

SAN ANTONIO TALK

Some Texas dialects match up well with southern United States dialects. North Texas, for example, shares its dialect with the highlands south; east Texas with the lowlands; while the Houston-to-San Antonio corridor has pockets of people who speak the Delta southern (New Orleans) dialect.

Central Texas and south Texas, however, do not have quite as close a match-up with the rest of the south. One reason for the split revolves around the importance of pigs in north and east Texas, compared to the lessened importance in the rest of Texas.

Want a linguistic test? All right, how many of you include *chitlins*, *cracklins*, *hasslet*, *middlins*, or *souse* in your daily menu?

I'm talking basic Arkansas-type hog talk here: deep-fried hog intestines; rendered fat tissue; internal hog organs; salt pork; and a meatloaf made from the head, heart, and feet of a pig. Those of you who indulge in these culinary southern delicacies represent San Antonio well to our southern cousins. Those of you who do not . . . well, what can I say?

O.K. I can say this: the majority of San Antonians can not define the word *chitlins*--the most popular word used in the south for deep-fried hog intestines. Nor does the majority recognize variants of the word: *chitlets*, *jitlins* and *chitterlings*.

Ask San Antonians what they call that part of the hog that you sometimes deep fry and sometimes stuff sausage in. Most likely, two-thirds of your informants will gag and come up with guesses such as *intestines*? *guts*? *entrails*? *casings*?

Only about one third of your informants will grin, smack their lips, and ask if you have some *chitlins*. Actually, about thirty percent will say *chitlins*; another seven percent will use the word *chitterlings*.

Ask the same question of north and east Texans, however, and this minority quickly becomes the two-thirds majority. In east Texas, for example, fifty-five percent of the folk eat *chitlins*; eight percent *chitterlings*. That's a combined sixty-three percent majority. In the lower south--South Carolina, Georgia, upper Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana--the *chitlins* and/or *chitterlings* eaters constitute a whopping sixty-nine percent of the population.

United States southerners did not create *chitterlings*. As far back as the thirteen century, folks in England ate them. The Middle English word *chitterlings*, in fact most likely derived from an Old English word, *cieter*, which meant "intestines." I cannot ascertain, however, who shortened the pronunciation from *chitterlings* to *chitlins* or who changed the *chitlins* to *jitlins*. Since Englanders can shorten *Worcestershire* to *Wooster*, I certainly would not dismiss them from shortening *chitterlings*. But since some Texans confused *chitlins* with *giblets* to form our own *chitlets*, I can't dismiss home-country innovation, either.

However, if all this leaves you feeling left out, just imagine what those southern majority folk would say about one of San Antonio's favorite culinary delights, *menudo*!

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