

## Non-standardization: On the historical enregisterment of *ain't* in 19<sup>th</sup> century American newspapers

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Anderwald specializes in corpus-based variation studies, comparative dialect grammar, and grammar writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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### ABOUT THE TALK

The emergence of a "non-standard" register is quite obviously the flipside of standardization: if there is no standard, there can be no non-standard. If standardization is the suppression of optional variation (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 22), then a non-standard can be thought to emerge when optional variation is "relegated" to a register of non-standard, vernacular forms, or is reassigned non-standard status (i.e. stigmatized). Perhaps the most stigmatized widely-used form today is *ain't*, a historically well-established negative contraction for all forms of present tense BE and HAVE (and, more recently, DO).

In this talk, I will try to show that "relegation to non-standard" is not an automatic by-product of codification or prescription, but a deliberate construction by interested parties, a process I will call "non-standardization". Taking *ain't* as my example, I trace the historical enregisterment of this negated verb in historical newspaper data (taken from the *AHN* database).

AHN: America's Historical Newspapers: <https://www.readex.com/products/americas-historical-newspapers>

Milroy, J. & Milroy, L. 1999 [1985]. *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London & New York: Routledge.

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