Development of implicit language attitudes in children

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Background

- In implicit language attitude tasks, listeners' judgments about a specific talker are taken to reveal listeners' judgments about a dialect group
- For adult listeners (Clopper, Rohrbeck, & Wagner, 2012; Giles, 1970; Luhman, 1990):
  - Ratings of status (e.g., intelligence, wealth) tend to be high for socially prestigious ("standard") dialect groups
  - Ratings of solidarity (e.g., trustworthiness, friendliness) tend to be high for dialect groups that are local to the listener
- In a forced-choice task, 5- and 6-year-old children showed no dialect-based attitude differences, but 9- and 10-year-olds thought Northern talkers were "smarter" and Southern talkers were "nicer" (Kinzler & DeJesus, 2013)
  - 9- and 10-year-olds from the North as well as the South showed this pattern, suggesting stereotypes in addition to local solidarity

Research Questions

1. When do listeners learn which regional dialects are local to them?
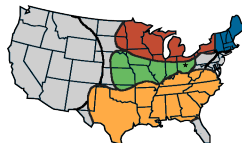2. What are adult-like implicit attitudes about regional dialects, and when do they emerge?

Methods

Listeners

- Tested in the Language Sciences Research Lab at a science museum in central Ohio
- 240 monolingual American English speakers ages 4-75
  - 76% had lived in Ohio
  - 46% had lived *only* in Ohio

Age	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13
N	24	24	24	24	24
Age	**14-15**	**16-17**	**18-34**	**35-49**	**50+**
N	24	24	24	24	24

Stimulus materials

- Sentence: "She had your dark suit in greasy wash water all year"
- Talkers: 3 women from each of 4 regions in the United States (Midland (M), North (N), New England (NE), South (S))
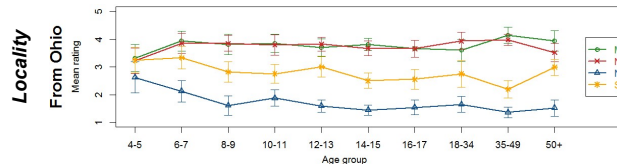
Methods (continued)

Procedure

- Participants heard sentences and rated each talker on labeled 5-point scales measuring the attributes **from Ohio**, **smart**, **rich**, **honest**, **friendly**
- Ratings were blocked by attribute (12 trials per block)
- Blocks were presented in random order for each participant
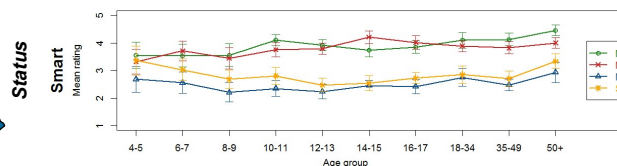
Predictions

- Midland and North should sound local and should be rated relatively high on measures of status and solidarity
- New England and South should sound non-local and should be rated relatively low on measures of status and solidarity
- At least some attitudes should show differences across dialects by age 9-10

Results
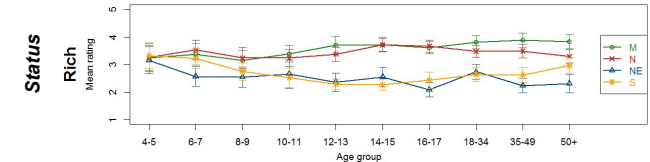

Midland and North are **from Ohio**.

- By age 4-5, New England is not
- By age 8-9, South is less **from Ohio** than Midland and North, but more **from Ohio** than New England
- Initially these patterns are more robust for listeners who have lived in Ohio, but by age 14-15, these patterns are consistent for all listeners
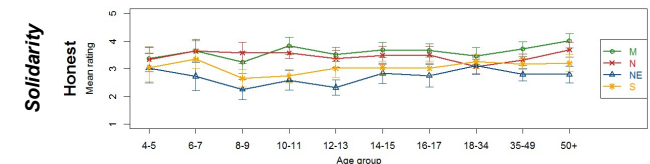

Midland and North are **smart**.

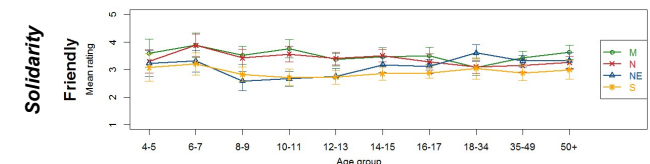- By age 8-9, New England and South are not

Results (continued)

Midland and North are **rich**.

- By age 12-13, New England and South are not

Midland and North are **honest**, but New England and South are not.

- This pattern does not change significantly across age groups

Midland, North, and New England are **friendly**, but South is not.

- This pattern does not change significantly across age groups

Discussion

- Predictions about regional dialect patterns were generally upheld
- Listeners show a three-way division for **from Ohio** (Midland, North > South > New England), but a two-way division for other attributes (often Midland, North > New England, South)
- The age at which implicit attitudes begin to differ across dialects depends greatly on the attribute in question
  - **Rich** was harder for children to understand than **smart**
  - Future research will evaluate children's understanding of the attributes tested in this work