Recent years have seen increasing interest among linguists in what is known as syntactic microvariation, which refers to syntactic differences across otherwise closely related dialects of the same language. Recent studies have revealed numerous syntactic phenomena that vary across dialects of American English. To date, however, there exists no comprehensive resource elucidating what kinds of syntactic phenomena are subject to microvariation in American English, or where, geographically, such microvariation is found.

In this talk, I will present the prospects and some challenges for the creation of an Atlas of American English Syntax. I will outline some reasons why we should want such an atlas, and then present some methodologies aimed at achieving this goal. I will focus in particular on cases where statistical analysis of gradient acceptability judgments can help us determine when a geospatial distribution is significant.

Although there are some challenges, I conclude on an optimistic note: we can and should create an Atlas of American English Syntax. Moreover, an atlas would only be the beginning. The methodology I will discuss can be applied quite generally, whenever syntactic microvariation is encountered. The availability of such resources therefore provides a general opportunity for theoretical syntacticians, dialectologists, and other scholars of language variation to engage in an open-ended dialogue that promises to deepen our understanding of syntax specifically and language more generally.