

## Measuring Syntactic Variability in the Linguistic North

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This paper reports on two pilot studies for a large-scale research project which ultimately aims to:

- (i) Systematically collect a corpus of British dialect grammars for the creation of a web-based, methodologically coherent database in Atlas format for modelling geosyntactic variation across the linguistic North. The resulting *Syntactic Atlas of Northern England* (SANE) will be built from interviews and a battery of native speaker judgement tasks along similar lines to those of current European digital atlas projects (Syntactic Atlas of Netherlands' Dialects (SAND) and the Atlas of Northern Italian Dialects (ASIS));
- (ii) Establish sophisticated methodologies for the collection, digital storage/manipulation and multivariate analyses of such data.

The research reported here aimed at testing the strengths/weaknesses of methods commonly used to measure syntactic variability (see Cornips & Corrigan 2005, Cornips & Poletto 2005, Hollmann & Siewierska 2006). We have focused, in particular, on the following:

1. Pictorial tasks
2. Indirect judgments
3. Direct judgments
4. Reformulations
5. Magnitude estimation tasks.

Two communities were targeted on account of their distinctive demographics and particular social histories, namely, Peebles, a small rural town (8,000 inhabitants) on the English-Scottish border and an urban conurbation (Newcastle/Gateshead) in the North East of England (population 880,000). Data was collected using a friend-of-a-friend approach from 16 speakers, stratified by location/gender (Newcastle/Gateshead) and age/gender (Peebles). Some of our findings are exemplified below with respect to the variability of doubling phenomena for Newcastle/Gateshead (a-e below and see <http://www.meertens.nl/projecten/edisyn/>):

- a) Multiple Negation:  
*I **divven't** know **nowt** else you know*
- b) Double Conjunction:  
***Suppose if** ye've a big name, eh...*
- c) Verb doubling:  
*We don't often go out at weekends but **we do do** sometimes.*
- d) Double Modal:  
*He **wouldn't could** have worked even if you had asked him.*
- e) Subject Doubling:  
*That's in ten-sixty-six, **that is.***

Using statistical tests, we assessed the extent of test internal consistency as well as the comparability of results across different instruments. Our findings suggest, e.g., that:

- (i) Reformulation tests are highly problematic since the informants refrained from using vernacular variants;
- (ii) Even with more successful testing instruments, there were some important differences as well as consistencies across the tests (inter-speaker as well as intra-speaker);
- (iii) Results seem most consistent for Magnitude Estimation tasks allowing us to investigate how speaker groups differed in interesting ways regarding the acceptability of constructions. Thus, Newcastle male informants were more inclined to be permissive than their female peers from Gateshead:

*Magnitude Estimation ratings for doubling constructions from Newcastle/Gateshead and male/female informants*

	<b>Multiple Negation</b>	<b>Subject Doubling</b>	<b>Double Modal</b>	<b>Double Conjunction</b>	<b>Verb Doubling</b>
Newcastle	<b>7.7</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>6.17</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>7.1</b>
Gateshead	6.1	6.5	5.97	7	5.15
Male	<b>8.23</b>	<b>6.75</b>	<b>8.33</b>	<b>12.25</b>	<b>6.75</b>
Female	5.58	5.5	3.8	5.85	5.5

- (iv) Interview data and elicited judgement data corresponded and diverged in a number of respects.

This research promises to refine methods for investigating morphosyntactic variation across social/temporal/geographical space and therefore makes an important contribution to the establishment of good practice for the creation of digital dialect atlases as advocated in Kretzschmar *et al.* 2006.

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### References:

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