

Mapping perceptions in New Englishes

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Language attitude research in New Englishes often fails to employ mixed methods, but rather relies heavily on vocal stimuli. This paper will therefore present an alternative method for the field, which has traditionally been used in perceptual dialectology studies in the US and the UK (see e.g. Montgomery 2015) but is almost always neglected in perceptual studies on New Englishes; namely the mapping of perceptual landscapes. This perceptual mapping is achieved through map drawing tasks undertaken by informants, which are then visualised using GIS tools. In the present paper, this will be illustrated on the basis of first-hand data collected in St. Kitts in 2018 and 2019.

St. Kitts forms part of the island state of St. Kitts and Nevis and with approximately 40,000 inhabitants, it belongs to the smaller islands of the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean. Within the wider region, it was the first island to be settled by the English in 1623 and was used to explore and settle other islands of the surrounding area (Parkvall 2000: 123). Up to the present day, mobility strongly shapes the island's population and their language practices, as many Kittitians go abroad for work, tertiary education or because of family ties that connect them with other Caribbean islands or the mainland. Moreover, there is also a considerable number of incoming people, due to the thriving tourist industry and the work this provides on the island. Thus, St. Kitts and its speakers lend themselves well to the study of perceptions towards both local language varieties and overseas varieties of English.

With the data from this island the present paper focuses on the perceptions of Kittitians and attempts to perceptually map parts of the Caribbean from the viewpoint of one of the smaller islands of the wider region. Using ArcGIS to visualise the perceived linguistic variation, a first perceptual map of the area will be presented. Furthermore, data gathered in sociolinguistic interviews and the judging of vocal stimuli will be added to the analysis. This paper consequently proposes that the geographical mapping of perceptions, in combination with other methods, will provide us with a better and more holistic picture of the perceptions and attitudes present in New Englishes speech communities.

References

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