

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study was prepared in order to fill a gap in the accumulated knowledge about the linguistic geography of the North Central states. Some years ago Alva Leroy Davis and Albert Marckwardt located a Northern-Midland dialect boundary which extended from the Eastern United States into Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. More intensive studies followed. Roger Shuy later refined the precise configuration of that same boundary in northern Illinois; Robert Dakin examined the entire Ohio River Valley; and Marvin Carmony published some very detailed studies of Indiana. Even after Shuy had identified the northeastern quadrant of Illinois as Northern, however, questions still remained. The Lead Region of northwestern Illinois had been identified as a Midland speech island, and the rest of northern Illinois as either Midland or transitional. But the nature of the speech of Midland Illinois was unaccounted for.

The Midland area of the Eastern United States as defined by Hans Kurath was a highly complex area in itself, including the North and South Midland, identified as subareas in their own right which also shared groups of diagnostic features with the North and South. Western Pennsylvania and the West Midland also appeared as distinct subareas, with the West Midland overlapping parts of both the North and South Midland. Would these various Midland subdivisions reassert themselves in Illinois and could a North/South Midland dialect boundary extend itself into Illinois? Dakin's Ohio Valley study concludes that only extreme southern Illinois is pure South Midland, but he restricted his examination to communities south of the National Road, and, unlike Shuy, did not use any survey information collected after the 1950s.

What could have been expected to be the problematic nature of Midland Illinois linguistic geography, then, prompted an intensive study of the region.¹ The specific questions to be answered were, first of all, are there separate North Midland and South Midland areas in Illinois? Second, if there are such areas, are they identified by all of the features which set them

apart in the Eastern United States? Third, if these areas occur in Illinois, what is the location of the boundaries or transition zones that separate them? Fourth, do the other subareas of the Eastern United States Midland—Western Pennsylvania and the West Midland—have an influence on the speech of Illinois?

To answer these questions I designed a study which would use the maximum amount of systematically collected raw data and would examine all of Illinois except for the ten northeastern counties which Shuy had already designated as Northern.² I began with 91 field records from the Linguistic Atlas of the North Central States (hereafter referred to as atlas) and 217 checklists which are part of the atlas archives; the checklists will not be included as part of the data when the atlas is finally published. To expand the data base and to provide the most up-to-date information available, I added 42 field records and 43 tape recordings which were collected in Illinois for the Dictionary of American Regional English (hereafter DARE) between 1967 and 1970.³

The original questions that prompted the study were geographical; however, when I began working with the data (which are described below), some new questions arose that could not be ignored, even though they went beyond the original geographic scope. First, since atlas and DARE data were collected at different times, they offered an opportunity, at least for lexical items, to discover instances of usage change, to determine, in other words, the extent to which such factors as higher levels of education, the population from rural to urban areas, and the advent of mass culture and mass media had affected the folk vocabulary of Midland Illinois. The comparison of atlas and DARE data, moreover, suggested yet another possibility: such a comparison would give me the chance to answer at least some of the questions raised about the reliability of linguistic atlas studies. Having gone that far, however, it seemed appropriate to go even further to address some other issues that had been raised by critics of linguistic geography. Even if some of those objections take us beyond the scope of the data presented here, they deserve attention nevertheless, since the present study is rooted in traditional dialectology, as it is now called, and since any criticism of traditional dialectology must therefore apply to this study as well.

The bulk of the evidence used in this study is lexical; and I have presented that data in the form of a word geography. This was done for two reasons: first of all, the atlas field records existed only in their original form at the time I assembled these data. Since the atlas archives were relatively inaccessible, I was able to copy lexical but not very much phonological information. Secondly, the DARE survey was by design primarily a lexical survey, and the checklists, of course, covered only lexical material. However, it remained desirable to be able to corroborate lexical boundaries with boundaries representing phonological information. Most of the phonological data presented here came from the DARE tapes; I was able to obtain copies of the tape recordings which supplemented DARE interviews. I was also able to obtain some phonological information on those items which could be easily transcribed from the atlas records.

Since a major question raised in this study involves an examination of the contrastive areal distribution of North and South Midland features, I compiled a list of items shown to be exclusively North or South Midland in Kurath's *Word Geography*, Kurath and McDavid's *The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States*, and several smaller studies. I added to the list a smaller number of western Pennsylvania and West Midland diagnostic items.

Chapter 2 sketches a settlement history of Illinois; the reader will be referred to this throughout the data presentation, especially in the interpretive sections. Chapter 3 treats the vocabulary material in two sections. Section A begins with a discussion of some methodological matters not treated here, presents the lexical data, and concludes with an interpretive summary; that summary is based only on those items for which the atlas, DARE, and the checklists are in essential agreement. Information on individual items is presented in summary form. Section B includes the discussion of vocabulary change. Chapter 4 presents pronunciation data together with an interpretive summary. Chapter 5 is a broader interpretive summary treating both kinds of data together against the background of the settlement history from Chapter 2. Chapter 6 discusses dialect methodology and examines the agreement, or lack of it, between atlas and DARE results.