

## SAN ANTONIO TALK

The topic for today involves the weather. Suppose that the skies have been cloudy and dark and overcast for days, but you see a clear patch of blue heading your way. Sunny days have returned.

So. How do you describe this phenomenon? Let me warn you: among native speakers of American English, enough variety exists to keep language scholars busy. By far, most of you think *clearly* at times like this: "The weather is *clear*; It's *clearing up*; Look at the sky *clear up*; I think it's going to *clear off*." Bagby Atwood, the famous Texas dialectologist, who did his work thirty-five to forty years ago, claims that a little more than half of us are *clear* thinkers. Lee Pederson and his group from Georgia, who completed the huge Gulf Coast survey twenty years ago, claims a little more than sixty percent of Gulf Coast southern speakers like variations of the word *clear*.

For discussion purposes, let's assume that half of us like some variation of *clear*. That leaves that other half, which must use a bit more picturesque and creative English, right? Well, not exactly. A small number of that half (about two percent) just can't get rid of their school-indoctrinated English--you know, the preaching that says not to use two-place verbs, such as *clear up* and *clear off*. This somewhat proper handful of English speakers use the innocuous word *change*. "I think I see a *change* in the weather, old chap." Something like that.

Nonetheless, picturesque and metaphoric usage does exist among us. Lots of American English speakers, for example, think of the

sky as *breaking*. "There's a *break* in the weather; Look at the clouds *break off*; Looks like we're having a *break up* in the weather; The clouds are *breaking up*."

So, with *clearing* and *changing* and *breaking* weather established all over the United States, let's look at a unique southern expression, *fair up* and *fair off*. *Fairing* seems to have linguistic inroads into *breaking*, not into *clearing* or into *change*. According to both Atwood and Pederson, about one-fourth of southern speakers think *fairly* about their weather: "It looks like the weather is going to *fair off*; Do you think it's going to *fair up*?"

But that's not all. Here in Texas, we have our own little linguistic curiosity: *moderating*. That's correct: "The weather is *moderating*." And it does that for about two percent of us.

But what about San Antonio Talk, itself? Well, here in South Texas less than half of us (45%, in fact) watch the weather *clear*, *clear off*, *clear up*, or *clear itself up*. Almost that many of us, (41%) like our weather to *fair off*, *fair up*, or *fair itself off*. A small number of us (12%) watch for a *break* in the weather; watch it *break off*, *break up*, or *break itself up*. And, yes, we do have that predictable, educated bunch (2%) who just watch the weather *change*.

Evidently, we South Texans don't watch the weather *moderate*. I guess we leave *moderation* for those "other" Texans.

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04/24/96