

CHAPTER 2

Phonological Possibilities in Appalachian Englishes

Paul E. Reed

SUMMARY

This chapter summarizes and reviews the literature on phonological and phonetic variation in Appalachian Englishes. The focus falls on the features and variation that are current and thriving in the twenty-first century among consonants, vowels, and other features, such as intonation. Many of these features have received quite a bit of scholarly attention but have often been described in categorical terms while the reality is much more nuanced. A good example is /aɪ/ ungliding, which has highly variable usage but is stereotypically cast as a common trait for speakers of Appalachian Englishes. This chapter examines such common features but also considers the diversity and variability of their use.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are a noisy species. We make lots of sounds. We yell when we are at stadiums cheering on sports teams; we whistle for pets; we react in pain when we stub our toe; and we also talk, a lot! We can make many different sounds, but we only use a small subset of those when we talk. We are quite chatty creatures, first making coos and cries as an infant but very quickly moving on to syllables and words within the first year or so of life. However, when we look at spoken language, we can start to classify and describe the sounds that we use for speech. We use these sounds in contrasting combinations to create meaning. For example, if we swap the vowel sound in the word *cat* /kæt/ with the vowel sound from the word *but* /bət/, we get a new word with a new meaning,

/kət/, the word *cut*. When the change in sounds results in different meanings, the contrasting sounds are considered *phonemes*. This distinction is a fundamental use of sounds in language, to contrast different meanings. Languages can differ in how many phonemes they have (or how many sound contrasts they maintain) (Clark, Yallop, and Fletcher 2007). Varieties of English have around forty phonemes, depending on the dialect (Ladefoged and Disner 2012). Phonemes are mental sounds, the patterns we use for perception and contrast to tell words apart. This system means that speakers of English tend to interpret the pronunciations of /t/ in the word *top* and the word *stop* as the “same” even though they are not. Since we English speakers think of these sounds as the same, /t/ is a phoneme, a contrast unit, of English.

However, if you say these two words, you will notice that when you say *top*, there is a big puff of air that comes out during the /t/. When you say *stop*, however, there is no big puff of air during the /t/. The actual way that we articulate the two versions of /t/ is different. In *top*, we use aspiration and represent it like [t^h] (note the square brackets are for the actual pronunciation). In *stop*, we use a plain version of the phoneme, and we represent it as [t]. We English speakers do not interpret these as being different sounds, even though we articulate them differently. In English, these two sounds, [t^h] and [t], are *allophones* or variations on a phoneme. We mentally interpret these two as the same sound even though the actual phonetics (how we physically produce the sounds) are different.

The English varieties of Appalachia have been described as some of the most “divergent” varieties of American English (Wolfram and Christian 1976, 1). In particular, the ways that Appalachians articulate and pronounce syllables and words are quite different from many other non-Southern varieties. Sometimes, Appalachian speakers use completely different patterns of sounds than other North American English varieties. Linguists describe these differences in two ways. First, the *phonetics* of Appalachia is different in that some sounds are pronounced differently, and second, sometimes the *phonology* is different in that the overall patterns of which sounds occur is somewhat distinct (either different phonemes, allophones, or sound patterns). What these distinctions mean is that sometimes Appalachians have the same system as other US English speakers, but the way they pronounce the sound will be a little different (phonetics), and other times, the patterns and predictable occurrence of sounds are different (phonology). The differences from standard American varieties are not haphazard or random. Standard American varieties is an umbrella term for the types of English that we learn about in school, that appear on news broadcasts, and that do not have stigmatized, recognizable

regional features. In contrast, English varieties in Appalachia have systematic differences from standard American varieties, and the differences can be accurately described. Importantly, the differences do not come from errors or incorrectness. The current chapter will describe these differences from standard American varieties but will also discuss the variation within Appalachian Englishes as well.

A NOTE ABOUT APPALACHIAN VARIETIES

There is a persistent myth about Appalachian English varieties: namely that they are often described as “Elizabethan” or “Chaucerian,” preserving very old features of English. This mistaken belief leads many people to think that these varieties are some type of antiquated versions of English, little changed from when immigrants began arriving to the region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such a belief is false (Montgomery 1999; Cramer 2014), but it is telling. Often, when people (and sometimes linguists) write about Appalachia, they overlook the ways that Appalachian varieties are similar to other varieties.

Appalachia is a dynamic region with language varieties that are equally dynamic. Some of the features in the region are not any different from those sounds in other regions, particularly southern US regions. This similarity is a point that needs to be highlighted, particularly as we discuss ways in which Appalachian varieties are different. Many times, the differences are matters of quantity, where something occurs more often in Appalachia, and not a matter of quality, where something is unique to Appalachia. And, like all places, there is considerable variation within the communities and subregions that comprise Appalachia. This fact means that some Appalachian varieties will have every feature that I describe in this chapter, while others may have only a handful. There also may be speakers who have none of these features.

Since Appalachia is stigmatized in the broader American society, most Appalachians are keenly aware of their speech (Greene 2010; Reed 2014, 2016). Some of the features described below are closely associated with the region, with home. Thus, when the feature is present in speech, the speaker is potentially using the feature as a kind of signal of belonging, to show that Appalachia is important to their sense of self. In my research, I call this sense of belonging rootedness (Reed 2016), and it impacts many of the features described below. Some Appalachian speakers have a strong sense of rootedness and, as a result, use many of the features or a greater percentage of the features. Other speakers may not have the same sense of belonging, or perhaps do not want to face the social stigma that using the features might bring, and as a result, they avoid the features or use relatively fewer of them.

I make these last points to underscore that the features described below should be considered possibilities in the varieties of Appalachia. Not every Appalachian will use them all, or they may only use them in certain contexts. Other speakers may use them all quite frequently in all contexts. This complexity is one of the beautiful aspects of language—speakers get to express different parts of their identities. Now, on to the sounds!

APPALACHIAN SOUNDS

The following sections outline some of the phonological features of Appalachian Englishes. When linguists look at the sounds of a region, there are two main divisions in the types of sounds: vowels and consonants. Consonants are sounds that are made with some kind of constriction (narrowing) in the vocal tract (basically, the “tube” that runs from your larynx to your lips) (Ladefoged and Disner 2012). I discuss the consonantal variation first, as there is not as much contrast with other varieties for consonants. Then, I discuss the differences in vowels. Vowels are sounds made with a fairly open vocal tract, with some differences in where your tongue is. Much of the variation in Appalachia is found in the vowel system.

Consonants

In Appalachian Englishes, the consonant systems as a whole are fairly similar to many other varieties of American English. While there are undoubtedly individual differences in the precise location of the lips and tongue for particular sounds, in general many of the consonants sound like and pattern like other regions. However, there are some consonants and consonant processes that can be different in the region’s varieties (Hall 1942). I will address each in turn below.

Which Witch? /m/ and /w/

This sound occurs in some words with spellings that begin with <wh>, like *what*, *which*, or *whale*. In many varieties of American English, this sound is a voiced labiovelar approximant, /w/. With this sound, a speaker purses their lips and also raises the back of their tongue toward their soft palate while their vocal folds are vibrating. However, in some Appalachian varieties, this sound is not voiced; it is a voiceless labiovelar fricative /m/ (the vocal folds are not vibrating). With this sound, some Appalachian speakers differentiate between *which* and *witch* or *whale* and *wail* or between *whine* and *wine*, a distinction that reflects the original history of these two sounds. As will be a common theme in this chapter, there is much variation at the individual level.

Some speakers will have a robust difference between these two, while others may have the two sounds merged like speakers of other varieties. Hazen, Lovejoy, Daugherty, and Vandevender (2016) found that speakers in West Virginia were losing the distinction between the two sounds and that they were merging. However, speakers with college education seem to be maintaining the difference at a higher rate than those without any college education.

Leaping Fall Lizards /l/

In all varieties of English, there are at least two types of L sounds, a clear [l] and a dark [ɫ]. Historically, the clear variant [l] (voiced alveolar lateral approximant) occurred in syllable-initial positions, while the dark variant [ɫ] (voiced velarized lateral approximant) occurred in other positions. You can probably feel and hear this difference by saying the words “lab” and “ball.” Notice how you make the first [l] sound by raising your tongue tip upward. However, in “ball,” you raise the back of your tongue toward your soft palate and shift your tongue back a bit to make [ɫ]. The tongue position is the difference in these two L sounds. In many varieties of American English, this distinction between initial sound and final sound is not clear cut, as the two sounds can show up in the same places. Many speakers are using darker [ɫ] variants in syllable-initial positions. However, many Appalachian speakers maintain a very clear /l/ variant in syllable-initial position, particularly when the /l/ occurs between vowels, like in the words *belly*, *valley*, or *Tellico*.

Also, many Appalachians will tend to use a very dark [ɫ] in syllable-final position as in *coal* or in syllable-final clusters as in *belt*. In fact, often the [ɫ] will almost sound like a back vowel. So, words like *school* are actually pronounced [skuw] or [skuu] (the actual vowel sound can vary). This process is called L-vocalization and occurs in many varieties of English. In Appalachia, this feature can be quite common and found across social groups, but there is much variation (see Hamilton and Hazen 2009). What is interesting is that L-vocalization may be receding across time, as younger speakers (particularly younger females) are vocalizing less (Dodsworth and Hazen 2011).

Minding Your “Bidness” /z/

The next consonantal processes occur with the sound /z/, a voiced alveolar fricative. The first of these processes happens word-medially. When this sound occurs in the middle of a word and before a nasal sound,¹ it is often realized in Appalachia as /d/. When this change happens, the word *business* will sound like *bidness*, or the contracted word *wasn't* will sound like *wadn't*. As with some of the other processes discussed here, this variation happens in

other varieties of American English as well. However, it can be more common among speakers of Appalachian Englishes.

The second process that can occur with /z/ in Appalachia happens word-finally. Appalachian speakers can make the /z/ sound more like an [s]; this change means that the word *cheese* can sound like *cheess*. This variation is a very subtle difference, but if you pay close attention, you can hear it from the mouths of Appalachian speakers more than Southern English speakers (Walker, Southall, and Hargrave 2017). This devoicing process involves many acoustic parameters, and there is much individual variation (Hazen, Lovejoy, et al. 2015).

Consonant Additions

In some Appalachian varieties, particularly from older natives in more rural communities, there are occasions when speakers will pronounce consonants that are absent in other varieties. Words like *once*, *twice*, *cliff*, and *across* are spoken with a final [t] sound, and sound like *oncet*, *twicet*, *cliff*, and *acrosst*. This addition is rarely heard in younger speakers or speakers from more urban areas.

Another process of consonant addition is pronouncing *it* or *ain't* with an initial /h/ sound, realizing them as *hit* and *hain't*. This variation primarily occurs at the beginning of a phrase, as in *Hit's gonna rain today* or *Hain't you going?* The forms with initial /h/ can be traced far back into the history of English. However, this dialect feature is fading among younger speakers as well. Related to this process, Hazen et al. (2016) found that West Virginia had little /h/ in words that historically began with /h/ like *help*. More research is needed for this process!

Consonant Deletions

Many Appalachian varieties allow for some consonants to be deleted where other varieties maintain them. This process can occur at the beginning, the middle, or the end of words. Each of the following paragraphs outlines these positions, respectively.

Words like *this*, *these*, *that*, *those*, *there*, *than*, and *then* (all begin with initial /ð/, the voiced (inter)dental fricative) can be pronounced without the initial /ð/, especially in running or rapid speech. While this process occurs in many varieties of American English, it appears to occur more frequently and in more contexts in Appalachia. For example, the sentence *There's a big storm coming* can sound like this one: *'Ere's a big storm coming*.

Initial /w/ in the words *was* and *would* is often lost after the pronouns.

While contraction occurs in all English varieties, this particular contraction is common in many Appalachian varieties and does not appear to be socially stigmatized. Such a process renders *I was* to *I'z/I'uz* or the contraction of *he would* to *he'd/he'ud*. This contraction of past tense *be* is intriguing because it rarely happens in English. Research has shown that this feature has been part of Appalachia at least from the start of the twentieth century and has increased in some areas of Appalachia by the end of the twentieth century (Hazen 2014).

In other positions, medially and finally, there is a process of consonant cluster reduction. This process occurs when sequences of consonants that are in the same syllable are simplified. Reduction happens primarily at the ends of words and particularly with the alveolar stops, /t/ and /d/. Words like *first* or *mind* might be pronounced without their final consonant, rendering *firs'* or *min'*. However, consonant cluster reduction is a complex process. If the cluster occurs before another consonant, like in the phrase *first thing*, there is a greater chance of deletion. But, if the cluster occurs before a vowel, like in the phrase *first order*, the consonant is much less likely to delete. Hazen (2011) found 30 percent deletion before vowels yet 90 percent before nonalveolar consonants. Another factor in consonant cluster reduction is that it can be affected by morphology in some dialects: a word with only one morpheme (like *first*) may have a reduced consonant cluster more often than a word with two morphemes (like *trapped*, where you have the verb *trap* and the past tense marker *-ed*). However, this result does not seem to have as much of an effect in Appalachia. Varieties of English differ on which of these factors is most important (following sound or morphology). In Appalachia, the following sound is most important. When compared to other varieties of English, ethnicity was also a factor contributing to the presence of consonant cluster reduction (in line with other varieties), whereas social class was not.

In medial position, many Appalachian varieties reduce clusters of two or three consonants, and again, /t/ and /d/ are subject to this deletion, along with /l/. In words like *directly* or *chestnut*, the medial /t/ is often deleted, rendering *direckly* and *chesnut*. In words with a medial /d/, particularly after /n/ or /l/, the /d/ can be deleted; this means *Caldwell* sounds like *Callwell* and *hundred* sounds like *hunred*. When /l/ occurs in clusters, but is not the final sound, the /l/ is subject to being vocalized (as described above) or deleted outright—where *bulb* sounds like *bub*.

Vowels

As a person who was educated in English in the United States, I learned early on that English had five or maybe six vowels, “*a, e, i, o, u*, and sometimes *y*.”

However, this idea refers to the vowels that we write orthographically (regular spelling). In speech, we have between thirteen to fifteen vowels. We can see this difference in observing that *heed, hid, hayed, head, had, hod, hawed, hood, hoed, who'd, Hud, heard, hide, how'd, and Hoyd* are words that are distinguished only by vowel sounds. So, depending on the variety, English has rather many vowels! Our issue is that many of these vowels use some of the same written letters for different sounds. English orthography has not kept up with pronunciation.

Since American English as a whole has so many vowels, it is natural that there is a lot of variation in how speakers actually pronounce these vowels. Most people are aware of regional dialects because of the vowel sounds, and Appalachian Englishes are no exception. There is actually a series of vowel differences that form some of the characteristic sounds found in several varieties of English spoken in Appalachia.

The Southern Vowel Shift

Across large portions of the southern United States, including parts of central and all of southern Appalachia, there are several particular vowel pronunciations that are characteristic of many of the English varieties spoken. These pronunciations are called the Southern Vowel Shift (Labov, Yaeger, and Steiner 1972; Fridland 2001; Thomas 2001, 2003), and this shift can be described in general terms as /aɪ/ ungliding, a rotation of the front vowel sounds, and fronting of the back vowels. Figure 2.1 shows a graphical representation of the shift, and I elaborate upon each part below.

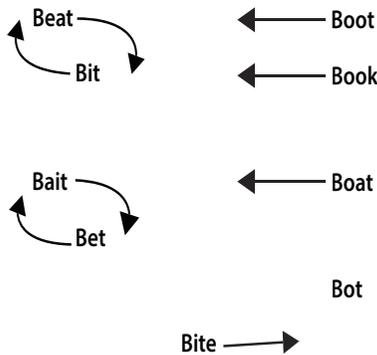


Figure 2.1. The Southern Vowel Shift. Illustration by Paul E. Reed.

/aɪ/ Ungliding

In many parts of the South, and especially in southern Appalachia (see chapter 1), the vowel sound in words like *bite*, *buy*, and *time*, /aɪ/, is not realized as two vowel sounds but as one vowel sound (the actual quality varies by person). This sound is one of the hallmarks of Southern speech and is a prominent part of the Southern Vowel Shift (Thomas 2003). In many varieties of English, this sound /aɪ/ is a complex vowel that begins with the first vowel in *father* and ends sounding almost like the vowel in *kit*. This type of complex vowel is called a *diphthong*. The first part is called the *nucleus* or *onglide*, and the second part is called the *glide* or *offglide*. Thus, when the vowel sounds more like one sound than two, it is called *unglided*. This process is common across the South and southern Appalachia. Where some Appalachian varieties distinguish themselves from other Southern varieties is that the ungliding happens in all contexts. In other parts of the South, the ungliding happens in open syllables (like in *buy*) and before voiced sounds (like in *prize* or *time*). Voiced means that the vocal folds are vibrating when a speaker makes the sound, like /d/ or /m/. However, in some Appalachian varieties, you can find unglided /aɪ/ before voiceless sounds (like in *bite* or *price*). Voiceless refers to consonants that are made without vibrating the vocal folds, like /t/ or /s/. Typically, ungliding before voiceless consonants is more stigmatized than the other contexts (Bernstein 2006). Speakers who use prevoiceless /aɪ/ ungliding are seen as more “country” or “mountain” and perhaps less educated or less sophisticated than other speakers. Many Appalachians are aware of what this sound can mean socially, and they will not use it. Others, however, may know its social meaning and actively use it (Greene 2010; Reed 2014, 2016).

In many studies, speakers are quite aware of this /aɪ/ vowel and its social meanings, particularly the ungliding in prevoiceless contexts. However, many speakers still use this unglided production in spite of the negative social connotations. To these speakers, especially those that are more rooted to the local area, this unglided vowel signals “home” and the positive connotations of Appalachia. Thus, they tend to have more of the unglided production of /aɪ/ overall and especially those of the prevoiceless unglided variety.

Rotation of the Front Vowels

Another feature of the Southern Vowel Shift that is found in some Appalachian varieties is the rotation of the front vowels. Sometimes this variation is described as the vowels “swapping places.” While not technically correct, it does help to explain what is going on. With this shift, the first part of the vowel in words like *bit* sounds more like the first part of the vowel in *beet* and vice versa.

So, *bit* sounds something like *bee-ih-t* [biit]. *Beet*, in contrast, sounds something like *bih-ee-t* [biit]. A similar rotation happens in the vowels of *bait* and *bet*. The first part of the vowel sound in *bet* sounds like *bait*, and then the second half sounds like *bet*, sounding something like *bay-eh-t* [beet]. Relatedly, the first part of the vowel sound of *bait* sounds like the first part of *bet*, and the second half rises to sound like the last half of *bait*, rendering [bæet].

For both of these rotations, the fully articulated versions can even have three vowel sounds, depending on the speaker, and, as mentioned earlier, some speakers may shift both sets of vowels (particularly older speakers). Other speakers, however, may only shift one of the sets, and other speakers may not shift either. Reed (2018) found that speakers who were more rooted tended to have more rotation in the *bait/bet* set and not the *beet/bit* set. Many of these changes depend on how a speaker views themselves and the region. There is a lot of individual variation in Appalachia!

Fronting of the Back Vowels

Across much of Appalachia, many speakers will *front* the articulation of the back vowels /u/, /ʊ/, and /o/ (particularly the sounds in *boot*, /u/, and *boat*, /o/), another aspect of the Southern Vowel Shift. In parts of Appalachia, this process seems to have been completed by the 1920s (Hazen 2018). During the vowel pronunciation, the tongue is pushed slightly forward, and thus the sound /u/ in *boot* sounds like a cross between *boot* and *beet*, something like *biewt*. Similarly, the /o/ sound in *boat* is realized like a cross between *boat* and *bait*, something like *beowt*.

Many varieties of American English have a somewhat similar process happening for the back vowels. What sets both the Southern and Appalachian versions apart is that the fronted vowels each sound like two or three vowels, whereas in other varieties there is not as much change across the production of the same vowel sound.

Vowel Breaking

Another common vowel process in southern Appalachian varieties is what is known as vowel breaking (see Labov, Ash, and Boberg 2006, particularly map 11.1). This term refers to a process where one vowel sound “breaks” into two sounds (Feagin 1996, 2008). Many Appalachian speakers will break the /æ/ sound in *bat* into two sounds, although some speakers may break others. So, the word *bad* will sound almost like it has two syllables with two or three vowel sounds and will be pronounced almost like *bae-id* or *bae-ed*, [bæid] or [bæed]. Many times, people refer to this process as “drawling,” as in the

“Southern Drawl” or the “Mountain Drawl.” This feature occasionally gives the perception of a slower speech rate, even though the speakers are not talking any slower. There is some evidence that such breaking might be decreasing across apparent time (Jacewicz, Fox, and Salmons 2011).

Pin/Pen Merger

Across much of the South, and across a good portion of central and southern Appalachia, the words *pen/pin* and *ten/tin* are homophones—that is, they sound the same (Hazen 2005). Specifically, the vowel sounds in these words are the same, meaning that they have merged (i.e., the *pin/pen* merger). In this particular case, the merger only happens before nasals in the United States, or sounds made with air coming out of the nose: /n/, /m/, and /ŋ/. These are the final sounds in *seen*, *seem*, and *sing*, respectively. When a mid-front vowel occurs before a nasal, the production of the vowels /ɪ/ as in *pit* and /e/ as in *pet* merge. In some areas, the vowels merge toward the *pit* vowel; in others, toward the *pet* vowel. Typically, in southern Appalachia, it goes toward *pit*. Thus, words like *temperature* begin with /tɪm/, like the name *Tim*. Brown (1991) showed that, in Tennessee, there was little social or ethnic variation and that most people born after 1900 had the merger. Growing up in East Tennessee, we were aware of this merger at some level, and we would talk about an “ink pen” and a “stick pin” to disambiguate. Mergers can trigger some crafty language use!

Cot/Caught Merger

In parts of northern Appalachia, akin to many parts of North America, the vowel sounds in words like *cot* and *caught* are the same (Hazen 2005). This pattern is another merger and is usually termed the *cot/caught* merger or low-back merger (because it takes place in the low-back part of the mouth). Specifically, where some US varieties make a distinction between the /a/ in *cot* and the /ɔ/ in *caught*, in parts of Appalachia (particularly younger speakers), speakers pronounce these words the same. Unlike the *pin/pen* merger, the *cot/caught* merger happens in every word these vowels occur. So, words like *bot/bought* and *hock/hawk* sound quite similar if not the same.

The fact that the *cot/caught* merger is present in Appalachian varieties is quite interesting, in that it shows that Appalachian Englishes are not as isolated as usually described in some scholarly literature. Since this merger is spreading across large parts of the English-speaking world, its presence in Appalachia counters the notion that the region is radically isolated from other parts of the country and underscores that Appalachian varieties are dynamic,

just like all living language varieties. Appalachia and its dialects are a vibrant part of change, and this aspect deserves more attention.

In other parts of Appalachia, particularly in southern Appalachia and more rural parts of the central Appalachian region, however, a different sound is sometimes used in words with the *caught* vowel. Rather than a merger, speakers tend to use a different vowel. Here, speakers use a diphthong /aʊ/ (Hall 1942), which starts with the vowel sound in *father* and ends with a vowel sound a bit like the vowel in *foot*. These speakers have different vowels in *cot* and *caught* like some US English varieties. The difference is that, rather than distinguishing /a/ and /ɔ/, these varieties contrast /a/ and /aʊ/. However, this particular usage might be less common among younger speakers, as they tend to be those that have the *cot/caught* merger described above.

INTONATION

One of the features of Appalachian Englishes that is quite characteristic, but less mentioned and studied, is the use of intonation. This aspect is quite salient to listeners but has been less often described in the linguistics literature. Intonation describes the melody of speech, how some syllables have higher or lower pitch. We use intonation for all sorts of purposes. Some are related to semantics: the meanings of the sentences.

All English speakers use it to mark the difference in a question or a statement, even when the words and word order are the same. For example, *You went to the store*, with falling pitch at the end, is a statement. However, *You went to the store?* with rising pitch at the end may signal a question. We are not using the syntax (word order) of the sentence to get the different meanings, as the order is the same. It is the way we are saying the sentence that gives the different interpretations. The falling pitch signals statement, and the rising pitch signals question.

Yet, intonation is not just used for the difference in questions and statements. We use intonation to contrast some meanings. For example, if your friend said that Mark left early, but it was actually Mike, you might say, “No, MIKE left early,” with a higher pitch on *Mike*. This higher pitch has a contrastive interpretation. You can also emphasize the other words, and the interpretation is also contrast. For example, if you say, “No, Mike LEFT early,” you are perhaps contrasting leaving versus arriving. You could say, “No, Mike left EARLY,” where the emphasis on *early* contrasts with leaving on time or late. These uses of intonation are shared widely across many varieties of English.

Some of the variation in intonation is common to many varieties of

English. There are sometimes differences in how high the pitch may need to go to signal a question, or whether the final rise signals question or statement. There are some varieties of English, particularly among younger speakers, that use lots of final rises on both statements and questions. This change is happening in Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. However, these types of intonation are not what sets certain Appalachian Englishes apart.

The use of intonation that is more characteristic of Appalachian varieties is a bit different than what I have described thus far. In parts of Appalachia, some of the varieties appear to emphasize many more words in sentences (Greene 2006; Reed 2016). Speakers place a pitch accent, a rise in pitch that makes the word stand out, on many more words that are not contrastive, which is different from the examples I used above. These pitch accents give the impression of a lot of emphasized words, or a lot of pitch rises and falls across a sentence. So, some Appalachian speakers will have many of these prominent words in lots of utterances. For example, an Appalachian speaker may say, “MIKE left EARLY,” in a situation where there is no reason to signal contrast with some other person or whether they are early, on time, or late. Some have described this pattern as a “musical” quality to Appalachian speech. Others interpret this pattern as emphatic or a storytelling quality.

Another aspect of Appalachian intonation is not only numerous prominent words in sentences but also large pitch changes in those prominent words. The difference in an unemphasized word and an emphasized word can be relatively large. This distinction adds to the impression of emphasis and prominence. At the same time, because the change in pitch is rather large, the pitch change has to occur quite rapidly (because it is a big change happening across a relatively short syllable or word). This rapid change adds to the storytelling quality of Appalachian Englishes, as most other varieties only utilize these types of changes when narrating a story or during dramatic tellings.

One thing to note about this pattern of intonation is who uses it. I have referenced the importance of rootedness above when discussing vowels, but the same importance is at play with intonation as well. Since many of the vowel productions described above are caricatured or stigmatized, speakers may be aware of them and can sometimes change them. However, with the intonational features, many times speakers are not consciously aware of them, and they are present in their speech even when some of the other vernacular features (like the Southern vowel patterns) are absent. Reed (2016) showed that the presence of many rising pitch accents (i.e., lots of prominent words) set that Appalachian community apart from non-mountain Southern varieties. However, within the Appalachian community studied in Reed (2016), the

speakers who were more attached to the local community (more rooted) had more rising pitch accents than the speakers who were less rooted to the local community. Additionally, the more rooted Appalachian speakers had quicker rises in pitch than the less rooted Appalachian speakers. So, the intonation is not just a distinguishing feature of some Appalachian Englishes, it is also variable within Appalachian communities themselves.

With these findings, it seems that intonation has two social meanings. One is that it is a feature of some Appalachian varieties. Overall, the varieties have more rising pitches than other varieties. The second meaning, related to the first, is that speakers might be subconsciously aware that using lots of rising pitches and having quick rises in pitch signal rootedness to the local community (because they signal Appalachia). Furthermore, Appalachian speakers who are more rooted will use more of the rising pitches and have faster rises than speakers who are less rooted. Both groups would be considered Appalachian speakers, but one group has a different relationship to place and to the region than others.

CONCLUSION

One of the clearest expressions of Appalachia is the speech used by those native to the region. The way one speaks represents a part of the identity of that speaker. Human languages are constantly changing and evolving, and Appalachian speech is no different. The particular sound features described above represent a part of that dynamic system. Like all varieties, Appalachian Englishes are living and changing, because the speakers of these varieties are changing as the world around them changes and evolves. Variation is present at many levels. Older Appalachians do not use the exact same sounds as younger Appalachians, nor do urban Appalachians use the same as rural folk. Some speakers will use many if not all of these features, while others will use very few. Certain speakers may not use any of these features and could be somewhat indistinguishable from speakers from the Midwest. However, these differences are woven together to form the beautiful tapestry of Appalachian Englishes.

Notes

1. A nasal is a sound produced with a closure in the mouth and air escaping out the nose. In English, we have three nasal sounds, /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/. These are the bilabial nasal, the alveolar nasal, and the velar nasal, respectively.

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