

DLLL, Lecture Series in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics

**Thursday, September 26, 2013**

**5:15 pm**

**Room Ross S 562**

**Sali A. Tagliamonte**

*University of Toronto, Department of Linguistics*

## **Probabilistic syntax in sociolinguistic corpora: The dative alternation**

*Recent research shows that corpora provide a good model of probabilistic syntactic choices (e.g. Bresnan, Cueni, Hikitina & Baayen, 2007; Bresnan & Ford, 2010; Bresnan & Hay, 2008). Variation between double object (1a) vs. prepositional dative constructions (with to), (1b), is a showcase feature.*

(1) a. Give me some all-dressed pizza.      b. Give some all-dressed pizza to me.

*The choice between these constructions has been found to have highly regular statistical patterns yet research has demonstrated a contrast in the ranking of these effects across varieties of English. This is perhaps due to the fact that the dative alternation has been diverging in varieties of English for several centuries (e.g. Bresnan & Hay, 2008). This is possibly due to pressure for shorter texts (e.g. Hinrichs, 2007); however shifting language styles and colloquialization may also be at play (e.g. Leech & Smith, 1994). All this points to external (socio-cultural) influences. Yet so far there have been no analyses of socially stratified corpora where each speaker's age, sex, education and social class are known and can be tested.*

*This paper seeks to redress this gap in the literature by providing a comparative cross-variety analysis of spoken Canadian (CdnE) and British English (BrE). While there is strong convergence across varieties in their linguistic patterns, the results also show subtle contrasts, supportive to a usage-based model of grammar.*

**\*Reception to follow in the DLLL lounge\***