Abstract

In this project, I will assess and evaluate the temporal accuracy of the language in the popular television show *Mad Men* by comparing it to languages from two other television shows: *The Twilight Zone* and *House of Cards* (2013). I have also included another point of comparison, which focuses on distributions of selected temporal words from the Google N-gram viewer. The Google N-gram viewer is comprised of over 5.2 million books from Google Books, a subdivision of Google Inc. that has conducted an extensive scanning of published manuscripts in order to create a database of electronic or digitized texts. The number of currently scanned books comprises approximately 4% of all the books ever written in English (Bohannon, 2011). This mega-corpus contains over 500 billions words—the majority of which are in English (Friginal, Walker, and Randall, 2014).

I have specifically chosen the two television shows in order to represent the different eras that mark the show *Mad Men*. *The Twilight Zone* represents a show that coincides with the era that *Mad Men* depicts, while *House of Cards* represents a show that coincides with the era that *Mad Men* airs. This project explores if there are any contrasting but systematic patterns that can be found within the shows that aired in these different time periods. Analyzing whether *Mad Men*, a show airing in the 21st century but set in the mid-20th century, is more similar to its contemporary (*House of Cards*) or of a show from the time in which *Mad Men* is set (*The Twilight Zone*) allows me to better evaluate the temporal linguistic accuracy of the show. In addition, the Google N-gram viewer provides a nearly institutional reference to which I can compare the language of the show.
My exploratory results (currently being finalized and interpreted) indicate that patterns of variations that show linguistic historical inaccuracies in Mad Men can be captured using corpus-based comparison. I will discuss societal and pedagogic implications of data.

*Keywords: diachronic study, television, Mad Men, The Twilight Zone, House of Cards, digital humanities, corpus linguistics*