

Chapter 1

Just What and Where Are Appalachian Englishes?: Subregional Language Variation in Appalachia

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<a>Summary

This chapter focuses on the regional divides in Appalachia. By describing the varying definitions in relation to dialect boundaries, along with the most diagnostic dialect features, the chapter also points out the gaps in scholarship on regional language variation in Appalachia. It is important to show the range of diversity across the levels of language and the contrasts found within the region. The contrasts can be found in many parts of Appalachian life, including economic differences between urban and rural areas and connections between dialect regions. The most major division is between Northern Appalachia and Southern Appalachia. Within these regions, dialect variation and language change are headed in different directions.

<a>Introduction

One of the first questions to answer regarding language in Appalachia is this: Just what exactly are these things we are calling *Appalachian Englishes*? How do Appalachian Englishes differ from other varieties of English? And what is the extent of language variation within Appalachia, as illustrated by our use of the pluralized *Appalachian Englishes*? While Appalachia is often perceived to be merely a part of the larger South, this characterization may not be the case for all of the region. Thus, we need to explore Appalachia's relationship to and distinctiveness from other varieties of English, which can be quite complex and variable. This chapter then attempts

to provide some direction on regional and subregional language variation in Appalachia.

<a>Appalachia and Other Regions

Perhaps the best place to start is to situate Appalachian Englishes in relation to other varieties of English. First, it is important to realize that, when used by linguists, terms like *language* and *dialect* are not as exclusive as when used by the general public and that these terms are socially rather than linguistically defined. That is, separating varieties commonly considered dialects (e.g., Southern English or African American English) is not straightforward because they are often connected. Further, even attempting to divide up varieties of related languages (e.g., Spanish or Portuguese) is not as easy as many would initially believe. Because of this complexity, any discussion of language variety should take the question of scope into consideration, since at some level of abstraction all Englishes spoken in America are similar in some ways (e.g., in contrast to English spoken in Great Britain). However, at the same time it cannot be denied that there are differences within American English, which can be measured both linguistically and perceptually. So, at some level, in the United States and thus in Appalachia as well, we are all speaking what could at least broadly be labeled American English, yet there are also clear regional (and other social) differences that have created different varieties of this English.

The most widely accepted understanding of the major regional dialects in the United States is illustrated in the maps below (figures 1.1 and 1.2) indicating four major dialect regions: North, South, Midwest, and West. This delineation of dialects is also paralleled through the general public's perception of where regional variation exists. Dennis Preston has investigated laypeople's perceptions of dialect boundaries in the United States by asking them to indicate on a map where people speak differently (cf. Preston 1997). Respondents to Preston's studies have

shown the same basic agreement seen in the maps drawn from the usage studies like Carver (1987) and Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006).

<Insert Figure 1.1>

However, these large speech regions also have a degree of subregional variation within them. While Appalachia does not show up as one of the major regional varieties, it is certainly an important area between some of these larger regions. Carver's map divides up larger areas like the South into several smaller subregions including an Upper South and the Midlands in the area of Appalachia. Others divide up these regions even further, for example Pederson (2001) delineates eighteen subregions within the South, including some version of Appalachia that he calls the eastern South Midland Highlands. Preston (1997) also shows evidence for perceptually distinct subregions, including at least a part of Appalachia. Other language attitude studies show measurable perceived differences between subregional varieties (cf. Hasty 2018 for Southern subregional differences), and Cramer (2016, chapter 5 this volume) indicates perceived differences specifically within Appalachia.

So, coming back to our question of just what Appalachian Englishes are, the answer must be that Appalachian Englishes are many things depending on the level of abstraction you are using. Appalachian Englishes are certainly part of American English. Some of them may be part of other regions like Southern English or Midwestern English. But there is also both a perceptual and linguistic truth to the idea that they are also distinct—something unique from those larger categories.

<a>Defining Appalachia

We can now move on to the more specific question of where these other regions end and

Appalachia begins. This question is quite difficult to answer, and it seems to really depend on who you ask. That is, are we talking about Appalachia geographically, politically, socially, perceptually, or linguistically?

Geographic Definitions of Appalachia

Much of what unites this large subregion together is the shared connection to the mountains. Geographically, the Appalachian Mountains are sometimes claimed (Fenneman 1917) as a geological whole stretching from northern Alabama all the way to Newfoundland, Canada, and encompassing several other smaller mountain ranges including the Great Smoky Mountains, the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Cumberland Mountains, the Poconos, the Allegheny Mountains, and the Laurentian Mountains. From Springer Mountain, Georgia, in the South to Mount Katahdin, Maine, in the North, most of these mountain ranges are stitched together by the famous Appalachian Trail, running approximately 2,190 miles through fourteen states (Appalachian Trail Conservancy 2018). This area is quite an expanse, but perhaps we can shorten it a bit since many geologists would place the northern boundary of the Appalachian Mountains in southern New York, given the differences in the structure and estimated age of the mountains north of this line (i.e., the Laurentians, Alleghenies, and Poconos) compared to the rest of these mountain ranges (Goddard Earth Sciences Data 2009). With this geographic definition of Appalachia, the region would be massive, stretching across at least part of nine or ten states. Even so, just having a common geographic form like a mountain range or a famous hiking trail does not necessarily give rise to the determination of a region, at least not a sociocultural region.

Political Definitions of Appalachia

In 1960, as a reaction to social problems of low income, high unemployment, low educational levels, and slow population growth in many parts of their states, governors from West Virginia,

Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia formed the Conference of Appalachian Governors and petitioned President Kennedy for federal aid (Roosevelt 1964). Therefore, one official definition of Appalachia could include at least parts of just those states. In an attempt to understand the scope of the problem and propose a plan for federal aid, in 1963 President Kennedy formed the President's Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC), which, along with cabinet officials, included governors from the states of Pennsylvania and Ohio. So, these two states could be added to the definition of Appalachia. Further, the original PARC report itself provided a description of what was officially meant by the term *Appalachia*: "a mountain land boldly upthrust between the prosperous Eastern seaboard and the industrial Middle West—a highland region which sweeps diagonally across ten states from northern Pennsylvania to northern Alabama" (Roosevelt 1964, xv).

Based on the PARC report, in 1965 President Johnson submitted legislation to Congress that was passed as the Appalachian Regional Development Act and formally established the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to carry out the programs and plans contained in the legislation. Within this act, a final legal definition of Appalachia is given. The act lists specific counties within the states that are to be considered part of this legal definition of Appalachia that would be able to receive aid from the ARC. Counties in part of all of the states from the original PARC are included: West Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, as well as the addition of certain counties in New York, South Carolina, and Mississippi (Appalachian Regional Development Act 1965). This final, legal definition including 420 counties in thirteen states is the definition currently being followed by the ARC (ARC 2018).

While these political definitions may make the boundaries of Appalachia appear rather

clear cut, there were questions from early on whether this prescribed thirteen-state area actually constituted a region socially. To account for these differences, based on “contiguous regions of relatively homogeneous characteristics (topography, demographics, and economics)” (ARC 2009), the ARC currently maintains a five-way subregional distinction within the official definition of Appalachian: Northern (Pennsylvania and New York), North Central (West Virginia and Ohio), Central (eastern Kentucky, extreme southwestern Virginia, northcentral Tennessee), South Central (southwest Virginia, northeast Tennessee, and North Carolina), and Southern (South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi) (see map). However, ARC is a politically created organization, and thus their definition of the region should be considered with that mindset. For example, Watts (1978, 7) notes that the additions of counties in New York and Mississippi were for “political reasons” rather than cultural or geographic cohesion and that these additions “resulted in a loss of both physical and socio-economic uniformity.”

<Insert Figure 1.2>

Perceptual Definitions of Appalachia

Using different measures of cultural unity, sociologists and geographers have shown an Appalachian cultural area somewhat different from the ARC political definition, with different subregional breakdowns. These studies have attempted to gain a more accurate picture of Appalachia by studying people’s perceptions of Appalachia and its location, for as Batteau (1990) argues, in many ways Appalachia is a social construct. In a large-scale study (*N* 2,397), Ulack and Raitz (1981) ask college students from both within and outside the region where Appalachia exists. They find a much smaller perceived Appalachian region, with only a 10 percent overall agreement with the ARC delineation, which excludes Mississippi, and with less than 20 percent of the respondents including Alabama, Georgia, Pennsylvania, or New York,

calling into question the far northern and southern edges from the ARC definition. Ulack and Raitz show a very small core of 80 percent agreement centered on southern West Virginia (basically Mercer County); a larger 60 percent agreement line including West Virginia, southeast Kentucky, southwest Virginia, northeast Tennessee, and western North Carolina; and lastly a 40 percent agreement adding in small portions of southern Pennsylvania, northwest South Carolina, and northern Georgia. Thus, their study describes a perceptual center in the central Southern parts of Appalachia, indicating a northern and southern subregional distinction.

Cooper, Knotts, and Elders (2011) take a different approach and study respondents' self-proclaimed Appalachian identity by counting the names of businesses including *Appalachia(n)*. From this self-naming of Appalachia, Cooper, Knotts, and Elders find a three-way distinction similar to Ulack and Raitz, with a core area of Appalachia in northeast Tennessee, western North Carolina, southeast Kentucky, southwest Virginia, and extreme southern West Virginia. Next, they identify a larger area including more of North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia along with south and middle West Virginia. Finally, they identify a third area on the southern and northern edges including parts of northern Georgia, northeast Alabama, northern Mississippi, and northwest South Carolina in the south as well as southeast Ohio, northern West Virginia, central Pennsylvania, and southern New York in the north. Thus, they find a self-defined, major perceptual area of Appalachia positioned in the central Southern states (which here notably excludes most of West Virginia), a second area including slightly more of these core states as well as most of West Virginia, and a marginal perceptual area on the far southern and northern edges. So, while the media and the general public may lump all of Appalachia together, it is clear from the research that there are differences throughout Appalachia.

The people within this region may even hold quite different beliefs about being

considered part of Appalachia. Hazen and Fluharty (2004) mention how many of their northern West Virginian respondents do not necessarily identify with the label of *Appalachian*, perhaps from the great stigma attached to the region or, as discussed below, from competing ideological associations with nearby northern urban regions. Additionally, people in southern parts of Appalachia may not realize that they live in an area believed to be different from the rest of the South until they travel outside it. For example, I grew up in a small farming community in northeast Tennessee. Though I could see the Appalachian Mountains from my bedroom window and lived just a few miles from the Appalachian Fairground and many local businesses with *Appalachia* in their name,¹ it was not until I went to college outside Appalachia in middle Tennessee (on the western side of the Cumberland Plateau) and then later to graduate school in Auburn, Alabama, that I realized I was from somewhere more than just Southern. People in middle Tennessee and Alabama, who I believed to be “fellow Southerners,” consistently pointed out how differently I talked from them, specifically mentioning how I pronounced words like *price* (see /aɪ/ ungliding below and in Reed chapter 2). Thus, the perception of Appalachia and differences within it may be driven by factors such as proximity to other contrasting regions, and perceptions of Appalachia are also intimately tied to personal identity construction (Greene 2010; Reed 2014; Cramer 2016).

Linguistic Definitions of Appalachian English(es)

While these geographic and political perceptions of Appalachia are important, this book is primarily interested in understanding the language differences in the region. Wolfram and Christian’s (1975, 1976) pioneering work *Appalachian Speech* is the first and most extensive discussion of language within Appalachia. Wolfram and Christian describe close to eighty different linguistic features cutting across all the levels of grammar: phonological (sounds),

lexical (words), and morphosyntactic (sentences).

As Wolfram and Christian note, many of these features were either known at the time or have been found since to be present in other varieties of American English, especially Southern English but also other nonstandard varieties of American English (e.g., nonstandard agreement, regularization of verbs, multiple negation). From the beginning, Wolfram and Christian (1976, 29–30) note that their definition of English in Appalachia should be qualified by the region they were focused on (specifically Mercer and Monroe Counties in southern West Virginia) and that other social factors (since they were focused solely on rural, working-class speakers) would certainly show variation with other Appalachian varieties. However, given its breadth of coverage, their work has often been taken as emblematic of a homogenous Appalachian English containing every feature described in their book.

Wolfram (1984) explicitly tries to head off such monolithic views, stating that, like all language, Appalachian Englishes would exhibit variation and change governed by social factors like class, age, gender, rurality, and style. While Wolfram and Christian (1976) and others have suggested that there may be some small set of linguistic features that could be identified as uniquely Appalachian, Wolfram (1984, 223) notes that what is perceived as Appalachian is probably best understood as implicational sets of features rather than a unique group of features not shared with other varieties. Thus, Appalachian Englishes on the whole should be thought of as some quantitative combination of the features mentioned in the present work, and linguistic variation within Appalachia should be expected. See the later chapters of this book for other categories of variation, especially by ethnicity and gender. The remainder of this chapter will outline some of the subregional differences within Appalachian Englishes.

<a>Subregional Variation in Appalachian Englishes

In light of the discussion above, I understand why scholars divide Appalachia into at least three parts following the distinctions made in Ulack and Raitz (1981) and Cooper, Knotts, and Elders (2011). Yet given that the far edges of what the ARC has called Appalachia (New York in the North and Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia in the South) have been called into question in the perceptual studies of geographers, sociologists, and linguists, this discussion will not consider these outer edges to be a major part of the region. Rather, I limit my understanding of the subregions of Appalachia into a more basic two-way distinction between what I call *Northern Appalachia*, including West Virginia and southern Pennsylvania, and *Southern Appalachia*, including southeast Kentucky, southwest Virginia, northeast Tennessee, and western North Carolina. This distinction combines the ARC subregions of Central and South Central together as Southern Appalachia and North Central and Northern together as Northern Appalachia.

Major Phonological Differences

<c>/aɪ/ Ungliding

When discussing specific Appalachian features involved in subregional variation, /aɪ/ ungliding is perhaps the most clear cut and recognizable. /aɪ/ ungliding involves the reduction or deletion of the upglide in the vowel in words like *pride* [praɪd], pronounced as something like “prahd” [pra:d] (see Reed chapter 2). This feature is not confined to Appalachia as it is also a prominent feature of Southern English and one of the most noticeable features identifying a speaker as Southern in general. Because of the salience of this feature, in the *Atlas of North American English*, Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006) use /aɪ/ ungliding to define the boundary of Southern English. In modern Southern English, the ungliding of /aɪ/ is primarily confined to words where it occurs before voiced consonants (like *pride*) or at the end of a word (like *pry*). However, one of the socially distinguishing features of at least some Appalachian varieties is the ungliding of

/aɪ/ before voiceless consonants like in the word *price* (Thomas 2001).

Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006) primarily confine prevoiceless /aɪ/ ungliding to what they call the Inland South (southeast Kentucky, southwest Virginia, northeast Tennessee, western North Carolina, and some parts of extreme southern West Virginia), which is what I have called Southern Appalachia. Several studies of Appalachian Englishes note prevoiceless /aɪ/ ungliding in Southern Appalachia (Wolfram and Christian 1976; Irons 2007b; Greene 2010; Reed 2014), while in Northern Appalachia /aɪ/ ungliding is confined primarily to prevoiced and word-final environments (Hazen and Fluharty 2004). /aɪ/ ungliding has been shown to be sensitive to variation in age (Irons 2007b; Reed 2014), urban/rural distinction (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006; Irons 2007b), as well as Appalachian identity (Greene 2010; Reed 2014). Therefore, it is understandable that this feature would be one of the most recognizable differences between Northern Appalachia and Southern Appalachia.

<c>/æ/ Breaking

Another major distinction between Northern and Southern Appalachian speech is the “breaking” of the vowel sound in words like *pass* [pæs] into a diphthong pronunciation including an additional upglide, resulting in a pronunciation with two or even three syllables. For example, *pass* is pronounced as “pa.ahs” [pæ:ʰəs]. This breaking of /æ/ is primarily what people perceive as the “Southern Drawl” (Feagin 1987). This feature, as well as the vowel lengthening in other parts of the Southern Vowel Shift (Reed chapter 2), has given rise to the popular stereotype that Southerners talk slow.

Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006) show /æ/ breaking confined to the South and going no farther north than Tennessee and North Carolina. While /æ/ breaking is not specifically unique to Appalachia, it does help to create another important distinction between Northern and Southern

Appalachia since Southern Appalachia participates in /æ/ breaking while Northern Appalachia does not.

<c>Low-Back Vowel Merger

A third major phonological difference between Northern and Southern Appalachia is participation in the low-back vowel merger, where the vowel sounds in words like *cot* [kat] and *caught* [kɔt] are merged together and both pronounced as *cot* [kat]. The low-back vowel merger is quite widespread across the West and some areas of the North but generally not in the Midwest or the South (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006). With Appalachia in the middle of these regions, participation in the merger is variable.

Earlier studies (Hartman 1985) did not indicate Appalachian participation in the low-back vowel merger; however, the current situation has changed with this feature showing subregional variation. Hazen (2005) reports extensive adoption of the low-back vowel merger in West Virginia and Labov, Ash, and Boberg (2006) show this merger in most of the area I have labeled as Northern Appalachia. Southern Appalachia shows much less participation in the low-back vowel merger. However, Irons (2007a) indicates that participation in the merger may be changing for at least parts of Southern Appalachia. His study in Kentucky shows that, while there is still some resistance, the low-back vowel merger is gaining ground, especially with younger speakers. Thus, this phonological feature points to variation within Appalachian Englishes as well as some unity, for perhaps Southern Appalachia is just a few generations behind Northern Appalachia in fully adopting the merger.

Subregional Comparisons

Beyond these phonological distinctions, little formal study has directly compared subregional Appalachian varieties to each other. This hole in the scholarship is partly because of the

logistical constraints on collecting sociolinguistic data in an area as large as Appalachia. Many studies have confined themselves to a single community of Appalachia (e.g., Wolfram and Christian 1976) in order to have the adequate time and resources to devote to the study. As Hazen and Fluharty (2004) point out, it is not necessarily a problem that previous studies have only focused on a single area within Appalachia; however, they call for studies of other areas within Appalachia in order to gain a complete picture of the region. In an attempt to add to our understanding of Appalachian subregional variation, Becky Childs and I set out to do a large-scale survey of variation within Appalachia, comparing Northern and Southern Appalachia, as well as Southern English. The following is a brief report of the preliminary results of that study (see Hasty and Childs 2016 for the specifics).

Our study utilized an online survey² that presented respondents from Northern Appalachia (*n* 104), Southern Appalachia (*n* 114), and the non-Appalachian South (*n* 115) with twenty-nine features associated with Appalachian Englishes (see companion website for the complete list) cutting across all levels of the grammar (lexical, phonological, and morphosyntactic). We asked the respondents to report both their usage of and their familiarity with hearing these features.

Appalachian Englishes and Southern English

Grouping both subregions of Appalachia together to compare with the Southern respondents, there is an indication that Appalachian Englishes are something unique from Southern English. Lexically, some traditional words like *bald* (a mountain above the tree line) and *poke* (a sack) are primarily used only in Appalachian Englishes, yet more distinctions are seen in the phonological features. While both Appalachian and Southern respondents report high usage of the Southern Vowel Shift (see Reed chapter 2), the Appalachian respondents lead the South for hearing /aI/

ungliding and back vowel fronting (e.g., pronouncing the vowel in *goat* [got] more in the front of the mouth closer to the vowel in *but* [bət] or *face* [fes]). These responses indicate that Appalachian respondents seem to be paying more attention to the first and last stages of the Southern Vowel Shift compared to their general Southern counterparts, perhaps an indication of the Southern Vowel Shift's continued importance in Appalachian identity construction (Irons 2007b; Greene 2010; Reed 2014; Hazen 2018).

Additionally, two morphosyntactic items are led by the combined Appalachian groups: positive *anymore* (*anymore* used in a non-negative sentence, e.g., *It seems to rain a lot here, anymore*) and zero plural measurement (lack of the plural morpheme *-s* on measurement terms, e.g., *That board is five mile_ long*). So, overall, there appears to be an indication of subtle differences between Appalachian Englishes and Southern English, giving some credence to Wolfram and Christian's (1976) belief that there may be some set of combined features that can be uniquely identified as Appalachian Englishes.

Southern Appalachia, Northern Appalachia, and Southern English

Yet, the relationship between the Appalachian subregions and the general South is rather complex. Though the Appalachian subregions pattern together for some features, often we see Southern Appalachia behaving more like the South, while Northern Appalachia patterns differently from both of these regions. For example, Southern Appalachia patterns with the South for greater use of several traditional words like *y'all*, *carry* (for *take*, e.g., *Can you carry me to the store?*), *tote* (for *transport*, e.g., *Tote this to the barn for me*), and *yonder* (as a measure of distance, e.g., *It is over yonder*). Additionally, Southern Appalachia speakers pattern closely with the South for greater use of morphosyntactic features like the use of the double modal (two modal auxiliary verbs in the same sentence, e.g., *I might could take you*) and *fixin to* (*about to*,

e.g., *It looks like it's fixin to rain*), while Northern Appalachia again lags behind. In fact, the only individual feature that is led by the Northern Appalachian respondents is usage of positive *anymore*. This finding may be expected given this feature's early attestations in areas of Northern Appalachia and some northern Midwestern states (Murray 1993).

Southern Appalachia and Northern Appalachia

The differences between Southern and Northern Appalachia become clearer when comparing the subregions directly to each other. For the lexical items, Southern Appalachia leads Northern Appalachia in using many traditional lexical items including *y'uns*, *y'all*, *poke*, and *bald*.

Phonologically, as stated above, Southern Appalachia and Northern Appalachia pattern together for the first and last stages of the Southern Vowel Shift, yet for other stages of this shift, Southern Appalachian respondents show greater usage of lax and tense vowel merging before /l/ (e.g., *feel* and *fill* pronounced the same). Additionally, Southern Appalachia leads Northern Appalachia in the usage of the *pen/pin* merger (e.g., *pen* and *pin* pronounced the same).

The differences between Southern and Northern Appalachia are most distinct when looking at the morphosyntactic features. Southern Appalachia leads Northern Appalachia in use of several features: double modals, *fixin to*, and *a*-prefixing (e.g., *I was a-running down the road*). The well-known Appalachian *a*-prefixing being maintained in Southern Appalachia is especially interesting when compared to previous work showing it to be dying out in Northern Appalachia (Hazen, Butcher, and King 2010).

As indicated in previous studies (e.g., Hazen 2006), it seems that Northern Appalachia is losing many of the traditional features previously associated with Appalachia, yet in Southern Appalachia many of these features are being retained (e.g., Childs and Mallinson 2004; Irons 2007b; Hasty 2011; Reed 2014). We can perhaps make more sense of the variation between

Northern and Southern Appalachia by looking at some social differences between these subregions.

<a>Regional Proximity and Urbanity

One important social difference between the subregions is their proximity to other regions, especially the South. For Northern Appalachia, Pennsylvania is located completely outside what linguists agree to be the South (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006), and while West Virginia is often included with the South, it is quite far removed from the rest of the South (not to mention its unique social history, becoming a state by seceding from Virginia at the onset of the Civil War). West Virginia is a border state between the South and the Midwest and even the North, and because of its proximity to these other regions, West Virginians often have to negotiate an identity between one of these other regions (Hazen 2005). In contrast, the Southern Appalachia state of Kentucky is also a border state with a complicated identity, torn between the Midwest and the South, yet the Appalachian areas of southeast Kentucky are much closer to Southern states like Tennessee and Virginia than to Ohio (see Cramer 2016 and Cramer chapter 5). The other states I have labeled as Southern Appalachia are all unequivocally located in the South and thus have proximities to subregions inside the South rather than other speech regions. Proximity is important given that linguistic distinctions are often most notable when given a contrast. In Southern Appalachia, the closest contrast is Southern English, while in Northern Appalachia it is a Midwestern or Northern variety.

It is also important to consider Appalachia's connection to urban areas. As Wolfram (1984) points out, the urban/rural distinction should be taken into consideration for language variation in Appalachia, and Cramer (2016) discusses the importance of urbanity in Kentucky for a perceived allegiance to regions other than Appalachia, like the Midwest. Technically speaking,

few places in Appalachia, if any, could truly be considered urban other than Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (population greater than two million³). The US Census Bureau primarily uses population density to identify urban areas with a threshold of at least 1,000 people per square mile (Ratcliffe et al. 2016). With this measure, the majority of Appalachia is decidedly rural, with population densities lower than many other regions of the United States. Based on the 2000 census data, the only county in Appalachia that could officially be considered an urbanized area is Allegheny County in Northern Appalachian Pennsylvania (population density 1,756/square mile) anchored by Pittsburgh, while the only other counties that even come close are Knox County, Tennessee, (population density 752/square mile) centered around Knoxville and Hamilton County, Tennessee, (population density 568/square mile) centered around Chattanooga. All other counties within Appalachia contain fewer than 500 people per square mile (ARC 2000). With Appalachia being so rural, perceptions of urbanity and proximity to perceived urban areas are important to consider and further highlight subregional differences.

In a region that is decidedly rural, perceptions of urbanity and what constitutes “the big city” are certainly different from other, more populated regions. In much of Northern Appalachia, there is a rather close proximity to true urban areas, all of which are clearly outside of the South: Pittsburgh, PA; Philadelphia, PA; Columbus, OH; and Washington, DC.⁴ That is, Northern Appalachia is closer to Northern and Midwestern urban centers than to urban areas in the South. For example, from the center of West Virginia, the closest urban areas (within 300–400 miles) are Washington, DC, Columbus, OH, and Pittsburgh, PA. However, in Southern Appalachia the closest urban areas are either the much smaller Appalachian cities of Knoxville, TN, (population 186,239 within city limits and 303,625 in metro) and Asheville, NC, (population 89,121 within city limits and 424,858 in metro) or larger urban areas in the general South like

Charlotte, NC; Raleigh, NC; and Atlanta, GA.

These urban differences, then, help to explain why in Northern Appalachia many canonical, vernacular features of Appalachia are dying out and why in our survey Northern Appalachia is often not patterning with Southern Appalachia or the South. Many Northern Appalachian speakers are apparently beginning to align more with non-Southern varieties, perhaps targeting urban varieties from outside the region. However, in Southern Appalachia with its proximity to the South and to urban areas either within Appalachia or the South, many younger speakers have been instead revitalizing some of the older Appalachian features (see Hasty and Childs 2013).

<a>Conclusion

So, while we have seen that Appalachia is a unique region historically associated with the larger South, we have also seen that there are subregional differences within Appalachia. While there are certainly still features (or perhaps a certain constellation of features) that may unify Appalachia as a whole, there is also good evidence to propose the plural Appalachian Englishes view of this speech region. I have sketched out this variation here in terms of a Northern and Southern divide, and many of these subregional differences seem to stem from proximities to other regions (i.e., the Midwest, the North, or the South). There is also an indication that urbanity and perceptions of the closest “big city” may be at work in subregional variation, especially as areas of Appalachia become increasingly less isolated. More research on variation within Appalachia is needed, particularly research directly comparing different subregions and different constructions of urbanity. Additionally, social identity is keenly important to the variation seen throughout Appalachia, and any true understanding of Appalachian variation must take individuals’ attitudes about who they are into account, as these have a direct bearing on both the

uniqueness and the variation of Appalachian Englishes.

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¹ The nearby city of Kingsport, Tennessee, was the second-most self-identified Appalachian city in Cooper, Knotts, and Elders (2011).

² For access to the survey, see <http://snap.coastal.edu/snapwebhost/s.asp?k=142082821915>.

³ Including the greater metro area. Population estimates given are according to the 2016 US Census unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Preston (1997) shows Washington, DC, associated with northeastern cities and thus not a part of the South.

