

Using dialect variation to analyse ongoing change in some British English prepositional structures

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This paper looks at the application of social-media data to the analysis of syntactic structure. Using a corpus of some 546m tweets from 6m British and Irish English Twitter users, it will investigate and map the geospatial distribution of prepositional structures of current interest in the dialect syntax literature. Social-media data gives us access to large data sets of a size that could not be achieved using conventional methods allowing the establishment of large-scale geospatial patterns and the testing of correlations that have been proposed in the literature.

This approach provides a new insight, for instance, into whether a particular case of grammatical variation should be modelled as minor feature-based differences within what is essentially a single grammatical system or as the difference between radically different structures and whether variation arose through a single or multiple innovation. It will be shown that such an approach can be applied fruitfully, for instance, to questions surrounding the analysis of preposition drop (*Let's go pub; Let's go the pub*); why for (*Why are you doing that for? Why for are you doing that?*); or non-directional where to (*Where to is that? Where's that to?*)