TRANSCENDING THE LINE — FOCUSING ON THE SPOT: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH FOR THE CARTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF DIALECTS

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My research has shown that the east and the southeast of England are not homogeneous dialect areas and that the neat lines on dialect maps — boundaries and isoglosses alike — hide much of the internal variability. I have demonstrated elsewhere that "there are no clearly defined dialect boundaries in the East and the South-East of England" (Wegmann 2004:183), and on the basis of the heterogeneity in the area under consideration, I shall argue, in accordance with Chambers and Trudgill (1998:104), that "variability causes the isogloss to vanish." Although I was generally inspired by Chambers and Trudgill's suggestions as to how to deal with variability in their *Dialectology* book, I will not follow them in detail; rather, this paper presents the major aspects of my own approach, developed on the basis of their suggestions.

My primary aim is to abandon delimiting dialect areas by boundary lines. Instead, I will attempt to do justice to the accepted philological knowledge that variation in speech is not abrupt but rather ranges along a continuum. Schneider (1988:182) states that the real linguistic situation is characterized by "gradually growing differences in space rather than sharp distinctions". Thus ever since systematic attempts at mapping dialects started in England with Prince Bonaparte and Ellis, dialect geographers have been concerned with finding discontinuity within the continuum so as to determine the course of dialect boundaries.

It is evident that methods of determining dialect areas according to different degrees of dissimilarity — like Kurath's and Séguy's — involve a certain amount of diversity being tolerated within the dialect areas delimited by boundary lines. This is basically a function of such approaches. Focusing on dissimilarity and dividing the "continuum up into areas at points where it is least continuum-like", as Trudgill (1999:7) puts it, consequently means that diversity is accepted within sharply delimited dialect areas. There are, however, no objective criteria for determining the "points" where a continuum can be divided, neither for Kurath's nor for Séguy's method. Viereck (1980:28) supports the tolerant attitude of many a dialectologist

when stating that "dialectology [is] a discipline oriented towards eliciting linguistic diversity, not uniformity". Yet as long as diversity is hidden by clearly defined dialect boundaries, Viereck's statement remains contradictory.

Believing in the existence of uniform dialect areas in real linguistic situations would be utopian. Yet my alternative approach is oriented towards eliciting uniformity rather than diversity in order to find focal areas (which are areas of greatest uniformity) and transition areas instead of dialect boundaries. This allows me to do justice to the gradual transitions, hence the variability within my area of investigation.

My own approach requires that, on the one hand, a set of data should include randomly chosen features and, on the other hand, all levels of language, phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical should be taken into account. However, my alternative approach is as yet undefined and I have only been able to test it with a relatively small set of data. I therefore had to particularly select a number of phonological features while the items of the *Survey of English Dialects (SED)* representing them have been randomly chosen. For the feature /j/-dropping I used the following items: *cucumber, dew, ewe, few, nephew, new, suet, suit, Tuesday, tune.* Owing to the lack of appropriate *SED* items I decided to study the examples of /j/-dropping with 10 items only.

The feature /j/-dropping lends itself to introduce my procedure. First, I classified the sounds for the feature /j/-dropping according to the frequency of their occurrence in the 103 localities of my area of investigation. I thus found that the two most frequently occurring sounds are absence of /j/-dropping (/ju(:)/) and /j/-dropping (/u(:)/) besides some other sounds like [əu], which I grouped together as "other sound". Having thus classified the sounds for the feature /j/-dropping, I counted for how many of the 10 items /ju(:)/, /u(:)/ and/or "other sound" was recorded in each locality. Each locality has a total of 100%, which is constituted by the different sounds occurring in the particular locality. For example, in Ess 11 we have 70% /ju(:)/ (= 1st index), 10% /u(:)/ (= 2nd index), and 20% "other sound" (= 3rd index). These percentages express how frequently each group of sounds I distinguished (/ju(:)/, /u(:)/, and "other sound") is to be expected in a particular locality.

It becomes evident that there is at best a minority of localities in which only one of the three sounds I distinguished was recorded. Such pure localities have 100% of either /ju(:)/ or /u(:)/ or "other sound". In Figure 1 there are only two such examples, namely Nth 1 with 100% /ju(:)/ and Hrt 3 with 100% "other sound".

We recall that, in traditional dialectology, isoglosses yielded by a single item are often equated with dialect boundaries. In order to show how much variability is hidden behind such boundary lines, I mapped the isoglosses yielded by the items *suit* (solid line, yielding areas 1 and 2) and *few* (broken line, yielding areas 3, 4 and 5), both of which represent the feature /j/-dropping according to the *Linguistic Atlas of England (LAE)*. The two numbers attached to the ends of each line, as for example, in the area of the Thames Estuary, where we have 1 and 2 for the solid
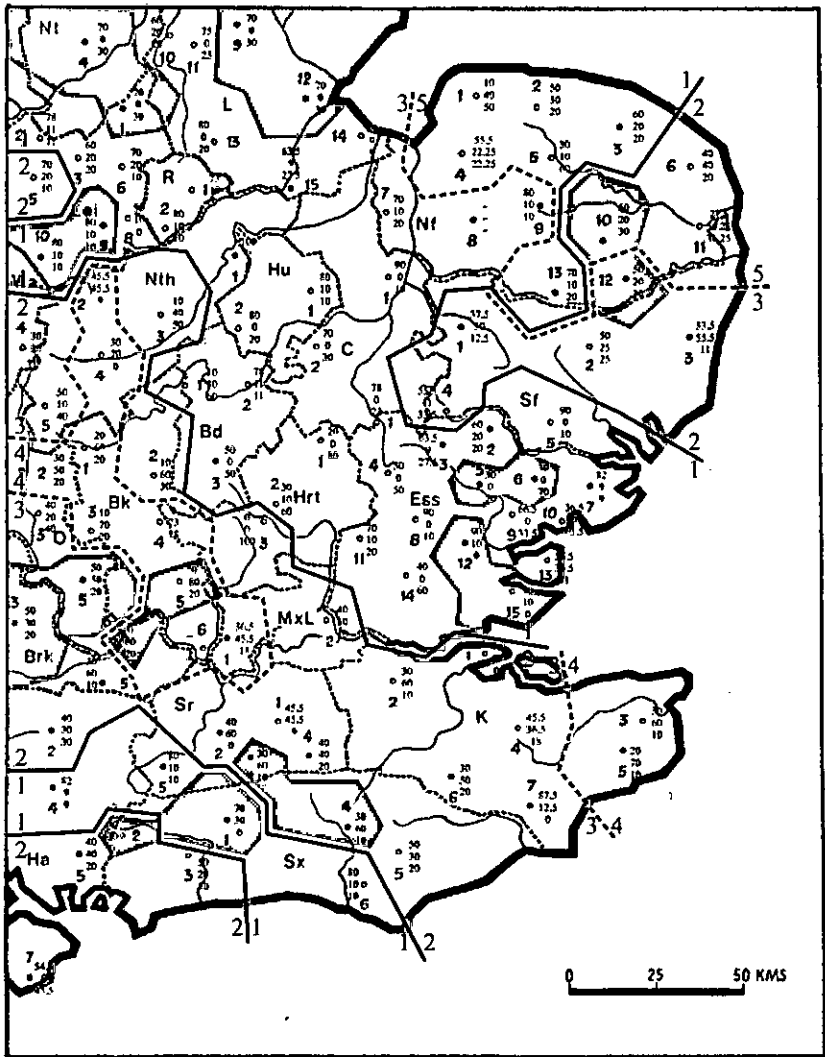
FIGURE 1

Indices and uniform areas: /j/-dropping

Source: The isoglosses have been adapted from *LAE* —
          maps Ph 182: *suit*, and Ph 180: *few*.

          1/3   /ju(:)/   (1st index)
          2/4   /u(:)/   (2nd index)
            5   [əu]   (included in 3rd index)

149

line and 3 and 4 for the broken line, refer to the areas 1, 2, 3, 4 determined by the isoglosses; moreover, they correspond to the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 in the key to Figure 1. Thus 1 and 3 denote /ju(:)/, 2 and 4 /u(:)/ and 5 [əu]. In other words, what results from the traditional cartographic technique are dialect boundaries yielded by the items *suit* and *few*, which cut my area of investigation into /ju(:)/, /u(:)/ and [əu] pronouncing areas.

The indices in Figure 1 show, however, that the areas delimited by the lines do not at all consist of pure localities. Rather, the indices reveal both the variability within the dialect areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, and the arbitrariness with which dialect boundaries based on a single item cut the map. The isoglosses intersect and delimit areas of different sizes. For example, according to Wells (1982:207) "[t]he accents of East Anglia are notable for having extended Yod Dropping to most or all post-consonantal environments". This means that in East Anglia the isoglosses of *suit* and *few* in Figure 1 should yield an area 2 and an area 4, respectively. The solid line does, indeed, delimit an area 2, which includes localities of Nf and Sf, whereas the broken lines create no area 4 in East Anglia at all. In K, however, we find an /u(:)/ area constituted by K 3 and 5, in which area 2 (determined by the item *suit*) and area 4 (determined by the item *few*) overlap. I will therefore speak of area 2/4.

In order to emphasize my point about the arbitrariness of dialect boundaries — particularly boundaries based on a single item — I will have a closer look at the example of K 3 and 5. It is evident that traditional dialectologists can easily construct dialect areas according to their liking by judiciously choosing the items which are most likely to yield the course of their predetermined boundary lines. For example, if a dialectologist decided that there was a relic area in K, he might prefer to map the item *few* to the item *suit* to arrive at the appropriate boundary line. Finding the innovation /u(:)/ in the easternmost part of K, in area 2/4, is surprising, since K holds as a potential relic area. The indices of K 3 and 5 nevertheless support the finding of /u(:)/ pronunciation as a tendency, although they neither show pure localities nor yield a uniform area there.

Chambers and Trudgill (1998:109) suggest that "[r]ather than attempt to 'regularise' the variability, a more fruitful approach to the problem of transition would seem to be to seek generalisations and systematicity in the variability itself". Attempts at generalizing and especially systematizing in dialectology reflect the idea mentioned above, namely that dialectology is a discipline oriented towards linguistic diversity rather than uniformity. Unlike Chambers and Trudgill, I would not call transition a problem. It only is a problem if we think in terms of clearly defined dialect boundaries but not so if we accept the variability as part of the object we study — dialects. Variability is a part of our object that we must neither try to hide nor to systematize. In other words, variability cannot be squeezed into a mould, but it can be distinguished from uniformity. I shall therefore search for uniform areas rather than delimit dialect areas by clearly defined boundaries.

First, I shall explain what I understand by uniform areas. They are not, as one might suspect, areas consisting of pure dialects. Rather, any two or more adjacent

localities which agree in all four indices form a uniform area. In a nutshell, I am looking for uniformity within variability, no matter whether the indices are of the type 100–0–0 or, as the shaded uniform areas in Figure 1, 80–10–10 or 50–20–30. Localities with variable pronunciations of the feature /j/-dropping (50–20–30) are therefore not regarded as fundamentally transitional. Such dialects are transitional from a diachronic point of view or if we focus on two poles — /ju(:)/ vs. /u(:)/, i.e., 100–0–0 vs. 0–100–0 — and try to separate them by a clearly defined dialect boundary. Figure 1 illustrates that there is neither a particular region where /j/-dropping occurs nor are there two poles, but there are homogeneous "spots", neighbouring localities in which the variant pronunciations of the feature /j/-dropping are used with the same frequency.

From a synchronic viewpoint, it does not matter whether the dialect spoken in the localities which form a dialect area is pure or not. What matters is that all the localities constituting a dialect area are ideally at the same stage of development, diachronically speaking. With reference to the present analysis, this requires that the localities agree in all indices and hence form a uniform area. Still, it can be demonstrated that it would be patently unrealistic to believe in uniform areas when taking more than one feature into account.

The overlapping of the dialect areas created by the isoglosses in Figure 1 yields another area 2/4 besides the one in K which includes these localities: Nth 2, 4, O 2, 6; Bk 1, 3, 4, 5, 6; and MxL 1. The indices indicate that, on the one hand, there is a majority of /u(:)/ pronunciation in this area but, on the other hand, they also reveal much heterogeneity. These two statements are summarized by the uniform area within this area 2/4: the uniform area has a high 80% of /u(:)/ sounds, but it only includes two localities, Bk 5 and O 6. Consequently, what the lines in Figure 1 delimit as a homogeneous /u(:)/ pronouncing area 2/4, consisting of the ten localities mentioned above, turns out to be neither a pure /u(:)/ area nor a uniform area constituted by all the ten localities.

In addition, there are two /ju(:)/ areas created by the overlapping of areas 1 and 3. The smaller of the two areas 1/3 includes the localities Sr 5, Ha 4, Sx 1, and 6. The larger one, which I will focus on, is constituted as follows:

Nt	4
L	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15
Lei	1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10
R	1, 2
Nth	1
Hu	1, 2
C	1, 2
Nf	7, 8, 9
Sf	5
Bd	1, 2, 3
Hrt	1, 2
Ess	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

This large area especially illustrates how misleading dialect areas delimited by isoglosses can be. According to the isoglosses yielded by the items *suit* and *few*, this area 1/3 is simply a /ju(:)/ pronouncing area, and a look at the indices confirms that /ju(:)/ is the sound most frequently recorded there. However, the variability within this large area ranges from 100–0–0 in Nth 1 to 55.5–33.5–11 in Ess 13, and there are uniform areas as contradictory as 90–10–0 and 30–0–70 in this very area 1/3.

I shall conclude the discussion of Figure 1 by focusing on the bundling of isoglosses according to Kurath's method. He postulates that the importance of a dialect boundary depends on the strength of the bundles of isoglosses. With regard to the fact that dialect boundaries drawn by dialect geographers are often based on very small sets of data, I shall demonstrate, with the example of the two items *suit* and *few*, how problematic it is to determine dialect areas according to the traditional method. The strongest bundles of isoglosses which can be found in Figure 1 consist of two isoglosses as between the following pairs:

> Lei 10 and Nth 2
> Lei 9 and Nth 2
> Nth 4 and Bd 1
> Bk 4 and Bd 3
> Nf 9 and Nf 10
> Nf 12 and Nf 13
> Nf 13 and Sf 1
> Nf 13 and Sf 2

In other words, the bundles propose that the transition is most abrupt between these eight pairs of localities. The indices of each pair of localities show that Bk 4 (9–73–18) and Bd 3 (50–0–50) differ considerably, but not so, Nf 12 (50–20–30) and Nf 13 (70–10–20). Thus generally speaking, there is no more difference between the eight pairs of localities separated by a bundle of two isoglosses than between many other pairs of neighbouring localities such as Hrt 2 (30–10–60) and Ess 11 (70–10–20) or K 6 (30–50–20) and K 7 (87.5–12.5–0), which are not even separated by a single isogloss.

I carried out the procedure described above for another four phonological features, /ʊ/ vs. /ʌ/ distinction, /l/-vocalization, /h/-dropping and loss of rhoticity. On the basis of my findings I have argued that it would be utopian to believe in the existence of uniform areas in real dialect situations. Rather, the lightly shaded areas in Figure 2 show the areas with least variability when taking the five phonological features into account.

I shall call the seven shaded areas "focal areas". The definition of the term focal area differs slightly from dialectologist to dialectologist, but it generally means "the relative absence of isoglosses" (Glauser 1991:2). In my alternative approach, focal area means the area(s) formed by at least two adjacent localities which show the highest percentages of agreement of their indices concerning all the features considered in the particular investigation. In my example, we have seven focal ar-
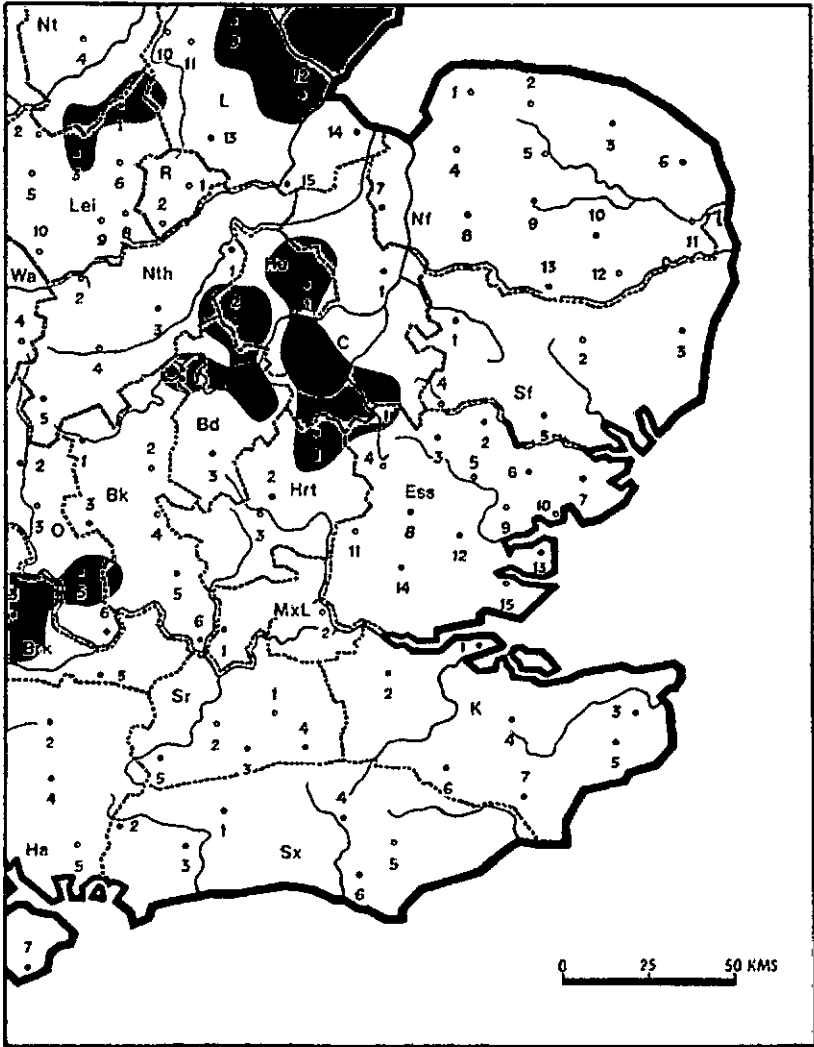
FIGURE 2

Focal areas

eas, six of which are formed by two neighbouring localities (L 9 and L 12, Lei 1 and Lei 3, Hu 1 and C 2, Hu 2 and Bd 2, O 5 and Brk 3, Bd 1 and Bd 2) and one is constituted by three adjacent localities (C 2, Hrt 1, Ess 1). These shaded "spots", the focal areas, are, thus far, the end product of my alternative approach.

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