

ABSTRACT
A Vernacular Baseline for Appalachian English

The academic excitement which surrounds some nonstandard varieties at times pushes linguistic descriptions towards the vernacular end of the continuum. For a variety like Appalachian English, popular characterizations focus exclusively on only the most vernacular examples, and many not familiar with this variety assume that these extremes are actually the norms, although recently that trend has been reversed (Montgomery 2006). In part, sociolinguists have not corrected this characterization: For example, from their sample of 52 Southern Appalachian speakers, Wolfram and Christian (1976) provided quantitative evidence of (ING) variation for six speakers, all of whom produced the alveolar variant at rates above 80 percent.

In order to provide a contemporary and more broadly-based description of Appalachian English and its place in the Midland (Murray and Simon 2006), this paper investigates the (ING) variable in Appalachian speech, explaining both the linguistic and social constraints on variation. Data from 60 West Virginia speakers are qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed for grammatical context of the *-ing*, preceding or following place of articulation, sociogeographic orientation, age, sex, ethnicity, social class, and interview context.

Results indicate that the only linguistic conditioning factor for this speech community is the syntactic category. This finding aligns with Labov (1989, 2001) and Houston (1985) where the verbal progressive context favors the alveolar variant and the gerundial context favors the velar variant (e.g. *She is walk[ɪn]; walk[ɪŋ] is fun*). When Wolfram and Christian did their research in the early 1970s, the grammatical constraint on (ING) was not known to scholars, and thus no indication is given in their work as to its patterning in their data. Socially, the patterns of variation are considerably more complex than the grammatical patterns. Reflecting the sociogeographic boundary found with lexical and phonological variables in Midland Appalachia (Kurath & McDavid 1961; Labov, Ash, & Boberg 2006), a Southern/Northern divide exists in the production of variants: The Southern speakers have a higher rate of the alveolar variant than the Northern speakers. Yet contrary to most references to Appalachian rates of (ING), speakers in this sample are far from categorical, with rates ranging from one to 96 percent for the alveolar variant. But the other social categories affect this regional variation. For example, the speakers' social class influences in an inversely proportional relationship the rate of the alveolar variant, with the working-class speakers having the highest rate of the alveolar variant.

Overall, the rate of the alveolar (ING) variant is only 50 percent. Although more vernacular rates for individuals can be found in the subject pool, so can a wide variety of speakers with much lower rates. In this paper, individual results for the 60 speakers are exemplified and contrasted with the social demographic averages to assess the range of diversity for English in Appalachia. With this baseline established for Appalachian English in the Midland, a wide variety of sociolinguistic variation can be investigated along the entire continuum of vernacularity.

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