Abstract

The HMS "Chesapeake" was a ship that sailed during the height of the British Empire. This ship had many wonderful attributes, one of them being a handwritten newspaper, "The Young Idea." I grew curious about the literacy of the men in the navy through reading, transcribing, and coding this newspaper. Through looking at the types of slang and vocabulary used, I believe I can determine the class of the contributors, which in turn allows me to speculate on how literate they are.

Introduction

"The Young Idea" is a shipboard newspaper from the height of the British Empire. This series of newspaper editions were all hand-written, with a few passed around the to crew of the HMS "Chesapeake". Unfortunately, there were no surviving editions of "The Young Idea." There are, however, surviving witnesses of this handwritten newspaper. One is in the Chaplain's J.W.L. Bampfield's personal diary, the other is a published book, "The Young Idea: A Naval Journal Edited on Board the H.M.S. Chesapeake in 1857, 1858 & 1859." Using these two sources, I embarked on a voyage to answer my question: What was the average education level of the average sailor who contributed to the newspaper and is it possible to determine it through analyzing and transcribing these two witnesses? I decided to try to answer this question by looking at the different types of slangs used by the contributors to the articles.

My Research

My research is centered around the idea that jargon and slang are class dividers. People are often put into groupings based around how they speak, and many people who use slang are often seen as less intelligent than those who always use proper vocabulary. An example for this would be, for the time period, someone who is of a certain social standing will have an understanding of what the term "Let's have a butcher's" means versus someone who does not. This is an example of slang used in the city of London, so it would be easier to assume that the author who wrote that would be of a lower social class, and thereby less educated.

The problem with this methodology is that there is very little written about slang. Slang is more often spoken than written, but this is where transcribing the to crew of the HMS "Chesapeake" in 1857, 1858 & 1859 proves crucial to that project.

Our team also has plans for conferences that we will ideally attend this summer. The money originally put towards the trip to Lyon, France would be used on this trip. This conference specifically discusses and aids humanities researchers interested in studying maritime research topics. It is much more informal than the other conference, but it would still be an incredible experience, no matter the formality of the situation.

My Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship started in September when my mentor, Dr. Mary Isbell, had the class I was taking with her read a review written in "The Young Idea." She introduced us to the shipboard newspaper and what she enjoyed researching for it. She mentioned SURF to all of us and encouraged us to talk to her if we were interested, but quickly redirected our attention to the review, I was completely interested.

My research process was very difficult. It involved long hours of reading plain handwriting and engraved handwriting from the late 1850s and typing everything I saw into a plain text file. Once that was finished, I took my coding, and is it possible to determine it through analyzing and transcribing these two sources, I decided to try to answer this question by looking at the different types of slangs used by the contributors to the articles.

My SURF

My SURF was all correct and the tags all made sense. I then took my Editor application, and trying to make it so that the coding literacy of the men in the navy through reading, transcribing, and coding this newspaper. Through looking at the types of slang and vocabulary used, I believe I can determine the class of the contributors, which in turn allows me to speculate on how literate they are.

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