Immigration and words, 500 words

This homework requires very little library work but a good bit of talking to people:

- Drawing on the Words Used in Wisconsin chapter, Vaux’s dialect survey (and especially the Wisconsin link I gave you), and our classroom discussions, identify at least 6 words or phrases that are associated with Wisconsin.
- Using the Dictionary of American Regional English (available in several libraries on campus) and the Oxford English Dictionary (available online through the library website), sketch the origins of these words, and how / why they came to be associated with Wisconsin. (You can definitely use other sources as well, just list what they are.)
- Informally interview at least 4 people about their use of these words and other words that they associate with the place they’re from.

First, think carefully about what words/phrases you want to use and who you want to talk to and try to get a coherent set in some way. Two examples:

- Are you interested in changes in vocabulary? If so, choose some words that you think are more used by older people and some you think are more used by younger people. Then talk to two younger and two older people about the words. For instance, some of the German words talked about in the chapter are probably fading away, and some of the ‘tag questions’ may be.
- Are you interested in vocabulary differences? If so, choose some words that you think are associated particular parts of the state or which differ across the state, like pop vs. soda, or bubbler vs. drinking fountain. Then talk to people from the relevant areas, for those examples, people from eastern vs. western Wisconsin.

Second, think about how you’re going to ask people. You heard from Alyson, Sam and Christine about how they approach related issues, but there are lots of ways to go about this. Here are some options:

- Asking questions to elicit the word, like: ‘What do you call the thing in public places where you can get a drink of water?’ (Vaux has tons of examples of how to do this.) For some things, you can use pictures. These get at actual usage relatively well.
- Asking direct questions about words or types of words, like: ‘Do you ever say ‘ainna’ at the end of a sentence to make it a question?’ ‘Do you know of any Norwegian words that are used around here?’
- Asking about people’s perceptions of words and kinds of words, like: ‘I’ve heard people on campus talk about being Sconnies. Who uses that word? What other words do the same people use that are distinctive?’
- Definitely ask follow-up questions and open-ended questions too. You learn a lot that way.

By the way, if we were doing this as graduate research or for publication, we would be required to get IRB (institutional review board) approval for work with ‘human subjects’. If you decided to
do your paper on this kind of work, we would want to get that clearance, if it looked like your results would likely be something that could be presented at a conference or even published.

50 pts