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*