Examining 'Bad Data': Ego Documents in the History of English

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Historical data sources and text types available for linguistic investigations depend on the literacy rates, and the text production, of the English-speaking population in different time periods. As education opportunities and therefore literacy acquisition were socially stratified until the Elementary Education Act, written language use before 1870 will have varied greatly. A text category that can be found across the entire social spectrum of those who could write are so-called ego documents – including autobiographies, diaries, or letters. The lecture will consider ego documents as a data source for historians of the English language, with the main focus on Irish emigrant letters.