

# Author's preface

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.40.preface>

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**The Written Questionnaire in Social Dialectology: History, theory, practice**

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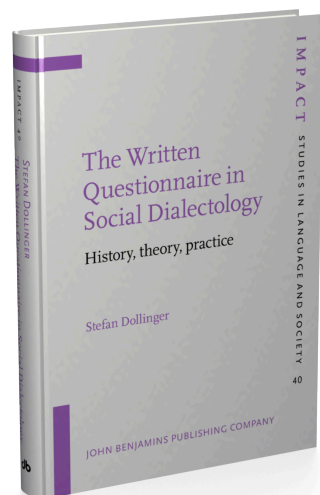
[*IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society*, 40]

2015. xxvii, 397 pp.

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## Author's preface

When somebody studies a method without the direct assistance of an experienced practitioner, one is forced to glean insights from the existing literature on the one hand, and to learn by trial-and-error on the other hand. In linguistics, one will quickly find that articles reporting results based on the method in question do not always offer, or if then only in a very limited way, practical instructions on how to proceed. This book has its origins in such attempt. When I first used written questionnaires in the summer of 2008, I was trying to make sense of the methodological sections of existing questionnaire studies, but quickly realized that the method appeared to be only loosely defined and that practices would sometimes stand in outright contradiction.

The problem of an apparent lack of universal guidelines became especially obvious when the method was presented to students, whom I required to collect data in a UBC course on Varieties of English (ENGL 323A) in the fall of 2008. While the results from this class-based survey were as good as those published (some discussed in Dollinger 2012a, 2012b), it became obvious that a lot of methodological potential remained untapped. As attempts to gather information on principles and best practices from those who had been actively engaged with written linguistic questionnaires was not particularly helpful either, the idea of composing some sort of “guide” for the design of linguistic questionnaires was first conceived in the spring of 2009. Over the years, the blueprint of the book was extended more and more, including theories, some of long-standing and some newer ones, as three draft manuscripts were tested in advanced upper-level undergraduate courses.

Originally, this book was intended as a combination of previously published articles and some newly commissioned papers and section introductions. It is thanks to Kees Vaes of John Benjamins, who, while seeing the potential in the idea, suggested that the text should offer maximum coherence. At a time when Praat and sociophonetics were already buzzwords and were being used in more and more contexts by more and more people, a proposal by a junior scholar on an apparently “old-fashioned” method of yesteryear might have seemed strange on many an editor's desk. Not so with John Benjamins and Ana Deumert's *IMPACT* series, whose assistance resulted in a much improved book. I hope that the outcome will at least in part meet with approval.

Experience with multiple methods improves any field. Should this book facilitate this overall goal somewhat, it will have served its purpose.

Vancouver, Canada, 1 May 2015

