

The Old is New Again:  
Curvilinear Patterns of Linguistic Change in Appalachia

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Appalachian English is often thought of as a more traditional form of speech associated with the older generation (Dial 1972, Montgomery 1979, Wolfram & Christian 1976). However, recent research indicates that traditional Appalachian English features are actually in flux in the region with some dying out (Hazen 2006, Hazen, Butcher, & King 2010, Hazen, Hamilton, & Vacovsky 2011), other remaining stable (Hazen 2008), and others showing an increase among the younger generations (Hazen 2005, Childs & Mallinson 2004). This variability, especially among younger speakers, brings about questions regarding both the linguistic and social factors at play in the reclaiming of traditional, relic dialect forms (Childs & VanHerk 2013). Keeping with the conference theme, we discuss the ways which young speakers in two distinct (geographic and ethnic) Appalachian communities are bridging the past and the present, combining the old with the new. We consider data from North Carolina and Tennessee where younger speakers are using Appalachian English features more like their grandparents and discuss the curvilinear pattern of linguistic change (Wolfram 2007) that emerges in both.

This paper presents the analysis of phonological (i.e., consonant cluster reduction, post-vocalic *r*-lessness, back vowel fronting, and /ay/ monophthongization) and morphosyntactic data (i.e., 3<sup>rd</sup> plural -s and double modals) from these two areas of Appalachia, and both confirm a movement toward several Appalachian English norms among the young speakers. We believe this curvilinear pattern is indicative of a “recycling” of Appalachian features similar to the revival of Cajun features among the young reported by Dubois and Horvath (1999) as well as the revitalization and reappropriation of particularly salient linguistic features by younger speakers in Newfoundland (Childs & VanHerk 2013). We argue that this revival is not one that happens on a wholesale level. Rather it is the most salient features and those features considered the most local that are recycled by younger speakers but with constraints that differ from those active in the previous generations. We suggest then that curvilinear patterns of linguistic change are more than just revivals of old forms, they are new manifestations based on the past yet moving the community forward within the global linguistic landscape.

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# The Old is New Again: Curvilinear Patterns of Linguistic Change in Appalachia

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# Appalachian English

- Traditional/heritage dialect associated with older speakers
  - Dial 1972, Montgomery 1979, Wolfram & Christian 1976
- Overrepresentation of West Virginia
  - Older features dying out
    - Hazen 2006, Hazen, Butcher, & King 2010, Hazen, Hamilton, & Vacovsky 2011
- Underrepresentation of Southern Appalachia
  - Tennessee and North Carolina
  - Young speakers reclaiming older features

# Research Questions

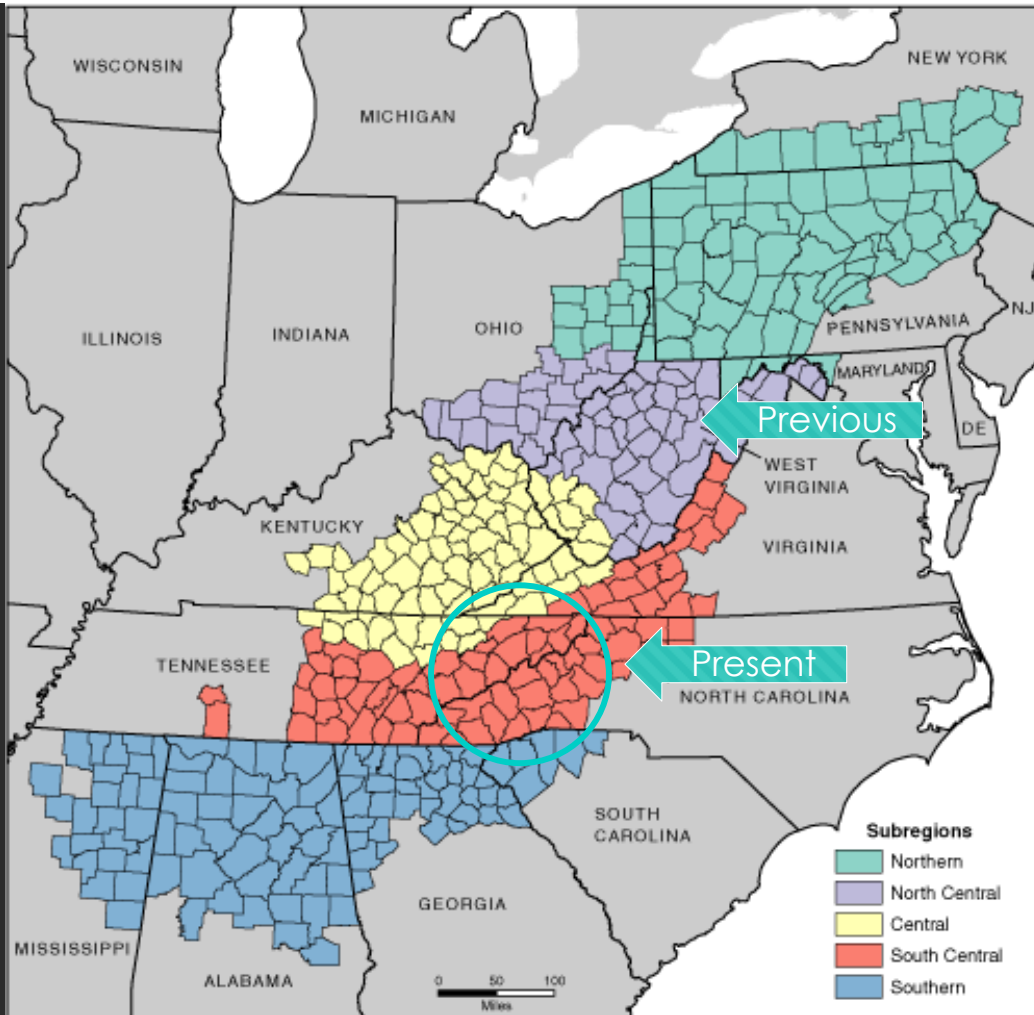
- What can a curvilinear pattern of change tell us about a linguistic feature's "life and trajectory"?
- What features are most likely to appear in a curvilinear distribution across a community and region?
- What makes this region of Appalachia different than others linguistically?
- What are the reasons that young people may be reclaiming AppE features?

# Other examples of Reclaiming Features

- Cajun English (Dubois and Horvath 1999)
  - Revival of Cajun features among the Young in response to a changing view of Cajun identity
- Newfoundland English (Van Herk and Childs)
  - Longstanding and fairly iconic features (– s attachment and interdental stopping) re-emerge in Young
  - With different linguistic constraints, and for social capital and communicative goals

# Loss of Traditional Features in WV

- Features dying out
  - Subject/verb concord and demonstrative pronouns (Hazen 2006)
  - Demonstrative *them* (Hazen, Hamilton, & Vacovsky 2011)
  - Perfective *done*, *for-to* infinitivals, *a*-prefixing, *was leveling* (Hazen, Butcher, & King 2010)
- Features remaining
  - pre-voiceless /ai/ glide reduction (Hazen 2006)
  - Alveolar (ING) (Hazen 2008)
  - Pleonastic pronouns, *pin/pen* merger (Hazen, Butcher, & King 2010)
- Suggests younger Appalachian speakers are developing a new dialect

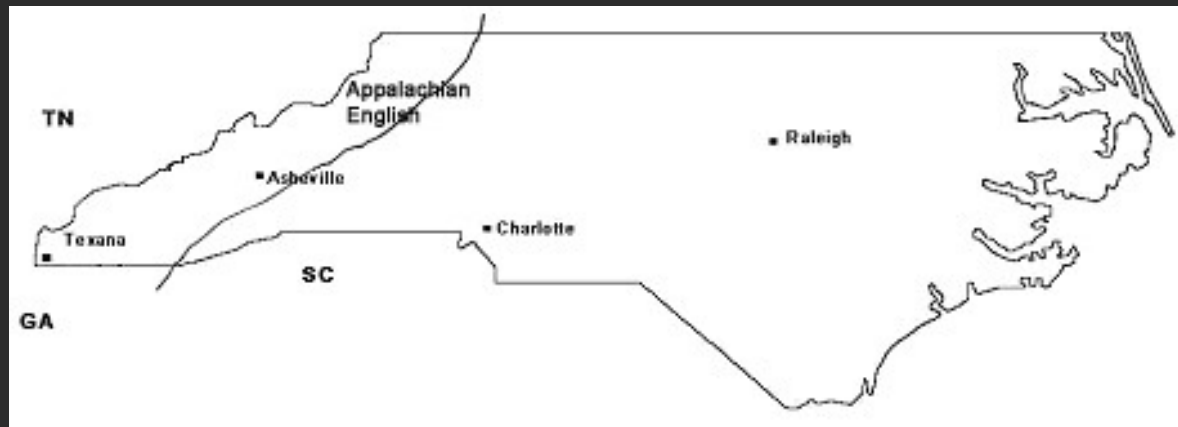


Map by: Appalachian Regional Commission, November 2009.

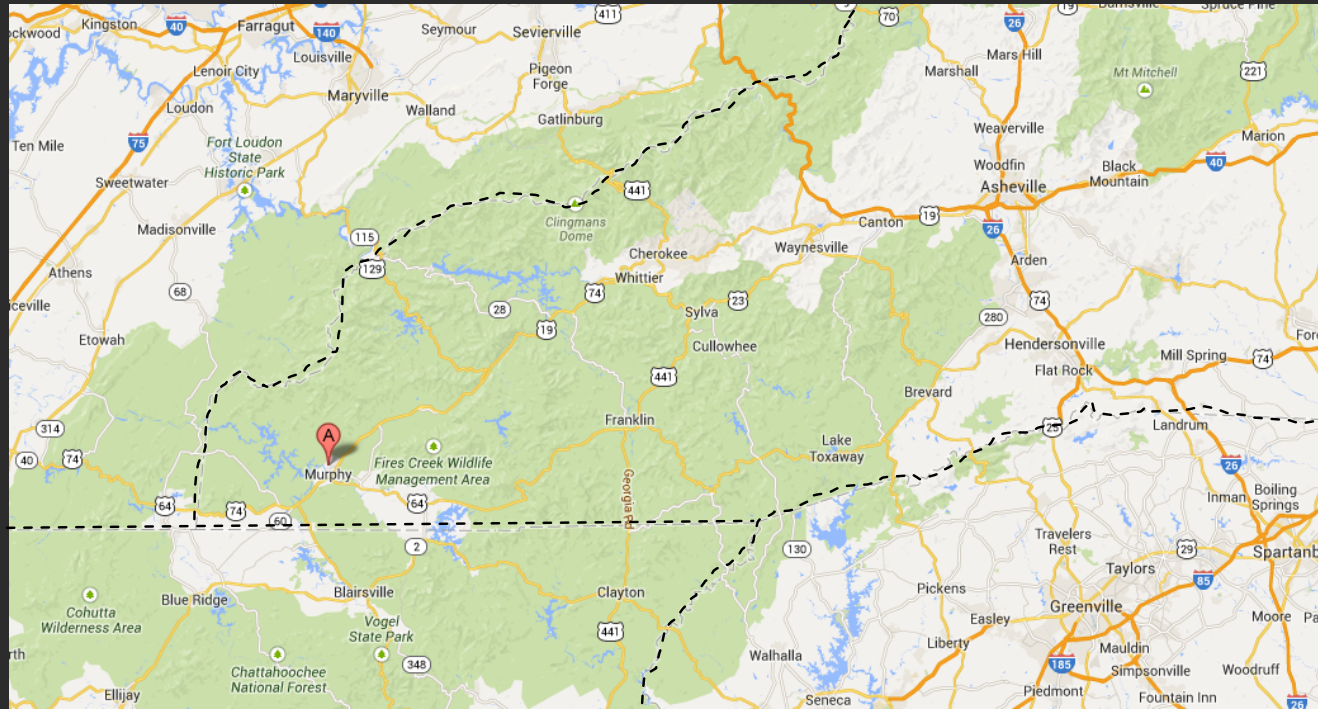
# Appalachia



# Texana, NC



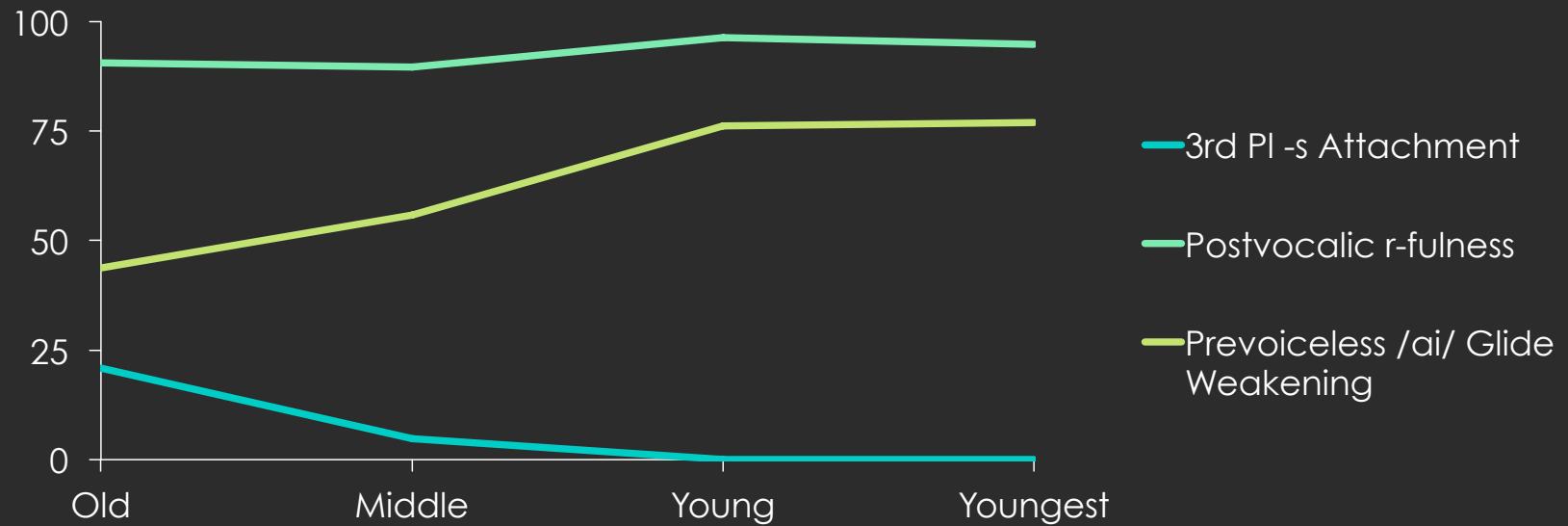
# Texana, NC



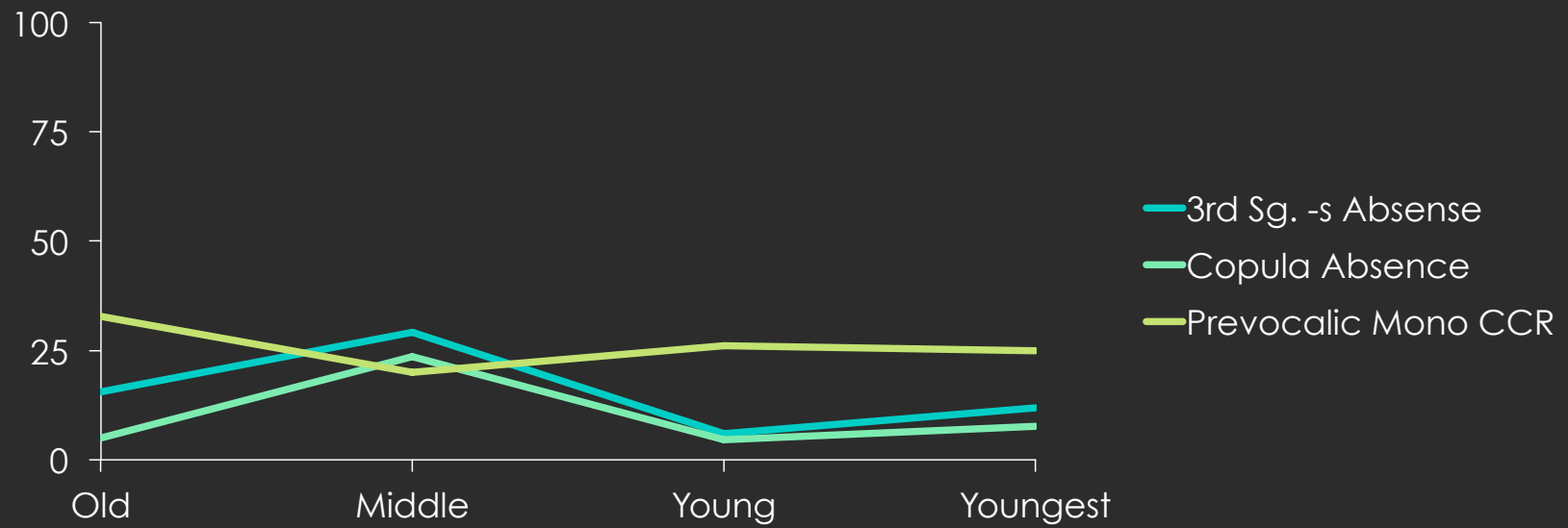
# Texana, NC

- Appalachian African American community
  - NC Smoky Mountains (Nantahala and Murphy)
- Historically isolated
  - Recently more contact with surrounding communities and urban centers
- High resident pride
- Identify as Appalachian and African American
- Examination of AppE and AAE features in the community (Childs and Mallinson 2004)

# AppE Variables



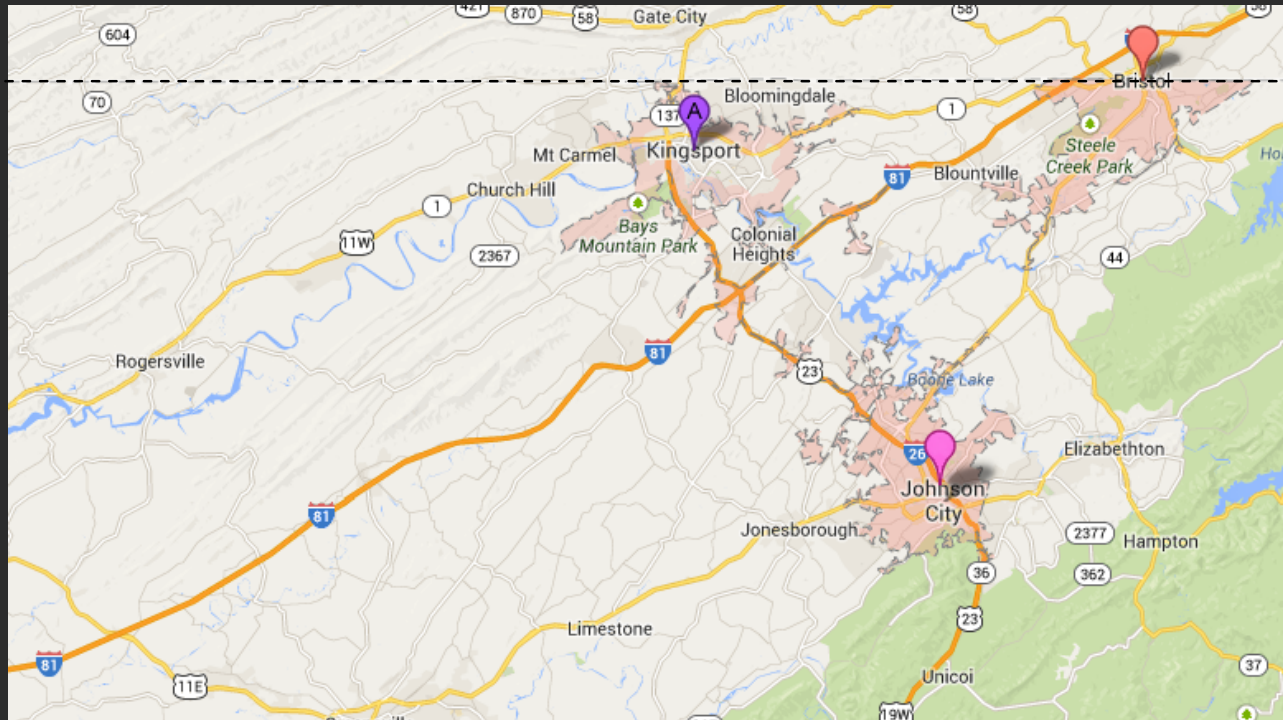
# AAE Variables



# Results from Texana

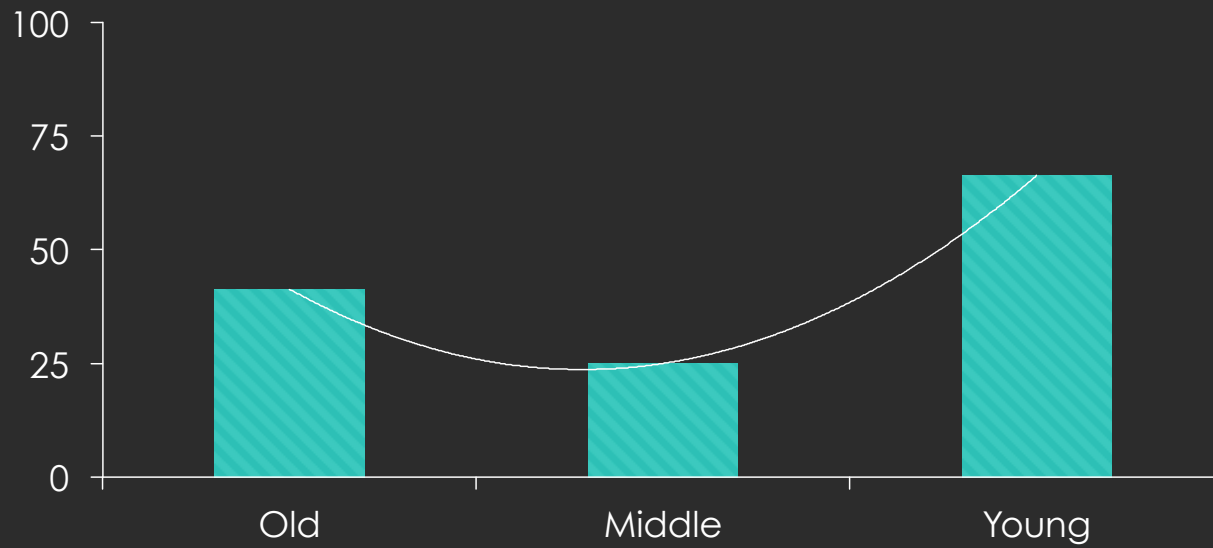
- Rates of AAE linguistic features are generally declining among young speakers (curvilinear pattern) after being quite high frequency in their parents' generation
  - CCR stays relatively stable across generations but saliency is most likely at play here
- At the same time, rates of AppE linguistic features are generally on the rise among young speakers
  - We see young speakers moving to higher frequency use of AppE features than their parents and using AAE features less frequently than their parents or grandparents
    - In Atlanta they say "shut the do, here we say shut the door"

# Tri-Cities, TN



- Kingsport, Johnson City, and Bristol (490,238)
- Foothills of Appalachia
- Less isolated
  - I-81 and I-26
- Employment
  - Eastman Chemical (Kodak), Mead Paper, Pet Dairy
  - East Tennessee State University

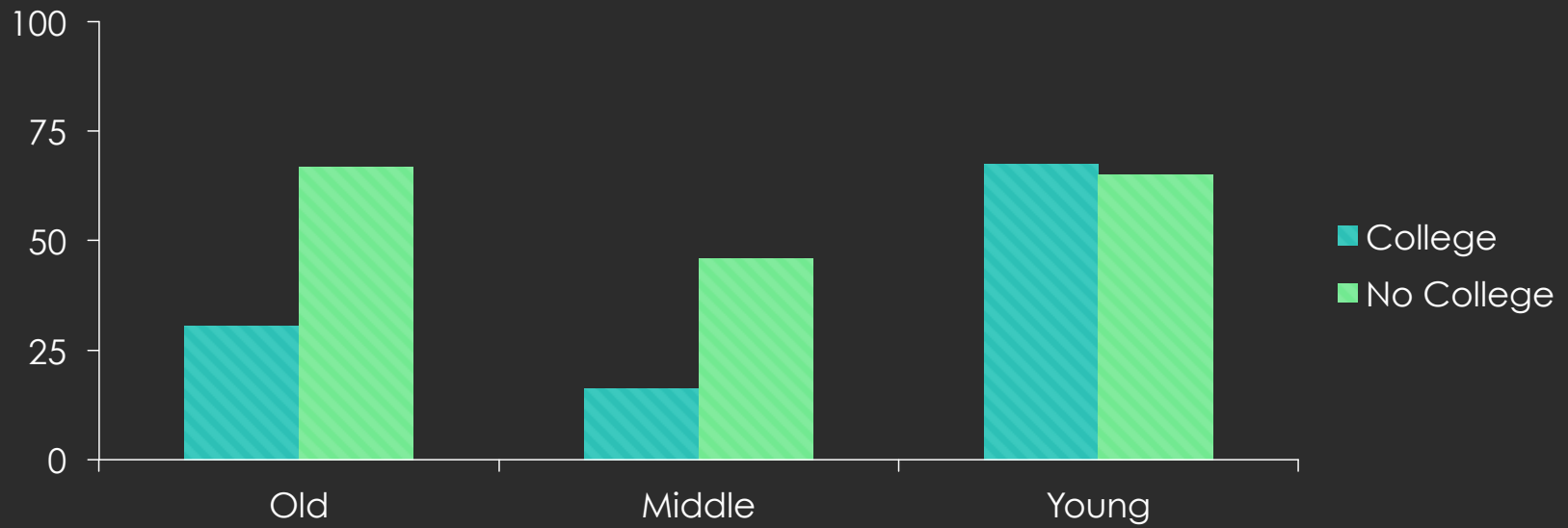
# Acceptance of Double Modals



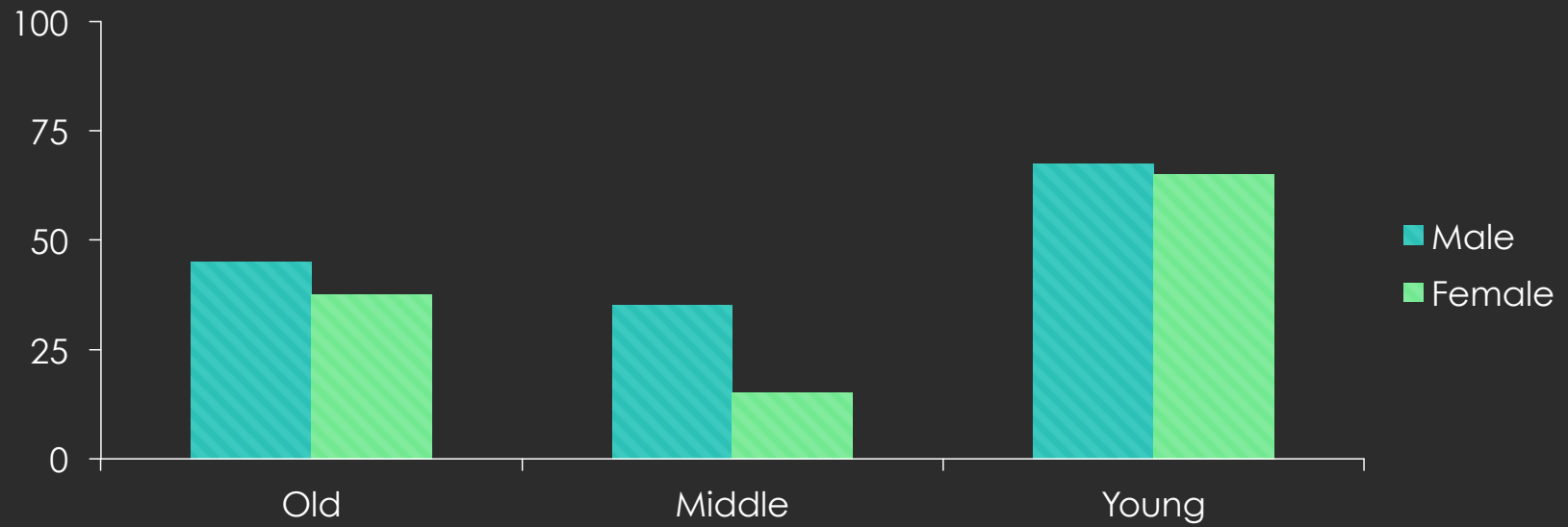
Hasty (2011)



# Age and Education



# Age and Gender



# Tri-Cities Results

- Greater acceptability of DMs by the Young (curvilinear pattern)
- Social factors affecting previous generations not influencing the Young
- Indicates not just a return to a traditional feature but a new adoption
  - With different social meaning than in previous generations
- The Young see the DM without the apparent negative social evaluation that it has had in previous generations
- Indicates a new construction of App identity from older forms

# More Appalachian?

- In Texana we see young AA leaving AAE features and adopting some more highly marked AppE features (/ai/ glide weakening, r-fullness)
  - Data from another study shows the young males performing r-lessness in written speech, but the written representations do not match with their spoken results
- In Tri-cities we see the Young reclaiming an older feature with new meaning
  - Stripped of any negative connotations
- Saliency seems to have a key role, they know that the features are “local”
- Perhaps the emergence of a new Appalachian identity, one that is not at odds with urban or young

# Conclusions

- Back to our original questions:
- What can a curvilinear pattern of change tell us about a linguistic feature's "life and trajectory"?
  - What is a highly salient feature
  - Features that have undergone some type of social reconditioning
  - More importantly this pattern can tell us a great deal about the ways that a community feels about a feature, the way that they see it as representative
- What features are most likely to appear in a curvilinear distribution across a community and region?
  - Iconic features or those are held in high esteem by one group

# Conclusions

- What makes this region of Appalachia different than others linguistically?
  - Sub-regional differences in Appalachia and Appalachian identity
  - Not coal mining communities
  - Contrast in WV with a Northern Urban Center vs Contrast in Southern Appalachia with Southern communities
- What are the reasons that young people may be reclaiming AppE features?
  - Construction of a new identity
  - New social meanings

# Future Work

- Looking at a more robust feature set and considering saliency as an important indicator in a reclamation process
- Examining other communities in Southern Appalachia and looking for patterns
- Investigation of folk language materials to find indicators about saliency