
Coffee Zone: Del cafetal al futuro / From the coffee fields to the future

Mark Anderson

mark-anderson@uiowa.edu

University of Iowa, United States of America

Hannah Scates Kettler

hannahskettler@gmail.com

University of Iowa, United States of America

In the last decade, the number of coffee farms in Puerto Rico has shrunk from around 11,000 to nearly 4,000. Economic and climate conditions, as well as the increased migration of young people to the more cosmopolitan coastal areas in pursuit of education, have resulted in significant changes to the island's coffee-growing regions. These changes, especially with regard to linguistic characteristics of the coffee growers themselves, have been the subject of a multi-year study by University of Iowa Linguistics Professor Julia Oliver Rajan.

The Digital Scholarship & Publishing Studio at the University of Iowa collaborates with faculty and students on the digital design, implementation, and circulation of their research. The Studio embraces scholarly creativity and encourages interdisciplinary research and multiplatform circulation. In this manner, the Studio helps scholars tailor the presentation and application of their research to a variety of audiences.

Together with Professor Oliver Rajan, the Studio has created a unique bilingual (in Spanish and English) digital archive of oral history videos – Coffee Zone: Del cafetal al futuro / From the Coffee Fields to the Future documents a vanishing dialect of Spanish spoken in the mountainous coffee growing regions of Puerto Rico. Currently consisting of over 600 short video clips in 16 topical categories, the archive demonstrates how rapid migration to the cities has altered the power structures of coffee plantations, the role of women and young people, and the new landscape of coffee production. The site can serve as a template for other researchers who are documenting similarly endangered languages or dialects in other parts of the world.

We propose to present a poster at DH2017 reporting the progress and challenges of this digital humanities project, how it acts as a resource for scholars and students in a wide variety of disciplines (ecology, horticulture, psychology, and obviously linguistics, just to name a few), and the upcoming features we are working to implement. We will outline the upcoming features and how this specific project, though currently focused on linguistic shifts in the coffee zone, applies to much larger, global concerns of globalized economies, climate change and the loss of language as it relates to cultural identity.

Although the videos are now freely available worldwide, accessibility is limited because they are neither transcribed nor translated from their original Spanish. Closed captions in the videos would enhance their usefulness to a wider audience, but a major challenge lies in the very nature of the oral histories – the unique dialect of Spanish spoken by the interviewees. To overcome this, we look to expand the project by collaborating with the University of Puerto Rico, where they would contribute to it by assisting with the tasks of transcription, translation, and caption encoding as well as test the site in their courses. Another feature we look to add is an interactive map showing the geographic areas affected by these changes, which would function as an additional access point to the videos themselves.