KENTUCKY

DOES TENNESSEE HAVE THREE "GRAND DIALECTS"?:
EVIDENCE FROM THE LINGUISTIC ATLAS OF THE GULF STATES

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This paper is dedicated to Kelsie Harder, a native Tennessean who has written more on the language of the Volunteer State than any other person, especially on his native Perry County.[1] Professor Harder, who has spent his academic career largely at the State University of New York at Potsdam, is most widely known for his work on onomastics and is familiar to readers of this journal as the long-time, faithful reviewer of hundreds of books on names. It is thus fitting that the present essay, which combines name study with dialectology with reference to Tennessee, should pay tribute to his work by examining the linguistic dimensions of a long-held, popular truism--that the state has three distinct "grand divisions" of East, Middle, and West. Is this a linguistic as well as a political differentiation? Beyond considering some of the types of linguistic evidence available and determining what they tell in this regard, we will see that deeper issues of continuing interest to folklorists, sociologists, and historians are raised, such as, "What are the elements of linguistic behavior that people use to classify one another as belonging to a certain regional or social group?", "In what objective way are sectional divisions manifested in the behavior of Tennesseans?", and, more elusive, "What is the psychological reality of dialects and on what exactly are they based?"

Early in his 1986 Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel *A Summons to Memphis*, the late Peter Taylor has the teenage protagonist move with his parents and sister from their native Nashville to the river city of Memphis; the latter, according to the young man, was marked by "the peculiar institutions of the place--the institutions, that is to say, which one associates with the cotton and river culture of the Deep South" (p. 2). Taylor frames this relocation from one city to another in terms of a deep cultural contrast between the two regions in which the cities were located: "on the whole the move was made quietly and without fanfare, in the best Upper South manner. There was nothing Deep South about our family--an important distinction in our minds" (p. 3). A recent story in *The Tennessean* newspaper (December 25, 1994), dealt more closely with the long-time contrast, even rivalry, between the two cities:

They have spent two centuries growing up together, have traded
sons and daughters for countless generations, have battled for
similar spoils and opportunities, developed distinct cultural

heritages, nurtured waves of entrepreneurs, and done it all under the roof of the same state government.

And they are stranger unto each other. Or is it rivals? The nature of their relationship--or lack thereof--is one of the great puzzles of the age.

"I don't really know the dark secrets between these two cities, why it is that they are brothers and yet strangers," says Nashville author John Egerton, "It just seems it's always been that way."

To hear lifelong residents of both cities tell it, there is an eerie gulf between Memphis and Nashville. Each city tends to take a dim view of the other, latching on to a few simple stereotypes and supposing that somehow the other is worse. Nashville is country music, hifalutin snobs, churches, Opryland, and state government. Memphis is rhythm and blues, decadent partygoers, barbecue, cotton and Elvis. (Parsons, p. 1F)

In many ways the distinction between the two cities is a real and important one. Most Tennesseans would feel that Taylor's description is neither artificial nor exaggerated and would have an intuitive sense of the difference between both the cities and the regions of which they are a part. But they would likely add something to this--the consciousness of a third division of the state, with its own culture and people and identity--East Tennessee.

It is a bit strange. One can hardly begin a volume on Tennessee history without the author referring to the state's "Three Grand Divisions," sometimes called the "Three States of Tennessee," which are enshrined on the state flag by three white stars in a circle of blue. Nor can one read about significant facts and events in the history of the state without the interplay of these divisions coming to the fore. Though just about everyone native to the state, regardless of social class, *knows* that these divisions are there in very human terms, it is usually right nigh impossible for them to pin down what they consist of. It is one thing to say that Memphis is the home of rhythm and blues while Nashville is the capital of country music, but this implies little, if anything, about differences between the people of the regions. There's no obvious test that can objectively detect East, Middle, and West Tennesseans today by their political inclinations, cultural affiliations, athletic allegiances, or social manners, but there seems to be agreement that the differences are as real as they can be. Might their speech have something to do with this? This possibility has motivated the author over the past decade to conduct of his fellow Tennesseans an unscientific, intermittent oral survey consisting of three questions: "Are people in the three parts of the state

different?" (to which the response has almost invariably been "Yes"), "Do you think they talk differently?" (also usually answered "Yes"), and "In what way is their speech different?" (to which respondents have rarely been able to be specific, except occasionally to suggest that East Tennesseans pronounce the name of the state with the accent on the first syllable, while other Tennesseans pronounce it on the third).

The political angle to this intrastate division can in part be documented and understood. The June 14, 1987, issue of *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* ran a piece that must have seemed a little off the wall to many of the newspaper's readers. The story was headlined "Cumberlanders want a 51st State" and reported how residents in a nine-county area of southeast Kentucky, northeast Tennessee, and southwest Virginia had joined to declare themselves a separate entity. This would doubtless have been viewed by most readers as a publicity gambit, and this it surely was (after all, the nickname of the State of Cumberland was "Mountains Are Fun"), but this proposal for separation strikes a familiar note to many Tennesseans and has nothing to do with refighting the Civil War--in fact, the idea long predates that conflict. Since the late eighteenth century, the very earliest days of settlement, the territory later to become the Volunteer State has been marked by sectionalism. East Tennessee hill folks haven't been at all sure they've wanted to be part of the same state as Middle Tennesseans, and vice versa. For instance, in the 1780s East Tennesseans in the Watauga settlements were involved in the abortive attempt to create the State of Franklin for themselves, and in Middle Tennessee a group of 256 pioneers in 1780 formed an independent government in the Nashville Basin by drafting and signing the Cumberland Compact. Tennesseans in different parts of the state have long had their own ideas about their sectional independence.

Political as well as economic forces conspired to crystallize the three-way division of Tennessee in the early days of statehood. (Their economies have long been based on distinctive patterns of agriculture and land use, with, for instance, cotton dominating West Tennessee and tobacco in East and parts of Middle Tennessee.) The division was manifest in the rivalry over locating the state capital in the early 1800s and also in the 1834 state constitution, a document that institutionalized the three sections by decreeing equal representation of each on the state Supreme Court. It was cemented by differences in their participation in the Secession Convention of 1860 and in the Civil War. The War, as we read in the state's history, split a tragically large number of Tennessee families, and the high enlistment rate of East Tennesseans in the Union cause solidified the isolation of the eastern third of the state. The elevation of the East Tennessee tailor Andrew Johnson, considered a turncoat by many of his fellow Volunteers,

to the Presidency in 1865 widened and embittered the rift. That the sectional feeling may consequently be strongest in East Tennessee is echoed by historian Charles Crawford of Memphis State University: "It has been traditional in the mountain counties to view those of different experience and culture as real or potential enemies. And the local residents [of East Tennessee] make little distinction between Middle and West Tennessee. All are outsiders . . . ." (Crawford 1986:68).

In politics East Tennessee has seen itself as a separate entity down to the modern day. It's not just that Jimmy Quillen, the First District Congressman representing Upper East Tennessee, proposed as one of his first actions in Congress in 1963 that East Tennessee be split off and declared the 51st state in the Union. The reporting of statewide election returns is normally broken down three ways, reflecting the divergent political climates and party loyalties in East, Middle, and West Tennessee and the expectation that the different political histories of the three will be revealed in the vote counts, which it usually is. The state guidebook to Tennessee produced by the Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration (1939) characterized the situation in this way: "In politics, as in most things, the East Tennessean shows his independence, for here in an otherwise Democratic State is a strong Republican district that regularly chooses Republican representatives in both State and Federal elections. To the East Tennessean, West Tennessee is almost as far away and unknown as Missouri. He looks upon this western section as a swamp and resents the weight of the powerful Shelby County political machine in State-wide elections. What West Tennessee is for, he is `agin'" (p. 4). As evidenced particularly in the November 1994 elections, the political allegiances of Middle and West Tennessee have shifted markedly since this statement was written, but it is not at all clear that residents of the state's three divisions feel any closer to one another.

When Tennesseans identify with one division of the state or another today, in the late 20th century, does this reflect anything more than regional pride? Or to put it more bluntly--do Tennesseans claim identity with their section of the state as a way of expressing some kind of local clannishness and sectional prejudices against other Tennesseans, while using the history of the state as justification?

This last question is probably easy enough to discount, but the persistent belief by the residents of the state in sectional differences in Tennessee is difficult to explore in any concrete way. The three grand divisions are not markedly distinguished by geographical lines, as is the Upper Michigan peninsula, for instance, from the lower part of the state, or by settlement history, as Up Country South Carolina is from the Low Country. Stanley Folmsbee et al. in *Tennessee: A*

Short History, surely overstate the case in saying that "had the natural contours been followed, Tennessee would be three states or parts of three states, instead of one" (1969:3). The boundary between West and Middle Tennessee is the short hop across the Tennessee River. Hardly anyone but the state legislature and professional geographers have known where Middle Tennessee stops and East Tennessee begins, and the legislature has changed its mind several times about this.

The three sections of Tennessee were settled largely by the same groups of people, at least among whites, who migrated from east to west across the territory and state from the 1780s to the 1820s. David Crockett represents an archetypical Tennessean in this regard. Born in Washington County in Upper East Tennessee, with his family he moved seventy miles southwest to Jefferson County at an early age, as a young husband to southcentral Tennessee (Hickman County), which he represented in the state legislature, and later to "the last frontier" of the state, what was to become Gibson County in the extreme northwest corner of Tennessee, which he represented in the U.S. Congress. While Middle and West Tennessee were not settled entirely by East Tennesseans looking for more open spaces, they were populated by the same European-derived stocks of people (this is not to discount the numbers and influence of black settlers, particularly in West Tennessee).

Yet many Tennesseans perceive that the three divisions of the state have had distinct histories, and today the Volunteer State is, so far as this writer knows, the only one with three regional historical societies, each with its own library and journal.[2] Despite mobility between the sections and many recent common political and economic developments, Tennesseans remain as conscious of the divisions of the state. Natives of Knoxville or Johnson City or elsewhere in the eastern third of the state, when asked where they are from, tend to say "East Tennessee" rather than "Tennessee," when meeting outsiders.[3] This does not reflect any lack of state pride. We come back to a question posed at the beginning: In what objective way are sectional divisions manifested in the behavior of Tennesseans? Why are they so clear cut in the minds of the state's citizens?

Though problematic to distinguish on the basis of physical geography and settlement history, the three grand divisions of Tennessee have sometimes been recognized by geographers and correlated with cultural artifacts. For example, in his *Cultural Regions of the United States* (1975:174), Raymond Gastil outlines a three-way division of the state, based on analysis of material features like barn and fence construction, between the Mountain, Upland, and Lowland cultural areas. This is a more refined division than that of most other geographers, who

consider both East and Middle Tennessee as part of the Upper South and West Tennessee a northward extension of the Lower South Plantation Belt (see Zelinsky 1973, Jordan 1976). However, the regional distinctions made by cultural geographers hardly bring us closer to understanding the perceived differences between the sections of the state, because it is quite doubtful that material culture has much to do with the consciousness of regional divisions in our urban age.

As far as research and discussion on Tennessee speech is concerned, more than two hundred articles and notes have dealt in whole or in part with the state, beginning with a five-page article, "Dialectal Survivals in Tennessee," that Calvin S. Brown, a Vanderbilt University Professor, published in 1889.[4] As voluminous as this literature may appear to be, most of it, including all nine dissertations that have been written, focuses on single communities or other small areas and thus provides no basis for a statewide view or a comparison between regions within the state. Because of this basic limitation, no material has been collected, with the exception of two projects, to permit the examination of regional linguistic distinctions within the state. Actually, nearly all the scholarship on Tennessee speech has been concerned with East Tennessee. This is explained by the longer and greater interest in mountain speech, but it means that the western two-thirds of the state have been almost entirely neglected by researchers--other than Kelsie Harder.

One researcher to collect evidence statewide is Gordon Wood, who began his Vocabulary Change project while on the faculty at the University of Chattanooga in the 1950s. A number of preliminary reports of his research were published in the present journal and a summary volume appeared in 1973. Because Wood assumed a two-way division of the state and accordingly sought the relative frequency of items in these regions, his findings do not bear directly on the question at hand about a possible three-way distinction. In more recent years, however, research in linguistic geography, in the form of data from the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States (LAGS), has become available to analyze, and this offers the first realistic opportunity for a three-way contrast of language patterns within Tennessee.[5] LAGS data provide two unique features for exploring intra-state differences and similarities. First, LAGS interviewed 141 natives of the state (60 in the East, 47 in Middle, and 34 in West Tennessee) at roughly the same time--in the early and mid 1970s.[6] Second, the data are largely comparable, in that informants generally answered the same questions (the survey encompassed approximately 800 questions which sought responses that were known to vary in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, or otherwise). In short, LAGS data offer the prospect of identifying linguistic contrasts within the state,

perhaps even quite subtle ones, that play a role in the perceptions Tennesseans have of intra-state differences among its citizens. Such data will help us answer, or come much closer to answering, whether it is possible to identify three different dialects in the state and whether there are shibboleths that mark the speech of East Tennesseans vs. Middle vs. West Tennesseans.[7] We will examine some of the LAGS lexical and phonological evidence to answer these questions.

For those unfamiliar with the LAGS project, a brief summary is in order. Directed by Lee Pederson of Emory University throughout its history (1968-92), LAGS is an broad-based study of regional and social dialects in eight southern states: Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas (as far west as the Balcones Escarpment). It is the largest and most inclusive research project ever undertaken on Southern speech, providing basic texts for the study of speech in the region and a description of the sociohistorical and sociolinguistic contexts necessary for their interpretation.[8] Ultimately, the project has sought to achieve four additional, interrelated goals: an inventory of the dominant and recessive patterns of usage in the Gulf States; a global description of regional and social varieties of southern speech; an abstract of regional phonology, grammar, and lexicon; and an identification of areas of linguistic complexity which require further study (Bailey 1989; Pederson 1977:28).

Linguistic geography is the discipline that attempts to map, through various devices, individual linguistic features and then to generalize the results of these maps into distinct language or dialect areas. LAGS is an extension of the direct method of linguistic geography, which was initiated by Jules Gillieron in France at the turn of the century and refined by Hans Kurath in the United States in the 1920s. These methods involve the following: selection of a network of communities, including focal, relic, and transitional communities, on the basis of the history of the region; conversational interviews with natives of these communities conducted with a questionnaire of selected items; and recording of the responses in finely graded phonetics. In LAGS, informants were of three types: Type I, folk informants with a grade school education or less (40%); common informants with some high school education (35%); cultivated informants with some college education (25%). Blacks comprised 22% of the sample, which also included several informants whose language was Spanish, French, or German. Although faithful to the methods and the questionnaire of other regional linguistic atlas projects, LAGS was innovative in a number of important ways: for example, every interview was taped, producing a total of nearly 5,500 hours of recording for the project as a whole, most interviews elicited at least one hour of

free conversation, and approximately 160 informants in urban areas were given a supplementary set of questions about city life.

From the very earliest days of research in linguistic geography in Germany over a century ago, it has been the case that rarely, if ever, do dialects (or even the distribution of individual words) pattern in an absolutely clear-cut fashion. Words and other linguistic features are rarely confined to a given territory; nor is there a one-to-one correspondence between linguistic form and land area. (For instance, they frequently have a social dimension and are shared by social groups across regions). It is therefore most likely that any differences found between East, Middle, and West Tennessee will be relative ones, and, of course, it is possible that no significant contrasts will show up--after all, the perception of regional differences may be a figment more than reality. The perception may also be based on stereotypes that once corresponded to reality but do so no longer, or on more subtle and elusive features of speech like intonation that are difficult to identify and almost impossible to quantify.

LAGS Lexical Evidence

From LAGS evidence on vocabulary, the differences between the three divisions appear to be rather few and not so revealing. Table 1 lists some of the terms, out of hundreds that were elicited, that show a distinct distribution across the state.

Table 1: Vocabulary Showing Regional Patterns in Tennessee

	West Tenn (n = 34)	Middle Tenn (n = 47)	East Tenn (n = 60)
airish (cool weather)	3 8.8%	0 0.0%	17 28.3%
baker (a type of frying pan)	0 0.0%	3 6.4%	17 28.3%
barefooted (black coffee)	2 5.9%	1 2.1%	12 20.0%
barn lot	1 2.9%	9 19.1%	22 36.7%
blinky (thick sour milk)	0 0.0%	1 2.1%	18 30.0%
branch (small stream)	11 32.4%	32 68.1%	46 76.7%
family pie (deep-dish dessert)	2 5.9%	0 0.0%	13 21.7%
fireboard (mantel)	0 0.0%	5 10.6%	19 31.7%
grub (to clear land)	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	16 26.7%
mountain boomer (mt. resident)	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	7 11.7%
mountain hoosier (mt. resident)	0 0.0%	4 8.5%	18 30.0%
paper poke (paper sack)	0 0.0%	5 10.6%	15 25.0%
poke (paper sack)	3 8.8%	9 19.1%	34 56.7%

rock fence	3 8.8%	21 44.7%	22 36.7%
rock wall	2 5.9%	11 23.4%	20 33.3%
snake doctor (dragonfly)	21 61.8%	26 55.3%	8 13.3%
snake feeder (dragonfly)	1 2.9%	7 14.9%	43 71.7%
spicket (outside outlet)	4 11.8%	0 0.0%	19 31.7%
spicket (inside outlet)	1 2.9%	3 6.4%	27 45.0%
tommyto (miniature tomato)	11 32.4%	16 31.0%	38 63.3%

From this table, which gives a good idea of the relative frequency of twenty selective vocabulary items in Tennessee, several points emerge:

1) The vocabulary of East Tennessee appears to be the most distinctive of the three divisions, the speech of West Tennessee the least distinctive. Many terms occur frequently in East Tennessee but much more rarely elsewhere: *airish*, *fireboard*, *baker*, *poke* and *paper poke*. *barefooted*, *grub* (to get rid of trees and stumps on a plot of land), *blinky*, *snake feeder*, *mountain hoosier*, *mountain boomer*, and so on. The only term that appears most often in West Tennessee is *snake doctor*, but it occurs nearly as often in Middle Tennessee and is hardly unknown in the East (8 occurrences).

2) However, lexical differences within the state turn out to be quite relative. With two exceptions (*grub*, *mountain boomer*), no term is found in only one section of the state. The table actually underrepresents this uniformity to a significant degree, in that the vast majority of vocabulary items collected by LAGS reveal a far more even spread and are thus not cited here.

Social differences, especially between generations, are actually greater than sectional ones, though this is not represented in the table. For instance, nearly all the terms mentioned in the table were used by middle-aged and older speakers, rather than speakers under age 30, in East Tennessee. This writer, a Knoxville native (born 1950), was acquainted with only two terms in Table 1 (*spicket* and *tommyto*) there.

Further, the distinctive vocabulary in sections of Tennessee is largely recessive, constituting almost entirely what are known as "secondary" responses to terms (i.e., synonyms for more common terms known and used throughout the state). While most Tennesseans knew the term *dragonfly*, fifty-one also knew *snake feeder*, forty-three of them in East Tennessee, and fifty-five knew *snake doctor*, only 8 of them in East Tennessee. Terms like *fireboard*, *barefooted*, and *tommyto* have competition from national alternatives (*mantel/mantelpiece*, *straight/black*, and *cherry tomato*). There is another obvious reason for the

recessiveness of this vocabulary--most of the terms in Table 1 have to do with rural and agricultural life, which younger and increasingly urbanized speakers usually have little contact with. While urbanization can explain the fact that fewer and fewer speakers know many terms, and while the importance of documenting how language changes is not to be denied (the LAGS data directly call into question the assumption that some type of "media influence" is behind such changes), this matter is not germane to the question of this paper. For vocabulary, perhaps the most crucial point is not just that more and more speakers don't know the terms in Table 1, but that the opportunity for the terms to be used is occurring more and more rarely; people don't talk about barns and clearing land and fences and dragonflies much anymore. At the very least, these topics would hardly seem to arise often enough in conversation for vocabulary pertaining to them to become widespread markers of East, Middle, and West Tennessee speech.

Thus, relying on patterns of vocabulary to distinguish the sections of Tennessee runs into the same problem that cultural geographers have tended to face--the differences revealed pertain primarily to the older, rural population and have little reality for modern urbanites--who still do express intra-state sectionalism.

Pronunciation Data in LAGS
This brings us to pronunciation. There are many reasons why we might expect to find significant variation in this aspect of language and why this area will be more productive in our search for intra-state differences. Vowels, consonants, and combinations of sounds occur with far greater frequency than specific words. They occur in the speech of everyone and are not dependent on a topic of conversation. As revealed by many different languages and dialects, sounds are highly prone to vary in any number of ways--socially, regionally, articulatorily, etc. It is thus intuitively far more reasonable that there may be phonological shibboleths to being an East, Middle, or West Tennessean--nuances of pronunciation that enable Tennesseans to categorize one another.[8] To explore whether it is one's pronunciation that may reveal what section of Tennessee a person is from, five place names (four cities--*Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville,* and *Memphis*--and the state of Tennessee) were examined in the speech of the 141 Tennessee informants for LAGS to determine the common variations in their pronunciation and then to see if these variant pronunciations correlate with the three divisions of the state. Among the linguistic forms sought by LAGS for studying pronunciation, place names have two important advantages over vocabulary: they were elicited by investigators for most informants, and they are items that occur with far greater frequency in everyday life, for speakers of all

ages and groups, and thus differing pronunciations would be more likely to develop associations with different groups. (This view receives some support from the few concrete responses to the "unscientific" survey of the author cited above.)

Tables 2a-2f show the results of the analysis of the five names. The first two tables examine the pronunciation of unstressed vowels (the variation between [ə], the central vowel or "schwa" or "uh" sound, and [ɪ], what is traditionally called "short i"). This variation affects the vowel in the second syllable of *Chattanooga* and *Tennessee* (producing "Chat-*uh*-noo-ga" vs. "Chat-*ih*-noo-ga" and "Ten-*uh*-see" vs. "Ten-*ih*-see") and the final vowel of *Memphis* ("Mem-fus" vs. "Mem-fis") and *Chattanooga* ("-noo-*guh*" vs. "-noo-*gih*" or "noo-*gee*"). The unstressed syllable in all cases is only very weakly pronounced. In Table 2a we see that no distinct correlation with region emerges for the middle vowel in *Chattanooga* or *Tennessee*. For the former word, the unstressed [ə] occurs at a highest rate in West Tennessee (61.1%); however, in this region *Memphis* was never pronounced with [ə]--West Tennesseans tend to say "Chat-*uh*-noo-ga" but "Mem-*fis*." At the same time, a third of West Tennesseans (9/27, 33.3%) use this vowel in pronouncing "Ten-*uh*-see." What is most striking is that the percentages of [ə] vary greatly from name to name for each section of the state. This means that, if any one of these names does represent a shibboleth in the minds of Tennesseans and used to classify their fellow Volunteers, it is only the individual name rather than the pattern of pronouncing a sound in a certain way in a certain context that is involved. For the final vowel in *Chattanooga* (Table 2b), a clearer pattern is seen, with a high front vowels [i]/[ɪ] occurring only in East and Middle Tennessee, although at a rather low rate.

Table 2a: Unstressed Vowels in *Chattanooga* and *Tennessee*

Section	Chat-*uh*-noo-ga		Ten-*uh*-see	
East Tenn	25/53	47.2%	12/56	21.4%
Middle Tenn	17/43	39.5%	14/41	34.1%
West Tenn	11/18	61.1%	9/27	33.3%

Table 2b: Final Vowels in *Memphis* and *Chattanooga*

Section	Mem-*fus*		Chattanoo-*gih/gee*	
East Tenn	9/56	16.1%	8/53	15.1%
Middle Tenn	2/43	4.7%	6/43	14.0%
West Tenn	0/30	0.0%	0/18	0.0%

Table 2c shows whether speakers in the three sections pronounce the vowel in the final syllable of *Knoxville* and *Nashville* as either -*vil* [vɪl] or -*vul* [vəl] (strictly speaking, the latter has a "syllabic l" rather than a vowel). The percentages of speakers who say "Knox-*vil*" is relatively even across the state, those who say "Nash-*vil*" slightly less so. While West Tennesseans pronounce the names of the cities consistently, East and Middle Tennesseans show a somewhat higher rate of -*vil* in pronouncing the principal city in their own section of the state than other Tennesseans do. The samples are too small and the differences too limited to make much of this, but it does represent an intriguing pattern of reversal. What is probably most important here is that Tennesseans everywhere overwhelmingly say -*vul*, which would tend to make this pronunciation (and that of many other towns in the state--*Rogersville, Smithville, Brownsville*, etc.) a marker of being a local rather than a new arrival. A number of years ago this writer made a presentation at East Tennessee State University, in the course of which he stated that he was from Knoxville; after the talk a member of the audience told him that she could recognize this by his pronunciation of "Knox-*vul*."

Table 2c: Pronunciation of -*ville* in *Knoxville/Nashville*

Section	Knox-*vil*		Nash-*vil*	
East Tenn	16/56	28.6%	6/54	11.1%
Middle Tenn	7/41	17.1%	13/46	28.3%
West Tenn	4/18	22.2%	4/18	22.2%

Two of the five names (*Memphis* and *Tennessee*) show variation between the vowels /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ ("short I" and "short e," respectively). A frequently noted feature of Southern American speech in the twentieth century is the merger or identical pronunciation of these two vowels before certain consonants-- specifically before /n/ and /m/. As a result, pairs of words like *ten/tin* and *hem/him* pronounced identically by most Tennesseans. This, however, is not borne out by the pronunciation of the two names by LAGS speakers, most of whom, especially in East Tennessee, say "*Mem*-phis" and "*Tenn*-essee" rather than "*Mim*-phis" and "*Tinn*-essee"; Tennesseans may in fact pronounce *pen* and *pin* exactly alike, but this doesn't imply that the same tendency extends to proper nouns. If anything, "*Mem*-phis" and "*Tenn*-essee" may distinguish East Tennesseans from others in the state.

Table 2d: Front Vowel before Nasal in *Memphis* and *Tennessee*

Section	[mɪm-]	[tɪn-]

East Tenn	5/56	8.9%	8/56	14.3%
Middle Tenn	15/43	34.9%	17/41	41.5%
West Tenn	7/30	23.3%	10/27	37.0%

Two further, unrelated patterns of variation with the name *Memphis* are worthy of attention. One of these is the variable addition of a "p" sound at the end of the first syllable; the other involves the stretching of the vowel in the first syllable and the attention of another vowel sound (the "schwa" vowel) so that the name sounds like "Me-*um*-phis" [mɛ°mfəs]. The latter tendency, which is frequently called the Southern drawl, is pronounced most often in East Tennessee, occurring at a level of nearly 50%, although the rate in West Tennessee (30%) is not far behind.

Table 2e: Pronunciation of *Memphis*

Section	Mem*p*-phis		Addition of schwa	
East Tenn	23/56	41.1%	26/56	46.4%
Middle Tenn	23/43	53.5%	6/43	14.0%
West Tenn	10/30	33.3%	9/30	30.0%

A final aspect of pronunciation involves stress. While *Memphis, Nashville,* and *Knoxville* are invariably accented on the first syllable, this is not true for *Tennessee* and *Chattanooga*, which may have the primary accent on the first or third syllable. Table 2f shows the rate of pronunciation of the latter two names with initial accent. The evidence provides some support for the anecdotal reports given to the investigator's "unscientific" survey cited earlier, in that the name of the state more often than not receives stress on the first syllable in East Tennessee; the contrast with Middle Tennessee is strong, but less so with West Tennessee. The same type of pronunciation of *Chattanooga* is most prevalent in the East but does not occur for the speakers interviewed in West Tennessee.

Table 2f: Accent on First Syllable

Section	*Tenn*-essee	*Chat*-tanooga
East Tenn	34/56 60.7%	14/53 26.4%
Middle Tenn	11/41 26.8%	5/43 11.6%
West Tenn	13/27 48.1%	0/18 0.0%

Conclusion

The results of this rather brief study, this sectional comparison of Tennessee speech using Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States data, are mixed and

seemingly ambiguous, in that there are no dramatic differences in vocabulary or pronunciation between the three divisions. Looking at these results in a larger perspective, however, does tell us a number of things about the language of the state in general. Tennessee vocabulary is marked by sectional differences not so much as it is by widespread change. Many differences once existing for older speakers no longer hold for their younger counterparts, who may know several synonyms for an item or none at all. This does not necessarily mean that national or larger regional patterns are erasing the distinctiveness of the three grand divisions of the state or that all Tennesseans will be talking alike in another couple of generations. Sociolinguists have long pointed out that one speech community will often differ from another community not because of the historical derivation of its speech, but because it *wants* to be set off and recognized as different from another speech community and have its own identity. In theory at least, East Tennesseans will be distinctive in their speech as long as they have a strong identification as East Tennesseans and they don't want to be mistaken as "them flat landers," "those Democrats," or whatever. The psychological reality of the three grand divisions of the state then is at least as important as the geographical reality. Linguistically speaking, the divisions within the state are still most likely to be based on variation in the pronunciation of vowels, although this did not turn out very clearly to be the case for the five names examined in the present study. Even if they may no longer be geographically or linguistically valid or if they linger in the subtle, hard-to-discuss, impossible to quantify areas of manners and disposition, the divisions may be real nonetheless because they have become part of mental maps of the state. They are part of what makes some of us Tennesseans.

While only weak intra-state divisions of speech in Tennessee are suggested in this study, this does not mean that the citizens in one section of Tennessee do not maintain notions and stereotypes about how those elsewhere in the state talk. Nor does it mean that the identification of Tennesseans as being from the East, Middle, or West is not based on something else: this needs to be investigated through other approaches, including direct surveys which ask a variety of Tennesseans whether and how they classify one another. It is the impression of this writer that sectional identification (for categorizing both oneself and others) is still potent in the state, but this is surely a question that is fascinating enough to be explored by sociologists, anthropologists, folklorists, and others. Perhaps Kelsie Harder will take up the challenge and bring us closer to an understanding himself.

Notes

1. A roster of his publications relating to Tennessee are listed and annotated in *Annotated Bibliography of Southern American English*, edited by James B. McMillan and Michael Montgomery (1989).

2. The oldest of these is the East Tennessee Historical Society in Knoxville, which has published a journal since 1929 (*East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* until 1989, when it became the *Journal of East Tennessee History*). The Tennessee Historical Society in Nashville has published the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* since 1941, whereas the West Tennessee Historical Society in Memphis has published *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* since 1947.

3. I am indebted to Bethany Dumas of the University of Tennessee-Knoxville English Department for this observation. She pointed out to the author that he, a Knoxvillian, exemplified it himself. `

4. A survey presented by the author at a gathering of the Tennessee Conference on Linguistics (Montgomery 1986) identified 195 items. A number of others have been published in succeeding years, bringing the total well over 200.

5. For research purposes not important here, Tennessee was classified as a "Gulf" state by the LAGS project, which was edited at Emory University.

6. This is better characterized as a judgment sample (LAGS sought primarily older, rural speakers) than as a random sample. It is inappropriate to use the results of the survey for statistical comparison for this reason and others as well (for instance, it is not discernible from transcription records whether a given question was in fact asked in a given interview).

7. The term *shibboleth* originated from the pronunciation of the stream by the name by the Gileadites (Judges 6).

8. The publications generated by the LAGS project are many and diverse, ranging from microfilm to oversized volumes to computer files. A survey and critique of these can be found in Montgomery 1993.

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Historians as well recognize them. Each division even has its own historical society (which means that the East Tennessee Historical Society and the West Tennessee Historical Society complain that the Tennessee History Society headquartered in Murfreesboro should more accurately be named "The Middle Tennessee Historical Society") and each publishes its own journal. Other Southern states (particularly Georgia and even South Carolina) have greater differences in topography than Tennessee, and other states (like Kentucky and North Carolina) have a distinctive mountain region comparable to East Tennessee, but none other expresses such a definite intrastate division.

But whatever the source of this division (one East Tennessean tells me that East Tennesseans are different in that they are prouder of their region than citizens in other divisions, a claim we will avoid here),

East Tennessee speech turns out to be most distinctive, West Tennessee speech least distinctive. Why? Is this consistent with the South/South Midland boundary proposed by Kurath?
Problems of interpretation:
3) Differences in generational split in informants and in data.
Explain LAGS maps.

Cautionary Conclusions:
Relativeness of differences; there is hardly any lexical form that is diagnostic of only one section of the state. There are few, if any, exclusive features anywhere.
Recessiveness of distinctive vocabulary; it comprises almost entirely secondary responses to terms (i.e., synonyms for more common terms that are known and used throughout the state).
As much social variation, especially generational differences, as regional variation. This means that many of the vocabulary differences suggested here may no longer exist for younger speakers, who may know all the synonyms for an item or none at all. This does not necessarily mean that national or larger regional patterns are wiping out the distinctiveness of three grand divisions of the state. Sociolinguists have long pointed out that one speech community will often differ from another community not because of the historical derivation of its speech, but because it WANTS to be set off and recognized as different from another speech community. In other words, in theory East Tennesseans will be distinctive in their speech as long as they have a strong identification as East Tennesseans and they don't want to be mistaken as "those flatlanders," "those Democrats," or whatever. The psychological reality of the three grand divisions of the state then

are at least as important as the geographical reality; this points us toward an even more interesting question to explore.

Heretofore the piecemeal studies that have been made have not allowed us to survey how specific words, pronunciations, and grammatical usages patterned across the entire state.

We may mention that there are reasons to expect grammatical differences between different sections of Tennessee as well. Anecdotal evidence alone--the relatively archaic nature of East Tennessee speech and the type of regional divisiveness within the state which would tend to produce shibboleths of usages--brings several candidates to mind immediately. A former professor of this writer in Maryville is convinced that East Tennesseans tend to have different irregular verb patterns for go, come, and run than other Tennesseans, in that they use go, went, and went as principal parts of go, come, come, and came for the verb come, and run, ran, and ran as the principal parts of run.

Lee Pederson's monograph *East Tennessee Folk Speech* (1983) is a goldmine of material on one region of the state, but there has been nothing to compare it to from elsewhere.

1994 ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

The 60th annual meeting of the Tennessee Folklore Society was held November 12, 1994, on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro. The sessions were held in the university's new John Bragg Mass Communications Building, and consisted of a typical array of papers, presentations, and discussions. The final program included the following events:

THE TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY

60th ANNUAL MEETING

November 12, 1994

Middle Tennessee State University
The John Bragg Mass Communications Building
Room 101
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

PROGRAM

9:00   Coffee and pastries

9:30   Welcome and announcements

9:45   "Traditional Culture and Children's Fiction: The Case of May Justus." Charles Wolfe, Middle Tennessee State University

10:15   "Field Report: Odus Maggard of Kingsport: Three-Finger Banjo Picker." Richard Blaustein, East Tennessee State University.

10:45   Coffee break

11:00   "A Program of Folk Songs with Commentary." Bettye and Graham Kash, Tennessee Tech University

11:30   "Charles Faulkner Bryan: A Tennessee Folklorist Revisited." Carl King, East Tennessee State University

12:00   Lunch

1:00   "Teaching About Women in Country Music." Jim Akenson, Tennessee Tech University.

1:30   "The Tennessee Overhill Heritage Tourism Program." Brent Cantrell, Tennessee Overhill consultant.

2:00   "Report of the State Folk Arts Director." Roby Cogswell, Tennessee Arts Commission

2:30   Open forum: The State of Folk Arts in Tennessee.

3:00   Business meeting

3:30   Adjournment