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Talking Appalachian: Voice, Identity, and Community

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Recommended Citation

Clark, Amy D. and Hayward, Nancy M., "Talking Appalachian: Voice, Identity, and Community" (2013). *Appalachian Studies*. 27.
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/upk_appalachian_studies/27

TALKING APPALACHIAN

Voice, Identity, and Community



Edited by AMY D. CLARK and NANCY M. HAYWARD

Talking Appalachian

TALKING APPALACHIAN

*Voice, Identity,
and Community*

Edited by

Amy D. Clark
and

Nancy M. Hayward



UNIVERSITY PRESS OF KENTUCKY

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Scholarly publisher for the Commonwealth,
serving Bellarmine University, Berea College, Centre College of Kentucky, Eastern
Kentucky University, The Filson Historical Society, Georgetown College, Kentucky
Historical Society, Kentucky State University, Morehead State University, Murray
State University, Northern Kentucky University, Transylvania University, University of
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Editorial and Sales Offices: The University Press of Kentucky
663 South Limestone Street, Lexington, Kentucky 40508-4008
www.kentuckypress.com

17 16 15 14 13 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Talking Appalachian : voice, Identity, And Community / Edited by Amy D. Clark and
Nancy M. Hayward.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8131-4096-4 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8131-4097-1 (epub) —

ISBN 978-0-8131-4158-9 (pdf)

1. English language—Dialects—Appalachian Region. 2. English language—Variation—
United States. 3. Americanisms—Appalachian Region. 4. Appalachian Region—
Languages. I. Clark, Amy (Amy D.) editor of compilation. II. Hayward, Nancy M.,
1945- editor of compilation.

PE2970.A6T35 2013

427'.974—dc23

2012045878

This book is printed on acid-free paper meeting the requirements of the American National
Standard for Permanence in Paper for Printed Library Materials.



Manufactured in the United States of America.



Member of the Association of
American University Presses

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Preface

As editors, we came to this book with personal histories in Appalachia and keen interests in language. To clarify why we are so passionate about this topic, we offer our stories.

Amy D. Clark

I grew up in the far southwestern corner of Virginia in what might be called the heart of Appalachia, a part of the state that converges with eastern Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina, and southern West Virginia. Born to teenage parents, I was a fourth living generation in a family of front porch storytellers, so numerous linguistic heirlooms were passed on to me over the years.

My great-grandmother (whom we called “Mamaw”) sparked my interest in the history of Appalachian Englishes. I grew up just a mile from her farm in Jonesville, Virginia. She referred to a bedspread as a “counterpane” and the peacocks that clattered on the roof of her house and in the surrounding woods as “pea-fowls.” She talked about what she “commenced to” do that day and warned us that we would “feel right common” the next morning if we ate too many green apples. She and my great-grandfather told stories about “haints” that had—at certain points in their pasts—revealed themselves up and down the “holler” where they lived. While growing up, I attributed the different kind of English they spoke to their ages; I thought it was just the way older people from the hills talked. But I also remember how Mamaw described our ancestors, a strange breed originally from Scotland. It would be years later, when I returned to her recorded voice and heard the melody in her vocabulary and grammar and the way she pronounced her words that I would begin

to link her version of English to the place we call home and to my own language patterns.

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, I watched enough television to see and hear the cultural demarcation between mainstream America and my region, particularly in the way people in my family and in my community spoke. I loved to read, but I was never introduced to Appalachian literature in my high school English classes, where I might have recognized my home voice in that of the characters. Our curriculum did not include classes that invited discussions of Appalachian issues or culture, so I did not identify as an Appalachian, nor did I understand that I spoke a particular regional dialect. Because I devoured so much literature, I had tacit knowledge of the rules of standard American English (SAE) and honed the skill of code-switching from an early age; I could turn off my dialect when I wanted to, but it was always at the risk of teasing from friends and family who believed that SAE was for people who thought they were too good to be associated with our neck of the woods.

A class at Clinch Valley College (renamed the University of Virginia's College at Wise in 1999) changed all that. The class, called Appalachian Prose and Poetry, introduced me to James Still, Lee Smith, Mary Lee Settle, Harriette Simpson Arnow, and many others. Their characters' voices mirrored my own. I remember feeling so proud when I realized that my culture was worthy of study, that an entire field was dedicated to my homeplace, people, and culture.

As my research project for the course, I began working on an oral history of my great-grandmother's life. I spent hours transcribing stories that I had heard growing up, but for the first time I was actually *listening* to the poetry of her dialect: the rhythm in her accent, the expressions as colorful and musty as old-timey clothing in a trunk, the creative syntax of her sentences. I realized that my entire life had been an education in Appalachian studies, that there were people who wanted to read about the kinds of stories I had listened to over and over again, and that my vernacular dialect—my *home voice*—would be invited into that discussion. It was a watershed moment in owning my identity as an Appalachian.

As an educator in central Appalachia, I work to cultivate an understanding and appreciation of the region's dialectal diversity, particularly for students who may face well-meaning but misguided ideologies about

vernacular dialects in the classroom. In my view, referring to a student's vernacular speech or writing as "bad grammar" denigrates her family, her community, and her culture. In contrast, teaching a student about the origins, linguistic structure, and rich literature associated with her "voiceplace" may have far-reaching benefits in how she perceives herself as well as the place she calls home. For many of us who speak the dialects described in this book, our speech *is* home, so how we choose to name and talk about it matters. Most speakers like me know very little about their linguistic histories or why they speak the way they do because discussions of dialects are rarely a part of general educational curriculums. The result is a gulf between what we believe about our speech and the *true* influences that pepper our dialectal patterns. For me, this book represents a bridging of that gulf.

Nancy M. Hayward

My mother, and her family before her, came from western Virginia. I was born into a small coal mining community, and although I lived there only a short time, my sense of self resonates with that part of the country. Perhaps that's because some of my earliest—and best—memories were created while listening to the sounds of my mother's people. Their storytelling was richly interwoven with their identities of belonging to that place, in that time, and in that community.

Now, as an academic, I recognize that my interest in language was nurtured during the summers I spent in Virginia. My curiosity about how languages are affiliated with place and identity has driven my work. Studying—and then teaching—sociolinguistics clarified why my mother never lost any of her original pronunciations or the particular cadence of her speech: her identity was entangled in her love of Virginia. Even though she lived in the Northeast for most of her adult life, she was never *of* that place.

Unlike Amy, I can't credit my interest in Appalachian Englishes to rich lived experiences. My academic pursuits introduced me to the issues embodied in this book. However, having lived in southwestern Pennsylvania for thirty years, I now recognize that the people of this place have struggled with many of the same issues as the rest of Appalachia: the eco-

nomic downturns of coal mining, the destruction of beautiful mountain-scapes, and the stigma of being from a place called “Pennsylvucky.”

A Final Note

Given the complexity of the subject, this volume cannot possibly cover all aspects of the region’s rich and diverse range of dialects, but we believe it is a first step toward assembling the scholars and creative writers who best know the varieties of Appalachian English. We anticipate a growing interest in Appalachia’s linguistic diversity and expect that the topics in this work will continue to evolve—and expand—as other voices join the conversation.

Introduction

Amy D. Clark and Nancy M. Hayward

To every person who has asked us why Appalachians sound like hillbillies, to every teacher who corrected us for taking our home voices to school, and to every misguided individual who has described Appalachian speech varieties as “bad,” “incorrect,” or “improper,” this book is our response.

Like the borders of Appalachia, its dialects are difficult to define, and the boundaries of where language “appropriateness” begins and ends are blurred by politics. *Bad grammar, hillbonics, hick, comfortable tongue, nonstandard English, briar, countrified, and Shakespearean* are value-laden descriptors of Appalachian speech that may lead to emotional reactions. The way people clash over language variations, their origins, their significance for speakers, and where they rank in the linguistic hierarchy of American Englishes begs for the conversation in these pages.

Appalachia is generally considered the region that follows the Appalachian mountain chain in the eastern United States. The name suggests a type of geographic core distinguishing it from the rest of the United States; however, Appalachia’s boundaries, drawn and redrawn since the seventeenth century, are chiefly political.¹ The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), established in 1965, developed what may be the most widely accepted map of Appalachia, although its inclusion of southern New York and parts of Mississippi while excluding sections of Virginia is a matter of contention.² Nevertheless, Appalachia is both a real place to those who live there and a sometimes mythic land to outsiders. For inhabitants, what it means to live in Appalachia and how they identify

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themselves varies from person to person, just as what it means to be an American is a matter of individual experience. For those who live outside the region, Appalachia and its people are likely defined by maps or media—sometimes romanticized, and sometimes stigmatized. Whatever *Appalachia* means to the reader, this book explores the inextricable link between place (both real and psychological) and language, resulting in what Appalachian author George Ella Lyon calls “voiceplace,” or the “first voice [that is] tuned by the people and place that made [us]” (see part II).

Traditionally, constructions of Appalachia have cast it as an essentialized geographic location—that is, either you’re Appalachian or you’re not. Yet readers of this book already know that there are many manifestations of Appalachia, just as there are many Appalachian Englishes. In truth, some of these manifestations may be due to a particular geographic location along the Appalachian mountain chain. But many more are probably due to social interactions and, moreover, the identities that speakers project within those social interactions. As Bonnie Norton points out, “linguistic communities are not homogeneous and consensual”;³ they are localized and contextualized. In other words, within any broad geographic region—in this case, Appalachia—there are microcommunities where speakers enact their social identities *through* language. So in this book we take a broadly sociolinguistic approach and explore what it means to be an Appalachian speaker across many social environments and in many unique communities and communities of practice.

We begin our discussion by deconstructing the concept of “Appalachian English.” It is important to note that this book’s perspective encourages the contextualization of Appalachian Englishes within what can best be described as shifting boundaries and perceptions. In his book *Appalachia*, John Williams states that the modernist definition of Appalachia tends to rely on environmental, cultural, or socioeconomic markers that are chiefly “political” and therefore arbitrary. He suggests a postmodern approach whereby Appalachia is seen as “a zone of interaction among the diverse peoples who have lived in or acted upon it, as it is also of their interactions with the region’s complex environment.”⁴ Although boundaries and definitions remain problematic, we accept Williams’s theoretical frame as we discuss the variations of English spoken and written by those who live in Appalachia. The territory covered in this book is not

representative of the ARC's map of "Official Appalachia"; however, the ARC version includes much of the territory discussed here, from western Pennsylvania to northern Georgia.

What to call the dialects discussed in this book presents a similar complication, particularly because we are talking about a place where the very pronunciation of *Appalachia* and how one refers to the Appalachian parts of the region's states are cultural markers and sometimes matters of debate.⁵ We have worked to avoid a sweeping characterization of the region's dialects, recognizing that dialects do not observe political or geographic boundaries; factors such as migration and settlement patterns over the years counter any claim that there is a general Appalachian person who speaks a general Appalachian language.

Talking Appalachian is cast in a region of "stunning natural and cultural extremes" that is overshadowed by an "image problem" affecting language perception.⁶ Jeff Biggers describes four images of Appalachia that persist: "*pristine Appalachia*, the unspoiled mountains and hills along the Appalachian Trail . . . *backwater Appalachia*, home of the 'strange land and peculiar people' in thousands of stories, novels, radio, and TV programs and films . . . *Anglo-Saxon Appalachia*, once defined by *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* as a mountain region of 'white natives' despite its role as a crossroads of indigenous cultures and vast immigrant and African American migrations for centuries; and *pitiful Appalachia*, the poster region of welfare and privation."⁷

Many of us who research and write about Appalachia know that it is time to move on from the polarizing effects of stereotype and to explore the region's positive traits rather than dwell on its scars. But while it may no longer be politically correct to use the word *hillbilly* in "mixed" company, linguistic prejudice is still openly practiced—even encouraged—against varieties of Appalachian English and those who speak them. And Appalachians are not the only marginalized groups to face this problem.

We know about the suppression and attempted eradication of American Indian languages and their dialects in the mid-1800s. These programs were enforced by U.S. government officials who believed that civilization would surely follow if "schools should be established, which children should be required to attend; their barbarous dialect should be blotted out and the English language substituted."⁸ African American dialects have

also long been denigrated; the Oakland, California, Ebonics (also known as African American Vernacular English, or AAVE) controversy of 1996 cast a spotlight on racist attitudes about educational curriculums that support the vernacular dialects of minority students.⁹ Likewise, speakers of Latino dialects have experienced “seclusion and silencing” through “punitive measures” not just in educational institutions but also in communities and families that “continue to silence, exclude and disempower” those who speak anything other than standardized English.¹⁰ As a final example of linguistic prejudice, we need only look at the current English-only movement in the United States to witness the attitudes of many toward Spanish-speaking residents. The English-only discussions—though cloaked in practical and legal issues—represent a resistance to servicing brown-skinned speakers of second languages, especially students.

Despite a shared linguistic prejudice, Appalachians do not generally share a *recognized* ethnicity, although there are those who make the case for such recognition. Victor Villanueva, in his foreword to Katherine Sohn’s book *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia* (see also Sohn’s essay in part I), says that Appalachians personify every color. (How true, in that many of us could be—and are—American Indian, Turkish, Portuguese, African American, or Hispanic.) “Appalachian is a color,” Villanueva says, “if not recognized as such.” Appalachians’ color exists, he says, in the prejudices based purely on appearances, behaviors, and dialects, “bigotries that cannot be readily discarded through class ascension.” At least “folks of color always have ‘color’ as part of the victory” when they climb from the lower classes, Villanueva writes.¹¹ Appalachia’s reputation for being generally white and lower class is a plausible reason why the region’s dialects are still openly ridiculed in just about every aspect of society, particularly mainstream media, without fear of recrimination. While there has been much discussion of dialects “by and about people of color,” Villanueva writes, “discussion concerning Appalachia has been scarce.”¹²

Linguistic bigotry stems from ignorance about how language is constructed, its place in society, and the human tendency to project prejudicial attitudes about a group of people by attacking a cultural trait such as language.¹³ For this reason, perhaps more than any other, many Appalachians have struggled with the concept of an Appalachian identity—what it is and whether to claim it—given that Appalachians can “pass” as

being from somewhere else simply by standardizing their dialects (see Silas House's essay in part II). Traits such as race and gender, which part of Appalachia you're from, and the type of dialect you speak further complicate the issue. Stephen L. Fisher, an urban Appalachian, has written of his failure to fit in with the "creekers," the "middle-class whites from the suburbs," and the "inner city Blacks" because of his accent and the way he presents himself; he was characterized as a hillbilly in college simply because he was from West Virginia.¹⁴ Crystal Wilkinson (see part II), a founding member of the Affrilachian poets, has written of the agony of "constantly trying to disprove that [she] was a black version of Ellie Mae Clampett or Daisy Duke," going so far as to homogenize her speech.¹⁵ Both Fisher and Wilkinson eventually reconciled their complex feelings about claiming an Appalachian identity. Fisher now sees himself as a product of both a "working-class, rural life and . . . [an] urban, middle-class culture."¹⁶ Wilkinson discovered her identity in being Affrilachian—"a black woman from a mostly white rural area" for whom being "country is as much a part of me as my full lips, my wide hips, my dreadlocks, my high cheekbones."¹⁷ One of our hopes is that readers will connect on some level with the contributors' struggles and awakenings (particularly in part II) as they come to terms with their Appalachian or Affrilachian identities, with their dialects forming the core of their understanding.

Major Appalachian studies published in the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first have offered valuable insights into the history, origins, myths, varieties, and educational and social contexts of Appalachian Englishes. Such texts include *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, edited by Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell; *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, edited by Dwight Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford; Craig Carver's *American Regional Dialects: A Word Geography*; the two-volume *Appalachia Inside Out*, edited by Robert J. Higgs, Ambrose N. Manning, and Jim Wayne Miller, which includes both research and creative pieces; *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson, William Ferris, and Ann J. Adadie; and Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian's *Dialects and Education: Issues and Answers*. Some well-known works dedicated entirely to a specific Appalachian speech variety or speech area include *The Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English*, edited by Michael B. Montgomery and Joseph S. Hall;

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Anita Puckett's *Seldom Ask, Never Tell: Labor and Discourse in Appalachia*; Verna Mae Slone's *How We Talked*; and Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian's *Appalachian Speech*. Too numerous to mention are the journal and magazine articles examining Appalachian Englishes that have been published over the past 120 years, particularly those by legendary Appalachian scholar Cratis Williams, who wrote *Southern Mountain Speech*.¹⁸

Talking Appalachian was born from the aforementioned interdisciplinary publications and was inspired by both scholarly and creative voices that sparked an awareness of the region's dialects. Since there is no one self-contained volume on the varieties of Appalachian English, we have assembled a book that combines both academic discussions and interpretations of the dialects found along the core of Appalachia. Given that range, we are *not* claiming that Appalachian Englishes make up a monolithic language shared by millions of people in a region thousands of miles long. Rather, we examine uniquely situated dialects in a way that is accessible to both academics and novices interested in Appalachian studies.

Talking Appalachian takes a qualitative approach to a topic that resides in the vastly interdisciplinary field of Appalachian studies. In this volume, we combine research studies, testimonials, and creative works about the dialects of Appalachia. Part I is a collection of essays written by experts who specialize in this topic. They take what can best be described as a postpositivistic approach to thinking about Appalachian Englishes, as the authors recognize that social research can only approximate reality; however, these essays focus on the evidence that supports or refutes what we believe about Appalachian Englishes. Part I suggests answers to the questions that we and the contributors believe are most significant: Where and how did Appalachian Englishes originate? Why do people in Appalachia talk the way they do? What makes these dialects different from other dialects? How can dialects be used to subordinate others? What are some of the problems with how Appalachian Englishes are treated in the educational system, and how can teachers create more inclusive classrooms for Appalachian students who speak with vernacular dialects? How have dialect varieties been portrayed in Appalachian literature historically, and how have Appalachian authors shaped our ideas about them?

Part II can be seen as an interpretive extension of part I, as it includes

the work of some of the most well-known authors in Appalachian literature. There are many people with authentic narratives and works who could speak to this topic; however, because we envisioned this book primarily as a teaching tool, it was important to include recognizable authors whose literature might already be a respected part of Appalachian studies curriculums. Their voices and interpretations of Appalachian Englishes suggest additional ways of seeing the dialects as they exist in social and personal realities, as well as the dialects' tremendous influence on the authors' personal and writing lives. The essays in part II reveal the authors' truths about themselves as native speakers, while the poetry and short fiction illustrate the dialects through character or persona.

As a whole, this volume suggests a critical approach to the study of Appalachian Englishes by combining research with the authentic perspectives of writers who are deeply committed to preserving their dialects and reaching out to those who would dismiss them as brands of ignorance. In other words, neither research studies nor creative works alone can begin to cover the depth and breadth of what there is to know about the varieties of Appalachian English.

Part I: Varieties, Education, and Power in Appalachia

Part I is written by experts who recognize varieties of Appalachian English as rule governed and the sum of speakers' cultural heritage. In our experience, judgments about these dialects stem largely from a lack of knowledge or understanding, because the study of linguistic variation is typically limited to experts; our hope is that part I will open that field of inquiry to a wider audience. The essays are arranged thematically and explore Appalachia's linguistic history (including myth and reality), speech communities from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, Appalachian Englishes in education, dialects and power, and the evolution of Appalachian Englishes in literature.

Part I builds on the editors' discussion of dialectal diversity by examining the characteristics of several varieties of Appalachian English in communities both rural and urban. Michael Montgomery begins by noting the importance of understanding the history and unique circumstances of immigration into the Appalachian region. While the label "Ap-

palachian” is useful to denote shared beliefs, identities, and language features in a general way, Montgomery stresses the importance of localness in forging community identity and language variety. To understand the variation and commonality among different Appalachian English dialects, Montgomery looks to history. He notes that the eighteenth century was particularly important in establishing language patterns. German and Scotch-Irish settlers first migrated to Pennsylvania’s central valleys and then southward and southwestward along the Appalachian Mountains and river valleys. However, this general sketch is complicated by the time periods in which migration took place, the locations where people settled, and the circumstances of migration. For example, coal towns in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania had large influxes of eastern, central, and southern Europeans, often recruited from their villages in Europe. African Americans also settled in some of these towns. The people brought with them languages that influenced the local dialects in distinct ways—so much so that villages only a few miles apart demonstrated different language elements. Montgomery puts to rest the romantic myth that Appalachian English is Elizabethan. Further, he debunks the idea that there is only one Appalachian English. Using data from language surveys, linguistic geography, personal accounts, and literature, Montgomery paints a complex picture of Appalachian people and their dialects.

Next, Kirk Hazen, Jaime Flesher, and Erin Simmons work to debunk the stereotype of English in Appalachia as one monolithic language. They do so by investigating ten linguistic variables that exist on a continuum from stigmatized to more standardized dialect features in West Virginia. By analyzing recordings of eighty-three speakers from towns throughout West Virginia who were born between 1817 and 1989, they were able to track the number of times the variables appeared. They were also able to determine which variables were not widespread across the state (as is the case with perfective *done*, such as “I done read the book”) and which were persistent (as is the case with leveled *was*, such as “’s in the house when the storm hit”). In addition, they analyzed whether the variables were declining or occurring with frequency based on the speakers’ ages. Although ten linguistic variables is a small sampling, their study calls into question the myths that lurk behind assumptions about Appalachian dialect varieties.

Whereas Hazen and coauthors' essay illustrates a range of Appalachian Englishes within one particular state, Nancy Hayward goes a step further, exploding what scholar Werner Sollors calls a "previous 'essentialist'" category—Appalachian English.¹⁹ She uses Etienne Wenger's "community of practice" model to describe and explain how local factors play an important part in the construction of linguistic identities.²⁰ Hayward's essay highlights three studies of communities in or near Appalachia: (1) an ethnography of two groups of black women in one North Carolina town, which showcases the importance of active participation in developing a speech variety; (2) a 2002 study that explores how people's affiliation with one particular ethnic identity affects their language choice in a North Carolina county; and (3) a study of how language is locally constructed and used, based on a situated, mostly working-class dialect in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. These three examples put to rest the myth of Appalachian speech as a unified language code and situate it within unique contexts. Hayward's essay also introduces important concepts that apply to the next piece about linguistic diversity within racial or ethnic groups.

Walt Wolfram writes about the diversity of southern Appalachian dialects among African Americans. Citing studies of both African American communities and communities of practice in southern Appalachia, Wolfram discusses the demographic as well as the individual differences that make the study of these dialect varieties so complex. He begins by explaining the myth of a uniform dialect spoken by African Americans (the same myth perpetuated about Appalachians in general); this myth, which grew from early studies, has since been replaced by an emphasis on the diversity of dialects, as revealed by later research. People rely on such myths, he says, as a way of idealizing and unifying the complexities of a region and its people. Wolfram uses several language variables that are typically associated with AAVE and their frequencies of usage to describe a linguistic identity that is both shared with and distinct from European Americans in Appalachia.

The next three essays situate varieties of Appalachian English in public schools and colleges, where they are measured against standard American English (SAE). In the classroom, vernacular dialects can be a source of contention for teachers charged with teaching or preserving

the “power” dialect, or SAE. Though research solidly supports Appalachia’s dialect varieties as rule governed, they are still outsiders among the dialects of prestige—namely, those associated with wealth. Negative perceptions of Appalachian Englishes are supported by a culture of product-oriented pedagogy and quantitative assessment that regards everything but SAE as incorrect. It is no surprise, then, that among the vernacular dialects that exist in the United States, those associated with Appalachia are some of the most misunderstood. In fact, many native speakers have internalized the negativity related to their dialects, including the belief that their dialects should be tempered or erased.²¹ In these essays, the authors also point out important intersections of dialects and literacy practices.

Jeffrey Reaser begins with a description of the interface of language and education and continues with a discussion of the impact vernacular dialects have on four areas: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. He contends that the dialects themselves are not the problem; rather, most educational systems and the tools of assessment they rely on employ a “correctionist” methodology that neither accounts for nor understands the sociolinguistic significance of these dialects and their link to literacies of the home, particularly in these four areas. Reaser then shifts to an examination of teaching practices that include the study of language variation and its history instead of traditional grammar programs, which, according to previous studies, do not work. Offering students greater linguistic options and encouraging them to “read, write, and speak in a variety of levels of formality, genres, and purposes” can be a more culturally sensitive and successful way of teaching vernacular speakers. He describes the practice of teaching code switching by way of contrastive analysis as one such method of effectively instructing vernacular-speaking students, and he offers several resources for teachers who need to obtain substantial knowledge about their students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Amy Clark’s essay picks up where Reaser’s ends by describing why the method of code switching via contrastive analysis works so well for Appalachian students who speak vernacular dialects. Clark narrates the journey she took toward understanding what it means to be a native speaker who is also expected to teach standardized English. Realizing that traditional methods were failing to reach her students (and, in some cases, turning them against writing altogether), she began to teach

them to code-switch by comparing their vernacular dialects with those of standardized English, creating a classroom where students' dialects were equally valid as the language they were expected to use in academic writing. Her success with this method led Clark and a team of teacher consultants in the Appalachian Writing Project to develop a two-year research study conducted in central Appalachian schools. The research team invited multiple dialects into their classrooms, changed their language of instruction, and allowed students to write in different voices as they learned about their grammar systems. The results of the study suggest that students' attitudes about language instruction, as well as their writing skills, improve—sometimes dramatically—using this method.

Katherine Sohn takes this discussion to higher education and illustrates the intersection of dialects and the multiple literacies of eight central Appalachian college women. Sohn analyzes how silence, voice, and identity intersect. In particular, she considers how dialect figures in the lives of the women, who were stigmatized by outsiders, educated insiders, and their college instructors. Remarkably, says Sohn, these women took what they could from their college experience. Many of them decided to retain their regional dialects because of their allegiance to their home communities, and in the process, they experienced little disjuncture when they moved back to their home settings. Ultimately, they found their voice, along with pride in themselves and pride in their region. Sohn's essay links Reaser's and Clark's, as well as Puckett's (which follows), to issues of power. Because vernacular dialects are measured in schools against a "standard" that is perceived to be the best, Appalachian speakers (as well as their homes, families, and culture in general) may be perceived as failing to meet that standard. The teaching methods suggested by Reaser and Clark can have an equalizing effect in the classroom, allowing students to make personal choices based on the influences they respect most. That is, will they discard their vernacular dialect in place of a more standardized version, or, like the women in Sohn's study, will they choose to keep it in spite of those who disrespect it?

Anita Puckett examines specifically Appalachian Englishes and issues of power. Unlike the subjects of Sohn's study, some people feel pressured to forsake their home dialects. Puckett explores how the system of valuation of different discursive frameworks in southern Appalachia shapes or

controls policies and attitudes toward the use of these frameworks and the social, political, and economic power of the speakers who rely on them. She begins with a brief overview of the historical patterns establishing these different systems of linguistic empowerment. Then she focuses on how these different patterns of valuation—language ideologies—may not be consciously articulated but nevertheless impact the ability of southern Appalachian English speakers to succeed in professional and corporate positions. Pressure to conform to language ideologies that support SAE forces speakers to abandon or devalue their ways of talking and therefore their cultural orientations and place-based identities. Strategies to adapt to the sociopolitical impact of these pressures conclude this essay.

Just as Appalachian speech has changed over the years, so has its representation in literature, which is the focus of Michael Ellis's essay, positioned as a transition into the literary works of part II. Ellis traces the evolution of mountain speech as it appears in mid-nineteenth-century literary works by George Washington Harris and others who arguably influenced later writers. Ellis explores the different styles used by writers, such as literary and eye dialects, and the difficulties of trying to re-create mountain speech on paper. Although Harris and his contemporaries (such as Mary N. Murfree) contributed a great deal to our understanding of the words used in parts of Appalachia, their phonetic depictions of pronunciation likely contributed to regional stereotypes. Ellis credits writers such as James Still and Harriette Simpson Arnow for a more restrained but likely more authentic use of dialect, citing passages from *River of Earth* (1940) and *The Dollmaker* (1954) in which the vocabulary is more important than how the words sound. Representations of dialect in works since the 1930s suggest a diversion from nineteenth-century reasons for using literary dialects. One reason, Ellis argues, citing Lee Smith's epistolary novel *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988), is to accomplish a particular style, honesty, and distinctiveness. Another reason is to reveal how dialect is used as a weapon against those who speak it, as evidenced in works such as *The Dollmaker*. The pressure to assimilate into new communities or as times change is also evident in *The Dollmaker*, as well as in Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven* (see part II). A final reason Ellis cites for the use of dialect by modern writers is to demonstrate broad dialectal differences

that reveal even deeper struggles, as shown in Crystal Wilkinson's short story "Holler" (see part II).

Part II: Voices from Appalachia

While there is no substitute for solid research in terms of explaining Appalachian dialects (particularly for the segment of society that supports standardization) and debunking stereotypes, we believe it is equally important to read about the *experience* of being a native speaker and to sample literary Appalachian speech by contemporary Appalachian authors. The contributors to part II are respected authors who write about—and in the dialects of—Appalachia. Here, poets, novelists, and essayists interpret language through their characters and reflect on themselves as speakers. Their pieces tell the stories that research cannot.

The personal essays included in this volume offer individualized, personal perspectives about dialects and their connections to identity and place, but similar thematic threads weave through all the authors' narratives. George Ella Lyon opens this part with her eloquent essay "Voice-place," describing the spiritual connection between place and dialect and the cost of losing that connection. Silas House, in his essay "In My Own Country," describes his parents' struggle as they tried to assimilate into another culture by covering up their dialects. He goes on to explore his own resistance to the practice he calls "passing" and why he refuses to compromise by standardizing his dialect in even minor ways. Lee Smith's "Southern Exposure" provides a whimsical look at why keeping her dialect is a "political" decision, in spite of those who suggest that she take elocution lessons. Finally, Jane Hicks, in "A Matter of Perception," describes the linguistic prejudice and misperception she has encountered as both a student and an educator because of her dialect—a voice she fervently embraces and that informs her work as a writer and artist.

Denise Giardina, Ron Rash, Rita Quillen, and Crystal Wilkinson contribute excerpts of fiction, and their characters' voices speak in a variety of Appalachian Englishes. These writers represent West Virginia, western North Carolina, southwestern Virginia, and eastern Kentucky, and they write across a variety of genres; however, in these excerpts, their characters face similar conflicts about identity and perception that arise as a

result of their dialects. These excerpts also illustrate themes that are common in speech communities across Appalachia and among many dialect varieties: perceptions of changing dialects within families, the practice of code switching as social currency, and a resistance—among members of the same community or between communities several miles apart—to use or even respect vernacular dialects due to the blue-collar reputation that is often attached to them.

Giardina's excerpt from her novel *Storming Heaven*,²² set in early-twentieth-century West Virginia during the industrial boom, is narrated by Carrie. She sees her brother, Miles, transformed by his education and by his involvement in the mining business. This transformation is most evident in his talk of progress and in the way he standardizes the dialect his family uses, which, he says, "sounds ignorant." Carrie's observation of Miles's changing dialect represents even bigger struggles brought on by the changing environmental, economic, and social landscapes due to industrialization.

Conflicting attitudes about vernacular dialects as well as code switching for social currency are evident in an excerpt from the first chapter of Ron Rash's *One Foot in Eden*.²³ Rash's protagonist, Sheriff Will Alexander, is investigating a murder in his small Appalachian town, where people believe in *haints* and black snakes are hung across fences to bring rain. The reader is clued into Will's troubled marriage when, among other things, his wife recoils at his use of the term *look-see*, describing such words as "hillbilly talk." But Will continues to use his mountain dialect, explaining that "it put people more at ease when you talked like them," though the reader knows it is also very much a part of who he is.

Rita Quillen is best known for her poetry, but here she offers an excerpt from her (as of this writing) unpublished novel *Hiding Ezra*, set in the mountains of southwestern Virginia during World War I. It tells the story of Ezra Teague, a new draftee who is caught in the conflict between family and duty and abandons his post. In this particular excerpt, Andrew Nettles, an army officer who, like Teague, is a rural Appalachian, dispatches two mountain "yokels" (who speak in a dialect that most people won't understand) to find the deserter. When they fail—as Nettles is sure they will—he hopes the army will send him some "real soldiers." Nettles is the product of a complicated union: a mother born into wealth

and an uneducated, rural father. He grows up in a confusing world of opposites, ultimately deciding that his mountain dialect cannot be reconciled with formal education. Though it is part of his heritage, Nettles rejects the dialect, fearing that he will be perceived as ranking low in the social and economic hierarchy.

Wilkinson's short story "Holler" illustrates another Appalachian voice—the Affrilachian one. Here, an African American narrator tells a story within a story. The conflicts about language are similar to those in the other excerpts; however, as members of a black community, Wilkinson's characters speak a different variety of Appalachian English, and the conflict tells a bigger story about race and perception. Like the concentric circles made by a stone thrown in water, a fight reveals the family's complex history of hardship and the perception that those from the city—even those with a "shared ethnic connection," as Ellis points out in part I—have of black people in the mountains. "Holler" is embedded with themes of race and place and their connection to voice.

We conclude with Anne Shelby's poem "Spell Check," about an Appalachian writer whose computer insists on correcting her vernacular dialect. Shelby's poem is a humorous look at technology's refusal to acknowledge her voice: "Makes you have titles where titties ought to be." But it also says something about the struggle between preservation and standardization and what is lost in between: "Now it wants to replace the homeplace / with just someplace. Is this the same spell / that changed proud to poor, turned minnows / into memories?" These lasting images from Shelby's poem provide a final summary of the book's general themes: perception and truth, preservation and loss, and language and identity.

Defining *Dialect*

Almost everyone has a different definition of *dialect*,²⁴ but those engaged in linguistics and related fields generally agree that "to speak a language is to speak a dialect [or variety] of that language" that is distinguishable by its grammar (or syntax), its speech sounds (or phonology), and its vocabulary (or lexicon).²⁵ A *regional dialect* is determined by its association with a particular geographic area and, within specific communities, its vocabulary, expressions, and variations of usage.²⁶ Within any large

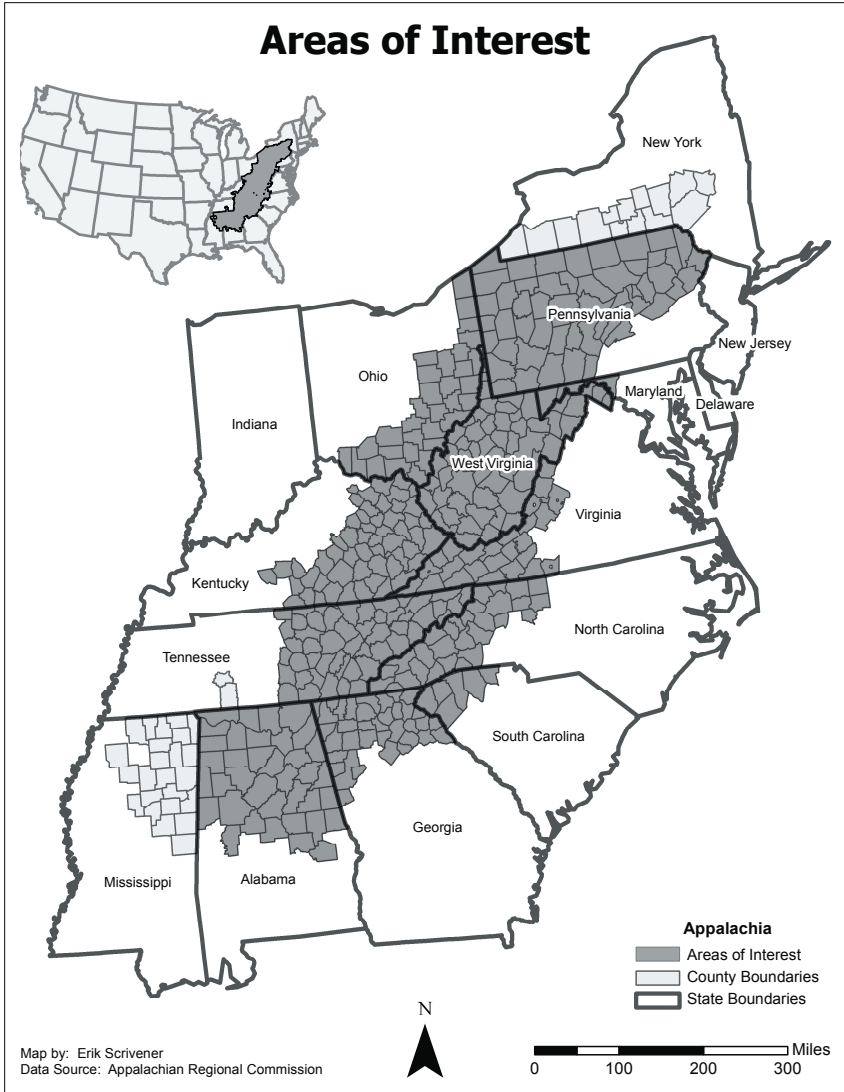
regional dialect, there are many varieties that exist for different reasons, such as social class and socioeconomic status or geographic boundaries that may isolate inhabitants (such as islands). The language varieties of Appalachia discussed in this volume are generally found from western Pennsylvania to northern Alabama (see map).²⁷ However, dialects are not contained by official geographic boundaries; they move as freely as speakers do. Consider this excerpt from an article by linguist Walt Wolfram: “Within the Southern highland area generally identified as the home of ‘Appalachian culture,’ there are many specific locations that can be set apart linguistically . . . [which] is also common knowledge to natives. Thus, the pronunciation of *wash* in one area may contain a vowel like *father*, in another area the vowel of *bought*. Still another area’s pronunciation may contain an *r*, as in *warsh*. . . . The important point here is that all of these different pronunciations legitimately characterize particular areas within the more general region of southern Appalachia.”²⁸

Although the dialectal varieties of Appalachia are often identified by their linguistic features, they are also identified by a *shared belief* among inhabitants that they speak distinctive dialects.²⁹ Those shared beliefs about Appalachian Englishes, however, are shaped by myths that have persisted over the years. In part, those myths exist because so few of us know how our dialects emerged and continue to change.

Threats to Appalachian Englishes

Some scholars predicted that the language varieties of Appalachia would be completely erased or leveled as new generations and newer linguistic forms replaced the old; however, although some patterns (such as the *a*-prefix) are no longer widely used, those predictions proved largely premature.³⁰ Neither radio nor television led to the extinction of vernacular speech, and it is unlikely that future inventions will result in the disintegration of dialect features and patterns that have survived this long. Further, Appalachia’s celebration of its cultural heritage—particularly the ballads, music, storytelling, and literary works that embody language—in festivals, museums, and Appalachian studies programs throughout the region will likely keep even the oldest dialect features alive.

Others believe that the teaching of SAE and high-stakes assessments



Areas of interest (Map by Erik Scrivener, based on data from the Appalachian Regional Commission).

that categorize other dialects—particularly vernacular dialects—as “incorrect” will lead to their extinction. Our first lessons in English typically identify two types of speech or writing: the good (correct) and the bad (incorrect). The further removed a dialect is from SAE—or what is commonly accepted as the “correct” version—the more likely it is to be stigmatized (see the essays by Reaser and Clark). It is no surprise that speakers of vernacular dialects like Appalachian Englishes often find themselves labeled as speakers of the “bad” variety of English. Although this dichotomy is a fallacy, it stubbornly persists in educational programs and mainstream attitudes about how English *should* sound. But Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schillings-Estes contend that these vernacular dialects represent “an integral component of personal and social identity” and “carry strong positive connotations for individuals and local groups” that can be “stubbornly resistant to change.”³¹ In other words, peer and family influence can be more powerful than institutionalized perceptions of language.

Katherine Sohn discovered this resistance to change among the eastern Kentucky women she studied, who were returning to college after spending several years in the home and workplace. Though the women’s dialects engendered some resistance among faculty members at the community college they attended, Sohn observed that none of the women felt pressured to speak differently. She writes that “language is closely tied to the way women define themselves and create community, and changing that language is a method of erasing culture.”³²

Still others have learned how to negotiate other speech communities while retaining their Appalachian dialects. A native of eastern Kentucky, Linda Scott DeRosier knows this pressure all too well, but she refuses to abandon her dialect. DeRosier, a professor of psychology who now lives in Montana, writes in her memoir that her dialect has influenced other speakers. “I have . . . accommodated to the rules and expectations of the academic speech community,” she says, “but I have retained a number of the expressions common to my home community and use them so often that some of my colleagues now regularly use terms they have picked up from me.”³³ It is this kind of innovation, DeRosier says, this “ability to describe all manner of things,” that SAE lacks. In fact, for most Appalachians, SAE is like a second language. Appalachian Englishes are “color-

ful, earthy, profane . . . a very important part of our identity as hill folk . . . and not something we should give up without a fight.”³⁴

Linguistic artifacts represent not just grammar or pronunciation but also generations of *people* who share a history, a cultural upbringing, and a strong connection to *place*. An expression, a grammatical pattern, or a way of pronouncing a word that can be linked to our ancestry is like a 150-year-old letter, a lock of hair, or a uniform that we hold in awe as we consider history. But unlike those objects, language is a *living* link to the past. Linguists may contend that Appalachian Englishes are more innovative than historical and that their linguistic links to medieval, Elizabethan, and colonial times are few, yet the words, sounds, and grammar patterns of Appalachia continue to conjure strong reactions among speakers who carry heritage in their mouths, even though they may never understand why.

Notes

1. Karl Raitz and Richard Ulack, *Appalachia: A Regional Geography* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984).
2. John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
3. Bonnie Norton, “Language and Identity,” in *Sociolinguistics and Language Education*, ed. Nancy Hornberger and Sandra Lee McKay (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2010), 350.
4. Williams, *Appalachia*, 12.
5. *Ibid.*, 14–15.
6. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell, “Introduction,” in *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, ed. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xx, xxvi.
7. Jeff Biggers, *The United States of Appalachia* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2006), xi–xiii.
8. Jon Reyhner, “American Indian Language Policy and School Success,” *Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students* 12, no. 3 (1993): 35–39.
9. Teresa M. Redd and Karen Schuster Webb, *African American English: What a Writing Teacher Should Know* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2005).
10. D. Leticia Galindo and María Dolores Gonzales, *Speaking Chicana: Voice, Power, and Identity* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 4–5.
11. Victor Villanueva, foreword to Katherine Kelleher Sohn, *Whistlin’ and*

Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), xiv.

12. Ibid.

13. Clare J. Dannenberg, "Attitudes toward Appalachian English," in Abramson and Haskell, *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, 1412.

14. Stephen L. Fisher, "Appalachian Stepchild," in *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, ed. Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 187–89.

15. Crystal Wilkinson, "On Being 'Country': One Affrilachian Woman's Return," in Billings, Norman, and Ledford, *Back Talk from Appalachia*, 185.

16. Fisher, "Appalachian Stepchild," 189.

17. Wilkinson, "On Being 'Country,'" 186.

18. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell, eds., *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006); Dwight Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford, eds., *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999); Craig Carver, *American Regional Dialects: A Word Geography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989); Robert J. Higgs, Ambrose N. Manning, and Jim Wayne Miller, eds., *Appalachia Inside Out*, 2 vols. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995); Charles Reagan Wilson, William Ferris, and Ann J. Adadie, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian, *Dialects and Education: Issues and Answers* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989); Michael B. Montgomery and Joseph S. Hall, eds., *The Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004); Anita Puckett, *Seldom Ask, Never Tell: Labor and Discourse in Appalachia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Verna Mae Slone, *How We Talked* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009); Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian, *Appalachian Speech* (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1976); Cratis Williams, *Southern Mountain Speech* (Berea, KY: Berea College Press, 1992).

19. Werner Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford, 1991), x.

20. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

21. Biggers, *United States of Appalachia*.

22. Denise Giardina, *Storming Heaven* (New York: Ivy Books, 1987).

23. Ron Rash, *One Foot in Eden* (New York: Picador, 2002).

24. The word *dialect* has many definitions and perceptions among the general public and is—for that reason—often replaced by the terms *language variety*, *language difference*, or, in the case of English dialects, *English varieties*. The contributors to this volume may use all these terms, but with the understanding that they reference the literal definition that follows.

25. Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schillings-Estes, *American English*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 2.

26. Carver, *American Regional Dialects*; Wolfram and Schillings-Estes, *American English*.

27. The official borders of the Appalachian region, according to the Appalachian Regional Commission, extend far beyond the areas delineated on our map, which includes only the general dialect regions referenced by the studies and works in this volume.

28. Walt Wolfram, "Sociolinguistic Assumptions, Labels, and Change," *Appalachian Journal* 11 (1984): 215–24.

29. Michael Montgomery and Ellen Johnson, "Language in the South," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, vol. 5, *Language*, ed. Michael Montgomery and Ellen Johnson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

30. Wolfram, "Sociolinguistic Assumptions."

31. Wolfram and Schillings-Estes, *American English*, 318–19.

32. Sohn, *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women*, 37.

33. Linda Scott DeRosier, *Creeker: A Woman's Journey* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 63.

34. *Ibid.*, 58.

Part I

Varieties, Education,
and Power in Appalachia

The Historical Background and Nature of the Englishes of Appalachia

Michael Montgomery

The historical background of the English language in Appalachia and its ongoing change reveal a heritage shared across the region in many ways today. Yet at the same time these fundamental realities fully justify the plural designation *Appalachian Englishes*, to indicate its diversity. The overarching label *Appalachian* can be useful to make qualified generalizations about speech and many other things, to suggest commonalities between places that are distant on the map, or to identify affinities that people in the mountain states of the eastern United States share. However, in practice, local or subregional identities rank first and trump the broad one of *Appalachian* on the ground.¹ Ask me where I'm from, and as a reflex I say, "East Tennessee." While in Abingdon a few years ago, people adamantly told me that they were from "southwest Virginia" (leaving me no doubt where they were from). There are good reasons to believe that localness has long been primary to people, especially those of European extraction whose families have been in the same area of Appalachia for up to three centuries. If this is so, can one talk about "Appalachia" at all?

Yes, but only with care. Appalachia is a place as well as places, people as well as peoples. The more closely one examines the region, the more complex it becomes. The features and usages of its English are shared not only across many states but also with areas farther afield, such as the

Ozarks or even Texas.² Equally, there is immense variation from place to place and from one community of practice to another; for example, compare the English of a group of quilters with that of a group of NASCAR fans. No matter how small the place, there are social differences in the use of English within it—there probably always have been and will be. Admonitions to younger people “not to get above their raising” (i.e., their elders) in the way they talk and behave are nothing new, yet they cannot prevent differences between generations from being the most prevalent of all, especially in terms of vocabulary.

This essay discusses how we can talk about Appalachian Englishes in the realm of history, especially with regard to settlement and migration in the region. Here the eighteenth century is the most crucial time, for the region was gradually populated by Europeans from about 1730 (south-central Pennsylvania) to the 1830s (north Georgia).³ If one were to choose a label for relic usages lingering in the region in the late twentieth century (e.g., *holp* ‘helped’ or *waiter* ‘wedding attendant’), the best one would be “colonial” or “eighteenth century.” This colonial heritage may come as a surprise to the many Americans who have heard that “Elizabethan” or “Shakespearean” English is (or was, until not long ago) spoken somewhere in the mountains and that the region’s linguistic ancestry can be traced back that far—four centuries or more.⁴ However, historians and other researchers have shown that such is the case for language and many other facets of culture. The history of settlement and migration points to the primary importance of Pennsylvania and the secondary importance of the Lower South. As we will see, arguments that mountain English is Elizabethan falter on several grounds, including an implausible explanation of how it could have gotten to Appalachia.

The foundational migration of Europeans into Appalachia occurred in a widening corridor from central Pennsylvania’s Cumberland Valley westward to Pittsburgh and the Ohio Valley and southwestward into Virginia during the eighteenth century. The storied movements into Virginia, predominantly (but far from exclusively) by Germans and Scotch-Irish (from Ulster),⁵ have been frequently recounted since at least Theodore Roosevelt’s *The Winning of the West* more than a century ago: how many of these settlers followed the Shenandoah River and its forks, traveled along the Great Wagon Road into and through the Valley of Virginia, and

followed the Great Valley of the Tennessee into North Carolina (i.e., into what would become the state of Tennessee), while others trekked through the Cumberland Gap, into what would become Kentucky.⁶ This narrative of migration and settlement was incorporated by renowned historian Frederick Jackson Turner into his *Frontier Thesis*, which represented the largest truly American epic to his time.⁷ Players in this drama of “conquering” the frontier included the larger-than-life Daniel Boone and the Overmountain Men, who in lightning fashion descended from the valley of the Holston and Clinch to defeat Loyalist forces at King’s Mountain, South Carolina, on October 7, 1780, an engagement that turned the tide of the Revolutionary War and led to British capitulation the following summer. Such figures and compatriots left behind oral accounts, correspondence, and incipient legends used by later researchers to reconstruct the period. Interestingly, it is due largely to the efforts of one individual that these stories and documents were gathered and preserved for posterity. Lyman Copeland Draper (1815–1891) from upstate New York was the indefatigable librarian who scoured the interior of the country beginning in the 1830s to collect and copy thousands of pages still in private hands and transcribe reminiscences that would become essential building blocks for later historians.

The backdrop just sketched provides some order to our discussion, but the settling and history of the Appalachian region—and the planting and development of its Englishes—requires a weaving back and forth chronologically as well as time exposures of specific places. Generalizations about history, language, or anything else are surely desirable, but they must always be assessed for mistaken impressions, assumptions, and gaps. For example, it is a fact that the arduousness of overland travel before the advent of modern roads prevented many in Appalachia from contact with mainstream society, but describing the region as a whole as “isolated” (as many, including linguists, have done) is misleading at best.⁸ Such a description may have some validity for individual communities, but it would involve specific people usually having a specific ancestry, specific contact with outsiders, and certain psychological and economic traits. The caveat about judging a community to be isolated based on the difficulty of access is nowhere better illustrated than in the seemingly less accessible coal mining areas of Kentucky and West Virginia, where east-

ern and central Europeans as well as African Americans settled and then often left in the early twentieth century.⁹ It is well known that language has a life of its own and is always subject to change. Given this reality, the purported isolation of localities should logically produce increasing differences in speech rather than uniformity. Ironically, however, many linguists and social scientists have often applied the all-encompassing label “Appalachian” to research conducted in a single small area, thereby considering it typical, whether this is acknowledged or not. Small differences in language (or the belief in their existence) are so much a part of local identity that people not uncommonly claim that they can distinguish residents of communities five miles apart by their speech or that they can tell just by hearing someone talk whether that person is from their own neck of the woods. Such claims involve tiny details of rhythm and intonation that others cannot detect, and though they may not be demonstrable or testable, they are nevertheless believed because they are part of what defines localness.

Another element of local identity is consciousness of local history and topography, both of which are important to linguists tracing how people migrate and how language varies and changes. For example, from time to time one finds it stated that people from the east and north, including those following the routes outlined earlier, migrated into or settled the “Appalachian Mountains” or even “migrated down the ridges of Appalachia.” In truth, the paths were nearly always valleys. People followed watercourses and constructed farmsteads, forts, stockades, and other buildings usually adjacent to them or to bluffs along them. They built stores, churches, and inns near water and whatever roads existed. However inconstant the tides and navigation might be, rivers and streams often surpassed roads as a means of travel. Settlements formed at the forks of streams and rivers, and some of them grew in time into towns and then cities (Knoxville, Pittsburgh). Settlers eyed stable homesteads and the most productive land they could make their own; they knew farms would be poorer and less tenable in higher elevations. Assessment of the land’s fertility led many to skirt eastern Kentucky in favor of the Bluegrass. It prompted a vanguard of Virginians and North Carolinians to found Nashville in 1780, several years before Knoxville. The latter was a more secure and, for a time, more substantial settlement, but one with a

less fertile hinterland. This tendency was often replicated elsewhere, and the interplay of valley and ridge became what is still a constant. Outside of county seats and other towns, communities in much of the region were often loose and highly dispersed, bearing scarce resemblance to villages elsewhere in early America. In much of Appalachia, uplands were settled a generation after the bottomlands as the population grew and spread. In the higher or more rural areas of Appalachia, communities were called *settlements* well into the twentieth century. Even so, that term is misleading, because migration and population fluidity have also been constants. It was through southern Appalachia that much of the southern half of the country was populated, ultimately all the way to California.

Although the English language called Appalachian is often believed to be the most distinctively regional variety in America and is often referred to as if it were a single homogeneous entity, the region does not have just a single dialect. The population's ancestry is quite mixed, and in many ways, the English of Appalachia represents a microcosm of American English; its speakers have both preserved forms that are no longer used in most of the rest of the country and innovations of others. Educator and social researcher John C. Campbell's famous observation in 1921 about Appalachia being "a land . . . about which, perhaps, more things are known that are not true than of any part of our country," pertains particularly well to the English spoken there.¹⁰

The speech of Appalachia has captivated journalists, travelers, and educators for the better part of two centuries. One early commentator was Anne Royall (1769–1851), the most famous, if not also the most reviled, female journalist of her time (she was tried and convicted of being a "public nuisance" and a "common scold"). About the speech of her Monroe County, Virginia (now West Virginia), neighbors, she wrote in 1826: "Their favorite word of all, is *hate*, by which they mean the word thing; for instance, nothing, 'not a hate—not waun hate will ye's do.' What did you buy at the store, ladies? 'Not a hate—well you hav'nt a thing here to eat.' . . . When they would say *pretense*, they say *lettinon*, which is a word of very extensive use among them. It signifies a jest, and is used to express disapprobation and surprise; 'you are just lettinon to rob them spoons—Polly is not mad, she is only lettinon.'"¹¹ From antebellum times until well into the twentieth century, the region's speech was known primarily through

writers of fiction, such as backwoods humorist George Washington Harris (1814–1869) and prolific novelist Mary Noailles Murfree (1850–1922), who wrote under the name Charles Egbert Craddock. They and countless other writers of popular fiction employed contorted spellings to stress the exoticness of local speech and enhance their portrayals of illiterate, dialect-speaking characters. “Thar’s nun ove ’em fas’ enuf tu ketch me, nither is thar hosses,” Harris has his narrator, Sut Lovingood, boast, using a form of English that is almost too difficult to read because of its “eye dialect” (spellings like *ove* and *tu* that represent common pronunciations and are solely for the sake of appearance).¹² Many such forms were later stamped into public images of hill-country English through the *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith* comic strip, launched in 1919 and still running in some newspapers today. Its creator Billy DeBeck borrowed heavily from his copy of Harris’s book.¹³ Since that time, countless books, movies, television programs, and tourist-shop caricatures have reinforced the popular but erroneous belief that such usages as *plumb* ‘completely’ (as in “he fell plumb to the bottom”) and *right smart* ‘good deal’ (as in “they lost a right smart in that trade”), among others, are found only in mountain speech. It’s not hard to see why misconceptions, myths, and misinformed stereotypes about the region and its speakers abound.

Study of and commentary on mountain speech by educators, scholars, and linguists began in the late nineteenth century and continue to the present day. We can group these efforts into two general categories: those based on an individual’s observations, and those based on a survey or project of some kind. Each is valuable in its own way. The observations of an individual (e.g., Josiah Combs of Knott County, Kentucky), made at close hand and over a lifetime, can identify many terms that no survey ever can. Reference works like the *Dictionary of American Regional English* rely heavily on both types.

Individual Accounts

The idea that American English is markedly conservative and preserves forms no longer used in the British Isles has found expression with respect to American English generally and to specific varieties of it. When commentators identify items from more geographically or socially “isolated”

speech varieties that are also known from seventeenth-century or earlier English literature, they are apt to label them “Elizabethan” or “Chaucerian.” Because that literature (including the King James Bible) was long an integral part of American education, it served as the natural, immediate point of comparison. By the end of the nineteenth century, it was commonly held that exported (or transplanted) language as found in a colony often displayed an arrested development when compared with that of the mother country.¹⁴ That the English of Appalachia was four or more centuries old became the most prevalent version of this idea. Dozens of articles claiming Elizabethan, Shakespearean, or Chaucerian holdovers in the southern mountains have appeared since 1889, when a Vanderbilt University professor cited items in Tennessee speech with identical parallels in Shakespeare (e.g., *handkercher* ‘handkerchief’, as in *King John*, act IV, scene I, line 42: “I knit my handkercher about your brows”).¹⁵ William Goodell Frost, president of a small Appalachian college in Kentucky, was most responsible for propagating and establishing the idea that mountain speech and culture were legitimate survivals from older times, and he took issue with the prevailing view that these were degenerations:

The rude language of the mountains is far less a degradation than a survival. The Saxon pronoun “hit” holds its place almost universally. Strong past tenses, “holp” for helped, “drug” for dragged, and the like, are heard constantly; and the syllabic plural is retained in words in -st and others. The greeting as we ride up to a cabin is “Howdy, strangers. ’Light and hitch your beastes.” Quite a vocabulary of Chaucer’s words which have been dropped by polite lips, but which linger in these solitudes, has been made out by some of our students. “Pack” for carry, “gorm” for muss, “feisty” for full of life, impertinent, are examples.¹⁶

Such accounts not only claim Shakespeare and his contemporaries as precedents but also occasionally reach back to the Old English of a millennium ago (*ax* ‘ask’ and Frost’s *hit* ‘it’, both of which continue to linger in pockets of Appalachia). Initially, it was outsiders who labeled the speech of mountaineers as Elizabethan; more recently, some in the region have adopted the label to ascribe status to their speech. The idea has taken

on a life of its own and become a hardy myth in American culture, part of a popular view that the southern mountains have remained static in time and that their people have maintained a cultural repository of balladry and other music, story cycles (e.g., Jack tales), dance, quilting, and other traditions. One cannot understate the contribution of research-based studies demonstrating the survival in North America—most often in Appalachia—of practices, lore, and traditions now largely or completely extinct in the British Isles. The work of Cecil Sharp, Olive Dame Campbell, and Maud Karpeles on Child ballads is only the most outstanding example.¹⁷ But problems and inaccuracies easily arise when comparisons are based on poor or nonexistent historical documentation or when presumptions are based on superficial similarities—such as connecting Appalachian clog dancing, a twentieth-century development, with Irish step dancing—or when time periods or geographic locations are merged or other details are treated loosely.

Pride, romanticism, and a desire for cultural validation through associating local speech with prestigious writers and King James English are what underlie most claims about the speaking of Elizabethan or older English in Appalachia. Proponents of this idea are usually interested in perceptions and ideology rather than being overly concerned with issues of documentation. A few years ago, Knoxville congressman John Duncan Jr. wrote a defense of his local accent, affirming, “I am proud to be from East Tennessee, and, even though I may be teased, I will just relax and keep speaking ‘authentic Chaucer English’” (but citing no allegedly Chaucerian usages).¹⁸ Being considered a cultural repository has helped inhabitants of the Appalachians define themselves in an affirmative way. However, advocates seldom quote or reference the sources allegedly used (Frost does not). Rarely do they relate similarities in language to settlement and migration history or attend to issues of time sequencing. Shakespeare and Elizabeth I lived 400 years ago, generations before English speakers came to the mountains, and it is unknown how closely the English of those speakers approximated the literary English of their day. Almost never are any communities in the United States named where such archaic speech can be found. Still, it is important not to dismiss arguments for an Elizabethan heritage of Appalachian speech without seeing whether one can make the connection. In this regard, the work of one scholar stands far

above all others and ranks as the definitive version of the Elizabethan case: that of Josiah Combs (1888–1960). His work has been almost entirely neglected, yet he has arguably pursued the case most diligently in articles published in 1916 and 1931.¹⁹ Perhaps his reputation suffered because he accompanied claims of linguistic inheritance with ones that mountain natives were racially pure: “the Southern mountaineers are the conservators of Old, Early, and Elizabethan English in the New World. These four million mountaineers . . . form the body of what is perhaps the purest Old English blood to be found among English-speaking peoples.”²⁰ Unlike other commentators, Combs did not make this statement out of blind ideology or prejudice, for he based it on a study of eastern Kentucky surnames.²¹ Methodologies of evaluating the ancestry of surnames were undeveloped in Combs’s day, but he did not hesitate to declare that all but a fraction of the relevant names were English, apart from a few that began with *Mc-*, which he took to indicate Scottish ancestry. He demonstrated that he was an extraordinary observer of his eastern Kentucky English, that he read English Renaissance literature widely and closely, and that he could cite it in case after case.

About the same time that claims for an Elizabethan heritage arose, one scholar writing about West Virginia speech suggested “a Scottish influence to some extent,” although he cited only one possible piece of evidence: fronting of the vowel in *good* and *school* (making these words sound more like *geed* and *skeel*).²² The idea received only occasional, inconsistent mention for three generations thereafter, mustering little evidence and failing to make much headway against the more popular Elizabethan argument. This slow development happened in spite of the fact that research on surnames and traditional ballads was finding connections to Scotland and Ireland and that historians were becoming increasingly aware of the numbers of Scotch-Irish (with ancestry from Ulster, the northern province of Ireland) in certain interior parts of America. Other than Combs’s argument for the predominance of English surnames in eastern Kentucky, only one early study in Appalachia sought to compute ancestry using surnames. Using a sample of 228 surnames he had compiled, John C. Campbell estimated that the founding population of Tennessee had been one-third Scotch-Irish, one-third English, one-seventh German, and the remainder composed of other nationalities.²³

Research using surnames has limitations and must make assumptions. One of the biggest problems is that many English-looking surnames are disguised names borne by emigrants who appeared to be from England but were not. For example, *Robertson* and *Anderson* were brought to the United States by many Scots and Scotch-Irish (in some cases, these replaced *McRoberts* and *McAndrew*, the counterparts based on Scottish Gaelic and originally native to Scotland). By the same token, *Müller*, *Weiss*, *Schmidt*, and other German surnames were brought to America, and often to Appalachia, only to be altered to the English-looking *Miller*, *White*, and *Smith*. Obviously, looking below the surface for hidden ancestry is a skill that genealogists must master; one of them recently recounted to the author how the seemingly Scottish surname *McInturff* was borne by a German family originally named *Machendorf*. Thus, high proportions of surnames assigned to an English background are well-nigh inevitable in such calculations.²⁴

As stated, evidence for a significant linguistic influence from the English-speaking Scotch-Irish was slow to accumulate. Horace Kephart, a student of North Carolina mountain people and their culture, wrote in *Our Southern Highlanders* a century ago: “Since the Appalachian people have a marked Scotch-Irish strain, we would expect their speech to show a strong Scotch influence. So far as vocabulary is concerned, there is really little of it. A few words, *caigy* (cadgy), *coggled*, *ferment*, *gin* for *if*, *needcesity*, *trollop*, almost exhaust the list of distinct Scotticisms.”²⁵ Combs asserted that “Scotch and Irish survivals are negligible. They occur here and there, but rarely.”²⁶ A substantial Scotch-Irish component was first argued by Cratis Williams: “Appalachian speech was determined by the predominance of the Scotch-Irish in the settlement of the Mountain region prior to and following the American revolution.”²⁷ However, he and others labored under a lack of sources from the British Isles other than earlier English literature to use for comparison—no dictionaries, grammars, or descriptions of speech in Ulster; no knowledge of eighteenth-century literature written there; and apparently no personal contacts in Ireland to consult. With respect to Scotland, the situation was somewhat better, but one could hardly use Robert Burns’s poetry and Sir Walter Scott’s fiction very extensively. Such a handicap meant that, almost inevitably, U.S. commentators arrived at the conclusion that mountain speech came from England.

Scholarly bridges across the Atlantic needed to be built, and not surprisingly, this was first done from abroad, by those familiar with the contemporary speech of the north of Ireland on the ground. John Braidwood had already identified thirteen Ulster items he believed contributed to the American vocabulary, including *granny* 'midwife', *hap* 'quilt', and *mooley* 'hornless cow'.²⁸ Alan Crozier, the most extensive examiner of vocabulary to his time, documented the Ulster ancestry of thirty-three items in Pennsylvania, including *piece* 'distance', *dornick* 'small round stone', *fire-board* 'mantel', and *redd up* 'prepare, tidy up'.²⁹ The Scotch-Irish influence was greatest in western Pennsylvania, he concluded. By far the most extensive consideration of the subject is this writer's *From Ulster to America: The Scotch-Irish Heritage of American English*, which is based on fifteen years of research, primarily using local literature and archival materials. It presents in dictionary format nearly 400 terms that can be mainly or exclusively attributed to the Scotch-Irish, with one or more dated citations for each from both sides of the water.³⁰ Comparison of Appalachian vocabulary with Ulster and Scottish sources reveals such connections as the following:

<i>airish</i>	'chilly, cool'
<i>back</i>	'to endorse a document, address a letter'
<i>backset</i>	'a setback or reversal (in health)'
<i>bad man</i>	'the devil'
<i>barefooted</i>	'undiluted (for coffee)'
<i>beal</i>	'suppurate, fester'
<i>biddable</i>	'obedient, docile'
<i>bonny-clabber</i>	'curdled sour milk'
<i>brickle</i>	'brittle'
<i>chancy</i>	'doubtful, dangerous'
<i>Cohee</i>	'resident of western Virginia'
<i>contrary</i>	'to oppose, vex, anger'
<i>creel</i>	'to twist, wrench, give way'
<i>diamond</i>	'town plaza'
<i>discomfit</i>	'to inconvenience'
<i>hippin</i>	'diaper'
<i>ill</i>	'bad-tempered'

<i>let on</i>	‘to pretend’
<i>nicker</i>	‘whinny’

One of the more intriguing Ulster contributions to American English is *cracker* for a white southerner, a term now used especially for a resident of rural Georgia or northern Florida.

Survey Account I: The Linguistic Atlas

The Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada is a systematic survey of pronunciation and traditional vocabulary launched in 1929. Interviews were first conducted in New England and then in the Atlantic states as far south as northeastern Florida in the 1930s. Inspired by the work of historians and geographers, the project collected data using an 800-item survey of vocabulary, pronunciation, and, to a limited extent, grammar. Its principal goal was to map individual linguistic features and to show their regional patterns.³¹ Two larger objectives were to outline dialect regions and to correlate regional terms with settlement and migration in North America and ultimately with their earlier history in the British Isles.

Because Appalachia encompasses a vast area from the Northeast to the Deep South, the region would seem to be too large to form a distinct territory in terms of traditional culture or speech. The Linguistic Atlas project findings confirmed this and led to the positing of the “Midland,” a dialect region somewhat smaller than Appalachia stretching westward and southwestward from its cultural and linguistic seed bed of central Pennsylvania, where English was first planted in the region, to the Carolinas. The Linguistic Atlas’s three-way regional division of the North, the Midland, and the South may fly in the face of popular conceptions that rely on a simpler North-South dichotomy, but it is consistent with many linguistic patterns and, just as importantly, with the historical development of the country (the North versus South distinction undoubtedly reflects nineteenth-century sectionalism). “There can be no doubting,” according to Hans Kurath, “that the major speech areas of the Eastern states coincide in the main with settlement areas and that the most prominent speech boundaries run along the seams of these settlement areas.”³²

As we will see, these boundaries pertain to features of speech that are uniquely American as well as ones traceable to Europe. Though far from uniform, the Midland region has a number of terms that set it off from both the North and the South. It is subdivided into the North Midland region (encompassing northern West Virginia, northwestern Maryland, and most of Pennsylvania) and the South Midland region (southern West Virginia, western Virginia, and western North and South Carolina). Linguistic Atlas research from the 1950s through the 1970s extended the North Midland boundary across central Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and it extended the South Midland boundary across north Georgia and north Alabama, thus including Kentucky and Tennessee in the South Midland. The upland interior of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia (the South Midland, or, as it is known by historians, the Upper South or the back-country) and the coastal areas of these states (the Lower South) differ broadly in speech and in numerous other ways, such as traditional types of houses and barns, reflecting the fact that much of the interior of Virginia and the Carolinas was settled from the north rather than from the east.³³ Although the boundary between the South Midland and the South proper was formed in colonial times, it is also valid for vocabulary that is uniquely American (e.g., South Midland *chigger* versus Lower South *red bug*), as well as for many other phenomena mapped by geographers, such as the birthplaces of country musicians.³⁴

Here is how the founder of the Linguistic Atlas portrayed the process of forming the Midland:

This far-flung Midland area, settled largely by Pennsylvanians and by their descendants in the Southern uplands, constitutes a separate speech area which is distinct from the Northern area—the New England settlement area—and from the Southern area. Its northern boundaries run in a westwardly direction through the northern counties of Pennsylvania, its southern boundary in a southwestwardly direction through the Blue Ridge and through the Carolina piedmont. The South Midland, to be sure, exhibits a considerable infusion of Southern vocabulary and pronunciations. . . . After 1720 large flocks of Ulster Scots and Palatine Germans arrived on Delaware Bay and spread out into the back

country of Philadelphia and then westward to the Alleghenies and the Ohio Valley, and then southward through western Maryland and Virginia to the Carolinas. . . . The influence of the English-speaking Ulster Scots upon the speech of certain sections of Pennsylvania and of the southern upland cannot be doubted, but it is surprisingly intangible. The Dutch and the Germans, who spoke their own language for many generations and passed through a stage of bilingualism before they gave up their native language, have left a much more tangible impress upon the English of their areas of concentration.³⁵

Because it aimed to identify speech patterns that were closest to the settlement period, the Linguistic Atlas project concentrated on surveying older, rural individuals whose language had been less influenced by travel, formal education, and urban life. In West Virginia, for example, 30 of the 111 interviewees were in their seventies, and 13 were in their eighties. When it conducted its interviews in the Atlantic states in the 1930s, the Linguistic Atlas found twenty items of vocabulary or grammar used predominantly in the Midland. In keeping with its interests in traditional vocabulary, most of these pertain to the household and farm life:

<i>bawl</i>	(of a calf)
<i>blinds</i>	'roller shades'
<i>green bean</i>	
<i>grist of corn</i>	'load of corn'
<i>hay mow</i>	'barn loft'
<i>hull</i>	'to shell (beans or peas)'
<i>lamp oil</i>	'kerosene'
<i>lead horse</i>	'left-hand horse of a team'
<i>(arm)load</i>	'armful'
<i>(little) piece</i>	'short distance'
<i>poke</i>	'paper bag'
<i>saw buck</i>	'sawhorse'
<i>skillet</i>	'frying pan'
<i>snake feeder</i>	'dragonfly'
<i>sook</i>	'call to cows'

<i>spouting/spouts</i>	‘gutters’
<i>sugar tree</i>	‘sugar maple’
<i>(quarter) till</i>	(the hour)
<i>want (to get) off</i>	
<i>you’ns</i>	‘you [plural]’ ³⁶

The Linguistic Atlas found six terms used predominantly in the South Midland:

<i>clabber milk</i>	‘curdled sour milk’
<i>fire board</i>	‘mantel’
<i>jacket</i>	‘vest’
<i>milk gap</i>	‘enclosure for milking cows’
<i>ridy-horse</i>	‘see-saw’
<i>sugar orchard</i>	‘grove of sugar maples’ ³⁷

North Midland terms included the following:

<i>jag</i>	‘part-load of corn’
<i>piece</i>	‘snack’
<i>run</i>	‘small stream’
<i>side meat</i>	‘pork from the side of a hog’
<i>smearcase</i>	‘cottage cheese’ ³⁸

Terms concentrated in western Pennsylvania included these:

<i>carbon oil</i>	‘kerosene’
<i>closet</i>	‘outhouse’
<i>cruds</i>	‘curdled milk’
<i>doodle</i>	‘haycock’
<i>grinnie</i>	‘chipmunk’

Mapping terms can be fascinating, but it provides only one way to look at variations in speech. Maps of speech present simplified, two-dimensional snapshots of complex, dynamic processes, and they have limitations:

1. Speakers often know (if not use) multiple terms for the same thing; for example, in western Pennsylvania, users of *grinnie* usually know *chipmunk*.
2. A speaker may use terms that have the same meaning in different situations and styles, such as when talking to strangers or work-mates versus talking with family members or members of a close peer group.
3. There are normally social differences in usage in any geographic area, based on social standing, level of educational attainment, and so on.
4. All languages change constantly, and most individual elements do as well.
5. Many words and usages are in the process of diffusing geographically, moving along networks usually centered in urban areas or dispersing through media influences, regardless of whether their users move along with them.

These qualifications do not nullify the findings of geographically based research, but they do constrain the generalizations that can be made. In fact, the Linguistic Atlas was aware of these limitations and sought to take some of them into account.

Nonetheless, we can learn much about the history of American English, both for individual terms and for general patterns, from geographic research. Consider terms for a small stream. This is usually called a *branch* in the South and South Midland. This term, unknown in Britain, was documented as early as John Smith's *General History of Virginia* (1624). Also found early in North Carolina and Georgia, it later spread into the South Midland as far as Kentucky, where it remains common. Its counterpart in the North Midland is *run*, traceable to Scotland and found throughout West Virginia, northern Virginia (note Bull Run of Civil War fame), Maryland, and most of Pennsylvania. The distribution of *run* suggests that it entered the colonies through the Chesapeake Bay. *Creek*, used throughout the South and Midland, came from England, where it originally referred to a tidal stream; in the Atlantic colonies it later spread inland to refer usually to a somewhat larger watercourse than a *branch* or a *run*. In the South Midland *creek* rhymes with *Greek*, but in the North

Midland it rhymes with *brick*. Atlas surveys, in combination with other research, have shown how other terms have spread into the South Midland from the Lower South, such as *peckerwood* 'rural white person' and *redworm* 'earthworm'.

Many other small groups of synonymous vocabulary have distinctive geographic patterns, some of which conform to the areas outlined earlier; others display startling exceptions, showing that items may have quite different lives of their own. One example is the existence of three terms for a noisy mock wedding-night celebration, usually held at the home of the newlyweds: *belling* (chiefly in German settlement areas of western Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan); *serenade* (chiefly in the Atlantic states, including eastern Appalachia); and *shivaree* (from the French *charivari*, found chiefly in western Appalachia and westward). The boundary between *serenade* and *shivaree* runs along the Tennessee–North Carolina border in a fashion unlike any other words yet researched.³⁹

Survey Account II: Dictionary of American Regional English

Another essential resource for studying patterns of regional English in the United States is the five-volume *Dictionary of American Regional English* (*DARE*), a preeminent work of American lexicography and an unrivaled, permanent index to the country's diverse cultures and varieties of English.⁴⁰ Like the *Oxford English Dictionary* and other historical dictionaries, *DARE* dates every citation, so in most cases the reader can obtain a capsule view of the occurrence of a word's forms and senses. *DARE* is set apart from other dictionaries by its meticulous banks of lengthy citations. The dictionary is equally an encyclopedia of the country's regional life, natural history, and much more. *DARE* is a product of raw material of many kinds, including written literature (fiction, scientific reports, travel accounts, diaries, and so on), glossaries and word lists compiled by linguists and other observers, and Linguistic Atlas data, among many other sources. Every citation in the dictionary is given a regional or sub-regional label (e.g., those from James Still's writings are given the label eKY, for eastern Kentucky). Two other features are especially noteworthy. For one, in the late 1960s the dictionary project surveyed over a thou-

sand communities across the country, using a 2,000-item questionnaire, seeking terminology for all aspects of the country's life. These responses enabled the mapping of thousands of terms, including many of those collected for the Linguistic Atlas. Using these 3 million responses, along with its other citations, *DARE* editors have assigned labels to many terms or their specific forms, variants, and senses. For purposes of this labeling, the Midland encompasses a territory stretching as far west as Missouri, and Appalachia includes all of West Virginia and parts of nine other states from central Pennsylvania to northern Alabama. *DARE* labels 389 items Appalachian, including *everwho* 'whoever', *bad to* 'having an undesirable tendency to' (as in "he was bad to drink"), and *baking powders*. Though it uses qualifiers like *chiefly*, *especially*, or *formerly* and bases the labels on twentieth-century evidence alone, *DARE* is a remarkable tool for exploring the English of the United States or that of its many regions, large and small. The dictionary labels and maps individual pieces of language; unlike the Linguistic Atlas, it does not seek to map broad regions. This emphasis takes nothing away from the many uses to which the dictionary can be put to study the regional diversity of American English and the historical development of countless words.

Such exploration is greatly facilitated by the indexes to *DARE* labels.⁴¹ These list 121 items labeled from Kentucky (e.g., *coffee sack* 'burlap bag', *hobby* 'small, hand-shaped corn cake', *hogback* 'independent political candidate', *stir-off* 'neighborhood party to make molasses'); 111 from North Carolina (e.g., *baseborn* 'illegitimate [said of a child]', *boomer* 'diminutive red squirrel', *house plunder* 'house furniture', *sochan* 'an edible wild green'); 44 from Tennessee (e.g., *dry-land fish* 'edible morel', *fee grabber* 'law-enforcement officer', *hunk* 'country bumpkin', *johnny walkers* 'make-shift stilts'); and 48 from West Virginia (e.g., *ackempucky* 'jelly-like food', *filth* 'underbrush, weeds', *jim around* 'do odd jobs', *ribey* 'scrawny'). Such compilations confirm the fact that much of the country's English is local or subregional in nature. Of the 389 items whose distribution is labeled "Appalachian," 294 (75.6 percent) are further specified as "sAppalachian" (i.e., southern Appalachian), indicating their concentration in the southern half of the region. The samples above hardly begin to suggest the many ways to taste the fruits of a dictionary project now nearly complete after half a century in the making.

The comprehensive research conducted by the Linguistic Atlas and by *DARE* enables one to consider two general, related questions of historical interest: (1) How much of the vocabulary found in the Midland and Appalachia can be traced to other languages or to specific settlement groups, parts of the British Isles, or elsewhere in Europe? and (2) How much of it is new or “made in America” or even “made in Appalachia”? Despite the fact that the English of Appalachia is most often cited as preserving older forms, commentary on its antecedents remained anecdotal—with no detailed attempt to determine its regional sources abroad (i.e., to test the Elizabethan and Scotch-Irish hypotheses)—before the 1980s.⁴²

With Pennsylvania’s population being one-third German speaking at the time of the American Revolution, it is not surprising that most items labeled “Pennsylvania” by the Linguistic Atlas or *DARE* come from German. These include simple borrowings like *belsnickel* ‘Santa Claus’ and *ferhoodle* ‘to ruin, spoil’, as well as loan translations like *sawbuck*, *smearcase*, and possibly *snake feeder*. Other terms of German derivation include *panhas* ‘dish of meat scraps’, *snits* ‘quartered dried apples’, and *sweeny* ‘atrophy of a horse’s shoulder muscles’. Since English and German are related languages, it is not surprising that some of their forms share the same basic meaning and thus that English-looking terms and constructions have been reinforced by German ones. Two of these are especially pertinent to Appalachia: *leave* ‘let’ (as in “leave him go”) and *want* + preposition with an elliptical infinitive (e.g., *want in* ‘want to go/come in’). Both of these usages are documented in Scotland and Ulster, so they (and, no doubt, others) have a blended ancestry.⁴³

Besides those derived from German, very few words identified as Appalachian have a historical derivation other than from the British Isles. Cherokee has contributed to place names (especially of rivers) in six states of southern Appalachia, but that language is the source of only a handful of vocabulary, mostly for flora and fauna, in the English of western North Carolina, including *catoosa bass*, *cullowee* ‘an edible wild green’, *sochan* ‘an edible wild green’, and *talala bird* ‘a woodpecker’. Contrary to occasional popular belief, no evidence has been produced of a Celtic language ever being spoken in Appalachia. It is possible that some early Scotch-Irish settlers were bilingual, knowing either Irish or Scottish Gaelic, but this has yet to be confirmed. It is clear that the Scotch-Irish brought some

words with them that originated from Celtic languages, such as *clabber*, but these are extremely few.⁴⁴ Many Scotch-Irish knew Scots, however, a close relative to English that is best known through the writings of Robert Burns. In the generation after the American Revolution, newspapers in western Pennsylvania featured poetry on local political topics written in Ulster Scots, especially the poems of David Bruce, who wrote under the name “The Scots-Irishman.”⁴⁵ As an identifiable language variety, Scots apparently survived the emigrant generation, but it is unclear to what extent it was a community language or merely a conscious poetic idiom.

Since the 1980s, researchers have compared Appalachian features with regional ones in twentieth-century Britain. Michael Ellis compared thirty-two vocabulary items from east Tennessee to those from parts of England and found that eight corresponded to northern England and five to the English Midlands; all but one of the remaining terms showed no correspondence. Of seventy-six pronunciations compared, twenty-eight showed a greater similarity with southern England or the west Midlands and only four with northern England.⁴⁶ Although he found several specific correspondences (e.g., the Appalachian *waspers* ‘wasps’ to the English west Midlands), the overall pattern was mixed. Ellis demonstrated that Appalachian English has connections with more than one region of England. Edgar Schneider compared Appalachian vocabulary to that of both England and Scotland using a modern-day glossary and the *English Dialect Dictionary*.⁴⁷ He found the strongest correlation with Yorkshire and Northumbria in northern England and secondarily with Lincolnshire and the central and west Midlands, concluding that “the North of England and Scotland are the most important donor varieties for the Appalachian vocabulary.”⁴⁸

These scholars have demonstrated that, for vocabulary and pronunciation (assuming little change in British regional speech since the eighteenth century), we must expand the varieties of English contributing to the English of Appalachia to include those of the north and west of England. Many of these items could have come from such regions either directly or indirectly through Ulster. The consensus of research to date is that in pronunciation, the English of Appalachia reflects primarily a heritage from England. Further study will undoubtedly continue to find that many traditional pronunciations in Appalachia were once widely current

in eighteenth-century England, including among educated speakers (e.g., *join* pronounced as *jine*, *oblige* as *obleege*). At the same time, few items or pronunciations traceable to Scotland or Ulster will likely be found; ones identified by the Linguistic Atlas in Pennsylvania (e.g., *drouth* ‘drought’, rhyming with *tooth*) do not occur farther south. The Appalachian vowel system is, like elsewhere in America, based on that of southern England, with the same number and type of distinctions between vowels, except for a few minor details. However different in rhythm and intonation the speech of early Scotch-Irish settlers might have been (and these characteristics made them clearly identifiable in Pennsylvania), like others, they and their descendants adopted their vowels from neighbors of English ancestry.

Emigrants from Ulster found themselves in all mainland colonies, with significant numbers landing at Chesapeake ports and at Charles Town (as it was then called), South Carolina. However, by far the largest proportion debarked at Delaware Valley ports and spread inland.⁴⁹ Many ultimately settled in parts of Appalachia, and a great many more of their children and grandchildren did so. By many accounts, these descendants were the predominant white settlers in the backcountry from central Pennsylvania south to Georgia after about 1730.

When it comes to connections with the Old World, the Scotch-Irish element is the strongest for grammar and, to some extent, for vocabulary. Many vocabulary items were cited earlier. Six of the twenty items the Linguistic Atlas identified as Midland are traceable at least in part to Ulster: *hull*, *piece*, *poke*, (*quarter*) *till*, *want* (to get) *off*, and *you’ns*.⁵⁰ The reasons for this significant proportion may be debated, but the generalization is soundly based on a wealth of empirical evidence. Following are some features of traditional English in Appalachia having a primarily Scotch-Irish ancestry:

1. Personal pronoun *hit* ‘it’.
2. Addition of *all* after pronouns to indicate inclusion (*what all*, *who all*, and so on).
3. Addition of suffix *-s* to verbs (and use of linking verb *is*) with plural noun subjects (but not with pronoun subjects): “people *knows*” versus “they *know*”; “people *is*” versus “they *are*.”

4. Use of *they* 'there' to introduce clauses: "They's a problem with Bessie."
5. Formation of nouns and pronouns with the addition of 'un (from *one*), producing *young'un*, *big'un*, *you'uns*, and so on. The last term has become almost a trademark of western Pennsylvania speech in recent years, especially in Pittsburgh, where it is usually spelled *yinz* or *yunz*. It remains in use farther south, as in east Tennessee, where it competes with *you all* and *y'all*. The first known use of *you'uns* dates from 1810, when Margaret Van Horn Dwight wrote from Ohio: "Youns is a word I have heard used several times, but what it means I don't know, they use it so strangely."⁵¹
6. Use of *need* followed by a verb past participle, as in "That boy needs *taught* a lesson."
7. Use of the subordinate conjunction *whenever* 'at the time that', as in "Whenever I was young, people didn't do that."
8. Use of *all the* 'the only', as in "That was all the way we could go to school."

Some well-known features of grammar in Appalachia have little if any trace of a Scotch-Irish heritage. The following ones come ultimately from England:⁵²

1. Use of *a-* as a prefix on verb present participles: *a-goin'*, *a-comin'*.
2. Formation of possessive pronouns with the suffix *-n*: *hern*, *hisn*, *yourn* (as in "a book of yourn").
3. Use of verbs whose principal parts are made regular by adding *-ed*: *blowed*, *drawed*, *heared*, *seed*, and so on.
4. Use of personal dative pronouns, as in "I bought *me* a dog."

As already shown, every linguistic feature has a life of its own. We can never presume that their geographic distribution corresponds with that of any another, whether on the basis of ancestry or otherwise. However, if one were to ask where the Scotch-Irish influence is strongest today, a very good candidate would be western Pennsylvania. A booklet on Pittsburgh speech released some years ago included the following terms of Scotch-Irish ancestry: *anymore* 'nowadays', *hap* 'quilt', *leave* 'let', *lenth* 'length',

nebbby ‘nosey’, *need* (followed by a past participle), *redd up* ‘tidy up’, *slippy* ‘slippery’, *wait on* ‘wait for’, *want* + preposition, and *yunz* ‘you [plural]’.⁵³

It may seem that we have left the Elizabethan hypothesis well behind, and in effect, this is true. Researchers scrutinizing the English of Appalachia have had difficulty confirming past claims by amateur observers who often lacked historical dictionaries to consult. The 1899 statement by William Goodell Frost cited earlier identifies seven terms he claimed were centuries old, but four of these were first cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* in only the nineteenth century and thus can hardly be considered very old, much less Elizabethan.

Answering the question of how much of the distinctive English of Appalachia is new (versus the proportion that can be traced to other languages and to various settlement groups) is quite easy. Of the sixteen terms listed earlier that *DARE* labels as being from Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia (four from each state), only one (*baseborn*) is not an Americanism. A scan of the 389 terms *DARE* labels Appalachian finds that the overwhelming majority are obviously modern. Explaining why and how terms become regional, even in the age of unprecedented movement of people and contact with national varieties of English, is beyond the scope of this essay. That task awaits future investigators, for whom the Linguistic Atlas, *DARE*, and other resources have laid an immense baseline. Suffice it to say that most of the distinctive vocabulary in Appalachia is recently minted, showing the creativity of modern American culture and that of the people of Appalachia as well.

The Linguistic Atlas and *DARE* have added immensely to our understanding of American English, but for all their merit, they lack time depth. Speakers surveyed by the Linguistic Atlas, though often elderly, were not born before about 1850, and for Appalachia, *DARE* had few pre-1875 works to consult other than stories by backwoods humorists such as George Washington Harris, cited earlier.⁵⁴ Reconstructing the roots of English in Appalachia is an arduous, long-term undertaking made very difficult by the dearth of documents written by settlers that provide evidence of their speech patterns. This limitation does not compromise existing conclusions so much as it reminds researchers to keep seeking early evidence. For purposes of illustration, we can consider two substantial sources produced by settlers that exemplify usages from two or

more centuries ago. One is *Documentary History of Dunmore's War 1774*, a collection of letters pertaining to the defense of settlements along the Holston and Clinch Rivers, in what is now southwestern Virginia and southern West Virginia, against the Shawnee and Cherokee, indigenous tribes whose lands were being entered or threatened.⁵⁵ Therein are found the following items:

a-: "He was informed, before he left Holston, that there was 2 or 3 Indians there a hunting" (41). [*DARE* label: throughout the U.S. but especially frequent Midland, Southwest, less frequent South, New England]; inherited from England.

against 'by the time that': "I have requested of Capt. Crockett & Doack one half of their Men to meet against next Tuesday or sooner at the Town House" (58). [*DARE* label: chiefly Midland]; from Scotland and Ulster.

is (verb, used with a plural subject): "Please give me instructions how the Forts is to be provided with Provisions especially Flour" (136). [*DARE* label: chiefly South, South Midland]; from Scotland and Ulster. By the same token, the suffix *-s* occurs on a verb with a plural subject: "These men tells me they are fresh Signs of Indians Seen Every Morning" (99).

cove (noun): "This day I leave this neighborhood to go towards the Rye Coves" (3). [*DARE* label: especially South Midland]. *Cove* originally referred to an inlet of the sea in England and in early America, but by the late eighteenth century, it applied to an inland topographical feature.

liked to 'nearly': "The Indians had like to done Andersons Job, having struck into the stockade a few Inches from his Head" (244). [*DARE* label: chiefly South, South Midland]; inherited from England.

shoot (noun) 'shot': "I think every Man have ½ doz shoots a piece" (227). [*DARE* label: especially South Midland]; inherited from England.

they 'there': "These men tells me they are fresh Signs of Indians Seen Every Morning about the plantation" (99). [*DARE* label: scattered, but chiefly South, South Midland]; inherited from Scotland and Ulster.

There is also an interesting term found in Joseph Doddridge's *Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars*, a recollection of life in late-eighteenth-century northwestern Virginia:⁵⁶

infare 'wedding dinner, usually at the home of the groom's parents': "On returning for the infare, the order of procession and the race for black Betty was the same as before. The feasting and dancing often lasted several days, at the end of which the whole company was so exhausted with loss of sleep that several days' rest was requisite to fit them to return to their ordinary labors" (104). [*DARE* label: chiefly South, South Midland]; inherited from Scotland and Ulster.

This essay has shown that detailing the history of English in Appalachia is a complex but fascinating activity. The constancy of language change means that we cannot expect to find easy or straightforward answers to the questions of its origins. Nor is there one ideal place or area that, for speech, best represents the region as a whole. Appalachia is a region settled at different periods in different places under different circumstances, and this more than anything else is the key to understanding the designation Appalachian *Englishes*.

Notes

1. This observation is true however the region is defined—whether one accepts the official thirteen-state Appalachia of the Appalachian Regional Commission or the smaller compass adopted in this book.

2. Hans Kurath, *Word Geography of the Eastern United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949), 27.

3. The latter date coincides with the removal of the Cherokee to Indian Territory in 1838.

4. Ted Ledford, "Colonial Survivals in Appalachian Speech," in *Encyclopedia*

of *Appalachia*, ed. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

5. Here, *Ulster* refers to the historical nine-county province of Ireland, not the modern-day province of Northern Ireland. The term *Scotch-Irish* is often misunderstood, sometimes debated, and occasionally controversial. For a summary of pertinent issues, see Michael Montgomery, "Scotch-Irish or Scots-Irish: What's in the Name?" *Tennessee Ancestors* 20 (2004): 143–50. For perhaps the best survey of these emigrants, see Kenneth W. Keller, "What Is Distinctive about the Scotch-Irish?" in *Appalachian Frontiers: Settlement, Society, and Development in the Preindustrial Era*, ed. Robert D. Mitchell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 67–86. Early emigrants from the north of Ireland have frequently but somewhat erroneously been collectively called "Ulster Scots," but they were actually a more diverse stream that included Ulster English and Ulster Irish. Accordingly, they must have brought mixed varieties of English with them. Estimates of their numbers before the American Revolution range from 50,000 to 500,000. An authoritative estimate is at least 150,000, which was the collective judgment of a seven-member team of American experts assembled by the Ulster-American Folk Park in 2004 to advise it on interpreting the re-created American landscape at the open-air museum in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland.

6. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, vol. 1 (New York: Putnam, 1889); Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities of the Colonial South* (New York: Atheneum, 1963); David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

7. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Old West," in *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 67–125.

8. "Isolation" is a phenomenon all too broadly and too loosely and mistakenly perceived by outsiders, and it consists of factors that have only begun to be teased apart. See Michael Montgomery, "Isolation as a Linguistic Construct," *Southern Journal of Linguistics* 1 (2000): 25–36; Michael Montgomery, "The Idea of Appalachian Isolation," *Appalachian Heritage* 28, no. 2 (2000): 20–31.

9. For example, see "Italians," in *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, ed. Ken Sullivan (Charleston: West Virginia Humanities Council, 2006), 370–71.

10. John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921), xxi.

11. Anne Royall, *Sketch of History, Life, and Manners in the United States* (New Haven, CT: Ann Royall, 1826), 58.

12. George Washington Harris, *Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spun by a "Nat'ral Born Durnd Fool," Warped and Wove for Public Wear* (New York: Fitzgerald, 1867), 49.

13. M. Thomas Inge, "The Appalachian Backgrounds of Billy de Beck's Snuffy Smith," *Appalachian Journal* 4 (1977): 120–32.

14. William T. Thom, "Some Parallelisms between Shakespeare's English and the Negro-English of the U.S.," *Shakespeareana* 1 (1883): 129–35; John Picker-

ing, "Memoir on the Present State of the English Language in the United States of America, with a Vocabulary, Containing Various Words and Phrases which Have Been Supposed to Be Peculiar to This Country," *Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 3, no. 2 (1815): 439–536.

15. Calvin S. Brown, "Dialectal Survivals in Tennessee," *Modern Language Notes* 4 (1889): 205–9.

16. William Goodell Frost, "Our Contemporary Ancestors," *Atlantic Monthly* 83 (1899): 313.

17. Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk-Songs from the Southern Appalachians, Comprising 122 Songs and Ballads, and 323 Tunes* (New York and London: Putnam's, 1917); Cecil J. Sharp and Maud Karpeles, *Eighty English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968).

18. John J. Duncan Jr., "Letter from East Tennessee," *Chronicles* 28, no. 1 (2004): 44.

19. Josiah H. Combs, "Old, Early and Elizabethan English in the Southern Mountains," *Dialect Notes* 4 (1916): 283–97; Josiah H. Combs, "The Language of the Southern Highlander," *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 46 (1931): 1302–22.

20. Combs, "Old, Early and Elizabethan English," 283.

21. Josiah H. Combs, *The Kentucky Highlander from a Native Mountaineer's Viewpoint* (Lexington, KY: Richardson, 1913).

22. Sylvester Primer, "Dialectical Studies in West Virginia," *Publication of the Modern Language Society* 6, no. 3 (1891): 165.

23. Campbell, *Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, 50–71.

24. The degree of overestimation of English ancestry remains a controversial if not unresolvable issue. For further discussion, see American Council of Learned Societies, *Report of Committee on Linguistic and National Stocks in the Population of the United States*, annual report, vol. 1 (American Historical Association, 1931); Thomas L. Purvis, "The European Ancestry of the United States Population, 1790," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 41 (1984): 85–101.

25. Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 280.

26. Combs, "Old, Early and Elizabethan English," 296.

27. Cratis D. Williams, "Appalachian Speech," *North Carolina Historical Review* 55 (1978): 174.

28. John Braidwood, *The Ulster Dialect Lexicon* (Belfast: Queen's University of Belfast, 1969), 31–32.

29. Alan Crozier, "The Scotch-Irish Influence on American English," *American Speech* 59 (1984): 310–31.

30. Michael Montgomery, *From Ulster to America: The Scotch-Irish Heritage of American English* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2006).

31. Kurath, *Word Geography of the Eastern United States*; Hans Kurath and Raven I. McDavid Jr., *Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961); Hans Kurath et al., *Handbook of the Linguistic Atlas of New England* (Providence, RI: Brown University, 1939); William A. Kretzschmar et al., *Handbook of the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

32. Kurath, *Word Geography of the Eastern United States*, 1.

33. John F. Rooney Jr., Wilbur Zelinsky, and Dean R. Louder, *This Remarkable Continent: An Atlas of United States and Canada Society and Culture* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982); Wilbur Zelinsky, *The Cultural Geography of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

34. Rooney, Zelinsky, and Louder, *This Remarkable Continent*, 244.

35. Kurath, *Word Geography of the Eastern United States*, 3–4.

36. *Ibid.*, 28.

37. *Ibid.*, 29.

38. *Ibid.*, 31.

39. Alva L. Davis and Raven I. McDavid Jr., “‘Shivaree’: An Example of Cultural Diffusion,” *American Speech* 24 (1949): 249–55.

40. Frederic G. Cassidy and Joan Houston Hall, eds., *Dictionary of American Regional English*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985–2012). A sixth volume of the dictionary that includes indexes, summaries, and other ancillary materials is in press, and an electronic edition of the entire dictionary is also planned for the near future.

41. A master list of terms can be found at <http://dare.wisc.edu/sites/dare.wisc.edu/files/DAREindex.htm#Kentucky>. They are grouped according to 400 regional labels (Acadian to Wyoming), social labels (abusive to young), and language of origin (Abnaki to Yupik).

42. Michael E. Ellis, “The Relationship of Appalachian English with the British Regional Dialects” (MA thesis, East Tennessee State University, 1984); Michael E. Ellis, “On the Use of Dialect as Evidence: Albion’s Seed in Appalachia,” *Appalachian Journal* 19 (1992): 278–97; Edgar W. Schneider, “Appalachian Vocabulary: Its Character, Sources, and Distinctiveness,” in *Verhandlungen des Internationalen Dialektologenkongresses Bamberg 1990 Band 3*, ed. Wolfgang Viereck (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994), 498–512; Michael Montgomery, “Exploring the Roots of Appalachian English,” *English World-Wide* 10 (1989): 227–78.

43. R. Whitney Tucker, “Linguistic Substrata in Pennsylvania and Elsewhere,” *Language* 10 (1934): 1–4; Michael Adams, “Lexical Doppelgängers,” *Journal of English Linguistics* 28 (2000): 295–310.

44. Michael Montgomery, “The Celtic Element in American English,” in *Celtic Englishes II*, ed. Hildegard Tristram (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000), 231–64; Montgomery, *From Ulster to America*.

45. Claude M. Newlin, “Dialects on the Western Pennsylvania Frontier,”

American Speech 4 (1928): 104–10; Michael Montgomery, “The Problem of Persistence: Ulster-Scot-American Missing Links,” *Journal of Scotch-Irish Studies* 1, no. 1 (2000): 105–19.

46. Ellis, “Relationship of Appalachian English with British Regional Dialects,” 41, 42.

47. Paul M. Fink, *Bits of Mountain Speech* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium, 1974); Joseph Wright, ed., *English Dialect Dictionary*, 6 vols. (London: Frowde, 1898–1905).

48. Schneider, “Appalachian Vocabulary,” 509.

49. James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962); R. J. Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America, 1718–1775* (London: Routledge, 1966; reprint, Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1987); Warren R. Hofstra, ed., *Ulster to America: The Scots-Irish Migration Experience, 1680–1830* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011); Kerby A. Miller et al., *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675–1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Richard K. MacMaster, *Scotch-Irish Merchants in Colonial America* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2010).

50. Some of these correspondences have been identified thanks only to such recent publications as James Fenton, *The Hamely Tongue: A Personal Record of Ulster-Scots in County Antrim*, 3rd ed. (Belfast: Ullans Press, 2006), and Caroline Macafee, ed., *A Concise Ulster Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

51. Margaret Van Horn Dwight, *Journey to Ohio in 1810*, cited in *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*, ed. Mitford M. Mathews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), xx.

52. Michael Montgomery, “The Scotch-Irish Element in Appalachian English: How Broad? How Deep?” in *Ulster and North America: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Scotch-Irish*, ed. H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press 1997), 189–212.

53. Sam McCool, *Pittsburghese: How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher* (Pittsburgh: Goodwill Industries, 1982).

54. This problem is a general one. Early in the nineteenth century, commentary and short glossaries began to appear. Many of these are very usefully collected in Mitford M. Mathews, ed., *The Beginnings of American English: Essays and Comments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931).

55. Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, eds., *Documentary History of Dunmore’s War 1774* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1905).

56. Joseph Doddridge, *Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars of the Western Parts of Virginia & Pennsylvania: From the Year 1763 until the Year 1783 Inclusive; Together with a View, of the State of Society and Manners of the First Settlers of the Western Country* (Pittsburgh: Ritenour and Lindsey, 1824 [1912]).

The Appalachian Range

The Limits of Language Variation in West Virginia

Kirk Hazen, Jaime Flesher, and Erin Simmons

Consider the following scene from the TV show *The Golden Girls*:

Dorothy: Ma, what are you doing?

Sophia: Getting ready. There's a hurricane a-coming!

Dorothy: A-coming?

Sophia: Yes. People only use the *a-* if a really big storm is a-coming or a-brewing.

Dorothy: Look, Ma, I don't mean to be a-criticizing you.

Sophia: Don't you patronize me!

Dorothy: I'm not patronizing you. I'm a-mocking you!¹

In this exchange, a single sound triggers a lot of social meaning. A dialect feature like the *a-* prefix carries such strong social meaning because it is associated with stigmatized regions like Appalachia. Perhaps because of this stigma, use of the *a-* prefix is relatively rare in modern Appalachian speech. Other, more frequent dialect features go largely unnoticed because they are not associated with a stigmatized social group. How noticeable any bit of language is for an audience is directly related to its social associations, not to its frequency or its linguistic qualities. This range between stigmatized and more standard dialect features is explored here for

the West Virginia region of Appalachia in order to highlight how modern varieties of English in Appalachia work linguistically and socially.

Often, outsiders consider English in Appalachia to be a one-dimensional, highly vernacular dialect. However, our sociolinguistic research in West Virginia suggests that this is an unjustified stereotype. It is important to explain how such stereotypes are false so as to paint a more accurate picture of life, culture, and language in West Virginia. Based on work by the West Virginia Dialect Project (WVDP),² we review ten dialect features to showcase the wide variety of language features employed by English speakers in West Virginia—from features that are highly stigmatized to those that do not appear on the social radar. Some speakers commonly use the vernacular forms; others rarely use them at all. It is this range of variation that we explore here.

Methods and Variables

Our results come from studies based on the West Virginia Corpus of English in Appalachia (WVCEA). The WVCEA comprises interviews with sixty-seven speakers who are fairly evenly divided by age, region, and sex (see the accompanying table). They come from towns and rural areas throughout West Virginia, including the counties of Logan, Mingo, Mercer, Raleigh, Fayette, Greenbrier, Kanawha, Boone, Lincoln, Gilmer, Pleasant, Harrison, Barbour, Jefferson, Preston, Monongalia, Marion, Brooke, and Hancock. Figure 1 maps the speakers' home areas. These speakers were interviewed by Kirk Hazen and research associates of the WVDP beginning in 1998.³ Sociolinguistic interviews such as these are designed to facilitate free-flowing, unself-conscious conversation; they are specifically designed *not* to be question-and-answer sessions so that we can obtain conversations that are as relaxed as possible.

We also relied on a separate group of sixteen speakers born between 1871 and 1918, all but two of whom were male. These interviews were recorded in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of an oral history project on mining and are available through the West Virginia and Regional History Collection.⁴ These speakers were also divided evenly by region. Although the actual boundary line is disputable, most dialect atlases and our own survey of native West Virginians indicate that an east-west line

Table 1. Social Breakdown of the Sixty-Seven Speakers Constituting the West Virginia Corpus of English in Appalachia

Characteristic	Number of People
<i>Year of birth</i>	
Group 2: 1919–1947	23
Group 3: 1950–1979	23
Group 4: 1980–1989	21
<i>Sex</i>	
Female	32
Male	35
<i>Region</i>	
Northern West Virginia	33
Southern West Virginia	34
<i>College experience</i>	
Some college	45
No college	22
<i>Ethnicity</i>	
African American	6
European American	61
<i>Social class</i>	
Working	16
Lower middle	32
Upper middle	19

running through Braxton County is a reliable division for northern and southern regions of West Virginia.

In the sociolinguistic scholarship of dialects, language is often studied through the analysis of *variables*. The different forms speakers can produce are called *variants* of the variable. A classic example, so-called *g*-dropping, provides a good illustration, despite the fact that no *g*'s are actually dropped. The variation between *walkin'* and *walking* is the difference between two nasal sounds, [n] and [ŋ]: the first is heard at the end of *pin*, and the second at the end of *ping*. Both forms are variants of the

4. The demonstrative *them* occurs when a speaker uses the word *them* to replace *these* or *those* when pointing out a noun (e.g., “All them young ladies”).
5. Pleonastic pronouns occur when speakers use a pronoun to summarize a preceding noun phrase rather than just allowing that noun phrase to function on its own as the subject of the sentence (e.g., “All those young ladies, they wanted to hold him”).
6. The leveled *was* happens when a speaker uses the word *was* with subjects that would take *were* in other varieties (e.g., “Your dad and uncle was coming down”).⁵
7. The deletion of word-final *t*'s and *d*'s occur when words like *best* are reduced to *bes*'.
8. The *-ing* variable is the previously mentioned variation between two nasal sounds (e.g., “I was walkin' to town”).
9. Vowel mergers happen when different vowels are pronounced the same (e.g., *pin~pen*, *cot~caught*).
10. The quotative *be like* emerges when a speaker uses the combination of *be like* to introduce a quote (e.g., “They are like, ‘You speak English so well’”).

These ten variables include two types of language variation. The first type involves the effects of surrounding sounds. For instance, the deletion of word-final consonant clusters and the merger of vowels are affected by other sounds near them. The second type of language variation is affected by grammatical qualities—that is, certain grammar environments enhance or restrict variation. For example, the only language environment that affects the *-ing* variable is whether the attached words are gerunds, progressive verbs, or adjectives. Gerunds are nouns formed by adding the *-ing* suffix to a verb (e.g., “Walking is fun”); progressive verbs are those in which the *-ing* suffix indicates an ongoing action (e.g., “I am walking”); adjectives ending with *-ing* modify nouns (e.g., “walking shoes”). These different grammatical contexts influence this second type of language variation. For example, when used as a verb, the word *walking* may be pronounced *walkin'*, but the same speaker may employ the final *-ing* sound when using *walking* as a gerund.

The WVDP has examined eight dialect features that are influenced

by grammatical factors. Some of these features were analyzed because of their strong stigmatization both inside and outside of Appalachia, as well as their prominence in media stereotypes of Appalachian English speakers. *The Hillbilly Bears* television show, for example, has drawn international attention to the perfective *done* variable, which outsiders believe is common in Appalachia.⁶ Others were analyzed because of their rising frequency (e.g., the quotative *be like*).

Perfective Done

The perfective *done* is one of the most stigmatized features. In a WVDP survey, sentences containing the perfective *done* were rated as the most “nonnormal” by native Appalachians. Accordingly, Kirk Hazen, Paige Butcher, and Ashley King note that the perfective *done* is commonly used in “racist or otherwise socially demeaning jokes.”⁷

The perfective *done* construction began in the Middle English period. This dialect feature deals with a verb quality called *aspect*. Aspect can be neutral (“She swims”), progressive (“She is swimming”), or perfect (“She has swum”). The perfect aspect refers to a completed situation, and the perfective *done* emphasizes such completeness (e.g., “I done washed the dishes”).

Michael Montgomery points out that the perfective *done* was used in the more southern Smoky Mountain English in the twentieth century, citing such sentences as, “We thought Pa and Ma had done gone to church.”⁸ There is no evidence, however, that the perfective *done* was ever widespread in West Virginia. This feature was used only once among the oldest speakers in our corpus and once among the middle-aged speakers.

a-Prefixing

a-Prefixing is another highly stigmatized language feature whose usage is fading from regular speech in West Virginia. Scholars generally agree that the prefix *a-* is a weakened form of the preposition *at* or *on*.⁹ This feature is most commonly used with progressive verbs; however, it can also be found with other verb types, such as past participles.¹⁰ In addition, *a*-prefixing most often occurs in words with syllable initial stress. Five centuries ago, this feature was used to indicate an action that was occur-

ring at the moment of speech; for example, “she’s at washing” meant “she is washing right now.” Today, it has lost that meaning; at most, Montgomery notes, it “highlights dramatic action,”¹¹ as in the *Golden Girls* scene quoted earlier.

Although it is a renowned Appalachian feature, scholars’ findings clearly indicate that *a*-prefixing has been on the decline since the 1960s. In our studies, only six of eighty-three speakers used *a*-prefixing in their interviews (and we had to search outside the WVCEA to find these instances). These six speakers produced an *a*-prefixed form only fifteen times. As a further indication of its decline, none of the speakers was born after 1947. We predict that *a*-prefixing will be used more often in performances of Appalachian speech than in unself-conscious speech by native speakers.

For-to Infinitive

Another fading dialect feature is the *for-to* infinitive. The WVDP examined four types of this variable as defined by Michael Montgomery and Joseph Hall in the *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English*. All types include *for* and an infinitive form *to*—sometimes in combination with nouns (e.g., “Would you like for me to check your oil?”), and sometimes contiguously (e.g., “I had to pick up chestnuts for to buy what we had to wear”).¹²

Like *a*-prefixing, usage of *for-to* infinitives is limited. There were only fifteen instances in our corpus, and of these, only three were the more stigmatized types of *for-to* infinitives. The contiguous *for-to* version, which is the most strongly stigmatized, did not appear. This feature occurred almost exclusively in speakers born before 1947; only one speaker born after 1947 used the *for-to* infinitive. We can conclude that the *for-to* infinitive is in its twilight in West Virginia.

Demonstrative Them

Demonstrative determiners are words that modify nouns, often providing information about the noun’s quantity or proximity. For example, in the sentence “You can have *these* apples or *those* oranges,” one can infer that the speaker is talking about apples nearby and oranges farther away. The demonstrative *them* occurs when speakers use *them* as a demonstrative

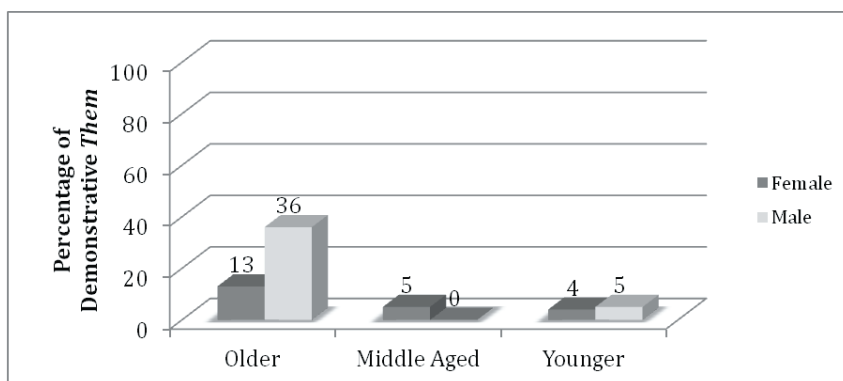


Figure 2. Usage of the demonstrative *them*, by age and sex.

determiner (e.g., “We bought them Jeeps”) instead of *these* or *those*. At the start of the twentieth century, scholars in England noted that speakers so frequently used *them* as a demonstrative determiner that *those* rarely appeared in speech. There is no general consensus on the history of demonstratives in the English language, but the first written instance of the demonstrative *them* did not appear until the Early Modern English period (1596).¹³

Although the demonstrative *them* continues to be the dominant form for many different English speakers around the world, it has become highly stigmatized in the United States. Not surprisingly, its usage seems to be diminishing in West Virginia. As can be seen in figure 2, the older speakers had the highest rates, especially older males. The decline of the demonstrative *them* was dramatic during the twentieth century, but it is holding on at low levels in West Virginia. The demonstrative *them* may still be used for social meanings, such as solidarity, or to express a rural identity. Our observations of some rural communities inform us that the demonstrative *them* is holding steady at its reduced rates.

Pleonastic Pronouns

In contrast to the preceding stigmatized features, which are on the decline in West Virginia, the use of pleonastic pronouns is holding steady.

Pleonastic pronouns occur when a speaker follows a noun phrase with a related pronoun—for example, “Now Jerry, he messed up his hand.” Here, the pleonastic pronoun *he* restates the sentence’s subject. Pleonastic pronouns occur in several varieties of U.S. English, including some standard ones. In those varieties, pleonastic pronouns summarize preceding long noun phrases, whereas in vernacular dialects, pleonastic pronouns can also occur following short noun phrases.

Overall, pleonastic pronouns are not prolific, but they are not disappearing either. Both younger and older speakers use them. Our study found that this variable occurred most often when the noun was animate (e.g., a fish versus a doornail). In fact, of ninety-nine instances of pleonastic pronouns, only ten referred to inanimate subjects. This dialect feature seems to be gender related: it was used by nineteen females and twenty males, but females used the feature 54 percent more than males did (sixty instances versus thirty-nine). As a distinguishing characteristic, these speakers used pleonastic pronouns more often when the noun phrase in question was three words or less. For example, a speaker from Boone County stated, “And my mom, she works.”

Leveled Was

Although it is one of the oldest language variation patterns in English, predating Old English, usage of the leveled *was* declined dramatically in West Virginia during the twentieth century. The leveled *was* refers to use of the verb *was* for every subject, whether singular or plural (e.g., “They was like any other parents”). Historically, subject-verb agreement was much more extensive than it is today; English used to have several different suffixes for the verb to mark whether the subject was singular or plural. Now, the norm has become one past-tense form for both singular and plural subjects (e.g., “I walked”; “we walked”). The verb *be* is an anomaly, however, as it maintains the singular and plural past-tense forms *was* and *were*.¹⁴ Leveling verbs such as *was* to a single form helps resolve the asymmetrical patterns of subject-verb concord in the English language.

The results of the WVDP show that usage rates of the leveled *was*

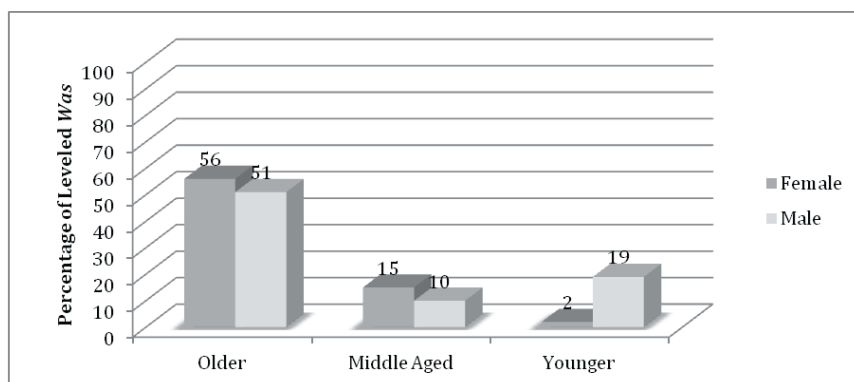


Figure 3. Usage of the leveled *was*, by age and sex.

range widely (see figure 3). Some speakers never used it, while others used it nearly every time they could. Similar to the long-standing *-ing* variable, the leveled *was* is old enough that it is distributed across the entire social spectrum. The oldest speakers produced the leveled *was* significantly more often than younger speakers, however, indicating a decline in usage: 54 percent for the oldest speakers, compared with 8 percent for the youngest speakers.

The WVDP found that the leveled *was* persists as a vernacular feature, despite schools' continuing efforts for standardization. In part, younger speakers have camouflaged the leveled *was* by producing contracted forms such as "We's there last night."

T, D Deletion

Deletion of a word's final *t* or *d* is a prevalent linguistic variable in West Virginia and in all Englishes around the world: for example, *west side* becomes *wes' side*, or *buzzed in* becomes *buzz' in*. Both the *t* and the *d* are coronal stops.

The factor that most influences whether the final consonant is reduced is the sound that follows it. This influence is true for English-speaking communities around the world. If the following sound is a consonant, the rate of deletion is 90 percent; if the following sound is a

vowel, the rate of deletion is only 30 percent. For example, *best buddy* is reduced to *bes' buddy* three times as often as *best apple* is reduced. The second most influential factor for West Virginia speakers is the quality of the sound that precedes the final consonant in a word. For example, words such as *best*, containing [s] before a word-final [t], are twice as likely to have their final consonant reduced than are words in which [k] precedes the final consonant, as in *packed*. Among individual speakers in our study, the rate of *t* or *d* deletion ranged from 46 to 87 percent. In other words, all speakers used it to some extent, but some speakers used it nearly twice as often as others. Because the lowest rate is still quite high, it seems that people do not employ this dialect feature to mark social differences. For other English dialects, final consonant deletion is socially diagnostic, especially before vowels. For these West Virginia speakers, however, this dialect feature has attracted little social attention.

-ing

Another stigmatized feature prevalent in West Virginia is the previously mentioned variation of *-ing*. The stigmatized variant occurs when a speaker uses an alveolar nasal [n] instead of the velar nasal [ŋ] in producing the *-ing* suffix (e.g., “Nobody’s tellin”). This variable is partially the result of a sixteenth-century spelling merger for two separate suffixes—the *-ende* suffix for progressive verbs, and the *-inge* suffix for gerunds. Modern [‘n] comes from the *-ende* suffix, and modern [‘ŋ] comes from the *-inge* suffix. Today, *-in’* is used more frequently in informal speech. Speakers in our corpus had a significantly higher rate of *-in’* use in casual interviews than in the more formal reading passages.

This variable is common in Englishes around the world and was common in our study (we found nearly 7,000 instances).¹⁵ With such an old language variation pattern, usage varies greatly across speakers, with rates ranging from 1 to 96 percent. This range is a perfect example of how speakers use vernacular variants in specific ways to develop their own style of language. As one might predict based on the history of *-ing*, these speakers used *-in’* more for progressives (e.g., “I was walkin”) and *-ing* more for gerunds (e.g., “Walking is fun”), as can be seen in figure 4. These

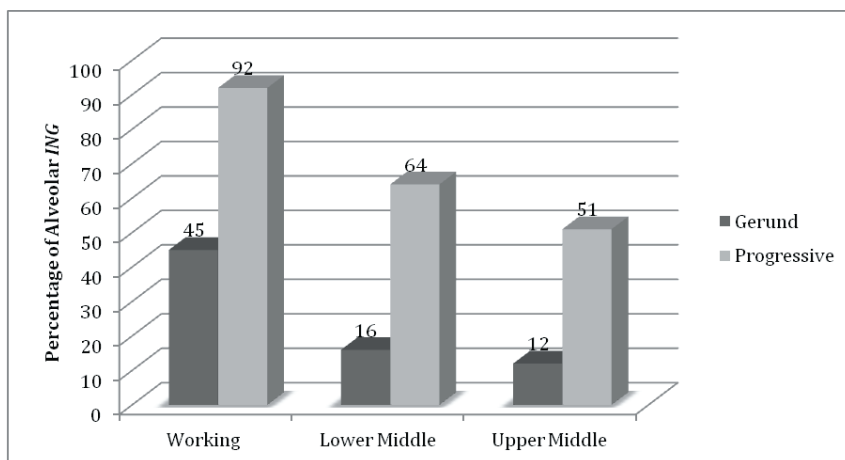


Figure 4. Usage of the alveolar *-ing* (*-in'*) in progressive and gerund contexts, by economic class.

numbers point out that the gerund context is the most socially sensitive one.

The WVDP found that *-in'* was slightly more common among women (53 percent) than men (51 percent). It was also more common among southern West Virginians (59 percent) than northern West Virginians (46 percent).¹⁶ Those with no college experience tended to use *-in'* more often (67 percent) than those with some college experience (45 percent). The highest use of *-in'* occurred among speakers in the working class (see figure 4). For most communities in the United States and England, higher rates of *-in'* are found among men in lower socioeconomic classes.¹⁷

Vowel Mergers

Vowel mergers occur when a speaker produces one vowel sound for two traditionally different vowels. Although the mergers appear to have originated in different places, they are now beginning to overlap in some parts of the United States, including West Virginia.

The WVDP investigated two vowel mergers in West Virginia: the front-lax merger and the low-back merger. The front-lax merger happens

with the vowels in *pit* and *pet*. When they occur before nasal sounds, the two vowels are pronounced the same (e.g., *tin~ten*). The front-lax merger is traditionally a feature of the southern United States, but it is spreading out geographically. Previous studies indicate that the front-lax merger is stigmatized when associated with speakers who are less formally educated.¹⁸ The low-back merger occurs when the vowels in *cock* and *caulk* are pronounced the same (e.g., *cot~caught*). The low-back merger started in Pennsylvania and then expanded and stretched throughout the West. This merger is also spreading across West Virginia and Kentucky and regularly passes without social notice.¹⁹

West Virginians increasingly have both front-lax and low-back mergers. In a study of forty speakers who read specially crafted word lists, 10 percent had only the front-lax merger, 10 percent had only the low-back merger, and 48 percent had both vowel mergers. Having both mergers is most common among speakers with some college education who are female or are younger than twenty-five years. Given these social trends, having both mergers will likely become the norm in West Virginia.

Quotative *Be Like*

A relatively new dialect feature, the quotative *be like*, has made its way into West Virginia over the last few decades. Quotatives are used to introduce quotations: for example, “They *were like*, ‘You speak English so well,’” versus, “They *said*, ‘You speak English so well.’” It is believed that the quotative *be like* was originally used to introduce inner monologue and began on the West Coast. Now the quotative *be like* can introduce both inner monologue and direct speech. This feature has expanded very quickly around the world, and speakers have readily adapted it to suit their needs.²⁰

The quotative *be like* is still under investigation by the WVDP, but several trends are clear. First, speakers’ use of the quotative *be like* ranged from 0 to 94 percent, demonstrating a highly variable community pattern. The speakers who used the quotative *be like* most often were upper-middle-class, younger females from the northern part of the state who had some college experience. People with these social attributes have

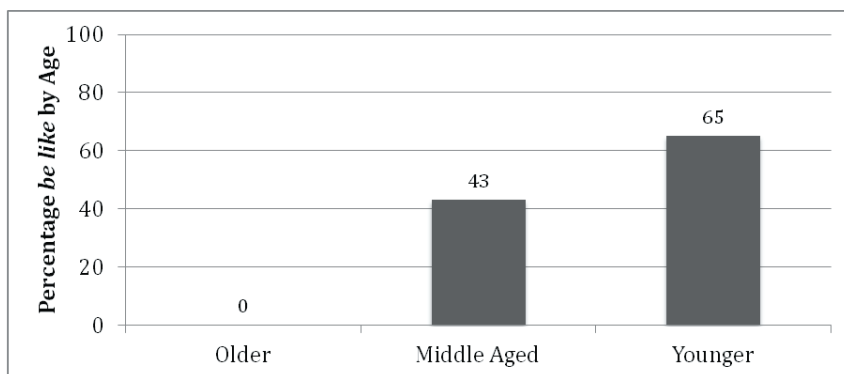


Figure 5. Usage of the quotative *be like*, by age.

more connections to speakers and identities outside of Appalachia and, as a result, have imported and adopted the quotative *be like* variant more readily. The change was rapid in the final quarter of the twentieth century, with less than 1 percent of the older speakers using *be like*, 43 percent of the middle-aged group, and 65 percent of the younger group (see figure 5). Usage of *say* as a quotative (e.g., “She said, ‘I’m not going’”) dropped from 70 percent to 13 percent across the same age groups. Similar to vowel mergers, the results of the quotative *be like* study dispute the idea that Appalachia is an isolated speech community with an old-fashioned dialect.

Language variation makes us human. No other species has a communication system that propagates continually shifting meanings and forms. In concert with that basic quality of language, humans produce a wide range of language variation, which is an important descriptive characteristic of any dialect. For the negatively stereotyped varieties of English in Appalachia, it is crucial to discover, understand, and report the range of language variation to enhance education about Appalachia itself.

A tremendous range of variation exists in the daily conversations of West Virginians. We have presented here only ten linguistic variables—a small slice of the language pie. West Virginians use both stigmatized

and unnoticed features in the construction of their language, indicating that language variation in West Virginia can be both highly vernacular and unmarked in relation to national norms. A primary conclusion must be that English in Appalachia is not monolithic but varies both among speakers and for each individual speaker in different contexts. The traditional stereotypes of Appalachian Englishes have portrayed a simple language trapped in the past, but these varieties actually have a beautiful and natural complexity that stretches across the entire Appalachian range.

Notes

This research was supported by NSF grant BCS-0743489. We would like to thank the entire WVDP crew over the years for their research efforts and feedback on this essay.

1. Mitchell Hurwitz and Marc Sotkin, "The Monkey Show (Part 1)," *The Golden Girls*, directed by Lex Passaris, 1991 (Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD.

2. <http://dialects.english.wvu.edu>.

3. This language corpus is described further in Kirk Hazen, Paige Butcher, and Ashley King, "Unvernacular Appalachia: An Empirical Perspective on West Virginia Dialect Variation," *English Today* 26, no. 4 (2010): 3.

4. <http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/wvcollection/>.

5. It is called the leveled *was* because, across the verb paradigm, the form is the same for every possible subject. That is, the form of the verb is leveled out for *I, you, he, she, it, we, they*, and all plural nouns used as subjects.

6. Kirk Hazen and Ellen Fluharty, "Defining Appalachian English," in *Linguistic Diversity in the South: Changing Codes, Practices, and Ideology*, ed. Margaret Clelland Bender (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 52.

7. Hazen, Butcher, and King, "Unvernacular Appalachia," 16.

8. Michael B. Montgomery, "Appalachian English: Morphology and Syntax," in *A Handbook of Varieties of English*, ed. Bernd Kortmann, Kate Burridge, Rajend Mesthrie, Edgar W. Schneider, and Clive Upton (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004), 246, 254.

9. Walt Wolfram, "Toward a Description of A-Prefixing in Appalachian English," *American Speech* 51, no. 1–2 (1976): 45.

10. Montgomery, "Appalachian English: Morphology and Syntax," 256.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Michael B. Montgomery and Joseph S. Hall, *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 257, 236.

13. Kirk Hazen, Sarah Hamilton, and Sarah Vacovsky, "The Fall of Demon-

strative *Them*: Evidence from Appalachia,” *English World-Wide* 32, no. 1 (2011): 77.

14. A late exception was *you* invading singular subjects during the Early Modern English period. *You was* for singular and *you were* for plural were variably in use for some time.

15. Kirk Hazen, “(ING): A Vernacular Baseline for English in Appalachia,” *American Speech* 83, no. 2 (2008): 130.

16. As noted earlier, the north-south dividing line in the state runs through Braxton County.

17. Hazen, “(ING),” 122.

18. Vivian R. Brown, “Evolution of the Merger of /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ before Nasals in Tennessee,” *American Speech* 66, no. 3 (1991): 308.

19. Kirk Hazen, “Mergers in the Mountains,” *English World-Wide* 26, no. 2 (2005): 205; Terry Lynn Irons, “On the Status of Low Back Vowels in Kentucky English: More Evidence of Merger,” *Language Variation and Change* 19, no. 2 (2007): 166.

20. Isabelle Buchstaller and Alexandra D’Arcy, “Localized Globalization: A Multi-Local, Multivariate Investigation of Quotative *Be Like*,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13, no. 3 (2009): 292.

Think Locally

Language as Community Practice

Nancy M. Hayward

Those who study Appalachian Englishes—dialectologists, folklorists, sociolinguists, historians, and geographers especially—have long been interested in Appalachian dialects for reasons important to their own disciplines. To these people, Appalachian English (AE) has represented, among other things, a uniquely situated dialect, a remnant of an archaic language, a language that is localized in a place and resonates with a culture, and a language that came with waves of immigration and was “deposited” along a mountain chain because of economics, migration, and jobs. Researchers across disciplines helped concretize a definition of Appalachia. Further, as the introduction points out, the definition was fully politicized in 1965 when Appalachia was presented as a unified region by the Appalachian Regional Commission and became recognizable by its hick characters, its unstable economy, and especially its quirky speech. Among the general public, moreover, the view persists that AE is one dialect spoken by one people. Despite decades of research showing that Appalachia is not a homogeneous geographic region and that AE is not a unified and homogeneous language variety, the one-Appalachia ideology persists. In many ways, this perception continues to mark Appalachia as a stigmatized region and to label its residents as “other.” Historically, it has been difficult to challenge this stereotype. Note, for example, the following passage from the *Atlas of North American English*: “While lin-

guists disagree on the extent to which Appalachian English can be considered a single dialect, it is clear that the varieties spoken in these areas share certain features that set them apart from other varieties of English. As a result, Appalachian English is considered to be a regional dialect of American English.¹ Most sociolinguists agree that there are certain overarching linguistic markers of AE; however, it is an oversimplification to say AE is one dialect spoken by all. It is the goal of this book—and this essay—to deconstruct that stereotype.

Certainly, media depictions of Appalachia play a role in maintaining the stereotype.² But perhaps the idea that there is only one AE is also due to discourse within the field of sociolinguistics, as encapsulated in the previous quotation from well-known linguists. In their attempt to document and describe AE, sociolinguists are responsible—at least partially—for perpetuating such stereotypes (see Wolfram’s essay). Working from a paradigm that sought to understand the “variation of the speech community as one entity,”³ a body of research emerged that claims there are certain phonological, morphological, and syntactic features indicative of AE. Beginning in 1929, as work was getting under way for the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, Hans Kurath and other linguists collected speech samples. These were later used to construct maps or isoglosses of dialect regions. Some of the broadly defined linguistic regions, such as Appalachia, then became concretized. Both the academic and the vernacular notions of this assumed homogeneity cast a number of language varieties as “Appalachian English.” The academic stance often linked unique features of the language to an archaic—and privileged—influence: Shakespearean England.⁴ The vernacular or common view, however, essentialized AE as belonging to poor, white, uneducated and uncultured people who engaged in scratch farming or coal mining.⁵

Until the early 1990s, many sociolinguists framed AE studies as binary: one’s linguistic identity was based on certain linguistic features and geography rather than on social, cultural, and ideational factors. Research and popular perceptions saw AE and standard American English (SAE) as opposites, and this polarization persists today, despite efforts to dispel the myth. Most significantly, this view ignores the importance of human agency in the actual speech used by people in everyday life. More recently, and situated in a postmodern framework, many sociolinguists now con-

sider the social complexity that influences language use. Here I echo John Williams, who sees Appalachia as a “zone of interaction among diverse people who have lived in or acted upon it, as it is also their interactions with the region’s complex environment.”⁶ Indeed, if we accept that language is a social construct and that one’s identity is performed in social action that is mediated through language, it makes sense to examine the social contexts and communities in which language is used. In this way, a discussion of AE in the singular becomes a discussion of AEs in the plural, where issues of geography, economics, power, gender, race, ethnicity, history, and age all come into play, but not as variables that determine language use. Language used in context or in a unique situation is always influenced by other factors.

The title of my essay, “Think Locally: Language as Community Practice,” is reminiscent of Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet’s seminal article in gender and language research entitled “Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice.”⁷ Their article addresses the then-current divide between men’s language and women’s language, assuming there are such constructs. This binary essentializes gender and gender constructions. However, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s work sees the possibility of looking beyond this binary definition of gender; their research argues that gender performance encompasses a range of linguistic possibilities, from the traditionally “feminine” (e.g., Paris Hilton) to the less traditionally “feminine” (e.g., Rosie O’Donnell). Each woman in the public spotlight performs her gendered language differently.

Simultaneous with the work specific to language and gender, many sociolinguists have come to embrace a paradigm that contextualizes language use and posits local factors in the construction of linguistic identities and language itself. Using Etienne Wenger’s “community of practice” (CoP) model,⁸ many sociolinguistic studies have moved beyond simply describing language to examining how language is used in context.

The idea of a CoP is that people gather for social reasons (here, the term *social* is used in its broadest, Vygotskian sense)—for work, for sports, for religious services, for school, for hobbies or interests—and in so doing, they create a “community” that engages in site-specific practices with people who are similarly engaged. These CoPs are self-defined and

self-regulated. They can be large, as in a virtual CoP with thousands of online members, or they can be small, consisting of a few women who participate in a Bible study group one evening a week. The important thing to remember is that these people come together for *mutual engagement* in a *joint enterprise* and use a *shared repertoire* of common resources. Language and language-related behaviors are chief among the shared repertoires.

Wenger's concept of CoP is that "learning" is situated and always involves a form of participation. Much of what is learned is how to use language in the everyday business of interacting with others. For the purpose of this discussion, the CoP construct provides a way of understanding and explaining the richness of linguistic varieties in the Appalachian region and of bringing in aspects of a sociocultural perspective to explain the ways people actively construct identity via language. Language is thus seen as a performance.

The CoP model is especially compelling in deconstructing the one-AE model in which one variety of English is spoken by all the people of Appalachia. It allows researchers to understand the uniquely situated instances of AEs. Rather than viewing AE as one dialect, practitioners of CoP choose to look at language socially, culturally, politically, and critically and link it to issues of identity, power, and belonging. Moreover, the CoP model highlights the process of becoming a speaker of a particular variety of situated speech and addresses the following questions: How do small social groups of Appalachian women make choices about using speech that reflects both their racial and their Appalachian identities? How do various ethnic groups make language choices that perform their identities? How does an urban place construct its industrial and ethnic history through language? These questions are at the heart of the CoP model and help illuminate the complexity of AEs.

Later I focus on three research studies that span the Appalachian region to illustrate specific constructions of contextualized language and the complex relationships embodied in it. One of these studies uses the CoP model, while the others situate unique language varieties in a rich context and discuss issues of language and identity. Readers will see that in these analyses, the common notion of AE as a single unified dialect is put to rest. Further, the idea that Appalachia is inhabited by only one type

of person—the poor, white hick mountaineer—is taken to task. The social, racial, and cultural makeup of the people collectively known as Appalachians is much more complex and history laden. Moreover, the ways that people enact their identities through language cannot be described and explained by a label such as Appalachian English.

In addressing how the blanket term *Appalachian English* was constructed, Anita Puckett chronicles its history.⁹ Beginning in the early twentieth century, the term was used to describe the vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar of a vast region by sociolinguists who were interested in defining what they saw as a broad regional dialect. In fact, AE was one of the nonstandard dialects, along with African American Vernacular English (AAVE), that educational and social reformers targeted in the 1960s for federal aid. Likewise, the term *Appalachia* was a political designation,¹⁰ evoking a socioeconomic-political ideology. In other words, the term *Appalachian English* (or the more accurate *Appalachian Englishes*) represents an outsider's perspective by using a discourse chosen by sociolinguists and agents of the U.S. government.

In fact, the people of the Appalachian region historically did not—and still do not—refer to their own speech as Appalachian English; they often self-define it with a local vocabulary.¹¹ They might describe their language as countrified, hillbilly, Pittsburghese, or southern. In recognizing the artificiality of the term *AE*, current research focuses on how language is realized in context, often adopting the ethnographic lens to see how people use language as part of their “identity kit,” which James Paul Gee defines as “ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity.”¹²

Shirley Brice Heath's groundbreaking *Ways with Words*, published in 1983, is perhaps the best-known ethnography to examine the behaviors and artifacts associated with language.¹³ In three communities of the piedmont area of North Carolina, Heath documents language and literacy use not as an isolated phenomenon but as growing out of and integrated with other parts of life. For example, she looks at the presence or absence of bedtime stories and makes connections between home literacy

teaching and school success—or failure. In other words, Heath explores the communities that give rise to language—as Gee calls it, their “ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects.”¹⁴ Heath’s work is a model for the kind of research that is needed in different regions of Appalachia.

While there are studies of AE in specific contexts, many do not frame their work in the CoP model. One body of research that does is Christine Mallinson and Becky Childs’s “The Intersection of Regional and Ethnic Identity: African American English in Appalachia.”¹⁵ Their groundbreaking work applies the CoP frame to AEs, which, they explain, provides “a basis for focusing on the mutual construction of individual and community identity.”¹⁶ Mallinson and Childs’s ethnography includes 153 African American women in Texana, North Carolina, a small rural town in the Great Smoky Mountains. At the heart of their work is an attempt to sort out whether the regional AE dialect is more “powerful” than the women’s identity as African Americans. Their analysis shows that there are influences from both the (white) AE regional dialect and the overarching African American speech patterns (AAVE). But in looking more closely at the community, it is clear that neither region nor race determines these women’s speech choices. Rather, it is their sociocultural orientation—their participation and identity constructions in particular CoPs—that determines their language choice.

AAVE has often been considered a language variety that does not respect geographic borders. In other words, the AAVE spoken by African Americans in Maryland is often considered the same dialect as the AAVE spoken in California. Mallinson and Childs believe that this “categorization also tends to cast African American speakers as one-dimensional linguistic entities whose language attributes are solely a result of their ethnicity” and not other factors.¹⁷

Two groups of women in the small, predominantly black community of Texana stand out: the “porch sitter” group and the “church lady” group. Mallinson and Childs studied how these two groups of women mark their “regional and ethnic identities in their speech” through their use of six grammatical structures.¹⁸ The porch sitters are a group of four women who gather on a front porch to talk. Much of their time is spent observing the men across the street at a local hangout, and their conversations

concern the men and others in the neighborhood. Their language shows strong AAVE characteristics. The church ladies gather in the local Baptist church to discuss their families, Bible readings, and church business. Their language displays more characteristics of AE. Mallinson and Childs believe that the women in each of the two groups are performing their gendered, racial, ethnic, social, cultural, and regional identities via language; in other words, “language is a primary symbol of group identity.”¹⁹ That the porch sitters use language forms more closely aligned with African American speech patterns indicates that they construct their identities as women of a certain race engaged in a particular social activity. In contrast, the church ladies adhere to a more regional, “standard” AE variety of speech, and again, it is their church-related identities that help determine their language use.

The second study is not framed specifically as a CoP, but it unpacks the demographic variables of race or ethnicity, age, and gender and looks at how identities influence language use. Kirk Hazen’s study examines variation within one North Carolina county by closely examining forty-five speakers of three ethnicities (African American, European American, and Native American) in three different age groups and divided about equally by sex.²⁰ Hazen’s purpose is to explore “cultural identity,” and he does so by analyzing how speakers linguistically orient themselves to either the local culture or the greater regional culture by exhibiting certain linguistic traits. Specifically, he examines grammar forms associated with AAVE (e.g., the absence of *be* in sentences such as “He going”). His results show that neither ethnicity per se nor age determines an individual’s language choice. Rather, it depends on how the speaker self-identifies. For example, Native Americans who see themselves as part of the local community use more AAVE features in their language. Hazen hypothesizes that this is because Native Americans and African Americans have had a historically close relationship as marginalized people in the area. In contrast, Native Americans who view themselves as part of the larger culture exhibit fewer AAVE characteristics; they do not align themselves with local blacks. We might expect Native Americans in one relatively small geographic area to speak similarly, but Hazen reminds us that “identity categories like gender, ethnicity, and cultural identity are not monolithic social factors” but “are constructed out of evolving local practice.” He

concludes: “Cultural identity helps explain interspeaker variation, both within and across generations, for those speakers who would otherwise share many of their sociological traits. A part of who a person is, cultural identity influences the outcomes of other subidentities: being an expanded-identity Native American is different from being local-identity Native American.”²¹

The third body of work is situated in a place not usually included in discussions of AE: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Barbara Johnstone and Scott Kiesling’s work on the local dialect, Pittsburghese, is another example of local and historically situated speech.²²

In general, Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania have not been considered in studies of Appalachia until recently. Both residents and outsiders commonly refer to the area as Pennsylvtucky. The term *Pennsylvtucky* itself is a curious blend of *Pennsylvania* and *Kentucky* and has been used as both a pejorative label (by outsiders who want to associate the worst characteristics of the rural states) and an affectionate term (by natives of rural Pennsylvania). The coined term links the region to the greater Appalachian geographic region and its history. Noting the exploitation of the Pennsylvania mountains, a practice common in Appalachia, Samuel A. MacDonald writes: “The Allegheny region, [is] known to many locals as ‘Pennsylvtucky’ for its peculiar mix of rural and industrial culture.”²³

Western Pennsylvania shares a similar linguistic history with other parts of Appalachia. In particular, the earliest seventeenth- and eighteenth-century settlers were Scots-Irish who were part of a general migration westward and along the Ohio River and Appalachian Mountains. Pittsburghese, then, originated with these immigrants, which explains why some local Pittsburgh language features are also common in other varieties of AE, including the following:²⁴

<i>r</i> -intrusion	<i>worsh</i> for <i>wash</i>
lowered <i>ire</i> sequence	<i>tar</i> for <i>tire</i> , <i>far</i> for <i>fire</i>
intrusive <i>t</i>	<i>oncet</i>
glide reduction	<i>taam</i> for <i>time</i>
<i>h</i> -intrusion	<i>overhalls</i> for <i>overall</i> s
positive <i>anymore</i>	“Anymore I don’t go there”

plural count noun	“It’s ten mile up the road”
object pronouns	“Me and him went out”

So why did Pittsburgh develop its own idiosyncratic language variety? Johnstone and Kiesling’s work for the Pittsburgh Speech and Society Project probes this question and finds that the answer is based on the history of the area, consistent with immigration, settlement, and industry. In the period of profound immigration, 1880–1920, the immigrant laborers were mostly from eastern and southern Europe; when they arrived, they adopted many of the speech patterns of the original Scots-Irish settlers. Because of their working-class status, their speech was stigmatized as working class or uneducated. However, that does not explain why this local-sounding speech persisted even as the area became more technologically and educationally savvy. Much of Pittsburghese’s vitality has to do with the identity constructions of the people who grew up in ethnic, often working-class enclaves within the city. The Pittsburgh Speech and Society Project has documented local speakers and attributes much of the local dialect to issues of identity and belonging: “Generally, older, long-time residents of Pittsburgh use Pittsburgh speech the most. Also, men are generally more likely to speak with a local accent than are women, possibly because of a stronger interest in displaying local identity, and because speaking ‘correctly’ is often more important to women in the workplace than it is to men, who may need to speak more like the other people they work with.”²⁵ Many locals continue to be proud of the city’s working-class history, as it resonates with personal values such as being hardworking and honest—values that are part of Pittsburgh’s immigrant labor history and its development as an industrial center. This identity continues as a collective urban identity among certain groups and is linguistically realized on T-shirts and coffee mugs and in newspaper editorials.

Johnstone and Kiesling conclude their analysis by stating that among speakers of Pittsburghese, “self conscious performances of social identities [are] linked with place as well as class.”²⁶ Bonnie McElhinny’s 1999 study of eight officers (four men and four women) in the Pittsburgh Police Department resonates with this idea. All eight police officers aligned themselves with the city’s identity and spoke Pittsburghese. According to

McElhinny, “all of the speakers . . . would be conventionally categorized as working class . . . [and] their job often required them to display some kind of street smarts,”²⁷ implying a group of people, a community of practice, that performs language in concert with their identities.

It is interesting and certainly historically important to understand broad regional dialects such as “Appalachian,” for it provides insight into larger social and economic issues. Yet at this juncture in our knowledge of how and why language varieties are produced and transmitted, it seems much more relevant to place such studies in specific times and places, as Mallinson and Childs, Hazen, and Johnstone and Kiesling do. The old notion that all people living in the Appalachian region use only one language variety—and usually the stereotypically negative variety at that—has been unfortunate. Moreover, belief in the stereotype has impeded more productive lines of sociolinguistic research, including examinations of why a group of speakers uses a particular language variety and not another. Looking at specific varieties of language within the Appalachian region and contextualizing them can lead to more significant findings that link language use to issues of belonging—essentially, a sense of identity (see Sohn’s essay) and power (see Puckett’s essay).

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18. *Ibid.*, 131.
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African American Speech in Southern Appalachia

Walt Wolfram

Despite their invisibility in traditional portraits of Appalachia, African Americans have been a part of southern Appalachian culture since the eighteenth century. In fact, nearly 10 percent of the population of the Mountain South is African American.¹ Even though the black population was much less dense than in the lowland, plantation South, African Americans in southern Appalachia were not cushioned from the social and political impact of enslavement and social subordination.² At the same time, there were differences. Wilma Dunaway notes that in the Mountain South, slaveholdings per household were smaller than in the lowland South, more ethnic mixing occurred between African Americans and Native Americans, slaves were more frequently assigned to non-agricultural occupations, and there was heavier reliance on the labor of women and children. In this context, a number of small rural and some urban African American communities were established in southern Appalachia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and have stably existed since that time.³

Linguistic Myths

Until the past decade, the speech of African Americans in the Appalachian range has largely been ignored or dismissed.⁴ Some of the oversight is attributable, no doubt, to the general cultural and sociohistorical

oversight of blacks in the Mountain South, but some sociolinguistic circumstances contributed to this neglect as well. Notwithstanding the significant contributions of dialectologists and sociolinguists to the description of regional, social, and ethnic varieties of American English over the past half century, the field was lulled into accepting several sociolinguistic assumptions that may have contributed to the lack of attention to African American speech in this region.⁵ One of the conclusions that emerged from the early wave of sociolinguistic studies of African American English (AAE) was the observation that a common set of structural pronunciation and grammatical features characterizes the vernacular speech of African Americans, regardless of where it is spoken.⁶ It was assumed that AAE possessed a kind of homogeneity that united its use in different regional contexts and in urban and rural settings as well. As William Labov—arguably, the most influential voice on the study of AAE for more than four decades—put it, “By the ‘black English vernacular’ [AAE] we mean the relatively uniform dialect spoken by the majority of black young in most parts of the United States today, especially in the inner city areas. . . . It is also spoken in most rural areas and used in the casual, intimate speech of many adults.”⁷ From this perspective, it could be assumed that descriptions of AAE for the Mountain South would match those of AAE varieties elsewhere.

By the same token, analogous assumptions of homogeneity have been made about varieties of Appalachian English, and it has sometimes been assumed that there is a uniform language that extends throughout the Appalachian range. For example, Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian, in one of the earliest descriptions of Appalachian speech, noted, “We use the term AE [Appalachian English] to refer to the variety of English most typically associated with the working class population,” and “many of the features we describe have relatively wide distribution within the central Appalachian range.”⁸ From such a perspective, it might be assumed that a general description of Appalachian English could be applied regardless of region and ethnicity in the Mountain South. In the words of Thomas Bonfiglio, the illusion of homogeneity “is largely a function of secondary revision that glosses over differences and constructs a linear metanarrative . . . there is something in the popular consciousness that desires to see a unity of geography, ethnicity, and language.”⁹ More recent descriptions

of Appalachia emphasize the diversity of language within the Mountain South.¹⁰

Most studies of AAE have focused on the forms that are most different from standard American English (SAE), and there has been little study of how AAE is differentiated in different regions and within communities themselves. The traditional definition of AAE emphasizes its most non-standard, or vernacular, variety, and most data-collection efforts center on how to access these vernacular forms instead of gathering data from a full range of community participants on the standard–vernacular continuum. Even standard varieties of English become idealized in the process of describing AAE, as if there were a unitary version of spoken SAE. A similar preoccupation has occurred in the study of southern Appalachian speech, where descriptions tend to focus on working-class speakers who are most distant from SAE, rather than speakers who represent the range of social strata within the community.¹¹ In other words, researchers become preoccupied with describing the most vernacular varieties of Appalachian speech in a way that idealizes the so-called authentic vernacular speaker, rather than acknowledging the full range of variation among Appalachian speakers.¹² In reality, identity, style, and politics intersect with the full range of language fluctuation that occurs in varieties of both Appalachian English and AAE, wherever they are found.¹³

Linguistic Issues

There are several possibilities in terms of explaining African American speech in Appalachia. As Kirk Hazen points out, there may be shared features between African Americans and European Americans that make the speech of these groups indistinguishable in actual dialect use and undifferentiated in dialect perception.¹⁴ At the other extreme, we might find distinct varieties of English that demark a clear-cut ethnolinguistic boundary so that African American speech maintains the kind of socio-cultural distinctiveness that has been noted in traditional sociolinguistic studies of AAE. Or there may be different constellations of shared and distinctive structures that are sensitive to the local context and to community dynamics. Of course, it is also possible that the speech of African Americans in the Mountain South is characterized by a range of language

and social relations and that demographic, social, and sociopsychological factors intersect in defining the use of these language varieties in particular communities. Certainly, there is great diversity in the African American communities of Appalachia, making it difficult to generalize from community to community. Notwithstanding these differences, there may be other factors that unify African American communities in the Mountain South, such as the common imposition of segregation laws that led to separate schools, separate churches, and other forms of institutional and social segregation. As some African American scholars have pointed out, the underlying issue is one of race and ethnicity manifested in sociolinguistic diversity.¹⁵ Questions about African American speech in the context of southern Appalachia can be answered only by examining empirically some actual African American communities in this region.

Empirical Evidence

We can consider the relationship of African American speech to local speech in the Mountain South by examining several types of diagnostic linguistics structures, that is, structures that set apart different regional, social, or ethnic groups. Before examining some of these representative variables, however, it is necessary to understand that although dialects are sometimes set apart by qualitative differences (i.e., one variety always uses a structure that another variety never does), they just as often exhibit quantitative differences in which language varieties are distinct in terms of the relative frequency of usage rather than the categorical absence or presence of a structural form. For example, all speakers of English sometimes use the form *-in'* for the unstressed suffix *-ing*, as in *swimmin'* for *swimming* or *runnin'* for *running*. At the same time, some groups and individuals use the *-in'* form significantly more frequently than others:¹⁶ low-status speakers may use it more than high-status speakers, men more than women, southerners more than northerners, and some southern mountain communities more than some southern lowland communities. Thus, certain dimensions of African American and Appalachian speech are defined by patterns of relative use rather than by categorical patterns of use or nonuse.

As an example, consider the relative absence of the third-person singular *-s* suffix in structures such as “She run” for “She runs” in some re-

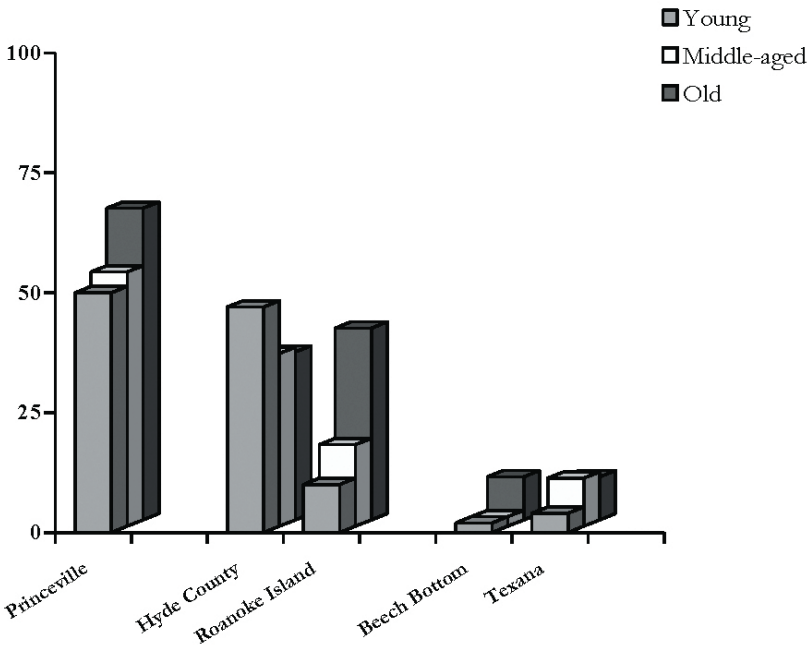


Figure 6. The percentage of third-person singular *-s* absence in African American speakers, by community and age.

gional African American communities, including a couple in southern Appalachia. This feature is a common trait of AAE,¹⁷ but it is not commonly found in varieties of Appalachian English.¹⁸ Figure 6 summarizes statistics for the *-s* absence in five different communities: two of them, Beech Bottom and Texana, are located in the Appalachian mountain range of western North Carolina; two, Roanoke Island and Hyde County, are on the Outer Banks by the coast; and one, Princeville, is in the Coastal Plain region of North Carolina.¹⁹ The Appalachian community of Beech Bottom is located in the northwest corner of North Carolina in Avery County, about thirty-five miles southwest of Boone, along the Tennessee border. Settled in the 1870s, Beech Bottom has had an African American population ranging from 80 to 120. Since the early 1940s, however, due to the closing of feldspar mines and the mobilizing effects of World War II, the community's population has been drastically reduced, and there

are only a handful of African American residents remaining. Texana is a small African American community located high on a mountain about a mile from the town of Murphy in the Great Smoky Mountain region of North Carolina, near the Tennessee border. It was settled in the 1850s and currently has a relatively stable population of about 150 African Americans.

The statistics in the figure are also divided on the basis of three age groups: older speakers, middle-aged speakers, and younger speakers. As figure 6 shows, the frequency of the absent third-person *-s* suffix is different among the three regions and is quite sensitive to generational differences as well. For example, *-s* absence is relatively rare—and receding—in the Appalachian African American communities but is quite common in the Coastal Plain community of Princeville, with the Outer Banks communities falling in between. Similar shifts across these communities have been found for other “core” AAE structures,²⁰ such as absence of the verb *be* (e.g., “She nice” for “She’s nice”) and loss of a final stop consonant after another consonant (e.g., *wes’ en’* for *west end*, *col’ egg* for *cold egg*). These findings suggest that features commonly included in the inventory of AAE structures may appear in Appalachian African American speech, but they are not nearly as stable and uniform as attested in non-Mountain South African American communities.

Considered next is a phonological variable that represents a different pattern: the absence of *r* following a vowel, as in *fea’* for *fear* or *ca’* for *car*. Traditional AAE varieties in both urban and rural contexts are described as predominantly *r*-less,²¹ whereas varieties of Appalachian English are typically described as *r*-ful, that is, speakers tend to pronounce the *r* in *fear* or *car*.²² Figure 7 depicts the relative incidence of postvocalic *r*-lessness in the same five communities considered in figure 6. For the sake of comparison, figures for *r*-lessness are also given for two cohort European American communities: one on the Outer Banks, and one in Appalachia. As in figure 6, percentages are given for three different age groups so that changes over time can be considered in the assessment of regional accommodation. The two Appalachian communities (Beech Bottom and Texana) have little *r*-lessness, much like their cohort European American communities. Furthermore, *r*-lessness rates show a relatively stable pattern in the Appalachian communities, with little change

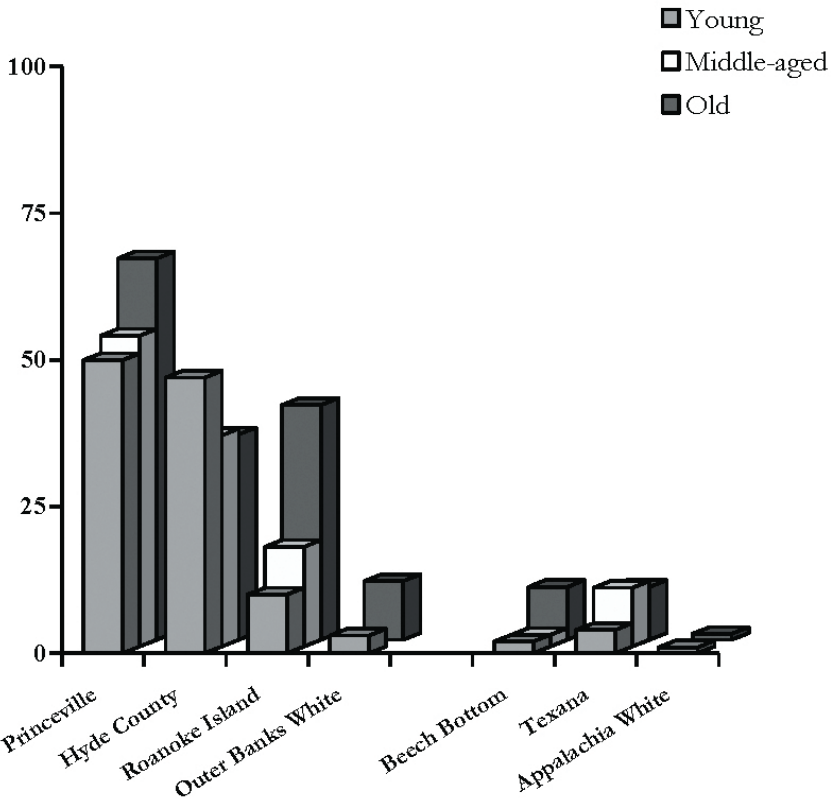


Figure 7. The percentage of postvocalic *r*-lessness in African American speakers, by community and age.

across the different generational groups. The patterning of *r*-lessness in communities in eastern North Carolina shows much more variability in time and place.

The preceding examples indicate that core vernacular AAE structures that differ from vernacular Appalachian English structures may be represented, but at significantly reduced levels in African American speech in the southern Appalachian range. This finding has been replicated in other studies; for example, Wolfram and Jeannine Carpenter found similar patterns for reducing consonant blends before a vowel (e.g., *wes' en'* for *west end*) and for the absence of *be* (e.g., “She nice” for “She’s nice”) among African Americans in different settings in the Mountain South.²³

At the same time, many local and regional traits are assimilated in African American Appalachian communities. For example, the loss of *r* after a vowel (e.g., *feuh* for *fear*) aligns with the pattern found in the local Appalachian community rather than that found in other African American communities in the lowland South. Most speakers in Appalachian communities pronounce their *r*'s after a vowel, and African American communities in Appalachia tend to follow suit.

Alignment with local patterns is also found for vowels. Becky Childs conducted an extensive instrumental analysis of vowels in Texana and found that traits of southern Appalachian vowels are frequently adopted by African Americans,²⁴ contra AAE vowel norms.²⁵ For example, the southern vowel fronting in words such as *boot* and *boat*, so that they sound more like *biwt* and *bewt*, respectively, is common among African Americans in Mountain South communities, although it is not typically found in the core AAE system.²⁶ Similarly, the ungliding of vowels in words such as *right* and *ride* by African Americans in southern Appalachia is more likely to follow the local pattern than the core AAE pattern found elsewhere. As noted by Erik Thomas, there are two patterns of reducing the glide—one in which the ungliding affects only vowels occurring before voiced consonants or syllable-final vowels (e.g., *tahm* for *time*, *bah* for *bye*), and a more general pattern in which the ungliding takes place before voiceless consonants as well (e.g., *rahs* for *rice*, *raht* for *right*).²⁷ The more general version of this pattern is typical of southern Appalachian varieties, whereas the more restricted version is found in some regions of the lowland South and in urban areas.²⁸ African Americans in southern Appalachia, however, are more likely to adopt the general version of this pattern, which is found in most southern Appalachian communities, rather than the typical AAE pattern.

The accommodation of local southern Appalachian vowel traits may be one of the reasons that African Americans in southern Appalachia are often misidentified as European Americans in ethnic identification tasks by outsiders. For example, two studies found that African American speakers in small African American communities in the Mountain South were consistently identified as European Americans by listeners in Raleigh, North Carolina.²⁹ This misidentification may occur even when the speakers use some core features of AAE that are not found among European American

speakers in Appalachia. This pattern underscores the significance of local accommodation by African Americans in southern Appalachia, as well as the significant role of vowel production in ethnic identification.

The picture that emerges from recent studies suggests that African American speech in southern Appalachia is somewhat different from that found in the canonical studies of AAE in large urban areas of the North and in lowland South regions.³⁰ While some of the distinctive, core structures of AAE are evident, they appear to a lesser degree in southern Appalachia than in other regions. At the same time, African American speakers tend to adopt some local and regional dialect traits found among European Americans, particularly in terms of vowel production and some distinctive grammatical traits. Although the vocabulary has not been studied in detail, it appears that African Americans in the Mountain South also tend to accommodate distinctive local vocabulary items. Some southern highland dialect words—*airish* ‘breezy’ or ‘chilly’, *holler* ‘a valley between mountains’, and *gaum* ‘gummed up’ or ‘messy’—are typically known by both European Americans and African Americans in southern Appalachia. By the same token, some lexical items may be distinctive to the African American community, such as *high yellow* ‘light-skinned person’, *ashy* ‘dried, scaly skin’, and *CPT* ‘colored people’s time’. These items are often known only by members of African American communities in these regions. Thus, we see a pattern in which regional vocabulary items are shared, while African American communities may preserve some ethnically distinctive terms.

Sociolinguistic Diversity in African American Speech

African American speech in the Mountain South is not a uniform variety; in fact, it may be characterized by great diversity based on demographic, social, and individual factors. For example, urban areas of southern Appalachia, with larger and denser concentrations of African Americans, are likely to show more extensive traits associated with core AAE and fewer local dialect traits compared with smaller rural areas. But it is not simply a matter of demography and population concentration. Aspects of cultural differentiation and ethnic identity are also symbolically reflected through language. Thus, Christine Mallinson and Wolfram contrasted the case of Hyde County, a historically isolated coastal community, with

Beech Bottom, a historically isolated community in southern Appalachia.³¹ Whereas younger Hyde County residents showed a movement away from the local norm in favor of external urban AAE norms, the few younger speakers remaining in Beech Bottom accommodated the local dialect norms of their European American cohorts. Beech Bottom African Americans expressed a strong desire to put the racism of the past behind them and to gloss over the existing ethnic divide between whites and blacks; in fact, they self-identified as mixed race rather than African American. There was also a lack of a distinctive black youth culture in Beech Bottom, where African American youths were largely involved in local white culture. The converging cultural themes and activities led the movement toward a regional dialect norm, even as traces of a distinctive ethnolinguistic past continued to erode.

Finally, there may be differences in communities of practice within local African American communities. For example, in their study of Texana, a small African American community in the Smoky Mountains, Childs and Mallinson found that the linguistic practices of women there were best explained in terms of the different communities of practice in which they participated.³² One group, the “church ladies,” engaged in practices related to churchgoing and activities associated with cultural conservatism and “propriety.” The other primary group, the “porch sitters,” engaged in regular socializing on one group member’s porch, where they would listen to music and participate in activities indicative of affiliation with the more widespread African American culture, especially the youth culture. Differential social practices help explain why the porch sitters showed high usage levels for core features of AAE, while the church ladies showed low usage levels for these features and instead used language associated with the local southern Appalachian variety of English, as well as features of standard English.

African American speech in Appalachia cannot be reduced to a singular description any more than Appalachian English can be. There are regional differences; demographically based differences related to community size, gender, and social status; and cultural differences related to how ethnolinguistic differences are symbolically perceived and practiced in various communities. And of course, we cannot overlook individual differences: particular speakers choose to present themselves ethnolin-

guistically as either inside or outside certain communities. Notwithstanding these significant variables, we can conclude that many African Americans in the Mountain South reveal an identity that is both shared with and distinct from their European American cohorts. This identity reflects the complex ways that region, ethnicity, and culture intersect in the Mountain South, as well as the existence of past and current social interactions within and across communities.

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Research reported here was generously supported by NSF grants BCS-0236838 and BSC-0843865. Thanks to Kirk Hazen and Mary E. Kohn for comments on a draft of this essay.

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26. *Ibid.*

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28. Walt Wolfram, "The Grammar of Urban African American Vernacular English," in *Handbook of Varieties of English: The Americas and Caribbean*, ed. Bernd Kortmann and Edgar Schneider (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004), 111–32.

29. Mallinson and Wolfram, "Dialect Accommodation," 743–75; Becky Childs and Christine Mallinson, "The Significance of Lexical Items in the Construction of Ethnolinguistic Identity: A Case Study of Adolescent Spoken and Online Language," *American Speech* 81 (2006): 3–30.

30. Wolfram, "Grammar of Urban African American Vernacular English," 111–32; Guy Bailey, "The Relationship between African American Vernacular English and White Vernaculars in the American South: A Sociocultural History and Some Phonological Evidence," in *Sociocultural and Historical Contexts of African American English*, ed. Sonja Lanehart (Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001), 53–92; Patricia Cukor-Avila, "Co-existing Grammars: The Relationship between the Evolution of African American and Southern White Vernacular English in the South," *ibid.*, 93–128.

31. Mallinson and Wolfram, "Dialect Accommodation," 743–75.

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Dialect and Education in Appalachia

Jeffrey Reaser

Language, perhaps more than any other discipline, is fundamental to all academic pursuits. Other disciplines assume students' proficiency in academic language, while English or language arts classes typically do not assume an ability in math or physics. Because language is assumed to be a part of a person's overall ability, it is typically acceptable to admit deficiencies in a subject like math ("I can't balance my checking account") but not about language ("I can't conjugate my verbs"). The different evaluations of these disciplines stem from multiple important differences between the subject matters. Children acquire language in advance of the onset of formal schooling by sifting through the words and sentences they hear and using those data to develop and test hypotheses about the patterns of a language (known as *grammar*). Remarkably, even though parents seldom chide young children for saying "foots" instead of "feet," children who are exposed to standard forms will eventually master the irregularities of English with little or no formal instruction. Unlike those who are proficient in math, it is common for adept language users to have relatively little conscious knowledge about how it works. Another factor in the different evaluations of academic disciplines stems from the role language plays in constructing individual identities.¹ Language is not a "fixed code," and any attempt to define a single static set of patterns as correct is inherently flawed.²

People know how to use language to present an image of who they are; therefore, even as verb conjugations may vary from person to person, people naturally use language in a way that is right for them in that particular context.

Children arrive at school speaking a version of the dialect spoken in their homes. They also arrive with radically diverse backgrounds in literacy and orality.³ Unfortunately, many curriculums and classrooms are designed based on “one-size-fits-all” thinking. School provides access to new language influences (dialects or languages not previously encountered), and many students begin accommodating to the speech of teachers and peers. Children whose parents speak vernacular dialects often face more language-related challenges in formal education than do children of nonvernacular-speaking parents.⁴ It is not the language itself that is the source of these problems, however. Instead, difficulties are often mediated through well-meaning but linguistically unaware teachers or through biased educational policies, including placement and standardized assessments, that assume cultural knowledge or familiarity with mainstream linguistic norms. Assessment and teacher responsibility are discussed in more detail later, but the fact that vernacular-speaking students struggle in school is related primarily to schools’ lack of understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of different ways of speaking and the related cultural backgrounds and literacy practices.⁵ Unfortunately, vernacular-speaking students are often labeled as lacking ability, effort, or motivation, which can be an extremely harmful mischaracterization.

The remainder of this essay examines the ways in which speakers of Appalachian Englishes may experience dialect “interference” in formal educational contexts in the realms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These areas are treated individually, despite the fact that they are not at all discrete. A few final but important caveats are in order: the varieties of Appalachian English are far from homogeneous; not all Appalachian English speakers have the same inventory of linguistic features, nor do these features cause the same interactions in all students. Finally, I do not intend to suggest that teachers, students, or administrators are in any way homogeneous; however, space constraints require some generalizations that are not universally appropriate.

Speaking

While many consider it common sense that schools should teach students standard English pronunciation, this stance is far messier than it seems on the surface. Dictionaries, which are often seen as bastions of standard pronunciation and meaning, are quite inclusive of alternative pronunciations and nonstandard meanings, not to mention slang and nonstandard words (*ain't*, the bane of many schoolmarms, is defined in many dictionaries). Any good dictionary includes multiple accepted ways to pronounce words (e.g., *harass* as either *huh-RAS* or *HAR-uhs*; *family* and *caramel* with either two or three syllables), and these do not even cover the accepted standards of all regional dialects. To privilege some pronunciations over others is to privilege some students over others.

The Conference on College Composition and Communication, a subdivision of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), adopted a position statement in 1974 that asserts that students have a “right to their own language—to the dialect that expresses their family and community identity, the idiolect that expresses their unique personal identity.” It states that the goal is to help students “in their ability to speak and write better . . . [and] learn the conventions of what has been called written edited American English.”⁶ In this statement there is a clear expectation of mastering written conventions, but also a more ambiguous suggestion about learning to “speak . . . better.” Surveying the policy statements of other groups, including the American Association of Applied Linguistics, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, it is clear that while each agency recognizes the importance of competence in written, edited American English, none stakes out so definitive a position on spoken language instruction.

On this issue, Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian note, “There appear to be essentially two dimensions of [the debate over teaching standard spoken English], one relating to the philosophical position on whether standard English should be taught and the other relating to the reality of the prospects for success in teaching spoken standard English.”⁷ Ann Piestrup offers some insight into the difficulties associated with teaching pronunciation effectively; in her study, students whose pronun-

ciation was corrected by teachers tended to use more, not fewer, vernacular features over time.⁸ The real danger of correction methodology is not that it produces fewer standard-speaking students but that it may lead teachers to assume that vernacular-speaking students are unable to learn, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (this is known as the “Pygmalion effect” or the “Rosenthal effect”).⁹ Such models of teaching are not regionally restricted, and it is safe to assume that some students who speak varieties of Appalachian English have been subjected to such pedagogically indefensible methods.

Another issue surrounding oral language instruction is that there are conventions in writing with no equivalency in spoken English, including punctuation, capitalization, homophone differentiation, and so forth. Further, the connection between speaking and writing is not as clear as many people believe. Although it is commonly assumed that students write as they speak, in reality, there are critical distinctions between the two modes of communication, including differences in formality, word choice, and grammatical strategies. This does not even touch on differences in spontaneity and process; spoken language is less planned and cannot be “edited” the way writing can be. A final distinction is that speaking is a mode of communication that is acquired naturally, unlike writing, which must be learned; regardless of the dialect, children acquire their language at approximately the same rate.¹⁰

Teachers tend to pay less attention to pronunciation differences than to grammatical differences, which often carry a larger “social tax.”¹¹ Teachers are more likely to comment on the use of *clumb* as the past-tense form of *climb* or on multiple negation (grammatical differences that are found in some varieties of Appalachian English) than on pronunciation of the word *fire* as *far* (which is common in some varieties of Appalachian English). Teaching students to use nonnative grammatical structures may be more successful than convincing students to alter pronunciations. The success of learning standard spoken language depends primarily on the students’ motivation for doing so, and studies have demonstrated that students who are oriented primarily toward their community value local pronunciations over nonlocal ones, including those associated with standard American English; further, the promise of better future employment does not seem to be an adequate motivator for abandoning local pronun-

ciations.¹² A few scholars, while acknowledging the philosophical rationales for not teaching pronunciation, have suggested some guidelines for programs that do teach standard spoken language. Such programs should take into account group and individual reference; have clearly articulated goals accessible by students; include information about dialect diversity; be scientifically based, using comparative linguistic methods to analyze differences between the vernacular and the standard variety; and be realistic in terms of the variety taught and the spheres of desired usage.¹³

Listening

All language users misinterpret utterances from time to time. Some people may live their entire lives mishearing *garter snake* as *garden snake*, a classic example of what linguists call *folk etymology*. The two phrases sound similar, and the snake in question is often encountered in gardens, so the misunderstanding is understandable. Similar reinterpretations include the parsing of *Alzheimer's disease* as *old-timer's disease*, *for all intents and purposes* as *for all intensive purposes*, and *would've* as *would of*. Listening errors are common across all dialects, and they often turn up as writing errors. Exposure to these words and phrases via reading is typically all that is required to shift toward standard versions of them (though some, such as *would of*, are more persistent than others in students' writing). Difficulty in differentiating homophones in writing (*to*, *two*, and *too* or *there*, *their*, and *they're*) is a related phenomenon. With no difference in pronunciation, the spelling distinctions of these words are purely a written convention.

Listening may contribute to academic difficulty in a variety of ways, perhaps most substantially via orally administered assessments such as speech pathology or placement tests. In oral testing situations, dialect differences between student and proctor may result in a child's misunderstanding of directions or content. Tests are sometimes created without regard to the effect of various vowel mergers on the perception of homophones. For instance, some speakers of varieties of Appalachian English would pronounce the following pairs of words the same: *which/witch*, *hoarse/horse*, *pin/pen*, *find/fine*, *filled/field*, *marry/merry*, *sale/sell*. More concerning than individual misinterpretations, however, is the as-

sumption that children's presuppositions about what is being asked of them match those of the test designer or administrator. Task instructions that seem unambiguous to the test administrator may be heard correctly but still lead to a miscommunication between student and proctor. For example, many tests ask students to "repeat" a word or phrase. While this directive seems straightforward, it is not unambiguous. Some students repeat the word or phrase verbatim (usually what the test expects), while others attempt to rephrase or use a synonym for what was said. Although the latter approach generally demonstrates greater language competency, it is typically considered incorrect according to scoring protocol. Antonyms are also prone to cultural difference. Deborah Meier notes that *far* could be a logical antonym of *tall*, though such a response would be scored as incorrect on standardized assessments.¹⁴ A final example involves the common and seemingly innocuous task of "summarizing a story." Allyssa McCabe demonstrates that children of different cultural backgrounds approach this task in very different ways: some focus on plot, others describe relationships between characters, while still others examine a potential moral to the story.¹⁵ In standardized assessments, as well as in the classroom, the assumed neutrality of a task and task instruction should always be questioned.

Reading

Since everyone speaks with a dialect, everyone's dialect influences their pronunciations when they read aloud. Most of the time, readers use their dialect to pronounce words while more or less following the grammatical conventions of the author's writing. It is possible to affect a dialect other than one's own while reading, especially when reading the speech of a character (e.g., reading the speech of Scarlett O'Hara with a southern accent). Occasionally, dialect pronunciations may be masked in reading; students may access their knowledge of letter-to-sound correspondence and pronounce words differently than they would if they were speaking casually. Such pronunciations are called *spelling pronunciations*. For example, some speakers of Appalachian English dialects pronounce *forehead* without an *h* sound, so that it sounds more like *for'ed*. Such a speaker may, when reading, see the *h* on the page and pronounce it. This

is also why more people are beginning to pronounce the *t* sound in *often*. Spelling pronunciations are not a given in reading, however. While reading, the eyes do not examine each word individually. Instead, they jump rapidly both forward and backward (these rapid movements are called *saccades*), resting only briefly (*fixations*) on words that require special attention. Thus, only certain—and sometimes random—words may be affected by spelling pronunciations.

Understanding how the eyes move during reading also helps explain why a reader's grammar may supersede the grammar encoded in a text. While it is unlikely, for example, that Appalachian speakers would insert an *a-* prefix where one does not exist on the page (except, possibly, if the reader wished to portray a character as speaking an Appalachian English dialect), other grammatical features, such as double negatives or irregular past-tense forms, may occur if these happen in places in the text where the readers' eyes do not fixate. Highly proficient readers have greater distances between fixations, allowing more opportunities for their dialect grammar to supersede the grammar on the page.¹⁶ Readers tend to fixate less on parts of the sentence that are likely to have *redundant* semantic or grammatical meaning.¹⁷ The verb phrase is one such place of high redundancy in standard English, as auxiliaries (sometimes called "helper verbs") typically carry redundant information about grammatical aspect (e.g., perfective, progressive). This makes both auxiliaries and participle forms subject to variation or elimination in the reading of vernacular speakers. Thus, a relatively proficient reader might say "brang" instead of "brought," especially in perfect constructions (e.g., "We had brang the dog") or drop the auxiliary *are* from progressive sentences (e.g., "We talking").

Regardless of native dialect, reading has proved to be one means by which people become better at using patterns of edited written English. However, not all such patterns and distinctions are attained passively; in some instances, more focused instruction is needed. All English speakers reduce complex consonant clusters occasionally, especially when they are followed by another consonant, as in the sentence "I saw mis' [instead of *mist*] rising from the water." Similar reductions have produced the now-standard forms *skim milk* (from *skimmed milk*) and *ice cream* (from *iced cream*). As these two examples demonstrate, this process can lead to an

apparent absence of past-tense markers in speech. For example, the verb *miss* is made past tense with the addition of only a *t* sound, resulting in the same *-st* sequence as in *mist* (*missed* and *mist* are pronounced identically). Working-class speakers of Appalachian English varieties were found to reduce preconsonantal consonant clusters 74 percent of the time for non-*-ed* clusters (as in *mist*) and 67 percent of the time for *-ed* clusters (as in *missed*),¹⁸ which is more frequent than in other rural white southern varieties. Reductions of consonant clusters commonly transfer into reading, resulting in readings such as “Yesterday, I miss’ the bus” or “I miss’ the bus, so I ran to school.” Reductions go unnoticed much of the time because the past-tense context is clearly understood (the *-ed* ending is redundant with *yesterday* in the first sentence, while *ran* marks the past tense in the second). Occasionally, if there is no adverbial phrase or sufficient context to convey the tense, teachers may misinterpret these readings as errors rather than attributing them to dialect influence. Work with African American students has found that they reduce consonant clusters less often in reading and writing if they have received focused instruction on pronouncing consonant clusters.¹⁹ As argued for nearly fifty years, dialect interference ought to be treated differently from clear reading errors.²⁰

Writing

Whereas listening and speaking are skills that can be acquired without much instruction, reading and especially writing competency requires instruction and effort. Part of the reason why writing requires special attention are the aforementioned conventions for which there is no oral language equivalent, including punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and editing. Since language users understand words to be polysemous (i.e., a single word may have many meanings), they use homophones in oral communication without ever pausing to consider that there are different spellings for *to*, *too*, and *two* or that *effect* and *affect* are different words. Put differently, it is impossible to make a mistake with homophones while speaking.

Despite the fact that there are important differences between the speech and the writing of developing writers, dialect can influence writ-

ing.²¹ Dialect features that occur in writing are often evaluated quite negatively by teachers and professionals.²² In the section on reading, it was noted that teachers should distinguish between dialect influence and reading errors. With writing, teachers must distinguish dialect influence from mistakes such as typos (which are not based on a lack of knowledge) and errors of writing convention ranging from spelling and punctuation to syntax and narrative format. Generally, it has been found that vernacular-speaking students make about the same number of errors related to language conventions as nonvernacular speakers do; however, the presence of dialect features in their writing (e.g., past-tense absence, possessive *-s* absence) results in a larger total number of departures from the standards of edited written English.

This difference in total number of errors is exacerbated by the influence dialect can have on spelling errors. Donna Kligman and Bruce Cronnell found that vernacular-speaking students were five times as likely as nonvernacular speakers to misspell words whose pronunciations might be influenced by dialect.²³ Pronunciations that are common in Appalachian English dialects, such as vowel mergers in the words *pin* and *pen* or *fill* and *feel*, may present spelling challenges to speakers of such dialects. The common advice to “just sound it out” or “look it up in the dictionary” may leave students frustrated, as this advice ignores the fact that their confusion stems from differences between their dialect and standard American English. For example, a student with the *pin-pen* merger may “sound out” the spelling of *penguin* as *penguin*. Giving this student a dictionary may result in examining *pi-* entries for a few moments before giving up.

Studies of dialects’ influence on written grammar have not always produced consistent findings. Johanna DeStefano, for example, found that African American students made more dialect-related errors involving nouns than verbs,²⁴ while other studies reported the opposite.²⁵ Difficulties also arise in separating dialectal and developmental effects, which are the deviations from standards that all people exhibit as they learn to write. For example, C. Kovac and H. D. Adamson documented the presence of features such as *be* absence in the developmental writing of students whose dialects never omit *be*.²⁶ Many dialects, including some varieties of Appalachian English, have features that overlap with

these developmental effects, making it difficult to definitively separate dialect influence from natural developmental processes. Finally, just as people's spoken codes change throughout the life span, written codes also change in somewhat surprising ways. Researchers in the 1960s and 1970s suggested that vernacularism in speaking may increase throughout adolescence.²⁷ A landmark longitudinal study of African Americans confirmed this notion but also suggested that some individuals do not fit the majority pattern.²⁸ Using the same data set, Kelly Abrams examined vernacularity in student writing from grades 2 through 10 and found few traces of dialect interference in early writing; increases in vernacular features began in about grade 6 for most students.²⁹ Interestingly, the vernacular features common in the students' speaking were not necessarily those found in their writing. It is unclear to what extent speakers of Appalachian dialects follow or stray from the patterns discovered in the longitudinal study of African Americans; however, it is worth noting that, like African American students, Appalachian students are likely to have some dialect features that overlap with developmental writing differences (including, for some, absence of the form *are*). As with reading, some features are more likely to be encoded in student writing. A feature that a speaker uses categorically or near categorically—for example, the leveled *is* (“we’s going”) or double negatives—is more likely to show up in writing than a feature used only occasionally, such as *a*-prefixing.

Responsible Teaching Practices

Prescriptive, fixed-code, or single-standard instruction has consistently fallen short of its desired impact. A study of three instructional programs used in New Zealand found that students taught with a traditional grammar program scored the worst on vocabulary, reading comprehension, sentence combining, and writing tasks compared to two peer groups taught with more linguistically informed methods.³⁰ Finlay McQuade analyzed the effectiveness of a course designed to teach students to write and edit better and found that it resulted in writing that was “awkwardly and I believe self-consciously constructed to honor correctness over all other virtues, including sense.” He concludes, “No reduction in the num-

ber of errors could be significant, I reasoned, when the post-course essays are inferior in every other way to the pre-course essays.³¹

Various scholars have laid out guidelines for developing appropriate language programs.³² At the core of these guidelines is often knowledge of language variation and history. Such knowledge includes an understanding that all language varieties are linguistically equal; that they all have systematic and complex grammars that effectively translate the world into language; that they reflect the culture and history of a group or region; and that any evaluation of dialects as inferior, broken, lazy, or slang is inappropriate and is really an evaluation of the group that speaks the dialect.³³ Put simply, any program designed to eradicate a dialect via education will fail (and fail the children it aims to help) because it denigrates not only a dialect but also a history and a way of life. Instead, programs should be designed to increase rather than limit the linguistic options available to students. As such, students should be encouraged to read, write, and speak in a variety of levels of formality, genres, and purposes.

It is a common but misguided belief that vernacular speakers have tried but failed to learn standard forms. Such thinking was behind programs to eradicate foreign languages throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States. Florence Goodenough, a pioneer in the field of developmental psychology and a contributor to early placement testing, had an extremely negative view of foreign languages, stating: “the use of a foreign language in the home is one of the chief factors in producing mental retardation.”³⁴ Later, Uriel Weinreich suggested that bilingualism contributed to idleness and a lack of morality.³⁵ I note these early sources for two reasons. First, such notions ought to seem shockingly uninformed and prejudiced today; however, although it is unheard of to make such claims about bilingual children, many dialect speakers continue to be unfairly evaluated with the exact same rhetoric we reject for non-English speakers. Second, teaching English to speakers of other languages has changed dramatically over the past 100 years in the United States, moving from eradication approaches (sometimes called “transitional” or “immersion” programs) to “dual-language” approaches that do not attempt to eliminate other languages.³⁶ These shifts in perspective and approach—which took a number of decades to complete—reflect the same shift that schools must undergo with regard to nonstandard dialects.

It is crucial for schools and teachers to understand that vernacular-speaking students may struggle not because they are less bright, suffer from a learning or speech disability, or are lazy but because they have acquired and continue to value language patterns that are fundamentally different from those that are privileged, such as standard American English. Most curriculums are built on the assumption that students will progress relatively uniformly through a series of goals and grade levels. But if all students are expected to attain a certain competency by a specific time, it is clear that vernacular speakers must learn more than their nonvernacular-speaking peers in the same amount of time. Equating the school experience of vernacular speakers to that of foreign-language students provides a hyperbolic analogy: no one would expect mainstream American students to learn how to speak and write a foreign language at exactly the same pace as they learned to write in their native language, nor would anyone assume that all students would learn the foreign language at the same rate. Further, the methods used for teaching a foreign language would likely be different from those used to teach about a native language. To be clear, I am not suggesting that vernacular speakers be treated like foreign-language students. But the lack of awareness of language variation by curriculum developers leaves vernacular-speaking students frustrated because no matter how hard they work, they continue to fall further behind their mainstream peers.³⁷ Recognizing the inequality behind privileging some students' native dialects while disfavoring others, James Sledd suggested that requiring only vernacular speakers to learn explicitly about language variation is tantamount to a "linguistics of white supremacy."³⁸

One trend that has recently become more common in some settings is code switching via contrastive analysis, in which students are taught how to shift between their native dialect and academic registers when appropriate, thereby reducing the frequency of dialect influence in writing and, perhaps, speaking.³⁹ The most effective programs combine information about contrastive analysis with a sociolinguistic perspective that recognizes not only the systematic nature of the nonstandard dialect but also the legitimate and important role of the dialect in constructing individual and group identity.⁴⁰ Such programs require teachers to have substantial knowledge about their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. To

meet this need, linguists have created resources that describe dialects for nonexpert audiences. One such resource, *American Voices*, is a volume of short overviews of a number of American dialects, including Appalachian Englishes.⁴¹ A project created specifically for secondary teachers in West Virginia, titled *Enduring and Fading Features in West Virginia*, examines the local variety in an engaging and accessible way.⁴² There is also a short segment on Appalachian English varieties in North Carolina in Jeffrey Reaser and Walt Wolfram's state-based curriculum, which draws in part on the documentary *Mountain Talk*.⁴³

A goal of education in the United States is to prepare students to be successful in academic, professional, personal, and community spheres. Dialect eradication—an approach that many teachers and curriculums embrace—is not consistent with this goal. In addition to being intrinsically intertwined with history and culture, vernacular dialects persist in part because of their role in gaining access to local goods and services and in allowing individuals to align themselves with a particular social group. In the case of Appalachian Englishes, the positive local evaluation of these dialects often makes them the correct language choice to satisfy Robert Pooley's definition of *good English*: "language choices so that the fewest number of persons will be distracted by the choices."⁴⁴ The importance of the dialect becomes even more apparent when listening to speakers of Appalachian Englishes who are also adept code switchers. It is not uncommon for such speakers to embrace their native dialect when they wish to convey pride in their unique Appalachian culture and heritage—some of which is tied intrinsically to language, including the art of storytelling (as part II of this volume clearly demonstrates).

It is important to note, in conclusion, that the goal of formal education—for students to master academic English in its written and spoken form—should not be seen as incompatible with the goal of investigating and celebrating language diversity. Embracing this diversity results in language users who are more adept at utilizing a variety of approaches in speaking and writing, including those that are privileged in education.⁴⁵ While formal education will continue to espouse the importance of a more or less singular standard, it is crucial to recognize, explore, and value students' dialects as linguistic equals to that standard.

Notes

1. See the essays by Hayward, Wolfram, Lyon, House, Smith, and Hicks in this volume.

2. Roy Harris, *The Language Myth* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 10.

3. See, for example, Victoria Purcell-Gates, *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

4. The term *vernacular*, like *dialect*, is not used in an evaluative manner. All speakers of any language speak a dialect of that language, and some are evaluated socially (not linguistically) as being better or worse, standard or nonstandard. The term *vernacular*, as used by linguists, denotes a dialect whose patterns are more dissimilar from the accepted standard variety than are other dialects. Because of the principle of linguistic subordination, many vernacular dialects are also the most highly stigmatized dialects. Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

5. Purcell-Gates, *Other People's Words*.

6. Conference on College Composition and Communication, National Council of Teachers of English, *Students' Right to Their Own Language* (Champaign-Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974).

7. Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian, *Appalachian Speech* (Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1976), 14.

8. Ann M. Piestrup, *Black Dialect Interference and Accommodations of Reading Instruction in First Grade*, Language and Behavior Research Lab Monograph 4, ED119113 (Berkeley: University of California, 1973).

9. See Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (New York: Irvington, 1992).

10. Wolfram and Christian, *Appalachian Speech*, 132.

11. Maxine Hairston, "Not All Errors Are Created Equal: Nonacademic Readers in the Professions Respond to Lapses in Usage," *College English* 43 (1981): 794–806.

12. Wolfram and Christian, *Appalachian Speech*, 147.

13. *Ibid.*, 147–48; Carolyn Temple Adger, Walt Wolfram, and Donna Christian, *Dialects in Schools and Communities*, 5th ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 104–7.

14. Deborah Meier, *Reading Failure and the Tests* (New York: Workshop Center for Open Education, 1973).

15. Allyssa McCabe, *Chameleon Readers: Teaching Children to Appreciate All Kinds of Good Stories* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995).

16. See Stanford E. Taylor, "Eye Movements in Reading: Factions and Fallacies," *American Educational Research Journal* 2 (1965): 187–202, for a seminal study of eye fixations and saccades of 12,000 schoolchildren in grades 1 through 12.

17. Here, *redundant* refers to the linguistic notion that grammatical information is marked multiple times in a single sentence. The progressive aspect is

marked with both a conjugated (and tense-marked) form of *be* and a present participle form of the main verb (the form with the *-ing* suffix), as in “I am going to the store.” The perfective is equally redundant, requiring a conjugated form of *have* followed by a past participle form of the verb, as in “He has written a story.”

18. Wolfram and Christian, *Appalachian Speech*, 36.

19. William Labov and Bettina Baker, *The Individualized Reading Manual: A Textbook for Tutors and Children* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999); William Labov and Bettina Baker, “What Is a Reading Error?” *Applied Psycholinguistics* 31 (2010): 735–57.

20. See, for example, Kenneth S. Goodman, “Dialect Barriers to Reading Comprehension,” *Elementary English* 42 (1965): 853–60; William Labov, “Some Sources of Reading Problems,” in *New Directions in Elementary English*, ed. Alexander Frazier (Champaign-Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1966), 140–67.

21. Some commonly cited differences in writing versus oral communication include a more formal style, a common prohibition against first-person pronouns, increased repetition of known information, fewer sentence fragments, fewer discourse markers (e.g., *like* or *you know*), more passive voice, and more appositives.

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26. C. Kovac and H. D. Adamson, “Variation Theory and First Language Acquisition,” in *Variation Omnibus*, ed. David Sankoff and Henrietta Cedergren (Edmonton, AB: Linguistic Research, 1981), 403–10.

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28. Janneke Van Hofwegen and Walt Wolfram, “Coming of Age in African American English: A Longitudinal Study,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 14 (2010): 427–55.

29. Abrams, "Comparing Codes."
30. Warwick B. Elley, I. Barham, H. Lamb, and M. Wyllie, "The Role of Grammar in a Secondary English Curriculum," *Research in the Teaching of English* 10 (1976): 5–21.
31. Finlay McQuade, "Examining a Grammar Course: The Rationale and the Result," *English Journal* 69 (1980): 29.
32. See, for example, Constance Weaver, *Teaching Grammar in Context* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996), 26–27; Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, *Dialects in Schools and Communities*, 117–19.
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34. Florence Goodenough, "Racial Differences in the Intelligence of School Children," *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 9 (1926): 393.
35. Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact* (The Hague: Mouton, 1953).
36. John Edwards, *Language Diversity in the Classroom* (Buffalo, NY: Multilingual Matters, 2010).
37. Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
38. James Sledd, "Bi-dialectalism: The Linguistics of White Supremacy," *English Journal* 33 (1969): 1307–29.
39. See, for example, Norma R. LeMoine, "Language Variation and Literacy Acquisition in African American Students," in *Literacy in African American Communities*, ed. Joyce L. Harris, Alan G. Kamhi, and Karen E. Pollock (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000), 169–94; Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords, *Code-Switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms* (Urbana, IL: NCTE Publications, 2006); Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords, *Code-Switching Lessons: Grammatically Diverse Strategies for Linguistically Diverse Writers, Grades 3–6* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2010); and Clark's essay in this volume.
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42. Kirk Hazen and Paige Butcher, *Enduring and Fading Features in West Virginia: An Education Unit for Secondary School Teachers* (Morgantown: West Virginia Dialect Project, 2011), <http://dialects.english.wvu.edu/outreach>.
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44. Robert Cecil Pooley, *The Teaching of English Usage* (Champaign-Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974), 5.
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Voices in the Appalachian Classroom

Amy D. Clark

As a native of central Appalachia, I grew up in a multigeneration family with homes spread throughout a holler in far southwestern Virginia. There, a “story” ranges from a Jack tale to a homey anecdote to juicy gossip, and the *telling* is as important as the details. My family told stories as they graded tobacco, put up vegetables from the garden, and rested on the front porch. Women told stories on Saturdays as they gave each other perms in their kitchens. And everyone told stories over Sunday dinner, their words and sentences embroidered in a variety of Appalachian English that would define my identity for the rest of my life. As George Ella Lyon describes so eloquently in part II, my region and people created my “voiceplace.”

I knew where my great-grandmother kept the brown *pokes* in the *warshroom* when I was *fixin'* to climb onto the smokehouse roof to pick a *right smart* bunch of apples. And I knew that *daggum* was an acceptable replacement for a curse word, but we better *not never* be caught using the Lord's name in vain. At night, when we rode home from her house in the back of my dad's blue Ford, we watched for *haints* in the darkest parts of the holler, and *us* girls never wore *paints* to church. And when we *come* to the county fair every summer, *me and my brother* brought something to enter in a contest, whether it was a piece of art or our favorite goat.

I could not have told you, back then, that the way I spoke was old, so old that it is the closest to colonial American English you will hear

anywhere in the United States today, nor did I know that the way we talk has its roots in eighteenth-century Ireland. I didn't know that double and triple negatives were once included in the rules of standardized English and were used frequently by Geoffrey Chaucer. But I was keen on the differences between my speech and that of my cousins from Indiana, who turned on the *lah-eets* and rode their *bah-eeks*.

I learned the skill of shifting between informal and formal dialects fairly early in my academic career because I was an avid reader. Intuitively, I knew that altering my dialect was as necessary among my peers for purposes of solidarity as it was with my teachers for the purpose of making As. Though I had a good command of standardized English, it was important to go back to my Appalachian voice among my friends and family. Anything more formal, and I would have been pegged as someone who thought she was better than her kinfolk. Nevertheless, I encountered that problem with my family over and over during my college years, when my accent began to shift undeniably toward something more mainstream. It created tension between my home dialect and that of the world of academia, where I would spend the rest of my career. That tension remains.

Once I began teaching, I forgot—or maybe denied—the experience of being a vernacular-speaking student, even though I was teaching in central Appalachia, where my students and I share similar dialects. Before I returned to graduate school, my degrees were in literature, so I was trained to teach literary analysis but not specifically trained to teach writing. As a student, I believed—as I had been taught—that any written dialect other than standard American English (SAE) was wrong, and the only way I knew how to respond to my students' vernacular writing was to correct it, as my teachers had done. I passionately marked my students' papers, returned them, and waited for revised copies, unaware that I was wasting both my time and theirs with this process.¹ Then my students broke my heart when they told me that they hated to write. The hours I spent correcting papers seemed to have no effect, leading to my frustration and eventual burnout. I watched incredulously as students got their papers, looked at the grades, and dropped them in the trash on the way out the door. I thought about quitting.

I was a good teacher: enthusiastic, innovative, and passionate about inviting all things “Appalachian” into the curriculum. But the part of me

responsible for teaching writing did not know how to respond to sentences like “My brother and me drives the same truck,” even though I knew (based on my own experience and research) how important these dialectal patterns were in my students’ peer groups, homes, and communities. Reflecting on those early years in my career, I now know that my understanding of “grammar” was limited to what I had learned in the traditional or correctionist English classroom, where vernacular dialects belonged only to characters in the literature we studied. As Jeffrey Reaser points out in his essay, in students’ writing, such dialects are considered incorrect, in no uncertain terms. In my experience as a student and a teacher, dialects from rural Appalachia are simply unwelcome in most classrooms.

Once I began teaching at the college level, it occurred to me that I was privileging the authors we read but not the students’ texts. With every mark, I was silencing my students’ authentic voices. Every time I told them their dialect features were incorrect or erroneous, I was sending the same message about their homes, their communities, and their values—but I was not the first. I was just widening a gap between home and school that existed before they ever came to college, and that delicate bridge between the two had already been eroded by years of correctionist teaching.

The Influence of Speech on Writing

This essay builds on research previously cited by Reaser in this volume, as well as the work of Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian,² which supports the key tenets of this section: that oral and written literacy are closely linked; that there is no difference in the cognitive abilities of vernacular and standard dialect speakers; that vernacular speakers know and sometimes internalize negative attitudes and beliefs about themselves based on their speech patterns; and that vernacular speakers learn at an early age how to code-switch, or change their speaking patterns, to accommodate the expectations of a particular audience. Family literacy researchers have also dispelled the myth that vernacular-speaking children have little or no access to literacy in their homes and communities; in fact, like me, they typically come from literacy-rich environments where everything from recipes to letters to the King James Bible are available to inform children’s developing literacies.³

Though speech is often characterized as an independent process with its own set of traits, Wolfram and Christian's studies indicate that "certain parts of the writing process may reflect the influence of the vernacular dialect."⁴ In the 1960s and 1970s the research of William Labov, Mina Shaughnessy, and Geneva Smitherman opened discussions about the relationships among writing, dialect, and discourse communities. They confronted the belief that speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) are cognitively challenged and do not understand the grammar of SAE; in fact, AAVE speakers' failure to measure up to classroom standards was found to be the result of cultural conflict between the student and the institution.⁵ Wolfram and Christian's research in West Virginia communities revealed that speakers of both AAVE and varieties of Appalachian English learn how to shift into SAE fairly early to avoid judgments about their intellectual capabilities.⁶

Anita Puckett's eight-year study of labor and discourse in a community she calls "Ash Creek," Kentucky, also supports the relationship among writing, speech, and awareness of disapproving attitudes. Her study documented residents who "engage in certain domains of reading and writing activities which augment, rather than replace, oral forms."⁷ Puckett found that residents were aware of negative stereotypes associated with their speech patterns and understood that institutions expect a social and cultural identity that they do not share. Unlike those who may label such communities illiterate by institutional standards, Ash Creek residents simply believe, and correctly so, that they "do' literacy differently."⁸

Similar studies by myself and by Katherine Kelleher Sohn of central Appalachian women who speak with vernacular features revealed their awareness of disapproving attitudes toward their speech patterns.⁹ Consequently, these women referred to their dialects as "incorrect" and sometimes asked that their speech be standardized in transcripts of their interviews. For similar reasons, the women questioned the value of their writing. In my own study, the women's responses to survey questions about how strongly they identified themselves as writers, readers, and learners revealed a reluctance to associate what they did with particular words reserved for the "published" or the "educated." Overall, the women were most comfortable calling themselves "learners," less comfortable with the identity of "readers," and least comfortable labeling themselves as

“writers.”¹⁰ Their comments suggest that adults have an enormous influence on how children perceive themselves as they develop literacy skills. Thus, a classroom that invites the use and study of both vernacular and SAE dialects in the learning process can make a big difference for children, helping them develop writing confidence early on. By adulthood, it is difficult, though not impossible, to change attitudes about language.

Though the college students in my classes were not taking standardized tests for writing assessment, the majority of their writings suggested that they either had not internalized the rules of SAE or were consciously resisting their use, even at the college level. I heard similar complaints from middle and secondary school teachers, whose students performed poorly on benchmark tests in spite of tireless efforts at teaching SAE. Teacher-researcher Lizbeth Phillips writes that the middle school students in her classroom reported feeling “defeated before they even started planning a response to a formal prompt.”¹¹

What we intuitively know to be true is supported by research: vernacular dialect speakers typically underachieve on standardized tests and in the language arts classroom.¹² *Why* they underachieve cannot be absolutely explained, but there are probable causes, some of which are addressed by Reaser in this volume. Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords suggest that the struggles among AAVE speakers “revolve around issues of language and culture, poverty, distribution of goods and resources, the physical conditions of school buildings, the training of teachers . . . and ethnic and linguistic bias in standardized tests, just to name a few factors.”¹³ Rural areas in central Appalachia share these same issues, which may explain why speakers of Appalachian English varieties have trouble on writing assessments. More specifically, according to Androula Yiakoumetti, a curriculum that “suppresses the home language and forcibly promotes the standard is *likely* to be part” of the reason for underachievement, in addition to “teachers’ attitudes toward the [vernacular] dialect.”¹⁴

In 2009 the Appalachian Writing Project’s research team circulated a perception survey among a small sample of teachers in far southwestern Virginia.¹⁵ This survey asked the teachers to rate sentences using a variety of possible responses. One of the sentences, containing language variables associated with an Appalachian dialect variety, was this one: “About four mile down the road they’s a farmer’s market where you can get the best

'matters around." Of the twenty-five respondents from secondary schools and colleges, 50 percent identified the sentence as "incorrect, improper, wrong, or bad English." Forty-four percent of the respondents identified the same sentence as "an example of central Appalachian English." Although the survey sample was small, it suggests that further research is warranted to convince our colleagues that vernacular dialects are neither wrong nor incorrect.

One of the problems with those of us who teach writing is that we tend to look at language *prescriptively* instead of *descriptively*. We mistakenly believe that we own the rights to how language may be used, an ideology that is passed down from teacher to student. The great language debate arguably began in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, leading to a controversial resolution adopted by members of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1974 that officially acknowledged and affirmed all dialects students brought to the classroom, particularly those of less privileged groups.¹⁶ Though linguists have been publishing research that supports this position since the 1950s, pedagogical practices have been slow to reflect it, as Reaser points out in his essay. Writing teachers who are primarily literature specialists may come from degree programs that did not train them how to teach writing to vernacular dialect speakers. So, in many cases, they are teaching the way *they* were taught by emphasizing "correctness," or SAE, above all else and marking nonstandard dialect forms as incorrect or erroneous. According to Wheeler and Swords, "English teachers routinely equate standard English with 'grammar' as if other language varieties and styles lack grammar, the systematic and rule-governed back-bone of language. Yet, the child who speaks in a vernacular dialect is not making language errors; instead, she or he is speaking correctly in the language of the home discourse community."¹⁷ So if a curriculum that values SAE *exclusively* can do more harm than good, can a curriculum that teaches both SAE and the language system of a vernacular dialect increase scores on writing assessments, as well as improve students' awareness of different grammar systems? Previous research says it can.

Michelle Croutteau's work with central Appalachian high school students who had failed benchmark tests and were in danger of not graduating involved teaching the students their own vernacular dialect features

in contrast to those of SAE, so they could successfully code-switch when the audience and the occasion called for it.¹⁸ After Crouteau began teaching this way, benchmark tests were no longer barriers to graduation: all the students in the class passed the test and were able to graduate. Wheeler and Swords's research with minority-language children in eastern Virginia also addressed the issue of low test scores. One year after being taught to code-switch by using contrastive analysis, minority-language children performed just as well as their counterparts on standardized tests. These issues and outcomes are not unique to the United States, however. Wheeler and Swords cite Canadian and West Indian schools where "linguistically informed" instruction has made a difference in the test scores of vernacular dialect speakers.¹⁹ Yiakoumetti's research with rural and urban Cypriot students in Greece revealed that a contrastive analysis approach to teaching can even be *disproportionately beneficial* to the vernacular dialect speakers.²⁰ Given these results, it seemed logical that this approach could work with vernacular-speaking students in central Appalachia as well.

The Appalachian Writing Project Study

As director of the Appalachian Writing Project (AWP), an organization of teachers dedicated to progressive, research-based teaching methods that privilege student voice, I have been fortunate to work with educators from all over southwestern Virginia. One of the key benefits of the AWP is that teachers can work through their pedagogical problems in teams and conduct research in their classrooms.²¹ In this case, the AWP's research aimed to determine whether teaching the grammar systems of vernacular dialects side by side with the grammar system of SAE (a method known as contrastive analysis) would improve students' ability to code-switch—that is, to use SAE for particular audiences and purposes. Our two-year study suggests that teaching students to code-switch using the method of contrastive analysis results in higher scores on writing assessments.

Far southwestern Virginia is embedded in the core of central Appalachia, where several states converge. We share borders with eastern Tennessee, eastern Kentucky, southern West Virginia, and western North Carolina. We also share features of Appalachian dialect varieties that

many speakers proudly associate with their culture; however, on high-stakes tests, these dialects represent incorrect answers.

As of this writing, Virginia assesses its students' proficiency in English using the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, administered in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11. Such tests place the vernacular dialect speaker at a disadvantage in several ways: (1) the vernacular dialect employs nonstandard grammatical forms, conversational lexical items, and archaic expressions that are largely stigmatized in mainstream American society; (2) the vernacular speaker may be taught to recognize his or her home speech as "incorrect" or "bad," as opposed to being a dialect variety with a particular purpose and audience; and (3) the vernacular speaker must make a counterintuitive choice on tests that identify his or her dialect features as incorrect.

How much of this disadvantage can be attributed to dialect prejudice is hard to prove. In 2010 the student population of the two school divisions involved in this study were 95 and 97 percent Caucasian, and the majority of those students were the third, fourth, and fifth generations to be born and raised in central Appalachia. These students speak varieties of Appalachian English that include grammatical, phonological, and lexical features that would be considered incorrect on formal assessments; however, white vernacular speakers are not tracked in formal assessments because they are not considered a subgroup.²²

SOL tests are written in SAE, which is considered the dialect of power in the United States. Consider, for example, a central Appalachian student who speaks a dialect variety of Appalachian English and frequently uses the nonstandard reflexive pronoun *hisself* or *theirsself* in place of the standard *himself* and *themselves* with peers, who accept his usage as part of his identity, culture, and community. If that student uses those words on a formal writing assignment, however, an SOL prompt scorer reading for a student's control of writing within the parameters of formal English could interpret such features of Appalachian English as a "lack of control of either the Written Expression or the Grammar/Usage/Mechanics domain."²³ (The reality may be that the student did not take the time to code-switch to more formal usage or that he used a more authentic voice for purposes of dialogue or expression.)

Another problem that arises for the vernacular dialect speaker is a

multiple-choice test that lists answers in both SAE and a vernacular dialect. The following is a question from the spring 2009 Virginia SOL Grade 5 Writing Test, pertaining to the sentence “The model did not look like no sailboat I had ever seen”:

In sentence 11, *did not look like no* should be written:

- F. did look like no
- G. did not look like none
- H. did not look like any
- J. as it is

In some varieties of Appalachian English, the use of multiple negative markers—or “the marking of negative meaning at more than one point in the sentence”²⁴—is a distinguishing dialect feature. Therefore, answers H and J would both seem right to the vernacular speaker. Without the skill of contrastive analysis—the ability to contrast the informal or vernacular pattern to that of SAE—the student would have to make a counterintuitive decision to mark H as the correct answer.

When secondary school teacher (and AWP research team member) Grace Bradshaw was told by her students that their method of choosing the right answer was to go with what “sounds right,” she explained to them why such a method could backfire: “Some people overcorrect their usage by saying things like ‘It happened to Marvin and I.’ In this case, the use of nominative case for the object of a preposition may sound ‘proper’ but it isn’t. Choosing the opposite of what ‘sounds right’ can be problematical.”²⁵

When specific vernacular dialect patterns emerge frequently in student speech and writing, they can cause problems for students both in class and on SOL tests. Students’ disdain for writing and their frustration at being taught the “rules” of SAE can make English instruction even more challenging. Older students in particular have a difficult time accepting any perceived criticism of their dialects because they have a history of marked-up papers; consequently, any desire to write may be diminished by the time they reach high school or college. Anecdotally, we know that teachers, in turn, feel resentment about what they perceive as students’ “laziness” toward grammar instruction. This cycle of resent-

ment can have far-reaching adverse effects for both students and teachers, and it reinforces ill-informed ideologies about vernacular dialects and the people who speak them. The AWP researchers thus sought to answer this question: Does the use of contrastive analysis as a method for teaching code switching improve students' awareness of different grammar patterns and their test scores?

At the beginning of the academic year, the research team administered pretests (released versions of the SOL writing test) at the middle and high school levels to identify baseline scores. Team members also assigned and collected student writings from a variety of different literacy tasks, which they coded for the most common vernacular dialectal patterns; these patterns would then be addressed using contrastive analysis. A total of 110 students at the middle school level and 74 students at the secondary level participated in the study.

The team members then designed lessons for teaching code switching that were appropriate for their grade levels, their schedules (the time allotted for each class), and, most important, the vernacular dialect patterns present in their classes. Although the instruction had to be individualized for each class, the teachers uniformly created classrooms where changing the *language of instruction* was key to student awareness and shifting attitudes about language. This meant no longer using judgments such as "correct/incorrect," "bad/good," "wrong/right," or "proper/improper" to pit SAE against the students' home dialects. It also meant creating age-appropriate terminology that students would understand as they entered into discussions about their dialects and reconceptualized writing and speech that had previously been marked as wrong by authority figures, such as formal versus informal or school versus home.

The research team drew on Wheeler and Swords's contrastive analysis chart as a foundation for the many activities used over two semesters.²⁶ The chart simply identifies a pattern and divides that pattern into informal and formal categories. The following example shows how this applies to forming the past tense of the irregular verb *blow*:

Informal

The wind *blowed* so hard
the house shook.

Formal

The wind *blew* so hard the
house shook.

Students are then asked to describe the patterns they see at work in these sentences as the starting point for a discussion of grammar rules. A student might write something like this:

Informal

The present-tense *blow* is used with *-ed* added (*blowed*).

Formal

The simple past tense of *blow* is created by changing the *o* to *e* (*blew*).

By using their own words to describe these patterns, the students move from what they intuitively know about language to an understanding of language variation and how it works in different settings and with different audiences.

The teacher-researchers also used classroom boards, cartoons with dialogue bubbles, games, videos, songs, and poetry to teach mini-lessons for each pattern they covered. Lizbeth Phillips designed an innovative “language monitor” booklet for her students, turning them into field researchers and participant-observers of language. The students were asked to observe and record a minimum of fifty informal patterns in their booklets, which they would then bring to the classroom for code switching:

Students carried their monitor booklets from class to class, and they listened closely for casual language they could record and convert to formal language. Word got around fast that you could catch certain teachers during lectures, hear patterns at lunch tables and on buses, and even catch a few each day by listening to the office on the public address system. They discovered that plenty of casual language was used in the local WalMart . . . , especially in the electronics or hunting departments or the check-out lanes. A group of basketball players started keeping their books on the bench because they heard plenty of casual language when grown-ups got upset enough to talk loudly or yell from the bleachers. By keeping the language monitor booklets, students began to differentiate between formal and casual language during classroom discussions.²⁷

At the high school level, Grace Bradshaw’s students compared prose and poetry originally written in vernacular dialects with “standardized”

versions, which prompted discussions about why dialects are important in building strong fictional characters. Students wrote personal narratives and journal entries in their vernacular dialects and then code-switched to SAE for formal essays and letters.²⁸

The team encouraged students to discuss dialects and attitudes about them as part of the contrastive analysis instruction, realizing that it is important for students to understand the social implications of language. Bradshaw noted that teaching contrastive analysis can be “a bit of a prickly issue” because students are acutely aware of the stigma associated with their vernacular dialects, and any “perceived criticism . . . can inhibit their desire to express themselves in writing.”²⁹

Results

Posttest scores revealed dramatic results after just one semester of teaching contrastive analysis. At the middle school level, the scores of students who were taught using the contrastive analysis method were compared with those of a control group taught using traditional or correctionist methods. The contrastive analysis group showed a 72 percent increase in posttest scores, compared with a 9 percent increase in the control group.³⁰ At the secondary level, students showed an average 26 percent increase in test scores after two semesters of contrastive analysis instruction. These gains suggest that changing the language of instruction, as well as using methods that pair vernacular grammar patterns with those of SAE, is beneficial to central Appalachian students in terms of their performance on formal assessments.

The research team also concluded that teaching contrastive analysis changes the classroom environment for the better. Their students, according to Phillips, were “more confident, more productive and more engaged in their writing.”³¹ While it is never too late to teach code switching, they noted that raising awareness about code switching should begin in primary school, when language acquisition is well under way. Citing Donald Graves and Nancy Atwell, Peter Elbow notes that research has shown that children can be taught to write before they can read, and they become literate much more quickly and comfortably when they start by writing in their idiosyncratic dialects; even their “relationship to reading improves.”³²

I would add that enlightening students about their linguistic histories is equally important; it teaches them why their dialects may be worth preserving.³³ Most students are unaware of the artifacts in their speech patterns or why they use them. This kind of knowledge is a weapon against linguistic prejudice, a battle sword for their encounters with the words “bad grammar.”

The term *code switching* and the practice of teaching it are not without flaws or critics, and understandably so. The practice of changing one’s dialect to accommodate that of the so-called power structure may create an internal struggle of sorts, meaning that the act of code switching does not occur without cost to the speaker. In part II, Silas House tells the story of his parents learning to “pass” as they shifted from their eastern Kentucky dialect to better assimilate into the community of Flint, Michigan, where they moved in the 1950s. Many of the other authors in part II share hurtful experiences in which they were ridiculed yet chose to keep their authentic spoken dialects. The pedagogical practice described in this essay may invite varieties of Appalachian English into the classroom, but depending on the language of instruction, students may still perceive a marked separation and implied power difference between Appalachian English and SAE—a hierarchical difference in which SAE still reigns. Certainly, the high-stakes tests students must ultimately take reinforce this ideology.

Some researchers urge instructors to rethink this kind of separation in favor of a rhetorical strategy they call “code meshing,” in which vernacular and formal dialects “mesh” to create a “multilingual text,” giving vernacular and formal discourse equal space, even in high-stakes writing.³⁴ Authors such as bell hooks and Geneva Smitherman, for example, successfully mesh black English and SAE in “high stakes scholarly writing for representation of voice.”³⁵ In this way, students’ home dialects are given their rightful places alongside SAE.

In my own experience, my love of teaching writing returned once I began to learn more about sociolinguistics and its place in writing pedagogy. Enjoying writing is one thing, but teaching it is another, particularly for Appalachian students who may have had painful experiences related to the stigma associated with their speech patterns. A classroom that invites and encourages linguistic diversity can make a difference for the

instructor, the student, and the community as a whole. Learning the *why* behind our dialects is the first step in respecting them all and the voice-places from which they originated. There is room enough for *every* voice on a piece of paper.

Notes

1. Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords, *Codeswitching: Tools of Language and Culture Transform the Dialectally Diverse Classroom* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2006), 57.

2. Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian, *Dialects and Education: Issues and Answers* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989).

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6. Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian, *Appalachian Speech* (Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1976).

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8. Anita Puckett, *Seldom Ask, Never Tell: Labor and Discourse in Appalachia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 132.

9. Clark, "We Are Our Mothers' Words"; Sohn, *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia*.

10. Clark, "We Are Our Mothers' Words," 176.

11. Lizbeth Phillips, "Helping Early Adolescents Identify Southern Appalachian Dialect Code-Switching Traits in Casual and Formal Writing" (unpublished manuscript, 2010).

12. Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords, "Codeswitching: Tools of Language and Culture Transform the Dialectally Diverse Classroom," *Language Arts* 81 (2004): 470–80; Androula Yiakoumetti, "Choice of Classroom Language in Bilingual Communities: To Include or Exclude the Dialect?" *Cambridge Journal of Education* 37, no. 53 (2007): 51–66.

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15. This research team included Grace Bradshaw, Elaine Childress, Amy Clark, Cynthia Newlon, and Lizbeth Phillips.
16. Conference on College Composition and Communication, "Students' Right to Their Own Language," last modified August 29, 2006, <http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Groups/CCCC/NewSRTOL.pdf>.
17. Wheeler and Swords, "Codeswitching: Tools of Language," 471.
18. Michelle Croutteau, "Honoring Dialect and Culture: Pathways to Student Success on High-Stakes Writing Assessments," *English Journal* 96, no. 4 (2007): 27–32.
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20. Yiakoumetti, "Choice of Classroom Language."
21. The National Writing Project, founded by Jim Gray in 1973, funds hundreds of programs like the AWP across the United States. For more information, go to www.writingproject.org. The AWP was founded by Amy Clark in 2001 at the University of Virginia's College at Wise.
22. Croutteau, "Honoring Dialect," 27–32.
23. *Ibid.*, 28.
24. Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schillings-Estes, *American English*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 379–80.
25. Grace Bradshaw, "Code-Switching Instruction Report" (unpublished document, May 2010).
26. Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords, *Code-Switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2006), 86–87.
27. Phillips, "Helping Early Adolescents."
28. Bradshaw, "Code-Switching Instruction Report."
29. *Ibid.*
30. The control group and the contrastive analysis (CA) group were taught by different instructors; however, they were tested using the same instrument, and writing from both groups was coded by the same instructor. The average pretest score for the CA group ($N = 70$) was 11.46 (number of errors), compared with 3.23 for the posttest score. The average scores for the control group ($N = 23$) were 7.54 for the pretest and 6.85 for the posttest.
31. Phillips, "Helping Early Adolescents."
32. Peter Elbow, "Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond 'Mistakes,' 'Bad English,' and 'Wrong Language,'" *Journal of Advanced Composition* 192, no. 2 (1999): 385.
33. Michael Montgomery's essay in this volume is a good resource for teachers who want to use a sociolinguistic approach to teaching writing; they can begin by incorporating their Appalachian students' linguistic histories into the curriculum.
34. S. Michael-Luna and A. S. Canagarajah, "Multilingual Academic Literacies: Pedagogical Foundations for Code Meshing in Primary and Higher Education," *Journal of Applied Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (2007): 55–77.
35. *Ibid.*, 72–73.

Silence, Voice, and Identity among Appalachian College Women

Katherine Sohn

Like the contributors whose stories of language prejudice appear in part II of this volume, the nontraditional students from eastern Kentucky who took my composition classes in the early 1990s experienced discrimination on the basis of their gender and their dialect, and this figured strongly in their identities. These women were the subject of my doctoral study, for which I interviewed eight graduates of Preston College in Preston County, Kentucky (the names of both the college and the county are pseudonyms), to discover the effects of acquiring academic literacy and current literacy practices. From the eight, I chose three women for follow-up interviews and participant observation. These women taught me how coming to college helped them rise above cultural constraints to complete their degrees and take positions of responsibility in their communities. Ultimately, they disproved the adage that “whistlin’ women and crowin’ hens, always come to no good ends.”

When I wrote my dissertation—the basis for my book *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College*¹—I argued that lightly editing the female participants’ speech would retain their dignity and enable readers to more easily understand what the women were saying. If I were writing the book today, I would make some changes. While watching “Hidden America: Children of the Mountains” on ABC’s

20/20 in February 2009, I was horrified to see that the producers used subtitles, as if the subjects' eastern Kentucky dialect was a foreign language. I realized that I had, in effect, done the same by editing out dialect features of the women's speech. How could I claim to honor their language and continue to challenge language attitudes and prejudices if I edited the very language that defines them?

Since my study in 1999, I have interviewed the children of these women to see what effect their mothers' education has had, since one of the primary hopes the women expressed in their interviews was that their children would not, like they did, wait too long to attend college. Pharmacists, auto mechanics, construction workers, teachers, and telecommunications workers, their sons and daughters are all contributing to their communities and were terrifically proud of what their mothers did. The following statement by Victor Villanueva applies to these women: "All [academic authors] have written about . . . the need to reclaim a memory, memory of an identity in formation and constant reformation, the need to reclaim a memory of an identity as formed through the generations."²

As I heard the stories of these Preston County women, I observed them move from silence in the academic classroom to revised identities and more confident voices in their communities. Reflecting on their stories, I began to see the parallels to my own search for voice, the need to "reclaim a memory of an identity." Slowly I began to acknowledge that the "reasons we engage in academic endeavor are often connected . . . implicitly to our own experiences and desires . . . our own history and interests."³

Looking back through a generation, I remembered my first voice, nurtured fifty-some years ago in Greensboro, North Carolina, where I grew up as the oldest of eight, the daughter of Leo and Teresa Kelleher. My voice emerged among numerous silences: my mother's silence in a family of thirteen, which strengthened her resolve to raise eight children to know the value of work, education, and equality; my silence in a northern college, which strengthened my resolve to show that southern women are not idiots; my later silence as a long-term part-time college instructor, which strengthened my resolve to return to school for my PhD; my silence in the doctoral classroom born of fear of failure; and other silences in between. In fact, I observed how our mutual coming to voice fit the three different meanings reflected in Elisabeth Hayes's essay "Voice."⁴

Voice as Language

George Ella Lyon (see part II) speaks eloquently about the importance of reclaiming one's "first voice"—one's regional dialect—which has been the object of ridicule and creates a clear class distinction based on social and cultural identity. In what follows, I reflect on the connection of voice and language, using Hayes's definition of voice as talk, which can "signify women's actual speech or speaking style . . . focus[ing] on how women use spoken language in learning situations and how their learning preferences may be reflected in their use of talk."⁵ This section concentrates on the first part of the definition—the actual speaking style or dialect of the women and me.

Unlike the women of Preston County and Appalachians in general, I did not grow up with missionaries or government workers telling me I was culturally deprived, but I got the message from insiders as well as outsiders that my first voice was not "proper." All the teachers in our Catholic schools were nuns from Maryland and Philadelphia who had come south to "mission" territory. Mother herself corrected our grammar constantly, so we understood that if we didn't speak "well" and become educated, we would not do well.

The summer before I went off to St. Joseph's College in western Maryland, Mother sent me to Mrs. Ainsworth's two-week charm school to learn social etiquette. This included diction lessons, so that I would not embarrass my mother while I was away at school. My speech teacher, with a broadcasting degree from the University of Maryland, spent hours with me outside the classroom, trying to cleanse my speech of its regional quality. People would ask me to talk for them and then break into peals of laughter. Well-meaning people said, "You're pretty smart for a southerner." My first voice was shadowed by many others saying it wasn't good enough; therefore, I changed my dialect and accumulated college degrees to define myself as better, as smarter. I mastered standard English, and people stopped to listen without laughing.

When I came to eastern Kentucky I had a hard time understanding the dialect, especially when I traveled into Preston County. When I began teaching, students thought I was from Boston, not North Carolina. Before my doctoral work, I thought their speaking reflected poor grammar;

since then, I have learned that the dialects of Appalachian English are among the “highly stigmatized variet[ies] of American English.”⁶ Though Appalachians do not limit themselves to speaking one way and frequently intermingle standard and nonstandard language, and though “no dialect can be seen as inferior or superior to another,”⁷ the social judgment about Appalachian dialects and other vernacular varieties results in the perception that people in the region are less respectable and economically and culturally unequal, illustrating that “racial discrimination and internalized racism are often inseparable from intolerant attitudes toward different languages and dialect.”⁸

Numerous studies illustrate the prejudices of school-educated people toward nonstandard speakers, the most pertinent of which was a matched guise study, “a technique [that] involves asking interviewees to evaluate the personal qualities of speakers whose voices are recorded on tape, whereby the *same* speaker uses *different* linguistic varieties.”⁹ In Reid Luhman’s study of eastern Kentucky speakers at a Kentucky state university, speakers of Appalachian English varieties were judged to be lacking ambition, intelligence, and education, though their grades proved otherwise. He also found that speakers of standard English were more respected than loved, that respondents felt more solidarity with speakers of lower status and less solidarity with speakers of higher status, and that book learning canceled common sense.¹⁰

Since language marks economic class, and “since it is not so easily shed as a suit of clothes or a rusted and aging automobile, . . . [language] symbolizes our social experience in an intimate way and locates us within significant social groups from which we draw our identities.”¹¹ Kimberly Donehower observes that participants in her study of an Appalachian community in western North Carolina recognized and spoke standard English, but they wanted “those around them to acknowledge . . . that [standard English is] not the only way to talk and write.” She goes on to say:

Informants generally knew that their dialect was one of the primary markers of their identity as Southern Appalachians, and this man [a school principal] was quick to defend their right to speak it: “our dialect, the mountain dialect, is just a—an area dia-

lect, and that's just the way the, the speech you know a lot of, a lot of the mountaineers still use 'holped' for 'helped.' And, and you'll hear this, but it's what, you know, it's just something that's instilled in them, it's not—it's correct English for them. And our English and our dialect is just as correct for us around here as any in Chicago, or New York, or you go to Canada, you'll have a little blend of the French, in it."¹²

In my experience of living and teaching in the region, I have found that students can complete four years of college and still sound as if they came from “the head of the holler,” a phrase used by local people to designate those who are isolated, don't get out much, and hence speak with a heavy accent. The students in my classroom worry about losing their family connections if they “get above their raisings” by talking in what they call a “citized” way. They also, like the school principal above, want respect for their native tongue.

Sensitivity about dialect occurs when outsiders' attitudes are internalized by insiders trying to “better” themselves. As stated earlier, I sought to deflect attention from my study participants' exact language patterns and settled on a lightly edited version of their speech in my dissertation. It was therefore surprising that when I asked the participants to review their interview transcripts, Jean edited her interview even further, saying that she did not want to sound like a “hillbilly” to anyone reading the transcript.

Although there was no specific question about dialect, I did ask the participants if their teachers had ever attempted to correct their speech. Lucy said that the teachers sounded like her and that any discrimination had been based on her being poor and obese. Jean stated that the teachers had not motivated her as a practical learner, so she lost interest, but she reported no pressure to speak differently. Similarly, Donehower's school principal responded that none of his teachers had asked him to change his dialect.

However, when the women came to Preston College, they experienced some disjuncture related to faculty attitudes toward Appalachian dialects. They got the message that their dialect was not acceptable in academic writing, in speech classes, or in future job interviews. A colleague in a nearby college observed that faculty worked with students on their

voice and diction to little avail, because once the students became classroom teachers, they returned to their old ways. Linguist Michael Montgomery's work on Appalachian English varieties points out the diversity of the dialects, and he would concur with sociologist Paula Moore's opinion that trying to make language more homogeneous is like taking the color out of a painting.¹³ Linda Scott DeRosier states that the dialects are "colorful, earthy, profane, and . . . a very important part of our identity as hill folk, and . . . not something we should give up without a fight."¹⁴ By maintaining their first voice, the Preston County women have learned the power of the language they use in their communities in positive ways. Kentucky-born DeRosier states that she is at home in both communities (in her academic position as a professor at the University of Montana and as the daughter of a Kentucky coal miner) because she makes an effort to watch her language in both settings, taking care not to offend her relatives. She says: "My sense of who I am comes from my identity as a hill-billy woman, and I do not see that ever changing. . . . To maintain a sense of wholeness and of loyalty to the community that I was brought up in, I have held on to an accent that is too often mistakenly seen as an indication of lower intelligence than many other accents in the US."¹⁵

Language is closely tied to the way women define themselves and create community, and changing that language is a method of erasing culture.

Voice as Identity

One of my participants, Mary, stated: "If I hadn't come to college, I wouldn't be the person I am now. I wouldn't trade that growth or the knowledge I've gained. Yeah, I'm glad I did that, I'm glad I did that. It made me a better person." Even though she had not been employed in the teaching field since college and was underemployed in her present job, Mary reflected positively on college's contribution to her identity during our interview. Her response echoes my own awareness when I finished the course work for my doctorate. Like the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*, who seeks a brain but finds out from the Wizard that he's had one all along, my doctoral work reinforced my intellect in a way that no other experience could have. This common experience of being smart but not

knowing it is reflected in other literacy studies about women, most notably those of Jennifer Horsman and Wendy Luttrell.¹⁶

Generally, the Preston County women were not voiceless in the context of their families; they had strong identities as mothers, wives, and daughters but felt “inarticulate when [they] enter[ed] a college classroom.”¹⁷ Voice in this sense “focuses on how women’s identity is reflected in what they say, in the ideas they express, and in the confidence they express in their own thoughts and opinions.”¹⁸ I would add that this confidence emanates into all aspects of their lives, far beyond the personal to include families, spouses, and children, as well as community acquaintances.

Going to college helped each of these women become somebody and to make her voice heard. Like them, I turned the silence of fifteen years as an adjunct faculty member into action by enrolling at age fifty in a doctoral program—a step toward identity and recognition as a professional by colleagues and students. My identity as a nontraditional student in that setting prompted me to gain a new respect for the nontraditional female students in my classroom and to see the possibilities of educating others about our stories. For these women, one of the tools provided by academic literacy that helped them achieve comfort in the academic setting was their writing. They reported doing some personal writing before college but spoke unkindly about school-sponsored literacy. Mary’s remarks reflected a common theme in the interviews—students’ struggles with college writing: “At first I thought it [writing] would be difficult, but once I started learning some patterns about writing, how to get across what I wanted to, because you can’t just write something down on paper, [it was not so hard]. There are certain steps you’ve got to take. And I was never taught those steps.”

These reflections surprised me, since the women’s writing was generally more lucid and creative than that of some of the traditional students. Their maturity and life experience made content easy to retrieve, and once they grasped the form, they illustrated working-class women’s potential to give words to their stories, which in turn affirmed their power and worthiness. They wrote about homemaking (e.g., the process of making chocolate gravy or an eleven-layer apple stack cake) and other issues of importance to women (e.g., the horrors of child and spouse abuse and

date rape)—issues that cut across class boundaries. I believe that literacy, both reading and writing, offered these women “the greatest force for empowering, validating, and affirming [themselves] and [their] self-worth.”¹⁹ In fact, many of their essays ended up in the English Department’s publication of teacher-nominated student essays, *Voices from the Hill*.

Although they had not written expository essays before, the women reported writing poems, journals, and letters, forms of expression that Anita Puckett confirms are considered acceptable for mountain women. In her literacy study in eastern Kentucky, she notes that “literate practices are God-given attributes of women’s ‘nature’ . . . provid[ing] contexts in which a woman can negotiate her social, religious, and cultural identity.”²⁰ Women can acquire literacy, but they are bound by cultural roles not to get above their raisings. Puckett observes that these women “walk a literate tightrope, called upon to assert an identity that affirms ‘good’ reading and writing skills but constrained by cultural norms and social practices in the directions and forms their writing can successfully assume to maintain social propriety and their family name.”²¹

The Preston County women managed to walk that tightrope. Their stories showed individual confidence in their mastery of the written code as steps toward achieving an identity within the academic community. Recognizing the power of the written word, they expressed themselves more actively, using writing to create meaning and contribute to their identity and moving from discomfort with academic literacy to fulfillment.

Voice as Power

One of the Preston County women, Polly, said, “Whether I ever use it [her education degree] towards teaching, I will always use it in life.” With their college experience and recognition of self-worth, these women came to power, though not in Hayes’s sense, which “emphasizes women’s development of a collective identity and oppression as women, and of the means to challenge this oppression.”²² In contrast to a collective identity, the Preston County women experienced power in their personal achievements, primarily by maintaining the closeness of their families. I believe, along with Mary Field Belenky, Lynne A. Bond, and Jacqueline S. Wein-

stock, that as women are educated and are “drawn out and empowered, they are likely to draw out and uplift others, who in turn will reach out to still others. . . . Such women are more likely to be deeply invested in seeing that the community meets the needs of all children and families.”²³ Their choice of work, their desire for more education, and their influence on others make powerful statements, even though they might not organize as a group. They prove that “even those environments that may not seem optimal have given women opportunities to create new knowledge, question old beliefs, and engage in personal and social change.”²⁴ Even Lucy, who does not work outside the home and has not pursued an education beyond college, has power through her local expertise and her frequent letters to the editor.

Even previous silences can empower women, as my mother, Teresa Kelleher, illustrated by numerous activities in her life. A frustrated intellectual who felt inferior because she had completed only one year of business college, Mother spent a lifetime instilling in her children, especially her daughters, the importance of literacy and education. Steeped in Catholic teachings about having large families, she married Leo Kelleher, who inherited his dad’s scrap iron and metal business. Dad’s salary was stretched by his family of eight children, and Mother thought education could help us achieve her dreams.

Turning voice into power, I completed my doctorate, an accomplishment that, next to marrying my husband and birthing my daughter and son, was the most joyful act of my life. Mother’s influence lives on in my daughter’s work with female Appalachian folk artists and her position as a fund-raiser for Appalshop, a socially activist Appalachian film media organization. Like his grandmother, my son marches in antiwar protests and fights for environmental causes. Power begets power.

The participants in my study, once they experienced the power of literacy and learned to manage multiple tasks successfully, became invested in the concept of lifelong learning, seeking advanced degrees through correspondence and satellite programs. Completing college, they knew that they could accomplish whatever they set out to do. Like other college graduates, these women “learn much more than subject matter or skills. They learn implicit and explicit lessons about themselves as women and . . . about themselves as women of a particular race, class, and culture. These

lessons in turn affect how they see themselves as learners and shape their future learning experiences.”²⁵

Not content to remain in one position for too long, most of the employed women talked about job advancement. Mary, working in a lab at the time of my research, wanted to get a degree in English and work toward a master’s degree, “and maybe someday I’ll get to teach on the college level.” In the summer of 1999, Hope was planning to go back for her master’s, either in special education or in teaching reading on the elementary level—education that would help her move up the salary scale in the Preston County schools. When Judith finished her internship, she was planning to pursue graduate school. Jean’s plans included getting numerous nursing certifications and working toward her master’s in critical care nursing through correspondence. Sarah was aiming for a master’s in social work. Lucy worked at home, became more active in her son’s school governance, and continued to help others in various ways. All this illustrates that literacy is social practice and, according to David Barton and Mary Hamilton, “demonstrates the changing demands that people experience at different stages of their lives and offers convincing evidence of the need for lifelong learning systems which people can access at critical points when they need to respond to new demands.”²⁶

The women in this study gained economic power by making higher salaries without moving outside the community. Jean describes the lack of economic power for women without a college education:

I think it’s a lot different for the girls than it is the boys. The boys can always get out and make a living. They can do something somewhere, somehow driving a coal truck, driving something, even though it’s not what you want them to do, they can still make the money. But for a girl it’s very hard. They can’t get out and do what they want. And who wants to house clean for \$5 an hour the rest of your life? It’s fine; I’ve done it before. It’s good. But you don’t want to stay there the rest of your life.

Without an education, residents in rural regions like Appalachia are harder hit by the dwindling economy, so job opportunities are limited for both men and women. Some may ask whether women entering tra-

ditional occupations doesn't just reinforce traditional low-paying work by keeping women in their place. But the study participants chose traditional professions because there was no alternative. They moved from minimum-wage jobs in retail and housekeeping—the only choices Jean describes for women—to salaried positions as teachers, nurses, and social workers.

The power of literacy relates to the sense of accomplishment in finishing a college degree, something the women valued whether they found jobs in their fields of study or not. Their power rested in their ability to be role models for their children, for the chance to be “somebody”²⁷ and to move “from a passive to an active role . . . to see themselves as . . . instruments of knowledge and influence.”²⁸ The women of Preston County are like the African American women in rural Georgia that Sue Hammons-Bryner studied: “women who grow up in rural poverty [and] are poorly educated in classrooms where they suffer from denigrating remarks about their success potential, yet who dream, do more than wish, become change agents, and fulfill goals.”²⁹

Those who could not find jobs in their majors were frustrated with the job market, with perceived age discrimination, and with the inability to use the talents they had discovered during their four years at college; they blamed family pressures, the economy, and employers as opposed to blaming the college. We tend to hope that education will enlarge women's vistas and encourage them to consider nontraditional occupations, but these Appalachian women did not have many choices. Still, they achieved personal and social change, which they surely would not have been able to do otherwise. In other words, “Education does offer women opportunities, and the credentialist tie between education and work is as strong for women as it is for men.”³⁰ The key difference between their poor pre-college experiences and their postcollege ones appeared to be that the women had become “instrumental in shaping . . . their destiny.”³¹

One of the most powerful statements these women made was deciding to remain in their communities: their acquisition of academic literacy did not destroy family or community. Many were not opposed to moving away or becoming more upwardly mobile, but they knew how disruptive such a move would be for their families. So they overcame family members' objections to their returning to school and the constraints of

gender roles; they advanced beyond minimum-wage jobs to get college educations. They voiced their concerns by using literacy for their own purposes in their jobs, churches, children's schools, and homes, maintaining community values. These mountain women appear to be similar to Donehower's informants, who "use literacy within this system in the ways that they can, or to choose to opt out of this system as it operates in mainstream society by staying in their own communities, and enjoying a different kind of relationship with literacy as a result."³²

This finding challenges previous literature about other nonmainstream groups who are alienated from their cultural moorings because of acquired academic literacy.³³ Essays of working-class academics illustrate that the academy "has destroyed something even while it has been recreating [us] in its own image."³⁴ For many immigrant groups, education creates "the clash and dislocation in our communities."³⁵ Most notably, Richard Rodriguez describes his estrangement from his home and native tongue (Spanish) as a result of his education.³⁶ Although language change was an issue for these Appalachian women, it was not nearly as dramatic as it is for nonnative speakers of English, as exemplified in case studies of Appalachian and Californian nonliterate. Juliet Merrifield and her colleagues found that there was less concern "about the impact of literacy language, and education on family relationships for the Appalachian group than for the California immigrants, some of whom fear the loss of their culture in following generations."³⁷ Although educated Appalachians may leave the region to find work, they usually come home often for visits, so there is less risk of a change in cultures. Likewise, many academics manage to bridge the gap and not feel alienated.

The women in the Preston County study might have had more economic power if they moved away, as some Appalachians do. However, Candy Knudson, a colleague who formerly lived in Preston with her professor-husband and was a nontraditional student in the Preston College English program, shared with me the evolution of her thinking about people who prefer to remain in the region: "The magnificent, awe-inspiring beauty of Kentucky's hills and 'hollers' and the sense of familial commitment made me see 'wealth' and 'resources' differently. Having been ping-ponged as academic gypsies, back-and-forth these past many years and realizing too late the negative impact that has on family, I know that 'pov-

erty' of soul and poverty of social ties are much worse than poverty of 'stuff.'" Though I do not mean to valorize poverty, Knudson points out the advantages of remaining in the mountains. In fact, a study of the alumni of twenty-three of the thirty-three colleges that make up the Appalachian College Association revealed that many graduates of all ages remain in the area, supporting my findings.³⁸

By taking their academic literacy and fitting it to their own purposes, these women maintained their common sense and cultural integrity, which they (and other working-class students) feared they might lose by going to college. One of the participants, Mary, said of her eighty-six-year-old grandmother, "I would give anything for her wisdom." Common sense is defined as "the commonly held conceptions of the world held by various cultures, a culture's way of seeing and believing . . . carried and transmitted by discourse."³⁹ Resisting the loss of common sense, and not wanting to be alienated from their families, many students drop out of college. In fact, common sense equates to personal empathy and experience, which, for Horsman's adult education students, counted for more than an educated person's knowledge;⁴⁰ in other words, book learning does not equal "real" knowledge. Luttrell's adult students in North Carolina and Philadelphia "were drawn to common sense and intuition because these forms of knowledge rest in women themselves (not in higher authorities) and are experienced directly in the world (not through abstractions)."⁴¹ Common sense, in reality, is a literacy with its own language and rules,⁴² and although it generally stands in contrast to education, the dichotomy may not be as absolute as the women feared.

The most important achievement of these nontraditional women, an outgrowth of the "personal is political" argument, seems to be "the sense of self-respect and worth gained from taking that first step into college and sticking it out until they finish[ed]."⁴³ Not getting work in their fields did not seem to matter as much as having something they did not have before. These women's narratives illustrate that "some people use literacy to make their lives more meaningful, no matter what their economic and political circumstances are."⁴⁴

Mary recently called to see if I could help her find a publisher for her poems. In the middle of the conversation, she described the hours she

had spent constructing her Web page and went on to say, “After the interview with you [in the winter of 1999], I realized how much I missed writing, so I began writing poetry again.” In addition to the poems, she had written several articles for a local newspaper, summarizing her interviews with local bluegrass artists performing in the region. She informed me that she had quit her position as an environmental lab assistant to return to substitute teaching because the laboratory job was just not satisfying. Continually frustrated that she could not get a teaching job, Mary told me that the school principals she subbed for were pleased with her work, but “when a job opens, somebody’s cousin gets the job!” She has since moved to Pennsylvania, where she is teaching four-year-olds.

Because Preston is so small, I run into the other women occasionally or talk to them on the phone. At least quarterly I see Lucy’s letters to the editor about school conditions and related topics; she was recently elected to the Site Based Council at her children’s school. Lucy also had two works of art—a pencil drawing entitled *God, Naked in Our Sins* and a piece in acrylics called *Memories*—in an alumni art exhibit at Preston College. Sarah has taken a new job doing social work in a nearby county after quitting her job as director of a private social work agency. Hope finally found a teaching position closer to home than her previous two-hour round-trip commute. These and other conversations have confirmed for me the continuing importance of language and literacy in these women’s lives.

Notes

1. Katherine Kelleher Sohn, *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006).

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Language and Power

Anita Puckett

My point of view toward language is different from that of the other contributors to part I, so I must use some space to describe these differences and their influence on the study of language and power relationships in coalfield Appalachian speech. This perspective asserts that languages, whether spoken or written down in some way, should be viewed as always doing “cultural work.”¹ That is, it assumes that we actually use language all the time to create “places” for ourselves in the social world around us. This process most commonly involves using speech to consciously or subconsciously accomplish specific goals or tasks. Examples might include asking for a hamburger at a restaurant and getting one, or having an intimate conversation with a loved one and becoming more closely bonded.

More generally, many of these verbal exchanges are patterned; we say the same or similar things to the same people or to strangers in familiar situations. For example, common expressions in the coalfields include “If you don’t care to, get me a pop” or “If the creek don’t rise.” In using these types of patterned or routinized ways of communicating, we reproduce similar interpersonal relationships time after time. In so doing, these patterns allow us to group specific speech events—and what is expected to happen in them—together into categories or patterns that then form larger systems of cultural meaning.

Sometimes we also use speech to talk about itself. We can say that a certain utterance has a more general meaning, such as being an insult or a specific type of talk. For example, one common usage in the southeastern

Kentucky coalfields is, “You’ve no right to talk to me like that!” Another is “That’s good preachin.” Still another is “She’s talkin school talk.”

These two attributes of actual speech—that it is commonly patterned and routinized in verbal interactions, and that it can be talked about in more general terms—give us strong tools to build bridges from individual instances of talk to macrosystems of meaning that linguistic anthropologists call *culture*. Furthermore, it is culture that gives direction to how cultural members apply power in verbal interactions.

By *power*, I mean the ways that individuals not only enforce their will on others in specific instances of talk but also how these specific acts of control constitute more general patterns of applying and exercising power. At an abstract level, these patterns tell us how people assign value and meaning to specific situations in which power is verbally expressed. They allow us to construct a larger symbolic system demonstrating the process of domination. Further, they show us how these systems come into contact with one another when people of different backgrounds work together and, most important, the reasons why some systems are more successful than others at dominating. For coalfield Appalachian residents, these processes of power creation or reproduction are closely linked to the retention and use of their local varieties of Appalachian English, which are what local people speak most of the time. They are a major resource for talking about power and for exercising it in everyday speech events.

Despite many claims to the contrary, and despite many pressures from schools, media, and electronic technologies, coalfield vernacular speech has not disappeared, nor does it seem to be in process of disappearing completely; it has, however, certainly changed to conform, on the surface, to more standard American English written patterns and to standard broadcast American English (SBAE) spoken patterns.² The continued use of local varieties of Appalachian English means that these speakers have different ways of exercising power and making meaning; Appalachian English coexists with other varieties or languages, such as SBAE or Spanish.

One way to recognize power differences is to note the devaluation of local varieties of Appalachian English with respect to SBAE (see the introduction). The presumption is that SBAE is more correct and bet-

ter; for most English-speaking Americans, it is considered to have more status and more weight in influencing the acts and thoughts of others. In addition, linguistic anthropologists have noted that SBAE is a preeminent symbol of Americanness at the expense of any vernacular.³ Many consider a person less American if he or she doesn't speak the standard English of the land. These attitudes toward SBAE in relation to local varieties of Appalachian English have been used by governmental authorities and various corporations to justify dismissal, denial, or simple rejection of many regional educational, economic, environmental, transportation, and social needs.⁴ Roads aren't built, businesses locate elsewhere outside the region, and some faculty at both regional and nonregional universities treat speakers of local Appalachian English varieties as less intelligent or in need of speech therapy.

Yet there are other, lesser known language-based processes of exercising power that occur in everyday speech among regional residents as well. These processes also need to be understood because they influence how speakers of Appalachian English varieties respond to forces of change and control. In some cases, speakers' interactions are entirely in local vernaculars; in others, they may be mixed with or entirely in SBAE forms. Code switching or code mixing with other languages is also possible, especially in areas where Spanish speakers have migrated. Appalachian English speakers use language to constitute their own systems of empowerment to resist or agree to be subjected to the forces of domination used at the local level by institutions possessing legal political authority and organizations having political economic force.

This essay explores these everyday instances of power exchange by examining how a small segment of naturally occurring talk enacts a local system of ideas. These ideas include what and who has power; how the exercise of this power impacts local residents (especially with respect to the use of SBAE by institutional power brokers, such as educators and government officials); and how the local system of ideas constructs a cultural orientation toward power that is different from that constituted by the more dominant system expressed in SBAE.

The examples used in the analysis that follows come from speech I collected while conducting linguistic anthropological research in a southeastern Kentucky community given the pseudonym "Ash Creek."⁵ The

residents gave me their permission to record them as they engaged in talk with one another during normal everyday exchanges. None of the audio-recorded data used here were obtained through interviews. I lived and worked in the community for several years, both as a researcher and as a teacher at a local community college. In this type of participant-observation, I engaged in day-to-day activities with residents of the community. I came to know them through my teaching, but I also went to church, visited homes, hung out at neighborhood mom-and-pop stores, worked briefly for a local clinic as a receptionist, and made friends and had a social life with them.⁶

My goals for this ethnographic research were to learn to speak and think about speech in a manner consistent with local residents' ways of valuing and using their speech and then to share this knowledge with others in a manner that respects speakers' cultural orientations and validates why they speak the way they do.⁷ For example, I learned that when people end a conversation with the common leave-taking phrase "Come to supper," it is not literally an invitation to "come to supper"; rather, it means something like, "I enjoyed talking with you and will be glad to talk to you again in the future. You're welcome to stop by my house as well." Many more subtle and significant speech differences also exist, of course, and they can have a significant impact on power relations.⁸ All of them, however, taught me about the highly developed and nuanced forms of respect and politeness that exist in the everyday speech of coalfield residents in or near Ash Creek.

These ethnographically collected speech data reveal how local instances of everyday talk interconnect and create the value and meaning of different interpersonal relationships and the structures in which they occur (e.g., homes, workplaces, schools, clinics, stores, hospitals, court-houses, and banks). This type of research focuses more on the underlying patterns of speech than on the structure of Appalachian English itself, apart from the contexts in which it occurs. It recognizes that how one person talks to another can change according to who is talking to whom, at what time, in what setting, and for what purpose. That is, this type of research focuses not just on the text of the talk but also on the context—it goes beyond what was said and examines how it was said, who said it, and what it meant at a given time.

In addition to collecting linguistic information, this approach requires collecting data on interpersonal relationships among speakers, their value and belief systems, their daily activities, where and how they obtain their income or other economic goods, and how they have fun. This allowed me to compare discourse structures (the ways of talking below and above the level of the sentence), participant roles, settings, and other components across the different types of speaking events that occurred in Ash Creek. I eventually came to learn the underlying patterns of meaning from the speakers' own perspectives. Comparing my perceptions with residents' perceptions about the meaning of events or their relationships with others allowed me to discover more abstract cultural patterns. In turn, these revealed how residents assigned value and meaning to the concept of "power."

As a result of my research, I formulated the following three questions that I address in the rest of this essay: What are the most important language patterns that construct power relations, and how do they relate to the continued use of nonstandard Appalachian English varieties in communities such as Ash Creek? How does the use of these speech patterns constitute an abstract system of what powerful speech is and what it can do? And finally, does this local model of power construct an alternative view of the social world that differs significantly from the dominant (SBAE) language-based models of power used by government, higher education, international corporations, and national media?

Power

As it is used here, *power* is a broad term encompassing two distinct levels of meaning. At the level of verbal interaction, it can be defined as how speakers of Appalachian English negotiate or assert control, influence, or assumed advantages in an interaction relative to other participants. Two types of power are asserted in speech at this level. One type is "statusful power," in which a speaker has control over the actions and destiny of someone else participating in the speech event by virtue of his or her social, religious, or political position. One example I heard in Ash Creek was when a grandmother said to her adult granddaughter, "I need me some red thread." The granddaughter understood the utterance to be a

request to get the thread and bring it to her grandmother, and she did so because of the older woman's status and the younger woman's affection for her. Similarly, when a teacher gives homework, the students (might) complete it because of the teacher's status: they are obligated to comply.

The second type is "interactional power," in which some people actually control the talk by manipulating such things as what is talked about, whose opinion is focused on, what topics are introduced and developed, and who gets to talk.⁹ An Ash Creek example comes from an oral history project initiated by an Appalachian studies teacher at the community college. When a student interviewed an older resident about her life, the older woman would not permit the student to ask her questions; rather, she talked about her life in the manner she wanted (or needed) to tell it. This forced the student to simply listen. The older woman asserted control over topics and speaking turns—just the opposite of how an oral history interview is expected to unfold.

Studies of power from a linguistic anthropological point of view, then, must consider how these two types of power are asserted (or not) in different verbal interactions. When we pay attention to how these two types intersect, we can discover how power is expressed through language in communities such as Ash Creek, whether it is a variety of Appalachian English; SBAE; some other speech variety, such as an African American variety; or some other linguistic code, such as electronic text messaging.

However, this approach is not enough if we are to understand more about how and why Ash Creek residents continue to express power in the local vernacular or why they abandon it for various SBAE forms. At a second, more abstract level, the norms transcend individual speaking events and influence how speakers shape their speech across different speech events and respond to the speech of others. Therefore, a second definition of power, first formulated by Susan Gal,¹⁰ is one in which more abstract values and beliefs are imposed on instances of empowered talk, regardless of whether all speakers have the authority to do so or whether they even consciously know they are doing so. This larger system of shared agreement (or disagreement) about who can demand what of others and for what reasons is redefined by Gal not as power but as "symbolic domination." Because *domination* suggests a single system of empowerment and does not quite capture the resistance efforts related to coalfield Appala-

chian speakers' vernacular forms, my discussion reframes Gal's usage to "symbolic systems of power" but applies the phrase with similar meaning.

This essay also seeks to illuminate the processes by which the two symbolic systems of power present in many coalfield Appalachian communities compete for the right to control and determine the appropriate behavior of residents. The first system is supported by the more formal professional and corporate speech forms that focus on exercising individual authority and privilege through the use of SBAE directives (ways of ordering, commanding, or requesting).¹¹ This system emphasizes personal expertise, rights, and authority, as well as an established hierarchy of decision making established by law or institutional custom. It is frequently substantiated by legal documents and law enforcement and is often aspiritual or areligious when it posits validation in the use of power. An example of this system in action in Ash Creek occurred when the board of trustees for a local environmental education center refused to consider residents' requests that the center serve Ash Creek and surrounding communities more comprehensively. The trustees had legal right behind them and therefore could act independently. Responses from the center's director included phrases such as "I won't do that" or "We will not consider your requests."

The second of the two systems is constituted through far fewer assertions of individual authority and privilege; instead, it uses extensive politeness structures expressed in vernacular forms conforming to coalfield Appalachian English varieties. It is based on face-to-face ways of expressing mutual respect and is characterized by indirect forms of asking, such as telling a story about a problem to get the listener to volunteer to do something, or the use of "let me" and "might need" forms, as well as "if you don't care" and "one might do X" forms, rather than commands or orders.¹² This system emphasizes oral and customary practices; a division of decision-making labor based on gender, personal, or family prestige; and spiritual validation. One Ash Creek example of this form of exercising power occurred when the kitchen supervisor, a local woman, said to her coworker, "We might need us some butters when the delivery man comes," meaning that the coworker should obtain butter when she met with the delivery man that day.

In the first system, direct ways of asserting rights to power and au-

thority often devalue or bluntly disregard the opinions or values of others because of the right to exercise statusful power. In the second system, politeness and self-respect dominate in the linguistic forms used to influence or direct others' behaviors. Each set of verbal norms implies very different symbolic systems of power.

Requests and the Symbolic Systems of Power

Central to the construction of symbolic systems of power are ways of demanding, ordering, and requesting, which are called speech directives. It is through such directives that individuals directly assert their intentions to alter the behavior, actions, or thoughts of another. The forms these directives take, and under what circumstances they are uttered, are invariably patterned according to cultural norms, attitudes, or practices.¹³ They and their contextual meanings form the core of any symbolic system of power.

Ash Creek examples are provided to illustrate basic linguistic differences and their cultural significance. To understand these examples, however, it is important to know the difference between "want" and "need" directives. "Want" directives focus on the wishes of an individual, as in "I want it." "Need" directives focus on the needs of a group such as a family or a church congregation, as in "We need us some gravels for our road." A common question that captures the distinction between the two is, "Do you want it or need it?" These distinctions are not as clear when SBAE is the preferred speech variety rather than Appalachian English.¹⁴ In fact, they may merge so that speakers make no distinction in meaning between the two.¹⁵

Linguistic anthropologists use transcriptions of actual speech as data to support their analyses of the language and cultural relationships they are investigating. In this case, I am hoping to show that there were clashes in the use of speech directives that resulted in the environmental education center maintaining its power to determine who was permitted to use the grounds and buildings, while local people were disempowered and disregarded. The style of presenting this transcription is consistent with professional protocols, both in linguistic anthropology and in the related field of discourse analysis. All speech features, including hesitations (in-

dicated by a period), extra stress (indicated by the symbol ' preceding the word or syllable), and coughs, must be included because they can influence how listeners understand the contextual meaning of the speech. The first segment below captures the complex dual system of power operating in the county through the use of "want" constructions; the second segment attempts, but ultimately fails, to express the strong sense of insider solidarity through "need" constructions.

Both transcriptions are from a community meeting I recorded in Ash Creek.¹⁶ This meeting, held in the dining hall of the local environmental education center (with the permission of its director), was called to discuss the future of the center. The "committee" that organized the meeting consisted of about six concerned county leaders and community residents who had no legal authority in terms of school management or administration. Under local norms, there was a presumption of the community's right to use the center, and committee members were responding to perceived concerns about the distancing of school activities from the community it purportedly served. In addition to the committee members, thirty-five to forty local residents attended the meeting; also present were the center administrator, a few voting members of the center's board of trustees, teachers, and staff. None of the teachers or administrators spoke the local variety of Appalachian English; all came from non-Appalachian areas. All those present were Caucasian.

Segment I: "Want" Example

In this segment, the speaker (the "Chair") is the ad hoc committee chair and a former attorney and judge in the county. This segment occurs about three minutes into the meeting.

Chair [addressing local residents attending the meeting]:

We *want* to in'vite you . uh

After the 'meeting is over . uh

For ideas that you 'have. uh

That . occur to you to ? the committee. . uh

Share your ideas

Or [clears throat] know that . uh

You know a number of the committee members . and uh
 At a later time we *want* you to meet with us
 And share some ideas about the school . uh
 We encourage you to do that. . . .

In this segment, the Chair assumes the role of spokesperson for the ad hoc committee. His speaking style (his presence in front of the group, his control of the speaking “floor” by determining who gets to talk and when, and his use of the more standard English lexicon such as *encourage*) asserts his desired position of authority and influence within a more mainstream framework of meeting decorum. This type of participant framework is unusual in Ash Creek, except perhaps in the context of a denominational church meeting, a meeting of state officials at the local grade school, or an outside speaker at the community college sixteen miles away. Even then, the “want” constructions would be unusual if local people were involved. This meeting’s very configuration evokes educated or professional contexts, immediately distancing some of the audience from acknowledging the Chair’s requests.

In addition, his use of “want” constructions codes the Chair’s speech in professional settings—that is, as if he is someone who has the “right” to make requests of others; therefore, it gives him statusful power. The “want” form stipulates that the flow of ideas should come from the audience to him and then, through him, to the other committee members, who will determine which ideas are worthwhile and which are not. In constructing this monodirectional flow of information, he is asserting a self-focused empowerment of his claim to direct the center’s programming and administration. His claim to statusful power is clear and transparent, regardless of whether one embraces the local symbolic system of power or that of the legal and corporate world in which the Chair works and is oriented.

At the same time, this segment exhibits several contradictions, because many other linguistic features point to the local Appalachian English symbolic system of power rather than the one typifying the Chair’s professional world. These contradictions create confusion over which power relations are in play and therefore which system of power is being constituted. Are the participants speaking as professionals, or are they speaking as members of the local speech community?

To illustrate, the Chair's accent conforms to the local variety of Appalachian English, identifying him not only as local but also as "from here."¹⁷ Yet his use of a certain Latinate lexicon and *ideas* instead of *ideals*—the word used by many younger Ash Creek residents¹⁸—indexes his educated background, setting him apart as someone who talks "proper" or uses "school talk" (see Clark's essay in this volume). The intertextual switching of speech variety elements results in conflicting signals: the Chair is "one of us," yet he is not. Of course, many people in the county, primarily those who left the area to attend four-year universities, speak with a similar style and diction level, so his speech cannot be considered unusual.

Yet in this case, speech marks group boundaries between community members who commonly use the center's facilities and participate in events and those who do not. The former rely extensively on the power system validated primarily by local Appalachian English forms, whereas the latter approximate educated standard American English in many if not most ways. Consequently, the Chair's use of "want" is inappropriate for the audience, although it would have been appropriate in his law office; in general, though, his accent is appropriate. As a result, the Chair communicates mixed signals about which power system he is asserting, and at this point, most local residents in the audience simply dismiss his talk as "hot air."

Interestingly, the Chair's rapport with the audience didn't improve when he switched to "like to" forms later, as in "We would like for you to identify yourself when you do speak." "Like" forms are valued by local residents as less self-focused than "want" forms. The us-you dichotomy the Chair created earlier still held, however, and his attempt to assert both statusful and interactional power failed. Residents offered no follow-up or positive responses to his requests.

Segment 2: "Need" Example

One committee member who spoke at length introduced a contrasting "need" discursive sequence about forty minutes into the meeting, suggesting an unambiguous insertion of the local symbolic system of power. This too failed, however. This speaker (the "Member") is an educator, although she is not familiar with everyday events at the center. She was

born and reared in Ash Creek and still lives nearby. She attempts to move the meeting forward by requesting specific types of information:

Member [addressing the audience]:

One of the things that's occurred to me as we talked yesterday

And I thought about it last night

Was that . uh

We really 'need to know some demographics about the valley

[referring to where the center is located] that we don't know

We need to 'know

How 'many youngsters there are between the ages of 12 and 16 who
are going to drop 'out of high school if they don't get some help.

Several discursive elements combine to mitigate any self-focused assertion of power on the Member's part. First, her use of "we" in the phrase "We need to know" possibly includes more than just committee members, unlike the Chair's use of "we." It could include everyone, depending on how the audience understands her meaning. Her use of "need" also shifts the focus from just the Member or just the committee to everyone in the room. The connotation or contextual meaning she conveys implies the need for information that will benefit everyone, including all the children in the area. This segment, then, seems to present an interpretation of power mitigation, of de-hierarchization, and of self-deprecation for purposes of advancing what is good for everyone—a stance that fully conforms to local Appalachian English directive patterns.

Again, as in the first segment and the Chair's discourse as a whole, a more complex set of contextual meanings was understood by the community members present, as they reported to me after the meeting. Given the overt purpose of the event, how the Chair had already framed it, plus the Member's more standard American English phonology, lexicon, and intonational phrasing, as well as what the audience knew of her character as a local resident and native of the area, the "we" was interpreted by some as indexing the woman alone rather than a group—a royal use of "we," as it were, and simply a substitute for "I." They also understood the "need" forms to really be "want" forms. In this case, some listeners interpreted

her utterance as well-intentioned, but they also felt that it benefited her own power and control over one set of potential outcomes of the meeting. The meeting was therefore unsuccessful, and nothing came of it. There was no serious challenge to the center administration's legal right to construct the kinds of programming it wanted.

The situation was even more complex because of the historical context in which the center had been formed, which was well known to the local residents in attendance. The linguistic confusion in the use of "want" and "need" directives by speakers was an immediate cause of the committee's failure. None of the center's administrators was indigenous to the area or spoke a local variety of Appalachian English, so they gave only minimal credence to the meeting and the talk within it. They went ahead with their planned programming agenda, making only minimal changes and basically ignoring other points of view. This meeting represented a flash point where competing symbolic systems of domination commingled, if only for a couple of hours and with only a few intangible outcomes. Nevertheless, those relying on the symbolic system of power expressed through their variety of Appalachian English were not acknowledged by either the residents or the center administration; those attempting to use both the Appalachian English and the SBAE systems were unsuccessful because they sent mixed signals and mixed meanings, permitting both groups to dismiss them.

The differences between these two systems could not be more polar. One is based on diffusing and minimizing the potential power one individual has over another. The other conforms more to corporate, governmental, and educational organizations and permits (even demands) individuals' assertion of personal power to control others—to make decisions for them, allocate resources, and control their domains of action. The result is a linguistic tension within Ash Creek and similar communities: the local speech-based symbolic system of power represented by the continued use of Appalachian English (and the ways it has been shaped to express this system) intersects with another system of power that represents the nonlocal, political economic sphere. So why does this tension continue to exist? Why haven't the language and power relations expressed by nonlocal professionals and transglobal corporations erased local speech directives and other ways of expressing power?

Central to understanding why the Appalachian English-based system persists and doesn't just go away in the face of such hegemonic pressure to conform is an understanding of the locus of power itself—where many residents say it ultimately originates. For this cosmic task, we need to explore power relations in religious language.

Religious Discourse and Power

The most symbolically layered forms of speech in many Appalachian coalfield communities are part of church-related practices, intended to be sacred and designed for the worship of God. For most Ash Creek Appalachian English speakers, visions of what constitutes power and how it should be manifested in the everyday world are transmitted through church or the King James Bible. Everyday conversations often make allusions to scripture or mention God in some fashion and, on occasion, include the practice of speaking in tongues. Praying at home, at work, on a mountaintop, or in public venues is also common; prayer frequently contains speech directives but rarely “want” constructions. That the Christian God is the ultimate source of authority is commonly understood. By looking at church practices, we find “ideal” ways of structuring directives and illuminating the symbolic systems encoded in language and enacted in interaction.¹⁹

However, religion is complex in Ash Creek and other coalfield communities. Denominational churches such as the Southern Baptist, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and United Brethren are situated near other independent churches such as Primitive Baptist, Holiness, Old Regular Baptist, and others.²⁰ In terms of language and power relations, the denominational churches rely extensively on highly scripted ways of talking during services. These conform in structure and meaning to texts and procedures prepared and published by international regulatory church bodies. Often, these ways of talking are written down in standard American English and then read as SBAE during services, although some accent features (similar to the Chair's speech in segment 1) may appear. These speech events construct standardized, literate versions of what human and divine relations should be.

Local independent churches' speech events, in contrast, are influenced

by oral traditions and congregational leadership practices that grant the right to preach to “called” preachers. The preacher, in turn, is presumed to have a special personal relationship with God, with privileged access to him and his power. From the perspective of believers, church services are where God “talks” to or through the preacher and where members talk with God.²¹ They are zones of profound power access and dispersal. How this power is dispersed is a function of speech. Power and enactments of power are constituted by the performative meanings in the language used. Of crucial importance is the feature of “voicing”—that is, who is doing the talking.²² Practitioners believe that God has ultimate power, so if God is presumed to be talking, the source of ultimate power is talking.

This brief overview cannot explore the rich and complex meanings of these enactments through speech events and many different church activities such as preaching, praying, testifying, singing, baptism, and communion, among other acts of worship.²³ These are all important in understanding how the local symbolic system of power is constituted in Ash Creek, why the community has the system of meanings it does, what those meanings are, and how the system is reconstituted week after week and year after year. However, one of the most salient enactments—speaking in tongues—is covered here. Following is a brief segment from a revival service at a local holiness church held in January 1987. The preacher was visiting from the Louisville, Kentucky, area, but most other participants were local. The service began with music, the preacher’s testimony, quotation of scripture, and preaching. Congregational shouting, singing, and speaking in tongues were followed by brief periods of relative quiet in which the preacher spoke, creating an audio wave in which loud sounds waxed and waned. Transcribed here is one such moment, occurring toward the end of the service, in which the preacher spoke:

Holy, holy, holy, holy.
 Holy.
Buna ma si kos saya tami en day ya.
 Thus sayeth the Lo:rd.
 Unto my servant ??
 Yes, sayeth the Lord thy God.
 Yes, seen . huh . thy despair . huh.

In dalaba sayo holabiundayya

And ye::a.

I've *heard* thy cry . huh.

Amen

This was followed by the singing of a hymn, while some spoke in tongues or shouted. The service continued in this manner, alternating between preaching and singing, until the congregation's energy was expended (or, in religious terms, the Holy Ghost had departed) and the preacher sent everyone home.

The transcribed sections of speaking in tongues are indicated by sound clusters organized into distinct rhythmic patterns. In no way do they accord with local speech varieties. According to holiness Pentecostal beliefs, speaking in tongues represents the voice of the Holy Ghost, one aspect of the Trinity, actually inhabiting a person's physical body. The voice of the Holy Ghost talks to the congregation, not the voice of the person it inhabits at the time.²⁴ This segment represents the possession of God's power. Power itself is merged into a human self, and human selves are decentered into a timeless and spaceless divinity. There is no "need" to ask, request, or even demand God's presence, because there is no separation between the empowered and the unempowered.

Such a merger is demonstrated by the speech itself, for the sounds signifying the speech of the Holy Ghost contain no grammatical elements.²⁵ Structurally, for example, the utterance *Buna ma si kos saya tami en day ya* appears to lack any morphology or syntax, although those present at such events may claim otherwise when they interpret the Holy Ghost's speech and translate it into their variety of Appalachian English. Nevertheless, without tense, plurality, subordination, or other forms of grammatical marking, these sound clusters stand apart from the time- and space-bound world of human speech. By not encoding time, place, number, location, or subordination, such speech permits participants to see it as the voice of a timeless, limitless God.

When coupled with scriptural quotations that shift the meaning of "I" from indexing the preacher to indexing God himself ("I've *heard* thy cry"), this segment offers a profound way for believers to participate in the transcendent power of their divinity. Here, verbal communication is

literally the embodiment of power, and individual “selves” are decentered and diffused into a transcendent state through it.

Other ways of talking, such as testifying, praying, telling stories, and greeting; the participant frameworks in which they occur; and the symbolic significance given to them by local residents all combine to constitute a template for a near-perfect symbolic system of power—of how it should manifest itself in all areas of one’s life. This dynamic model constructs a minimally hierarchical set of relationships based only on god-human, male-female, saved-sinner dichotomies, not on the highly statusful and hierarchical organization that characterizes many denominational churches. It decenters the person and diffuses him or her into the being of God himself. Other believers in other independent church traditions likewise participate in this transcendent state in various ways. Similarly, everyday actions, with their emphasis on “need” forms to obtain compliance or agreement, are valued in ways that mirror, however imperfectly, this ideal system; they emphasize a diffusion of personal wants into a group-focused rather than a self-focused universe. This mirroring is accomplished through specific types of discourse, especially use of the local variety of Appalachian English. Appalachian English, not SBAE, is therefore the imperfect human way of talking to and about God, while speaking in tongues is the perfect speech of God himself. As indicated in segments 1 and 2 from the community meeting, if one does not use such discourse appropriately on the everyday level, it’s not “right,” and residents have every reason to resist, reject, or, in some cases, fight against efforts to enforce compliance—and they often do.

Rather than focusing on the structure of an Appalachian speech variety used in one coalfield area of southeastern Kentucky, this essay focuses on how people use Appalachian English to construct certain types of potentially empowering (or disempowering) relationships. In so doing, its emphasis is on sampling what interacting speakers say to one another in many settings, at many times, and among many participants. It also concentrates on the more abstract symbolic systems of power that emerge or are reproduced from these instances of talking. The interconnections among these different speaking occasions constitute more abstract and symbolic understandings, which in turn construct a system of meaning

given to language and power relationships. The meanings emerging from these interconnections help us understand how residents of Ash Creek construct their own cultural, symbolic system of power.

From this perspective, a diffused system of enacting power emerges that reinforces the types of relationships residents believe they should have with God. This system is one in which the profane everyday world (where most people spend most of their time) should be an imperfect approximation of the spiritual relationships individuals attempt to create when worshipping. It should not be viewed as one in which members of a church's governing body extend their views into the lives of individuals in the congregation.

Retaining the local Appalachian English variety to replicate this system is crucial, not because of grammar, lexicon, phonology, and intonation alone but also because of the system of meanings created. Multiple empowering or disempowering forms of language are used in familiar settings, times, and locations by people who know one another well, in many cases since birth. To replace them with standard American English forms would be to erase the empowerment these Appalachian English forms create and give meaning to. Residents would be replacing their culture with a different one in which cultural meanings are aligned with SBAE. The latter favors a more secular, standardized, and self-promoting system of empowerment that often has little sensitivity to the place-based, highly interpersonal relationships characterizing most coalfield communities. Consciously or unconsciously, Ash Creek and other coalfield communities recognize this potential *cultural* loss, in addition to any linguistic restructuring that would occur, and, in their continued use of Appalachian English forms, they reject it.

The tensions between the two systems are very real, and the more professionally oriented SBAE-based system is not about to go away. If anything, it will gain more power because of the continued intrusion of transglobal economics into every facet of community life. People need jobs, and they want many of the things that advanced capitalism provides. The system of symbolic domination encoded and expressed by standard American English is not perceived as inherently malignant; in fact, it is a significant factor in the contemporary political economic arena. Right now, though, distinctions are still made in terms of how directives should

be structured and used (“want” and “need” forms), what varieties are appropriate for religious discourse, and what varieties should be used in different types of talk such as “school talk,” “home talk,” “paycheck talk,” “church talk,” and “doctor talk.” Because the personal and communal stakes are so high, both forms—local varieties of Appalachian English and SBAE—are likely to continue.

Notes

1. *Culture* is used here in its anthropological sense of “learned and meaningful behavior” that contrasts with whatever is biologically determined. In this sense, religion, politics, economics, education, and so forth are all components of culture.

2. Rebecca Dayle Greene, “Language, Ideology and Identity in Rural Eastern Kentucky” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2010).

3. Michael Silverstein, “Monoglot ‘Standard’ in America: Standardization and Metaphors of Linguistic Hegemony,” in *The Matrix of Language: Contemporary Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. Donald Brenneis and Ronald H. S. Macaulay (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

4. Dwight Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford, *Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Backtalk from an American Region* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999); Ron Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

5. Ash Creek (a pseudonym) is a rural community of about 400 residents. Many of them are descendants of the original settlers, and when I lived there, few residents ever left the area, although some worked in the county seat or even farther away.

6. In addition to living and working in Ash Creek, I have collected data, with residents’ permission, in other southern Appalachian areas as part of my position as an Appalachian studies professor at Virginia Tech. My students also help me out from time to time by providing information and introducing me to their families or friends in their home communities. Through these experiences, I have been able to expand on my Ash Creek data and stay up to date on what is changing in many communities in the area.

7. Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Dell Hymes, *In Vain I Tried to Tell You: Essays in Native American Poetics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

8. See Anita Puckett, *Seldom Ask, Never Tell: Labor and Discourse in Appalachia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

9. Carol Myers Scotton, "Self-Enhancing Codeswitching as Interactional Power," *Language and Communication* 8, no. 3–4 (1988): 200.

10. Susan Gal, "Language, Gender, and Power: An Anthropological Review," in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001).

11. See Susan Ervin-Tripp, "Is Sybil There? The Structure of Some American English Directives," *Language in Society* 5, no. 1 (1976): 25–66; M. Margaret Weigel and Ronald Weigel, "Directive Use in a Migrant Agricultural Community: A Test of Ervin-Tripp's Hypotheses," *Language in Society* 13, no. 1 (1985): 63–80.

12. Puckett, *Seldom Ask, Never Tell*.

13. See Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge); Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

14. See Anita Puckett, "Negotiating Rural Southern Mountain Speech," in *Appalachian Cultural Competency: A Guide for Medical, Mental Health, and Social Service Professionals*, ed. Sue Keefe (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

15. Weigel and Weigel, "Directive Use in a Migrant Agricultural Community."

16. This recording was made with permission in November 1986. Most participants are still living, and I have visited the area regularly since I left in 1993.

17. See Bridget L. Anderson, *Migration, Accommodation and Language Change: Language at the Intersection of Regional and Ethnic Identity* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

18. Many older speakers say *idee*, which is a pronunciation commonly used by Sheriff Taylor on the *Andy Griffith Show*. See also Michael Montgomery, *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 216.

19. Gal, "Language, Gender, and Power," 427; Web Keene, "Religious Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 47–71.

20. Howard Dorgan, *The Old Regular Baptists of Central Appalachia: Brothers and Sisters in Hope* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Loyal Jones, *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Deborah McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

21. McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion*; Elaine Lawless, *God's Peculiar People: Women's Voices and Folk Tradition in a Pentecostal Church* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

22. As used here, *voicing* is not quite the same as Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia; see Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). The focus here is on the persona created by certain speech forms, not on systematic variations in linguistic codes in and of themselves.

23. See Lawless, *God's Peculiar People*; Beverly Bush Patterson, *Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Jeff Todd Titon, *Powerhouse for God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

24. Lawless, *God's Peculiar People*; Anita Puckett, "Speaking the Present into a Timeless God: Linguistic Transubstantiation in Southern Appalachian Religious Language" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.).

25. Many holiness believers elsewhere claim that speaking in tongues can occur in a foreign human language, but this was not substantiated in my observations of Ash Creek speech or in the other churches I have visited in the coalfields since then, although I am certainly not disputing such claims.

The Treatment of Dialect in Appalachian Literature

Michael Ellis

Stereotypes about Appalachian culture and Appalachian English have been around so long that it is hard to imagine a time when they did not exist, a time before there was even a distinctive variety of English in the region. Dialectologists, linguistic geographers, lexicographers, and sociolinguists have added considerably to our knowledge of Appalachian Englishes in the twentieth century and beyond, but how Appalachian varieties developed and what they were like in the nineteenth century are only beginning to be understood.¹ However, long before the first linguistic studies were published, many Americans thought they were already familiar with the language of the southern highlands and had formed opinions about it—usually negative. The purpose of this essay is to describe literary depictions of Appalachian English since the mid-nineteenth century, explore what these “literary dialects” tell us about earlier Appalachian Englishes, and, finally, reach some understanding about how these literary dialects contributed to popular notions about Appalachian English.

In the summer of 1845, George Washington Harris published the first in a series of humorous sketches in William T. Porter’s *Spirit of the Times*. The sketch, titled “The Knob Dance—A Tennessee Frolic,” is one of the earliest examples of an Appalachian literary dialect.² This story is about a dance party at Jo Spraggins’s house in southern Knox County, Tennessee. It is recounted by a character named Dick Harlan and is presented in a

manner intended to represent the way Dick talked: “The supper is made up by the fellers; every one fetches sumthin; sum a lick of meal, sum a middlin of bacon, sum a hen, sum a possum, sum a punkin, sum a grab of taters, or a pocket full of peas, or dried apples, an sum only fetches a good appetite and a skin chock full of perticular deviltrty.”³ This literary dialect, which Harris also used later in his *Sut Lovingood* stories, was no doubt influenced by the techniques employed by his literary antecedents to represent a wide variety of rural or frontier speech. These mid-nineteenth-century literary dialects would, in turn, influence several generations of writers who sought to portray the spoken language of the southern highlands, an influence that would last into the early twentieth century.

The number of books published over the past 150 years with Appalachian settings and characters is staggering. In his 1961 doctoral dissertation, Cratis Williams lists more than 260 individual writers who produced fiction with Appalachian settings—a list limited to the period from the end of the Civil War through the late 1950s.⁴ In 1964 Lorise C. Boger compiled an annotated bibliography at West Virginia University that includes 496 titles of literary works set in the southern mountains and published during the same period.⁵ These works of fiction cover a wide variety of literary periods and genres, from the frontier humor of the 1840s through 1860s, the local color movement of the 1870s through 1920s, and the agrarian sociological novels from the 1930s through at least the 1950s. The body of literature that can be called “Appalachian” is much too large and diverse to allow easy generalizations, but one thing is certain: the majority of these works of fiction include the portrayal of Appalachian speech in one form or another. Written language is, at best, an imperfect medium for conveying the often subtle complexities of a spoken dialect. This has not, however, deterred writers from attempting to imitate or suggest spoken language, although their methods have varied considerably. Several issues arise with regard to Appalachian literary dialects: What is the nature of these literary dialects? How authentic are they, and can they be used as a source of linguistic evidence? What has been the social impact of these literary representations? Finally, how have Appalachian writers since the 1930s chosen to portray the speech of their home communities?

What Is a Literary Dialect?

A literary dialect is an attempt by a writer to portray a regional, social, or ethnic language variety. These authors are writing for audiences of nonspecialists, are not linguists themselves, and are often not attempting to produce a realistic or authentic spoken language. Therefore, we must take great care when evaluating the usefulness of literary dialects as linguistic evidence. Most often, the literary dialect is confined to those portions of the text consisting of dialogue between characters. Sometimes the literary dialect is used throughout the entire text, in the form of either a first-person narrative or a text supposedly “written” by a semiliterate character. This technique is sometimes referred to as *dialect writing*. Harris used this approach by creating a narrative frame in which his persona, “George,” introduces and provides the context for the long monologues presented by his character Sut Lovingood.⁶ In *The Biglow Papers*, James Russell Lowell used a written version of dialect writing in the form of letters to the editor penned by his fictional Massachusetts farmer.⁷

The specific techniques used to convey the impression that characters are “talking” have varied considerably, depending on the time period, the genre, the writer’s degree of creativity or talent, and his or her personal knowledge of the dialect being portrayed.⁸ In the past, writers often used unconventional spelling to suggest variant pronunciations. These phonetic spellings include *larn* for *learn*, *jine* for *join*, *skear* for *scare*, *widder* for *widow*, and *hoss* for *horse*. Nineteenth-century writers tended to use these phonetic spellings much more often than twentieth-century writers. In the nineteenth century, many writers also used what is known as *eye dialect*, unconventional spellings that have no phonetic significance but are used to give readers the impression that characters are illiterate.⁹ Common examples of eye dialect include *wuz* for *was*, *minnit* for *minute*, *licker* for *liquor*, and *wimmin* for *women*. Our alphabet, however, has significant limitations in terms of how it can be used to portray the sound of a dialect. There are more sounds (*phonemes*) in English than can be accommodated by the twenty-six letters of the Roman alphabet, and representing the many vowel sounds in English is particularly problematic. For example, writers have always had difficulty representing the vowel

sounds in the common southern American pronunciations of words such as *tired*, *wife*, and *nice*. Therefore, although spelling occasionally provides important clues about pronunciation, it is probably the least reliable and most problematic indicator. Moreover, when nonstandard spelling is overused, it can create the misguided impression of ignorance and social divergence. This is probably why many writers since the 1930s have tended to use nonstandard spelling only sparingly.

Although writers have difficulty reproducing speech sounds, they sometimes do a much better job of representing the characteristic grammar and vocabulary of a dialect. In the twentieth century, writers tended to rely primarily on nonstandard grammatical features as a way of suggesting the spoken dialect of characters, including those from Appalachia. Among the most common grammatical features are nonstandard past tenses and past participles, as in “I seen him yesterday,” “They knowed all about it,” and “We have already eat our dinner.” Also common are nonstandard subject–verb/auxiliary agreement, as in “We was just talking about him”; nonstandard negative concord, as in “You don’t know nothing about it”; and the demonstrative *them*, as in “Them boys will be here in the morning.” Vocabulary is somewhat more challenging, and in the past, many writers avoided words and usages that might not be familiar to a general readership. Nevertheless, enough lexical variation exists in literary dialects to supply a significant number of citations for lexicographers. Unfortunately, no matter how many or what kinds of nonstandard features individual writers use, we are still confronted with the major problem of determining the authenticity of an individual literary dialect and what, if anything, the language spoken by fictional characters has to tell us about how living people actually speak.

Literary Dialect as Linguistic Evidence

The general lack of linguistic interest in literary dialect may be attributed, in part, to its uncertain status, since it occupies a gray area between literary and linguistic studies. Adding to this lack of interest is an understandable lack of confidence in the reliability of literary representations of spoken language, as well as doubts about its applicability to historical

investigations of the early development of regional and ethnic varieties of American English. Our understanding of literary dialect has not progressed much beyond where it stood in 1950, when Sumner Ives published "A Theory of Literary Dialect." There, he argues that "a scientific theory of literary dialect must be worked out according to the principles of linguistics and the facts of dialect geography."¹⁰ The method proposed by Ives requires first "eliminating the spurious";¹¹ that is, he recognized the need to sort out examples of eye dialect, comic mispronunciation, and malapropism. According to Ives, the genuine forms in a literary dialect can be authenticated if they correspond to evidence contained in publications based on the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada. Although Ives's method is a useful first step in separating the wheat from the chaff in literary dialect, it has often resulted in a tendency to merely attempt to authenticate the works of individual authors, rather than applying the evidence to larger and more important historical questions. In other words, describing how a nineteenth-century literary dialect is somehow similar to a contemporary (albeit conservative) regional or ethnic variety does not help us understand how these regional or ethnic varieties evolved.¹²

A significant shortcoming in Ives's method is that he does not give sufficient consideration to the fact that writers are commonly influenced by their literary predecessors. By the 1870s, the techniques used to portray the speech of the southern mountains had become quite conventional, drawing on the work of previous writers rather than attempting any significant degree of originality or realism in reproducing the speech of Appalachian highlanders. By the 1840s, there existed a "common stock" of phonetic spellings, eye dialects, and grammatical forms that were used to represent rustic speech in general, regardless of geographic location. These examples of literary dialect were often employed for comic purposes and were intended to convey the social divergence and backwardness of characters. Novelist Mary N. Murfree has been given a great deal of credit (or blame) for establishing Appalachian cultural stereotypes, but there is little in her literary dialect that does not derive from the work of earlier authors.¹³

Among the many phonetic spellings included in the common stock of features are the following:

<i>allers</i>	always	<i>nat'ral</i>	natural
<i>arter</i>	after	<i>natur</i>	nature
<i>ax</i>	ask	<i>nigh</i>	near
<i>bile</i>	boil	<i>oncommon</i>	uncommon
<i>Californy</i>	California	<i>onpossible</i>	impossible
<i>'cause</i>	because	<i>Pennsylvania</i>	Pennsylvania
<i>chicking</i>	chicken	<i>pizon</i>	poison
<i>creetur</i>	creature	<i>purty</i>	pretty
<i>darter</i>	daughter	<i>raal</i>	real
<i>edication</i>	education	<i>reg'lar</i>	regular
<i>eend</i>	end	<i>sarpent</i>	serpent
<i>feller</i>	fellow	<i>sarse</i>	sauce
<i>figger</i>	figure	<i>sartin</i>	certain
<i>furder</i>	further	<i>sitch</i>	such
<i>fust</i>	first	<i>skear</i>	scare
<i>guv'ment</i>	government	<i>'spect</i>	expect
<i>hoss</i>	horse	<i>spile</i>	spoil
<i>idee</i>	idea	<i>s'pose</i>	suppose
<i>infarnal</i>	infernal	<i>swaller</i>	swallow
<i>Injun</i>	Indian	<i>'tain't</i>	it ain't
<i>jine</i>	join	<i>tater</i>	potato
<i>jist</i>	just	<i>tuck</i>	take
<i>kear</i>	care	<i>'twixt</i>	betwixt
<i>kittle</i>	kettle	<i>widder</i>	widow
<i>larn</i>	learn	<i>wuss</i>	worse
<i>leetle</i>	little	<i>yarbs</i>	herbs
<i>Lowizy</i>	Louisa	<i>yeller</i>	yellow

This is not to suggest that any or all of these phonetic spellings are inconsistent with the dialects being depicted. In fact, they are commonly found in American literary dialects regardless of the region being represented.¹⁴

The same is true of a wide variety of grammatical features, including the plural *was* (“we was,” “they was”) and singular *were* (“I were,” “he were”); past-tense forms such as *knowed* (knew), *throwed* (threw), *ketched* (caught), *telled* (told), *drinked* (drank), *heerd* or *hearn* (heard), *rid* (rode), *fit* (fought), *druv* (drove), *done* (did), and *gin* (gave); *a*-prefixing and *g*-

dropping (*a-goin, a-gettin*); possessive pronouns such as *hisn, hern, ourn, theirn,* and *yourn*; superlatives *beatinest, cryinest,* and *wellest*; and *nor* for *than* (“He knows more nor we do”). Again, these forms had become conventional before the 1870s and represented rustic speech without a specific regional identification. If anything, these features may tell us something about early American English in general rather than any particular dialect.

Generally speaking, the earlier the publication, the less likely it is that the writer was influenced by earlier writers. In other words, we can consider George Washington Harris and his contemporaries (e.g., William A. Caruthers, Johnson J. Hooper, and Harden E. Taliaferro) to be pioneers of their genre and to possess a somewhat higher degree of originality than those who came later. In addition, we can assume that writers who are native to the region where their fiction is located are more likely to reproduce features that are characteristic of the regional dialect. Among writers from the Upper South, this is especially true of a particular pattern of subject-verb agreement, something that is very “deep” within the dialect varieties of that region and can be reproduced authentically only at an unconscious level. This pattern of subject-verb agreement allows the use of *is, has,* and verbs with the *-s* suffix with plural, compound, or collective noun phrase subjects, but not with plural pronoun subjects. It has been studied and described by linguists and is still a feature of dialects in the Upper South and South Midland.¹⁵ Following are some examples from works published in the mid-nineteenth century:

1. “Georgia boys is monstrous rough customers once they git their dander up.”¹⁶
2. “Crops is good with no prospect of scarcity.”¹⁷
3. “Human natur and the human family is my books.”¹⁸
4. “But I’m told the yankees always sings a psalm before they go into battle.”¹⁹
5. “Take this gentleman to wharever the boys puts ’em up.”²⁰
6. “Sumtimes the boys gits on a ‘tare’ ove nites, an’ tries tu upset hit on hit’s side.”²¹
7. “But onless some of ye counts me out five hundred, and furnishes your money to buy land.”²²
8. “The silk and sugar has never failed to be there yet.”²³

Notice in the first example, William Tappen Thompson writes “boys is” but not “they goes,” following the pattern’s subject constraint. Likewise, in the fourth example, Hooper writes “the yankees always sings” but “they go [not goes]” later in the sentence because the verb follows a plural pronoun. Without tacit knowledge of the rules governing the pattern, which can be acquired only through experience with the actual dialect, writers from outside the region are unable to authentically reproduce this pattern of subject-verb agreement.²⁴

With regard to the words used in literary dialects, Appalachian literature in general has contributed to our knowledge of the vocabulary common to specific areas. No other writer, however, uses vocabulary to the extent that Harris does. Indeed, even writers who regularly employ phonetic spellings and nonstandard grammatical forms are more reticent when it comes to unusual words or usages. The relative density of Harris’s literary dialect is exceptional, so much so that his work has sometimes been corrected by editors.²⁵ In his editions of Harris’s work, Thomas Inge includes a detailed glossary or glosses problematic words or usages in footnotes. No doubt, many modern readers would find understanding the *Sut Lovingood* tales a daunting task, as illustrated by this passage from “Sut Lovingood’s Daddy Acting Horse”: “When we got the bridil fix’d ontu dad, don’t yu bleve he sot in tu chompin his jis like a rale hoss, an’ tried tu bite me on the arm (he allers wer a mos’ komplikated durned ole fool, an mam sed so when he warnt about).”²⁶ This short passage contains several examples of eye dialect (*bridil, ontu, tu, sed, komplikated*), several phonetic spellings (*bleve, jis, rale, hoss, mos’, ole, warnt*), *sot* for *sat*, *allers* for *always*, and nonstandard subject-verb agreement (“he . . . wer;” “he warnt”). In addition to the frequent use of eye dialect, Harris employs nearly every type of nonstandard grammatical and phonetic spelling found in the works of his contemporaries, as well as a number of apparently unique features. While his literary dialect may create obstacles for present-day readers, it provides a rich source of material for lexicographers and dialectologists. It was not at all difficult to generate a list of more than a hundred words of interest from *Sut Lovingood’s Yarns*.²⁷ There are Americanisms such as *gouber peas, lightning bugs, roastin ears*, and *water moccasin*, as well as words that can be traced back to British dialects: *childer, chimbly, furnint, gallus, long-nebbed*, and *swingle tree*. A

comparison of words found in Harris's work and entries in the first two volumes of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* suggests that his vocabulary is, as we might expect, regional in character, with the majority of terms being distinctive of both the South and South Midland (e.g., *beyant, caticorner, chinkepin, clomb, devilment, flannin, gallinipper, geers, ghostes, glut, hanted, hearn, hissself*), the South Midland alone (*ager, atwixt, beastes, dulcimore, fotch*), or some other geographic region that includes the Appalachians (*afore, backards, buntys hens, catamount, chimibly, clapboard, cowcumbers, cumfort, forkid, furnint, gouber peas, granmam, hern, hisn*). The evidence suggests that despite the extreme exaggeration in his literary dialect and the use of some features of doubtful authenticity, overall, Harris was an astute observer of local speech. Generally speaking, as a source of linguistic evidence, literary dialect is inferior to nonliterary writing, particularly letters and diaries written by individuals who, because of limited education, are likely to reproduce the features of their spoken language. However, there is no good reason to ignore literary dialect as a source of evidence about earlier Appalachian varieties, as long as we understand the nature of literary dialects and how to recognize which features have possible linguistic significance.

From Literary Dialect to Linguistic Stereotype

As mentioned earlier, Mary N. Murfree is often credited with creating Appalachian stereotypes, and certainly one way she did so was through the use of literary dialect. But if her dialect derives mainly from earlier literature, why would her writing have more influence on regional stereotypes than, for example, Harris's? Consider this passage from Murfree's *In the Tennessee Mountains*: "Vander war a good blacksmith fur the mountings, but they sot him ter l'arnin' thar. They 'lowed, though, ez he war pearter'n the peartest. He got ter be powerful pop'lar with the gyards an' authorities, an' sech."²⁸ There are no examples of eye dialect in the passage, but there are many examples of phonetic spellings (*war, fur, mountings, ter, l'arnin', thar, 'lowed, ez, pop'lar, gyards, sech*). Indeed, although Murfree rarely uses eye dialect in her fiction, her heavy use of phonetic spellings is unusual. She also uses nonstandard subject-verb concord ("Vander war"), as well as some regionally distinctive words or usages

(the intensifier *powerful*, and the comparative and superlative forms of the adjective *peart* ‘healthy, lively, saucy’). However, most of her phonetic spellings had been around for decades in American literature, appearing in a wide variety of genres. Moreover, her examples of nonstandard subject-verb agreement, as well as other grammatical features, are not always consistent with the dialects of the region.²⁹

Whatever popularity the Sut Lovingood stories may have enjoyed in the nineteenth century, we can be sure that Harris was eclipsed by Murfree, whose numerous, highly popular works were often reprinted. Harris had a much smaller (and mostly masculine) audience for his single book, while Murfree published twenty-five books in her lifetime, thirteen set in the Tennessee mountains. Certainly Murfree was in a position to be very influential in creating Appalachian stereotypes, but how did she influence stereotypes about Appalachian dialects? It may have less to do with the kinds of features she used than with the relatively high frequency of nonstandard forms in her literary dialect. In comparison to most of her contemporaries (e.g., Mark Twain), Murfree employed a much denser literary dialect in which nearly every other word is nonstandard in one way or another. Most likely, Murfree used her literary dialect as a means of exaggerating the social distance between a romanticized and largely imaginary Appalachian subculture and a superior and homogeneous mainstream society whose fictional representatives “spoke” standard English.

Appalachian Literary Dialects since the 1930s

By the 1930s, Appalachian writers began to shift away from some of the techniques used by nineteenth-century writers, producing less exaggerated versions of Appalachian Englishes. The change did not occur overnight, and techniques that had been used for many decades continued to appear in literary dialects, like the following passage from Harriette Simpson Arnow’s novel *Mountain Path*:

A small boy’s head crowned with bright, wheat-colored curls reached the level of the top step.

“That’s Pete,” Rie said, nodding toward the stair. “He’s jist six

a goin' on seven, an' ain't naiver been tu school. Me, I'm th' oldest one a th' livin' childern, they's three uv us daid.

"I'm twelve a goin' on thirteen." She turned to Louisa, and added in what she doubtless intended to be a confidential undertone, "Don't feel hurt 'bout Pete a holdin' off so. He's the bashfullest youngen."³⁰

This early novel by Arnow probably represents a transitional stage in the depiction of Appalachian dialects. In the quoted passage we can still find a few examples of eye dialect (*uv* 'of', *tu* 'to'), and there is some doubt about what sounds some of the spellings represent, but overall, there is a greater feeling of both reality and authenticity than can be found in the works of either Harris or Murfree.

The trend toward a more restrained Appalachian literary dialect is particularly apparent in James Still's *River of Earth*: "Mother sat on a tub bottom holding the baby, watching Father notch the spool. 'It's a long walking piece,' Mother said. 'Four miles one way. But I allus wanted my young 'uns to larn to figure and read writing. I went two winters to school, and I've been, ever since, a good hand to larn by heart. I never put my schooling to practice though, and I've nigh forgot how.'"³¹ In this passage, Still uses no eye dialect and only a couple of phonetic spellings (*allus* and *larn*). He even avoids the common practice of using *in'* for *ing*. The dialect is conveyed primarily by the words themselves: "a long walking piece," "young 'uns," "to figure and read writing," "a good hand to larn," "I've nigh forgot how." In recent decades, many Appalachian writers have tended to follow Still's lead by avoiding eye dialect and keeping phonetic spellings to a minimum. Writers such as Lee Smith, Denise Giardina, Silas House (see part II of this volume), and Sheila Kay Adams, to name just a few, rely primarily on a few well-chosen grammatical features and a wide array of distinctive regional words or usages to convey the feeling of a spoken dialect. This does not mean, however, that these and other writers speak with one voice. There are simply too many differences, not just in terms of region but also in terms of age, gender, social class, and ethnicity. People within the same community or even the same family do not always speak the same, so there is no reason to assume that Appalachian authors do not draw on their own individual experiences with language to construct

a written version of the way their Appalachian characters talk. As Michael Montgomery has argued, “mountain people do not speak with one voice, and novelists of Appalachia don’t either.”³²

Some writers avoid literary dialect entirely, perhaps in reaction to the negative responses to the exaggerated forms used by authors in the past. A comparison of two novels set in western North Carolina during the Civil War—Charles Frazier’s *Cold Mountain* and Sheila Kay Adams’s *My Old True Love*³³—reveals how much authors can vary in their treatment of spoken language. Frazier’s novel is written in the third person, and what little literary dialect it contains occurs in dialogue. Adams’s novel, in contrast, is in the form of a first-person narrative in which the narrator, Arty Norton, re-creates the speech of her family through dialogue that is rich in dialect: “Honey let me tell you something. You three young’uns are some of the best singers of them old love songs I’ve heard since my Pappy passed. Now, he was a fine singer, Pappy was. Mommie would try to make him quit singing love songs. Said it was a sin! Pappy was plumb insulted, I can testify to that. Told Mommie she might want to reference the Good Book.”³⁴ Both Frazier and Adams are talented writers, and any critical appraisal of the relative merits of their fiction is largely subjective. Their work is too diverse in terms of perspective, form, and style to allow easy comparison. However, of the two, Adams’s novel probably has a stronger claim of being distinctively “Appalachian,” since it draws on the rich storytelling traditions of the region and on the rich linguistic heritage of storytellers like Adams.

Linguists have studied and described present-day varieties of Appalachian English in such detail that it is no longer necessary to use contemporary literary dialects as a source of evidence. For the most part, the meaning or function of nonstandard grammatical features used by Appalachian authors today is fairly transparent. However, one characteristic feature of Appalachian dialects that is frequently employed by writers may cause some confusion for readers unfamiliar with the speech of the region. This is the “existential” subject *they* instead of *there*, as in this example from *Clay’s Quilt* by Silas House: “‘You don’t owe me nothing,’ she said. ‘It was such a pretty wedding that they ain’t no way I could charge for playing. It was my pleasure.’”³⁵ The existential subject *they* looks and sounds like the third-person plural pronoun

they, and only a knowledge of the dialect makes the distinction between their functions clear.³⁶

Lee Smith's novel *Fair and Tender Ladies* is a particularly rich source of distinctive words, usages, grammatical forms, and even pronunciations, all contained in the series of letters written by Ivy Rowe over her lifetime. The first letter alone contains several dozen examples: verbs and verb phrases such as *seed* for *saw*, *knowed* and *growed*, *learn* for *teach*, *holp*, *fotched*, *heered*, *brung*, *set to*, *took up*, *lit out*, *start in*, and *heard tell of*; nouns and noun phrases such as *younguns*, *catamount*, *sprucey-pines*, *he-balsams*, *bloody flux*, *laurel slick*, *shucky beans*, *pallet*, *brain fever*, *play party*, and *pone*; adjectives (including superlatives) *puny*, *poorly*, *gayly*, *afeard*, *wore out*, *give out*, *store boghten*, *leapest*, *mostest*, *lastest*, *bestest*, and even *disablest*; pronouns *ourn*, *yourn*, and *hisself*; phonetic spellings such as *foller*, *yaller*, *sweet taters*, *rinch* for *rinse*, *clift* for *cliff*, and *atall*; and the expressions "down in the back" and "like to have died." There is something particularly appealing about young Ivy's unself-conscious use of dialect in the letters, and the epistolary style allows Smith to accomplish things with language that would not be possible in a more conventional kind of first-person narrative. Ivy's long letter to her "Pen Friend" Hanneke, who lives in the Netherlands, begins:

My dear Hanneke,

Your name is not much common here, I think it is so pretty too. I say it now and agin it tastes sweet in my mouth like honey or cane or how I picture the fotched-on candy from Mrs. Browns book about France, candy wich mimicks roses. Have you seed any such as this? I have not. I have seed them in her red book that is all.³⁷

Ivy can combine her own language (*fotched-on*, *seed*) with that drawn from the "book about France" in a way that does not devalue the former.

Dialect can sometimes be used as a weapon turned against those who speak it, as Arnow demonstrates in a passage from *The Dollmaker*. Here, Gertie Nevels has been summoned to meet with her son's teacher, Mrs. Whittle:

“What did you say your name was?”

“Nevels. My boy’s name is Reuben. Maybe you don’t recollect him, but—”

“I don’t what?” And she frowned as she might have at a child giving the wrong answer.

“‘Recollect,’ I said,” Gertie answered.

“Does that mean ‘remember?’”³⁸

One can assume that Mrs. Whittle knows very well what *recollect* means and that she is using Gertie’s own words to humiliate her.

The pressure to conform, to change one’s way of speaking, is well known to those who have left their home communities to find work or attend school, as evidenced in the essays by Silas House and Jane Hicks in part II of this volume. The pressure to conform may be more subtle than that experienced by Gertie in her meeting with Mrs. Whittle, but it is present nevertheless. In Denise Giardina’s *Storming Heaven* (see part II), the character Carrie Bishop describes how being away at school has changed the language her brother uses:

Miles always said “it” now, never “hit.”

“It sounds ignorant to say ‘hit.’ They shamed us out of it at school. Same with ‘aint.’ Educated people don’t use those words.”

Ben sat by the fire and whittled. “Chaucer said ‘hit,’” he observed.

Miles looked startled, then said, “That’s different.”

“Why?” Ben asked.

“He’s been dead a long time. He was *medieval*.” He said this last word as though it described a very disgraceful condition.

“This is the scientific age.”³⁹

While regional pronunciation or “accent” may be the most common way people recognize a dialect, it is an aspect of spoken language that is particularly difficult to render in writing. Writers sometimes have no other means of illustrating broad dialectal differences than to comment on these differences directly within the text. In her short story “Holler,”

Appalachian poet Crystal Wilkinson (see part II) describes the social gulf between her narrator, Mrs. Brown, and the black “law man” who interviews her in the hospital after she has been attacked by her husband: “Almost immediately I see the law man’s face and shoulders get set a certain way as he listens to the way I talk with all the Mission Creek in me spilling out into the room. And it’s then, when he acts like each word I speak is throwing shit on him, that I know it doesn’t matter what else I say so I stop talking all together.” In the case of Wilkinson’s narrator, social and urban-rural distinctions transcend any shared ethnic connection. The “law man” may resemble her Cousin Ronnie in superficial appearance, but for Mrs. Brown, “He’ll be thinking we are all just a bunch of country niggers.”

Appalachian writers such as those featured in part II of this volume have often received critical acclaim and found wide and appreciative audiences both inside and outside the region. Most of these writers use dialect in one way or another as a means of creating a regional and cultural identity for their characters. A literary dialect can help create that sense of place, home, community, and family. Literary dialects can also be used to illustrate the social barriers inherent in language differences. Programs in English education, particularly those aimed at students preparing to teach high school English, typically require some kind of English linguistics curriculum, and this requirement often includes instruction in the nature of language variation and language change. Ideally, such programs will produce teachers who are more sensitive to language differences and more tolerant of the differences they will encounter in the classroom (see the essays by Reaser and Clark). Exposure to literature containing dialects can be an effective way of accomplishing this. Literary dialects often personalize language in a way that conventional textbooks cannot, and they may be a better means of encouraging discussion about how and why we positively or negatively value our own spoken language and that of others. This is especially important in the case of Appalachian Englishes, since these varieties have been the subject of negative stereotypes for so long. It is encouraging to see present-day writers take on the challenges of portraying spoken language in Appalachian literature in ways that recognize the rich linguistic heritage of the region.

Notes

1. Various subdivisions of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada cover parts of the southern Appalachian region: the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States, the Linguistic Atlas of the North Central States, and the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States. Publications based on fieldwork for the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States (along with the Linguistic Atlas of New England) include Hans Kurath, *Word Geography of the Eastern United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949); E. Bagby Atwood, *A Survey of Verb Forms in the Eastern United States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1953); and Hans Kurath and Raven McDavid, *Pronunciation of English in the Atlantic States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961). Major dictionary studies include Frederick G. Cassidy and Joan Houston Hall, eds., *Dictionary of American Regional English*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985–2012), and Michael B. Montgomery and Joseph S. Hall, eds., *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004). Also of interest is the sociolinguistic study by Walt Wolfram and Donna Christian, *Appalachian Speech* (Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1976).

2. George Washington Harris, “The Knob Dance—A Tennessee Frolic,” *New York Spirit of the Times*, August 2, 1845. Other early works include William A. Caruthers, *The Kentuckian in New York* (New York: Harper, 1834); Johnson J. Hooper, *Adventures of Simon Suggs* (1845; reprint, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); and Harden E. Taliaferro, *Fisher’s River (North Carolina) Scenes and Characters* (New York: Harper, 1859). Harris began contributing “Sporting Epistles” to the *Spirit of the Times* in 1843, but these contain few examples of literary dialect.

3. Harris, “The Knob Dance,” 267.

4. Cratis Williams, “The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction” (PhD diss., New York University, 1961).

5. Lorise C. Boger, *The Southern Mountaineer in Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1964).

6. George Washington Harris, *Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spun by a “Nat’ral Born Durn’d Fool,” Warped and Wove for Public Wear* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1867).

7. James Russell Lowell, *The Biglow Papers* (Boston: Houghton, 1848). Every fall for the last twenty-two years, I have taught a course in American dialects. About halfway through the semester, after students have been introduced to regional variation and the various Linguistic Atlas studies, I hand out a passage from Lowell’s *Biglow Papers*. All I tell them is that it is a nineteenth-century literary representation of a particular American regional dialect. When asked to identify the dialect, students’ responses are consistently “Southern,” “South Midland,” or “Appalachian,” with an occasional “Ozark” or “hillbilly.”

8. G. Shorrocks, "Non-Standard Dialect in Literature and Popular Culture," in *Speech Past and Present: Studies in English Dialectology in Memory of Ossi Ih-alaine*, ed. Juhani Klemola, Merja Kytö, and Matti Rissanen (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 385–411.

9. Paul H. Bowdre, "Eye Dialect as a Literary Device," in *A Various Language*, ed. Juanita Virginia Williamson and Virginia M. Burke (New York: Free Press, 1971), 178–86.

10. Sumner Ives, "A Theory of Literary Dialect," *Tulane Studies in English* 2 (1950): 139.

11. *Ibid.*, 152.

12. Michael Ellis, "Literary Dialect as Linguistic Evidence: Subject-Verb Concord in Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature," *American Speech* 69, no. 2 (1994): 128–44.

13. Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Allen W. Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990).

14. George P. Krapp, *The English Language in America* (New York: Ungar, 1925).

15. For more details on this and other patterns of subject-verb agreement, see Ellis, "Literary Dialect as Linguistic Evidence"; Montgomery and Hall, *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English*; and Wolfram and Christian, *Appalachian Speech*.

16. William Tappen Thompson, *Major Jones's Courtship* (1840; reprint, Atlanta: Cherokee, 1973), 151.

17. George Washington Harris, "Sporting Epistle from East Tennessee," *New York Spirit of the Times*, September 2, 1843, 313.

18. Hooper, *Adventures of Simon Suggs*, 40.

19. Caruthers, *The Kentuckian in New York*, 25.

20. Hooper, *Adventures of Simon Suggs*, 60.

21. George Washington Harris, *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*, ed. M. Thomas Inge (1867; reprint, New Haven, CT: College and University Press, 1966), 108.

22. Hooper, *Adventures of Simon Suggs*, 75.

23. Harris, "The Knob Dance," 267.

24. Among works of fiction set more or less in the region but produced by writers who are not natives, the most prominent is probably the second series of "Nashville" *Crockett Almanacs* (1839–1841), which were written and published in Boston. Also of interest are James Kirke Paulding's play *The Lion of the West* (1831), loosely based on the life of David Crockett, and Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1837). None of these contain examples of the pattern of subject-verb agreement characteristic of the Upper South.

25. Although some scholars appreciate Harris's use of language, others find his dialect so annoying that they believe it is necessary to "translate" his work. For a good background to the scholarly responses to Harris's language, see Inge's

introduction to *Sut Lovingood's Yarns* (1966 reprint). According to Inge, "anyone who is familiar with southern speech of the less-educated classes, and with the East Tennessee brand in particular, will find that, when read aloud, Harris has achieved in the main a fairly accurate transcription of the native vernacular" (15). In her brief description of the Sut Lovingood tales, Boger writes, "The exaggerated dialect used in this group of twenty-two tales is a detriment to the enjoyment of the ribald humor in them. These are very southern, southern mountaineers" (*The Southern Mountaineer in Literature*, 37). For a "linguistic" treatment of Harris's literary dialect, see Carol Boykin, "Sut's Speech: The Dialect of a 'Nat'ral Borne'd' Mountaineer," in *The Lovingood Papers* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967). Boykin concludes that she believes Sut "talked like' the illiterate, individualistic East Tennessean he was" (42).

26. Harris, *Sut Lovingood*, 23.

27. Harris's work is the source for numerous citations in the *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English*.

28. Mary Noailles Murfree, *In the Tennessee Mountains* (Boston: Houghton, 1884), 67.

29. In another passage from *In the Tennessee Mountains*, Murfree uses "Rick say," "she say," and "she know" without the *-s* suffix for present-tense singular, a feature that would be very unusual for the region.

30. Harriette Simpson Arnow, *Mountain Path* (1936; reprint, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 47.

31. James Still, *River of Earth* (1940; reprint, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 80.

32. Michael B. Montgomery, "The Literary Representation of Appalachian English: A True Voice of Mountain Speech?" (paper presented at the meeting of the Appalachian Studies Association, March 1991). In this paper, Montgomery conducts a detailed comparison of three popular authors of Appalachian novels—Mary N. Murfree, John Fox Jr., and Wilma Dykeman—to determine whether there is any degree of consistency among their representations of dialect. Montgomery concludes that the three authors "are consistent with one another only to a limited degree. And their versions of mountain speech are not altogether close to reality, or at least certainly not reliable enough for linguists to use unadvisedly."

33. Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (New York: Grove Press, 2006); Sheila Kay Adams, *My Old True Love* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin, 2004).

34. Adams, *My Old True Love*, 16.

35. Silas House, *Clay's Quilt* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin, 2001), 50.

36. For a detailed treatment of this feature, see Wolfram and Christian, *Appalachian Speech*, and Montgomery and Hall, *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English*. Dialect vocabulary can bring a sense of authenticity to a literary dialect, but the meanings of these words may, on occasion, perplex readers who are not

familiar with them. Take, for example, *dommer* for *dominecker* (chicken) in Still's *River of Earth*, a word so obscure that it supplies one of the few citations in the *Dictionary of American Regional English*.

37. Lee Smith, *Fair and Tender Ladies* (New York: Putnam, 1988), 3.

38. Harriette Simpson Arnow, *The Dollmaker* (1954; reprint, New York: Scribner, 2009), 302.

39. Denise Giardina, *Storming Heaven* (New York: Norton, 1987), 59.

Part II

Voices from Appalachia

Voiceplace

George Ella Lyon

Early in “Song of Myself” Walt Whitman declares that he is “one of the Nation of many nations, the smallest the same and the largest the same” and then gives us fourteen long lines of places and ways of life, from the “Kentuckian walking the vale of the Elkhorn” to the fishermen “off Newfoundland, / at home in the fleet of iceboats.” He concludes the catalogue by saying: “I resist anything better than my own diversity / Breathe the air but leave plenty after me, / And am not stuck up, and am in my place.”

Whitman knew that democracy did not require and should not produce sameness—even within the individual (“Do I contradict myself?” he asks. “Very well then I contradict myself”), that in fact our strength and vitality spring from our variety. No melting pot for Whitman, no stew even, but many pots aromatically bubbling with everything from grits to borscht to fricasseed buffalo. What has happened to our taste for differences?

“I hungered for the burr of Appalachian r’s,” writes West Virginia poet Mary Joan Coleman in “D.C. Working Girl Lonesome.” Living in the city she longed not only for the place but for the voice of home. She grew up where the ruggedness of landscape and life shaped the language, where metaphors outnumbered even kinfolks. Having moved to a place where her accent was ridiculed, she realized her loss. For the history and spirit of a place are in its voices; to accept the denigration of the speech you were born into is to sever one of the threads of ongoing life.

It is also to foster the false impression that culture happens somewhere else, New York or Los Angeles, Chicago or Boston, and has to

trickle down to the rest of us, that culture is a commodity that we buy or travel far to see rather than something that comes from us and speaks to us. It implies that stories—and therefore the people who tell and hear them—are more important in the metropolis than in the mountains or the Midwest.

It took me a long time to recognize the vital connection between voice and place in my own life and work. I grew up in Harlan County, Kentucky, in the coalfields, and was in high school during the War on Poverty. I remember the TV stereotypes—not just on *The Beverly Hillbillies* but on the news—of mountain people both materially and culturally deprived. So I thought, if I am going to write, the first thing I have to do is go somewhere and acquire a culture. During that process I would learn to sound like I was from somewhere else. I didn't know that was like cutting your throat to remedy hunger.

In college I wrote poetry primarily and my subjects were medieval music, Dutch painters, and love. The language was that of a person born in a book and majoring in men's studies. We called it English. But I kept a journal, too, where I set down things that interested me. One was a sentence I'd seen printed in crayon on a young child's paper at Pine Mountain Settlement School: "I hope how soon Spring comes." I loved the way the rising sap of spring, hope itself, lifted the words into a new order. Not standard but rare, expressive. "How I hope Spring comes soon" is tired by comparison.

Another thing I took notes on was how my grandmother talked. "I feel like a stewed witch," she'd say. Or "I ain't seed you in a month of Sundays." I wrote down names of relatives she remembered: Honey-eating Richard, Pie-belly Miracle. I wrote down a story she told me of Old Aunt Martha Money who could cure the summer complaint. I didn't put this into poems. I just collected it. Poems, as far as I knew, didn't have stuff like that in them. But I valued the live language and elemental nature of her stories. Let not thy left brain know what thy right brain is doing.

After graduating from Centre College and the University of Arkansas, I studied with Samuel Yellen and Ruth Stone at Indiana University. It was exactly what I needed. Not just the workshop, but the community of writers that it fostered. Among those friends the most immediately important to me was Michael Allen, an Ohio poet who wrote about Sunday

dinner at his grandmother's, about growing corn, about everyday things that he knew as well as his face. I was astonished. Could I do that? Why not? Ruth's class added to this realization the fact that it was not only possible but crucial to write out of my experience as a woman. Suddenly I had a wealth of material. In the twenty years since then, I've been trying to figure out how to be true to it.

Where you're from is not who you are, but it's an important ingredient. I believe you must trust your first voice—the one tuned by the people and place that made you—before you can speak your deepest truths. Irish poet Seamus Heaney, winner of the Nobel Prize, confirms this, saying in a radio interview, “I think for words to have any kind of independent energy in some way they have to be animated by the first place in ourselves. Until that happens, words don't have that freedom and conviction that you need to write poems.” We see, then, that if a person's experience of the written voice confirms her “first voice”—both in what she reads and in how she is taught to write—then her growing literacy will be fed by strong cultural roots.

As an Appalachian, my education to this possibility was continued by discovering Jeff Daniel Marion's literary magazine *The Small Farm* in 1975 and *Appalachian Journal* the year after. Danny and I began corresponding, and I found out there was a whole passel of people out there writing down how their grandmother talked and why she talked like that and why her farm was taken away from her. I found out there was an entire tradition of Appalachian writing; furthermore, some of the songs my daddy had sung to me were Child ballads. In short (though it wasn't short—it took years) I found out I had a culture. I'd been to college and graduate school, London and Paris, the Smithsonian and the New York Public Library, and now I needed to go home. For while I found all sorts of necessary and wonderful things in those places, I couldn't find my voice.

I don't mean I went home literally—I'd been going back for holidays and summer visits all along—I mean I went home inside; I began to pay attention to all those voices, to the language and people I grew up with. In doing so, I abandoned the larger culture's belief that such voices had no place in art, had, in fact, nothing to say.

Kurt Vonnegut says that he finally realized he had to sound like a person from Indianapolis because that's what he was. No construct, no pos-

ture could give him as convincing a voice. This doesn't mean, of course, that he had to write about Indianapolis; it doesn't even mean that someone picking up *Slaughterhouse Five* would know he's from Indianapolis. It means Vonnegut did a countercultural thing: he took that voice seriously enough to believe it could speak to us all. Never mind that it's not from a designated cultural area. It's an ordinary voice. An ordinary voice given to visions.

I was aided in this homecoming by poet Lee Howard, whom I met early in 1980 right before her book, *The Last Unmined Vein*, was published. Lee didn't just write about life in Clay County, Kentucky; she wrote in voices of people who lived there. The first section of her book, "Motherlode," is a seam of the voices that nurtured hers. I was thrilled by the sound of these poems: "Lord gal, you have no idea / what meeting meant to me," Aunt Neva starts out in "The Meeting"; and Uncle Orville gets our attention with "Now it's neither here nor there / to most folks / but then I've never figured myself / to be like many / much less most." Lee's work, eloquent with everyday voices and concerns, gave me courage and a new direction. Ultimately this led me into fiction and playwriting; most immediately it gave me access to experiences, to strength and wisdom I could not claim on my own.

The first voice poem I wrote was called "Her Words." The speaker is a combination of two women I knew growing up. Some of it is direct quotation:

You gotta strap it on
 she would say to me
 there comes this hardship
 and you gotta get on up the creek
 —there's others besides you—
 so you strap it on
 Oh, you give St. Jude what he'll take
 hand it over like persimmons
 with the frost on
 it ain't nothin
 there's more stones in that river
 than you've stepped on—or are about to

Once your hands
 can get around sumac
 once your feet
 know the lash of a snake
 you'll strap it on
 that's what a good neck
 and shoulders are for

In winter
 at the settlement school
 our wet hair would freeze
 on the sleepin porch
 and we'd wake up
 vain younguns that we were
 under blankets of real snow
 Come Christmas
 we'd walk sixteen miles
 home to Red Bird mission
 only once gettin
 lost in the woods
 snowed over
 down the wrong ridge

Nobody's askin
 for what ain't been done—
 build against cold
 and death scalds the dark—
 you strap it on
 there's strength in the bindin'
 I scrubbed on a board
 I know what it's about

As this poem illustrates, place is not just location, geography; place is history, family, the shape and context of daily life. How can I separate the mountains from my grandparents, who seemed for a long time as large and absolute as anything else against the horizon? Their importance is

evident in the fact that four of my picture books are connected to them. How can I distinguish between where we stayed—my mother was the one of six surviving children who remained in Harlan alongside her parents—and the stories of those who left? Each place exists in context and in contrast with others and I grew up not only in Harlan, but in not-Lexington, not-Dayton, not-Orlando. I grew up where the Greyhound bus did not go through but turned around and went back. It was not because, as jokes would have it, we were so bad that nobody wanted to go farther; it was because the road through to Virginia was a cross between a washboard and a roller coaster.

I didn't grow up in Harlan either, but four miles south, in a neighborhood bounded on two sides by the Cumberland River, one side by the railroad, all sides by mountains, and called Rio Vista. I'd like to know how that sudden Spanish got there. Certainly my parents got a great river view as the Cumberland rolled through the living room in 1977. This and the flood of '63 were the source for *Come a Tide*.

I think being rooted nourishes a person. It limits you, too, the way all actuality limits possibility. But it gives you a context, a tapestry of conditions and stories into which your story will be woven and from which you can follow the thread of others. My metaphor for writing is listening—perhaps in part because I had visual problems as a child—but I couldn't do it if I didn't have a choir, a cacophony, a family reunion of voices in my head. Totally fictional voices speak out, too. Part of my work is extending the invitation.

Just as I know we are all mortal, all bound to drop out of that reunion one by one, I also know that the spirit survives. This is my experience. It came to me naturally in childhood, before I could read or write, but it's taken me many years as a writer, as an adult, to find my way back to it. I cannot give you any doctrine, only testimony. Places have spirits; they haunt us as they are haunted by the lives that have been lived in their shelter, on their ground.

Let me give you an example by tracing the origin of *Who Came Down That Road?* In the fall of 1990, driving home from a day spent in two schools, I decided to treat myself to a stop at Blue Licks State Park. It's the site of the last battle of the Revolution, fought after the war had ended. The news hadn't made it to Kentucky yet.

It was a perfect October day, trees in full color, air so clear as to be almost clairvoyant. I stopped first at the monument and was struck to learn that the battle took place on my husband's birthday, August 19. Then I noticed the evocative names of Kentuckians who fought there: Stern, Farrier, Jolly; Black, Green, Brown; Rose, Corn, Price, Boone; Joseph Oldfield. Elemental names. Walking around the monument, I found that, except for the commander, the opponents were listed only by tribal or national name: Shawnee, Delaware, Wyandot, Mingo, Ottawa, Canadian. I took notes. Something said, "Pay attention."

In the little museum, where I went next, I found that the battle was a relatively recent event in Blue Licks's history. The park is situated on a buffalo trace that runs down from the Ohio River to the salt lick. White settlers had followed Indians down the trace, just as Indians had followed buffalo, buffalo had followed mastodons, and so on, back and back in the past. The museum had a few artifacts from the Fort Ancient people who settled nearby and quite a few mastodon remains, including a twenty-five-pound tooth, extracted from local ground.

When I came out I saw a historical marker pointing to a part of the buffalo trace you can still walk on, so I set off into the woods. No one was around but me, and soon I was far enough away from the museum at one end and the highway at the other to really enter the place. The dry grass and crimson leaves were shining. It was hard to tell wind from light. And I had the strangest sense that someone else was there. I kept turning to look behind me or stopping to listen. Nothing. Finally I realized it wasn't anything *visible* I was sensing, but a spirit-trace the travelers had left, like the path they'd worn into the ground. And I began to imagine, almost to hear, a child asking, "Who came down that road?"

I've learned about the hazards of writing while driving, so I just let the possibility cook till I got home, then made a few notes (before I got out of the car, lest the tide of family doings sweep it out to sea), and started work later that night. It's my habit to get a first draft, so that I don't lose the feeling, before I get into the research. Otherwise what I don't know overwhelms me. I spent the next few days obsessed with finding the voice and the turnaround for the book. Form was never a problem, because the line I was given brought its own structure (question led to question—"Who

came before that?") and a certain playful exasperation at being hounded off the edge of the globe by a small child's questions.

Once I had a draft, I set to work in libraries and on the telephone, documenting and double-checking what I had written. One thing that nagged me was the reference to goldenrod at the end. I hadn't seen any goldenrod at Blue Licks since it's gone by late October, but it just *sounded* right to me. Besides, I told myself; the plant grows all over Kentucky—everywhere but your basement—and it's the state flower; it's got to grow at Blue Licks, too. So I let it stand. Then one day I was talking to someone at the park, and he wanted to know if I had put in anything about the goldenrod.

"What about it?" I asked.

"Well, this is a pretty famous place among botanists," he told me. "There's a kind of goldenrod found in a three-mile radius of Blue Licks that grows nowhere else in the world."

"Yes," I said, feeling again the shiver I'd felt on the trace, "I put that in."

Something put it in, made it feel right in relation to the whole. Seamus Heaney sheds light on this, too, when he says in the interview quoted earlier, "A poet has to find the language that makes the common, almost unconscious life vocal; he must be voice box for something that is in the land, the people."

You can't be a voice box for your own feelings and experiences, much less for those of your place, if you've accepted the teaching that your first speech was wrong. For if you abandon or ridicule your voiceplace, you forfeit a deep spiritual connection. As Bobbie Ann Mason said in a Kentucky Educational Television profile, "I was not able to write stories until I got over being ashamed of how my people talked."

"How [our] people talked" is the embrace of language that welcomed us into the world. It is nurture, humor, memory vision. It is what we must get back to in order to know ourselves, the "first voice" that teaches us to speak.

In My Own Country

Silas House

The First Time

I am twelve. The teacher's pet. I often get to lead the class in the Pledge of Allegiance, I am the first called on when I put up my hand, I have been personally selected by Mrs. Black to write the class play about FDR.

But today Mrs. Black is absent, and we have a substitute. Sour, sullen, angry for no good reason, although in retrospect I think it may have been because of her green, all-polyester dress suit that looked like the fabric of my granny's couch. Mrs. Black is always happy and excited about learning. This substitute teacher does not want to be here. Plus, she is from Off. Off is anywhere but here, and we hear people talk about it all the time ("Oh, that preacher don't know what he's talking about . . . he's from Off." "She moved Off and completely changed; thinks she's better than us now.")

The substitute stands at the blackboard and slaps a ruler against her hand. Her cat's-eye glasses look like something a teacher would wear on *The Andy Griffith Show*. "Well, does anyone know the answer?"

We are studying caves. The question she has asked is why people shouldn't touch cave walls when they are spelunking. We all know the answer because Mrs. Black gave a good presentation on it yesterday—making *spelunking* my new favorite word, which I have been trying to work into a sentence naturally ever since—but this woman is too hateful and no one wants to cooperate with her. Darrell Karr does a bird call—*Hooty-Who!*—and everybody laughs.

The miserable woman's brows arch in together. "Have you kids not learned *anything* about caves?"

I raise my hand, as I can't stand the silence stretching out across our classroom, and because I don't want her to think we're stupid.

"Yes?" she nods to me, more exasperated than glad that I'm willing to answer.

"You shouldn't touch cave walls because the oil from your finger could stop a stalactite from growing."

The substitute looks like she might laugh, then she looks mad again. "Your answer is correct. But if you want people to take you seriously, you must stop talking like a hillbilly."

I have been taught that this word is acceptable only when another hillbilly is using it. This woman is not my people.

"It's *oy-el*," she enunciates. "Not *ull*. And it's *feeng-er*, not *fanger*."

"That's the way I talk," I counter, sitting up straighter in my desk, defiant.

"You tawlk wrawng," she mimics, and laughs to herself. The whole class is silent. No one is laughing with her, and the shame rushing over me isn't because she's embarrassed me in front of my classmates—to them she's only embarrassed herself—but because I know that really, she's making fun of my people.

Why They Didn't Stay

My parents left the mountains briefly in the late 1960s to find work. "There was nothing for us back home except for me to work in the mines or at some gas station and for your mother to be a waitress," my father explains.

So they went North. Two of my paternal uncles had already settled in Hamilton, Ohio, another one to Michigan, and one of my mother's sisters had recently moved to Dayton. They sent back news of good-paying jobs. On their visits home my aunts chattered about the big department stores and how the schools were so much better and how they had washer-dryer sets Up North, while my uncles bragged about bars being on every corner and their newfound ability to own Corvettes. To hear them tell it, it was the Promised Land.

My parents ventured to Flint, Michigan, where they rented a trailer in a Little Appalachia trailer park and immediately found jobs with good

wages. My father poured concrete on the Flint River Flood Control Project while my mother built refrigerators at the Gibson plant.

My father didn't have trouble Up North. He'd had his fair share of discrimination in the army, where boys who talked like him were singled out as hillbillies. Once, at Fort Hood, Texas, during an alert in the middle of the night, my father had struggled to get his shoes on due to being half-drunk and sleepy-eyed. A fellow soldier laughed at him. "What's wrong, Hillbilly? Not used to putting on shoes?" My father—remembering how hard his mother had worked to raise him and his eight siblings alone after my grandfather died—rose up with arms flying. He and the man had fought all over the barracks. Perhaps once he got North he didn't even hear the put-downs anymore, or maybe the "country come to town" gleam was not as bright on him as on my mother.

That rural glimmer was only one of the things that shone out from her. She had a natural ability to make friends: she impressed them with her wild tales of having been a driver in the Manchester Drag Races and with her singing prowess. Before long, everyone was gathered around her during lunch, demanding Loretta Lynn and Brenda Lee songs.

"I couldn't eat my lunch for them wanting me to sing," she says, now. She was surprised that northerners loved country music so much, but eventually she realized that they were making fun of her, too.

The lunchtime group crowded around her while they ate exotic dishes like goulash and mushroom sandwiches (my mother preferred baloney or cans of Vienna sausages—*Vy-ain-ees*, in eastern Kentucky parlance), and after she sang for them, they asked for another kind of performance.

"This one girl said she had to watch my mouth when I talked because she couldn't understand what I was saying," my mother says, reenacting the way the woman stared at her lips. "They'd make me say stuff like 'aluminum foil' and just die laughing," she says.

I picture the factory workers inching closer, all at the same time, as if choreographed, studying my mother as if she is a late-sixties version of Gertie Nevels.

"What's that shiny stuff you wrap up leftovers in?" one said around the cigarette in her mouth, elbowing a coworker.

At the time, she smiled and sometimes laughed along with them, but in retrospect she wishes she hadn't. "I just wanted to get along and be ac-

cepted,” my mother says now, not meeting my eyes. “Sometimes it made me feel real bad, though. I felt like they thought I was dumb just because of the way I pronounced things. In my family, back home, we had always called it ‘lumeeum fuhl.’ But after they asked me a couple times, I finally learned to pronounce it their way, to not let them win. To not give them what they wanted. At home, though, I said it my own way.”

My mother had learned how to pass.

But she knew that there was a way of winning, too. She didn’t have to fist-fight the way my father had. She could defeat them quietly, one word at a time.

My parents moved back to eastern Kentucky after a couple years. When I press them on why they returned, they are evasive. “We just missed home too bad,” is the standard answer. But I wonder if there was something to the constant attention to their speech that made them miss home worse. Often I picture them driving back home, breathing a sigh of relief once they came to that place on Highway 25 where the mountains were lain out before them, once they found the curves in the road again, once they could close their eyes and breathe in the scent of honeysuckle or kudzu, once they could sit in the middle of a room and be surrounded by people who talked just like them.

A Man with No Country

Sometimes people back home—mostly the ones in my own family—accuse me of having gotten above my raising. They are basing this mostly on the simple fact that I’ve been to college, and that I teach at a college.

They’ve been made fun of their whole lives by people like me, so it’s hard for them to wrap their minds around how I haven’t become one of those people, too. It’s easier, sometimes, to just assume that I have.

Appalachians are not above judging others based on the way they talk, either. All my life I’ve been told to not trust people who “talk proud,” a colloquialism for speaking with a northern accent. I was raised to believe that folks who spoke that way had gotten above their raising (the ultimate sin in Appalachian culture), thought they were better than me, were trying to act as if they had money. I was completely grown before I realized this was a stereotype, too, the same way

that assuming someone is dumb because of the way they speak is a total generalization.

Despite the fact that my accent has never changed, the things I talk about *are* different, so I am watched with some amount of suspicion by the people who are supposed to trust me the most. I differ from most people back home because I think an education is the key to everything; they would find this offensive because they believe that nothing—not an education, not anything—should trump the importance of the church (in my family’s case, the Holiness Church). I differ from most of the people in my community because I have been vocal in my opposition to mountain-top removal, a vicious form of coal mining that causes my townspeople to paint me as an “anti-coal,” the equal of “anti-American” in Appalachia. And I differ from nearly everyone I know in the place where I grew up because I have “gotten liberal,” directly caused by my journey to the halls of the Ivory Towers. The trust into which my parents were enfolded when they returned from the North is not there for me.

I am a man with no country.

Yet there is little trust for me in the world of academia, either. Over the last several years I have visited hundreds of colleges and universities while on book tour and have been employed by four different ones on a full-time basis. At all of them there has been a moment when I opened my mouth for the first time and saw the flicker of recognition on someone’s face: “Wow, this guy’s a real, live hillbilly. I didn’t know they actually existed.” It’s easy to tell when someone is judging everything about you based on the way you talk; you can see it all over their face.

I might consider that I have a chip on my shoulder, except that I have proof. Several times people have told me that I must feel very lucky to have “escaped” Appalachia. When I question their thinking on this, explaining that I still live in the region, the people always say or insinuate that only someone who has truly escaped the place would become a writer. “I mean, isn’t illiteracy rampant there?” one woman said to me. When I explained to her that actually the inability to read is no more widespread in the mountains than in other parts of America, I was silently considered with some amount of doubt; her look said: “If you want to believe that, okay.”

Years ago I was teaching at a university, and on my first day a col-

league told another coworker (who told me years later) that everyone should be leery of me. “Listen to the way he talks,” she half-whispered. “He must be from Appalachia. Watch out for him; they’re all racist, homophobic misogynists down there.”

This woman’s profiling had been based completely on the way I talked. She hadn’t even met me yet, only heard me speaking during a luncheon. Some dismissed her as being unfair and judgmental. But several of my colleagues never did warm to me, and often I have wondered if it was because of the tales she had spread about me. Or simply because they had their own misconceptions about my way of speaking. Or hell, maybe they just didn’t like me. I have no way of knowing, but the point is that my dialect *makes* me wonder. Being profiled is like that; it causes people to live in doubt.

In every college job I have, I always dread that first moment when I open my mouth and begin to speak. When I am onstage, I often get a good view of people’s reactions to this. Sometimes they laugh good-naturedly, charmed to hear an accent in an increasingly homogenized world.

Recently I was speaking on a publishing panel at a university and every time the mic was handed to me, a woman directly in my eye line collapsed in laughter, then leaned over to her companion to whisper in his ear. He looked completely embarrassed and tried to shift away from her, but he was trapped. When the panel was over the woman bolted from the room, but the man lingered, hanging around at the end of my signing line the way people do when they want to visit with you a while.

“I just wanted to apologize,” he offered, abruptly, before we had even exchanged greetings. “For that girl sitting next to me. I know you noticed her laughing.”

“Yeah, I did.”

“Well, I don’t know her. I just happened to be sitting by her. But she was really rude, and I’m sorry.”

“What was the deal with her?” I asked, already knowing.

“She said your accent cracked her up. She was hysterical by the end of the panel. I finally had to ask her to shut up.”

I told him I appreciated him, and he sauntered away.

There have been countless other instances like this. Every time I com-

plain about it, I feel ridiculous. People are dying in wars, after all. People have been killed because of their race or sexuality. So my ethnic profiling pales in comparison. People are judged because of their class, religion, sexuality, race . . . everything. We all have our own set of prejudices, whether we want to admit it or not. The difference, to me, is that I find it terribly troublesome that to make fun of the way someone talks is completely acceptable in our culture. And I believe it has to do with class.

There's a famous scene in the classic movie *The Silence of the Lambs* where Clarice Starling, an FBI trainee (and West Virginia native), is interviewing the brilliant serial killer Hannibal Lecter. At one point Lecter leans at Starling and eases close to the cell's glass wall. "You're not more than one generation from poor white trash, are you?" he sneers. "That accent you've tried so desperately to shed? Pure West Virginia. What's your father, dear? Is he a coal miner? Does he stink of the lamp?"

I know how Clarice felt in that moment. I've been there.

Dialect is political, for the way people react to it is class based. In my experience, the more educated and self-proclaimed liberal people are, the more apt they are to freely make fun of the way people talk. Because although racism and homophobia and misogyny are frowned upon in modern academia and in "polite society," being a classist is perfectly acceptable.

Very recently I was a guest at a prestigious university, where I did a weeklong workshop with a handful of people who had paid a steep price to be a part of the program that involved several other writers, agents, and the like. I had the students read excerpts of work by authors from around the world: Larry Brown (Mississippi), Chris Cleave (England), Edwidge Danticant (Haiti), Emma Donoghue (Canada), William Gay (Tennessee), Lee Smith (Virginia), and Elizabeth Strout (Maine). The students felt free to classify the characters in the stories by Brown, Gay, and Smith as being "white trash." In their own stories, which we workshopped, they often referred to characters who had little money as being "trash." At the end of the workshop I asked them how they had been able to identify the social background and/or sense of place of each story. Unanimously they said they knew where the characters were from and their social status because of the way they talked.

I told them how it felt to be called "trash." I ought to know, since the

slur has been thrown at me a couple times because of where I'm from. They looked at me as if I had just fallen out of the sky.

Perhaps they couldn't understand what I was saying because of my accent.

Back to Off

Almost forty years after my parents left the North to return home to eastern Kentucky, I am flying there to record an audio edition of my latest book. One of the biggest audio publishers in the world is based in Grand Haven, Michigan, and I find the people to be very accepting and kind. It takes a while to record a book, so I am there nearly a week. To keep the recording process rolling along, I take lunch in the break room with everyone else. Since the books are not only recorded but also mass-produced at the same site, the break room is that of a factory. I think a whole lot about my mother's time in the break room of the refrigerator plant in Flint, only a couple hours away. The employees are laughing and joking in a completely inoffensive way, but I am not able to relate—the biggest difference I've found between the North and Appalachia is the sense of humor—and I'm wondering if any of them are the children of the people who gathered in close while my mother sang, if any of them are related to the folks who demanded she entertain them with her pronunciations.

In the recording studio I am working with a wonderful director who has told me he is excited I'm reading the book because he wants the main character's way of speaking to be authentic and with me he knows it will be. I'm relieved that I'm not going to have to constantly fight for the dialect to be accurate, as I have done in other instances. Over the next couple of days we record for about fourteen hours, and in that time the director keeps saying that everything is rolling smoothly. I become so comfortable in the studio that later, when listening to the playback, I am surprised by how "country" I sound. I have always been aware of my accent, but hearing it so clearly, on state-of-the-art equipment, seems to emphasize the fact that I really do speak much differently from most of the people I encounter on a daily basis out on the road.

On the next-to-last day, the director informs me that there is only

one thing he must ask me to re-record, simply because his team is afraid people won't be able to understand what I'm saying. It's the word *oil*. Instantly I am sucked back in time to the day the substitute chastised me for my pronunciation of this same word. And for the first time, I realize the link between my experience with the substitute and my mother's own similar run-in with the word *foil*.

The director has thought about this carefully and is watching me with his kind eyes, waiting for a response. "I wouldn't ask except that I'm just afraid it doesn't translate."

I tell him I'll have to think about it, so I do. On my drive through the snowy streets back to the hotel, I say the word out loud over and over: "Ull, ull, ull, ull," I say, my way. Then I try it the other way: "Oy-el, oy-el." This second way doesn't feel right in my mouth; it causes my lips to move in a way that is not natural, makes me feel as if a bubble of air is rising in the back of my throat.

That night, I eat alone on the banks of Lake Michigan. The coldest depths of December. There is snow on the beach, which is something I've never seen before. When the wind moves in across the water, the snow twirls through the air in great leaps. All is darkness over the huge lake, a blackness accentuated by the flatness.

Suddenly the waitress is at my table, asking for my order.

It's been a long day, and I am homesick, so I ask for a Jameson's.

"What'd ya say?" she asks, cocking her head. Her accent is a little bit like the one I know only from the movies. *Fargo*, mostly. Maybe she's from father west, perhaps the Dakotas? Maybe that accent lingers here? I don't know enough about this place and its history to figure it out.

"Jameson's," I repeat, hearing the word and knowing that I'm saying it just as anyone else in the United States would; it's not the kind of word that my dialect would distort.

"Are you from England, or what?" There is no malice in this. She's younger than I first thought. She's wearing a collection of different-colored plastic bracelets and she has braces on her bottom teeth, a scattering of well-hidden acne on her forehead. I wonder: on very slow nights, when the restaurant is empty, does she look out across the dark lake and wonder when her life will begin?

"Kentucky," I say, hearing my own voice completely.

“Wow! No way! You sound Scottish or something. Do people tell you that?”

I’ve been told that I sound like a Texan, a Briton, even an Australian.

“Well, it’s cool, anyways. I wish I had an accent.” She spins on one Tom’s-clad heel and goes to put in my order.

That night, I think about how the accent of my lead character, Eli, has been perfectly preserved throughout the recording of the book, and how while I want to be true to my people and my place, I also think it’s foolish to confuse people who will be listening to the book. I often teach my writing students that we should always envision our writing as a smooth highway upon which our readers are traveling, and we must always be on the lookout for any potholes that appear along the way. I fear that my way of pronouncing *oil* is the kind of pothole that may take the listener off that smooth ride, so different that it will pull the listener out of the experience of the book. But I am not sure what to do.

I call several people back home and spell out the word for them. “Pronounce this word for me: o-i-l.” A few of them pronounce it just the way I do. One says it much closer to the expected way, which borders on two syllables, a dip in the middle of the word like a rounded valley between two straight-up, steep mountains. Most, however, say it with some combination of the very Appalachian way and what I consider to be the newscaster way, which is to say the “normal” way. Almost all of them are Generation X or younger, and Appalachian dialect is generational. Although I am considered Generation X, my dialect has always been a bit thicker, perhaps because I didn’t watch as much television growing up, or because I was around older people growing up, or because that was the language that sang the loudest to me.

The next morning I go into the studio fully practiced. I enunciate *oil* enough that I have found a balance between my own way of speaking and total accessibility.

On the plane ride home, I begin to worry that I have tried to pass, too, the way my mother did all those years ago. Except I don’t feel as if I have won anything, the way she did. These are the kinds of things artists must and do worry about: every single word, action, motion. To a writer, everything means something profound. It’s why so many of us worry ourselves to death, I suppose.

At my layover in Charlotte, I call the person I trust most and tell him about my dilemma.

“How many words are in that book?”

“I don’t know. It’s two hundred fifty pages. So, like seventy-five thousand, probably?”

“So you said seventy-four thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine words the way you would every day, and you changed one to make it more accessible? That’s not ‘passing.’ Come on, quit worrying about it.”

But later, when I relate the same story to a cousin who is just like a brother to me, he is revolted. “You gave them just what they wanted,” he says, barely able to hide the disgust in his voice. “You’re a big talker, going on about the way we’re a ‘sacrificial grounds’ for the whole nation and all that, but then you just cave for them, too.”

Ever since I was little, I have been told that there is an “us” and a “them.” And that divide has always centered on language, the one big neon sign that points to us Appalachians and makes it clear to the world that we are The Other.

“It’s complicated,” I tell my cousin.

“That’s just an excuse,” he says.

But he’s wrong. He’s as wrong as the people who assume I’m ignorant because of the way I talk. There are all different kinds of intelligence, and ignorance, but in the case of the woman who judges me based on my dialect and my cousin who judges me based on his idea of “passing,” it’s all about language.

Dialect is what defines us as Appalachians. Thinking about it in a simplistic way—whether villainizing an entire people and their culture because of their dialect or romanticizing the dialect to the point of thinking it must be used only to fight back—is the most dangerous thing of all. That’s what the substitute teacher was doing so many years ago. And that’s what my cousin was doing to me, too.

I refuse to be judged on either count, and so I just have to plow on, safe in the knowledge that the mountains will live on my tongue all the days of my life, alive and vocal in all their beauty and ugliness, in all of their dark, lush complexity, the same way these creeks and rocks have taken up residence in my blood and bones, the same way my people chatter on in every cell in my body.

I—and my dialect—will not be silenced and will not be put into a neat little box for anyone. I'll defend my people to those who call them trash based on the way they talk. And I'll defend my ability to see beyond the mountains with those who demand that we must cower in the shadows and defy the rest of the world to retain our identity. Sometimes I may feel as if I don't have a place in either the world of Appalachia or the world beyond it, but the truth is that my feet—and my mouth—are firmly planted in both. Mine is the country of language.

Southern Exposure

Lee Smith

I have always known I have a strong southern accent but hadn't focused on it in a while until recently, when a well-meaning (though northern) friend told me she thought that I ought to take speech lessons.

"What for?" I asked.

"Well, you're always going around giving readings and talks, and it just seems to me that you ought to present yourself in the best possible light." She was floundering now and turning red.

"I have no intention of ever giving up this accent," I told her, the truth dawning on me as I spoke. "It's a political decision." But not, I knew, a decision that had come easily.

I first noticed a prejudice against southern accents years ago, when I was invited to read one of my stories at Columbia University in New York. The minute I opened my mouth, several urban, cutting-edge students glanced at one another, gathered up their books, and noisily left the room. I got the message: Nobody who sounded like I did could possibly have written anything that would interest them. Moon Pies, magnolias, and *Hee Haw*—I knew what they were thinking. I took a deep breath and went on, newly aware of how different my southern voice sounded from the others, how different I was from them.

So I am aware of all the reasons for my friend's well-meaning suggestion. For many Americans, southern is the equivalent of dumb. Many believe "slow speech indicates slow thought," southern sociologist John Shelton Reed once said. "Laboratory studies show that the average non-southern college sophomore assumes a southern speaker to be less bright

than a non-southerner, even when the two are saying exactly the same thing.”

Truth be told, the perception of southern-as-stupid can actually work to a person's advantage, especially at yard sales, for instance, or with car salesmen or tradespeople. I drive a mean—though sugarcoated—bargain and nine times out of ten get exactly what I want without the other person knowing. A well-placed, drawn-out “Thaaank youuu” can disarm its victim, lulling him into sweet surrender.

Some of my friends, especially those in business and law, actually cultivate their southern accents. They want to be underestimated so they will make the best deal, win the hardest case. My friend Drena Worth, who sells real estate in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, is known for her southern wit and charm. But don't eat lunch with Drena unless you want to buy a house.

As a young girl, I adopted my mother's drawl automatically. She had a softer (less nasal, less Appalachian) accent than anybody else in our small Virginia mountain town, and more refined ideas to go along with it. My father, Ernest Smith, had “swept her off her feet,” as she liked to tell it, and brought her from the more civilized tidewater Virginia to the remote part of southwest Virginia he came from, to the coal mining town of Grundy, nestled deep in the narrow valley between the high, rough mountains.

My mother felt it was her mission to civilize us all—her students (she was a teacher), my father, and especially me. She intended to turn me into a southern lady. That included training in not only what I said but also how I said it. This was a tough project, since I was a mountain girl through and through. My mother realized reinforcements were needed and sent me to visit my aunt Gay in Birmingham, Alabama, every summer. She was an expert lady trainer with a southern accent to die for. There I wore little Cuban heels and went to the club for lunch.

But it didn't take. Though I loved my mother and appreciated all her efforts in my behalf, and though I was told over and over again that I “looked just like Gig” (Mother's nickname), I soon found myself rebelling against both the way she talked and the advice she offered—mostly, instructions on how to talk like a lady: a lady never raises her voice; a lady never mentions money; a lady doesn't tell everything she knows; in a group, a lady never lets a silence fall; talk real nice and then you can do whatever you want.

What southerners *do not say* in those sweet voices has been the topic of much discussion. It's almost guaranteed that you won't hear anything distasteful come out of the mouth of a southerner. Author Pat Conroy told me once that the whole South runs on denial. And what is denial? It goes right back to another line of my mother's bad advice: if you can't say something nice, say nothing at all. That's only one step from: if you don't discuss something, it doesn't exist.

The traditionally southern way to handle problems is by not mentioning them, the very definition of *denial*. Writer Rosemary Daniel once said, "Tears, sulkiness, hysteria, even girlish temper tantrums were expected of me as a southern woman, but I had never heard a lady, or even a gentleman express direct anger." No, a southerner is much more likely to express anger by getting sick (attest the lingering illnesses prevalent among older southern women), getting drunk, wrecking the car, or cleaning the house with a vengeance. I once watched an older man, a friend of our family's, crush a wineglass in his hand, smiling steadily all the while, at a wedding he disapproved of. "Everything is just fiiiiine," he said nicely afterward.

Southern ladies never, ever discuss sex; the two don't fit together, a southern accent and sexual talk of any kind. My mother referred to anything that took place below the belt as *down there*, as in "Trixie is in the hospital for tests. She's been having trouble down there." Other topics to avoid are death, mental illness, politics, and, of course, divorce. Until she died, I never knew that one of my aunts had had a previous marriage. It had been edited right out of the family, in the same way all the pictures of her young husband had been removed from the family album.

This southern habit of *not saying*, of denial, has given rise to some of the most negative images of southern women—that we are shallow, bubbleheaded, or hypocritical. While it is true that some stereotypes exist because there is a grain of truth somewhere in them, by and large, these adjectives just don't apply. In the words of novelist Reynolds Price, "Southern women are Mack trucks disguised as powder puffs." Therein lies the power of a southern accent.

It is also true that those sweet voices are very skilled at storytelling. If there is anything recognizably "southern" left in the high-rise apartment buildings and outlet malls fast spreading over the once-rural South, it

is a particular approach to imparting information. Everything is anecdote; this is how we all learn and maintain our accents and traditions. As speakers, we put experience into the form of a story. As listeners, we are wild for detail: What was she wearing when he told her he was leaving? Where were the children? What did they have for breakfast? Listening to these kinds of things can wear you out. No wonder all I wanted to do when I was a teenager was to get out of town. I felt closed in; I was imprisoned not only by the mountains but by all this talking—trapped in a steel net of southern syllables, of endless anecdotes transmitted all over town. Everybody seemed to know everything about me and about my whole family. I hated that. I felt as if I could never break free of that net.

My last image of home, the day I left for college, was my mother and two of my aunts sitting on the back porch, drinking iced tea and talking endlessly about whether one of them did or did not have colitis. More than anything else, I wanted to get away from there.

At this point, I knew I wanted to be a writer, and in college I insisted on writing stories about anything but the South; none of my characters would have the drawl I was escaping. They were instead stewardesses living in Hawaii, where I had never been; executives with foreign accents; alternative universes. I ignored my teachers' instructions to "write what you know." I didn't know what they meant. I certainly was not going to write anything about Grundy, Virginia—ever. But then one professor, Louis Rubin, had us read the stories of Eudora Welty. Aha! I thought, with the awful arrogance of a nineteen-year-old. *Eudora Welty*. Setting my feet on more familiar ground, I wrote a story about some women sitting on a porch, drinking iced tea, and talking about whether one of them had colitis or not. I got an A.

Now, years later, I have come to understand that my best work is, in some sense, these stories from home—of the South, often of the Appalachian South. (By the way, the story I read at Columbia went on to be included in an O. Henry Awards anthology.) Each story has its own voice, and those voices are always southern. Just as I have come to appreciate my own heritage more and more, I have come to value my southern accent.

So I won't be signing up for speech lessons anytime soon, though—thank you kindly, ma'am—it's a real thoughtful suggestion.

A Matter of Perception

Jane Hicks

“I reckon poor old Tyler Farrar expected a better day. They’re crashing everywhere, the whole field is blocked.”

On paper, this sounds like Darrell Waltrip commentary on a NASCAR race. On television, uttered with a British accent, it becomes quite something else. These are the words of Phil Liggett MBE (as in Sir Phil Liggett) in a commentary on Le Tour de France. Sir Phil, former professional bicycle racer, is the premier English-speaking commentator and broadcaster of the tour. For a number of years, I have kept a notebook of Sir Phil’s familiar expressions that would get me laughed out of any non-Appalachian company if I used them. Among his regular repertoire are: “I reckon,” “poor old,” and such familiar expressions as “running like a scalded cat” and “bless his heart.”

Sir Phil hails from Wirral, Merseyside, England. Many of my ancestors came from that region. It only stands to reason that we have remnants of the expressions of our ancestral speech.

I grew up in extreme northeast Tennessee, only a mile or so from Virginia, up where folks think of Knoxville as middle Tennessee. Some of my classmates’ backyards were on the state line, where we sometimes amused ourselves jumping from one state to another.

Our house stood at the end of the street, the last house in the outer suburbs of a small city. On the one hand, we roamed the neighborhood; on the other, we roamed the ridges, the woods, and the banks of the Holston River. To call us town kids would have been a stretch. We spent as much time on our maternal grandparents’ farm as we did at home. I

could tie a hand of tobacco as well as I played the trumpet in my high school band.

At my blue-collar high school, we were expected to follow our parents into the workforce at one of the three large plants in town, where jobs were plentiful and secure. Teachers and counselors (a new thing when I was in school) implicitly and, sometimes, explicitly steered academically promising students away from “here.”

I never understood this mind-set until VISTA workers visited my school during the War on Poverty days. It was then I found out I was Appalachian. I had always thought of Appalachia in terms of heartrending magazine pictures and tragic stories seen on the nightly news. For the first time, I faced being stereotyped and was told that to be successful I needed to leave the region.

It was a strange meeting. I was dressed in my best Bobbie Brooks preppie attire (bought on layaway), complete with kneesocks and saddle oxfords. The VISTA workers looked like many college kids looked in the late 1960s—hippies. One had on tattered bib overalls my grandfather wouldn't have worn to the fields.

One of my classmates and I were National Merit semifinalists. The VISTA workers advised us to go anywhere but “here” to college and to get rid of our accents. Neither my friend nor I was impressed with the advice. We both started at the University of Tennessee that fall. She continued on to grad school. I transferred to Virginia Tech. It was there that I met the next group of people who judged me by my accent and I became aware of the astounding varieties of Appalachian Englishes.

My fiancé grew up in extreme southwest Virginia, about forty miles from me. He and his family had accents with remnants of a Scotch burr. My classmates from other parts of southwest Virginia sounded different. Besides Scotch-Irish, many Italians, Poles, and other nationalities immigrated to and worked in the coalfields of southwest Virginia, leaving subtle marks on each locale.

My first public-speaking class proved frustrating. Students from Maryland and eastern Virginia often made fun of our accents, invariably complaining that they didn't understand us. When my time for an impromptu speech came, I said, “The students from southwest Virginia do

not have accents. We live here. If you do not live here, you have the accent, not us." The rest of the natives applauded.

We moved to Minnesota when my then-husband graduated and took a job with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I worked in a four-star restaurant because no one else would hire me with my accent. The first night, the head waitress looked at me and said, "You talka vit an accent, ja?" Customers often called me over to "just say something." Most of it was patronizing, not cruel, but it became wearisome. The owners were hot-tempered and sharp-tongued. The day one of them called me a stupid hillbilly, I was gone.

The big skies, the constant belittlement, a crumbling marriage, and a horrifying tornado sent me heading for the hills. When I crossed out of Ohio and headed down 421 into Kentucky, people started to sound as they should.

As a student at Emory and Henry College, I took two classes as a visiting student at East Tennessee State University: Appalachian Geography and Appalachian Literature. The Appalachian Lit class changed my life. Jack Higgs made the class challenging, and his knowledge of the subject was (and still is) encyclopedic. This was 1976, and an Appalachian Renaissance was in full flower as part of the Bicentennial. Dr. Higgs whooped with delight when I brought in my copy of *The Last Whole Earth Catalogue* with the original *Divine Right's Trip* serialized within its pages. In this class I read Jim Wayne Miller, Gurney Norman, James Still, Harriette Simpson Arnow, Jesse Stuart, and other authors who wrote about things I understood.

It was chic to be Appalachian, and I encountered a different type of stereotype—a romantic one revolving around the idea of the contemporary ancestor. People assumed I could sing ballads and play a dulcimer. I had never seen a dulcimer, and when I inquired of my grandmother about ballads, she firmly told me that "those old love songs" were about people who "didn't know how to act." All I ever heard her sing were hymns and gospel music.

I disappointed more than one person on this count. But I made up for it by the fact that I was a quilter, taught by my grandmother. Quilting was also wildly chic at the time of the Bicentennial. Possessing this skill made having an accent easier. I brought a New York City quilt shop to

a standstill when the owner shouted, “We have a genuine Appalachian quilter here in the shop.” No one cared about my accent; they wanted authentic technique.

I had begun to publish poetry and short fiction in regional journals and signed up for writing workshops. The first two I attended were led by people I had read in Appalachian Lit classes. Jim Wayne Miller and Lee Smith sounded like me, and their work was taught in colleges and universities. Becoming acquainted with writers who wrote about things I knew, with expressions I knew and cadences that fell easy on my ears, made me sure I could be a writer.

By this time, in the middle eighties, I grew a bit militant about my accent. I heard east Tennessee writer Jo Carson say, “I keep my accent as a political choice.” Amen. I did, too. I wouldn’t dare let anyone suggest that my words and thoughts were less valuable because they were spoken with an upper east Tennessee inflection. I chose to use formal English with my native speech.

Being militant sometimes means laying it on thick to goad prejudiced people. At the school where I was teaching, I suffered two years of hell dealing with a set of parents who fell in that category. One morning, the intercom came on and the secretary requested that I answer the phone. This was not standard procedure. Thinking it must be important, I went to the workstation to answer.

“Good morning, this is Mrs. Hicks.”

“I wanted to speak to the person in charge of gifted education,” clipped the woman on the other end.

“Yes. How may I help you?”

“Oh, God, another hick drawl.”

I hung up.

Shortly, the principal tapped on my door. “I hate to ask, but did you just hang up on a parent?”

“Yes, I did.” I related the conversation.

He promised to take care of it, and my first meeting with the parents was coolly civil. The parents went on to explain that surely, by our standards, their recently enrolled children were gifted. I explained the regulations and procedures and started the process to evaluate their children.

When the results came back, my teaching partner and I agreed

that we would never meet alone with these folks—both of us would always be present. My teaching partner at the time was an extraordinary teacher and person. A Californian of Lithuanian descent, she had acquired a faint twinge of Appalachian in an otherwise rather neutral accent. We explained that both children had qualified for gifted services, and we each planned to assume case management for one of the children.

“Oh, no,” declared the father. “We want the person of higher educational attainment!” He turned to smile at my teaching partner.

Trying to smother her laughter, she simply pointed at me.

“No, we want the one with the highest educational degree.” Again, the parents turned and looked at my partner.

Finally, I tapped the man on the shoulder and said, “That would be me, honey.” I know it wasn’t professional, but I had reached my limit, and he was rude. To make a long story short, nothing I ever did suited them. The mother sent me a list of possible topics for investigation. When I thanked her and proceeded with the agreed curriculum, she complained to the principal that I couldn’t be sophisticated enough to plan a course of study for gifted children. He assured her that I had traveled widely and was trilingual. Then the parents complained that their children were picking up “hillbilly accents.” They finally went berserk when I introduced an Appalachian studies unit.

They fled back north, and the entire faculty breathed a sigh of relief. Both these people were highly educated but ignorant, in the sense that they were simply ill-informed. They equated accent with intellect.

When I first started attending the Appalachian Writers Workshop in Hindman, Kentucky, I met kindred spirits. Intelligent and talented, most of them speak a variety of Appalachian English. We all speak with perfectly “correct grammar” and can soften the edges of our accents when we choose. In our close circle, we code-switch and lapse into our comfortable dialects, using expressions and syntax we would never use in professional life. It’s a form of militancy, I suppose, against people who devalue our spoken words while admiring the written.

My writer friends and I have all had this experience: after a reading, a person comes up and offers to introduce us to someone who can “help with your accent.” I once had a man offer to read my poems to me so I

could hear them free of my accent. Another said, “Thank God you don’t write like you talk.”

I suppose if Sir Phil Liggett read my poems aloud, the reaction would be quite different. He could even get away with saying, “I reckon my new book will be ready soon.” Confusing accent with intellect, it’s all a matter of perception.

Carrie Bishop

From *Storming Heaven*

Denise Giardina

Introduction to the Excerpt by the Author

*Every young person who is the first in his or her family to go to college experiences the tension. Higher education changes experience and expectations, particularly with regard to language; those “left behind” worry they will be ridiculed or misunderstood or that their loved one will change in indescribable ways and be lost to them. When an entire culture—especially one that has been historically denigrated—experiences such an earthshaking change, and when this is coupled with the clash caused by mineral exploitation, the conflict intensifies dramatically. I tried to capture this conflict in my novel *Storming Heaven*, and the excerpt here is a prime example. A young man from eastern Kentucky is fortunate enough to go to Berea College, the classic path to education for mountain youth. At the same time, his family back home is brushing up against the invading armies of coal and timber speculators. And his sister, who will one day pursue an education in nursing, watches while her brother is drawn into the one circle that seems to value his education—the coal companies.*

I had a dream the night Miles came home from Berea. I dreamed one of Flora’s quilts hung on the clothesline to dry. It was the double wedding band, neverending loops of purple and red on white backing, paths lead-

ing back into themselves, mountain paths that refused to run straight. The quilt did not sag on the line but was taut as if nailed onto an invisible wall. Something moved at its center; it was the point of a knife thrust from the back. The knife cut easily as through butter, with no sound of tearing. I knew Miles held the knife.

“Why are you cutting up Florrie’s quilt?” I asked him.

“To make little covers for the baby’s bed,” he answered cheerfully. “It’s all for the new baby.”

Miles always said “it” now, never “hit.”

“It sounds ignorant to say ‘hit.’ They shamed us out of it at school. Same with ‘aint.’ Educated people don’t use those words.”

Ben sat by the fire and whittled. “Chaucer said ‘hit,’” he observed.

Miles looked startled, then said, “That’s different.”

“Why?” Ben asked.

“He’s been dead a long time. He was *medieval*.” He said this last word as though it described a very disgraceful condition. “This is the scientific age.”

It rained all that September evening. Daddy, Miles and Ben sat up late, deep in conversation about what Miles called “business affairs.” I listened from the front porch.

“Subsistence farming,” Miles said. “That’s what this is. You can’t make it on subsistence farming any more. The economy is changing. Prices are going up. It’s the miners’ wages doing it. They see more cash than you do, Daddy, a whole lot more. When Pond Creek opens up over here, you won’t be able to make it without more cash.”

Miles planned to move to Pond Creek in November to become superintendent of a new coal mine that was owned by a Boston family, relatives of one of his professors at Berea. That is what education is about, Miles said. To prepare mountain youth to take their place in the modern world. We must not be left behind, he said. Who better to oversee a coal mine than someone who had grown up in the area, someone who understood the men he would supervise? Miles had spent the summer in Boston getting acquainted with his employers and learning what he called their “business philosophy.”

He wanted to buy Daddy’s trees for his coal company.

“We’ll be building houses, using timbers inside the mine. A coal

company always needs trees. Daddy, it will be more money than you've ever seen. You can even build a new house for Ben and Flora and their children. You get some of the boys from Scary next winter and cut the trees, float them down to the sawmill at Catlettsburg. We'll pay you cash right there. I can draw up the contract first thing when I start work."

Daddy spoke so low I couldn't hear what he said. But he came out on the porch after a while to smoke his pipe and take a breath of air.

"You going to do it?" I asked.

"Aint much to do that time of year no way," he said.

"I dont think you should. The trees is too pretty."

He looked at me. "Where's the women?"

"Gone to the Aunt Jane Place."

"Why aint you with them?"

"I wanted to hear yall talking."

"Aint nothing for a girl to hear. Go on down there with them."

I ignored him, as I did more and more in those days. He was usually scornful of me as well. It had started not long after Albion left, when Daddy learned I was doing most of the hunting. He led me way up on the mountain, pretending we were going to hunt together, then he took my gun and left me without a word. I sat and cried for a long time and listened to the report of his gun on a distant ridge. Then I stumbled down the mountain alone.

He told me he didn't expect me to find a husband. I was not "deferin'" enough, my tongue was too sharp and I was too forward in my ways. I didn't believe him. Aunt Jane was not "deferrin'" and she had been married. Most of the women I knew on the creeks were strong and feisty and they all had men. Still he hurt my feelings. I held myself distant from him and from other men who might treat me the same.

The boys I knew didn't interest me. I still waited for Heathcliff and felt nothing for Arley Whitt or Billy Good. None of them paid attention to me either. Aunt Jane said I had my nose up in the air. Flora said I was too shy to flirt properly. Only Aunt Becka said nothing, and her silence frightened me. Did she think us kindred spirits?

I rocked back and forth after Daddy went inside. Rain hammered the roof and drowned out the voices of the men. Spray from the bannisters

left tiny wet spots on my cheeks. I closed my eyes and pretended they were the kisses of a man. I couldn't see his face, but he would be brave and charming, and I would marry him. I put my finger to my lips and pretended he had touched me.

“I love you,” I said softly, to no one.

The High Sheriff

From *One Foot in Eden*

Ron Rash

Introduction to the Excerpt by the Author

Too often in popular culture, Appalachians have been shown as capable of little more than grunts when it comes to communication. But the language I heard from older relatives while growing up was both inventive and poetic, most obviously in its use of similes, as when my uncle told me a scantily clad young woman “didn’t have enough clothes on to wad a shotgun.” My hope as a writer is that I convey to the reader the richness of the dialect and some portion of its distinctiveness and rhythms.

There had been trouble in the upper part of the county at a honky-tonk called The Borderline, and Bobby had come by the house because he didn’t want to go up there alone. I couldn’t blame him. One badge, especially a deputy’s badge, might not be enough. It was a rough clientele, young bucks from Salem and Jocassee mixed with young bucks come down from North Carolina. That was usually the trouble, North Carolina boys fighting South Carolina boys.

I had a good book on the Cherokee Indians I’d just started, but when Bobby knocked on the door I knew I wouldn’t be reading any more this night. “Go have you a smoke on the porch,” I told Bobby. “It’ll take me a minute to get dressed.”

Janice didn’t open her eyes when I went into the bedroom to get my

shoes and uniform. The lamp was still on, a book titled *History of Charleston* beside her. I looked at Janice, the high cheekbones and full lips, the rise of her breasts under the nightgown, and despite everything that had happened, and hadn't happened in our marriage, desire stirred in me like a bad habit I couldn't get shed of. I turned off the lamp.

Bobby and I followed the two-lane blacktop into the mountains. No light shone from the few farmhouse windows, not even a hangnail moon above. Darkness pressed against the car windows, deep and silent, and I couldn't help but think I was seeing into the future when much of this land would be buried deep underwater.

"It's a lonesome-feeling night, Sheriff," Bobby said, like he'd read my mind.

Bobby lit a Chesterfield, his face flaring visible for a moment before sinking back into the dark.

"Haints are bad to stir on a night like this," Bobby said, "leastways that's what my momma always claimed."

"So there are more things in heaven and earth than we might dream of?"

"What?" Bobby said.

"Haints. You believe in them?"

"I never said I did. I'm just saying what it was Momma notioned."

The fighting was over by the time Bobby and I had got to The Borderline. Casualties were propped up in chairs, though a few still lay amidst shattered beer bottles, cigarette butts, blood, and teeth. It was as close to war as I'd seen since the Pacific. I let them see my badge. Then I stepped through the battlefield to the bar.

"How'd this start?" I asked Bennie Lusk.

Bennie held a mop in his hands, waiting for the last men on the floor to get moved so he could mop up the beer and blood.

"How do you think?" Bennie said.

He nodded toward the corner where Holland Winchester sprawled in a chair like a boxer resting between rounds, a boxer in a fight with Jersey Joe or Marciano. Holland's nose swerved toward his cheek, and a slit in the middle of his forehead opened like a third eye. His clenched fists lay on the table, bruised and puffy. He wore his uniform, and if you hadn't known Holland was sitting in a South Carolina honky-tonk, hadn't seen

the Falstaff and Carling Black Label signs glowing on the walls, your next guess would have been he was still in Korea, waiting at a dressing station to be stitched and bandaged.

“What do you reckon the damage?” I asked Bennie.

“Ten ought to cover it.”

Bobby and I walked over to Holland.

“Sheriff,” he said, his wrecked face looking up at me. “Looks like you got here too late to join the ruckus.”

“Looks that way,” I said. “But it seems you got your share of it.”

“Yeah,” Holland said. “Sometimes when a man’s hurting on the inside a good bar fight can help him feel some better.”

“I don’t quite catch your meaning,” I said. “All I know is you’ve caused a good bit of damage to Mr. Lusk’s establishment.”

“I reckon I did,” Holland said, looking around as if he hadn’t noticed.

“I know what it’s like when you get back from a war,” I said. “You need some time to settle back in. You pay Mr. Lusk ten dollars, and we’ll leave it at that.”

“I ain’t got no problem with that, Sheriff,” Holland said.

“Next time you’ll go to jail,” I said. I smiled but I leveled my eyes on his to let him know I was serious.

“We’ll see about that,” Holland said. He smiled too but his dark-brown eyes had gone flat and cold as mine.

He reached into his pocket and lay a leather pouch and roll of bills on the table.

“There, Deputy,” Holland said to Bobby, peeling off a five-dollar bill and five ones. “You run that money over to Bennie.”

Bobby’s face reddened.

“I don’t take my damn orders from you,” Bobby said.

For a moment I was tempted to go ahead and cuff him, because it was sure as dust in August that we’d have another run-in with Holland and he wouldn’t come quietly. Tonight he was already wore out and wounded. Tonight might be easy as it got.

“Take the money to Bennie,” I said.

Bobby didn’t like it, but he picked up the money.

Holland stuffed the roll of bills back in his pocket.

“Look here, Sheriff.”

Holland opened the leather pouch and shook the pouch's contents onto the table. A Gold Star fell out, then other things.

"Know what they are?" Holland asked, dropping the Gold Star back in the pouch.

I stared at what looked like eight dried-up figs. I knew what they were because I'd seen such things before in the Pacific.

"Yes," I told Holland. "I know what they are."

Holland nodded.

"That's right, Sheriff. You would know. You was in the World War."

Holland held one up to me.

"You reckon them ears can still hear?"

"No," I said.

"You sure about that?"

"Yes," I said. "The dead don't hear and they don't speak."

"What do they do, Sheriff?"

"They just disappear."

Holland placed the ear with the others. They lay on the table between us like something wagered in a poker game.

"There was some said it was awful to cut the ear off a dead man," Holland said. "The way I see it, taking his life was a thousand times worse and I got medals for that."

Holland picked the ears up one at a time and placed them in the pouch.

"These here won't let me forget what I did over there. I don't take it lightly killing a man but I ain't afraid to own up to it either. All I did was what they sent me there to do."

Holland stuffed the pouch into his pocket.

"What did you bring back, Sheriff?" Holland asked.

"A sword and a rifle," I said. "Nothing like what you got in that pouch."

Then Holland Winchester said the last words he would ever say to me.

"There's some that gets through it easier than others when the shooting starts, right, Sheriff?"

Those words were what I remembered two weeks later when Bobby interrupted my lunch.

“Holland Winchester’s missing,” Bobby said. “His momma’s got it in her head he’s been killed.”

Bobby sounded hopeful.

“You don’t think we’d be that lucky, do you?” I said.

“Probably not,” Bobby said, the hope in his voice giving way to irritation. “Holland’s truck is at the farm. It ain’t like he would walk to a honky-tonk from there. He’s probably just laying off drunk somewheres. Probably down at the river. I told her to call if he comes back.”

“Let’s give him a couple of hours to wander back home,” I said. “Then I’ll go up there and have a look-see.”

Janice sat at the kitchen table, and she flinched when I said “look-see.” Hillbilly talk, Janice called such words, but it was the way most folks still spoke in Oconee County. It put people more at ease when you talked like them, and when you are the high sheriff you spend a lot of time trying to put people at ease.

Janice wore a dark-blue skirt and white blouse. She had another meeting this afternoon. Friends of the Library, DAR—something like that.

“There’s a missing person up at Jocassee,” I said, “so I might not be back for supper.”

“That will be fine,” Janice said, not looking up from the table. “I won’t be here anyway. Franny Anderson invited me to have dinner with her after our meeting.”

I leaned over to kiss her.

“Don’t,” she said. “You’ll smear my lipstick.”

I walked back to the office and waited for Holland’s mother to telephone. When no call came, I got in my patrol car and headed up Highway 288 toward Jocassee, toward what had once been home. The radio said it was over one hundred degrees downstate in Columbia. Dog days are biting us hard, the announcer said. I had the window down, but the back of my uniform already stuck to my skin as I left the town limits. The road was wavy with heat and humidity, its edges cluttered with campaign signs staked in the ground like tomato plants, some for General Eisenhower or Adlai Stevenson and even one for Strom Thurmond. Most were more local, including a couple with my name on them.

The blacktop steepened and pressure built in my ears until I opened my jaws. The road curved around Stumphouse Mountain, and beyond

the silver-painted guard posts the land dropped away like those old European maps of the unknown world. If it were late fall or winter I would have been able to see a white rope of water on the far side of the gorge, a waterfall that had claimed two lives in the last twenty years.

The road leveled out, and suddenly I was in the mountains. It surprised me, as it somehow always did, that so much could change in just a few miles. It was still hot, but the humidity had been rinsed from the air. Pines got scarce, replaced by ash and oak. The soil was different too, no longer red but black. Rockier as well, harder to make a living from.

Dead blacksnakes draped on the fences told me what I already knew from the way corn and tobacco wilted in the fields—it had rained no more up here than it had in Seneca. I wondered how Daddy and my brother's crops were doing, and I reckoned no better.

I pulled off the road when I came to Roy Whitmire's store, parking beside the sign that said LAST CHANCE FOR GAS TWENTY MILES. I stepped past men sitting on Cheerwine and Double Cola crates. With their bald heads and wrinkled necks they looked like mud turtles sunning on stumps. The men gave me familiar nods, but the dog days had sapped the talk out of them. I swirled my hand in the drink cooler on the porch, ice and water numbing my fingers before I found a six-ounce bottle. I wasn't thirsty, but it wasn't right not to buy something. I stepped inside, into a big room that was darker than outside but no cooler.

The store was pretty much the way it had always been, the front shelf filled with everything from Eagle Claw fish hooks to Goody headache powders, a big jar on the counter, pickled eggs in the murky brine pressed against the glass like huge eyeballs. Next to the cash register another jar, this one filled with black licorice whips.

"Howdy, stranger," Roy said, grinning as he stepped from around the counter to shake my hand.

We made small talk a few minutes. My eyes adjusted to the dark and I saw the stuffed bobcat on the back wall—paw poised to strike, yellow eyes glaring—still at bay after three decades. Fifty-pound sacks of Dekalb corn seed lay stacked on the floor below it.

"I don't reckon you've seen Holland Winchester the last couple of days?" I finally said, getting to the reason I'd stopped.

“No,” Roy said. “Of course I ain’t exactly been out searching for him. I got enough trouble that’s already found me without looking for more.”

Roy lifted the nickel I’d placed on the counter, leaving the penny where it lay.

“Buffalo head,” he said, holding the nickel between us. “You don’t see many of them anymore. They done got near scarce as real buffalo. You sure you don’t want to keep it?”

“No,” I said.

Roy closed the register.

“Your daddy and brother, they’re seeing a hard time of it, like most everybody with something in the ground. That ain’t no good news for them or me.”

Roy nodded toward the shelf behind him.

“I got a shoebox full of credit tickets. If it don’t come a good rain soon I’d just as well use them to start my fires this winter. But you don’t have to worry about such things down in town, do you?”

“No, I guess not.”

I lay the Coke bottle on the counter.

“You telephone me if Holland comes by.”

“I’ll do it,” Roy said. “You bring me one of your voting posters next time you’re up this way. I’ll put it in the window.”

Before I got in my car I glanced at the sky. Like it mattered to me, a man with a certain paycheck come rain or drought.

A mile from the North Carolina line I turned off the blacktop and headed into the valley called Jocassee. The word meant “valley of the lost” to the Cherokee, for a princess named Jocassee had once drowned herself here and her body had never been found. The road I followed had once been a trail, a trail De Soto had followed four hundred years ago when he’d searched these mountains for gold. De Soto and his men had found no riches and believed the land worthless for raising corn. Two centuries after De Soto, the Frenchman Michaux would find something here rarer than gold, a flower that existed nowhere else in the world.

Ezra's Journal and Andrew Nettles

From *Hiding Ezra*

Rita Quillen

Introduction to the Excerpt by the Author

Ezra Teague makes the difficult decision, as did many others during World War I, to abandon his post at Camp Lee, Virginia, and return to his native Scott County home. Andrew Nettles, the man the army sends to find Ezra and other deserters, is also from the mountains of southwestern Virginia—specifically, Big Stone Gap. But Nettles is a man who looks down on his neighbors, thinking that to be like them, to talk like them, to think like them is to be inferior and unsophisticated. He begins his search for Ezra certain that he'll have no trouble besting this "rube."

There is a lyric intensity here, a vivid descriptiveness, a musical cadence, a different syntax and vocabulary that are now almost gone from our language. An acknowledgment of the power of the oral tradition is something I also associate with our region's spoken language, as much as the pronunciations and unusual vocabulary. It's no accident that there has been both popular and academic recognition of the wonderful storytelling tradition of the Appalachian South in recent years; it is an integral part of our linguistic history and legacy.

From Ezra Teague's Journal

Dec. 12, 1918. I wish I was back at fort Lee. Everybody was sad about me going in the Army and some fellows I talked to said I was heading straight to hell. But I kind of like it. I got to know some fine people there. The food wasn't bad, they had some fine weapons. I even liked the training, the rope climbing and the obstacle courses. A man needs a test ever now and then, He needs to know how he stacks up.

I done alright for myself. I was proud of my shooting up there. Pa would've grinned like a mule eating sawbriers if he'd seen me put nine out of ten shots right in that bullseye like I did. I woulda been a good soldier, I think, but I guess I'll never know now. Ain't no way the Army would have me back now.

From "Lt. Nettles' Mission"

Andrew Nettles grew up on a quiet street in Big Stone Gap, in southwest Virginia, not too far from Ezra Teague's Scott County home. His father had been a successful businessman, owning a hardware store in town. His mother, Roberta Arnott Nettles, was the only daughter of one of the town's old families who "had money," people said. In truth, they didn't have much money, but they had property and status and pretensions. Roberta's mother had insisted on dressing for dinner, always wearing a hat whenever she went out, having ladies over for a book club luncheon, all things her mother had told her went on every day in the world outside "these hills."

The Arnott family had come to Big Stone Gap when almost everyone else had: during the coal mining, railroad-building days in the 1880s. Stories still circulated in the local lore about Roberta's mother, whom everyone referred to as "Miz Stella," getting off the train in a beautiful burgundy silk dress and a hat with a big feather, with ten trunks of clothes and household items loaded off on wagons.

Miz Stella never completely adjusted to the mud, the grey fortress of hills around her, the roughness of her Big Stone Gap neighbors. While her husband Jacob worked in the railroad office, she ran their home like a business and raised her children with one purpose: to persuade them

to leave the godforsaken place and make something of themselves. She punished any hint of a mountain accent in their speech, visibly shuddered if they used words like “recollect” for “remember” or “hit” for “it.” But to her bitter disappointment, it didn’t work. Roberta, her pride and joy, fell in love with a smooth-talking, handsome local boy named Jimmy Nettles and settled into a house right down the street. Jimmy was one of those mountain men for whom words were currency. He was a storyteller extraordinaire, his talk vivid and imaginative and original. Roberta was as spellbound by him as everyone else, and soon her own speech was sprinkled with his imagery and colorful similes. When Roberta told one of her friends to stop “grinnin’ like a mule eatin’ saw briars” about something, Miz Stella frowned. When Roberta complained that her mother’s chicken dinner was “tough as whit leather,” the double insult was too much, and Miz Stella took to her bed with a sick headache for three days. After Roberta and Jimmy ran off and got married, her mother never completely recovered and never forgave Roberta for her treachery.

So Andrew was born into a house of confusion and conflict. From the time he was little there were all these strange rules, mixed messages, and unspoken tensions in the grownup world around him. “Yes, Andrew, you can play on this street and visit this house.” “No, Andrew, we don’t go over there.” He could visit certain churches with his friends (one of the few social activities) but not others.

His father had lots of friends of all kinds, from the local circuit court judge to the local Coonhunter Club members with their baying hounds. Jimmy Nettles never saw a stranger. Andrew loved to go out into the yard and listen to the men talk about their hunting trips or tell stories about when they were little. He noticed from an early age that his mother and father talked very differently and had different friends and different interests. Though Roberta never grew as extreme on the issue as her mother, nevertheless, it was apparent that she had high expectations of her son, and these included getting an education and moving far beyond what she saw as the confines of Big Stone Gap. As a teenager, old enough to begin to ponder the mysteries of love and women and marriage, he grew more and more confused about his parents’ apparent mismatch. They obviously cared about each other very much; they never fought or spoke cruelly. Sometimes they looked at each other with sadness, though, which An-

drew became a part of. It attached itself to his face and hung there almost all the time.

Somehow, the feeling of being better than everyone, which he inherited from his mother, and the feeling of inferiority passed on by his uneducated father mixed into a strange demeanor and personality that limited him in his career in the military. Everyone at Fort Lee and at Fort Oglethorpe, where he had been stationed before, knew of his limitations, too. To put it mildly, people had a strong reaction to him, mostly negative. So he knew that number three in command was probably as high as he was going to get. At times he knew; other times he fantasized about being first in command.

When he heard about the Teague desertion, one of several that spring at Fort Lee, he saw it simply as an opportunity. If he could solve this embarrassing problem for the army, they would be very grateful. There was quite a bit of discussion among higher-ups about the sizable number of AWOL soldiers, and the government had a dilemma. If they made too much of it, the publicity might just encourage more to refuse to do their duty. On the other hand, it would be hard to find these men without publicizing the issue. The military couldn't afford to be wasting a lot of manpower with a war on. Nettles had decided to take the matter into his own capable hands; he walked into the commander's office and volunteered to spearhead the effort to solve this problem. Several officers had come by later to talk to him, shake his hand, and wish him luck. They seemed relieved, very relieved, in fact. Nettles now knew why.

That morning, two of the duller recruits he had trained in an earlier group appeared in his office. Smith and Cooper were two of the slowest country boys to ever fall off the pumpkin truck. They were from somewhere down in coal country; most people couldn't understand half of what they said. When they told him they had been assigned to his "retrieval detail," they called it, Nettles stood up and looked out the window so they couldn't see his face.

"We're gonna hep you find this Teague feller and maybe a couple of them others from down 'at way," Smith said, and Cooper nodded in agreement. "We're looking forward to it."

Nettles just looked at them. *If these are the type of yokels that I'm to be saddled with on this assignment, these runaways are home free. Why*

doesn't the brass realize that I need some good people? This Teague fellow is no fool and he's on his home turf. Nettles remembered him from basic. He was tough, strong, an excellent marksman. These rubes couldn't find an old lady's cat.

All he said to the two men was, "Good. You'll be leaving tomorrow morning. See the quartermaster for your supplies. I'll have detailed directions and instructions ready for you then. Dismissed."

"You mean," Cooper stopped and frowned, "you ain't a-goin' sir?"

"No, private. I've got too much to do here. We've got inspections in a few weeks. You should be able to handle this on your own. Is there anything else, Private?" Nettles gave them his best dead stare.

"No sir." They were out the door in a second.

Nettles knew that the odds were against them, but at least the strike-out would be on their records, not his. If the top brass thought they were going to saddle him with boobs like that and get away with it, they better think again. They'll reconsider and send some real soldiers, men of substance, when they come back empty-handed. *And I'll be the hero, not the clown,* Nettles smiled to himself.

Holler

Crystal Wilkinson

Editors' note: *Crystal Wilkinson, a founding member of the Affrilachian poets, has written about putting her "country" life—including her dialect—behind her to avoid ridicule, only to rediscover it when she returned to writing poetry and fiction. "The true grandness of my heritage became more and more clear," she says. "The way the words roll off my tongue is the voice of my people—the country Affrilachian folks."*¹

Turn left where Otha's one-room store used to be and the poplars get thicker, drive past Mt. Zion Baptist Church and across the concrete bridge and on up the holler. You'll be able to see Green River if you stretch your neck but don't expect something out of a picture book. It's brown, plumb full of mosquitoes, water moccasins galore.

Go to the end of the road and on up the hill a little and this is Mission Creek—this is where we live. You might not expect to find black people in the mountains, not many of us left, but we're here. Keep going until the road levels out a bit and the gravel gets more scarce and turns to dirt, go around the bend and soon you'll see the graying heads of black men nodding as you pass, black children playing Red Rover, black women hanging sheets on the lines.

Tallboy is my brother-in-law. He's six-foot-five, pock-faced and wears a Reds baseball cap pulled down over his eyes. All you can see is a little bit of his broad nose and headphone wires snaking down his bird chest. We all grew up together and I remember Tallboy before he found Mr. Jessie

out in the field, before he went a little off and Miss Mattie had him committed to the state hospital.

Tallboy came back a different version of himself but Miss Mattie says it's because he stayed away from here too long. The Tallboy I knew was smart and bright-eyed, always had his nose in a book. His hair was the biggest part of him: a wild long Afro that was sometimes braided in sleek cornrows that hung to the middle of his back. This new Tallboy has a close cropped fade and comes up the road to our house to get away from that place out there in the field where it happened.

One night a week ago, Tallboy came in while I was washing up the last of the supper dishes. JB was already gone to work out at Icco making car parts. He's been working third shift for going on a year. Tallboy sat in JB's chair. Like that, with his back turned, he was Mr. Jessie made over. He let out a long breath looking like his daddy for the world.

"Want some cobbler?"

I was already at the stove scooping some out into a bowl before he answered. He sunk his head back into the chair and started telling me about his girl trouble. He started and kept going like a train through it all. I knew about Tallboy's group therapy. I knew he'd met his girlfriend, Chelsea, there. Miss Mattie said it wasn't helping him none to sit around with people as bad off in the head as he was. I handed him the bowl, he took big bites and kept talking. Every once in a while he stroked the bridge of his nose or ran his thumb and forefinger across the brim of his cap.

I'd seen the girlfriend once all hugged up with Tallboy at Dee's. Her mother had driven her up here to see him. We all used to go to Dee's for birthdays, anniversaries, and proms. It was the kind of place that wasn't meant for us but we went anyway before they tore it down a few months back and built a Dollar Store. They had a jukebox then and we kept it fed quarters even if the songs were five or six years old. We preferred Aretha Franklin and the Floaters but some nights the lonesome twang of Merle Haggard.

Tallboy had his arm around that girl when me and JB walked in and her hair hung over Tallboy's elbow like kudzu. She wasn't from around here. Nice wire-framed glasses. Average face I guess, you couldn't really tell anything was wrong with her but mostly all I remember is that sheaf

of black hair hanging down to the center of her back, shining and waving to the white boys at the front counter.

Tallboy had a proud look on his face and nodded to me. JB slapped his brother on the back like he had just won something, which was unusual because usually he scowled at Tallboy like he was angry or ashamed. Everybody looked. I spoke gently to the girl and kept moving. Her mother was in the parking lot in her Chevy waiting for the date to end.

Miss Gayl waved to us from the back through a wall of steam. She was the one black cook they had and most times we didn't stay if we didn't see her working back there. We slipped into our booth. But even after we had received our drinks and tapped the hard red plastic glasses together in a toast I couldn't take my eyes off that girl Chelsea.

"Hair like that make a man go crazy," I said to JB.

He didn't say nothing.

Tallboy lit up a cigarette and pressed it between his lips, took a drag from it then looked into her eyes. He stroked his hand across that hair and chewed her ear a little. They looked normal from that distance.

Normal. He seemed normal that day, happy even, but last week when he came out to the house all that was gone, replaced with a wild-eyed misery. I ended up rubbing his neck while he lay over on my lap crying, hollering out like somebody had just died.

"Chessie's gone," he said.

"You'll be alright," I said but it wasn't something I really believed. He'd be alright? Nobody who'd known him before he found Mr. Jessie believed that.

They say when Tallboy found Mr. Jessie that his face was mostly gone. Mr. Jessie was working on his own land, riding his own tractor. They beat him up, then tied him to the back of the tractor with a log chain and drove around the pasture making huge round patterns like crop circles. Tallboy, fresh home from school, had been the first to find him. JB and Sis weren't home yet. Miss Mattie came home to Tallboy running loops around and around the outside of the house mumbling "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy" and Mr. Jessie out there mangled like something wild had gotten hold of him.

Tallboy curled his feet up on the couch.

After some time, Tallboy's story drifted off to nothing. Chelsea was gone. Her mother had thought it all a bad idea when she had caught them kissing.

I called out his name and tried to rustle him up but his head fell back hard against my legs and I knew he was asleep. Miss Mattie said it was the medicine that knocked him out like that but I knew the man was tired. I was tired too. His breath on my thigh was heavy and warm. I wanted to stroke his head where that Afro used to be but I didn't. I rubbed his back in small circles like I would a child's.

Sometime during the night I dreamed of Mr. Jessie's body out there in the field being drug behind the tractor but when I looked at him it was my own daddy's face I saw, the way he looked when they pulled him up from the coal mine, like he'd just fallen asleep down there and never woke up. Him and the fourteen others, everybody white but him, lifted up from their graves to be buried again three days later. I woke up thinking about Mama too and how she didn't last long after Daddy passed. It's easy for a woman up here to grieve herself to death.

I roused up a little but instead of telling Tallboy to move up off of me like I should have, I fell back asleep with his head buried in my stomach, my hand resting on his back, our legs sprawled out along the couch.

Up toward the morning, the front door thumped against the wall and it scared me considering what we'd all been through. Tallboy sat up straight on the couch and braced his hands on my thighs.

JB walked in and dropped the two plastic sacks of groceries and a gallon of milk he was carrying. The milk jug busted and poured onto the floor. I smiled, relieved at the sight of him.

I called out to him, "Baby . . ."

JB could have been Black Jesus coming to save us all with that halo of light spread out around his head but before I had a chance to tell him that, before I told him the story of Tallboy's woman or of my dream. Before all of this, he hauled off and hit Tallboy square in the face knocking him to the floor.

Tallboy sat in the milk cradling his bruise.

JB hit Tallboy again and I thought I could hear the small bones in his jaw give a little.

When he got back up Tallboy had his hands out in front of him at first trying to stay the blows then he took a wobbly swing. A look of terror welled up in Tallboy's eyes and I couldn't help but to think about Mr. Jes-

sie. I scrambled up and in the ruckus was knocked into the end table. The lamp crashed to the floor and Alpha was barking out in the yard.

Tallboy's arms were flailing around but he wasn't hitting nothing. His boyish face was becoming a blood blister and a long strand of red slobber slid from his mouth to the floor.

"Stop, JB. You stop this right now," I said. "He wasn't doing nothing."

But JB rubbed his hands across his face. He was sweating dark shapes through his work shirt. I tried to get to the phone but JB jerked it out of the wall.

"Just listen," I said and put my hands up to him but he kept his fists balled up.

Tallboy got to the door and we all went out into the yard where we could see the sun rising up over the mountains.

Alpha ran back and forth in front of the doghouse wagging his tail like he was waiting on breakfast. With all the yelling and moving around the poor thing began to yelp a little. It was already a little cold. The leaves had turned and were beginning to fall.

Tallboy ran to the end of the driveway, then down the path behind our house, past the cistern. He jumped over the barbed wire fence and ran on up the foothill toward the woods. Every once in a while I saw one of his hands go up to his face and I knew he was wiping away tears. JB ran after him and soon they were just outlines of men among the trees off in the distance.

I ran back into the house to grab my car keys and when I came out Tallboy was bounding back down the hill toward me covered in cockleburs. Once he reached flat land again Tallboy rushed past me and took off down the road his feet slapping the dirt and leaves.

JB followed but was losing ground and I could tell his rage, even though it had nothing to do with this, was getting the best of him. For a moment my heart fluttered a little at the thought of Mr. Jessie having one son so full of anger and the other emptied out of most every thing he used to be. My heart leapt out of my chest for my husband but JB still had that way about him that called for more fear than empathy.

I jumped in the Pontiac and sped past him.

Tallboy was way out in front and ducked quickly into the passenger's seat.

I could see JB in the rearview mirror his hands on his thighs gathering his breath. He dropped to his knees like a praying man.

I took Tallboy to his mama.

At Miss Mattie's place, Patton, who'd kept an eye out for her since Mr. Jessie died, was next door pulling weeds. He waved to us with a gloved hand.

In Miss Mattie's yard a stack of fresh wood was piled up against the house waiting on winter and a chicken wire cage was home to two pups. The pups barked at us when we arrived and then waved their tails when they picked up Tallboy's scent but he didn't bend down to pet them.

When Miss Mattie came to the door she was breathing hard and placed her hands on her hips.

"What now?" she said at the sight of us.

"Nothing," I told her. "I brought him back home to you."

Tallboy took his cap off when he entered the house but didn't say a word.

Miss Mattie came out on the porch in her housedress and rubbed the head of the mother beagle when the dog came out from around the house. Miss Mattie pulled a fat tick from the place she had rubbed and burnt it with a cigarette lighter. Then she threw her hand up at Patton and slipped back into the house.

The dog looked back at her with sad eyes, one drooping lower than the other. The trees in the back of the house were full of red leaves, some of which had already fallen.

"What happened?" Miss Mattie looked at Tallboy's face then turned to me.

I could hear the pups whining for their mother because they couldn't reach her through the chicken wire. I tried to explain what had happened but when she found out it was between the boys Miss Mattie grunted in response and lit a cigarette. The smoke came back in on her and she narrowed her eyes.

"You ate?" she said to Tall.

"Pie," he answered.

She went to the oven and pulled out a tin pan with beef roast, potatoes, green beans and a corn muffin inside and sat it on the table beside where Tallboy stood.

“Hungry?” she said to me.

I shook my head no.

Tallboy began to eat his supper, though it was early in the morning.

Miss Mattie poured him a glass of cold tea.

“Tea?” she said.

I shook my head no again. Somewhere outside I heard the clanking of metal next door and tried to imagine what chore Patton had moved on to.

“Family ain’t the place to fight,” Miss Mattie said and turned her back to us and began to piddle with a stack of dishrags.

Tallboy stopped eating for a second but didn’t respond.

I was embarrassed when a harsh sigh slipped from my throat.

She turned to me and rubbed my shoulder. I could smell cigarettes and coffee on her. She hugged me.

“Come sit down,” she said.

“Sis at work?” I asked looking around at the emptiness of the house but Miss Mattie didn’t answer me.

I sat beside her on the couch in the living room and could hear Tallboy fumbling around in the sink.

“Leave it,” she said. “Come on in here.”

Tallboy stood in the doorway waiting for his mama to lay down the law but she rested her head back on the couch and closed her eyes as if she was waiting for the right words to present themselves. She locked her fingers across her belly and sucked air through her teeth. If you looked at her close you could tell she was pretty once. Even now with all that weight on her she turns heads at church but her feet are like two balls of brown dough. I’ve seen pictures of her that I mistook for Sis. But Miss Mattie had a dignified stance about her back then that’s been lost to modern women.

Tallboy walked into the living room and sat in the chair Mr. Jessie used to rest in when he’d come home from work.

A few minutes later I heard JB’s truck pull up and heard the door slam. He came through the back door saying “Y’all needn’t worry Mama ’bout this.”

There was a quiver in his voice that made me want to just run to him and put my arms around his neck. Tallboy fidgeted with his cap and rubbed his hands palm to palm.

Miss Mattie pulled herself up from the couch and met JB in the doorway. “We don’t need no more,” she said. “Can’t take no more.”

He hung his head down to his chest and then glared at me.

Tallboy got up from the chair and edged himself along the wall toward the front door.

I squeezed the keys into my hand.

JB tried to ease past Miss Mattie but she stepped firmly in his path again.

“No,” she said again. “No more.”

Outside, I fumbled the keys around before I found the ignition. Tallboy looked down at the floorboard like he was drowning in his own thoughts. My only thought was to save him from this. By the time we left gravel for pavement, JB was close in his pickup.

We drove on out to the one lane road past Mt. Zion where we saw Frieda Jenkins’ boys carrying scrawny poles over their shoulders headed to the creek to fish. Tallboy’s eyes followed them up the hill until they disappeared. When we veered past Otha’s place on out to the main highway and edged through the white part of the ridge Tallboy flipped the radio on and rested his head on the window.

I just kept driving on through town until we reached the interstate. The day was beautiful and bright patches of mid-day sun shone off the dark tree line. JB had to cool off sooner or later and head on back home. I imagined that me and Tallboy would spend a day in the city, maybe get some ice cream. We might go up to the mall and I’d buy him a new ball cap, make him feel better.

In two hours’ time, glass and steel buildings were sprouting up toward the sky, and traffic was so thick that we could see the faces of people in cars on both sides of us.

When we reached a main artery in the city and buildings rose up from the ground where trees should have been, Tallboy glanced up at the mirror and saw that JB was right on the bumper. He hit his fists against the dashboard and his head jerked a little. “Quit!” he said with that humming whine in his voice like JB had him in a headlock, knuckle-burning his scalp through that thick Afro he used to have. I thought he was talking to me at first but his eyes were focused on JB who couldn’t hear him

because he was behind us in his pickup truck. "Quit it! Quit it! Quit it!" he said.

When the light changed JB gunned the truck into the back of the car. The tires squealed and my forehead smacked the glass.

JB punched the gas again and I heard the shriek of metal, smelled rubber burning. There was a little bit of blood on the windshield. When I turned my head I caught the blur of Tallboy's jacket. He was gone.

He had bolted from the car and was running down Main Street and all I remember thinking was *Damn, that boy can run* but Tallboy could always run faster than JB when we were kids.

I still see them shirtless running across Mr. Jessie's field elbow to elbow, the sweat flying off their shoulders like rain, Tallboy's fro waving like a flag, JB's face like stone, his jaw tight, and me and Sis standing in ankle-high grass getting bit by chiggers cheering them on. Mr. Jessie standing at the end of the fencerow with his chin tucked over a rake keeping us all safe.

But this time Mr. Jessie wasn't here and JB wasn't running trying to catch Tallboy; he was standing on the driver's side of my car beating on the window. He looked around in the car but there was nothing there now but me balled up in the seat holding my head.

His lips trembled, they were a little chapped, and he licked them but he didn't say nothing. He could have called me out of my name, said things no woman ought to hear and I'd understood it but he didn't. He jerked on the door handle but it was locked and then suddenly the law was everywhere.

The law don't carry on like that down here no matter what. One sheriff, a handful of deputies and that's all you get. Might not even get that much if you live out where we live. When somebody did that to Mr. Jessie the law come around and grunted at each other and shook their heads but still to this day don't nobody know who done it.

JB's fists turned open on the window and then he pointed down the street toward where Tallboy vanished. He called out his brother's name and mine then thudded the window one last time with his open hand before they pulled him away.

After the wreck I woke up in the hospital to that sickly smell of antiseptic with a bandage wrapped around my head. Sis starts telling me the story

like it had happened to somebody else and then leans over me and says “The law wants to talk to you.” Her face looks like a globe leaning over me like that and she talks loud like the knot on my head has made me deaf.

Miss Mattie, Sis and the girls circle around my bed and Miss Mattie makes them hold hands like I’m on my death bed and they all begin to pray. Miss Mattie calls out Amen three or four times and the girls say Amen back and then they all get quiet. Their eyes are on me and I grimace a little then turn over on my side. Miss Mattie places her hand on my head and something trembles inside me. Black women are like that down here, ready to lay hands if ordinary prayer ain’t enough.

“You rest,” she says and moves away from my bedside.

The nurse comes in and says “Only two visitors at a time please.”

Pudd, Sis’s youngest, is playing with the toiletries on the night stand. Miss Mattie holds her Bible to her chest like armor and I wish I could feel more of the sunlight from the window but Keisha, the eldest, is leaning across the radiator along the window sill in red culottes and boots looking down at the city. It’s then I notice that she’s filled out just over the summer.

“I’m a live down here,” she says and keeps on looking out into the sunlight at what she thinks is her future.

Miss Mattie says “Now y’all know what the nurse said” every few minutes and paces back and forth with her ankles spilling out around her shoes but nobody leaves until the law shows up and even then not right away because that’s when Miss Mattie has a spell and has to be helped into a chair.

The law man is a black man and asks me how I’m doing. I can’t help but stare at him for awhile. He holds his head to the side when he talks and reminds me of Cousin Ronnie.

“Better, I guess,” I say after some time. I smile.

I try to press my hair into the blue silk scarf that Sis brought with her. I clear my throat and drink some of the ice water the law man hands me.

“So we’ve interviewed your husband but do you think you’re up to telling me exactly what happened? At least what you remember?”

He poises his ink pen over the notebook and looks at me above it and waits.

“Why’d your husband do this?” he says raising one of his eyebrows like a scythe.

And of course all the women of the Brown clan are in the room waiting for me to speak, to tell it all. So I sip the water like I've never had a drop in my life and I wish I had on just a little bit of lipstick so I could look a bit more presentable. I pull the flimsy white blanket up to my neck with my hands underneath resting on my belly and I'm still trembling.

The law man notices my nerves so he asks the family to step outside for a minute but I can still see their feet in the hallway through the slats in the bottom of the door.

This is a story I don't know how to begin so I start with "I don't think he did this on purpose." Then I go back as far as I can. It's the kind of thing that a body can't understand in snippets. So I say, "We all grew up together back down home, I've known the Browns my whole life. Our families knew one another . . ." and start it over there. Then I realize that it will take at least one lifetime to get him to where we live. And another to explain all we've been through.

Almost immediately I see the law man's face and shoulders get set a certain way as he listens to the way I talk with all the Mission Creek in me spilling out into the room.

And it's then, when he acts like each word I speak is throwing shit on him, that I know it doesn't matter what else I say so I stop talking all together. I look in the other direction toward the door and see Sis's shoes through the slats. Her feet are beginning to puff up just like Miss Mattie's.

The law man stands up beside me with his legs all straddled out with his face already fixed and I know his tongue won't form the words when he tries to tell it later. He'll be thinking we are all just a bunch of country niggers. I reach for more water and suck the cup dry then eat the ice.

Before he leaves he says with his voice as smooth as butter "Mrs. Brown, would you like to talk to somebody about all this, a social worker maybe?" And I say, "No."

I see the sun setting behind him through the window against all those tall buildings and close my eyes.

Some of the hollers back home are full of women with bowed heads and black rings around their eyes but I am not one of them. Sometimes JB comes home sulked up like hitting me might soften something hard inside him but he has never laid a finger on me.

One night when one of the boys down at the factory called him out

of his name, he hit his knuckles on the wall and marched out into the dark. I lay on the couch and listened to him out on the porch breathing and pacing until I fell asleep. I woke up in the middle of the night and went to him. He was still out there in his work clothes staring out into the knobs.

“Daddy sure loved it up here,” he said. “Sometimes I wonder if we ought to just go on and leave.”

I looped my arm through his. I heard a dove cooing from the rafters of the house and me and JB and the bird were still and quiet like that for a long time.

Sis spends that night in the hospital with me and for a minute I can imagine us back home on the den peeling potatoes or cleaning greens. But this feels like a sort of vacation with no husbands or piles of something that needs doing.

She puts her bare feet up under her in the chair and drapes a blanket over her knees. She shifts her hips in the chair and I can see her feet threatening to show themselves.

I think of her kids back home with Miss Mattie and her husband Gene up the road sitting down to supper by himself. I ask her if she misses them and she says “Shoot no,” and laughs but I can tell she does and I can hear the worry.

She combs and plaits her hair for the night.

Us together like this makes me think of when we were girls and couldn’t wait to get out of the country and join the movement. “I’m going all the way to Baltimore,” I remember telling her because I liked the way the words lifted off my tongue when I got to the more, up and out into the dark and mixed with the song of the bobwhites across the river.

I start smiling at the memory and Sis says, “What?”

“Nothing.”

She looks out the window at the city skyline and starts talking about what all she needs to do at home—washing clothes, canning the last of the beans, painting the den—then she stops and says “You gonna leave?”

I lean into the sterile smell of the hospital bed for a few minutes just wishing I was standing on my back porch breathing fresh air but I don’t answer her.

The phone rings and I can hear Miss Mattie's breathing before she speaks.

"I ain't heard nothing from JB, Miss Mattie," I say.

Sis sits up straight in her chair and rubs her neck a little and puts the comb away in her pocketbook. Miss Mattie pauses on the other end. Then she asks about Tallboy.

"Nothing from him neither."

I can see her in Mr. Jessie's chair spread out over its sides and Sis's girls beside her on the living room floor like they are there just to worship that entire mountain of her. And I'm sorry I'm missing that sight though I've seen it a hundred times since I became a part of this family.

I can hear Pudd in the background saying something but I can't make out what.

Sis reaches over and cuts the TV on Channel 14 News, which is the same thing we watch back home.

"I'm sick to death," Miss Mattie says, "all our men . . ." And then I hear nothing else but her heavy breathing.

The reporter on TV is a white woman with bobbing red hair and too much eye shadow.

She pronounces JB's name Jessie Brown Junior like he's some vagrant up the holler and I can see everybody back home—black and white—gathered around their television sets over suppers of pork chops and fried chicken thinking Jessie Brown's boys finally lost their natural minds.

I look up and see a picture of JB's truck sitting up against my car on Main Street. They cut back to the studio, show pictures of JB's mug shot, Tallboy's driver's license and the front of the hospital. Then the law man comes on looking just like Cousin Ronnie standing out in the sun and says Tallboy (only he calls him by his true name Terrance Brown) is wanted for questioning but mostly he talks about how none of us are from the city.

And I want to say to Sis "Don't he look just like Cousin Ronnie?" but I don't.

I hold the phone and can hear the TV on the other end too with Miss Mattie and the kids. I hear Miss Mattie gasp and Pudd is saying, "Don't worry Grandmamma."

After I get off the phone me and Sis don't say nothing for awhile and

I rise up and look out the window out over the city. All of those lights down there remind me of Christmas back down home and I start to cry. Sis notices but don't say nothing. She just looks out the window and says "I wouldn't live down here for nothing in the world."

The next evening back at home I stand on the porch looking out into the woods and hear something skittering around in the dark. Alpha comes out of his doghouse and barks and I throw him a few table scraps. I holler out to him and hear my own voice echo off the knob.

The air is cool but I stand there until I can't stand it no more. The first frost is close but I think of spring and tomatoes growing in the backyard. I think of JB and his hands on the roll of fat that circles my middle. I place my hand on my stomach and peer out above the tree line hoping the stars will bring us back everything we've lost.

Just as soon as I go back in I call to check on Miss Mattie and settle myself at the kitchen table to pay a few bills. I hear a knock on the door. Tallboy stands in the yellow light of the porch bulb looking haggard, his eye a bruised plum, his face and arms full of small wounds like he's come from way across the water, from war.

I invite him in but we don't sit on the couch. We don't talk. I put on a pot of coffee and pour us both a black cup and scoop out two bowls of the chocolate pie I made.

He sits at one end of the kitchen table, me at the other. He stares at me for a long time then eats his pie. When he's finished he reaches across the table for my hand but I pull further away. We are inside the house but I can still feel the bite of frost in the air and I can see twelve thousand stars in the sky. I rest my head in my hands and run my hand through my hair. Alpha barks at something outside and I think I can hear a lone whippoorwill calling somewhere out in the dark, high up on the mountain, in the tops of the barren trees.

Note

1. Crystal Wilkinson, "On Being 'Country': One Affrilachian Woman's Return Home," in *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, ed. Dwight Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 184–86.

Spell Check

Anne Shelby

It's handy, but not much account for writing
hillbilly poems with. It won't let you waller,
won't let you foller a feller up the holler.
Makes you have titles where titties ought to be.

I'll go along with changing logwoods into dogwoods,
but before I could say Undo it turned
my housecat to a housecoat. Sallet, newground,
Junebug, graveyard—Not in Dictionary.

You can't have a grandbaby on this thing
without special arrangements. One spell
transformed my taters into tatters, served
me subpoenas when I ordered soupbeans.

Now it wants to replace the homeplace
with just someplace. Is this the same spell
that changed proud to poor, turned minnows
into memories? I need flies

buzzin in this poem, cool snap of beans
breakin on the porch, tenor of coonhounds
on a moonlit ridge. Exit.

Float a while on a honeysuckle breeze.

Spell: How long to set
on a sycamore bank
with your feet in the creek.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the University Press of Kentucky and particularly our editor, Ashley Runyon, for her patience and guidance. To all our contributors, we are infinitely grateful for your patience, time, and dedication to this book, but most of all for your faith in us to see it through. Thanks to cartographer Erik Scrivener for the map featured in our introduction. We would also like to extend our appreciation individually:

Thank you to my coeditor and friend, Nancy Hayward, for your commitment and hard work on this project; Rachel Tighe, for your gifts of time and support; Grace Bradshaw and Cynthia Newlon, for your feedback on my essay; Brian McKnight, for your advice; my husband, Bryan Spain, for your unfailing love and support; and my entire family—parents, grandparents, and beyond—for teaching me to be proud of my heritage.

This book is for Ethel Stanley Russell—yours was the voice of a poet—and for my children, Landon and Riley: Your mountain voice is an heirloom. Carry it with you always.

—Amy D. Clark

Without Amy Clark's research and dedication, this book would not have come to fruition. I thank Amy for beginning the process and keeping the project alive. Many thanks to my family, my children, and my friends. I want to send a special thanks to Susan Gatti, my friend and role model and with whom I share a love of language.

This book is for Edith Deyerle and Edward Marek, who showed me the power of language.

—Nancy M. Hayward

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“Silence, Voice, and Identity among Appalachian College Women” is based on *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), courtesy of Katherine Sohn and National Council for Teachers of English; “Voiceplace” first appeared in *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), reprint courtesy of George Ella Lyon and University Press of Kentucky; “Southern Exposure” is reprinted from Lee Smith’s official website, courtesy of Lee Smith; “Carrie Bishop: From *Storming Heaven*” (New York: Ivy, 1987), reprint courtesy of Denise Giardina; “The High Sherriff: From *One Foot in Eden*” (New York: Picador, 2002), reprint courtesy of Ron Rash; “Holler” first appeared in *Slice Literary Magazine* (Spring/Summer 2010) and *Degrees of Elevation*, ed. Page Seay and Charles Dodd (Huron, OH: Bottom Dog Press, 2010), reprint courtesy of Crystal Wilkinson; “Spell Check” first appeared in *Appalachian Studies* (Nicholasville, KY: Wind Publications, 2010), reprint courtesy of Anne Shelby.

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