

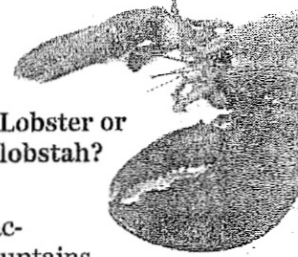
Accents: A cherished New England trait fades

After taking root with the earliest European settlers, the New England accent held surprisingly strong for several generations. Our forefathers may not have actually palked cahs in Hahvahd Yahd, but they likely did send boats up and down the rivah.

But what stood the test of time for centuries is now rapidly unraveling, according to researchers from Dartmouth College and the University of Texas at Austin. Each time the New England accent's geographic reach has been mapped in the past, the Green Mountains of Vermont have acted as an important dividing line. West of that line, Ma likes eating lobster; east of it, Mar prefers lobstah. The new study, however, found that the line of demarcation has moved several miles east, and the reach of the New England accent has diminished. Its disappearance is especially notable among young people, who told the researchers they associate thick accents with "old-fashioned" people.

The researchers called their study "Farewell to the Founders," and it's natural to lament the disappearance of a unique regional trait. Still, an older, broader fear about American language — that mass media would create a homogenized form of national speech — appears to be unfounded. As other recent studies of American linguistics have shown, the country remains rife with dialects, though people in some regions are blending different accents into new, distinctive sounds.

Besides, regional flavor isn't only a matter of pronunciation. Just think: Those European settlers might not have found anything especially "wicked" in their new surroundings, but today, that word defines New England at least as well as any other.



Lobster or lobstah?

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The Boston Globe

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2012