

An Empirical View of Varieties of English in Appalachia
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Varieties of English in Appalachia have received more public attention than scholarly scrutiny in the twentieth century. From comic strips to popular sitcoms and eventually the world-wide web, people from Appalachia have been lampooned in public circles for their speech and other cultural traits. Early myths, such as the reference to an extant Elizabethan English in the mountains, were used as a defense for language variation; however, such myths only obscure the actual patterns of synchronic and diachronic variation in this area of the country.

Working from the foundational scholarship of Wolfram & Christian (1976), Montgomery (e.g. 1989, 2004, 2006) and others, this paper explores a sociolinguistically empirical perspective of language variation patterns in speakers from Appalachia, specifically West Virginia, in order to emphasize a previously under-developed quality, namely the range of heterogeneity. By examining traditional features like *a*-prefixing (e.g. *She's a-fishing*) and (ING) (e.g. *We were walkin'*) in a corpus formed from 67 natives, we establish the range of vernacularity: For example, only 15 tokens of *a*-prefixing are found and none are found for speakers born after 1947; rates of alveolar (ING) range between 1 percent and 95 percent, while the average for the corpus is 52 percent (N = 6,989). Evidence emanates from such traditional variables and previously unassociated variables. By examining regionally-identified features such as the front-lax (e.g. *pin/pen*) and low-back mergers (e.g. *cot/caught*), we demonstrate that English in West Virginia has a regional dialect affiliation with both the North and the South: For example, 48 percent of speakers had both the front-lax and low-back mergers. For a phonological variable like /ay/-ungliding (e.g. *mine* [ma:n]), its fine differentiation by phonetic environment allows for quantitative sociolinguistic assessment between generations and speakers: For example, while younger Southern West Virginians maintain /ay/-ungliding before voiced phonetic environments, they have greatly reduced levels of /ay/-ungliding before voiceless obstruents. The other variables investigated are *for to* infinitives (e.g. *I guess it wasn't for me to play sports*), which are rare, and pleonastic pronouns (e.g. *Amanda, she was loud*), which are more frequently found in the corpus. Preliminary investigations of a traditional Appalachian variable, *was* leveling, and a more recent innovation, quotative *like*, illustrate how West Virginians maintain traditional variables while integrating innovations.

For a more complete analysis of the range of heterogeneity of this stigmatized variety, views from the speakers themselves are presented: Their stories of their language are explored to assess stereotypes and provide local meanings behind the sociolinguistic variables. This paper does not exclusively explore the most vernacular end of the Appalachian continuum, but instead provides empirical evidence for a wider range of possible variation along the standard-vernacular continuum with the hope of redefining the sociolinguistic norms for English in this region of Appalachia.

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