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EARLIER AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH IN AN APPALACHIAN BIRACIAL COMMUNITY




Ideals of A Study of Early Rural African American English

1. Time Depth: Speakers born as far back into the 19th century as possible.
 2. Speakers are natives and have social relationships with one another.
 3. Documentation of the history, including the settlement, is detailed.
 4. The fieldworker was native to the area and known to all the speakers before recording interviews.
 5. The fieldworker had an ulterior purpose in recording that was recognized by the speakers, meaning that their speech was likely less guarded.
 6. A cohort White community is nearby and, if possible, in frequent contact
 7. Each individual is identified clearly, so that his/her patterns can be quantified separately.
 8. Instrumental analysis of the speech signal was used to disambiguate any forms whose transcription was unclear from traditional impressionistic auditing of interviews.
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Previous Similar Studies

- Wolfram and Thomas 2002
 - Studied morphosyntactic and phonological similarities (regional features) and differences (broader ethnic features) between African Americans and White residents of Hyde County, NC.
 - Mallinson and Wolfram 2002
 - Similar to above, studied African Americans in a rural enclave with a white cohort in Beech Bottom, NC (far Western NC, near the TN border)
 - Both studies found shared regional features
 - Wolfram and Thomas found that younger generations had less regional features and more umbrella features
 - Mallinson and Wolfram found that the younger generation had more regional features, although all generations were very similar to cohort whites.
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Research Questions


- How does this Coe Ridge data compare to previous studies?
 - Will certain features be used as ethnic markers?
 - Which pattern of progression, if either, will hold over generations?
 - Will the older generations have more regional features? Or will the younger?
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Speakers

- Ten speakers: 5 African American, 5 White
 - 2 Generations: Older (70-80), Younger (50s)
- All were natives of Coe Ridge or its surrounding area, lived in close proximity, and had interacted (to varying degrees) with one another.
- African Americans
 - Older: LC, RC
 - Younger: LA, RA, ST
- Whites
 - Older: CC, TC
 - Younger: DC, EC, HH



Shared Qualitative Features

- These features suggest a shared grammar
 - Present in both African American and White speech, in similar percentages
 - Used in similar grammatical and pragmatic contexts
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Shared Qualitative Features

- *Hit* (*DARE* Chiefly South, South Midland)
- AA: 4 Speakers, 17 Token
- W: 3 Speakers, 6 Tokens
- Examples:
 - *Hit* ain't been too long ago. (ST- AA)
 - *Hit* was always claimed to be haunted. (EC – W)

Shared Qualitative Features

- *Liked to* (DARE Chiefly South, South Midland)
- AA: 1 Speaker, 1 Token
- W: 2 Speakers, 3 Tokens
- Examples:
 - They pulled him out, but he *liked to* froze to death, he just *liked to* died. (LC – AA)
 - They *liked to* got wiped out. (TC-W)
 - His feet *liked to* rot off. They'd froze on him, you know, in that snow. (HH – W)
 - He was out there in the road, and they *liked to* run over him on those horses. (EC – W)

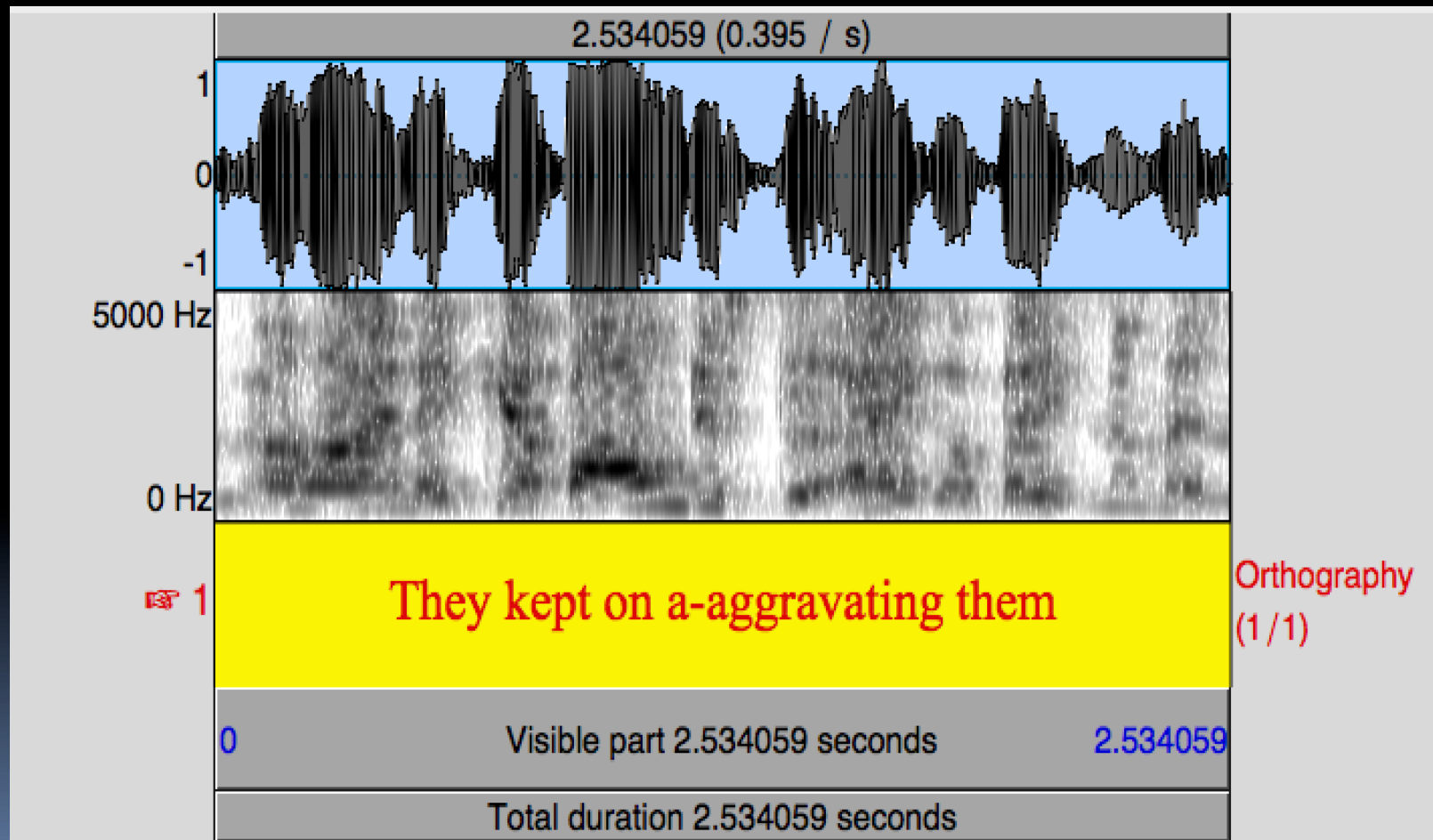
Shared Qualitative Features

- A- prefixing (*DARE* Throughout U.S. but especially frequent Midland, Southwest, less frequently South, New England)
- AA 5 speakers, 68/389 = 17.5%
- W 5 speakers; 30/218 = 13.8%)
 - Frank was telling me about it when I was up there, about Da- and about him a-disowning him. (ST-AA)
 - They kept on just a-aggravating them, and ... then well the one that come to kill Danny, he shot him through the head. (ST-AA)
 - Old John was a-getting up way out towards ninety. (TC-W)

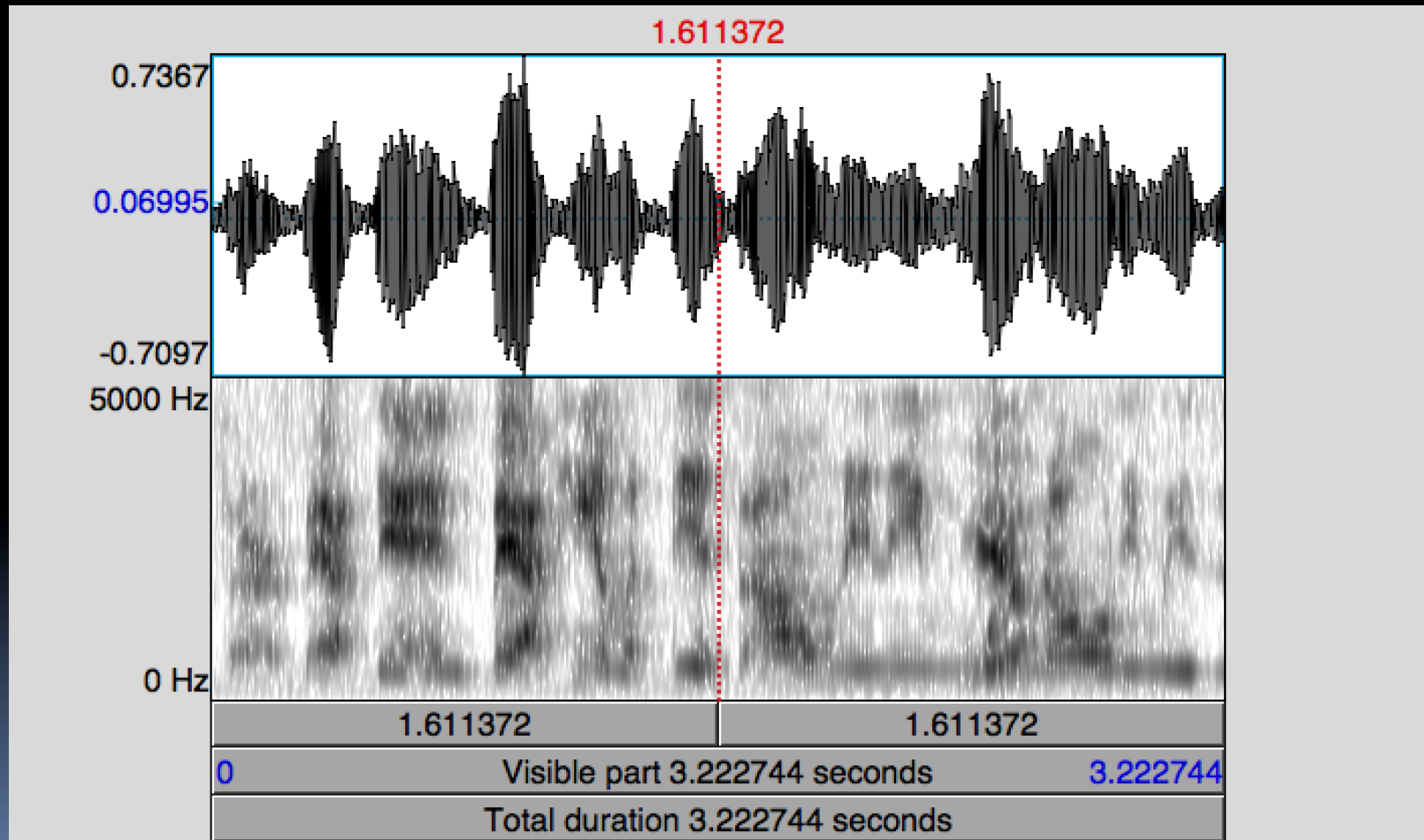
Table 2: a- Prefixing in Coe Ridge

LC 19/61	31.1%	CC 5/45	11.1%
RC 18/102	17.6%	TC 13/97	13.4%
ST 13/83	15.7%	HH 2/39	5.1%
LA 14/98	14.3%	DC 7/20	35%
RA 4/45	8.9%	EC 3/17	17.6%
Total 68/389	17.5%	Total 30/218	13.7%

A-prefixing example



A-prefixing example



Shared Qualitative Features

- Regularized Verbs (*knowed, heared, seed, drewed, &c.*) (*DARE*, s.v. know Scattered, but chiefly South, South Midland)

Table 3: Regularized Past in Coe Ridge

LC	19/61	31.1%	CC	5/40	12.5%
RC	13/21	61.9%	TC	13/97	13.4%
ST	10/25	40.0%	HH	0/14	0.0%
LA	19/22	86.4%	DC	10/10	100%
RA	7/8	87.5%	EC	12/13	92.3%
Total	68/389	17.5%	Total	40/174	23.0%

Shared Qualitative Feature

- *Never + did* (new feature, we are unaware of any studies of this particular construction)
- AA: 4 Speakers, 25/29 86.2%
- W: 3 Speakers 25/39 64.1%
- Examples:
 - I *never did* hear of what happened and who did it. (ST - AA)
 - Well, nobody *never did* know what had come of it. (TC - W)
 - This horse would snort and for a good ways out, but I *never did* see anything there. (EC-W)

Table 4: *never + did* in Coe Ridge

LC	9/10	90.0%	CC	6/11	54.5%
RC	2/2	100.0%	TC	18/2	475.0%
ST	13/16	81.2%	HH	0/1	0.0%
RA	0/0	0.0%	EC	1/2	50.0%
LA	1/1	100.0%	DC	0/1	0.0%
Total	25/29	86.2%	Total	25/39	64.3%

Shared Qualitative Features

- *Was* leveling – using *was* in plural/2nd person contexts

Table 4: *Was* percentage

LC	13/13	100.0%	CC	20/21	95.2%
RC	33/38	86.8%	TC	17/23	73.9%
ST	36/49	73.5%	HH	20/45	44.4%
RA	10/13	76.9%	DC	12/13	92.3%
LA	6/7	85.7%	EC	0/3	0.0%
Total	98/120	81.7%	Total	69/105	65.7%

Shared Qualitative Features

- Contraction of *was* and *were*
 - Montgomery and Chapman 1992
- Not quantified due to uncertainty, as all speakers employed historical present.
- Examples:
 - These Taylors sent word they 's going to break it up. (CC-W)
 - He's the one that's telling me about it. (CC-W)
 - Mister Bill Murray came out there at purpose to tell the boys that morning [so] that they'd know they 's a-coming where our people's at. (LC-AA)
 - He was a-slaving. He's trying to slave [enslave] ... (LA-AA)
 - They were, they're, they were afraid ... (HH-W)
 - [They] was throwing rocks in on him, and they're throwing rocks in on him. (RC-AA)

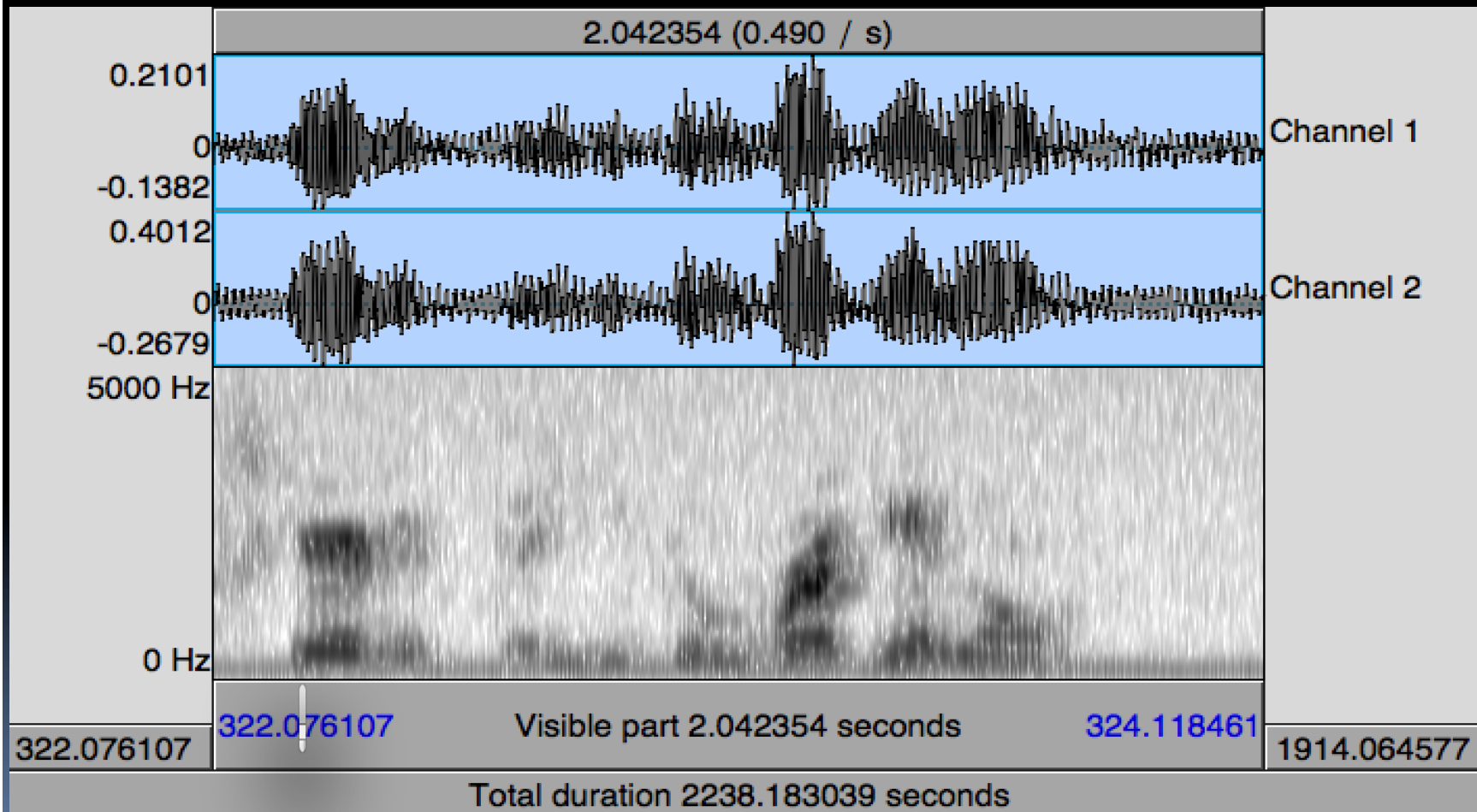
Possible Ethnolinguistic Markers

- These features are present only in the speech of the AAs, or are present in broader contexts
- Thus, they are suggestive of differing histories for the two ethnic groups

Possible Ethnolinguistic Markers

- Zero *was*
 - Very few unambiguous examples
 - Contraction and Historical Present
- Example:
 - They set up all night scared that uh he [=a panther] Ø going [to] break in on them. (LA-AA)

Zero was Example



Possible Ethnolinguistic Markers

- Zero Auxiliary *be* in Present Tense (cf. Baugh 1980)
 - We excluded first-person singular contexts, examples whose tense is unclear, and quoted speech, as in:
 - *What you Ø talking about? y'all Ø eating that chicken, by God, some of y'all done eat that chicken. (LC-AA)*

Table 6: Zero *be* in present tense

<i>_going to_</i>		<i>V + -ing</i>			<i>_going to_</i>		<i>V + -ing</i>	
<i>Sing</i>	<i>Pl</i>	<i>Sing</i>	<i>Pl</i>		<i>Sing</i>	<i>Pl</i>	<i>Sing</i>	<i>Pl</i>
LC 0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	CC	0/0	1/1	0/0	1/1
RC 0/0	1/1	0/0	1/1	TC	0/0	2/2	0/0	0/0
ST 0/1	1/1	0/0	2/2	HH	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
LA 1/1	3/3	1/5	2/2	EC	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
RA 0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	DC	0/1	0/0	0/1	0/0
Total 1/2	5/5	1/5	5/5	Total	0/1	3/3	0/1	1/1

Possible Ethnolinguistic Markers

- Other Zero forms of *be*
 - Only present in AA speech
- Examples:
 - before Nominal: There's two little kittens was born here, and I raised them up very good size, and they Ø a mess. (RC-AA)
 - before Adjective: You Ø liable to get [it]. (LA-AA)

Possible Ethnolinguistic Markers

- *Done*

- Present in both cohorts, but used in a more contexts in AA speech

- Examples:

- The old tree done begin to sway back and forth. (LA-AA)
 - They done got them all divided up. (LA-AA)
 - He done grab, grabbed the hand towel and put it over his head. (LA-AA)
 - Something up there done told us not to cut the tree. (RA-AA)
 - [He had] done bought the chicken. (LC-AA)
 - She'd done went and carried her wood in. (LA-AA)
 - He'd done begin to come to hisself. (LC-AA)
 - John had done got the sentence, and he'd have to pay. (LC-AA)
 - She'd done give him something to eat. (RC-AA)
 - I've done got up in years. (RC-AA)
 - He was **done** dead. (ST-AA)
 - As far back as I can remember, her and Tom was done married. (ES-W)
 - Her husband was done dead as far as I can remember. (ES-AA)
 - He'd done moved away. (TC-AA)
 - Her husband was done dead as far as I can remember. (ES-AA)

Possible Ethnolinguistic Markers


- *Bin*
 - Used in what appears to be an 'unstressed past marker' (cf. Green 2002:58)
- Examples:
 - That's **been** happened oh years ago, when I was just a little girl. (RC-AA)
 - I think he'd **been** gone to the pen for something, but I don't know what. (LC-AA)

Bin Example





Conclusions

- In our cohort, there were many shared features, echoing previous findings
 - Wolfram and Thomas 2002; Mallinson and Wolfram 2002
 - However, certain forms were suggestive of being ethnolinguistically marked, thus suggesting differing histories and developments.
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Thank you!

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