

DOI: 10.1344/Dialectologia.35.12

REVIEW

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BURKETTE, A., *Dialectology and the Linguistic Atlas Project*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025, 74 pp.

Dialectology and the Linguistic Atlas Project, part of the Elements in Sociolinguistics series, offers a comprehensive exploration of regional language variations and the groundbreaking *Linguistic Atlas Project* (LAP). Published in February 2025, this work by Allison Burkette provides readers with a foundational understanding of dialectology and its evolution. The book introduces the fascinating world of linguistic diversity and examines how people from different regions use varied vocabulary for everyday items. By showcasing the LAP's extensive research and methodologies, Burkette demonstrates how this long-standing project has adapted to meet contemporary sociolinguistic needs, offering valuable insights into the geographic distribution of words, pronunciations, and grammatical constructions across North America.

The compact book is structured into six sections, each likely addressing key aspects of dialectology and the LAP. Readers can expect to gain insights into traditional dialectological study methods, explore the rich history of the Linguistic Atlas Project since its inception in 1929, and understand how it has become the most thorough and

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expansive study of American English to date. Through a combination of audio samples, textual evidence, and maps, Burkette illustrates the project's evolution and its current relevance in the field of sociolinguistics. The book also promises to discuss the LAP's alignment with third-wave sociolinguistics, highlighting how the project has adapted over time to address contemporary research questions and analytical approaches in the study of language variation and change.

The first section, titled *Studying Language Variation and Change*, is a brief overview to the study of language variation and change, focusing on dialectology and its historical development. It explains that dialects are language varieties associated with specific groups, and dialectology primarily examines the geographic distribution of linguistic features. The section highlights the interrelationship between language variation and change, noting that much variation results from language change, while change itself often depends on existing linguistic variations. The author emphasizes that dialectologists have long considered social factors such as age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and education in their research. Overall, it presents dialectology as a field that investigates "who said what and where", with the addition of "when" to encompass language change.

Section 2, *Brief History of Dialect Geography*, offers a glimpse into the study of language variation and change. The author skillfully weaves together historical context, key concepts, and practical examples to provide readers with a solid foundation in dialect geography. The section begins by defining dialectology as the systematic study of dialects, focusing on the regional distribution of linguistic features such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical constructions. It emphasizes the intertwined nature of language variation and change, noting that much variation results from language change, while change itself often depends on existing linguistic variations. The historical overview of dialect geography is particularly enlightening. It traces the field's origins to late 19th century Europe, starting with Georg Wenker (1888-1923)'s ambitious survey of German dialects. The author highlights the evolution of data collection methods, from Wenker's mailed questionnaires to Edmond Edmont's face-to-face interviews using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) for the *Atlas Linguistique de la France*.

In the following, the author introduces key concepts in traditional dialectology, such as display maps, interpretive maps, and isoglosses. He uses clear examples from the LAP to illustrate these concepts, making them accessible to readers. The discussion of “bunk” and “pallet” distributions in the eastern United States demonstrates how linguists use maps to analyze and interpret dialect boundaries.

One of the strengths of this section is its subtle approach to dialect boundaries. The author emphasizes that isoglosses and dialect boundary lines are not absolute dividing lines, introducing the concept of transition zones where features from adjacent dialects overlap. This perspective challenges simplistic notions of dialect regions and highlights the complex nature of language variation. The section also touches on the social aspects of dialectology, noting that dialectologists have long considered factors such as age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and education in their research. Undoubtedly, this acknowledgment of social factors in language variation sets the stage for more in-depth discussions of sociolinguistics. The author’s explanation of the *Wörter und Sachen* (“words and things”) movement is particularly intriguing, highlighting the inseparable connection between words, their meanings, and cultural understanding. The inclusion of visual elements, such as the drawings accompanying the *Italian and Swiss Sprachatlas* maps, demonstrates the multifaceted approach of early dialectologists.

The section concludes with a brief introduction to American dialect geography, setting the stage for a more detailed exploration of the Linguistic Atlas Project. This transition effectively links the European origins of the field to its development in North America.

Section 3, *American Dialect Geography*, provides a fascinating look into the history and methodology of one of the most ambitious dialect studies ever undertaken in the United States. The author skillfully weaves together historical context, key concepts, and practical examples to offer readers a deep understanding of the LAP’s significance in American dialectology. The section begins by tracing the origins of the LAP to a 1929 meeting of American linguists who sought to create an American Linguistic Atlas modeled after European language maps. Hans Kurath, chosen to lead

the project, sought advice from European counterparts and developed a meticulous approach to data collection and fieldworker training.

The author highlights the rigorous preparation undertaken by LAP fieldworkers, including intensive phonetic transcription practice and interview technique refinement. This training aimed to ensure consistency across fieldworkers and accuracy in representing regional speech patterns. The scale of the LAP is impressive, with the initial Linguistic Atlas of New England (LANE) involving 416 interviews conducted over three years, each lasting 6-10 hours. Subsequent regional surveys expanded the project's scope, ultimately encompassing data from about 5,500 speakers across multiple decades.

The section offers valuable insights into the challenges and innovations of early dialect research. For instance, it describes the use of portable recording equipment to capture speech samples in informants' homes, a novel approach at the time. The author also addresses the demographic limitations of early LAP data, which tended to focus on older, rural, white male speakers (NORMs), while noting efforts to diversify informants in later surveys. Kurath (1933)'s approach to mapping dialect boundaries is also explained in detail, showcasing how isoglosses for specific lexical items were used to delineate major dialect regions in the eastern United States. The author thoughtfully notes that these boundaries represent a "best fit" approach, influenced by Kurath's knowledge of settlement patterns and migration routes.

The section concludes with a reflection on the current state of the LAP materials, describing the vast collection of data awaiting further exploration and emphasizing the human element behind the project. It portrays the LAP not just as a linguistic endeavor, but as a testament to the dedication of fieldworkers, informants, and researchers who contributed to this monumental study of American English dialects.

Section 4, *The Atlas Interview*, provides fascinating insights into the methodology and richness of data collected in this landmark dialectology study. The author skillfully weaves together historical context, practical details, and examples to illustrate the depth and breadth of information gathered through the LAP interviews. The section begins by highlighting the meticulous preparation undertaken by LAP fieldworkers, quoting Hans Kurath's sage advice to "Beware preconceived notions" and "Rejoice in

discovering new facts". This emphasis on open-mindedness and keen observation set the tone for the project's approach to data collection.

The author details the interview targets, which included over 800 linguistic items covering lexical, pronunciation, and grammatical features. Examples of these targets demonstrate the careful crafting of questions to elicit specific responses, such as "Sometimes you make up a batter and fry three or four of these at a time. You eat them with syrup and butter. What would you call these?" to elicit the term "pancakes". One of the most intriguing aspects of the LAP interviews was the inclusion of "character sketches" for each informant. These brief descriptions offer a vivid glimpse into the personalities and speech patterns of the interviewees, with colorful examples like a 78-year-old woman who "Sat puffing away at her pipe, enjoying the questionnaire from beginning to end" and whose speech was described as "quaintly antique and vulgar".

The author provides a detailed explanation of the interview worksheets, using figures to illustrate how responses were recorded and annotated. This insight into the physical documentation process helps readers understand the meticulous nature of the data collection and the wealth of information contained in each interview. He emphasizes that the LAP interviews were not simply "butterfly collecting" of words and phrases, but rather in-depth conversations that sought to understand the contexts and nuances of language use. This approach resulted in a rich dataset that offers "a detailed portrait of that individual and about what life was like in that place at that point in time".

Section 5, *LAP Language Data*, begins by highlighting the vast collection of comparable datasets from regional surveys across the US, emphasizing the varying degrees of accessibility and processing required for different surveys. This sets the stage for understanding the complexity and richness of LAP data. Using the example of "thunderstorm" responses, the author demonstrates how data has been collected and analyzed across different regional projects. The Linguistic Atlas of New England (LANE) example showcases the transition from handwritten IPA transcriptions to published maps, illustrating the meticulous work involved in early dialect studies. The part on the *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States* (LAGS) further emphasizes the comparability of data

across regional surveys, highlighting differences in variant frequencies between LAGS and LAMSAS. The Linguistic Atlas of the Middle Rockies (LAMR) example demonstrates a more recent approach to data collection, featuring full interview transcripts. This method provides additional context and commentary, offering opportunities for discourse analysis and deeper exploration of meaning-making in individual interactions.

The author concludes by emphasizing the significant impact of technological advancements on LAP research. Improved audio recording, computer storage, and computational tools have expanded research applications and made complex analyses more accessible to researchers with basic computing skills. He also introduces the concept of “third-wave thinking” in sociolinguistics, briefly outlining the progression from first-wave to third-wave approaches. This discussion sets the stage for understanding how modern dialectology research, including LAP studies, has evolved to focus on speakers as “stylistic agents” engaged in ongoing projects of self-construction and differentiation (Eckert 2012).

In the concluding section, *Third-Wave Thinking*, the author skillfully traces the progression from first-wave to third-wave approaches, highlighting key shifts in methodology and theoretical frameworks. The section begins by grounding third-wave studies in the concept of social practice, emphasizing the view of speakers as “stylistic agents” engaged in ongoing identity construction (Eckert 2012). This perspective marks a significant departure from earlier approaches that treated speakers as passive carriers of dialect features.

The author effectively outlines the three waves of sociolinguistic study, from the first wave’s focus on correlations between social variables and linguistic features (Labov 1966, Trudgill 1972) to the second wave’s emphasis on ethnography and social networks (Eckert 1989, Milroy 1987). The third wave’s concentration on practice, indexicality, style, and identity is presented as a natural progression in the field’s development.

The discussion of how these waves apply to dialectology is particularly illuminating. The author traces the evolution of the LAP from its initial goal of delineating dialect boundaries to a more sophisticated approach that investigates variation within response databases. This shift is exemplified by the work of

researchers like Pederson (1993) and Kretzschmar (1996), who moved away from isogloss mapping to focus on individual word studies and social extensions of linguistic features. The section also highlights significant technological advancements that have shaped second-wave dialect studies, such as portable audio recorders and computer-aided data analysis. These developments have enabled more sophisticated approaches to data collection and analysis, as demonstrated by Light and Kretzschmar's (1996) probability maps.

The author's discussion of the asymptotic hyperbolic curve (a-curve) as a pattern of variation in Atlas data is particularly intriguing. This concept, developed by Kretzschmar and others, provides a new way of understanding the distribution of linguistic features across datasets (Kretzschmar 2018, Burkette 2013). The author then highlights ongoing work in acoustic analysis of heritage recordings (Renwick & Olsen 2017, Jones & Renwick 2021) and efforts to clean and analyze century-old recordings.

In conclusion, as it has been explored throughout the review, the book provides a solid foundation for understanding dialectology and the LAP. It balances historical context with key concepts and practical examples, making it an invaluable resource for students and researchers interested in dialectology, language variation and change. The author's clear writing style and use of visual aids enhance undoubtedly the reader's understanding of complex linguistic concepts. Moreover, the book provides a compelling look into the inner workings of the Linguistic Atlas Project, highlighting its innovative methodology and the wealth of linguistic and cultural data it produced. It is worth noting that the author's clear explanations and use of specific examples make the complex process of dialectology research accessible and engaging to readers.

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