The U.P. Dialect:
Unique linguistic features and their influences

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Road Map of the Presentation

1. Introduction
2. Historical Background
3. Ethnic-heritage Influenced UP English
4. Conclusions
5. Q&A
Brief Immigration History

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 ≥50,000 in population)
**Immigration history and significance:**

- **Prior to 1870s:**
  - Rustic wilderness until the discovery 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:**
  - ≈ 300,000
  - 29% MI’s land area, but only holds 3% of its population

- **Marquette County:**
  - ≈ 67,000
  - Predominately monolingual (i.e., few younger-aged bilinguals)
Concentration of Finnish-Americans (US Census, 2000):

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)
Monophthongal [ow] (e.g., ‘boat’, ‘toast’, ‘Houghton’)
Monophthongal \([ow]\)

- The vowel in *boat*, \([\text{oU}]\), produced more like \([bo:t]\).
  - Most extreme for rural Finns, in comparison to more urban Finnish- or Italian-Americans in the same community (Marquette County).
  - Both Finnish and Italian have \([o]\) but not \([\text{oU}]\) sound.
- However, the vowel in *bait*, \([\text{eI}]\), patterns closer to American English.
Sounds

Interdentals (th) vs. (t)/(d)-stopping
Sounds

Interdentals (th) vs. (t)/(d)-stopping

- (t)/(d)-stopping involves a phonological process whereby the (th) sound is produced something more akin to (t) or (d).

- Most frequently produced among working-class men, particularly among the Finnish-heritage UP English speakers.
Interdentals (th) vs. (t)/(d)-stopping

- Typically, word-initial (th) are particularly susceptible to this sound change.
- Speakers are not simply being “lazy,” but are being influenced by the Finnish and Italian languages.
  - The (th) sound does not exist in either language.
- Over time, and even through generations, this feature has become a linguistic marker of the “Yooper” identity.
  - Particularly among working-class men.
Other note worthy features:

- The sounds (p), (t) and (k) within a word can sometimes be produced with longer durations (i.e., gemination).

**Ex:**
- “ripple” → *rip-ple*
- “little” → *lit-tle*
- “bicker” → *bic-ker*
- “ripen” → *ri-pen*
- “liter” → *li-ter*
- “biker” → *bi-ker*

- What could be causing this?
  - Finnish has “strong” and “weak” consonants, while English only has weak consonants.
  - (pp), (tt) and (kk) are strong consonants, compared to (p), (t), and (k)

- Further research required to investigate this feature in UP English.

- First syllable of a word is stressed. (e.g., *CALumet, BARaga*)
  - Finnish always stresses the first syllable of a word (Remlinger, 2007, 75)
Many words have come into UP English due to the cultural impact and prominence of this ethnic-immigrant group.

Some particularly salient ones include:

- Loan words can act as shibboleths separating insiders from outsider.
The pronunciation of ‘sauna’:

- As a shibboleth, the term is used in certain northern areas of the Upper Midwest to mark ‘insider’/‘outside’ distinctions (i.e., the Finnish variant, \( [\text{sa}u\text{n}@] \), 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).
How is ‘sauna’ pronounced in the Upper Midwest?

Geo-spacial distribution of ‘sauna’ in the Upper Midwest

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

Anglicized and Finnish variant exhibit differences in language regard.
Prepositional Omission (e.g., “We go Green Bay”)
Prepositional Omission

- English is regarded as a prepositional language.  
  \textbf{Ex:} \textit{I went to the store.}

- Finnish, however, is a postpositional language.  
  \textbf{Ex:} \textit{Mina menin kauppaan}

- In UP English, optional prepositional omission is permitted in certain situations.
  \textbf{Ex:} \textit{I went (to) store to get groceries.}
  \textit{Toivo went (to) Walmart this weekend.}
  \textit{Matti need to go (to) work everyday.}

  - Restricted to locative "to" and to general motions verbs.
  - Present tense form of "go" is highly stigmatized.
Michigan’s Upper Peninsula has been uniquely influenced by Finnish and other cultures and languages over the past century.

While predominately now a monolingual English speaking community, speakers of UP English exhibit certain features that can be directly linked to non-English first-language influences (i.e., past down generation to generation).

Other ethnic-heritage populations have also had their own part to play in the development and propagation of UP English; though, arguably, none had the same degree of impact as Finnish.
What we know so far...

- In recent years, an invaluable amount of ethnographic and sociolinguistic work has been done on UP English (Cornillie et al., 2017a,b; Rankinen, 2014; Rankinen and A., 2015; Remlinger et al., 2009).
  - Including Kathryn Remlinger’s recent book “Yooper Talk”.
  - However, there is so much yet that is still unknown.
Questions?
References


References (continued)


References (continued)


References (continued)


References (continued)


Volunteering Participants for Study MUST:

- Be a native English speaker
- Be a long-standing UP residents of one of the specific research sites and/or surrounding areas.
  - Only spent less than 5 years away from area
- Have HS diploma and no more than a 4-year degree
- Have no history of speech or hearing disorder