

Chapter 2

Erie's original status as a Northern city

2.1 Introduction

All of the earliest dialectological studies indicate that Erie was aligned with the North for at least the early part of the 20th century. The evidence for this based on lexical items is quite strong, and comes primarily from *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States* (Kurath 1949), henceforth *WG*, as well as the data collected for the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, henceforth *DARE*, as presented in Carver (1987). The sources for the phonological evidence are *The Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States*, henceforth *PEAS*, (Kurath and McDavid 1961) and Wetmore (1959), both based on the fieldwork done for the *Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States*, henceforth *LAMSAS*.

2.2 Lexical

WG provides two types of evidence for Erie's position within the North. First of all, Erie is located within 10 of the 11 defining isoglosses of the North (Maps 5–8 in *WG*) and all 6 isoglosses that are characteristic of both the North and the Midland (Maps 39 and

40). Table 2.1 lists these words along with their non-Northern counterparts, showing the Northern version used in Erie in italics.

Northern form	non-Northern form	map in WG
<i>whiffletree, whippetree</i>	swingletree	5a
<i>pail</i>	bucket	5a
<i>darning needle</i>	dragonfly	5a
<i>teeter, teeterboard</i>	seesaw	5b
<i>stone boat</i>	vehicle for dragging field stones	5b
<i>spider</i>	frying pan	6
<i>skaffle</i>	scaffold (in a barn)	6
<i>buttry</i>	pantry	6
<i>stoop</i>	porch	7
<i>dutch cheese</i>	cottage cheese	8
<i>stone wall</i>	fence built of loose stone	39
<i>hay mow</i>	hay loft	39
<i>grist of corn</i>	turn of corn	39
<i>whinny</i>	nicker / whicker	40
<i>corn husks</i>	corn shucks	40
<i>string beans</i>	snap beans	40

Table 2.1: Northern isoglosses in *WG* that contain Erie (italicized variant used in Erie)

Table 2.2 shows that *belly-gut* is the only one of the 11 Northern lexical items that does not contain Erie.

Northern form	non-Northern form	map in WG
<i>belly-gut</i>	<i>face-down on a sled</i>	7

Table 2.2: Only Northern isogloss in *WG* that does not contain Erie

Secondly, evidence for Erie's original status as a Northern city is provided by the Midland isoglosses in *WG*. Erie falls outside of 8 isoglosses that define the Midland (Maps 15-18) and 5 isoglosses that are characteristic of both the South and the Midland, all of which reach northward past Pittsburgh (Maps 41 and 42) . In Table 2.3 I refer to these two

types of isoglosses as the *non-Northern isoglosses*, in contrast to the isoglosses in Table 2.1 that were either distinctly Northern or shared by the North and Midland.

non-Northern form	Northern form	map in WG
I want off	<i>I want to get off</i>	15
Sook!	<i>call to cows</i>	15
snake feeder	<i>dragonfly</i>	15
blinds	<i>roller shades</i>	16
bawl	<i>noise a calf makes</i>	16
poke	<i>paper bag</i>	17
sugar tree	<i>maple tree</i>	17
worm fence	<i>a rail fence laid zigzag</i>	18
corn pone, pone	<i>cornbread</i>	41
paling fence, pale fence	<i>picket fence</i>	41
roasting ears	<i>sweet-corn</i>	41
pole cat	<i>skunk</i>	42
Christmas gift!	<i>Merry Christmas!</i>	42

Table 2.3: Non-Northern isoglosses in *WG* that do not contain Erie (italicized variant used in Erie)

Conversely, Erie shares only two of the lexical items characteristic of the Midland: *run* and *smear case* (used to define the North Midland in Map 18), and one of the items common to both the Midland and South: *spicket*. These three lexical items that Erie shares with the Midland are shown in Table 2.4.

non-Northern form	Northern form	map in WG
<i>run</i>	a small stream	18
<i>smear case, smear cheese</i>	cottage cheese	18
<i>spicket</i>	faucet	42

Table 2.4: Only non-Northern isoglosses in *WG* that contains Erie

Thus, Erie behaves like a Northern city for 88% (29 out of 33) of the relevant lexical items from *WG*. Finally, Erie is also situated outside of the three isoglosses that Kurath provides for Western Pennsylvania (Map 25 in *WG*). These three extend northward from

Pittsburgh into northwestern PA, but none of them quite reach Erie. This suggests that Pittsburgh’s influence in Erie was not yet strong at that time. These three lexical items are show in Table 2.5.

Western PA form	non-Western Pa form	map in WG
hap	<i>quilt</i>	25
doodle, hay doodle	<i>haycock</i>	25
drooth	<i>drought</i>	25

Table 2.5: Three Western Pennsylvania isoglosses that do not contain Erie

The evidence from DARE is available only indirectly through Carver (1987), who trolled through the DARE fieldwork data to compile maps that capture the regional patterning of some of the lexical items used in the survey. Instead of the more traditional concept of dialect region, Carver prefers to use dialect *layers* as his descriptive apparatus. He defines a dialect layer as “the composite of a unique set of areal isoglosses, the geographical spread of its lexicon” Carver (1987:16). This concept of dialect layer is useful for the lexicon (which, in contrast to the phonology, does not have structural relationships between its elements), because it does not force the researcher to posit discrete boundaries, and thus enables the landscape to be viewed more as a continuum. Any given community can belong to several different layers, each having a different strength at that location, based on the number of items from that layer used in the community. The different layer strengths thus provide information about how strongly that community is affiliated with each dialect region.

The evidence from the maps relevant to Erie is presented in Table 2.6. The first column in the table represents the name of the dialect layer, as defined by Carver. The next two columns represent the number of DARE isogloss terms for the layer that occur in Erie, and the total number of DARE isoglosses used to define the layer, respectively. Unfortunately, even though Carver does provide lists of all of the isogloss terms he used to define the

layers, there is no way to know, without consulting the original fieldwork data, which of them occur in any given geographical point—due to space limitations on the maps, Carver only depicts the number of terms, not the specific terms themselves. So, a direct comparison with the distribution of the words from WG in Tables 2.1–2.5 is not possible. The fourth column in Table 2.6 shows the strength of the boundary within which Erie is situated for each of the dialect layers. The possible types of boundaries are *primary*, *secondary*, *tertiary*, and *quaternary*, with a primary boundary containing the area where the highest percentage of terms for the layer are found. Finally, the fifth column shows the label of the corresponding map from Carver (1987).

Dialect Layer	# of terms in Erie	total # of terms for layer	boundary strength	map from Carver
North	33	82	primary	3.3
Upper North	20	62	secondary	3.7
Inland North	18	51	primary	3.9
Midland	1	40	N / A	6.5
Lower North	4	53	N / A	6.15

Table 2.6: Erie’s position with regard to dialect layers in Carver (1987)

The three boundaries for the layers of the North provide good evidence for Erie’s status as a Northern city at the time of the DARE fieldwork. Erie is located within primary boundaries for the North and Inland North layers; furthermore, Erie falls just outside of the primary boundary for the Upper North, which extends westward to Lake Erie, stopping just at the Pennsylvania-New York state line. On the other hand, the data provide very little evidence for associating Erie with the Midland. Map 6.15 situates Erie outside of the tertiary boundary for the Midland layer (which extends northward to around Youngstown, OH). Similarly, Erie falls outside of the two boundaries provided for the Lower North¹ layer, although the secondary boundary does stretch northward almost to Erie.

¹Carver’s Lower North layer corresponds closely to what is traditionally referred to as the North Midland. Carver’s terminology reflects his disbelief in the existence of a separate Midland dialect region.

2.3 Phonological

Table 2.7 presents the features mapped in PEAS that are evidence for Erie's original affiliation with the North. For all of these features, the isogloss falls just south of Erie, indicating that Erie was always just on the edge of the boundary between the North and the Midland. The first column in Table 2.7 describes the feature that Erie shares with the North, and lists the lexical items that PEAS uses to illustrate this.² The second column describes the contrasting feature that is found just south of Erie. In some cases, this feature is widely distributed throughout the Midland region (e.g., /uw/ in *due*, Map 163), whereas in others the contrasting feature is more characteristic of Western Pennsylvania in particular (e.g., [druθ] for *draught*, Map 142). In either case, there is a clear boundary between Erie to the north and the area of Western Pennsylvania surrounding Pittsburgh to the south. The speakers from two counties immediately south of Erie appear to be transitional for many of these features, with Crawford County aligning more frequently with Western PA, and Warren County aligning more frequently with the North.

The large number of features that Erie shares with the North can be contrasted with the features in Table 2.8. These are the only three listed in PEAS that have Erie aligned with the Midland or Western Pennsylvania in opposition to the North.

Even more probative of Erie's original phonological alignment with the North is the status of the low-back vowels. This (along with the status of /ae/) is one of the two main structural features that determine the status of a dialect of present-day North American English (Labov 1991). The fact that /o/ and /oh/ are kept distinct by the two PEAS speakers from Erie proves the region's original alignment with the North as opposed to Western Pennsylvania, where the two phonemes are merged as a low, back rounded vowel ([ɒ] in the PEAS notation).

²The isoglosses providing evidence for the low-back vowels are omitted from this table, since they are discussed separately below.

Erie feature (shared with the North)	contrasting Midland / Western PA feature	PEAS Map #
/i/ monophthongal in <i>crib</i>	ingliding diphthong [i ^ə]	4
/e/ monophthongal in <i>bed</i>	ingliding diphthong [e ^ə]	4
/ey/ more close (i.e. [eɪ]) in <i>day, bracelet</i>	[eɪ]	18, 19
non-fronted /ow/ in <i>ago, coat</i>	fronted to [ɜʊ]	20, 21
raised nucleus for /ay/ in <i>nine</i>	not raised	26
fronted [ɛʊ] in <i>mountain, (worn) out</i>	[aʊ ~ ɑʊ]	28, 29
unrounded [a] in <i>father</i>	rounded [ɒ]	32
/iw/ in <i>dues</i> and <i>tube</i>	/uw/	33
vowel in <i>four</i> and <i>forty</i> distinct	merged	44
[e] before /r/ in <i>married</i>	[æ]	51
[ʊ] in <i>root</i>	[u]	113
[ʌ ~ ɐ] in <i>won't</i>	[o]	125
[drauθ] for <i>draught</i>	[druθ]	142
/iw/ in <i>blue, chew, and suit</i>	/uw/	147
[ɪ] in final unstressed syllable of <i>careless, houses, haunted, and bucket</i>	[ə]	148
/iw/ in <i>due, new, and Tuesday</i>	/uw/	163, 164, 165
<i>yeast</i> pronounced as [jɪst]	[ɪst]	166
/ð/ in <i>without</i>	/θ/	170
/sl/ in <i>greasy</i>	/zl/	171

Table 2.7: Northern phonological isoglosses that contain Erie in *PEAS*

Table 2.9 presents the /o/ and /oh/ words that are mapped in *PEAS*. First of all, the merger in vowel quality is shown clearly for the Western PA speakers: they have a rounded low-back vowel for all tokens. Interestingly, however, the atlas does mark a distinction in length: the three /oh/ words (*law, salt, and dog*) have a half-length mark, and are also characterized by the possible presence of a central offglide. The Northern speakers, on the other hand maintain a clear distinction in quality between the two types. The /o/ words have an unrounded low-central vowel, possibly slightly fronted in *oxen*, whereas the /oh/ words all have a consistently low-back rounded vowel.

Erie feature (shared with the Midland / Western PA)	contrasting Northern feature	PEAS Map #
/i/ is ingliding [ɪ ^ə] in <i>whip</i>	[ɪ]	5
/e/ is ingliding [ɛ ^ə] in <i>fence</i>	[ɛ]	9
trisyllabic pronunciation of <i>mushroom</i> ending in /n/	disyllabic ending in /n/	177

Table 2.8: Midland / Western PA phonological isoglosses that contain Erie in *PEAS*

Lexical Item	Erie	North	Western PA	Map #
<i>oxen</i>	[ɑ ~ ɑ̣ ~ ɑ̣]	[ɑ ~ ɑ̣ ~ ɑ̣]	[ɒ ~ ɔ]	15
<i>wash</i>	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɒ ~ ɔ]	135
<i>fog</i>	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɒ ~ ɔ]	136
<i>on</i>	[ɑ]	[ɑ]	[ɒ ~ ɔ]	138
<i>law</i>	[ɒ' ~ ɒ' ^ə]	[ɔ' ~ ɔ' ^ə]	[ɒ' ~ ɒ' ^ə]	22
<i>salt</i>	[ɒ' ~ ɒ' ^ə]	[ɔ' ~ ɔ' ^ə]	[ɒ' ~ ɒ' ^ə]	23
<i>dog</i>	[ɒ' ~ ɒ' ^ə]	[ɔ' ~ ɔ' ^ə]	[ɒ' ~ ɒ' ^ə]	24

Table 2.9: /o/ and /oh/ words in *PEAS* in Erie, the North, and Western PA

Wetmore (1959) reaches the same conclusion based on a larger body of evidence from the LAMSAS fieldnotes. In addition to the data presented in *PEAS*, he examined the lexical items *pot*, *fought*, *shock*, *god*, *off*, *cloth*, *sauce*, *costs*, *frost*, *all*, *John*, *gone*, *launch*, *strong*, *saw*, *swamp*, and *wasp* (Wetmore 1959:109) for speakers from Western Pennsylvania (although it is unclear exactly which of these had data from the two Erie speakers). Based on this evidence he lists both Erie informants as having a distinction between /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ (Wetmore 1959:113).

Thus, it is clear from the earliest survey data available that Erie's linguistic original linguistic affiliation was with the North. Both the lexical data from *WG* and *DARE* as well as the phonological data from *PEAS* and further LAMSAS field records show that Erie was located inside of most of the Northern isoglosses and outside of most of the Midland /

Western PA isoglosses.