

## SAN ANTONIO TALK

Consider this: your best friend has just phoned and asked if you have time to help out with the Folklife Festival. You are interested, but are not sure how much time your friend needs, so you hedge your answer a bit. So how do you say this?

The most popular San Antonio hedge is "Yes. I *think* I have time."

Other popular San Antonio hedges, however, include *guess*, *believe*, and *imagine*. "I *guess* Carl would like to help out too." "What about Juanita?" "Well, I *believe* she has the time; and I *imagine* their daughters do, too."

A few San Antonians use *reckon* or *suppose*. "Do you really *reckon* all three daughters would help?" "I *suppose* so, yes."

Those of us who like to use *think*, *guess* and *believe* share our preferences with other lowlands southern speakers. We share *thinking*, *guessing*, and *believing*, that is, with kindred dialect speakers that live along the Gulf Coast: Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and the southern part of Texas.

Our sharing, however, is only partial. When we San Antonians choose to *imagine*, most of the other lowlands southern speakers prefer to *reckon*. Don't get me wrong here, now. All of us *imagine* and all of us *reckon*. But *imagining* is far more popular in San Antonio than is *reckoning*: about one time in eight, in fact, we'll *imagine* while we *reckon* only about one time in twenty.

The other lowlands folk reverse these two preferences: they *reckon* about one time in five, while they *imagine* only one time in

twelve. Another small difference between us and them is that few, if any, native San Antonians *expect*--as in "I *expect* the whole family has time, now that you mention it." Other lowlands southern speakers *expect* about two percent of the time.

Interestingly enough, when we lump all of us together--we south Texans and the other Gulf states--men and women use the same local mixtures of *think*, *guess*, *believe*, *imagine*, *reckon*, *suppose*, and *expect*. So do Latinos, Hispanics, African-Americans, and Anglos. The regional mixtures involve us all on an equal basis.

*Think* and *guess*, however, share a weird combination of social correlates: age and education. Younger people and highly educated people both show a higher percentage use of *think* and *guess* than do older folk and less educated folk.

One other social correlation, class distinction, shows up in lowlands southern time hedging: Upper class folk--no matter what gender or ethnic background--really like *believe*; upper and upper-middle class folk share a liking for *think* and *suppose*; and lower class folk hang on to that *reckon*.

And I reckon that means it's time for me to stop.

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Scott Baird  
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