

Native Yooper wants to hear about how we use language

By ANDY HILL
Editor

There is a man in Gogebic County who would like to speak with you.

He's truly interested in what you have to say, and how you say it.

Upper Michigan native Wil Rankinen (from Republic, and a Westwood High School grad) is an assistant professor at Grand Valley State University in downstate Grand Rapids. He arrived here Monday hoping to learn more about how his fellow

Yoopers speak.

The research study is entitled "How Michiganders talk in the Upper Peninsula."

No, he's not curious about the impressions created by the movie "Escanaba in Da Moonlight," nor the notion that Yoopers speak like Canadians (which may be true, in some cases).

"I'm not interested in right and wrong ways of speaking," he said.

He has scheduled appointments in the Ironwood area, but hopes to interview at least 30 in-



Grand Valley State University Assistant Wil A. Rankinen, Ph.D., poses with the tools of his academic trade during a brief visit at the Randall Bakery in Wakefield Monday morning. Rankinen, originally from Republic, is studying modes of speech in Upper Michigan. His doctoral dissertation included material gleaned from 150-plus interviews of Marquette County residents. WNBPA photo



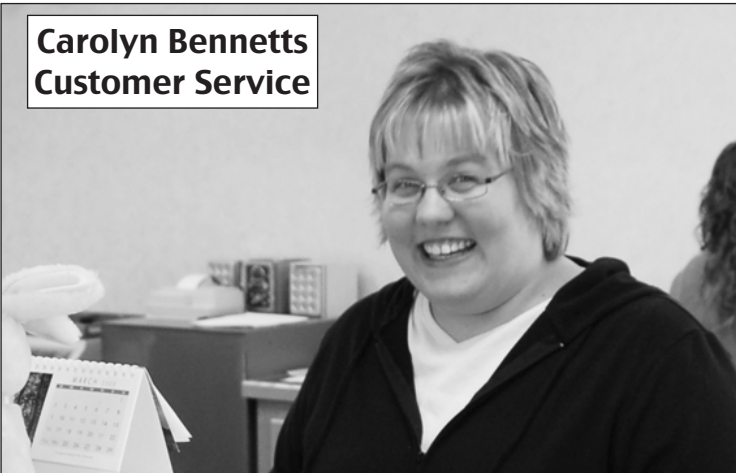
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dividuals before he departs late this week. Those he interviews "usually help find other people in the community."

He seeks native English speakers who are long-standing U.P. reasons to take part in his research.

Each should be at least a high school graduate, but have no more than a four-year college degree. It's also important that you have not lived away from the Yoop very much, with less than five years being the cut-off.

He has divided the Upper Peninsula into three large search areas, one entitled "Canadian Border" and located in the eastern region, another is "Interior," spanning Marquette through the Copper Country, and the last stretches from Ironwood to Iron Mountain, or "Michigan-Wisconsin Border."

He terms the area of study "fertile ground," a topic which hasn't been touched on in an academic way.

The reception has been mixed, though.

"I got some flack in the Newberry area," he said. "They were closed up. They were afraid I was doing a disparaging piece on how people talk."

"I don't know if I'm going to have some push-back here in Ironwood."

Rankinen says the assumption that means of mass communication, including TV and the Internet, have homogenized speech appears to be wrong.

"Regional ways of speaking aren't getting more similar," he said. "They're actually diverging more, which is cool. At the same time, smaller dialects are losing traction. Where do we fall?"

Upper Michigan speaking patterns are certainly affected by other nations.

He describes the northern tier including Minnesota, Wisconsin and Upper Michigan as "historically rich in immigrant populations and tight-knit."

Upper Peninsula speech is not uniform.

For example, the Yooperism "pank," used to replace the correct word, "tamp," is found on the west end, but virtually unheard of in the east, according to Rankinen.

West enders and those in the Central U.P. are likely to pronounce the word "sauna" in a manner a Finn would recognize, i.e. "SOW-na," while those on the east end are more likely to use "saw-naw," he said.

A winter cap is known as a "chook" on the west end of the peninsula, but easterners use "toque," which correctly honors the French derivation of the

word, likely arriving via Canada.

Other immigrant influences may include an inability to pronounce the "th" sound, which is not found in most of the 7,000-plus languages employed around the world.

(Ed.: It may also account for the signature Yooper words "deez," "dem" and "doze.")

And Finnish speakers have struggled with prepositions, leading many to drop the word "to" in a phrase like, "We're going to the show." Instead, it's been "We're going show."

Those interested in Rankinen's work may get connected by searching for "Wil Rankinen" on Facebook, or may email him at: wil_rankinen@gvsu.edu.

He's easy to talk with.

ON TARGET...

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on our website. Check it out, and I hope to see you on June 2," he concluded.

The easiest way to get registered is to go to the club's web page:

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