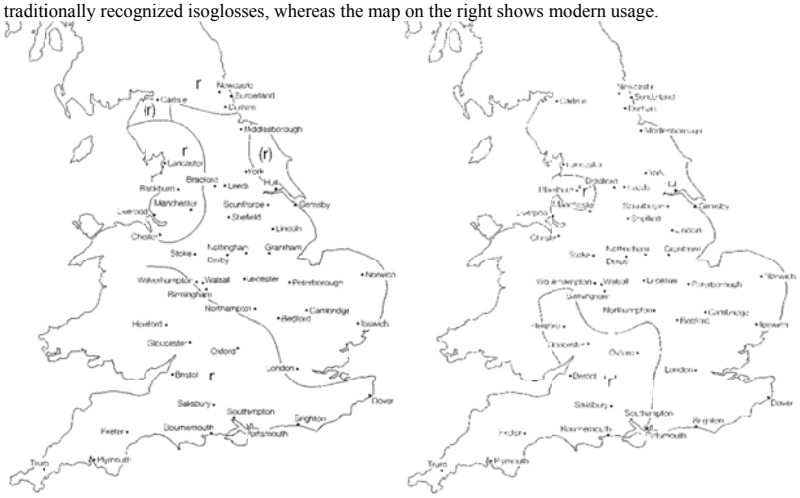
Handout 4: Dialect geography

Seminar *English Dialects*, A. McIntyre

- **Isoglosses** are lines on maps showing boundaries of areas where a particular feature is used (see the maps below). Isoglosses can indicate phonological, morphological, syntactic features or items of vocabulary.
- Isoglosses are only meant to be a *rough guide*, for the following reasons:
  - Lines are often drawn *between* areas known to have particular features. The exact positioning of the line relies partly on guesswork.
  - Isoglosses don't reflect social, gender-related, age-related differences between speakers within an area. Not everyone in the A-areas in Map 1 is rhotic. Non-rhotic pronunciation is spreading with younger speakers. (Here we need additional markings, say different types of shading reflecting proportions of rhotic speakers, proportions of rhotic pronunciations used by individual speakers; Cf. Map 4).
  - Isoglosses do not reflect the fact that there is often a **transition zone** between the areas where one finds **mixed lects** (varieties where both features occur) or and **fudged lects** (varieties where a compromise feature occurs, e.g. ([ɤ] between [ʊ] and [ʌ] in *cup*; see Chambers & Trudgill, ch. 8). Some dialect maps reflect this with *heteroglosses*, double lines with the intermediate area in between.

Map 1: The following maps (Trudgill 1990: 26, 53) show isoglosses for rhoticity in England; 'r' shows rhotic dialects, '(r)' shows partially rhotic dialects, and non-rhotic dialects are unmarked. The map on the left shows the traditionally recognized isoglosses, whereas the map on the right shows modern usage.



Questions: Is rhoticity increasing or decreasing in England?

The cities of Gloucester and Southampton are equally far into the area of rhoticity. Which, if either, do you think will be the first to become non-rhotic, and why?

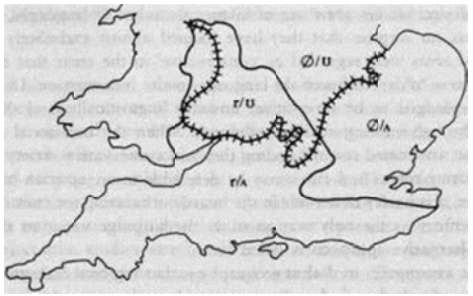
Geography and diachronic linguistics: Features found in geographically separate areas (e.g. rhotic areas marked A in Map 1) are likely to be historically older. (Terminology: we say that these older features are **conservative** or **relics**, rather than **innovations**). However, note exceptions to this:

- Movement of speakers who use the innovation (e.g. Australia is non-rhotic).
- Innovations can jump from town to town (see below).
- Genuine coincidence. E.g. unrelated diphthongisations in English and German (Great Vowel Shift, started in the 14th century; New High German Dipthongisation, with origins in Austria in the 12th century):

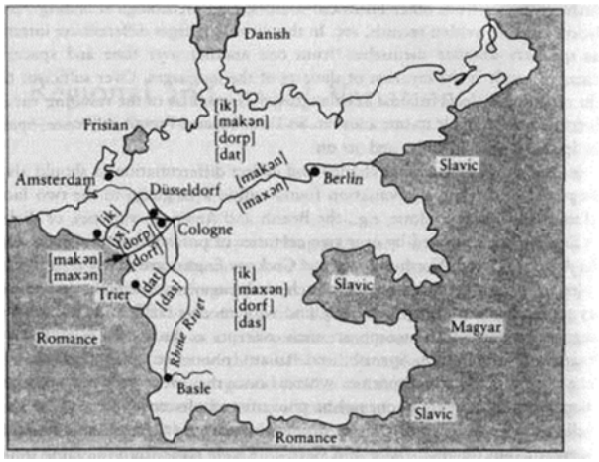
(1) Middle English/Middle High German /hu:s/, /mi:n/ → Modern English/German /haus/, /maɪn/

- Examples of conclusions that can be drawn from isogloss patterns:
  - If several isoglosses coincide, we have an **isogloss bundle** which can be said to separate dialects, dialect groups or languages. These are often a symptom of (geographical, political, cultural, social) **barriers** which restrict the progress of innovations.
  - **Intersecting isoglosses** like those in Map 2 are a challenge for the **Family Tree Model**, in which regional varieties are treated as distinct entities. If we assume dialect groups 'Southern English' and 'Northern English as distinct 'branches' of the English family tree, it is paradoxical that some areas are more 'Northern' w.r.t. one feature, but more 'Southern' w.r.t. another feature. Patterns like this speak more for the **Wave Model**, where different features spread independently from each other in wave-like fashion (sometimes from different centres) and eventually peter out in different areas.

Map 2: Isoglosses for rhotic accents and for the vowel in *but, tongue*. (Wardhaugh 2002:136).

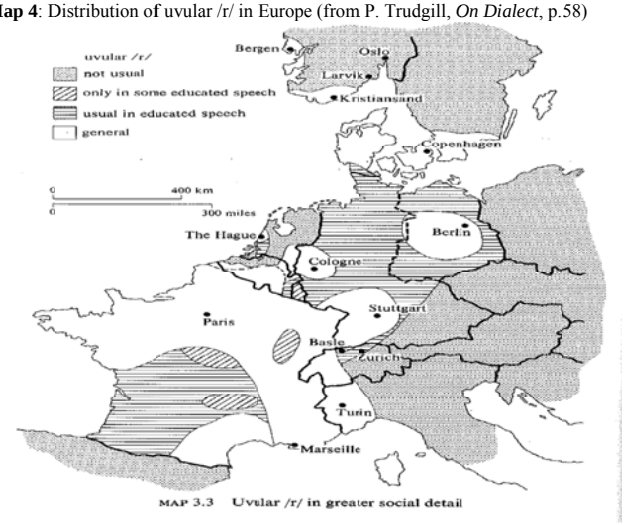


Map 3: The **Rhenish Fan** (*Rheinischer Fächer*), Wardhaugh (2002:135). Isoglosses reflecting various subinstances of the High German Consonant Shift (*Hochdeutsche/Zweite Lautverschiebung*) form a bundle, except West of the Rhine, where they separate in a fan-like pattern.



- Map 4 below illustrates **stepping stone** effects: innovations 'hop' from important towns/cities to other towns/cities without necessarily affecting the areas in between. (Can you think why this could happen?) Examples:
  - Uvular /r/ in Europe: spread from Paris to most of France, then hopped to some bigger German cities; has also reached The Hague, Copenhagen, Bergen. (That it spread from language to language is incidentally another problem for the Family Tree Model.)
  - H-dropping spread from London to Norwich to smaller towns, but did not affect rural areas in Norfolk that surrounded Norwich (Wells, vol 1, 1983, p. 13).

Map 4: Distribution of uvular /r/ in Europe (from P. Trudgill, *On Dialect*, p.58)



Map 5: A set of isoglosses traditionally thought to motivate a North-South divide in England. (M. Wakelin, 1984, Rural dialects in England. In: P. Trudgill (ed.) *Language in the British Isles*. Cambridge)

Most isoglosses in Map 5 correspond to the *Humber-Ribble line*. This line seems to have been an important dialect boundary from Anglo Saxon times until the 20th century (now the non-standard variants seem to be receding towards the North).

Some other notions connected with dialect geography

- **Dialect continuum**: chain of non-standard dialects A B C D E spreading over a geographical area, such that neighboring dialects (e.g. B & C) will be quite similar but non-neighbouring ones (e.g. A & D).
  "…Mercii [=Mercians], that beeth men of myddel Engelond, as it were parteners of the endes, understondeth bettre the side langages, northerne and southerne, than northerne or southerne understondeth either other." (John of Trevisa, 1387):
- Dialect continua can cross language borders (e.g. at Dutch-German border), another problem for the family tree model.
- **Barriers**: Isogloss bundles and dialect boundaries often coincide with physical geographical barriers (rivers, mountains, etc.) or political barriers (England-Scotland, Germany-France).
- **Social analogues of geographical notions**: Social barriers (e.g. caste system in India) can impede the spread of features between sociolects. There are social analogues of dialect continua. E.g. in Jamaica there is a cline between Jamaican Creole and more standard English, with various intermediate varieties making it hard to say where English stops and Creole starts which correlates with social class (Chambers/Trudgill p.8ff; for more on this, google the notions *post-creole coninuum, acrolect, mesolect, basilect*).

1. Dialect atlases and the methodology of collecting data on regional variation

1.1. Georg Wenker et al., *Sprachatlas des Deutschen Reichs* (1888-1926)

- Method: asked schoolteachers from nearly every area in Germany to fill in questionnaires, indicating how certain sentences would be pronounced in the areas where they taught.
- The sentences were meant to test the sounds, lexemes and grammatical constructions used in the dialect spoken in the area. Some of the 40 sentences he used:
  (1) *Ich schlage dich gleich mit dem Kochlöffel um die Ohren, du Affe.*
  (2) *Wo gehst du (denn) hin? Sollen wir mitgehen (mit dir gehen)?*
  (3) *Als wir gestern abend heim/zurück kamen, da lagen die anderen schon im Bett und waren fest eingeschlafen/am schlafen.*
  (4) *Hinter unserem Hause stehen drei schöne Apfelbäume /drei Apfelbäumchen mit roten Äpfeln/Äpfelchen.*
- In some areas he also asked for specific words out of context (*Samstag, fünfzig*) and asked about certain details of pronunciation (e.g. /r/).
- Surveys completed in 1887. Wenker received replies from over 40,000 schoolteachers.
- Later others extended his work to German varieties outside Germany and published it.
- Online version of the atlas: www.diwa.info

A. Wenker's work was a valuable first step, but is not free of methodological pitfalls. Can you see limits in the reliability of data based on:
   1. asking *schoolteachers* about linguistic phenomena?
   2. translations of standard language sentences into another dialect?
   3. written questionnaires with no recourse to interviews by the investigator?
   4. written questionnaires asking people to translate 40 sentences?

1.2. Jules Gilliéron, *Atlas linguistique de la France* (1897-1901)

- Gilliéron had a phonetically trained informant, Edmont Edmont, cycle round the European French-speaking countries and collect data by interviewing locals.
- Edmont collected data from over 600 areas.

B. In Gilliéron's and other early dialect studies, there was a concentration on the use of informants who are what are now called **NORM**s (Non-educated Old Rural Males). Can you think of reasons for this method, and arguments against it?
C. Compare the (dis)advantages of the methods used in the two atlases reviewed above.

1.3. Labov et al., *Atlas of North American English* (2006)

(to be discussed in class)