

Finnish and American English Pronunciations of 'sauna' in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

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Road map of the presentation:

1. Introduction
2. Historical Background
3. Method and Procedures
4. Results
5. Discussion
6. Conclusions

The focus of this talk:

How do you pronounce the word “sauna”?

- For many in the Upper Midwest, particularly in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, this question evokes a strong reaction.
 - Often stirs a debate on whether the speaker should or should not use an American English (i.e., either [sa.nə] or [sə.nə]) or Finnish pronunciation (i.e., [sau.nə]) of the word.
- The present research draws on data from self-reported responses in an online survey (i.e., The Sauna Survey) and online commentary in Facebook discussion groups.
- This study seeks to reveal if and where the pronunciation of the term is geographically constrained to the northern reaches of the Upper Midwest (i.e., areas that historically have had a strong Finnish ethnic-heritage presence).

What has previously been said on the matter:

- The term is a shibboleth in certain northern areas of the Upper Midwest to mark ‘insider’/‘outside’ distinctions (i.e., the Finnish variant, [sau.nə], seen as indexing Finnish-ness).
 - Now being commodified in advertisements (Remlinger, 2017, 107).



- Furthermore, Remlinger suggests that Finnish pronunciation of “sauna” is primarily restricted to western areas of Michigan’s UP.
 - However, it may be extending beyond “Finnish” local identity to index the more regional identity of “Yooper” (Remlinger, 2017, 48-47,107).

Where this study fit into the literature:

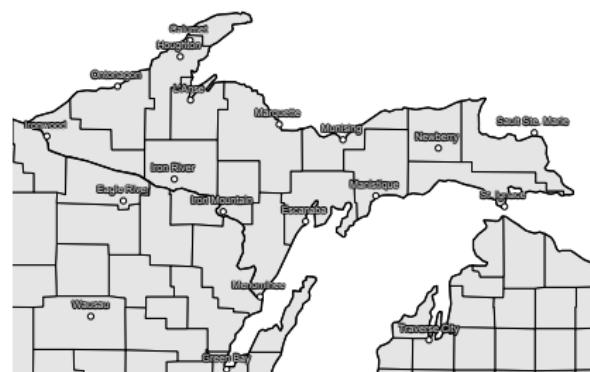
- What remains to be seen is:
 - the geographic distribution of these “sauna” variants across Michigan’s Upper Peninsula (i.e., beyond central and western areas), and
 - the Upper Midwest more generally, and in what ways does the pronunciation of ‘sauna’ index local identity.



Immigration history and significance:



- Heavy immigration from the mid-1800s until the mid-1900s
- Mining Communities included:
 - Keweenaw Range
 - Gogebic Range
 - Marquette Iron Range



- The position in the Upper Midwest:
 - Rural-based communities
 - Not any large cities nearby
(i.e., urban centers with $\geq 50,000$ in population)

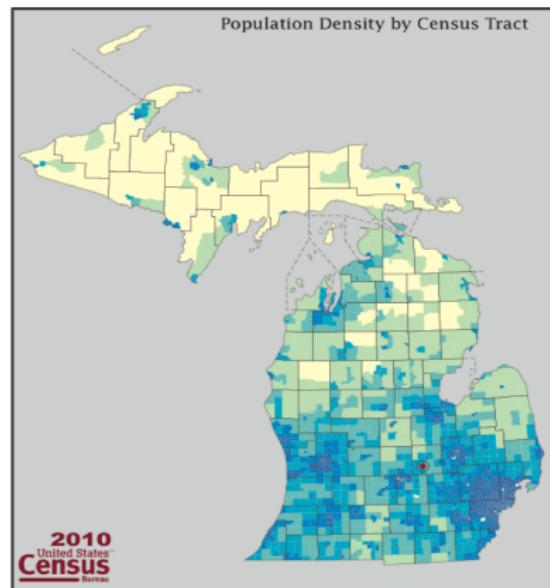
Immigration history and significance:

- Prior to 1870s:
 - Rustic wilderness until the discover of valuable natural resources in 1840s
 - European/western development was slow at first
 - Many of the communities across the county comprised of 70% foreign-born
 - Predominately Irish-, German-, or Canadian-born
- 1880s through 1910s:
 - Mining industry and population increased
 - Finnish and Italian immigrants arrived in large numbers
 - Maintained language and cultural practices longer than other ethnic-heritage group

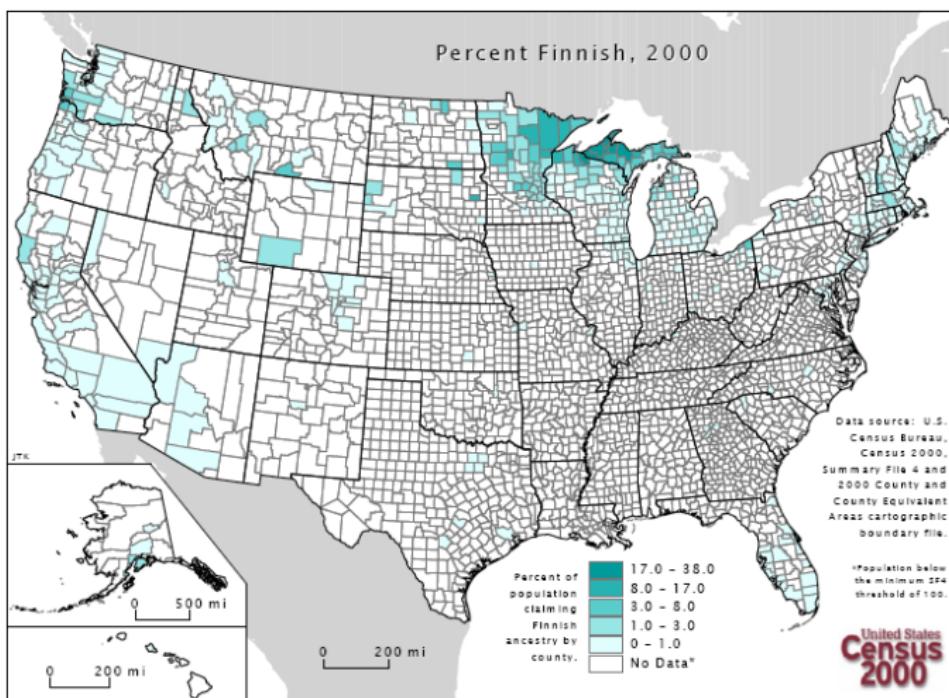


Marquette county and Michigan's population:

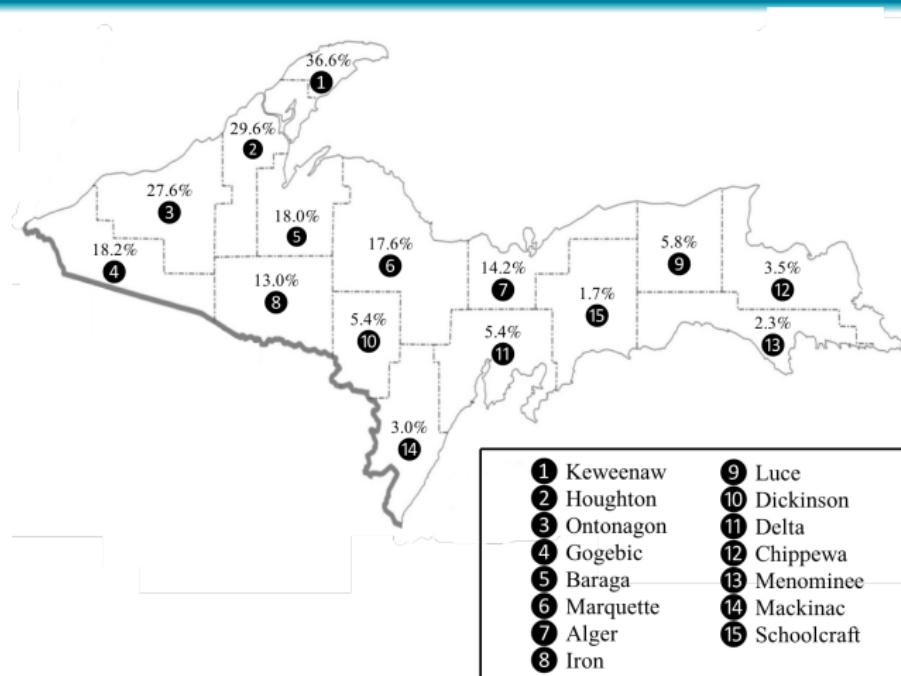
- Today:
 - UP Population:
 - $\approx 300,000$
 - 29% MI's land area, but only holds 3% of its population
 - Marquette County:
 - $\approx 67,000$
 - Predominately monolingual (i.e., few younger-aged bilinguals)



Concentration of Finnish-Americans (US Census, 2000):



Finnish Ancestry in UP (US Census, 2011-15)



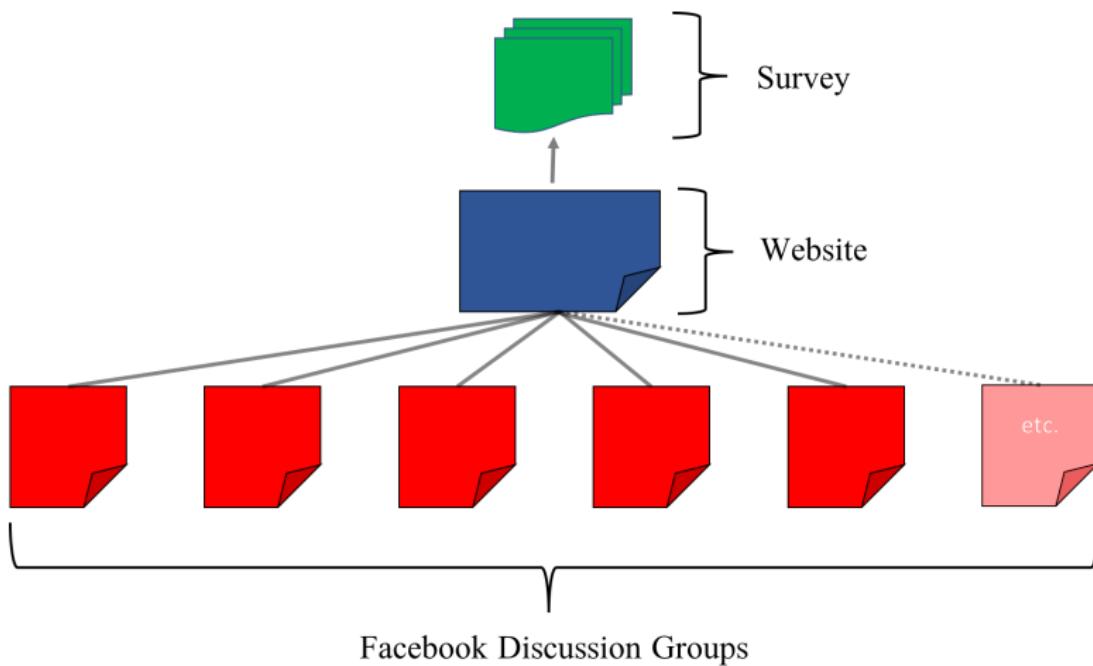
2011-2015, People Reporting Ancestry (B04006)

Vibrancy of Finnish-American culture:

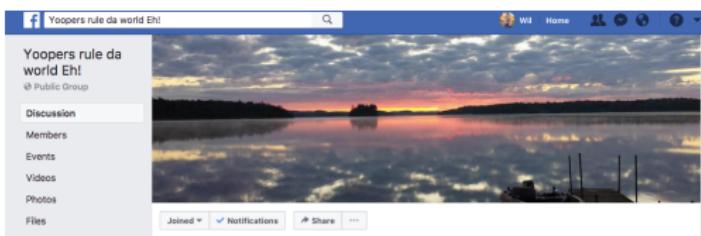
- Heikki Lunta Winterfest
 - Annual winter festival in Negaunee, MI (since 1995)
- Heikinpiävä (Henrik's name day)
 - Annual winter festival in Houghton, MI (since 1999)



The main components for data collection:



SAMPLING POPULATION

Facebook discussion groups: www.facebook.com

- ① Searched for groups related to classifieds (e.g., selling, buying or trading).
- ② Sent out requests to join groups.
- ③ Once accepted, a single post was submitted to the discussion to encourage participation in the online survey with link to website.
 - Elicited a lot of meta-linguistic commentary about “sauna”.

Examples:

- Escanaba area: buy, sell or trade
- Marquette County Stuff For Sale.
- MENOMINEE CLASSIFIEDS
- Northern Michigan's Buy Sell and Trade.
- Saint Ignace Area Garage Sales
- Upper Michigan classifieds
- Yoopers rule da world Eh!
- You know you're from IRON MOUNTAIN when...
- You know you're from the Copper Country when...
- etc. . .

CSD Website: gvsu.edu/csd/thesaunasurvey

Website as a portal?

- Webpage creates an portal or access point to the online survey.
- Contains essential information regarding the survey (e.g., general purpose, format and prerequisites).
- Allows for participants to self-select for participation.

How do you pronounce the word "sauna"?

Click Here
to
Begin Survey!

Ever wonder why people pronounce "sauna" differently across the Upper Midwest region of the United States?

The present on-line survey is your opportunity to contribute to the debate and help us better understand how and why people pronounce this term the way that they do.



Wil A. Rankinen, Ph.D., Grand Valley State University

About:

"The Sauna Survey" is a web-based project to plot regional variations in the pronunciation of the word "sauna" in the Upper Midwest. People across this area say "sauna" differently with various attitudes regarding the word. With your participation, we will show where different pronunciations and attitudes exist with regards to "sauna" in the Upper Midwest.

You can contribute to the debate by filling out [The Sauna Survey](#)!

The Survey:

This on-line survey is anonymous and voluntary, and it takes about 5-10 minutes of your time. During this survey you are asked various questions related to your 1) demographic info., 2) preference in the pronunciation of "sauna", and 3) attitudes toward this particular term.

While all responses are optional, a valid zip or postal code is critical, because the database of zip codes and their latitudes and longitudes are used to plot data on a map of the Upper Midwest.

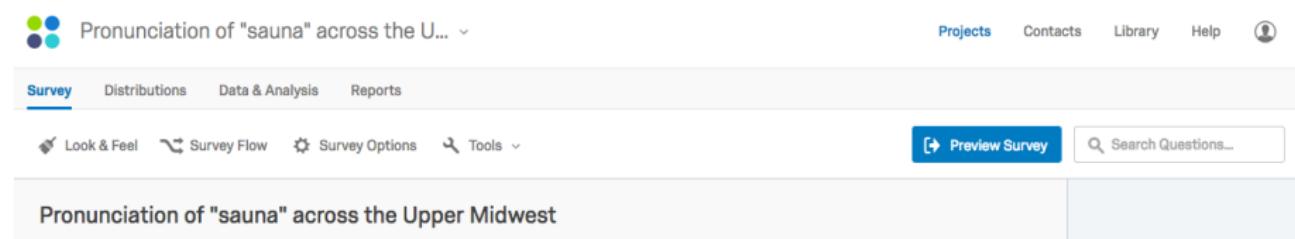
Participation:

In order to participate, you must:

1. be a native English speaker,
2. have been raised and/or lived at least half of your life in the Upper Midwest (i.e., one of the three states of Michigan, Minnesota and/or Wisconsin) and,
3. be 18 years or older.

Forgot the zip code of the location of your hometown or current residence? Please visit: <https://www.usps.com/>.

Qualtrics: gvsu.qualtrics.com



Pronunciation of "sauna" across the U...

Projects Contacts Library Help

Survey Distributions Data & Analysis Reports

Look & Feel Survey Flow Survey Options Tools

Preview Survey Search Questions...

Pronunciation of "sauna" across the Upper Midwest

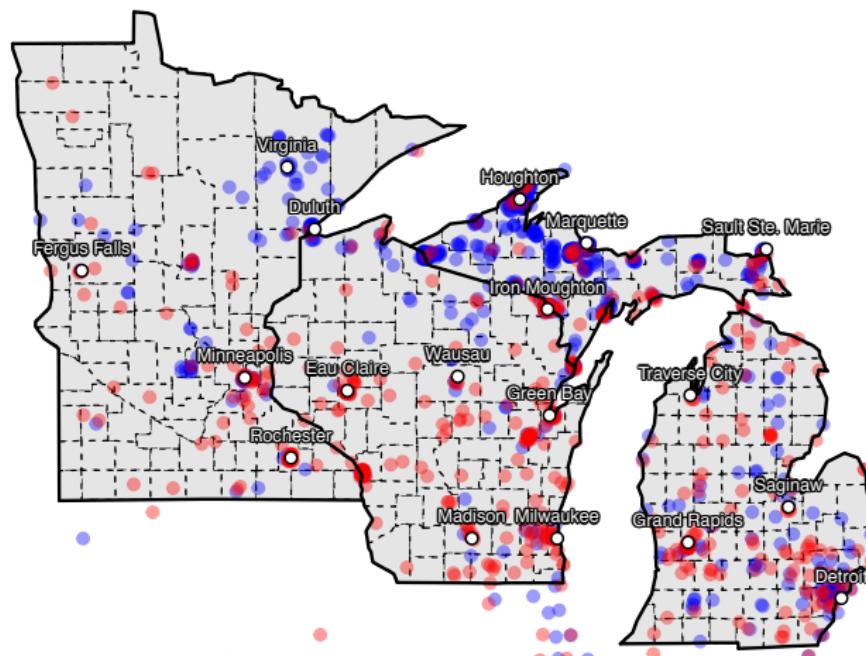
What is Qualtrics?

- Qualtrics is a web-based survey creation, collection, and analysis software tool.
- Used for the creating:
 - open surveys
 - targeted (panel) surveys
 - open polling

- Online survey contained 15 questions.
- Took approximately 2-17 minutes to complete.
- Obtained 1,500 surveys within a three week period.

RESULTS I: GEO-SPACIAL DISTRIBUTION OF 'SAUNA'

How is 'sauna' pronounced in the Upper Midwest?

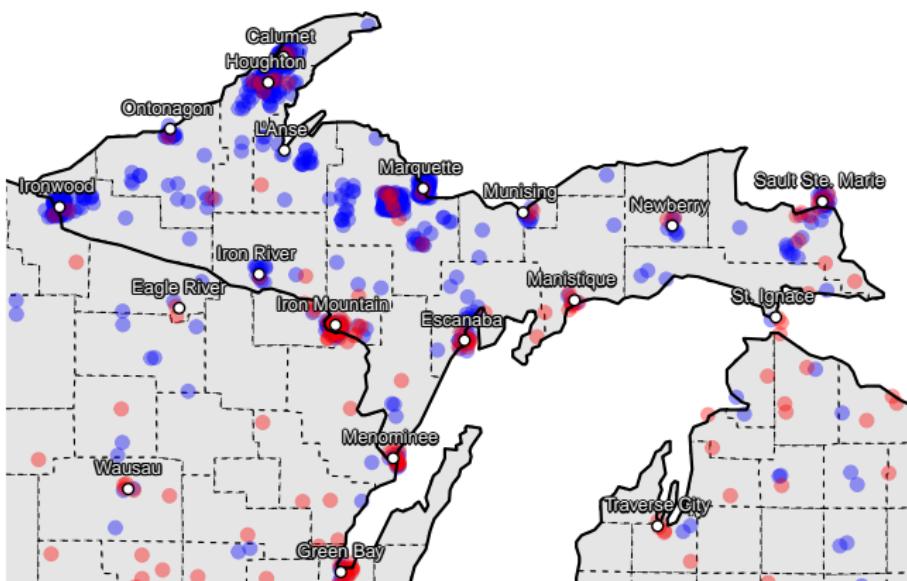


Geo-spatial distribution of 'sauna' in the Upper Midwest

(n=2,200; blue=Finnish pronunciation and red=American English variant; based on hometown)

RESULTS I: GEO-SPACIAL DISTRIBUTION OF 'SAUNA'

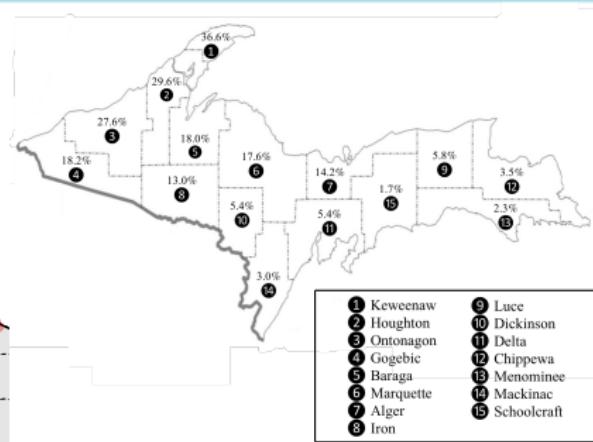
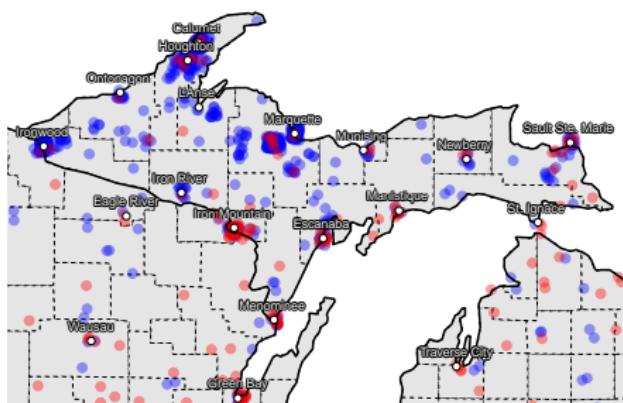
A closer look at pronunciation of 'sauna' in Michigan's UP



Geo-spatial distribution of 'sauna' in Michigan's Upper Peninsula
(n=2,200; blue=Finnish pronunciation and red=American English variant; based on hometown)

RESULTS I: GEO-SPACIAL DISTRIBUTION OF 'SAUNA'

Main observations:



- Finnish variant preferred in north-central/western areas.
- Anglicized variant preferred in south-central/eastern areas.
- Highest concentrations of Finns correlate with strong preference for Finnish variant.
- Anglicized variant areas exist.

RESULTS II

Pronunciation of 'sauna' and language regard:

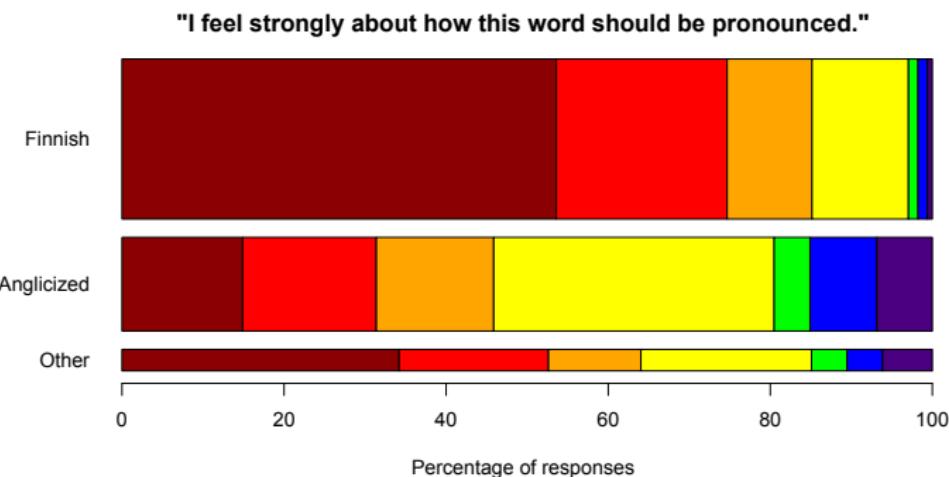
Please identify on the scale to which degree you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel strongly about how this word should be pronounced.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If this word is pronounced different from how I would say it by someone else, I feel justified in correcting that person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If this word is pronounced different from how I would say it by a group of individuals, I feel justified in correcting them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This word and how it is pronounced is important to my identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This word, but not how it is pronounced, is important to my identity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Attitudinal data based on a 7-point Likert scale.

RESULTS II

Pronunciation of 'sauna' and language regard:



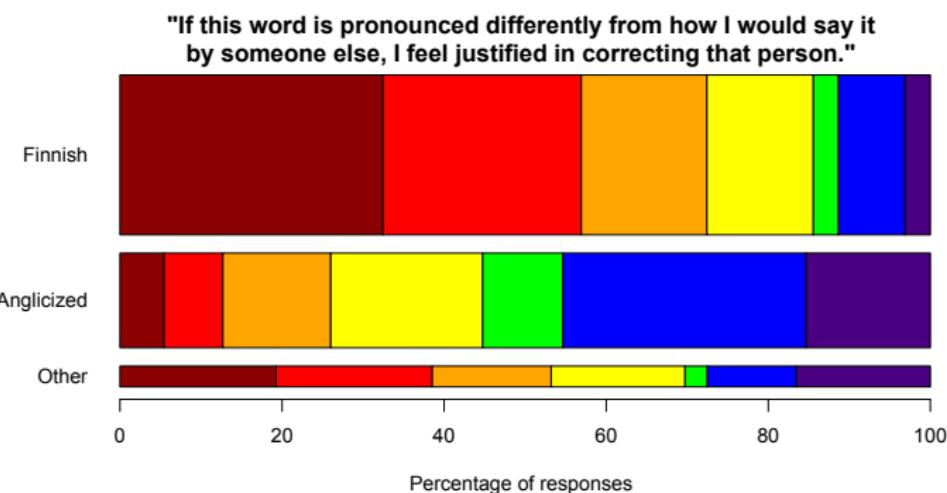
Observations:

- Finnish variant (FV) users: strongest feelings
- Anglicized variant (AV) users: primarily indifferent

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

RESULTS II

Pronunciation of 'sauna' and language regard:

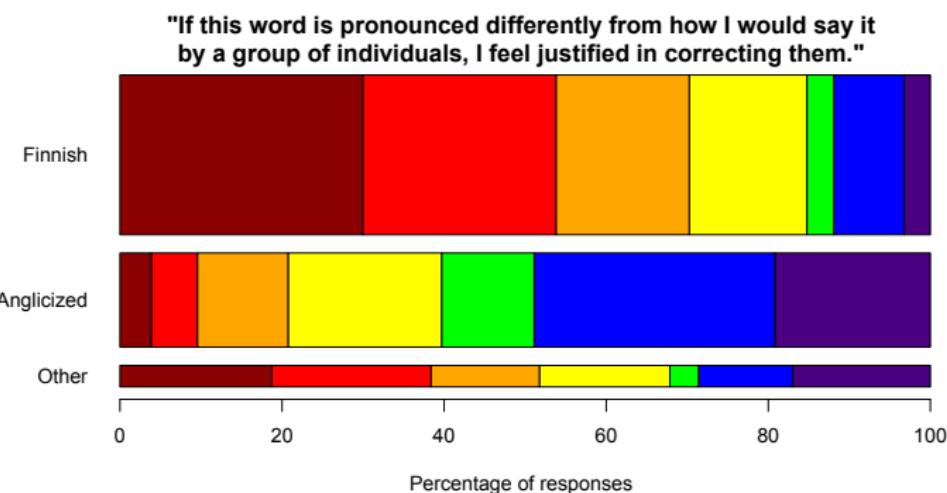


Observations:

- FV users: strongly willing to correct (individual)
- AV users: not willing to correct (individual)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Pronunciation of 'sauna' and language regard:

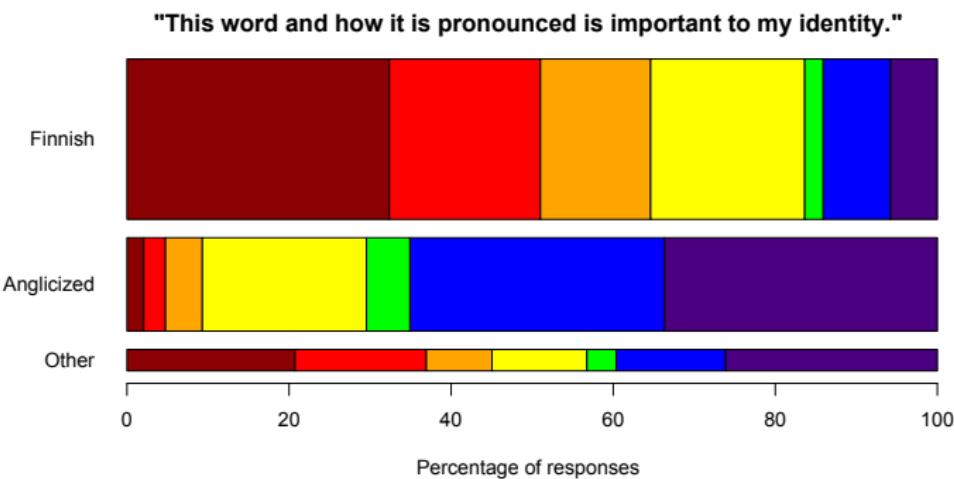


Observations:

- FV users: strongly willing to correct (group)
- AV users: not willing to correct (group)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Pronunciation of 'sauna' and language regard:



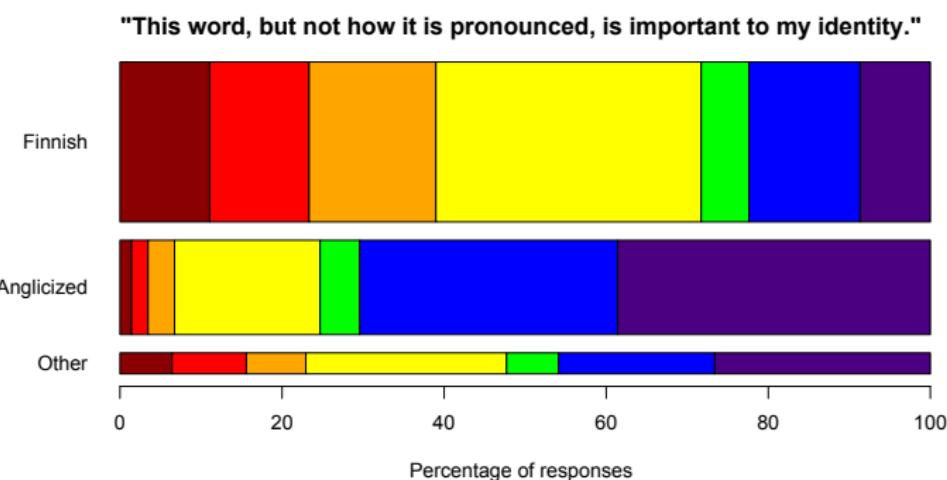
Observations:

- FV users: important to identity (pronunciation)
- AV users: unimportant to identity (pronunciation)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

RESULTS II

Pronunciation of 'sauna' and language regard:



Observations:

- FV users: less important to identity (not pronunciation)
- AV users: unimportant to identity (not pronunciation)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Which pronunciation is “right”?

- From a linguistic perspective, neither . . . , or both.
 - Finnish pronunciation argument:
 - The etymology of ‘sauna’ originates from Finnish.
 - Therefore, the Finnish variant of ‘sauna’ is a borrowing from the target language.
 - If a strong speech community supports its use, the source pronunciation can be borrowed too.
 - Anglicized pronunciation argument:
 - However, as a borrowed word into a source language (i.e., English), it is just as natural for borrowed words to lose their original pronunciation to the source language’s phonological makeup (e.g., ‘toque’, ‘karaoke’).

So, what's the situation in the UP?

- The use of a variant largely depends one's geographic location, and on if the variant has certain social capital within a particular community.
 - Among areas with highest concentration of Finns, the use of the Finnish variant indexes one's "Finnish-ness".
 - Individuals with non-Finnish ancestry use Finnish variant due to various reasons (e.g., social capital, peer pressure, origin argument).

When I first ever saw the word I pronounced it SAW-na. Since then I make it a point to call it a SOW-na because a number of Finnish and Swedish people have corrected me so many times.
Like · Reply · 4 · September 3 at 5:27pm

Anne Frey replied · 1 Reply

Same here. Sheila.
Like · Reply · 1 · September 3 at 7:33pm

SAUNA, what more can I say?
Like · Reply · September 3 at 9:03pm

I've always said SAW-na.
Like · Reply · September 3 at 9:53pm

OH, SO WRONG, SOWna.
Like · Reply · 1 · September 3 at 9:56pm

I have a UP accent, not Finnish or Swedish, lol
Like · Reply · September 3 at 9:56pm

I picked up pronouncing it sowna from living in the UP and hearing the Finlio-sowna commercials TV.
Like · Reply · September 3 at 10:08pm

Reminds me of my Austrian friends saying "chess" instead of "jazz." There is only ONE way to say sauna! Ask any 4-year-old Finn.
Like · Reply · September 4 at 5:16am

Sow oon na , Sauna
Like · Reply · 1 · September 4 at 9:28pm · Edited

Stanley Hale replied · 1 Reply

Haha! Yes they sure say Sow-na...UP here! I still say it Saw-na...I'm a transplant of over 30 years from the South, so what do I know??!! 😊😊
Like · Reply · 1 · September 5 at 9:44am

So, what's the situation in the UP?

- However, not everyone in MI's UP uses the Finnish variant.
 - This group is not simply restricted to 'non-native' UP residents.
 - Some UP communities use the Anglicized variant (i.e., Iron Mountain).
 - Others exhibit considerable variation (e.g., Escanaba, Sault Ste. Marie).
- The Anglicized variant of 'sauna' indexes "UP accent", while the Finnish variant indexes "Finnish-ness".

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Language regard

- Anglicized and Finnish variant exhibit differences in language regard.

Anglicized variant:

- Feels moderately strong about how it should be pronounced.
- However, not strong enough to justify correcting others.
- Connected to “UP-ness”, though tie to identity is weak.

Finnish variant:

- Pronunciation is extremely important to identity.
- Willing to correct individuals and groups of individuals.
- Tied to “Finnish-ness” but also connected to “UP-ness”.

Take-away points:

- The Anglicized and Finnish variants of ‘sauna’ are both found in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.
- The debate is strongly debated with strong arguments on both sides:
 - Both camps feel strong to moderately strong about how the word should be pronounced.
 - However, Anglicized variant tied weakly to identity while Finnish variant maintains strong tie.
 - Furthermore, people using the Finnish variant are far more willing to correct others compared to those that use the Anglicized variant.
- The question whether either one or the other variant will “win” over time is still unknown.
 - The Finnish variant is the dominant pronunciation of ‘sauna’ in the UP.
 - Falling numbers of those claiming Finnish ancestry, however, may tip the debate towards the Anglicized variant in the not so distant future.

Questions and Answers

Acknowledgements:

This talk could not have been possible without the support communities throughout the Upper Midwest that took time to complete The Sauna Survey. Additional, I must thank Aaron Albin, PhD; his support and guidance in the analysis of the data was exemplary.

References

Remlinger, K. A. (2017). *Yooper Talk: Dialect as Identity in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Languages and Folklore of Upper Midwest*. University of Wisconsin Press.

Facebook post for discussion groups:

How do you pronounce the word "sauna"? For some, this is a highly contested debate in the Upper Midwest.

Take "The Sauna Survey" and throw your hat into the debate! This is a voluntary and anonymous online survey that takes 5-10 of your time. The survey itself and the full details of about the survey and participation criteria are found at www.gvsu.edu/csd/thesaunasurvey.

Share and get the word out!

*pronounce the word
"sauna"?*

Click Here

to

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