

10. Regional Varieties

Ling 380/Soc 427 (Fall 2024)

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Quiz #7

Choose any two to answer.

Do not answer all three!

1. What is the connection between regional variation and language change over time?
2. What is the “Rhenish fan,” and why is it noteworthy?
3. What is a dialect atlas?

Cool classes!

In the spring, I'll be teaching two in-person classes:

Language Change

Ling 370 32003

Mondays, 6:30–9:50

Semantics & Pragmatics

Ling 405 32002

Wednesdays, 6:30–9:50



Amazing classes! Wow!

Register now! Please!

Regional Varieties

Regional Dialects

- “Dialect” can be a difficult term, hard to pin down.
- Still, we can talk about two types of dialects: regional dialects and social dialects.
- These are based on the notion that people can be arranged into groups, and members of a particular group will use language in a more or less consistent way. Their peculiar language use can be identified with that group.



Regional Dialects



Social Dialects



Men's dialect

Social Dialects



Women's dialect

Social Dialects



Moustache dialect

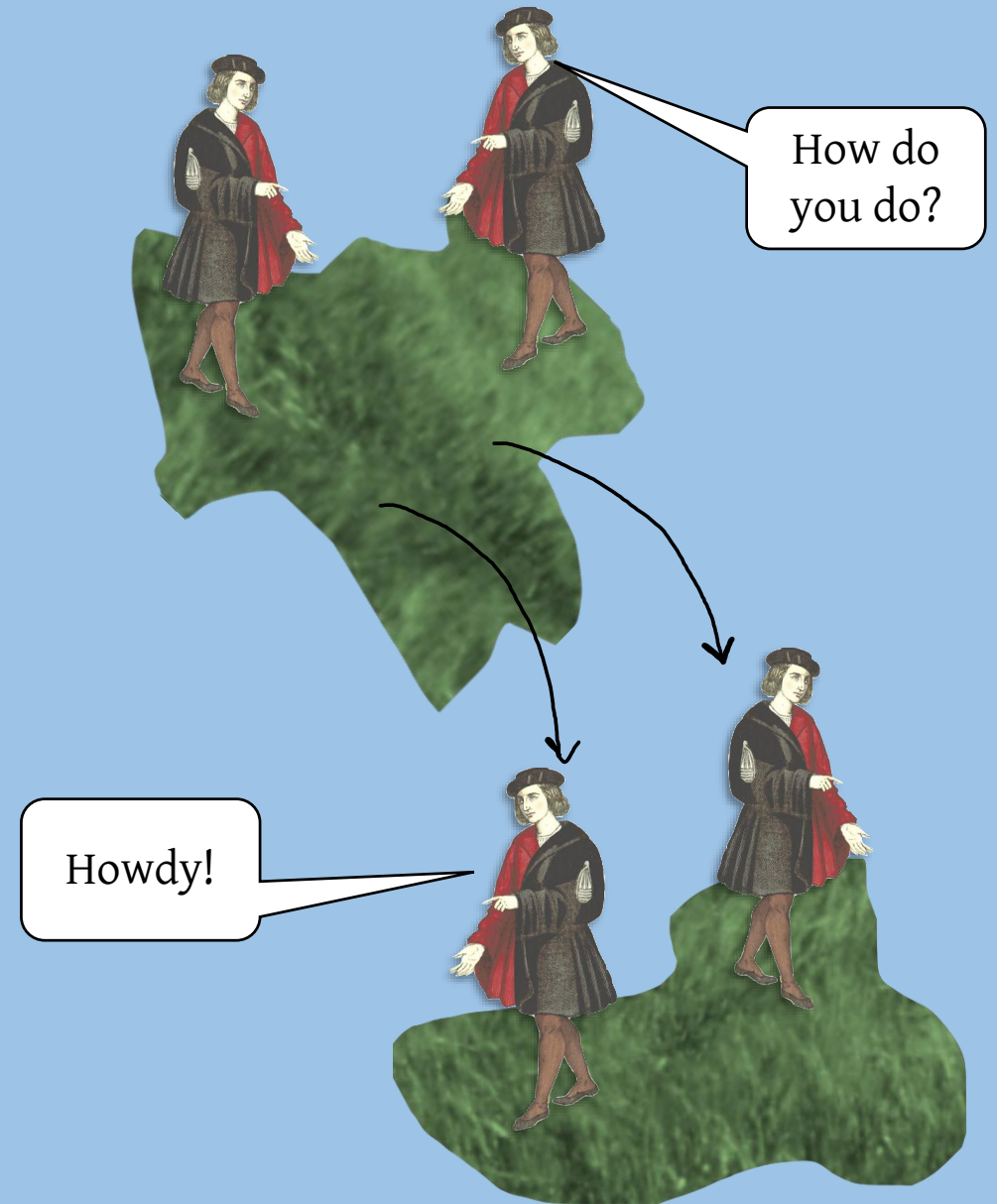
Social Dialects



How else might this population be grouped?

Regional Variation

- Let's say there's a group of people that speak a language.
- Some of those people move far away, while others stay put.
- Over time, their descendants' speech will diverge in the two locations.
- Over even more time, especially if the populations don't communicate much (if at all), their speech will diverge so much that they will become two totally different languages.



Regional Variation

- Regional variation is a big driver of language change over time, including how Latin differentiated into French, Italian, Romanian, etc.
- Let's see how this happened.

Two major languages spoken in the Empire were Latin and Greek.



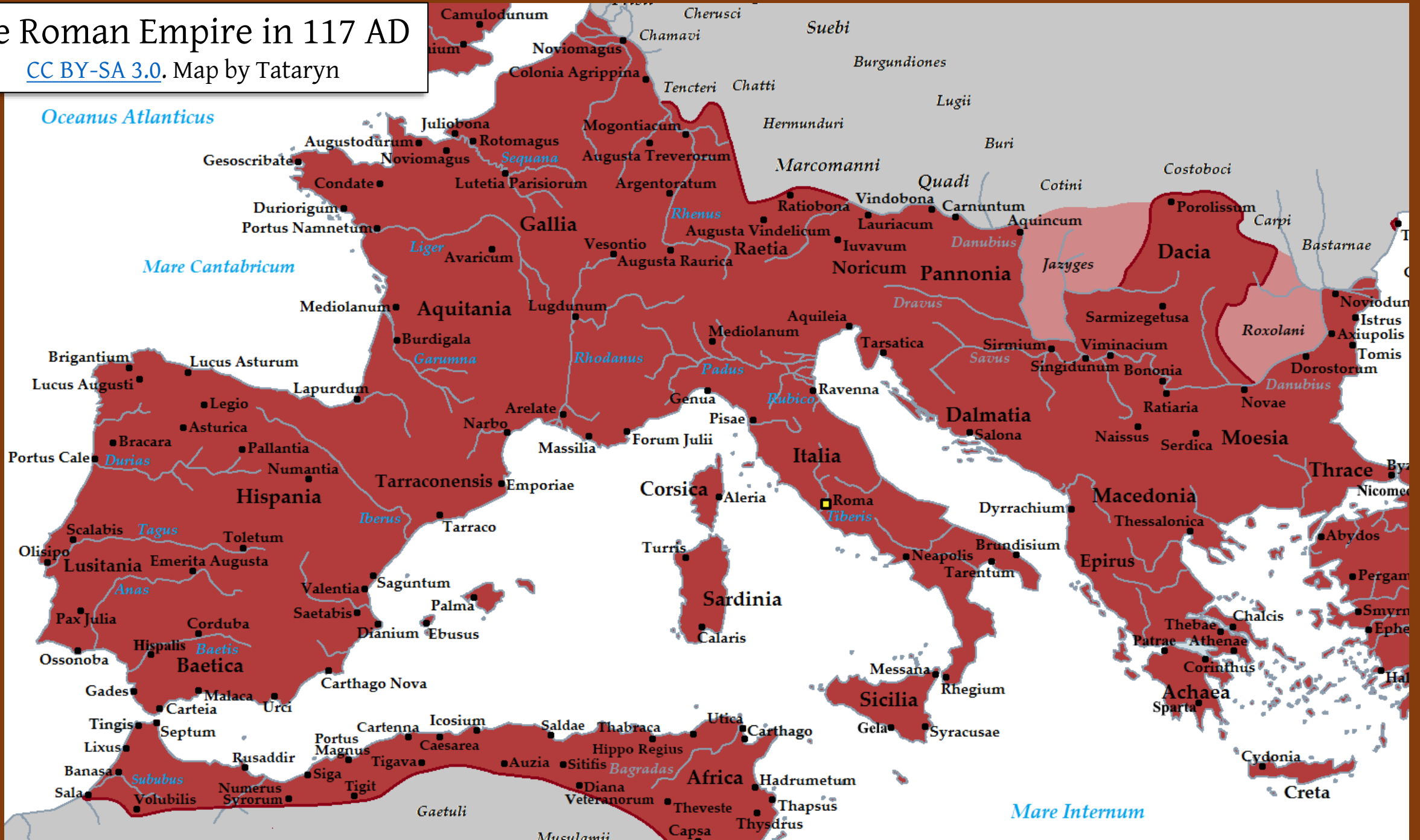
The Roman Empire in 117 AD
CC BY-SA 3.0. Map by Tataryn

Latin was most widely used in Western Europe, while Greek was used in Greece, Anatolia (modern Turkey), Egypt, and elsewhere.

The Roman Empire in 117 AD



CC BY-SA 3.0. Map by Tataryn



Romance Languages in Europe

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All of these languages descended from Latin.

Centuries ago, there were many different *regional dialects* of Latin.

Over time, those regional dialects diverged so significantly that they became different languages.

Swadesh list comparing the Romance languages:
https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Romance_Swadesh_lists

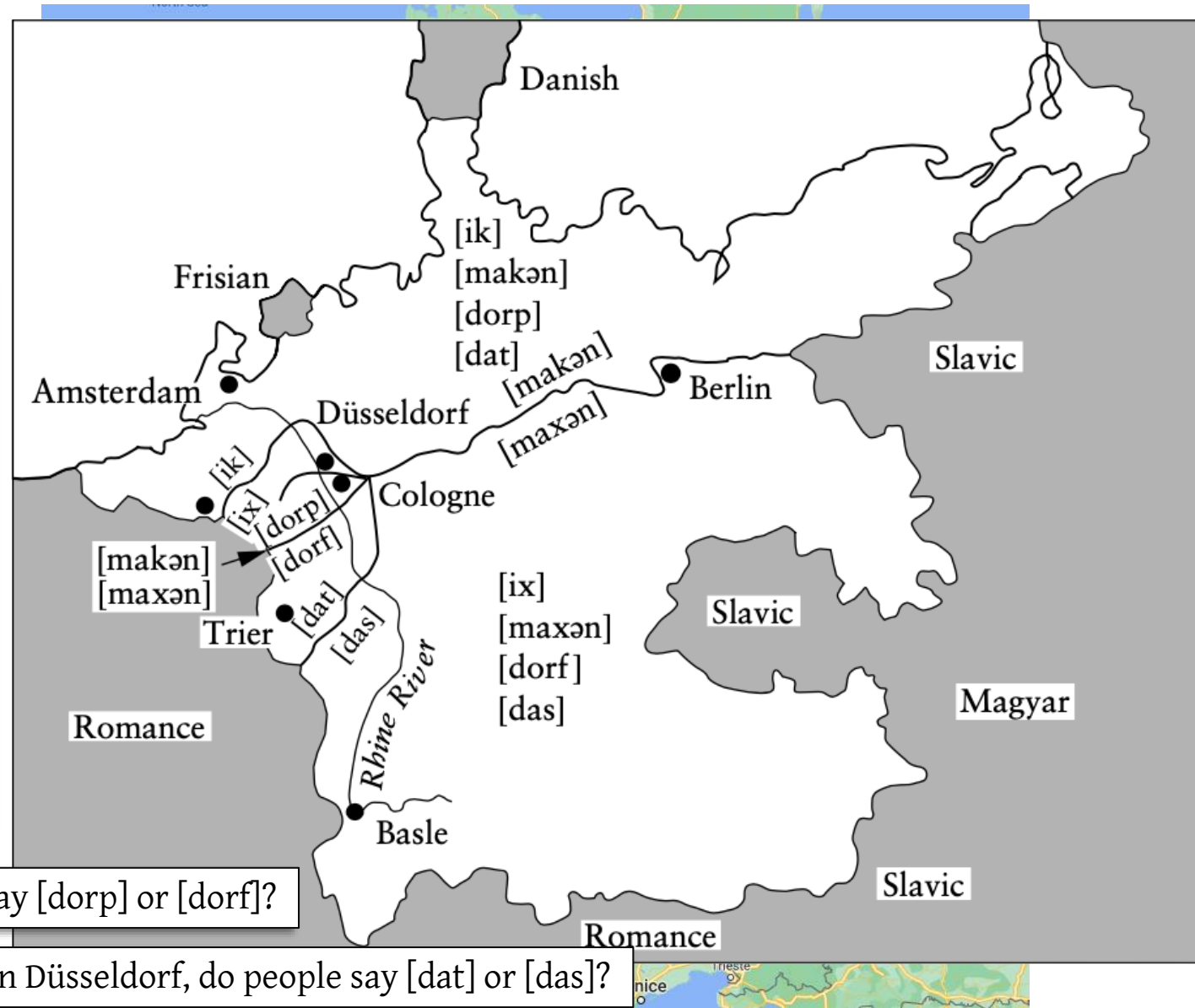
Dialect geography

- The people who map out regional dialects are called *dialect geographers*.
- They often produce *dialect atlases*.

They try to show the geographical boundaries of the distribution of a particular linguistic feature by drawing a line on a map. Such a line is called an *isogloss*: on one side of the line people say something one way, e.g., pronounce *bath* with the first vowel of *father*, and on the other side they use some other pronunciation, e.g., the vowel of *cat*. Quite often, when the boundaries for different linguistic features are mapped in this way the isoglosses show a considerable amount of criss-crossing. On occasion, though, a number coincide; i.e., there is a *bundle of isoglosses*. Such a bundle is often said to mark a *dialect boundary*. (Wardhaugh 2005: 136)

The Rhenish Fan

The Rhenish Fan is one of the best-known sets of isoglosses in Europe, setting off Low German to the north from High German to the south. The set comprises the modern *reflexes* (i.e., results) of the pre-Germanic stop consonants *p, *t, and *k. These have remained stops [p, t, k] in Low German but have become the fricatives [f, s, x] in High German (i.e., Modern Standard German), giving variant forms for ‘make’ [makən], [maxən]; ‘that’ [dat], [das]; ‘village’ [dorp], [dorf]; and ‘I’ [ik], [ix]. (Wardhaugh 2005: 137)



In Trier, do people say [dat] or [das]?

In Trier, do people say [dorp] or [dorf]?

In Düsseldorf, do people say [ik] or [ix]?

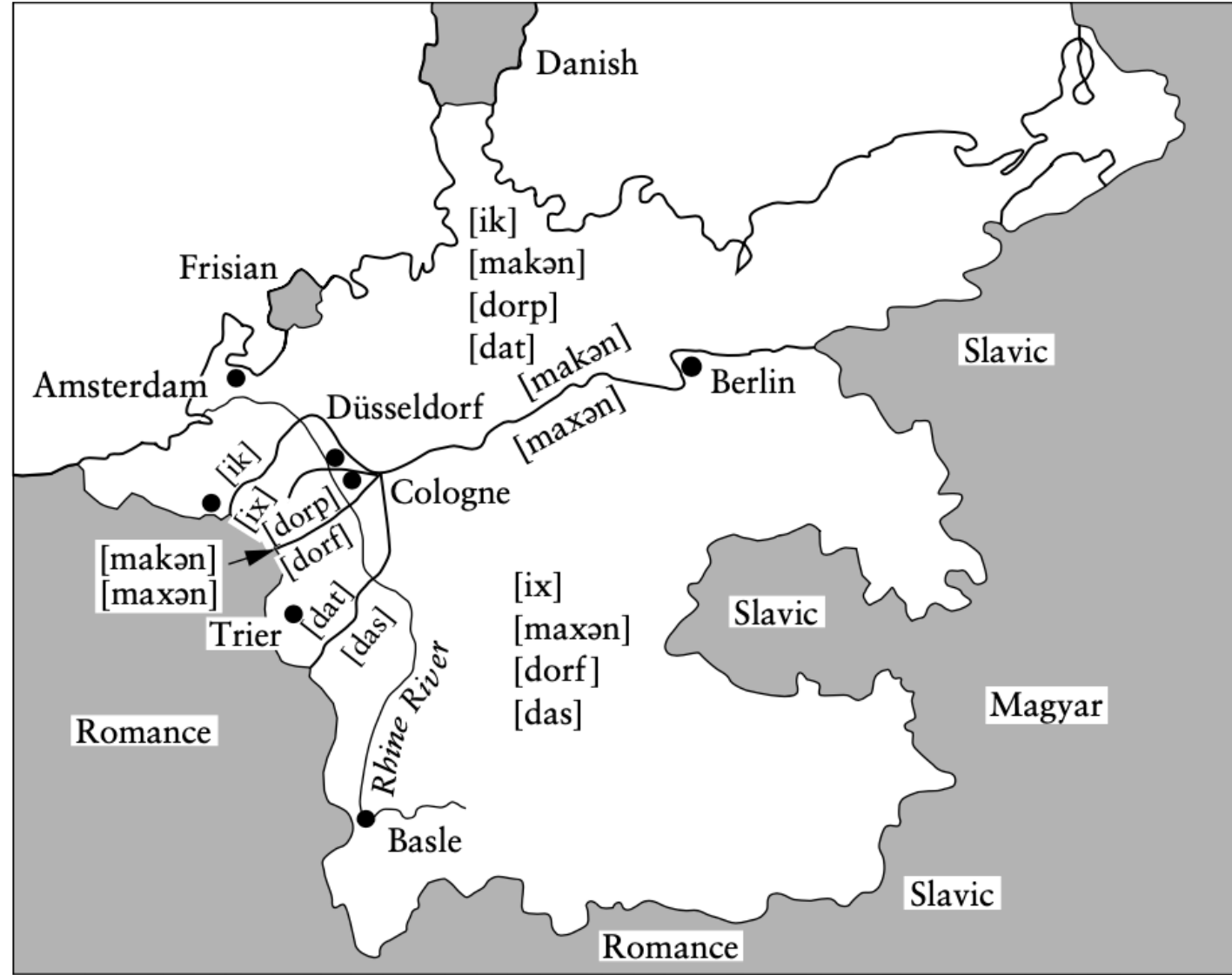
In Düsseldorf, do people say [dat] or [das]?

In Berlin, do people say [maxən] or [makən]?

In Berlin, do people say [ix] or [ik]?

The Rhenish Fan

In-between areas, like Düsseldorf and Trier, are sometimes known as *transition areas* – they only have this sound change in some words, but not all. They thus represent a transition between High German and Low German, being fully neither.



Dialect geography

- Why have dialect geographers largely focused on rural areas?

Rural areas were regarded as 'conservative' in the sense that they were seen to preserve 'older' forms of the languages under investigation. Urban areas were acknowledged to be innovative, unstable linguistically, and difficult to approach through existing survey techniques.

One basic assumption in dialect geography is that regional dialects are really quite easy to sample: just find one or two people in the particular location you wish to investigate, people who are preferably elderly and untraveled, interview them, and ask them how they pronounce particular words, refer to particular objects, and phrase particular kinds of utterances.

- What are some limitations of this approach?
- What are some limitations of regional dialectology in general?

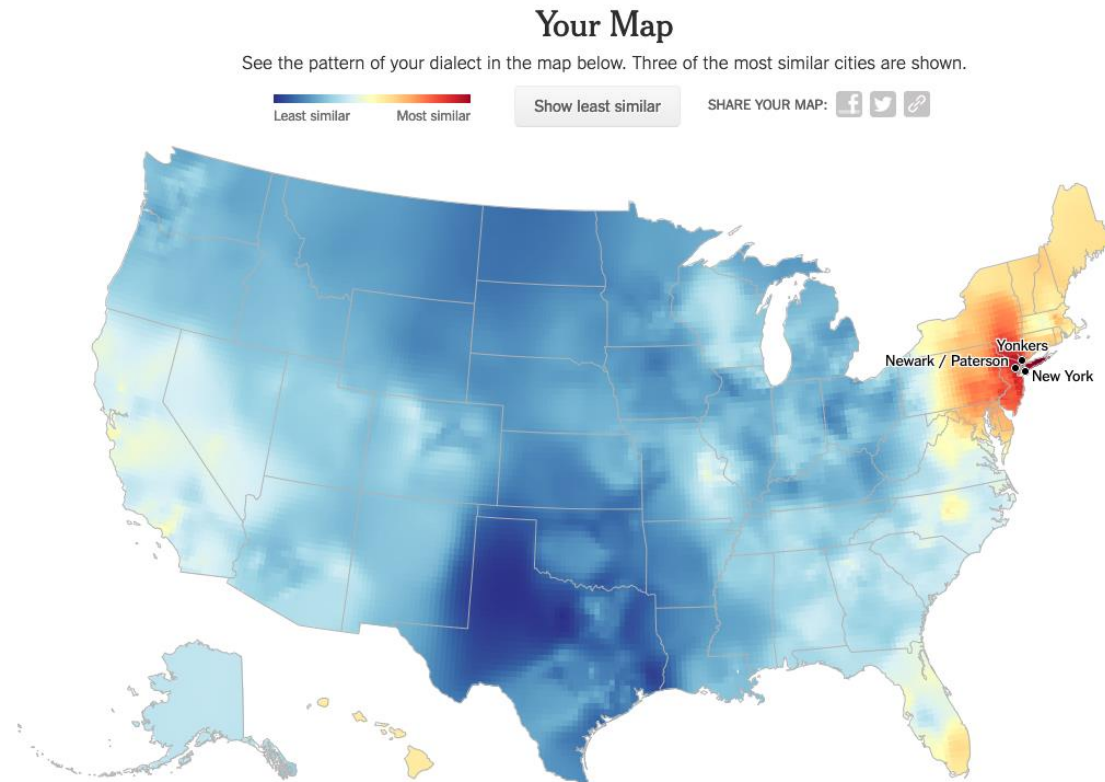
Discussion!

- If you were trying to create a dialect atlas, how might you decide on who to survey?
- What sorts of words or features would you be looking for?
- How would you try to get your participants to produce those words or features?
- If you're interested, feel free to check out *The Atlas of North American English* (2006), available on our course site.

Let's take the New York Times dialect quiz.

- https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/upshot/dialect-quiz-map.html?unlocked_article_code=1.Zk4.bNaq.9v3dpbdhdacd&smid=url-share

It's linked to on the Readings page of our class site.



Linguistic variable

“A *linguistic variable* is a linguistic item which has identifiable variants.” (Wardhaugh 2005: 143)

- What are some of the linguistic variables that were targeted in that dialect quiz from the New York Times?
- What are some of the linguistic variables that the researchers were after in *The Atlas of North American English*?

Discussion! (p.146, q.4)

I have suggested that certain linguistic variables are particularly marked, i.e., speakers and listeners are acutely aware of them. We immediately notice either the presence or absence of something. One consequence is that all a speaker must do is use a single instance of the 'wrong' variant, e.g., drop an *h* when he or she should not, to reveal that the middle-class style being used is actually overlaid on a working-class one. Can you think of other examples of this phenomenon, when someone 'gives himself or herself away' by using a linguistic feature in such a way? (Note that it is also possible to give away your middle-class or upper-class origins while pretending to be working class.)

For next week...

- Read pp.146–159 in the textbook. There will be a quiz at the start of class.