

# Linguistic Ideologies in Fiction Podcasts

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## Abstract

This thesis is a linguistic analysis of fiction podcasts, focused on the research question: how do linguistic ideologies and stereotypes function in fiction podcasts? To this end, I used both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis investigated whether there is a correlation between a character's role in a show and the type of language variety they speak. The results of this analysis showed no strong relationship between these factors; all character types were made up of majority \*SAE speakers, illustrating the effect of the Standard Language Ideology on the podcasts. Additionally, speakers of three regional varieties, Southern English, New York City English, and Upper Midwest English together made up the majority (87.1%) of all speakers of regional varieties; this result illustrates the salience of these three varieties in American society, and analysis of specific characters who speak these varieties showed the stereotypes closely associated with them. The qualitative analysis focused on specific elements of storytelling in which linguistic stereotypes and ideologies play a role. The results showed linguistic ideologies and stereotypes at work in four specific story elements: humor, character building, worldbuilding, and relationships between characters. Stereotypes about Southern English were present in three of these categories (humor, character building, and worldbuilding), supporting the quantitative finding asserting that variety's salience. Overall, I conclude that continued research into fiction podcasts will benefit the field of linguistics and creators & consumers of fiction podcasts.

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## 1. Introduction

Much of linguistic research is focused on the “authentic,” whether that’s an authentic utterance, or an authentic speaker or another aspect; researchers do their best to minimize the “observer effect,” the ways in which observing a situation necessarily changes it. Because of this, scripted media, which goes through a layered process of editing and production, is often not included in linguistic research or data; if research focuses on media, it’s more likely to focus on unscripted media, like news broadcasts, which are considered more similar to the type of language interactions that happen in “real life” (Queen, 2015, p. 20). Despite this perceived inauthenticity of scripted media, it’s a useful subject for research on language, specifically research on societies’ beliefs about and relationship to language; it is “a fairly contained, and edited, microcosm of the places from which [its] players come” (Queen, 2015, p. 21), and so offers different insight than unscripted media or “real life” interactions. Investigations of the way language functions in media benefit the field of linguistics by adding to the understanding of specific linguistic ideologies, as well as the understanding of how these ideologies function in general. These investigations can also benefit creators and consumers of media; by calling attention the ways that language operates in storytelling, they make it easier for creators to be deliberate about language in their stories, and for people to be active, critical consumers of content with regards to its language use.

This thesis is a linguistic analysis of fiction podcasts. Fiction podcasting is a relatively young medium, so there’s little written about it in general, and, as far as I’ve found, nothing written about it in linguistics. Broadly, my research question has been this: how do linguistic ideologies and stereotypes function in fiction podcasts? To this end, I’ve used both quantitative methods, looking at whether there is a correlation between a character’s role in a show and the type of language variety they speak, and qualitative methods, focusing on specific elements of storytelling in which these ideologies play a role. The results of the quantitative analysis showed no strong relationship between a character’s role in the show and type of language variety spoken; all character types were made up of majority Standard American English (\*SAE) speakers, illustrating the effect of the Standard Language Ideology on the podcasts. Additionally, speakers of three regional varieties, Southern English, New York City English, and Upper Midwest English together made up the majority (87.1%) of all speakers of regional varieties; this result illustrates the salience of these three varieties in American society, and analysis of specific

characters who speak these varieties showed the stereotypes closely associated with them. The qualitative analysis described linguistic ideologies and stereotypes at work in four specific story elements: humor, character building, worldbuilding, and relationships between characters. Stereotypes about Southern English were present in three of these categories (humor, character building, and worldbuilding), supporting the quantitative finding asserting that variety's salience.

In section 2, I explain the linguistic concepts necessary for understanding this thesis, linguistic ideologies and stereotypes; in section 3, I summarize previous research on language in media; in section 4, I describe the features of the fiction podcasts which make it especially suitable for linguistic analysis; in section 5, I explain the methods I used for this analysis; in sections 6 and 7 I give and analyze the results of my research; and in section 8, I offer conclusions and possibilities for future research.

## 2. Linguistic Ideologies and Stereotypes

In this thesis, I define linguistic ideologies as beliefs about language, which are held by individuals as well as institutionalized by the structures of a society. To help describe a few key features of linguistic ideologies, I'll give two examples of commonly held linguistic ideologies in the USA.

a) "Double negatives are illogical."

b) "African American English (AAE) is just bad English."

1. Feature One: Linguistic ideologies "forge links between language and other social phenomena (Woolard, 2020, p. 2);" therefore, they are connected to the prejudices and institutional injustices associated with those social phenomena.

In these examples, the linguistic ideologies are connected to ideas about race, and specifically to anti-Black racism—the devaluing of African American English is part of the devaluing of Black culture in general that happens in the US.

2. Feature Two: Linguistic ideologies don't need to be, and often aren't, supported by linguistic fact.

Both of these examples go against established linguistic fact. The double negative, or negative concord, is a grammatical feature in many languages, like French and Spanish, and varieties of English, like African American English, which is a systematic and valid dialect of English.

3. Feature Three: Linguistic ideologies can feed into one another.

While not all linguistic ideologies reinforce each other, some do; in these examples, the ideology that double negatives, a grammatical feature of AAE, are illogical, supports the ideology that AAE isn't a valid dialect.

Another prevalent linguistic ideology is the "Standard Language Ideology." This ideology says that there is one prestigious, "standard" dialect and accent, and all others are incorrect and invalid (Garrett, 2010). This standard dialect is often "an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 67). For example, in America the standard is "Standard American English (\*SAE)<sup>2</sup>," which no one person actually speaks, but which is based on the speech of middle- and upper-class white people (from certain areas of the US), another way white people are privileged in America. The standard language ideology underpins many other linguistic ideologies, especially those concerned with the "correctness" of language.

Closely related to linguistic ideologies are linguistic stereotypes. Stereotypes in general have been defined as "represent[ing] shared knowledge about some group, including beliefs and theories about the group's attributes (Hilton and von Hippel, 1996, as cited in Sierra, 2019, p. 2)." In the case of linguistic stereotypes, the groups in question are defined by the way they speak. In other words, linguistic stereotypes are images of and beliefs about people based solely on the way they use language (Garrett 2010). These stereotypes are often influenced by linguistic ideologies. For example, the Standard Language Ideology can influence stereotypes about people who don't use the standard dialect, like the stereotype that people who use non-standard verb agreement (e.g. "she don't" instead of "she doesn't") are unintelligent. These stereotypes can be based on the language one speaks, one's dialect or accent, a specific grammatical feature, or a

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<sup>2</sup> I'll be using Lippi-Green's (2012) notation of \*SAE to note the fact that the designation of this variety as "standard" isn't backed up by linguistic fact, the way syntacticians use the symbol \* to indicate ungrammaticality, rather than using alternate terms like "mainstream English"

feature of the voice itself (for example, vocal fry, which is associated with ignorance and shallowness, especially among women and girls).

Neither of these concepts are merely cognitive; they affect the structures of society, like educational and judicial systems, as well as people's everyday actions. People model themselves off of and judge others with these ideologies. A seminal illustration of the former is Labov's 1966 study, "The Social Stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores." Labov did a rapid anonymous survey of employees' pronunciation of "fourth floor" in three New York City department stores of varying levels of prestige, and found that employees at the most prestigious store were less likely to exhibit r-lessness than those at the less prestigious department stores. In other words, employees at more prestigious department stores (likely subconsciously) styled their speech to match their environment, based on the association between r-lessness and the working class, or a lack of prestige. An example of people making judgements based on accent is the backlash from listeners in the 1940s when BBC had its first national newsreader to speak with a northern English accent and several features of a non-standard dialect. BBC received countless complaints from listeners, and the newsreader, William Pickles, was caricatured by London artists, who drew him with "cloth cap and rolled up shirtsleeves," a caricature of the working class that the accent is associated with, who were deemed not sophisticated enough for the BBC (Garrett, 2010, p. 13-14). This example shows how just hearing someone's voice can conjure up an image of who that person is, and ideas about where they do and don't belong based on linguistic ideologies and stereotypes—in this case, the stereotype that people who speak with Northern English accents and non-standard grammar are working class, and the linguistic ideology that only people who speak with a prestigious accent (in this case, Received Pronunciation) should be on radio programs like the BBC.

Because these beliefs are firmly ingrained in people's minds and actions, media makes fertile ground for linguistic ideology and stereotype research. The decisions which lead to these ideologies appearing in media can be subconscious, like the subconscious styling of department store workers in Labov's 1966 study, or purposeful. Linguistic stereotypes can make easy shortcuts to character building by attributing a certain background or a set of personality traits not through exposition or flashbacks, but how a character speaks. Close analysis of different medias can reveal the mechanics of these linguistic ideologies in action—how they are reflected,

reinforced, and taught. The following section will give an overview of some previous research in the area, including studies on movies, tv shows, and video games.

### 3. Previous Research

There are some who argue that fiction doesn't affect reality (in the context of this research, reality refers to the beliefs people hold), or that if it does, the effects are negligible. However, research on the subject shows the opposite—fiction shapes our understanding of the world, and specifically our views of groups of people, both groups that we're part of and groups that we aren't part of. In 2015, contributors to an issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* devoted to the study of representation of race and ethnicity in media found that representation in media had significant effects on the beliefs and perceptions of viewers (Mastro, 2015). Negative representations of minority groups in media negatively affected the self-image of members of the minority groups, and taught and confirmed prejudices held by the dominant group. Additionally, Jerimiah Garretson, who studied the effects of media representation on opinions about interracial marriage, same sex marriage, and women working outside the home, found similar results (in the opposite direction)—positive representation in media was linked to more positive opinions on these issues (Garretson, 2015). Given the fact that linguistic ideologies and stereotypes are deeply related to the types of beliefs and biases explored in these studies, it's reasonable to assume that linguistic ideologies and stereotypes in media affect audiences' beliefs about language, another reason to study the way language is used and presented in media

For this thesis, I've divided linguistic analysis of media into two general categories: analysis focusing on what media can tell us about linguistics, and analysis focusing on what linguistics can tell us about media. In other words, the first category analyzes how linguistic ideologies and stereotypes are reflected and reproduced in media, and the second analyzes the ways linguistic ideologies and stereotypes are used to create media. The second category is further divided into four subcategories: humor, character building, worldbuilding, and character relationships. In this section, I'll summarize previous research in this area, using these categories to define the subsections.

### 3.1 What media can tell us about linguistics

One way media reflects the linguistic ideologies of a society is the makeup of its casts, or the amount of characters (and specific character archetypes) who speak specific dialects. Lippi-Green (2012) did this kind of analysis on Disney animated movies; she found that in these movies, \*SAE is spoken more than any other accent or dialect, and that love-interests (female love interests especially) by and large speak mainstream varieties of US or British English (Lippi-Green, 2012). In this way, Disney movies reflect and support the ideologies which privilege certain dialects—in this case \*SAE and mainstream varieties of British English—over others. In addition, when characters do speak foreign-accented English, they are more likely to be evil than characters who speak a variety of American English; this connects foreign-accented English, and with it the idea of “otherness,” with evil (Lippi-Green, 2012). Another method of analysis is to focus on the presentation of a certain dialect, rather than the overall makeup of casts; in an analysis of Hollywood films, Bucholtz and Lopez (2011) show that the AAE presented in films is not the AAE spoken in real life; instead, it’s a “Mock AAE,” in which only the features which are most widely known by people who don’t speak AAE, and thus are most associated with a stereotypical image of Blackness, are used. This reduces AAE to a handful of iconic structures, which are often used incorrectly, while \*SAE is presented in its full, grammatical & systematic form; in this way, the linguistic ideology that AAE is inferior to \*SAE is reflected and reproduced in these films.

In addition to insight into linguistic ideologies focusing on specific language varieties, or categories of language varieties, linguistic analysis of media can explore the relationship between language and social categories like gender. For example, Lien’s (2016) thesis, which analyzed the accent distribution in the first ten episodes of *Game of Thrones*, found that the majority of female characters spoke with prestige accents (like RP English), while the majority of male characters spoke with non-prestige accents. Additionally, there was more variation within the group of male characters, as male characters with high social status or sophistication were likely to speak with a prestige accent, suggesting that non-prestige accents are associated with a specific type of masculinity associated with the working class (Lien, 2016). This is similar to some of the findings of Lippi-Green’s (2012) study of Disney movies; while all love-interests spoke largely prestige or mainstream dialects of English, there was more variation within male



love interests than female, illustrating a strong connection between our idea of femininity and prestige or mainstream accents (Lippi-Green, 2012).

### 3.2 What linguistics can tell us about media

Linguistic ideologies and stereotypes aren't just reflected by media, they are actively (whether consciously or not) used to create it. These paragraphs will explore some of the ways linguistic ideologies can be used in different elements of storytelling: humor, character building, world-building, and character relationships.

#### 3.2.1 Humor

Like any kind of stereotype, linguistic stereotypes are often used to create humor in a piece, whether that's a quick joke or humor that will recur throughout the story. An example of the latter can be found in Lippi-Green's (2012) analysis of Disney movies. One of Disney's favorite archetypes is the "scrappy inner city tough guys with hearts of gold," who, along with supporting the main character, provide much of the humor; a prototypical example is Mushu from *Mulan* (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 113). These characters often speak language varieties associated with "urban" life, like New York City English, or AAE, which is spoken by Mushu. Another example of language being used to create humor is the Key and Peele sketch, "Phone Call,"<sup>3</sup> analyzed by Queen (2015). The sketch opens with Key speaking \*SAE, but when he notices Peele in earshot, he switches to AAE, and the men stand near each other for a time, both speaking AAE in separate phone conversations. When Peele keeps moving, leaving Key behind, Peele immediately switches into "a style that is indexical of American gay men" to say, "Oh my God Christian I almost totally just got mugged right now?" (Queen, 2015, p. 229). The humor in this sketch is created entirely by the linguistic style shifts and the stereotypes associated with the linguistic styles present. Key's switch to "a version of AAVE that is highly indexed to urban masculinity" indicates his assumption that Peele could be dangerous to him; Peele's switch at the end of the scene, after having only spoken AAE up until that point, is the final punchline, revealing that both men had in fact made the same "erroneous assumption of danger" about each other (Queen, 2015, p. 229).

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<sup>3</sup> The sketch is available to watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXH5CD307Oc>

### 3.2.2 Character Building

Linguistic analysis of media can also explore the ways language is used to develop characters. The basic example of this is giving a character a regional accent to show they've come from a specific area of the country, for example Brenda Johnson's southern accent in the show *The Closer*, which establishes her as being from Southern USA, specifically Atlanta. But even in cases where the specific, in-world reasoning for a character to be portrayed with an accent is their regional identity, the linguistic ideologies and stereotypes associated with the accent affect other aspects of their characterization; to continue with the example of Brenda Johnson, her southernness includes not only specific pronunciations and lexical features, but "a specific form of performed politeness" associated with the southern accent (Queen, 2015, p. 159). In examples like this one, the linguistic stereotypes at play can be thought of as functioning like backstory; in other instances, linguistic ideologies can serve to further a character arc. For example, in Bucholtz & Lopez's (2011) study, there were several instances of a Black female character who speaks mainly AAE switching to speaking \*SAE, shocking their white male counterparts, in order to deliver an argument (Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011). These moments use and reinforce the idea that \*SAE is the dialect of logic and convincing, coherent arguments, and thus superior to AAE, in order to show that the Black female character is just as intelligent and capable as her white male counterpart, even possibly more so in some ways, and to open the white male character's eyes to that fact.

### 3.2.3 World Building

Linguistic ideologies are also used in the process of worldbuilding. Glišić's (2018) thesis analyzed the linguistic attributes of three of the fictional races in the video game *Guild Wars 2*, demonstrating one of the ways linguistic ideologies contribute to worldbuilding. The three races in question are the Sylvari, the Asura, and the Skritt. The Sylvari are modeled after Arthurian lore, assuming a regal quality that the other two races do not have, and they are the only of the three that all speak RP (Glišić, 2018); in this way, the creators used the ideology that British RP speakers are posher, or more prestigious, than other English speakers to affect the players' perceptions of the race as a whole. This is deliberate; the former lead content designer Colin Johnson has said that the fact that the Sylvari speak with "a proper English accent" is "a big part of their character" (Glišić, 2018, p. 6). The other two fictional races included in the analysis, the Asura and the Skritt, were chosen based on their contrast—the two races are rivals, and they

differ in both language use and character traits. Glišić found that the Asura, the intelligent, technologically developed race, had more individual, distinct words than the Skritt, that of these words there were more nouns than verbs, and that the sentences tended to be more complex (Glišić, 2018). The Skritt, the unintelligent, undeveloped race, had fewer distinct words, of which there were more verbs than nouns, and their syntax tended to be simpler (Glišić, 2018). Glišić takes this as an example of the language ideology that upper-class people have a larger vocabulary and better language competence than lower-class people (Glišić, 2018). Because this is a comparison between fictional races, rather than individual fictional characters, I believe it also reflects a linguistic ideology about societies as a whole; people that are seen as more “primitive” are often portrayed as unable to speak a mainstream dialect, or “correct” English.

### 3.2.4 Relationships Between Characters

Linguistic ideologies also play a role in the development of interpersonal relationships between characters. Lien explores this element in the analysis of *Game of Thrones*; for example, prestigious accents are spoken by all characters in the court in King’s Landing, except for the king, Robert Baratheon. This serves to “position him as an outsider to the royal court,” despite being the king, because he won the title by leading a rebellion, rather than by his blood right, and thus is considered an usurper (Lien, 2016, p. 41). His language variety distances him from the characters around him. Queen (2015) also explores the way language can illustrate or create relationship dynamics. One example is from the show *Modern Family*, specifically the relationship between Phil Dunphy and his father in law, Jay Pritchett. Queen isolated the following quote:

Phil: I’ve been practicing like crazy all my cowboy skills [...] shootin’, ropin’, pancake eatin’. Why? Because sometimes I feel like Jay doesn’t respect me as a man. (p. 39)

The relevant feature in this excerpt is the “-in” variant, used instead of the “-ing” variant. Usually, Phil uses the -in variant 16% of the time, compared to Jay, who uses the -in variant 65% of the time; Phil’s desire to get Jay to “respect [him] as a man” is illustrated not only in the direct acknowledgement of it but in the fact that he mimics Jay’s speaking style, specifically a language variant which is linked to masculinity (as well as other traits) (Queen, 2015, p. 39).

## 4. Why Podcasts?

The previous section explained the benefits of linguistic analysis of scripted media in general, as well as summarizing some of the research already done on the topic; this section explains why I've chosen fiction podcasts as the subject of my thesis. Fiction podcasting is uniquely suited for linguistic analysis. The complete lack of visuals could lend itself to a reliance on linguistic stereotypes as a shorthand for establishing character; however, there's no institution to gatekeep the medium, no podcasting equivalent to Hollywood, so the medium is more open to marginalized creators, who often deliberately subvert or reject these stereotypes. The fiction podcast is unique not just in comparison to visual mediums, but also in comparison to its closest relative, the radio drama. In "Inner Ears and Distant Worlds: Podcast dramaturgy and the theater of the mind," Farokh Soltani (2018) argues that while radio is a "writer's medium," where the text of the story is the main focus, podcasting makes use not just of the text of the story, but also sound effects, and the "expressive characteristics" of sound, making the act of listening to a podcast more experiential than listening to the radio (Soltani, 2018, p. 198). The reason for this is the difference in the process of listening to the two mediums; podcast listeners have more control over when and where they listen, largely listen through headphones, and can play back, pause, etc (Soltani, 2018). Soltani doesn't examine the effects this has on language varieties in fiction podcasting; however, I believe that the freedom of experimenting with sound that the medium allows could extend to the way people perform their parts. Since early radio had to heavily limit their use of sound effects to increase listener comprehension, they may also have shied away from non-standard language varieties out of fear of non-comprehension, another concern podcasting is freer from. For these reasons, linguistic analysis of fiction podcasts can add much to the current research on linguistic ideologies in media, and the discourse on linguistic ideologies as a whole.

## 5. Methods

In this section, I give an explanation of the methodology for both the quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis. In total, I listened to fourteen podcasts, thirteen of which are included in the final analysis. The one not included is *The Magnus Archives*, which was the only podcast which was both set outside of the US and produced entirely outside of the US, as it was

set and produced in the UK by a British production company. Because of this, I didn't feel comfortable categorizing all its characters under the umbrella of "British English" and "Foreign Accented English"—the different British accents play an important role in the character and story building of the show in a way that I consider very different from an American show using a British accent, so I removed it from the dataset<sup>4</sup>. The thirteen podcasts included in the dataset are: *36 Questions*, *Adventures in New America*, *Ghosts in the Burbs*, *Gossip Podcast*, *Limetown*, *Mabel*, *Passenger List*, *The Alexandria Archives*, *The Walk*, *This Sounds Serious*, *Unwell: A Midwestern Gothic Mystery*, *Welcome to Night Vale*, and *Within the Wires*. Short bios of the podcasts, including genre, format, location of creators (if known), and the production company behind them can be found in the appendix.

For each podcast, I listened to the first fifty percent of the episodes (as of late May 2020 when I began data collection) and encoded each character/voice who spoke more than five seconds. This time frame was based on my experience listening to the podcasts—less than that amount of time, and I usually had very little sense of a language variety after a first listen, or even sometimes multiple listens. Aside from length, the other requirement for being included was intelligibility—some podcasts used effects to make some voices sound as if they were coming through a bad connection or otherwise interfered with the sound, in ways that made it nearly impossible to determine their language variety; these voices were not included in the data.

For each character, the following information was entered into a spreadsheet: show, character name, character type, language variety, language variety type, notes on what linguistic features led to the language variety determination, and what episodes they appear in. A snippet of that spreadsheet is included below.

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<sup>4</sup> This intuition is confirmed by the discussions on this reddit thread about different characters' accents, which coincidentally could be a nice starting point for future research on this podcast [https://www.reddit.com/r/TheMagnusArchives/comments/ago3eo/help\\_an\\_american\\_out\\_what\\_type\\_of\\_accent\\_does\\_the/](https://www.reddit.com/r/TheMagnusArchives/comments/ago3eo/help_an_american_out_what_type_of_accent_does_the/)

show	name	character type	language variety	language variety type	notes on linguistic features	episodes	other notes (misc)
welcome to Night Vale	Hiram McDaniels, Violet Head	Side Character	Cartoonish Accent	Cartoon English	high pitch, shaky voice	episode 32	extremely anxious
welcome to Night Vale	Hiram McDaniels-grey head	Side Character	cartoonish accent	Cartoon English	low voice, slow voice, eeyore	episode 49 A & B	
welcome to Night Vale	John Peters	side character	country accent	regional Accent/Dialect	"howdy", phonological features, especially vowels ("ah" instead of "I", etc.), "get gone"	episode 49 Part A & B, 74	
welcome to Night Vale	Deb	side character	midwest accent	Regional Accent/Dialect	vowels--/ou/ ->[o] "bag" vowel sounds more like "beg"	episode 49 part A, 72	midwest/minnesota nice stereotype playing in
welcome to Night Vale	Steve Carlsberg	side character	northern east coast	Regional Accent/Dialect	phon features, "needs fixin" phrase- maybe actually appalachian, but definitely regional	episode 49B, 53, 65	negative portrayal until he was voiced
welcome to Night Vale	Basimah Bashara	one off	SAE	SAE	no nonstandard grammar	episode 79	

Figure 1 Quantitative Data Spreadsheet

The language variety categories were inspired by Lippi-Green's (2012) study on accents/dialects in Disney animated movies. They are: \*SAE, social & regional varieties, foreign accented English (FAE), and Cartoon English. Originally, social varieties and regional varieties were two separate categories, but given the fact that there's overlap in these categories—for example, AAE and Southern English sharing many features, or varieties like “Surfer Dude” and “Valley Girl” English being associated with both a geographical region and social groups—I later combined them into one category.<sup>5</sup> Below, I'll give a quick explanation of each of these categories.

1. \*SAE—Language varieties which I categorized as \*SAE are not the homogenous, idealized \*SAE, because, as noted in the theory section, there are no “true speakers” of “Standard American English.” Instead, language varieties categorized as \*SAE are the mainstream white English that \*SAE is based on; in other words, the language varieties which are perceived by people as being “standard” or “accentless.” They were marked mostly by the

<sup>5</sup> I simply combined these categories, rather than going back into my spreadsheet and replacing each instance of either regional or social with regional & social; that's why these two separate categories appear in the snippet of the spreadsheet posted above.

absence of non-standard grammar and the absence of pronunciations associated with specific places or groups of people.

- This is a category where I relied heavily on my intuitions as a native speaker of English who was raised in the US. Because I've studied linguistics, I know that everyone has an accent—but I still perceive people as accentless, and I used that here.

2. Regional & Social Varieties—These are language varieties that are either associated with a particular region of the US, for example Southern English, or language varieties associated with particular social groups, for example African American English.

3. Foreign Accented English—This category encompasses L2 accents, for example French accented English, and non-American Englishes, for example Australian English.

4. Cartoon English—Characters were categorized as Cartoon English speakers if their voice actors were clearly not aiming for any human language variety, and were instead creating a voice akin to a cartoon character.

In identifying language varieties, I listened for pronunciation differences, especially with regard to vowels (e.g. the change of some diphthongs to monophthongs in Southern American accents) and non-standard grammatical structures (e.g. negative concord or double modals). Lexical features were also taken into account, but weren't on their own enough to categorize a character as speaking a certain language variety; instead, the presence of a lexical item commonly associated with a language variety was used in conjunction with any phonological and/or grammatical features to identify the character's language variety.

In addition to language variety, each character was coded for their character type. There were four character types: protagonist, antagonist, side character, and one off character. Below, I'll give a quick explanation of each of these categories.

1. Protagonist—The protagonist of a podcast is the main character, or the central character of the plot. They are often the point of view character (in a podcast, often the narrator though not always), and are in the majority of episodes. When there were multiple protagonists in a show, mostly they either had similar time on the show or they had their own episodes to themselves. For example, on the podcast *Mabel*, in the seasons I listened to, Mabel Martin had

significantly less time on the podcast than Anna Limon, but she both contributed to the plot extensively, and had episodes where she was the sole narrator.

2. Antagonist—To be categorized as an antagonist, a character had to be working against the protagonist’s goals, be plot-important, and appear in more than one episode.

3. Side character—Side characters are any characters not involved in/central to the plot enough to be a main character who were in more than one episode.

4. One off character—One off characters only appear in one episode of a podcast, never to be heard from again. They are often, though not always, unnamed.

In future research, quantifying these categories in terms of amount of time on the podcast, or otherwise comparing time on a podcast, may be helpful, but it’s out of the scope of this thesis; time on a podcast, when relevant, will be discussed impressionistically instead.

A note on character roles: A character may change roles over the course of a podcast, starting as a side character and then growing into a protagonist, or masquerading as a protagonist or side character before being revealed to be an antagonist. Characters were categorized based on their most recent appearance.

Unlike my quantitative research, where I had the specific research question “is there a relationship between character type and language variety type,” or, in other words, “does a character’s role in a show affect what language variety they’re likely to speak,” my qualitative research was more open ended. As I listened to the podcasts to enter each character into the spreadsheet, I was also listening for instances of linguistic ideologies and stereotypes being used or subverted, taking notes on specific characters, episodes, and plotlines in which language itself played a significant role. Once I’d finished gathering quantitative data, I went back through these notes and outlined possible analyses of each character or moment, and used those notes to find relevant readings on the ideologies and stereotypes involved, and, where necessary, transcribed specific moments from episodes. I repeated the process of seeking out scholarship and relistening to podcasts throughout the process of analysis, writing, and rewriting. In the following subsection, I’ll talk about the limitations of these methods.



## 5.1 Limitations

The main limit of these methods is that the process of determining what language variety a character speaks with, and what category that language variety falls into, is subjective. Much is based on my own personal judgements—though these have been supplemented by outside judgements<sup>6</sup> as well as reading about features of different language varieties. Additionally, I've only gathered data from thirteen podcasts, out of countless fiction podcasts available today. In order to include podcasts that I wasn't already a listener of, I posted online asking fiction podcast fans to list every podcast they listened to, and then, after a couple weeks, used the responses to compile a list of nearly a hundred fiction podcasts to choose from. I made an effort to choose a variety of creators, genres, formats, etc.; nevertheless, there was no way to get a representative sample of fiction podcasts.

With these limitations, this thesis can't make sweeping statements on the use of language varieties and linguistic ideologies in all of fiction podcasting, and it wasn't meant to; this thesis is a starting point of research. I think, and the results of this project show, that interesting linguistic things are happening in the realm of fiction podcasting, and further research would benefit the field of linguistics, as well as podcast creators. So, this thesis is looking at fiction podcasts from one relatively subjective angle, with the hope that others will join in with different perspectives and strategies of their own.

## 6. Results

In total, there are 424 characters in the dataset. Figure 2 shows the raw data, broken down by character role and type of language variety.

Raw Data					
	Protagonists	Antagonists	Side Characters	One Off Characters	Total
*SAE	19	7	39	177	242

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<sup>6</sup> outside judgements included playing clips for friends and family (if I couldn't identify an accent myself, I made sure two people independently came to the same conclusion, and asked for specific features that informed the judgements) and searching for discussion of the character's accent online

Regional & social varieties	2	3	16	64	85
Foreign accented English	6	3	8	68	85
Cartoon English	0	1	5	6	12
Total	27	14	68	315	424

Figure 2 Number of each character type in each language variety type

Something important to note about this data is that the podcasts do not contribute equally to it—they vary in amount of characters, with the largest podcast having seventy-seven voiced characters and the smallest podcast having only one.

Because there are very different amounts of each character type, I have converted the results into percentages for the analysis.

Figure 3 shows the percent of each character type in each linguistic category. For example, the cell that’s in the protagonist column and the % \*SAE row shows that 70.37% of protagonists speak \*SAE.

Percent of Each Character Type in Each Language Variety Type					
	Protagonist	Antagonist	Side Character	One off character	Total
% *SAE	70.37%	50%	57.35%	56.19%	57.08%
% Regional & Social	7.41%	21.43%	23.53%	20.32 %	20.05%
% FAE	22.22%	21.43%	11.76%	21.59%	20.05%
% Cartoon English	0%	7.15%	7.35%	1.90%	2.83%

Figure 3 Percent of each character type in each language variety type

## 7 My Analysis

This section will discuss what I found in this thesis, using the categories of analysis established earlier: what podcasts can tell us about linguistics and what linguistics can tell us about podcasts.

### 7.1 What Podcasts Can Tell Us About Linguistics

This subsection will analyze what podcasts can tell us about linguistics, first by looking for correlations between character type and language variety type, then by looking at the breakdown of the entire dataset, not divided into character types, by language variety, and ending with a discussion of the regional varieties found in the dataset.

#### 7.1.1 Relationship Between Character Type and Variety Type

To see if there was a significant difference between main and minor characters with regard to the percentage of the characters who spoke \*SAE and non-\*SAE varieties, I had to combine several categories. I combined the character categories of protagonist & antagonist into “main characters,” and the character categories of side characters and one off characters into “minor characters,” and I combined the language variety categories of regional & social varieties, foreign accented English, and cartoon English, into the category of “Non \*SAE Varieties.” Figure 4 is a stacked bar chart that shows the percentage of main characters and minor characters who spoke \*SAE and Non \*SAE Varieties; Main characters were 63.41% \*SAE speakers and 36.59% speakers of non-\*SAE varieties, and Minor characters were 56.4% \*SAE speakers and 43.6% speakers of non-\*SAE varieties.

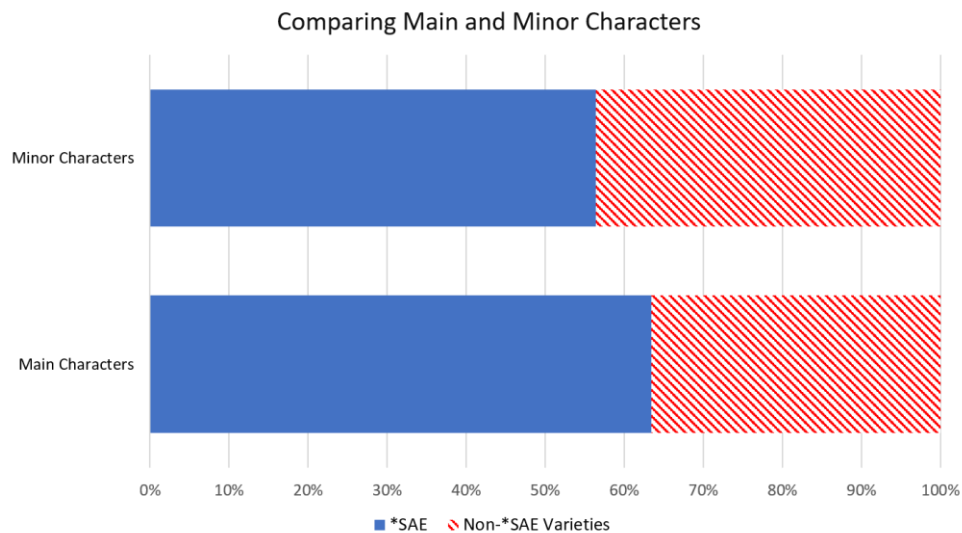


Figure 4 Percent of main and minor characters who speak \*SAE and Non \*SAE Varieties

I ran a chi-square test for independence, which showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between character type and language variety type ( $p=.388>.05$ ). While there were small differences in the breakdown of the data, overall, main and minor characters had very similar ratios of \*SAE speakers to speakers of other varieties. This is contrary to my expectation at the start of this project, which was that minor characters would have a higher percent of non-\*SAE speakers. I expected this based on two possible functions of linguistic varieties and the stereotypes associated with them—the ability to establish character quickly, and helping listeners identify or recognize a character. Because minor characters have less time on a podcast to establish themselves and for listeners to become familiar with them, I expected minor characters to speak non-\*SAE varieties more often than main characters; the fact that this wasn't the case suggests that the privileging of \*SAE (discussed more in section 7.1.2) is more powerful than the utility of giving characters different linguistic styles.

When looking at the data broken down by all four character types and all four language variety types, I was unable to run a significance test, as many of the individual data points were too small for the tests to be reliable (e.g. there were only two protagonists who spoke regional & social varieties of English, and zero protagonists who spoke cartoon English). However, there were similar results here as there were when looking at main and minor characters, in that there wasn't a strong relationship between character type and the percent of characters who spoke the different language varieties.

Figure 5 is a stacked bar chart that shows the percentage of each character type in each linguistic variety category; it shows similar ratios between the various character types.

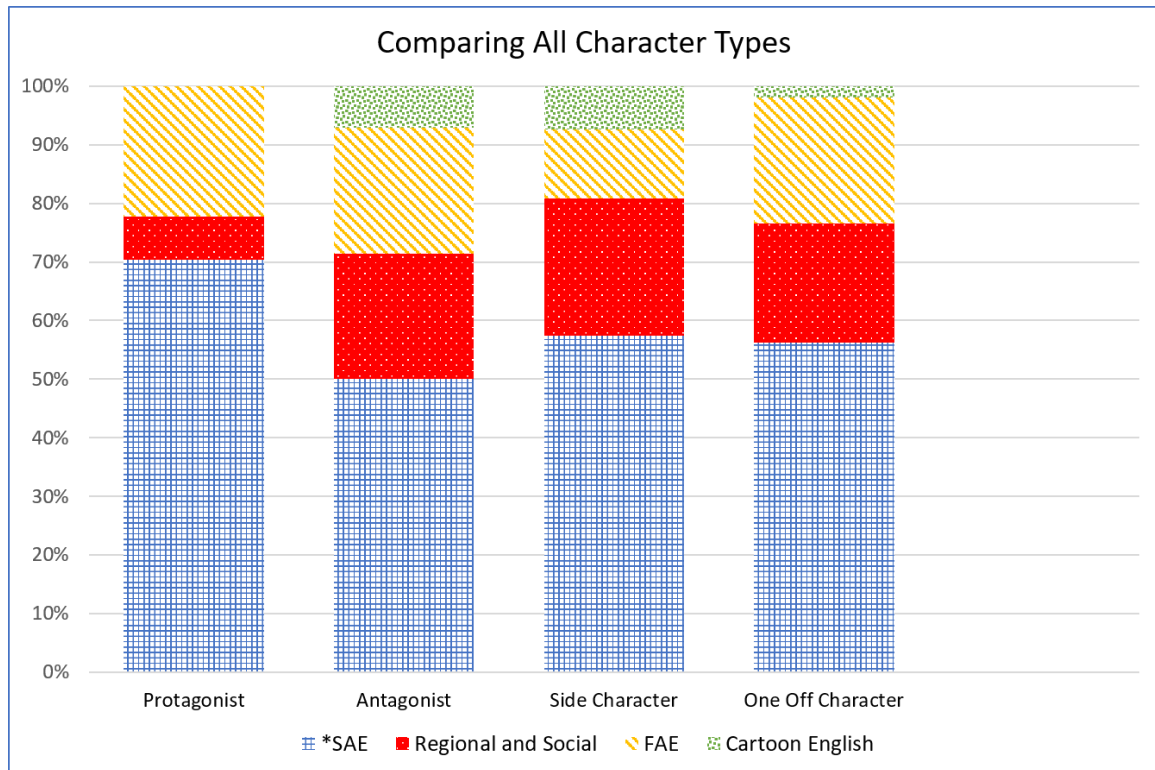


Figure 5 Percent of each character type in each language variety category

The two features of this comparison that are notable are the differences in percent of Cartoon English across the four character types and the percent of protagonists who are speakers of regional & social varieties.

Side characters and antagonists are more likely than one off characters or protagonists to speak Cartoon English; the reason for the lack of characters who speak Cartoon English is different for one-off characters and protagonists. The reason for the lack of protagonists is that Cartoon English doesn't function to create a well-rounded, "realistic"<sup>7</sup> character; instead, it's used to create a flatter character, whose personality is largely built around one exaggerated feature. For example, the Grey Head of Hiram McDaniels (more explanation of his character in section 7.2.2) speaks Cartoon English, specifically a linguistic style most like the character Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh (a very low voice and a very slow speaking style), and his personality is fully centered around being a gloomy downer. I've been listening to *Welcome to Night Vale* since the start, so I've heard every episode this character appears in, and the only

<sup>7</sup> "Realistic" in quotation marks because realism is relative, especially in fiction stories—making a believable, realistic character, and making a character who can hear dead people (*ghosts in the burbs*) or is part Fae, with flowers growing from her veins (*Mabel*) or any number of other fantastical elements are not mutually exclusive

thing I can tell you about his personality is that he's very depressed—which works fine, because he's a side character that doesn't contribute heavily to the plot. A protagonist, on the other hand, has to be more well-rounded because they're likely the character we hear from the most.

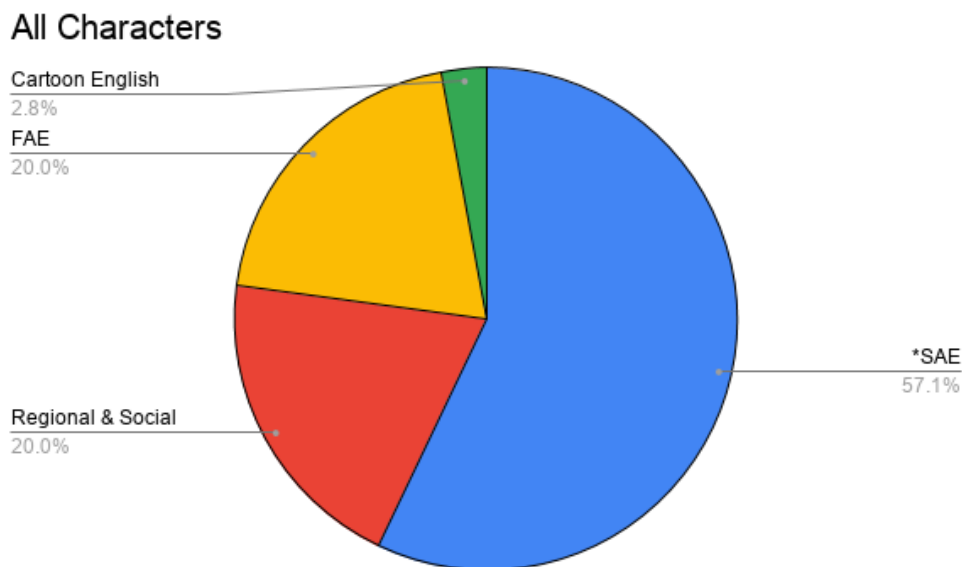
The one-off character obviously doesn't have to be well-rounded—and pretty much by definition, can't be—so that can't be the reason that there's a much smaller percentage of one-off characters who speak Cartoon English. Instead, I think it has to do with the uniqueness of a cartoonish linguistic style—while some are based on other notable cartoon characters, like the Hiram McDaniels/Eeyore example, others are created based on the character being voiced instead. An example of this is another part of the Hiram McDaniels character, the Violet Head, who is the polar opposite of the Grey Head discussed before in that his voice is extremely high pitched and he speaks very quickly. Creating a unique linguistic style has benefits for side characters, since they recur on the podcast; a unique style can help listeners identify characters when they appear on the podcast after an absence, and help build the personality of characters, even if they are very one-sided personalities. One-off characters don't need to be identified later on, so that function isn't useful. Also, creating a unique linguistic style for a character who will only be on the podcast for one-episode—and often for only one scene—is a waste of energy. For that reason, one-off characters are less likely to fall into the category of Cartoon English (though there are still some characters who do, unlike protagonists, who never do).

Along with the complete lack of Cartoon English speakers, protagonists have a lower percentage of speakers of regional & social varieties and a higher percentage of speakers of \*SAE than the other three character types—70.37% of protagonists were \*SAE speakers, compared to 50% of antagonists, 57.35% of side characters, and 56.19% of one-off characters. I believe the reason for this is the prevalence of the Standard Language Ideology that privileges \*SAE over other language varieties; this is similar to the fact that Disney love interests, aka the protagonists (at least in most Disney films I can think of), were more likely to be speakers of \*SAE (Lippi-Green, 2012).

### 7.1.2 Overrepresentation of \*SAE

The previous subsection illustrated the fact that, overall, character type and language variety type are not strongly related, aside from a few trends related to protagonists that could be explored in future research. Given the fact that the character types had similar percentages of the

language variety categories, this section will look at the data as a whole, not broken down by character type. Figure 6 is a pie chart showing the percent of all the characters in each of the language variety categories.



*Figure 6 Percent of all characters who speak each language variety type*

The main feature I want to comment on in this data is the overrepresentation of \*SAE. Speakers of \*SAE make up 57.1% of the data, more than any other category of variety. This is reflective of the Standard Language Ideology; because \*SAE is believed to be default, or normal, or superior to other language varieties, it's the language variety most often spoken by characters on these shows. You need to have a reason to have a character speak a different variety of English, whether that's related to the character's personality, or place of origin, or another characteristic; you don't need a reason to have a character speak \*SAE. This ideology affects both the hiring and casting of voice actors, and the performance choices that voice actors make, and leads to the overrepresentation of \*SAE seen in this data, as well as similar analysis of other media, such as Lippi-Green's (2012) study of Disney movies in which \*SAE speakers made up a higher percent of the characters (43%) than any other group of speakers. This is a symptom of a broader problem in media, in which powerful, privileged groups are the "default" characters,

who make up most of the characters in most media, while marginalized groups are underrepresented. This problem is illustrated and analyzed in studies like those included in the issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* “Media Representations of Race and Ethnicity: Implications for Identity, Intergroup Relations, and Public Policy,” discussed in the previous research section of this thesis, as well as being explored in public conversations about “representation” in general, and the lack of it (for examples of these conversations, see: Harris, 2020, Framke, 2018, Giardina 2020, and So & Wezerek, 2020). These conversations often center around social categories like race, gender, and sexuality—linguistic representation is far less salient. The overall lack of discussion around linguistic representation contributes to the continuing lack of it. Some of the creators of the podcasts in this dataset have been open about their desire to have diverse shows; for example, Joseph Fink and Jeffrey Cranor, when discussing their show *Welcome to Night Vale*, talk about their desire to “cast people from different places and backgrounds,” adding that “it tends to lead to a more interesting cast and better performances because not everyone is speaking from the same place” (Townsend, 2015). But Fink and Cranor, and other podcast creators, may not see linguistic representation as something to strive for because it isn’t as salient as other kinds of representation.

However, I don’t want to give the impression that *no one* is talking about linguistic representation, just because it isn’t a feature of the mainstream conversation on representation. As per usual, members of marginalized groups, in this case speakers of marginalized language varieties, are aware and speaking up about it. For example, in the tweet thread pictured in figure 7, YA author cara davis-araux discusses the need for representation of AAE in YA fiction.



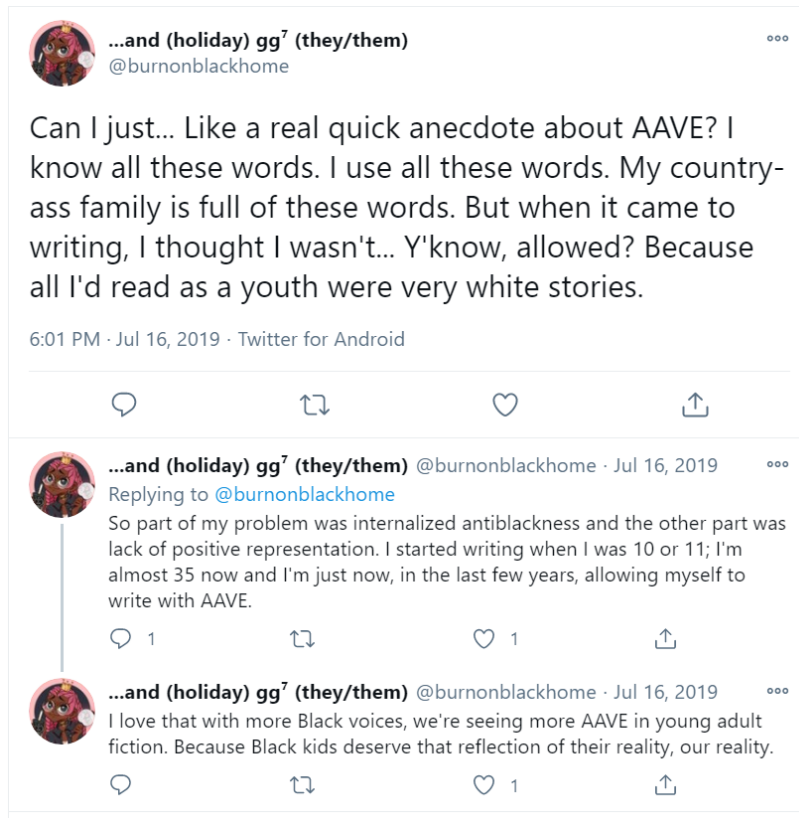


Figure 7 Tweet thread from a YA author discussing representation of AAVE in writing, specifically YA fiction

For this reason, I think the concept of ownvoices, created by author Corrinne Duyvis to describe books written by authors from marginalized groups about characters from the same marginalized group, is important to keep in mind while discussing and analyzing podcasts; it matters who's making a podcast. For example, *Adventures in New America*, an Afrofuturist podcast by Black creators, is responsible for 8 of the 12 characters in this dataset who speak AAE. I originally wanted to break up the data by podcast to examine things like this, but given time constraints, that type of analysis is left to future research.

### 7.1.3 Regional Varieties

In this section, I'm going to analyze the regional accents present in the dataset using Dennis Preston's (1998) work on perceptual dialectology. The three varieties that make up the

majority of the regional varieties in the dataset are: Southern English (43.55 %), Upper Midwest English<sup>8</sup> (25.81%), and New York City English (17.74%).

I'll first focus on Southern English and New York City English; together, these varieties makeup 61.29% of the characters who speak regional varieties of English. This result suggests that these two varieties are significantly more salient in US culture than other regional varieties of English. Despite being more present in the dataset than other regional varieties, Southern English and New York City English speakers are never protagonists, most often falling into either the side character or one-off character category<sup>9</sup>. (In fact, no speakers of regional varieties are protagonists, but given that no variety aside from the three discussed in this section have more than three speakers in the dataset, I don't believe there's enough data to conclude that the other regional varieties are similarly strongly associated with negative stereotypes.) The fact that these characters are almost always minor characters, and often portrayed stereotypically, suggests that their salience in culture is closely connected to the negative perceptions of the varieties, and the salience of the stereotypes about the varieties. Both of these findings are supported by Preston's perceptual dialectology on the subject. Two of his studies are relevant here. In the first (Preston, 1998) participants from Michigan were asked to rank the fifty states, DC, and New York City, according to the "correctness" of their English; in the second (Preston 1998), participants in several areas of the country were given a blank map of the US and asked to draw a map of the US's dialect/accent regions. In both studies, participants' views on Southern English were noteworthy; Southern English was the most consistently represented on the dialect maps, and received the lowest "correctness" rating from the Michigan participants. New York City English fared similarly, as it was the second or third most consistently drawn/notated dialect region on the maps from each area of the US, and received a very low "correctness" rating. These results suggest that the perceived "correctness" of a variety is closely connected to its social/cultural salience.

In other words, the fact that Southern English and New York City English are better represented in the data than other regional dialects of English, like California English or Northeastern varieties of English, is due to the negative associations—e.g. perceived

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<sup>8</sup> This variety will be defined in this section as well, as it is distinct from the Midwest English often thought of as "General American" by non-linguists and \*SAE by linguists

<sup>9</sup> The two protagonists who are in the "Regional and Social Englishes" category both speak AAE

incorrectness and negative stereotypes—which make the varieties especially salient. This also limits the roles that speakers of these accents have in podcasts; sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.3 will go into more detail about this element by analyzing the ways that characters who speak Southern English are presented.

Upper Midwest English operates somewhat differently than Southern or New York City English. Before explaining why I believe Upper Midwest English represents such a large percentage of the regional accents, I'd like to define some of the features I used when determining if a character spoke this variety.

- /oʊ/ being realized as monophthongal [o]
- /æ/ being raised, such that bag might sound closer to beg
- /ð/ being realized as [d] sometimes (i.e. “deese” for “these”)
- the lexical items “ope” and “eh”

Without doing perceptual dialectology on the subject, which is well beyond the scope of this thesis, I cannot prove that this dialect should not be categorized as \*SAE, since I cannot say for certain that it isn't perceived as standard by listeners.

However, I will argue that it is not perceived as “accent-less” or as a “non-accented” way of speaking based on two Wikipedia articles and one reddit thread. The two Wikipedia articles are titled “Upper Peninsula English” and “North-Central American English,” and concern two types of Midwestern English that fall into my category of Upper Midwest English. The “Upper Peninsula English” is also called “Yooper English,” and the Wikipedia specifically notes that it “differs from standard English primarily because of the linguistic background of settlers to the area;” the “North-Central American English” is said by the article to be “popularly though stereotypically recognized as a Minnesota accent.” The existence of both of these articles, as well as the descriptions of the Englishes, supports the categorization of Upper Midwest English as a regional variety. Additionally, I found a reddit thread about one of the characters that speaks Upper Midwest English; the thread is opened by a comment asking, “What accent does Deb have?”<sup>10</sup> There were thirteen comments total, ten of which were giving real answers. Of those ten, all agreed that it was a Midwest accent of some kind, and five specifically mentioned Minnesota, one of which wrote it out as “Mini Soda,” as a phonetic spelling of the stereotypical

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.reddit.com/r/nightvale/comments/5iqkm7/what\\_accent\\_does\\_deb\\_have/](https://www.reddit.com/r/nightvale/comments/5iqkm7/what_accent_does_deb_have/)

way that Minnesota is pronounced with the accent. (Another specifically mentioned the “Yooper Accent.”)

The high percentage of Upper Midwest English speakers in comparison with other regional accents is inconsistent with Preston’s results, in which only Michigan participants consistently drew a “Midwest English” region, and then it was often only Michigan English drawn, and it was accompanied by notation like “average/normal” (Preston, 1998). There are two reasons that Upper Midwest English is as represented in the dataset as it is. The first is similar to the reason Michigan put itself on the map more consistently than respondents from other areas of the country; one of the podcasts is called *Unwell, a Midwestern Gothic Mystery* and thus has many characters who speak with the identifiably Midwestern accent, partly in order to create the setting of the podcast. This is one way regional accents function in podcasts and other media (this will also be seen in section 7.2.3)—peripheral characters speak with an accent that indexes a specific region, in order to communicate the setting of a story, while main characters speak \*SAE. The other reason I see for the high percentage of Upper Midwest speakers is also found in the reddit thread about Deb’s accent. One commenter said: “It’s definitely Minnesota/Wisconsin. ‘Minnesota Nice’ in fact’.” The concept/stereotype of Minnesota Nice, or Midwest Nice, is the idea that people in the Midwest are overly-polite<sup>11</sup>, and characters who speak this variety of English often use that stereotype, either by being genuinely over-nice, or being passive aggressive (or aggressive aggressive which hides behind a little bit of politeness). Deb is an example of the latter—in an article about *Welcome to Night Vale*, Meg Bashwiner, the voice of Deb, says “She’s not concerned with human life in any way, but she’s very polite about that” (Wilkin, 2015). Other characters are less blatant than Deb with their disregard for human life—Hazel from *Unwell* is sugary sweet in public, but is revealed in a private conversation to be part of the menacing conspiracy at the center of the town.

My research thus supports the idea that Southern English, New York City English, and Upper Midwest English are three of the most salient regional language varieties in American society, as well as giving reasons for their salience; Southern English and New York City English’s salience is related to their perceived incorrectness, as well as stereotypes associated with them, and Upper Midwest English’s salience is related to the stereotype of “Midwest Nice.”

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<sup>11</sup> phrases associated with Midwest nice: “you’re fine” “let me sneak past you” “ope” “you betcha”

Further research could focus entirely on the question of which regional varieties are most often represented and how they are represented, to support/explore findings from other perceptual dialectology studies, as the varieties which appear most often are the ones that are most salient in a culture.

## 7.2 What linguistics can tell us about podcasts

This subsection will analyze the ways that linguistic ideologies are used in the creation of podcasts; it's divided up by story element, including humor, character building, world building, and relationships between characters.

### 7.2.1 Humor

One way language is used in the construction of stories is for humor, whether that's a story-long device (e.g., a comedic relief character, or a running gag) or a throwaway joke. An example of this second type is found in the podcast *This Sounds Serious*, using Southern stock characters. As discussed in section 7.1.3, Southern English is one of the most recognizable regional language varieties, and with its notoriety comes the many linguistic ideologies and stereotypes associated with it. Most of these cluster around a few concepts: incorrectness, informality, and unintelligence. For example, Preston's (1998) study on perceptual dialectology, also discussed in section 7.1.3, showed that participants overall rated it lowest in terms of correctness, and this idea that Southern English is "incorrect" is used to support the stereotype that its speakers are unintelligent because they don't speak "proper" English (\*SAE), as well as the ideology that it isn't appropriate for formal settings like job interviews or speeches. These beliefs about Southern English help create the stereotype of southerners as dumb hicks and hillbillies. These ideas aren't only visible in group studies looking at overall perception; Jennifer Cramer's (2013) analysis of identity among Louisville residents found multiple instances of people imitating stereotypical southern accents to deliver lines such as "Do you wear shoes down 'ere?" (Cramer, 2013, p.151). These instances weren't always of participants agreeing with the stereotypical image, but rather of making fun of northerners who have a stereotypical view of the south and southern accents. However, they show an awareness of the stereotypes, and these stereotypes aren't entirely rejected by the participants, as they reinforce the idea of a "south south," which Louisville is not a part of, according to the participants (Cramer, 2013). These

negative ideologies and stereotypes are also a regular feature of media, seen in characters like all of the Beverly Hillbillies, Cousin Eddie from *Christmas Vacation*, and many others.

These are the beliefs and images of southerners that *This Sounds Serious* draws on for humorous effect in its first episode. *This Sounds Serious* is a satirical podcast aimed at making fun of the true crime genre. In episode one, Gwen Radford, the main character and fictional true crime host, explains that she came to be interested in the case due to her odd hobby of listening to 911 calls, and her explanation is sprinkled with short clips from calls she’s listened to. In three of these clips, the 911 callers speak with Southern accents. I’ve provided transcriptions of the three calls below; the first two calls are played consecutively, and the third occurs later, after several other clips from 911 calls and some narration from the host. Following Queen (2015), I used conventional spelling rather than IPA and noted some but not all of the pronunciation differences, for ease of reading.

Caller 1: My, mah ah mah foot is stuck in a drain, but more importantlih, mah wahfe is dead.

Caller 2: Ah fahred uh crossbow out my window <emphasis on the first syllable>, 'n looks like I hit uh neighbor.

Caller 3: Uh how do you know if you have, you know, you may have burglared somethin'? Or somebodih's house?

All three callers fall into the “dumb hick” stereotype of Southern English speakers. Caller 1 leads with the fact that his foot is stuck in a drain, silly enough on its own but made truly stupid by the fact that he’s leading with it when his wife is dead; caller 2 has apparently fired his crossbow through his own window—accidentally or on purpose, we don’t know—and hit his neighbor; caller three is either somehow unable to know if she’s stolen something, or knows she has and is calling the police on herself anyway. In addition to being dumb, caller two embodies the stereotype of the southerner obsessed with weapons (usually guns, but the crossbow is similar enough and possibly even more hick), a stereotype that comes up in other podcasts (for example *Adventures in New America* has a fake, in-universe ad for a gun show read by a

southern English speaker). All three calls last 7-8 seconds, none were important to the plot either of the episode or the overarching plot of the podcast, and all three “characters” were one-offs. In other words, they are solely included as for comedic purposes, similar to the results found by Lippi-Green in her study of Disney movies—characters who speak non-standard Englishes are relegated to minor characters and used as comic relief, reflecting and supporting the Standard Language Ideology that subordinates these varieties (Lippi-Green, 2012).

In the interest of fairness, I will mention that *This Sounds Serious* is indeed a satirical podcast, so humor is to be expected—but satire is meant to take aim at the powerful. *This Sounds Serious* is ostensibly meant to make fun of the true crime genre, but demeaning those who speak non-standard varieties of English fits in perfectly well with the true crime genre, or at least facets of it; see “Intimate Publics: Hearing Race in Radio and Podcasts” (Sim, 2016) for a discussion of the way the host of true crime podcast *Serial*, a white speaker of \*SAE, speaks over non-white speakers of “non-standard” varieties, and centers herself in their story.

### 7.2.2 Character Building

One of the best examples of a voice actor using linguistic stereotypes as a way to quickly establish their character is Hiram McDaniels in *Welcome to Night Vale* (WTNV). Hiram is a recurring side character on the show and a literal five headed dragon; each of his five heads has a unique personality and speaking style, and all five are portrayed by the same voice actor. The gold head, who does most of the talking, speaks with a Southern accent and has a charming politician personality. This is a different stereotype about Southern English speakers than we saw in the earlier sections; the southern accent isn’t necessary for creating a politician character the way it is a dumb hick character, but it does create a more specific type of politician, the kind that aims to be down to earth and folksy no matter their actual background. The green head always shouts when he speaks, making it difficult to identify exactly what accent is being aimed for, though it has qualities of a contrived Germanic accent (according to a friend who lived in Germany during high school) and both of these features match his angry and violent personality (according to the linguistic ideology which deems German an “angry-sounding” language). The blue head speaks \*SAE, with notably more enunciated consonants, to match his statistically minded, mathematician personality (see Bucholtz 1999 on hyper enunciation and nerds). The violet head and grey head both speak cartoon English, with qualities of their speaking style—

specifically pitch and speed of speaking—corresponding with their personality. The grey head sounds like Eeyore, with a very low and slow speaking style, corresponding with his gloomy personality, and the violet head has an incredibly high-pitched voice and speaks very quickly, which correspond with its anxious personality. These linguistic styles are used both to establish and emphasize their personalities, and to help the listeners distinguish the heads from each other, as they often speak over each other and always appear together in a scene, since they’re attached to the same body.

Without the rest of the context of the show, keeping these connections straight can be difficult; figure 8 is a chart giving each head’s name/color, linguistic style, and personality, that you can refer to for the rest of this section as necessary.

Hiram McDaniel’s heads		
Name/Color	Linguistic Style	Personality
Gold Head	Southern English	the charming southern politician
Green Head	constantly shouting, somewhat contrived Germanic accent	violent & angry
Violet Head	very high-pitched voice, fast speaking style	anxious, “the worrier”
Blue Head	*SAE, notably enunciated consonants	logically/mathematically minded, often correcting others
Grey Head	very low-pitched voice, slow speaking style	gloomy & depressed

*Figure 8 Description of Each of Hiram McDaniel's heads*

The close relationship between their speaking styles and their personalities in the minds of both the creators and listeners of the podcast is confirmed by a discussion on the show *Good Morning Night Vale*, a WTNV recap podcast. In this excerpt<sup>12</sup>, Jeffrey Cranor, one of the creators of WTNV, Hal Lublin, the voice of Steve Carlsberg (WTNV side character), and

<sup>12</sup> This excerpt is from the episode titled “Good Morning Old Oak Doors (Live at PodX)”



Symphony Sanders, voice of Tamika Flynn (WTNV side character) discuss the anxiety the voice actor of Hiram McDaniels (Peter Jackson) felt about voicing all five heads at a live show. In doing so, they try to identify all the heads themselves. All three have recently relistened to the episode in which Hiram first appears.

Jeffrey: yeah, cuz all five of Hiram's heads have a completely different personality. He has like the default Southern Charming [gentleman

Symphony: [that's the gold one

Jeffrey: yeah the gold one.

Symphony: He's like the bossy, he's like the southern sorta, "oh yeah" <a failed attempt to imitate Hiram's southern head>

Jeffrey: [yeah he's real charming

Symphony: [that's not an impersonation of, that was, that was not good

Jeffrey: and then uh, you have the

Symphony: the red one is like the angry one

Jeffrey: the angry one is the [green one

Symphony: [green head

Jeffrey: that's the one that's just shouting and spitting fire on everything all the time

Symphony: Violet is the high, high pitched one

Jeffrey: Violet is the worrier

Symphony: yeah, he's like <high pitched whining, no discernable words> that was a better impression

Jeffrey: and blue is the "um actually head" like that's the one that's like correcting everything all the- no blue, I'm sorry, grey is the um [actually head

Hal: [see, see it's hard to keep [track

Jeffrey: [it is

Hal: You're doing way better-

Symphony: He's- he's Eeyore one, he's the like <she starts to do an impression but is cut off>

Jeffrey: Blue is the- I thought blue was the mopey one. Good God, I just listened to the episode and I [just-

Hal: [<laughs> do you see why he was nervous?

Jeffrey: Anyway Jackson, it's gonna be fine, just head out there it's gonna be great, I don't remember either.

There are several things in this interaction I'd like to comment on. First, there's never any confusion over which voice goes with which personality the way there's confusion over the name/head color. This is illustrated throughout the conversation, but can be seen specifically in the difference between two exchanges between Symphony and Jeffrey. When Symphony states that the red head is the angry head, Jeffrey interjects with "the angry head is the green one," which Symphony agrees with by repeating "green head." When Symphony says that the violet head is the high pitched one, Jeffrey adds that Violet is the worrier—rather than taking a "correcting" tone, as he did before, here he's just adding to her description. Because they're having a conversation about the difficulties of switching between the distinct voice styles on stage, and knowing which head goes with which style, it would be possible to have this conversation without discussing the personalities at all, but for each head, both the speaking style and personality are brought up each time. Sometimes the voice is described first, sometimes the personality first, and in the case of the gold head, both at once ("southern charming gentleman"). Even the \*SAE speaking blue head, who would usually be thought of as "default" under the Standard Language Ideology, is identified with a specific lexical feature, as the "um actually" head (with a corresponding change in prosody over the words that indicate it is an imitation of the character's speaking style as well as a way of describing him). Symphony also provides interesting data with regards to her impressions, or attempted impressions—in all three instances

where she tries to imitate Hiram, the words she says aren't relevant at all. In the first impression, of the gold head, she says "oh yeah" which appears to be similar to what she's going to say for the grey head as well, as she's saying "ohhh" when Jeffrey cuts her off, and when she impersonates Violet, she doesn't say any words at all, just emitting a high pitched vowel sound that moves up and down in pitch very quickly. This shows that it's not just the content of the character's lines which creates the perception of the characters by listeners.

### 7.2.3 Worldbuilding

This section will explore the ways that *The Alexandria Archives* uses linguistic ideologies in its worldbuilding. *The Alexandria Archives* is a fiction podcast that takes the form of a college radio station from Alexandria University and is described as "the South's response to Miskatonic University<sup>13</sup>," where vampires, aliens, and all manner of paranormal happenings are commonplace. For the first half of each podcast, host MW talks to callers, mostly students with occasional calls from campus safety or announcements from the dean of the college; for the last half, MW plays a story from around Alexandria, sometimes from the university and sometimes from the town it's placed in. Many of the residents of Alexandria are Southern English speakers, while most university students are \*SAE speakers. This dichotomy between the town residents/Southern English speakers and university students/\*SAE speakers is one of the ways that *The Alexandria Archives* uses linguistic ideologies for world-building; the podcast draws on the linguistic ideologies which say that Southern English speakers are rural, non-college educated folks who, if not outright dumb, only have access to earthy/grounded knowledge, and it does so in order to define the different relationships that the town and university have to the paranormal. While some students at the university are at least aware of the odd things that happen at Alexandria University, like vampires taking night classes or The Incident involving synchronized swimming and a possible portal to another world, their understanding remains surface-level, which often leads them to make decisions which put them in danger; others are fully unaware of the paranormal events happening on and off campus. The town residents tend to understand more about the nature of their home, including understanding that they don't know everything, though that doesn't always save them from danger. To illustrate these differences in

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<sup>13</sup> Miskatonic University is a fictional university which first appeared in H.P. Lovecraft's stories

understanding, I'll compare three characters (one Alexandrian resident, one university student, and one university faculty member) and their relationship to the paranormal.

Character one is Captain Wooley of Alexandria University's campus safety; Captain Wooley speaks Southern English and frequently shows a casual familiarity with the paranormal. In episode 9, MW rides along on Captain Wooley's golf-cart during his patrol so that he can tell her about an incident in the university's hedge maze, and he frequently interrupts his own story to point out strange things about the campus to MW. An example of his interjections is included below.

Wooley: That cheerwine machine over there's haunted, just so you know.  
If it steals your dollar, just let it have it, ya hear?

This interjection is given casually, after taking a long drink of his sweet tea, and showcases his familiarity with the area's supernatural quirks, and the right way to deal with those quirks. The fact that it's said as a friendly heads-up, rather than a serious warning, shows that he's also not worried by the mere existence of the supernatural—he knows how to deal with minor haunts like that. But he also understands that Alexandria's paranormal activity can be genuinely dangerous, and in these cases, he gives strict guidelines for the students to stay safe. When he's invited on the show before a hurricane is set to hit the town, to tell the student body how to stay safe during the storm, in addition to the more normal advice to be aware of closed roads and debris in the days following the storm, he offers this advice:

Wooley: It's important for students to stay indoors, no matter what they hear or see from outside. Now, dancing lights, great aunt Martha's voice begging for help, ain't nothin that should make you stir from your place of safety.

Granted I've never experienced a hurricane, so it's possible this is normal advice, but I'm assuming that, instead, Captain Wooley is warning students about paranormal entities—possibly elementals, referenced in other episodes of the podcast—who would lure the students out into the storm for whatever reason. This quote, like the one before, shows his familiarity and understanding of paranormal elements, and adds the information that he takes it seriously; unlike the vending machine, this is a real danger, and he knows that and knows how to stay safe.

Character two is the narrator of the archive story in episode three; he's a student at Alexandria University and part of AUPS, the Alexandria University Paranormal Society (student

club). It's unclear how much he believes in the paranormal despite this—it's established in the beginning that the club has so far only found "the occasional EVP or knocking or an orb showing up in a photograph," and that the narrator's friend has a rational, non-paranormal explanation for all of it so far. In the story, the narrator and his friend go down into the closed-off tunnels under the school, looking for paranormal activity; but when they find it, in the form of a room where some kind of ritual has taken place, and a tentacled creature living in the tunnels, they aren't at all prepared for it. The narrator doesn't realize they're in real danger, and need to get out of the tunnels, until it's almost too late; the narrator is knocked unconscious and found, alone and bleeding, in the basement they used to access the tunnels, while his friend is never seen again. The narrator and their friend differ from Captain Wooley both in their level of knowledge—they have none—and how they approach the paranormal, with electrical equipment and a view of how you find proof of the paranormal similar to the scientific method.

Character three is an Alexandria University professor, who was the department chair of chemistry and the head of the parapsychology lab. The archive story in episode 20 takes the form of an interview he did on the job; he is, technically, a paranormal investigator, though rather than looking for proof of the paranormal, he gives people the rational, non-paranormal explanations, even saying at one point during the tape that he "can't call anything [he's] seen a real haunting." His story takes the form of a recorded interview between himself and someone who claims to be experiencing a haunting—at least, that's what he thinks it is, until, at the end of the interview, the woman he's with reveals herself to be the ghost, or possibly demon, that haunts the house. She shows him her true form and tells him he's going to wake up on the road, saying, "I think you should go home then. And don't come back until you've learned some respect." Her voice ends the archive recording of the day; the professor does not continue the tape later to include an explanation or even response to her revelation, and his introduction to the tape only says he is submitting it to the archives in the hopes that it will be "educational."

Captain Wooley is a resident of Alexandria who works on the campus and speaks Southern English; both the student and professor speak \*SAE and are presumably not from Alexandria originally, though reference to where they are from isn't made in the recordings. These three examples show how the different varieties of English index different kinds of knowledge; \*SAE speakers wield the academic knowledge of higher education, while Southern English speakers wield knowledge of the land and practical life, including, in Alexandria, the

paranormal. The \*SAE speakers go in with confidence because of the academic (or academic adjacent, in the case of the AUPS students) knowledge they wield, but they find themselves out of their depth. The Southern English speakers don't have access to that academic knowledge—in Captain Wooley's archival story, he repeatedly refers to togas as dresses and cannot seem to pronounce or remember the names of the statues on the campus—but they do have access to an understanding of the paranormal.

This contrast can also be described using the “anonymity vs. authenticity” framework (Woolard, 2016). Woolard identifies these two ideologies as underlying modern western societies' notions of linguistic authority. The ideology of authenticity values speech varieties which are “perceived as deeply rooted in social and geographic territory,” emphasizing the identity of the speaker instead of what they're saying (Woolard, 2020, p. 22). The ideology of anonymity values speech which is considered to be universal or global, not localized, emphasizing what the speaker is saying and erasing, or downplaying, who they are. Wooley and other town residents show their strong identification with the town itself partially through the local language variety of Southern English; their claim to authenticity is also their claim to authority with regards to the paranormal happenings of Alexandria. And they have a higher claim to that authenticity than the students and professors, who technically live in the town but don't understand it or truly identify as its residents—or, if they do, don't have as strong a claim to that identity, illustrated by the fact that they don't speak the local language variety. But the university students and professors have authority derived from their institution; their claim to authority is based in the ideology of anonymity and their “unmarked” variety of \*SAE. Both of these ideologies are at play in this podcast, and the podcast may seem to alternate between supporting one or the other's claim to authority at various moments, but it's important to note that, since the podcast is framed as a university radio station, the student host effectively retains authority even over the town residents' stories. She decides which are played, and when, and she provides commentary on the town and university together that is assumed by listeners to be solid and based in the truth of the town, when she likely hasn't lived there even four years. In this way, the overall structure of the podcast supports the ideology of anonymity.

The ideology of anonymity plays a role in another element of the world-building of *The Alexandria Archives* as well. The ideology comes up again with regards to the characteristics of aliens on the podcast. There are three side characters and two one off characters that are aliens;

of these, three speak \*SAE, one speaks Upper Midwest English, and the other speaks Cartoon English<sup>14</sup>. I'll start by analyzing the two side characters' use of \*SAE. There's no in-universe reason for them to speak this variety. They didn't spend their first earth-bound years in an area of the country where people generally speak \*SAE, and their fake backstory is that they're Canadian, so it isn't part of their human disguise or backstory. Given that they appear to have begun speaking English for the first time in the town—not university—of Alexandria, it might have made more in-universe sense for them to speak the Southern English of their neighbors in Alexandria. The fact that they don't, rather than being based on in-universe explanations, is based on an ideology of anonymity; \*SAE's perceived accent-less and region-less-ness reinforces the fact that the aliens aren't from earth, as they aren't tied to any specific place, even the one where they currently live.

The one-off characters who are aliens appear in the mini-episode 9.5, which takes place mostly on their spaceship; one of these characters speaks \*SAE, and the other speaks Upper Midwest English. The Upper Midwest English speaker, called only “alien ensign” in the show notes, could be evidence, against my previous assertion, that Upper Midwest English is perceived as \*SAE and thus is just as region-less or anonymous; however, I believe that instead, the association between Upper Midwest English and “Midwest Nice” or politeness in general overrode the ideology of anonymity in this case, as the alien ensign is somewhat of a peacemaker in this episode, trying to keep things calm and conflict-free.

One interesting interaction between two of the alien characters involves the discussion of “Galactic Common;” below I've transcribed the two relevant lines from episode 9.5. Note that these do not occur consecutively; I've removed a tangent about the bounties on some of the character's heads since it wasn't relevant to the discussion of language.

Kilt (Side Character): Well, since we're all speaking this damned English language instead of the far more efficient Galactic Common, I'd like to take this opportunity to apologize for stowing away on your ship.

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<sup>14</sup> The side character who's categorized as speaking Cartoon English never uses words, at least as far as I can tell as a human, as his lines are made up by whispering sounds, and electronic effects, which the other two aliens understand and respond to

Steve (one off): Also, we are speaking Galactic Common; it just sounds like your ancestral language because that is what this room's settings currently are.

These two lines reflect a facet of the ideology of anonymity that says the focus of speech should be on what people say, not on how they say it; with a “Common” language shared by, apparently, the whole galaxy, which doesn't belong to any one species or planet, that becomes the case. This is a frequent trope in sci-fi stories, reflecting the common idea that if we all spoke in the same way, there would be fewer misunderstandings and everything would be better and more efficient; or, alternately, the idea that as we evolve technologically and societally, we will all start to speak the same language the same way, depending on the direction of cause and effect. Woolard describes the real-world analog, aka efforts to create anonymous “standard” language forms, as “language laundering analogous to money laundering,” in which “the actual source of capital (linguistic capital in this case) is obscured by transferring it through legitimate institutions,” and the power of a language or language variety comes to be seen as an inherent property of that variety, rather than rooted in society's prejudices and beliefs (Woolard, 2016, p. 29). But the creation of “Galactic Common,” and many of the other “common” languages of sci-fi, isn't part of the story; that process is simply assumed to be as positive as the outcome supposedly is.

### 7.2.3 Relationships Between Characters

Language is also used to develop the relationships between characters. This section will explore the ways the podcast *Mabel* uses characters' use of Spanish to highlight changes in the core relationship and establish other relationships.

*Mabel* is a horror-fantasy podcast about Anna Limon, a home help nurse living and working in a house which is connected to another world, and Mabel Martin, a woman who's part fae part human. For most of the first seasons, Anna and Mabel don't interact directly with each other. At first, their interactions are limited to Anna leaving Mabel voicemails that Mabel listens to but doesn't respond to. Between episodes 9 and 10, the two meet in the other world connected to the house, but because their meeting happens in the time between podcasts, listeners don't get to hear their interactions with each other. Despite this disconnected communication, the development of Anna and Mabel's relationship is made clear. This is accomplished by a multitude of devices, linguistic and otherwise, which could likely be the subject of a whole other



thesis; the one I'm going to focus on is the pair's use of Spanish words. Anna and Mabel both generally speak \*SAE, but following their first in-person meeting, they also start to use Spanish words, pronounced with a Spanish accent, in their dialogue; this coincides with and marks their relationship's development into something more intimate and romantic than it had been before. In the episodes I listened to for this thesis, there are three relevant examples. Below, I'll give transcripts of each moment, italicizing the Spanish word in the examples, and give some context for each example before analyzing them together.

1. Anna: So he'd be drinking beer and smoking out back and he'd say,  
Anna, come here, *mija*, I wanna talk to you

*Mija* is a conjunction of *mi hija*, meaning my daughter, and this *mija* is the first Spanish word spoken in the podcast, as far as I can tell; the monologue that it's part of is about Anna's family, and ideas about fate, and it gives the listeners more information about Anna's family and backstory than they've gotten up until that point. This example is from episode 14 of the podcast.

2. Mabel: I know that I am - sharp, that there's many edges inside of me, like *tunas*, needing fire and a good scrape with a knife before I resemble anything like sweetness.

*Tunas* are prickly pears, or cactus fruit, often used in Mexican dishes; this monologue is delivered following a moment of frustration in which Mabel yells, not at Anna, but at another (nameless and voiceless) character on the phone for failing to realize that Anna is missing.

3. Mabel: Someday, Anna. Someday we will eat *chorizo* smoked potatoes, drink rose lemonade, feed each other fruit from our fingers.

*Chorizo* is a kind of sausage used in Mexican dishes; this line comes in a monologue about an imagined future in which Mabel and Anna are together again, and out of danger. This monologue and the monologue from the second example are from the same episode (20), an episode which follows several episodes of Mabel working out her frustration with Anna for sacrificing herself to save Mabel.

To discuss these examples, I'll be using Gumperz's concept of the "we code," which tends to be "the ethnically specific, minority language" that is "associated with in-group and informal activities," and the "they code," which tends to be the "majority language" that is

“associated with the more formal, stiffer, and less personal out-group relations.” (Gumperz, 1977, p. 6).

In the case of *Mabel*, Spanish is the ‘we code’ and \*SAE is the ‘they code’; these designations are based not only on Gumperz’s dichotomy of minority vs. majority language, but also on the contexts in which Spanish is used in the podcast. In example 1 above, the Spanish word *mija*, meaning my daughter, is used in the context of a story about Anna’s family and childhood, connecting Spanish to family, and confirming its status as the ‘we code’. In examples 2 and 3 it isn’t the context which helps establish Spanish as the ‘we code’, but the Spanish words themselves; the words Mabel uses, *tunas* and *chorizos*, are both connected to Mexican culture, specifically Mexican dishes. The creators of the podcast, Becca De La Rosa and Mabel Martin (who voice Anna and Mabel along with writing and producing the show) are mixed indigenous Mexican women, and have said that’s how they imagine Anna and Mabel as well (Mabel, 2020). Using Spanish words that are specifically connected to Anna and Mabel’s shared cultural background further cements Spanish’s association with “in group activities.”

Their use of Spanish, as the ‘we code’, creates and illustrates intimacy between Anna and Mabel; because ‘we codes’ are associated with “in-group activities”, the fact that they use it together makes them part of the same “group.” In the first example, the use of Spanish demonstrates a change that has already happened, as Anna and Mabel’s relationship has been changed by their meeting between episodes; they’ve gone from being relative strangers, with a quasi-relationship, to having a real connection. The second and third examples illustrate another shift in their relationship, later on in the podcast, as Mabel lets go of (most) of her anger towards Anna and begins speaking of and to her with tenderness once more; again, the inclusion of Spanish words accompanies and emphasizes this shift. Partly because of this shift, these two monologues are some of the most important monologues in the podcast related to their relationship, which is essentially the core of the show. In the monologue that example two occurs in, Mabel is introspective, revealing more about herself than is typical, as her description of herself as like *tunas* (prickly pears, or cactus fruit) suggests; in the monologue that example three occurs in, she imagines their shared future, signaling the fact that, despite the fact that they are constantly being separated by forces outside of their control, neither of them will give up on being reunited. The fact that Spanish is included in these two monologues specifically

demonstrates the importance of Spanish in Mabel and Anna's relationship; the frequency of Spanish is small compared to \*SAE, so looking at the moments where it is included becomes especially important. Future research could continue this analysis on later seasons of this podcast, to examine other contexts in which Spanish occurs, and see if the frequency of Spanish use on the podcast increases—after all, Spanish is seen here to be tied to Mabel and Anna's relationship, and Mabel and Anna meet in person ten episodes into the twenty episodes I listened to for this podcast, so it's possible I listened to the half of the podcast with the least amount of Spanish.

Another relationship in which Spanish plays an important role is the relationship between Anna and Thomas, Mabel's father. Thomas appears in episode three and episode thirteen; he's never heard directly, but his dialogue and interactions with Anna are relayed to Mabel's voicemail, and the listener, after the fact. In his first appearance, his communication with her is severely limited, due to a curse placed on him, but he tries to warn her away from the house and the Martin family anyway by mouthing "get out." By his next appearance, it's no longer an option for Anna to run away, so he can speak freely. He's sympathetic with her plight, since they're in similar situations—both of them are people who were pulled into the Martin family drama—and tries to connect with her, but she's still wary of him for much of the episode. But as soon as she reveals that she's going to try to save Mabel, he cuts her off to give her a warning, and advice. I've transcribed this moment below.

Anna: "You need to stop talking about it. Ever hear the phrase, the walls have ears? Nowhere in the world is that truer than in this piece of shit house. Don't say those things out loud if you don't want them to screw with your plans. There—" He squinted up at the sky, his face all wrinkled. "I have to go," he said. "Can't stay in any one place for long. But listen to me, Anna." And he leaned in close to me, and I smelled him, and he smelled like something that's been dead for a long, long time. "Hay una puerta <There is a door>," he whispered in my ear. "Necesitas descubrirlo <You need to find it>." And then he shivered one last time, and pulled his jacket closer, and walked away.

This is an example of metaphorical codeswitching, which is a “change in language that does not signal a change in the definition of the fundamental speech event” (Woolard, 2004, p. 76). Thomas gives Anna the clue, the piece of a puzzle for her to use against the malevolent forces of the house, in Spanish, after their conversation before that happened entirely in English. This switch to Spanish occurs for two reasons, one practical and one social. The practical reason is that he’s trying to keep the information from the house, which is shown by his body language, his warning that the walls have ears, and the fact that he whispers the information. The social reason is that he’s trying to connect with Anna, to show solidarity with her as someone else caught up in the weird events they’re living through, and to get her to trust that he’s telling the truth. Using Spanish, the ‘we code’, creates a link that using English didn’t.

There are similar examples in Gumperz (1977), in which switching from the ‘they code’ to the ‘we code’ indicates a personal appeal, personal feeling, personal opinion, etc. (Gumperz, 1977, p. 30); the common thread through the assessments of switching to the ‘we code’ is the idea that it creates a more personal utterance. For example, Gumperz gives the following example of a father-son exchange (Hindi is italicized with a translation provided afterward):

Context: Father talking to his five-year-old son, who is walking ahead of him and wavering from side to side in the first-class compartment of a train in India

Father: Keep straight

*Keep straight*

*sīdhā jao betā* <walk straight son>

In this exchange, the shift to the ‘we code’ was “paraphrase[d] as ‘won’t you please,” as opposed to the reverse, a switch to the ‘they code’, which would be more of a warning or mild threat.

Gumperz’s example clearly happens in a different overall context than the example from *Mabel*, but the effect of the switch to Spanish by Thomas is similar to the effect of the switch to Hindi by the father. While speaking English in this excerpt, telling Anna to “stop talking about it,” he’s more forceful, his voice is louder, closer to a command; while speaking Spanish, he leans in close and whispers, softening from a command to a personal appeal. It’s an appeal that

she believe him, trust him, despite the fact that they are practically strangers, having met only once before, and the appeal is based partially in the connecting force of the shared ‘we code’ of Spanish.

In the end, the social function of this switch is the one that has a more lasting impact; Anna tells Mabel about the door over the phone, in both Spanish and English, so even if the house doesn’t understand Spanish (which isn’t guaranteed), it knows by the end of the episode. But Anna does trust Thomas’s message, and she uses it in the coming episodes to rescue Mabel.

Future research could look at code-switching in fiction podcasts generally (likely this kind of research would fall into the other category of “what podcasts can tell us about linguistics”). This could be particularly interesting in the context of this Gumperz quote: “metaphorical switching occurs demonstrably below the level of consciousness. You no more plan a metaphorical switch than you do your choice of tense or mood in speaking... people are often not even aware of what they do. (Gumperz, 1984, p. 110, as cited in Woolard, 2004, pp. 84-5)” Given the scripted nature of fiction podcasts, with the editing and production processes in place, does metaphorical code-switching within them rise to the level of consciousness? And if so, does code-switching in fiction podcasts function differently from code-switching in “real life”? Other podcasts which could be interesting for such research are *Passenger List*—the main character was described by her voice actor, Kelly Marie Tran, as having “a sort of in-between language that goes in and out of English and Vietnamese” (Quah, 2019)—and *Adventures in New America*—multiple characters speak AAE, and I can think of one instance of a character code-switching into \*SAE in the first episode off the top of my head.

## 8. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the research question “how do linguistic ideologies and stereotypes function in fiction podcasts?” The quantitative analysis, or the analysis of what podcasts can tell us about linguistics, examined the way that podcasts are affected by the linguistic ideologies and stereotypes of a society by examining the percent of characters in each language variety category, as well as the regional varieties most represented in the data. The Standard Language Ideology was seen to have an effect on the podcasts by the fact that more than fifty percent of the characters in the dataset were speakers of \*SAE. The salience of Southern English, New York City English, and Upper Midwest English in American society was

illustrated in the fact that these three language varieties were more present in the dataset than any other regional language variety; the linguistic stereotypes connected to these varieties were visible in the portrayal of these speakers, as well as the fact that they were never protagonists. Given the fact that my analysis of regional varieties represented in fiction podcasts was closely aligned with perceptual dialectology research by Preston (1998), future research could expand this area, looking at the regional varieties represented in more podcasts, in order to study people's perception of these varieties; future research could also expand by looking at foreign accented English, to see the difference in representation and presentation among non-American varieties.

The qualitative analysis, or the analysis of what linguistics can tell us about podcasts, examined the ways that podcasts utilize linguistic ideologies in the creation of their characters and stories. This analysis showed that linguistic ideologies and stereotypes are used in many features of podcasts—humor, character building, worldbuilding, and character relationships—similar to the way they've been shown to operate in other types of media. Future research could expand on any of these elements; for example, a matched-guise experiment (or similar experimental setup) could explore how much a character's personality can be changed only by changing the linguistic variety they speak. Additional research could also focus on genre conventions; for example, do certain genres tend to use certain linguistic ideologies or linguistic varieties in their storytelling more than others, or do genres have significant differences in the overall makeup of their casts?

In this thesis, I've identified two unique qualities of fiction podcasts: that they are a fully auditory medium, and that they are more open to marginalized creators, as there's no institutional gatekeeping. The lack of visual input encourages a reliance on linguistic stereotypes and ideologies; its openness to marginalized creators also opens it up for subversions or rejections of these stereotypes. Overall, in this thesis, we've seen the former pressure win out—the majority of characters are speakers of \*SAE, and linguistic stereotypes and ideologies about speakers of other varieties, like Southern English, are present in many elements of the podcasts. However, there were also moments where the benefits of the lack of institutional gatekeeping show through, like the use of Spanish in *Mabel*, or the representation of AAE speakers in *Adventures in New America*. There are also moments and characters that I made note of while listening but

which weren't included in this thesis, mostly due to time constraints; for example, the fact that the Vietnamese spoken in *Passenger List* by the main character and her family isn't translated in the podcast, and instead listeners can find translations in the written transcripts available on the website, alongside transcriptions of the Vietnamese spoken, and what it means to have a non-English language go untranslated in a podcast where in real time subtitles like are available on tv aren't an option. This isn't to say that the conclusions from this thesis are invalid—the reliance on linguistic stereotypes in these examples can't be canceled out by the existence of other podcasts where these stereotypes aren't used, or where the experiences of speakers of marginalized varieties are represented well. Instead, I'd like to propose that, in order to see the benefits of the lack of institutional gatekeeping, more attention will have to be given to individual podcasts and their creators; it's possible that overall fiction podcasts lean towards an overrepresentation of \*SAE and reliance on linguistic stereotypes, the way overall other types of media reproduce the ideologies of society, but allowing for more deviation from these norms within the world of fiction podcasts than can happen in other types of media.

I hope that this research, in addition to adding to the study of linguistic ideologies and stereotypes, can benefit creators of fiction podcasts by bringing their attention to the ways that linguistic ideologies and stereotypes function in their work. As stated in section 2, these beliefs can and often do operate at a subconscious level; one intention of my work is to encourage podcast creators to be deliberate about the casting and direction of voice actors, and to encourage voice actors to be deliberate about the acting decisions they make, in order to avoid harmful stereotypes and include more speakers of varieties other than \*SAE.

## Appendix

Podcasts Included in the Dataset				
Name	Genre	Format/Framing Device	Country/Location (of creators, not the story's setting)	production company
36 Questions	Musical/Drama	voice memos taken by two people to keep a record of their interactions	Brooklyn, NY, USA	Two-Up Productions
Adventures in New America	Afrofuturist	no framing device, presented more or less like a radio drama/radio play	USA	Night Vale Presents
Ghosts in the Burbs	supernatural/ghost stories	the narrator relays stories told to her in interviews, but her voice is the only one heard	Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA	no production company
Gossip Podcast	comedy soap opera	no framing device, presented as if you're listening in on three friends gossiping, and the stories they tell are then performed by other actors	USA, at least partially in LA	Stitcher
Limetown	mystery/thriller	fictional docu-drama/investigative journalist (only season 1)	Brooklyn, NY	Two-Up Productions
Mabel Podcast	Paranormal Horror	voicemails, at least in the beginning—it evolves into more of a straight audio drama	unknown	no production company
Passenger List	mystery/thriller	none, radio drama/play	USA	PRX's radiotopia



The Alexandria Archives	paranormal	Alexandria University's student radio station	USA, probably the South	no production company
The Walk	thriller	you are the main character, everything in the podcast is something you are hearing in the story	company is the US, author/creator is the UK	Panoply (now called Megaphone)
This Sounds Serious	Satire	true crime podcast	Vancouver	a castbox original from a production company, Kelly & Kelly
Unwell: A Midwestern Gothic Mystery	gothic mystery	none, audio drama	Chicago, IL	HartLife NFP
Welcome to Night Vale	supernatural/conspiracy	radio broadcast from Night Vale, a weird town in the desert	USA	Night Vale Presents
Within the Wires	dystopia	found audio (relaxations tapes, museum guides, etc)	USA	Night Vale Presents

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