

## **The Sociolinguistics of Bad Data**

Workshop at NWA46, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
November 2-5, 2017.

Convenor:

*Raymond Hickey*  
*University of Duisburg and Essen*

Participants:

*Valerie Fridland, University of Nevada*  
*Matthew J. Gordon, University of Missouri*  
*Tyler Kendall, University of Oregon*  
*Samantha Litty, University of Wisconsin-Madison*  
*Natalie Schilling, Georgetown University*  
*Christopher Strelluf, Warwick University*  
*Erik Thomas, North Carolina State University*

### *Idea behind the proposal*

In recent years linguists have been examining sources of data which are in themselves fragmentary and less than wholly representative of the communities from which they stem but which nonetheless are worthy of analysis for the insights which they provide into earlier stages of many varieties of languages. The sources in question include both early audio recordings and familiar letters (Hickey 2017, 2018). The audio recordings stem largely from the early twentieth century and hence offer a window on varieties over 100 years ago and the familiar letters present us with textual records of unedited vernacular speech and hence reach a level of authenticity not attainable with other kinds of data.

Analysing such 'bad data' in modern sociolinguistic terms requires bearing many caveats in mind. Audio recordings usually have a limited range without social stratification and consist frequently of someone reading a set piece. The quality of the recordings is not always sufficiently good for proper acoustic analysis. However, they may show previously unattested features or at least combinations of features not found later. They may also still show traits which are known to have recently disappeared in varieties. With familiar letters one is often unsure who wrote them, whether they were dictated and the level of education which the writer had. But again, such letters can reveal features and/or combinations of features not otherwise attested and thus increase the insights into variety development.

The aim of this workshop is to bring together a group of scholars, especially those beginning their linguistic careers, to discuss the value of the kinds of documents outlined above for interpretation and analysis and the extent to which they can lead to a revision or confirmation of standard wisdoms on varieties.

### *Innovative character of proposal*

There has to date not been a workshop on this topic at an NWAV conference (or any other for that matter). Thus it is justified to assume that the bringing together of a number of relevant scholars should have a synergistic effect and yield positive results.

### *Relevance to NWAV*

The sociolinguistics of varieties and their recent histories has always been a central concern of NWAV conferences and so this workshop should fit in well to the planned conference at Madison.

### *Proposed structure of workshop*

As the workshops involve two-hour slots, this workshop is to consist of an introductory session (10 mins) by the convener followed by 5 individual presentations on themes within the framework of the workshop. A panel discussion of 10-15 mins should then wind up the workshop.

## **References**

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