Handout 5: Dialect geography
Seminar *English Dialects*, A. McIntyre
1.   Illustrations of some basic principles of dialect geography
Map 1: Distribution of (non-)rhotic accents in British Isles, at least in the speech of older people (map from Hughes/Trudgill 1996:59).

A = post-vocalic /r/ present
B = post-vocalic /r/ absent

- **Geography and diachronic linguistics:** Features found in geographically separate areas (e.g. rhotic areas marked A in Map 1) are likely to be **conservative** (**relics**), and not **innovations**. However, note exceptions to this:
  - o   Movement of speakers who use the innovation (e.g. Australia is non-rhotic)
  - o   Prestigious innovations moving from city to city (see below)
  - o   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   Modern English/German
         /hu:s/, /mi:n/   →   /haus/, /main/

- **Isoglosses** (=lines showing boundaries of areas where a particular feature is used like those in Maps 1 and 2). These are an oversimplification 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 (e.g. social, age-related) differences between speakers within an area. E.g. 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).
  - 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 use *heteroglosses*, double lines with the intermediate area in between.

- Examples of conclusions that can be drawn from isogloss patterns:
  - **Intersecting isoglosses** like those in Map 2 are one 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 in wave-like fashion (sometimes from different centres) and eventually peter out in different areas.
  - **Isogloss bundle**: coincidence of several isoglosses, marks boundaries of major dialect groups or languages. These are often a symptom of (geographical, political, cultural, social) **barriers** which restrict the progress of innovations.

Map 2: Distribution of rhotic accents compared with isogloss for the vowel in *cup, come*. (Wardhaugh 2002:136).
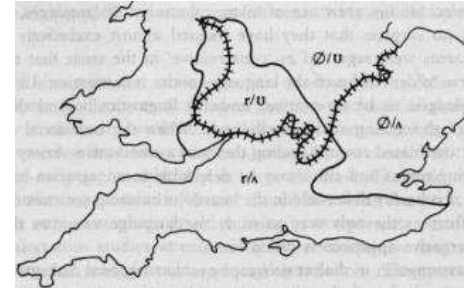
Map 3: The **Rhenish Fan** (*Rheinischer Fächer*), Wardhaugh (2002:135). Isoglosses reflecting various subinstances of the High German Consonant Shift (*Hochdeutsche/Zweite Lautverschiebung*) form a bundle, except in the East, where they separate in a fan-like pattern.
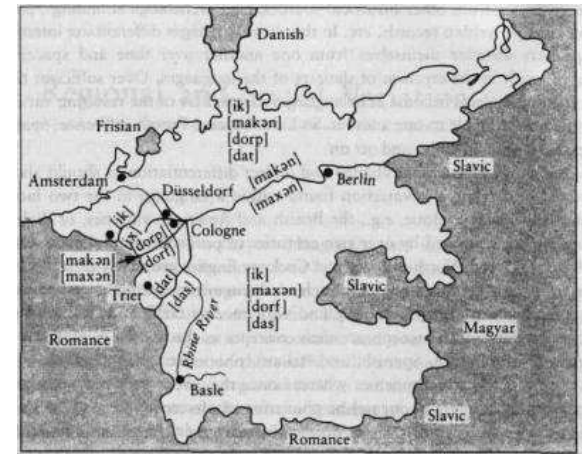
Map 4: Distribution of uvular /r/ in Europe (from P. Trudgill, *On Dialect*, p.58)

MAP 3.3   Uvular /r/ in greater social detail
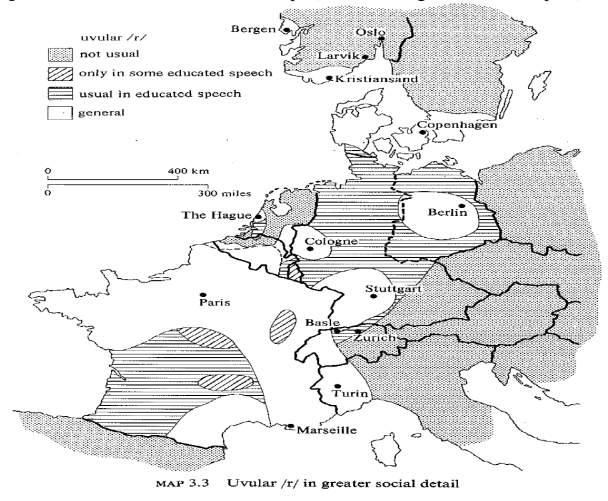
- The importance of **population density and cities**: Changes in a language often 'hop' from important cities to smaller cities. This might happen faster than the spread of the innovation to areas surrounding a city. (Can you think why this could happen?) Examples:
  - Uvular /r/ in Europe: spread from 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 (Wells, vol 1, p. 13).

2. **Dialect atlases and the methodology of collecting data on regional variation**
   2.1.   **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?

2.2.   **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.

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

(to be discussed in class)