



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG
SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH

Department of Epidemiology
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
415 N. Washington Street, 2nd Floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21231

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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: On the meaning of OK, good, and not too bad

I was raised on a farm in Minnesota, 4 miles west of Sleepy Eye. You can pick out the locals by how they talk.

When we moved to Baltimore people asked where we were from.

Why do you ask?

Because you talk with an accent.

It took years to hear it.

If someone in Sleepy Eye asks for “pop” they are local. If they ask for “soda” they are tourists or city slickers.

Everybody from Sleepy Eye knows a “little lunch” is anything but and that you must partake, even if you just ate.

Farmers wave with their index finger lifted from the steering wheel – both index fingers if they know you!

Waving is subdued back there. You will be taken as a nut job if you wave like you just arrived on the Queen Mary.

And if you want a jar of juice, you can buy it “off sale” at the liquor store.

But these are just tidbits about the culture. What you need to know is the dialect should you be teamed with someone from Minnesota doing a trial.

So you open a conversation with a stranger.

How are you doing?

If the reply is like a Texas used car salesman *Great, couldn't be better*, odds are the person is not from Minnesota. The standard reply for natives is *OK* or *Good*. Nothing more.

In the dialect “OK” and “Good” mean the same thing. “OK” is as good as it gets. There is no higher state.

The dialect is largely devoid of words such as wonderful, splendid, terrific, or excellent. Do not expect to hear them from your Minnesota colleagues.

So you distribute a draft of a study manuscript to your writing team. Your Minnesota colleague gives a three word reply “not too bad”. What do you make of it?

Back where I come from, “not too bad” means OK, good.

Years back I was meeting with a doctoral student about her dissertation. I listened intently to what she reported and when she finished I said *Not too bad* and wrapped up the meeting.

Later that day my secretary asked what I did to my student.

What are you talking about? Why?

Because she was in tears when she left.

Tears! Why? She's doing OK.

Not according to her. She said you told her her dissertation was bad.

Clearly she did not understand the dialect!