

Linguistic Change and Subregionality in Appalachia

Appalachian English is often thought of as a single, traditional form of speech associated with the older generation (Dial 1972, Montgomery 1979, Wolfram & Christian 1976). However, within the past two generations the social and linguistic landscape of Appalachia has greatly changed. Communities that lived mainly in isolation now experience immigration and emigration with the surrounding communities outside of Appalachia. With this openness come new language features and social practices. Recent research indicates that traditional Appalachian English features are in flux: with some dying out (Hazen 2006, Hazen, Butcher, & King 2010, Hazen, Hamilton, & Vacovsky 2011), others remaining stable (Hazen 2008), and others increasing among the younger generations (Hazen 2005, Childs & Mallinson 2004, Hasty 2011). These changes however are adapted and integrated differently by community members based on identity with the region and proximity to communities outside the region.

This study investigates these changes in Appalachian English through the results of a web-based survey of university students from Appalachian communities. The survey presents traditional phonetic, lexical, and morpho-syntactic Appalachian English features and asks respondents to report their use of these features and their observation of the use of these features by other speakers in their area. Results indicate significant differences between an area of Northern Appalachia (NAPP) and Southern Appalachia (SAPP), with SAPP leading NAPP in both hearing and using many more traditional features. While the two Appalachian groups patterned together for a few variables perhaps indicating a small set of unique Appalachian features, SAPP patterned more often with the South. These results indicate that language change in Appalachia is affecting NAPP and SAPP differently. We analyze this as NAPP becoming more like the surrounding Northern areas while SAPP follows the surrounding Southern areas and indicates the importance of these surrounding dialect regions when constructing an Appalachian identity.

References

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