IB, three; IIA, four; IIB, four; IIIA, four; and IIIB, four. Thus, emphasis is placed on the older, less educated informant, supplemented by cultured informants and informants from the middle group (middle-aged and with a high school education). In addition, I find it significant to distinguish informants who hold a socially prominent position in the county. Three informants (# 3, 4, and 23) are so designated; each is also classified IIIA or IIIB and is presently a resident of the City of Tuscaloosa. The distinction is impressionistically based on a number of considerations, including club membership, wealth, type of home, and the judgment of people familiar with the social structure of the county.

Of the twenty-seven informants, twenty-one were born in the county, five were born in counties which border on Tuscaloosa County and came to the county as children, and one was born in a county to the southwest, which while it does not border on Tuscaloosa County, is still part of the Carolina-Virginia settlement area. Of the fifty-four parents, thirty-four were born in Tuscaloosa County and twelve others were born in other Central Alabama counties. The remaining eight are from Georgia (two), Mississippi (two), Texas, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama (county not known). Of the grandparents reported who did not come from Alabama or from other Southern States, there were those from Scotland (maternal grandparents of informant 4), Illinois (maternal grandmother of informant 8), Australia (paternal grandfather of informant 26), and Germany (paternal grandparents of informant 2).

In addition, I sought distribution by race, sex, occupation, and place of residence within the county. Five Negro informants were obtained to represent the following Linguistic Atlas categories: IA, one; IB, two; IIB, one; and IIIB, one. Nine of the informants are male and are distributed through all categories except IIIB; however, no male Negro informant could be obtained. The occupations represented are housewife (eight), farmer (four), teacher (three), maid (two), carpenter (two), grocery store operator (two), clerical worker, nurse, maintenance engineer, electrician, rural postman, and purchasing agent. Finally, thirteen informants are classified as urban, indicating that their place of residence is within the cities of Tuscaloosa and Northport. A detailed biography of each informant is given in the Appendix.

NOTES

[1] Virginia O. Foscue, *A Preliminary Survey of the Vocabulary of White Alabamians*, *PADS* No. 56 (November, 1971), Map 14, p. 41; Gordon R. Wood, "Word Distribution in the Interior South," *PADS* No. 35 (April, 1961), p. 12.

[2] For a more detailed discussion of the settlement history of Alabama, see Foscue, pp. 5–6.

[3] *Alabama: Seventh Census, 1850*, University of Alabama microfilm; these figures are compiled from the microfilm copy of somewhat faded records so that an independent count might vary slightly, but not materially.

[4] E. Bagby Atwood, "Linguistic Atlas of the U. S. A. and Canada: Tentatively Adapted for Texas, the Southwest, and the South Central States" (University of Texas mimeograph, 1951).

[5] Additions were made to insure coverage of expressions in the studies by Foscue and Wood, noted above, and in Hans Kurath, *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States* (1949; rpt. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966) and in Hans Kurath and Raven I. McDavid, Jr., *The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).

[6] Hans Kurath and others, *Handbook of the Linguistic Geography of New England* (Providence: Brown University, 1939), pp. 41–44.