

On Writing the History of the Study of English Dialects

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In the spring of 2017, my textbook *Studying Dialect* will be published by Palgrave Macmillan. This is a history of the scholarly study of regional varieties of English across the world from the sixteenth century to the present day, aimed primarily at university students. My paper will summarize and clarify all the key choices that faced me in the writing of the book, from issues of style, structure, and terminology to selection of content.

Questions to be considered:

When does the history of the study of English dialects begin?

What have been the main motives for research into English dialects?

To what extent should one refer to works on regional variation in other languages?

Which names does one use for the various approaches that have been followed by scholars during this history?

How does one build a readable narrative that engages the student reader while also dealing with complex details of methodology and theory?

To what extent does one take into account previous histories of dialect study?

How does one judge the balance between evaluation and description of the works being discussed?

How does one judge which works should be mentioned and which should be excluded?

Should the book follow a chronological or a thematic approach?

What is the best contemporary medium for publication?

In conclusion, such a project has the potential to affect the historiography of dialect study and its constituent disciplines: to what extent can or should one plan for this potential outcome in advance of writing the book?

The paper will include reference to the following areas: dialectology, sociolinguistics, lexicography, linguistic cartography, language variation and change, perceptual dialectology, and geolinguistics.