

Linguistic variation and construction grammar: evidentials in Canadian English  
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In this talk, I present some findings from my analysis of data collected by Sali Tagliamonte and her research team at the University of Toronto as part of the Ontario English Dialects Project. Looking at material from speakers from a rural Ontarian town, I focus on variation in the forms of BE used in existential constructions, to further our understanding of how usage-based construction grammar and variationist sociolinguistics can mutually inform one another to provide a plausible account of variable patterns. I suggest that the architecture of construction grammar is able to account both for variation both at the level of the individual speaker and at more abstract group, network or community levels. Further, the framework provides a principled account of language internal constraints, namely the relationship between variation in the structure of the pivot DP in existentials, and agreement markers on the verb. From the perspective of language change, I consider the contrast between indexical and symbolic relations in Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001) and relate the development of the chunked contemporary form *there's* in the Canadian data to the establishment of *there* as an indexical marker of existentials in earlier English (Jenset 2010).