

Crowdsourcing dialectology in the undergraduate classroom

The field of dialectology has become a natural venue for research-based teaching methods because data collection and analysis can increasingly be carried out online. This paper reports on an undergraduate dialectology assignment which not only gives students hands-on experience collecting and analysing data, but has also resulted in a public interactive learning tool.

Students enrolled in a large sociolinguistics course at the University of Manchester are instructed to distribute to a minimum of ten acquaintances a questionnaire investigating phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical variation in British English. Under investigation are variables that are known or hypothesised to show regional patterning, e.g., the FOOT/STRUT contrast (Wells 1982), the theme-goal ditransitive (e.g. *Give it me*, Haddican 2010), and the variation between *dinner*, *supper*, and *tea*. All responses are pooled, resulting in a database of over 1000 tokens coded for 22 linguistic variables and 4 social variables (respondents' self-reported age, sex, postcode of origin, and occupation). By crowdsourcing the data collection in this way, we are able to amass a large number of responses with a wide geographic distribution within a matter of weeks. Then, students are taught to use Google's free online mapping tools to colour-code and plot the compiled data, and to draw conclusions about the geographic spread of linguistic change and the location of regional dialect boundaries.

Using this technology, we have mapped each of the 22 linguistic variables examined. These maps are available to the public at <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/maps.html>. As this course is run every year, the maps can be regularly updated, providing a current-day picture of the linguistic landscape. For instance, we find that the FOOT/STRUT boundary is now farther north than Wells (1982) reported. The maps can also serve as teaching tools for English Language at secondary school level and have attracted interest in the national news media.

References

- Haddican, William. 2010. Theme-goal ditransitives and theme passivisation in British English dialects. *Lingua* 120:2424–2443.
- Wells, J.C. 1982. *Accents of English, volume 2: The British Isles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.