

UPDATE ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE RESEARCH CENTRE

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Word-file Digitization Project

Directed by the ELRC Management Committee

With the 30th Anniversary of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English (DNE)* and the launch of the Dialect Atlas of Newfoundland and Labrador behind us, the main current focus of the ELRC is the ongoing *Word-file Digitization Project*, which aims to digitize the more than 100,000 word-files that went into the creation of the *DNE* and to make the data available to interested researchers and the general public. Digitization will also help to preserve the *DNE*'s primary and secondary source records.

There are 72 drawers of cards in total. Last year, 49 of these drawers had been fully digitized and 9 had been partially digitized. At the time of writing, 60 drawers have been fully digitized and 6 have been partially digitized.

Students are keeping pace as best they can but are now dealing with many queried and withdrawn files. These files tend to have a lot of handwriting, mainly editors' notes that can be very difficult to decipher. In fact, the queried files are nearly all handwritten and were questioned because the editors felt that, though the particular lexical item was a Newfoundland-specific usage, they required more evidence in order to include it in the *DNE*. Withdrawn cards are organized a little differently. They typically contain a handwritten note explaining why a certain file was withdrawn, followed by a typed card with the word and citation. The notes on both types of cards often direct student assistants to search other dictionaries (e.g. *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Century Dictionary*, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, etc.) or cited publications (George Allan England's 1924 publication *Vikings of the Ice* is a popular one) for further information.

In short, much work remains before the entire collection can be made available online.

Dialect Atlas of Newfoundland and Labrador

Directed by Sandra Clarke (Linguistics), in collaboration with Philip Hiscock (Folklore). Web design, programming and technical support by Memorial's DELTS (Distance Education, Learning and Teaching Support) and by Computing and Communications (C&C) Webworks.

The online Dialect Atlas of Newfoundland and Labrador was formally launched on October 23, 2013, to considerable media attention. More than a decade in the making, it documents regional differences in selected features of pronunciation, morphosyntax (grammar) and lexicon within the spoken English of the province. Its "structural" component – grounded in regional dialect data for traditional speakers in 69 coastal communities on the island of Newfoundland, assembled in the 1970s and 1980s by linguist Harold Paddock – expands the original project to include information on the geographical distribution of 31 features of pronunciation and 27 features of grammar. Its lexical ("words") component documents responses to a 566-item questionnaire from 126 traditional speakers in 20 representative communities, in both the island and Labrador portions of the province.

The Atlas can be accessed at www.dialectatlas.mun.ca. In addition, a general introduction and overview is provided in a promotional video produced by Debbie McGee of DELTS, located at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10MSgbnYGjk&feature=youtu.be>.

One of the very few online dialect atlases in the English-speaking world, the Atlas is designed to appeal not simply to scholars, educators and students, but also to the public at large. An important component is the provision of thousands of illustrative audio clips for the Atlas' pronunciation features, thereby enabling web users to hear the actual voices of Newfoundland speakers born as early as 1871. An "Activities" section provides site visitors with an opportunity to test their knowledge of – and increase their familiarity with – Newfoundland and Labrador English, in a dynamic and interactive environment. The Atlas also invites contributions and comments concerning current and observed usage of local features of English.

The Atlas has benefitted from financial support from Memorial University in the form of grants from the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) and the J.R. Smallwood Foundation, along with considerable funding for student assistance (full information is provided in the "About" section of the online Atlas). Its present format, however, was made possible by a generous Public Outreach Dissemination Grant awarded in 2011 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Despite its launch, work continues on the Atlas. A "search by community" function is under development. So too is the conversion of its databases to a format that will be made available, upon application, to interested scholars. In addition, the Atlas team is engaging with the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador to develop ways in which the Atlas can be profitably incorporated into the province's school curricula.

Voices of Newfoundland and Labrador

Directed by Sandra Clarke (Linguistics), Philip Hiscock (Folklore), Robert Hollett (English)

This project addresses an important gap in the documentation of Newfoundland and Labrador English: the need for high-quality sound samples representing the wide range of linguistic variation to be found within the province. Over 60 short samples of speech have been digitized from conversational as well as radio interviews. These span the last 50 years, and represent 58 different communities from all areas of the island, along with 11 communities in Labrador.

The project's output – a website containing the digitized speech samples, along with transcripts, notes and interpretive text – is intended not only for a linguistic audience, but for all those with an interest in the cultural heritage of the province.

The Voices website is presently under development. Intended as a sister site to the Dialect Atlas, Voices differs from the Atlas in that its speech samples are considerably longer. In addition, Voices offers two full transcripts, one in standard orthography and one in an orthography representing the non-standard grammatical and pronunciation features of each speaker.

Though the primary focus is on traditional rural speech (the oldest speaker was born in the 1870s), coverage extends to younger urban speakers born in the 1980s. The samples thus provide not only a picture of spoken English as it has evolved over the past century, but also considerable information on the regional differences in phonology and morphosyntax that occur within the province. The identification of the principal linguistic features of each speech sample should provide a baseline for future linguistic work on regional variation in Newfoundland English.

This project has received financial support from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Digital Corpus of St. John's English

Directed by Sandra Clarke (Linguistics)

The ELRC houses a large volume of recordings and questionnaires in various forms. This year, we have begun digitizing one of these collections, Sandra Clarke's Sociolinguistic Survey of St. John's English, assembled in the early 1980s. This corpus consists of 120 one-to-two-hour interviews with St. John's residents; it is stratified by sex, age and socioeconomic status. In addition, the collection contains some 40 supplementary interviews; two subsets of interviews from designated neighbourhoods (Downtown and Rabbittown); and a small set of interviews with city seniors, for a total of more than 220 city residents.

The corpus was originally recorded on cassette, though between 2004 and 2006 a considerable portion of the main 120-speaker sample was digitized to CD. During 2013, the remaining cassette tapes have been digitized to hard drive by undergraduate Linguistics student assistant Matt Samms. In copying the existing CDs to computer, he also discovered issues with sound quality, and has used sound editing software to acoustically enhance a number of the recordings in so far as is possible.

In addition to audio digitizing, the ELRC has begun a full transcription of the conversational segments of the St. John's interviews; prior to 2013, only a total of ten minutes of the conversation portions had been transcribed, and only for the main 120-speaker sample. This has necessitated the development of a new transcription protocol by the Centre. Transcription is currently in progress, and will continue as funding permits.

Such a large database of urban Newfoundland recordings is of obvious importance to sociolinguistic and other researchers. In the summer of 2013, the ELRC was visited by Dr. Nicola Bessell of the University of Cork, who intends to compare word-list portions of a small subset of the St. John's interviews with a comparable sample from southern Ireland. However, the St. John's corpus offers many other potential applications. In keeping with the university's mandate of public outreach and engagement, the ELRC is interested in producing a publicly-accessible online collection of stories told by members of the sample. Many speakers in the conversational interviews reflect on such topics as earlier days in St. John's, changes they have perceived in the city, and attitudes to local culture and local speech. An online website could provide a type of time capsule of St. John's, in much the same way as has the Newcastle Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English

(<http://research.ncl.ac.uk/decte/toon/index.html>) for the Newcastle region of northeastern England.

Student Assistants

Names of Memorial University students who have helped in projects of the English Language Research Centre were presented in *Regional Language Studies... Newfoundland (RLS)* 18, p. 31. Since 2005, 58 students have been employed on the *Word-file Digitization Project*.

Student assistants who have worked with the ELRC on the *Word-file Digitization Project* since November 2012: Marwa Al-Alawi, Kanachi Angadi, Terra Barrett, Joelle Carey, Kyle DeWolfe, Manjot Gill, Meaghan Gill, Nic Hartmann, Josué Kalombo, George Kubansteve, Sarah Milmine, Klara Nichter, Lakshmi Praveen, Shamiso Simango, Brittany Stamp, Cathy Wiseman.

Students who have worked on the online Dialect Atlas of Newfoundland and Labrador in 2013: Suzanne Power and Matt Samms.

Students who have worked on digitizing and transcribing the St. John's audio files in 2013: Janine Davidge, Laura Howell, Eric Kiraly, Cecily McKeever, Sarah Milmine, Rosanna Pierson, Matt Samms, Brittany Stamp, Cathy Wiseman.

We would like to extend a special thanks to Maudie Whelan who has been a volunteer with the ELRC since February 2013. She has been working on the *Word-file Digitization Project* and tackling some of the more difficult withdrawn and queried files.