

## The problem of field worker isoglosses

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Data acquisition for the regional linguistic atlases of the last decades typically was a matter of direct investigation by trained field workers. They directly wrote down the informants answers in a questionnaire using phonetic transcription. Because of the enormous amount of work, which this method implied, there was usually no alternative to splitting the area under investigation among the involved researchers.

As the dialectometric analysis of data from the *Sprachatlas von Mittelfranken* - which is a subproject of the *Bayerischer Sprachatlas* - showed, this approach may lead to differences in the data that actually do not represent diatopic variation but are based on individual transcription habits instead.

If such differences result in isoglosses separating not speech areas but different field workers' investigation areas ("field worker isoglosses"), researchers run the risk of mapping organizational structures of the project instead of truly linguistic similarity or difference. Examples from modern linguistic atlases will show that this has really happened. The reasons are not inattention or a lack in awareness for the problem, but the reliance in the comprehensive and diligently arranged provisions to avoid individual differences in transcribing.

The web-based application *Gabmap*, which provides different mostly dialectometric tools for linguistic data analysis, together with some more traditional procedures, enables the user to find out about such unrequested characteristics.

In my talk I will explain the problem of field worker isoglosses and illustrate its impact on the interpretation of linguistic data. The methods to detect those pseudo-linguistic differences in large quantities of data will be demonstrated to reflect on possible implications for future linguistic investigation and data analysis.