

Discussion: Frontiers in the study of language variety

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As the abstracts for the talks in this workshop illustrate, there are various competitors striving for attention in promising advancement in the study of language varieties. Where do the most significant opportunities for advancement lie?

We assume that is valuable to apply state-of-the-art quantitative methodologies to the study of variation (which the groups here have introduced to the study of linguistic variation) and to comparing the results of quantitative studies to earlier scholarship, which we emphatically respect but for which we seek in quantitative, and especially in aggregate analyses an insightful complementary approach. The convening group positions itself firmly within Linguistics and more broadly within the Humanities even while pursuing insight using exact techniques. The vision we pursue will in the long run link language variation study to the more general study of human culture and its complex patterns of diffusion.

Do they lie primarily in new sorts of data collection, e.g. via smartphone or via articulography? Is further research into social variation the key to understanding dialectology? Or do opportunities lie rather in focusing on the bilingual/bidialectal situation of most modern dialect speakers? Or do they lie in new (statistical) opportunities for assessing the geographical association of linguistic varieties? Or in seeking deeper organizing principles beyond geography (such as typology and/or cognitive principles)?