



GET A RISK-FREE ISSUE  
GIVE A GIFT  
IPAD SUBSCRIPTION

## New Twitter Study Discovers "Global Superdialects"

$$111,111,111 \times 111,111,111 = 12,345,678,987,654,321$$

Arika Okrent Share   
filed under: [internet](#), [language](#)

HIT ME WITH ANOTHER FACT!

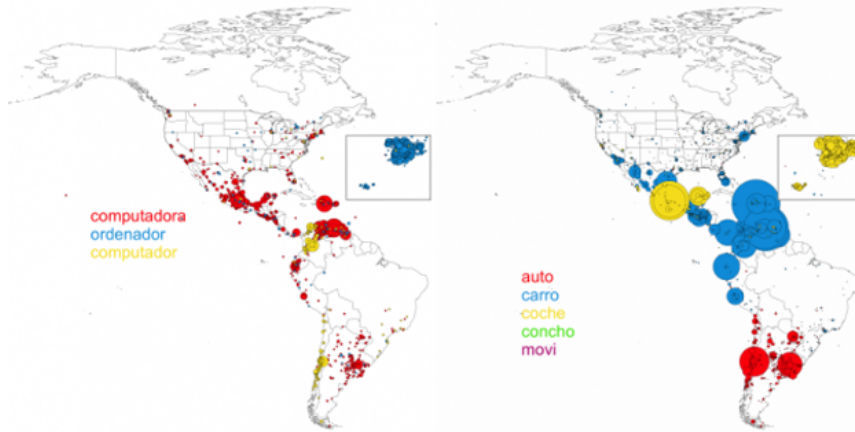


IMAGE CREDIT: TECHNOLOGYREVIEW.COM

Do you say sneakers, gym shoes, or trainers? Soda, pop, or fizzy drink? Your choice has a lot to do with where you're from. Certain terms vary by region, and it should be possible to get a good picture of regional differences in vocabulary by searching for these terms on Twitter and plotting where they come from using geolocation data.

As MIT Technology Review [reports](#), a new study did just that for variable terms in Spanish. As expected, terms known to distinguish various dialects of Spanish mapped well, in tweets, to the areas they are commonly associated with. For example, the map above shows that a computer is called a computadora in Mexico, an ordenador in Spain and a computador in Chile. The different terms for car—auto, carro, coche, concho, and movi—are also mapped. The size of the dots corresponds to the number of tweets with that term.

But researchers Bruno Gonçalves and David Sánchez also found something unexpected when they combined the data on all the words together. There were two main dialect groups, and they were divided not by region, but by population density. There were two "superdialects"—one in dense, urban centers, and another in smaller towns and rural areas. The rural areas "keep a larger number of characteristic items and native words," while cities, more subject to the forces of globalization, tend toward "dialect unification, smoothing possible lexical differences." The urban superdialect is a less differentiated, international Spanish, and the rural superdialect is more varied and less subject to international leveling, despite the fact that everyone in the study is using Twitter.

We don't speak differently just because we live in different places, but because we live differently. This is something sociolinguists have known for a long time. Advances in techniques for analyzing the huge amount of language data on Twitter offer new ways to look at how our lives influence our language.

The original paper is [here](#).

August 8, 2014 - 11:00am

Arika Okrent

### MOST POPULAR



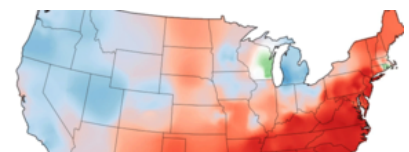
6 Fruits You've Been Eating All Wrong



11 Smells That Are Slowly Disappearing



11 Mundane Objects That Are Statistically Deadlier Than Sharks



What Do You Call That Thing You Drink Water From at School?





Linguist, author of **In the Land of Invented Languages**, lives in Philadelphia, talks with a Chicago accent.



Share



From The Web

From Mental Floss

Promoted Links by Taboola

- 5 Mysteries Surrounding The Cosby Show
- Things You've Always Wondered (But Not Enough to Actually Look Up)
- The Quick 10: 10 Abandoned Disney Projects
- 11 Things You Might Not Know You Can Still Buy
- 17 Ancient Abandoned Websites That Still Work

17 Signs That You'd Qualify as a Witch in 1692



13 Scientific Terms You Might Be Using Wrong



The Nautical Roots of 11 Common Phrases



12 Postcard Locations, Then and Now



11 of the Craziest S'mores Combinations Ever



Why Do Stop Signs Have Eight Sides?



TRY A **FREE ISSUE** OF MENTAL\_FLOSS MAGAZINE

[CLICK HERE >](#)

ALSO ON MENTAL FLOSS:

★ From the Archives  
**DID BLOWING INTO NINTENDO GAMES HELP?**  
[READ ON >](#)

In the store  
**CREATIVE AND HILARIOUS EXAM ANSWERS**  
[BUY THE BOOK NOW >](#)

★ From the Archives  
**15 REASONS WHY WE LOVE MISTER ROGERS**  
[READ ON >](#)

**mental floss** FREE OFFER  
**TRUTH ABOUT LIT** GET A FREE ISSUE OF mental\_floss  
**GET A FREE ISSUE** [CLICK HERE >](#)

DID YOU KNOW? Marlon Brando hated memorizing lines so much that he posted cue cards everywhere to help him get through scenes. He even asked for lines to be written on an actress's posterior. (That request was denied.)  
©2014 Mental Floss, Inc. All rights reserved. Mental Floss® is a registered trademark owned by Felix Dennis. mentalfloss.com is a trademark owned by Felix Dennis.