

Four Ws and an H of mining corpora for discourse-pragmatic variation

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Despite 50 years of rapid and robust development in variation theory, variationist analysis of discourse-pragmatic features remains embryonic (Pichler 2010:582; see also Macaulay 2002). Because discourse-pragmatic features often have interpersonal functions, their use can be motivated by subjective concerns of the speaker, concerns that are beyond reconstruction by the analyst (see, e.g., Dines 1980; Vincent 1986; Dubois 1992; Stubbe & Holmes 1995; Dubois & Sankoff 2001). Consequently, one of the biggest challenges for the Labovian approach to variation of this sort, systematic though it may be, concerns defining the envelope of variation: *What* meaning and/or function is in fact variable and *where* in linguistic structure does the variation occur? This workshop explores the issues raised by this *when* mining corpora for data: *why* extraction methods matter and *how* to account for and model the variation they encompass. Particular emphasis will be placed on function vs. form-based approaches to the analysis of variation, their intersections with Labovian accountability, and their implications for quantitative modelling.

References

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