Prof. Burt Monroe, Penn State University

“Estimating Legislator Positions from Speech”

Abstract: Penn State hosts several ongoing projects for the development of legislative/parliamentary speech data and techniques for the analysis of such data. In this talk, I will discuss the current iteration of efforts to develop techniques for using speech data to estimate the spatial positions legislator and parties.

The earliest version (Monroe and Maeda 2004) introduced a count-data item response model, largely analogous to binary item response models that have long been used to estimate positions from recorded [rollcall] vote data.

The current version takes advantage of preprocessing speech through a dynamic topic model (Quinn, et al 2010) (providing different topical "channels" from which to draw more contextual information about any given text fragment), explicit partisan tagging (providing a structured "filter" to better separate specifically political differences in speech), and dynamic estimation of the partisan content of language (Monroe et al 2008).

I will discuss examples and applications, and contrast with alternative approaches and data sources.