Dialects, Based on Patterns

Distinctions that determine how many distinct vowel sounds a speaker has (see How Many Vowels are there in American English?):

Double hatch: $a \rightarrow \alpha \rightarrow \delta$: "cot" = "caught", "Don" = "Dawn", "father" rhymes with "bother". These speakers have only 13 vowels, whereas speakers in other areas have at least 14. (This could be described as "Lowest Common Denominator English"). (See The Cot-Caught Merger.)

Single hatch: Eastern New England: $\delta \rightarrow \delta$: "cot" = "caught", "Don" = "Dawn", "father" does not rhyme with "bother". (Everywhere else on this map except Greater New York City "father" does rhyme with "bother"). These speakers have 14 vowels, but not the same 14 as speakers in the non-hatched areas. (See The Father-Bother Distinction.)

Cot-caught line: Separates "cot" = "caught" and "cot" ≠ "caught" areas.

Greater New York City: $a \neq \delta \neq \delta$: "cot" ≠ "caught", "Don" ≠ "Dawn", "father" does not rhyme with "bother". Southern Britishers (and others outside North America) do the same. However, this appears to be the only area in North America with this three-way distinction.

Short $\alpha$ split "bad" does not rhyme with "bad". (Everywhere else on this map "bad" does rhyme with "bad"). These speakers have 15 vowels, or, in the case of Greater New York City, 15.

“General American”:
Areas with no obvious southern, northern, eastern or western features.
Other distinctions:

- Pin-pan merger: “Pin” and “pen” are pronounced the same, as are all short e’s or i’s before n or m. This is primarily a Southern feature, but has spread far beyond the South.

- Long ə fronting: Indicates how the vowels of “boat”, “road”, “go”, etc. are pronounced, as far as fronting or backing in the mouth. This gradation is mainly from north to south.

- R-dropping: (Highfalutin term “non-rhotic”) Approximate boundary of areas in which white people drop syllable-final r’s. Cities or areas in which only much older speakers do this are marked like this: ☞.

This map generally does not include information about African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which tends to be independent of other dialects, except occasionally in the Lowland South, its true native area.)

- Canadian and Tidewater raising: Area in which the vowels of “out” and “house” are raised (i.e. before any voiceless consonant), but not the vowels of “loud” and “now”. (Only in Canada and the Tidewater South.)

- Bite-bout line: Area in which the vowels of “bite” and “high” are more fronted than the vowels of “bout” and “hau”, and the vowels of “too” and “toe” tend to be monophthongs rather than diphthongs.

- “On” line: North of this “on” rhymes with “Don”, south of it “on” rhymes with “Dawn” (or, in parts of the South from TX to NC, not yet delimited, with “bone”). In San Francisco and South Florida this north-south pattern is reversed. (In the blue-hatched areas “on” rhymes with both “Don” and “Dawn” (but on the edges of the South “on” may rhyme with “bone” instead), so this line would have no meaning in these areas. Even so, in a few places a dotted line is used to connect two sections of the “on” line across a blue-hatched area.)

Non-English areas:
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- Areas where the majority speak a European language other than English
- Same as above, but with a well-established English-speaking minority
- Areas where the majority speak an indigenous language
- Areas where a minority, including some children, speak a specific indigenous language
- Unpopulated areas

Geographic Features:
Items in these two colors represent geographic features, most of which have some direct correlation to some dialect boundary.

- City shown on the maps in the Atlas of North American English (ANAE), or clearly falling within a particular dialect area, but for which I have not confirmed the information or found an audio sample.
- City with data from Internet audio files for which I am fairly confident that the speaker represents well the native dialect. (Click on a particular state or province to see all of these links.)
- City with data from Internet audio files, but for which I am doubtful about the native area of the speaker, or about how much his speech has been influenced from living elsewhere.
- City for which I have listened to a native to determine his dialect, but do not have an audio file.
- Same as the previous, but this also confirms the conclusions of the ANAE. (Only used occasionally.)
- City whose data was obtained from another source, not as audio files, or which was extrapolated from available data. Often these need further investigation.
- City whose dialect status is unclear, because it is near a dialect boundary and no data (or insufficient data) is available, and which needs to be investigated.

(The smaller symbols are for smaller towns, though I have not yet adjusted these for all states and provinces.)