MALLINSON, CHRISTINE LOUISE. The Regional Accommodation of African American English: Evidence from a Bi-Ethnic Mountain Enclave Community. (Under the direction of Walt Wolfram, William C. Friday Distinguished Professor)

Recent studies of bi-ethnic enclave communities in coastal North Carolina (e.g., Wolfram, Thomas, and Green 2000) suggest that earlier African American speech both accommodated localized dialect norms and also exhibited a persistent substratal effect from the early African-European contact situation. To determine if such situations were the norm or an anomaly, this study examines Beech Bottom, North Carolina, a long-term, bi-ethnic enclave mountain community. In the early 1900s, Beech Bottom’s population ranged from 80 to 110 residents, but community size dwindled with the decline of feldspar mining. Currently, about ten longtime residents live in Beech Bottom: three are European Americans and the rest are designated as “African Americans” in the historical bi-racial taxonomy of the American South, although they are actually of mixed descent.

This study specifically examines dialect accommodation for the Beech Bottom African American speakers. To what extent do they share the local Appalachian dialect with cohort European Americans, and what does this reflect about the status of earlier African American English? Is there a contemporary ethnolinguistic divide, and if so, how is it manifested? To answer these questions, a representative set of diagnostic phonological (e.g., postvocalic r-lessness, /aI/ ungliding) and morphosyntactic (e.g., 3rd pl. –s attachment, 3rd sg. –s absence) variables for a sample of current residents is considered. The analysis supports the conclusion that earlier African American speech accommodated to local dialect norms, and it suggests that there has been subtle but persistent substrate influence in the historical development of AAVE.
THE REGIONAL ACCOMMODATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH:
EVIDENCE FROM A BI-ETHNIC MOUNTAIN ENCLAVE COMMUNITY

by

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Approved by:

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Chair of Advisory Committee
**BIOGRAPHY**

CHRISTINE MALLINSON was born on September 8, 1978, in Salisbury, North Carolina, and lived there for almost eighteen years until attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After graduating *summa cum laude* from UNC in May of 2000, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and a second major in German, Mallinson began her graduate study at North Carolina State University in August of 2000. With the completion of this thesis, Mallinson fulfills the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in English with a concentration in Linguistics.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In attempting to trace the development of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), linguists have offered two main hypotheses as to how this variety may have developed diachronically. First is the Anglicist hypothesis of the mid-twentieth century (Kurath 1949, McDavid & McDavid 1951), which proposes that AAVE is rooted in British-based varieties; by implication, then, the origin of AAVE and white vernacular English dialects are the same. The opposing explanation is the Creolist hypothesis, which was widely accepted in the 1970s (Stewart 1967, 1968; Dillard 1972; Rickford 1977; Baugh 1980; Holm 1984; Singler 1991; Winford 1992). According to Creolists, contact among African slaves and their masters and traders created the conditions for a Creole language to develop, from which AAVE eventually emerged.

Recent attempts to reconstruct the structure of Earlier African American English by investigating the role of historically isolated enclave communities of African Americans – such as the studies of transplant African American communities in Samaná and Nova Scotia (Poplack 1999; Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989, 1991, 2001) – provide strong evidence for the position that Earlier African American English was much more similar to cohort European American varieties than was postulated under the Creolist hypothesis. At the same time, evidence from earlier written records of semi-literate African Americans (Montgomery, Fuller, & DeMarse 1993; Montgomery & Fuller 1996) suggests that AAVE was a more recent development than was previously thought.
These data were influential in leading to a reformulation of the Anglicist hypothesis on the development of African American English. This position, known as the neo-Anglicist hypothesis (Wolfram 2000), is like that of the Anglicists in that it maintains that post-colonial African American speech was quite similar to the early British dialects brought to North America. However, unlike the original Anglicist position, the neo-Anglicist hypothesis acknowledges that African American English has since diverged so that it is now quite distinct from cohort European American vernacular speech. Based on the study of several expatriate African American enclave communities, Poplack (1999:27) concludes that “AAVE originated as English, but as the African American community solidified, it innovated specific features” and that “contemporary AAVE is the result of evolution, by its own unique, internal logic.” As Labov summarizes (1998:119): “The general conclusion that is emerging from studies of the history of AAVE is that many important features of the modern dialect are creations of the twentieth century and not an inheritance of the nineteenth.”

The recent investigation of coastal Hyde County, North Carolina, a long-term bi-ethnic enclave situation (Wolfram, Thomas, & Green 2000; Wolfram & Thomas 2002), has thrown new light on the historical development of earlier African American speech. This analysis reveals that earlier African American speech in Hyde County accommodated many localized dialect norms over the three centuries of black and white co-existence, which supports the conclusion that Earlier African American English was often closer to the regional dialect of the benchmark European American variety than to the contemporary version of AAVE. At the same time, however, this research indicates that there was a persistent substratal effect from the early African-European contact
situation that still differentiated Earlier African American English from local cohort European American varieties.

The Hyde County sociolinguistic situation examined in Wolfram et al. (2000), however, is only one example of a bi-ethnic enclave situation. To obtain a more complete picture of Earlier African American English, it is necessary to examine other kinds of long-term bi-ethnic enclave situations to determine if the situation in Hyde County, North Carolina, was the norm or an anomaly in the development of African American English. Ideally, the examination of other situations should involve different regional dialect contexts and varying circumstances. The present analysis extends the study of bi-ethnic enclave situations by examining Beech Bottom, a small, highland community in the Appalachian region of western North Carolina by the Tennessee border.

In some respects (e.g., physical location, community size), Beech Bottom is quite different from Hyde County, but the two do share some important parallels in their situations – notably historical insularity and the long-term continuity of the bi-ethnic community. Following the reasoning that enclave communities such as these provide a rich source in which synchronic data may be used to infer diachronic processes (Tagliamonte 1997:33), it seems that Beech Bottom is an appropriate context for comparing the early and contemporary development of African American speech. Thus, the study undertaken here offers an important complement to the analysis offered in Wolfram et al. (2000) and Wolfram & Thomas (2002).

In light of recent variationist studies (e.g., Dorian 1994; Johnstone 1996; Thomas 1996; Wolfram & Beckett 2000) that have examined the linguistic role of the individual,
we know that idiosyncratic patterns influence the overall picture resulting from a sociolinguistic analysis, especially in a study with few speakers. For this reason, the results of this study should not be overgeneralized, either to African Americans as a group or to African American English in general. And given the Beech Bottom African American sample – which stands at about ten people since the vast majority of African Americans who once lived there have migrated from the area – this examination must necessarily be taken as a case study (Mallinson & Wolfram 2002; Wolfram 2002).

At the same time, however, the results of this case study of a few remaining speakers should be factored into the effort to reconstruct the historical and current development of speech among African Americans, especially since the dialect vestiges of African American speech in this Highland Southern region still seem evident. In fact, case studies can often provide invaluable information about the establishment and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. For example, Rickford’s (1985) study of a white and black resident in a Gullah-speaking region of South Carolina, Reaser’s (2002) study of a single Anglo-Bahamian resident in a remote community of Afro-Bahamians, and Wolfram, Hazen, & Tamburro’s (1997) study of a single African American speaker from a lone African American family who lived on the island of Ocracoke for over a century have all provided significant insight into the construction and maintenance of such varieties.

In a similar vein, the oldest speaker in this Beech Bottom study may provide insight into what the speech of the more substantive African American speech community might have been like, and the lone young Beech Bottom resident might offer insight into speech accommodation of social isolates – just as Muzel Bryant, the
remaining African American of a single African American family on Ocracoke, has provided important evidence on the persistence of an ethnolinguistic boundary for well over a century (Wolfram et al. 1997). We therefore cannot minimize the significance of our findings, especially as they are placed side-by-side with other studies, such as Hyde County, which included over 150 participants (Wolfram & Thomas 2002).

Finally, in addition to the linguistic relevance of this study, the investigation of Beech Bottom also functions as a case study on the culture of African Americans in Appalachia. According to researchers such as Cabbell (1980) and Turner (1989), Appalachian African Americans are a neglected racial minority within a neglected cultural minority, and educational materials concerned with the region often do not mention their heritage and life history. Turner poses several questions about the African American Appalachian experience that still need to be investigated, such as how much of Southern culture persists among Appalachian African Americans today and whether Appalachian African Americans have evolved a separate culture, whether from the influence of European American Appalachian culture or because of isolation from other African Americans (1989:141). These questions parallel the very issues that will be explored from a linguistic perspective here, and much additional sociological and anthropological investigation should be undertaken to frame the research questions and aid in investigating the past and present sociolinguistic situation of Beech Bottom.
2. THE SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Physical Isolation

The receding mountain community of Beech Bottom is located in Avery County (U.S. Census 2000 population 17,167), about 35 miles southwest of Boone along the Tennessee border, and falls within the Southeastern U.S. region of Appalachia as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC 2000). Figure 1 indicates the location of Beech Bottom with respect to several major North Carolina cities.

![Figure 1. Location of Beech Bottom, North Carolina](image)

The name “Beech Bottom” ostensibly derives from a connection with the beech trees that once grew along the bank of the nearby Toe River and the characteristics of the low-lying area, since “bottom” is used to mean low-lying land along a watercourse. Sometimes Beech Bottom is called Beech Bottoms; the different spellings of the
community’s name vary according to how the name is used, and residents use both variants interchangeably. Cooper (1964) spells the name “Beach Bottom,” with the explanation that the sands along the banks of the North Toe River are reminiscent of the ocean’s beaches, but this variant seems to be anomalous.

2.2 Settlement

Local history (Harris 1994; Joslin 1995) maintains that a man named Hampton Jackson arrived in Beech Bottom in 1850. Although his own ethnicity is not recorded, Jackson was said to have raised two adopted sons, one of Native American and Polish descent and the other of Native American and German descent. Finally, African American slaves were also brought to Appalachia, probably from other parts of North Carolina and from Virginia sometime after the 1680s (Kay & Cary 1995). More specifically, local histories state that Colonel Waightsill Avery, for whom Avery County was eventually named, settled in the area around 1780 and brought slaves with him. After the abolition of slavery, Avery gave his freed slaves land, which was called Lick Log (Ollis 2002). This area lies about a half-mile from Beech Bottom, and it seems probable that Avery’s former slaves were the ancestors of today’s Beech Bottom residents. Though information about these slaves is sparse, the small Beech Bottom cemetery does include the grave of an African American slave named Mary Chambers, who died in the early 1900s at age 104. According to Joslin (1995, quoting Harris), Chambers had asked to be buried in Beech Bottom because her people had been buried
there earlier; since official records were not kept, her grave is the only memorial to many
unrecognized black slaves who may or may not be interred in the cemetery.

As the population grew, Beech Bottom developed as a multiethnic community
within Appalachia – a region that has not always been recognized for its diversity
(Billings 1989), even though Native American influence in Appalachia has historically
been strong and the ancestry of many northern European settlers in Appalachia was quite
varied, including those of English, German, French, Dutch, Scotch, Irish, Scotch-Irish,
and Swiss descent (Beaver & Lewis 1998). As Ostwalt & Pollit (2001:235), who studied
the Salem School and Orphanage for African Americans (located in Elk Park, North
Carolina, about ten miles from Beech Bottom), summarize, “[T]he myth persists that the
Appalachian region is a static and uniform society made up of poor white mountaineers.
But the social and cultural makeup of the region is much more complicated than some are
willing to admit….”

From 1900 to 1940, Beech Bottom’s population ranged from 80 to 111 people and
included residents of African American, European American, and Native American
descent; blacks and other minorities in Beech Bottom outnumbered the whites 65 to 46
during this time period (Harris 1994; Joslin 1995; Turner 2000). Historically, Beech
Bottom’s primary industry was feldspar mining (feldspar is a rock-forming mineral
industrially important in making glass and ceramics; U.S. Geological Survey 2002).

As the feldspar mines began to close in the early 1940s, residents migrated north
to seek work in the shipyards of Virginia or factories in Ohio. The mobilizing effects of
World War II also took a toll on the community’s population, as locals joined the service
and resettled elsewhere upon their return.
Christmas tree farming is now Beech Bottom’s primary industry. Two farms with about 100,000 trees employ two community residents full-time, and other residents tend or sell trees and make Christmas wreaths on a part-time basis. Currently, only about ten longtime residents live in Beech Bottom, and most are related to each other either by “blood” or by marriage. Three of the residents are European American while others claim either African American or mixed (African American, European American, and Native American) descent, as documented in a college senior thesis written by a former resident (Harris 1994), a popular article written about Harris’s research on the community (Joslin 1995), and U.S. Census data (2000).

2.3 Race and Ethnicity

Although non-white Beech Bottom residents claim a diverse heritage, a conception of the community as multiethnic is counterbalanced both by the historical reality of race relations within the American South and by a fundamental bi-ethnic dichotomy (in terms of certain social practices) that still exists and still demarcates the African American and European American communities in Beech Bottom.

I first learned from Harris (1994) and Joslin (1995) that several (mostly young) residents of the Beech Bottom community self-identify as multiethnic. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census seem to confirm this fact for two residents and also suggest that the other residents self-identify as African American, although these data are somewhat inconclusive since the numbers could not be matched to individual research subjects (Mallinson 2001). Residents themselves, however, volunteered little information about
their ethnicity. One informant, for example, said that residents are wary of outsiders (e.g., fieldworkers) because they worry that we will ask sensitive questions and resurrect racial controversy. For this reason, they avoid discussing topics of conversation that could lead to race or ethnicity issues. When such topics did come up, residents deflected attention from racism and instead preferred to talk, for example, about the relative ease with which schools were integrated in Avery County and their close relationships with their neighbors, both black and white.

Thus it became apparent that at the same time residents minimize ethnic divisions between whites and blacks, they also paint a picture of their community as a multicultural one that has historically enjoyed a relatively high degree of racial harmony among African Americans, European Americans, and Native Americans. In this way, the non-white Beech Bottom residents separate themselves from the historical reality of the bi-ethnic American South – in which, as Harris states in Joslin (1995:3), “any mixture and you were considered black” – and establish in contrast a view of Beech Bottom as “still a mixed community with the same values it used to have” (Joslin 1995:3, quoting Harris). In this way, it seems that residents have developed a multiethnic consciousness as a strategy for responding to disempowering and perhaps inaccurate racial classifications.

What are the consequences of the non-white Beech Bottom residents’ asserting their multiethnicity within the social context of the community (e.g., a society historically dominated by segregation)? For the most part, there is considerable social interaction between the European Americans and the non-whites. For instance, members of both social groups drop by and hang out at the local store, and Beech Bottom’s non-white
residents enjoy a number of cultural practices, such as NASCAR and rodeo, that are strongly associated with European American rather than African American culture.

But there still remains a fundamental bi-ethnic dichotomy. In a prime example, no European Americans attend the Beech Bottom Mennonite Brethren church, while about five of Beech Bottom’s non-white residents do. The church, which was founded in 1926 by the Mennonite Brethren of Hillsboro, Kansas, is one of only six black Mennonite Brethren churches in the United States, all of which are located in North Carolina: Beech Bottom, Boone, Lenoir (two), Darby, and Laytown (Scarlata 2000; Ostwalt 1992). Its existence is relatively anomalous in terms of the demographics of ethnicity within church denominations, and Joslin (1995:3), in fact, calls this church a “symbol of the segregated] past.” As Ostwalt (1992:105) notes:

If the words Mennonite and African-American sound strange when uttered in the same sentence, it is because the combination of Mennonite theological tradition, which is generally associated with Swiss or Dutch ethnicity, and African-American culture is virtually unknown. In fact, black Mennonite Brethren churches exist nowhere in the United States except in a geographic area that has traditionally symbolized isolation and socio-cultural homogeneity, namely the Southern Appalachian mountains.

In addition to post facto segregation in terms of religious practices, the ways that the non-white residents in Beech Bottom are classified imply a strict racial boundary. European Americans identify Beech Bottom as a black community, and they often used language in their interviews that separated themselves from the non-white residents. For example, European Americans classified them as black, as “colored,” and sometimes
even as “niggers,” while referring to themselves as the “whites.” As one older European American male put it:

Well, see, there’s white people and then they say colored people here. {laughter}

I didn’t say the wrong word there. {more laughter}

Beech Bottoms was where they lived, the colored people…

And that’s the only place they settled. (Interview 4:340)

By the same token, the older non-white Beech Bottom resident in the sample classifies himself as an African American when he explains his reasons for enlisting in the army.

They wadn’t no work for black people to do, men especially. They wadn’t no plants neither in this neighborhood. I went in the service. (Interview 7:15)

At another point in the conversation he refers to the segregated school system. (Prior to integration, there were two black schools – one in Beech Bottom and one in Plumtree, a community located only a few miles from Beech Bottom.)

They used to go to school down here – the black people. It’s about three, two and a half miles down here. (Interview 11:70)

Thus in Beech Bottom we have a situation in which some of the (mostly younger) non-white residents prefer to self-identify as multiethnic or multiracial while other (mostly older) residents identify as African American. At the same time, regardless of ethnic self-identifications, the social circumstances of the Beech Bottom community set up a fundamental distinction between “blacks” and “whites.” This is a common situation for blacks, according to Nagel (1994:156): “[W]hile blacks may make intra-racial distinctions based on ancestry or skin tone, the power of race as a socially defining status
in U.S. society make these internal differences rather unimportant in interracial settings in comparison to the fundamental black/white color boundary.”

To begin to try to sort out possible relationships that might exist between dialect and ethnic identification in the Beech Bottom community, I divided speakers into two groups, labeled European Americans and African Americans. The reason I used these traditional groupings was to test the hypothesis of whether the linguistic data for all the speakers in these two ethnic groups would be homogeneous. This decision was also made in light of the research goals of this thesis, which aims to compare a group of people who demonstrate strong bonds of social cohesion with a different group of local residents, thereby providing a basis for examining a set of regionally and ethnically sensitive linguistic variables. Of course, this classification is not intended to simplify the diverse ethnic heritage of the Beech Bottom residents or to imply that this group of people is completely homogeneous, either ethnically or linguistically. As data will reveal, in fact, the process of developing a multiethnic consciousness does seem to correlate with systematic differences in the patterning of key linguistic variables.

2.4 Beech Bottom as an Enclave Dialect Community

Given certain sociohistorical and sociocultural conditions – its physical detachment from larger cities, the mountainous terrain that still hinders accessibility, and the nature of internally focused social networks – the community of Beech Bottom appears to fit the criteria often used to define an enclave community and historically isolated situation (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes forthcoming; Wolfram & Thomas 2002).
Of course, a dialectologist’s perception of an “isolated” community may not match the residents’ perception of their isolation or social, sociocultural, or sociopsychological integration (Montgomery 2000). As Montgomery (2000:45) explains,

> While often invoking the concept of isolation, linguists have yet to define it in a way that is sociologically respectable (based on valid, measurable criteria), or anthropologically sensitive (involving analysis of the community on its own terms and based on community perceptions and behavior – what is remoteness for the investigator may not be perceived as such by residents)…In sum, we can see that American linguists may have recognized several types of isolation, but have done little to examine it critically or explore its dimensions.

In response to this challenge, recent research has begun to address in depth some of these same issues (e.g., Wolfram forthcoming; Mallinson 2001).

It should be noted that the situation in Beech Bottom is different from other sociohistorical circumstances of isolation, such as the coastal enclave community of Hyde County (Wolfram et al. 2000; Wolfram & Thomas 2002) or the transplant enclave communities in Samaná and Nova Scotia (Poplack 1999; Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1991, 2001) and Liberia (Singler 1991). First, an obvious physical difference is that Beech Bottom exists in a Highland Southern context as opposed, for example, to the coastal community of Hyde County. A further difference is in terms of Beech Bottom’s surrounding regional dialect community – a variety of Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976; Montgomery & Hall forthcoming) with distinct historical dialect roots in a Scots-Irish dialect source (Montgomery 1989).
Additional differences exist in terms of the historical continuity of the African American community and the population demographics of the African American community. With so few residents from the original population still living there, the Beech Bottom African American community is much smaller than any of the other communities that have been mentioned above (with the exception, of course, of Muzel Bryant – the sole African American female living on Ocracoke Island, discussed further in Sections 1 and 5 of this thesis). Thus, as noted before, the population is so small that the speech of the remaining African Americans must be examined as a kind of case study rather than a sample of a larger population. Finally, there may be a difference in terms of how the residents identified here as African American socially construct their identity. As noted above, several younger residents self-identify as multiracial rather than as African American, even though they have been segregated on the basis of a bi-racial social division historically. This identity contrasts with the ethnic self-identification of African Americans in Hyde County, for example, who do not classify themselves as multiracial. Such differences come into play in examining and interpreting the patterns of linguistic alignment between European American and African Americans in Beech Bottom and in comparing their community with other situations.
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Sample

As part of an ongoing sociolinguistic investigation of enclave communities in North Carolina, I and other staff members of the North Carolina Language and Life Project interviewed and recorded six different African Americans. However, in this thesis, quantitative analysis focuses on three subjects for whom extensive tape-recorded interviews of adequate quality are available. Each speaker was interviewed on more than one occasion, yielding approximately nine hours of relatively natural, recorded conversation. The three speakers are all males (only one African American female remains in the community); at the time the recordings were made in 2000-01, one was aged 72, one 39, and one 13. From the limited recordings and conversations with the other African Americans, however, it can be concluded that these three speakers are representative of the other African Americans in Beech Bottom. By extension, they represent the vestiges of the original, more substantive community of African Americans who have since moved from the area. All of the speakers were born and raised in Beech Bottom; only the oldest speaker, when he was in the army, traveled to any extent.

For comparison with the African American speakers, interviews were conducted with nine European Americans from the similarly rural, neighboring community of Roaring Creek, which is located less than one mile from Beech Bottom. All of the European American speakers are also lifetime residents of the immediate region, and they
are conveniently divided into two age groups – those 55 and over and those under 35. The older group includes four men (aged 89, 79, 62, and 55 at the time of the interview) and two women (aged 72 and 70). The younger group includes one male, aged 35, and two females aged 31 and 25.

Table 1 breaks down the numbers of the linguistic informants into categories based on generation, ethnicity, and sex.

Table 1. Linguistic Informants by Generation, Ethnicity, and Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic Informants</th>
<th>Beech Bottom African Americans</th>
<th>Local Cohort European Americans</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male</td>
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<td>Older</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As with the African American subjects, several of the European American speakers were interviewed more than once. Interviews were usually conducted by a pair of European American fieldworkers, in most cases a male and a female. Conversations focused on topics of interest to the subjects, such as hunting, the care of Christmas trees, and so forth – topics that fell within the parameters of the spontaneous natural conversation interview in sociolinguistics (Labov 1966; Wolfram & Fasold 1974).
3.2 The Data

In my analysis of the data, I occasionally used VARBRUL, a probabilistic-based, multivariate statistical procedure. Although VARBRUL outcomes can remain open to challenge, the statistical tool is useful since results can indicate the relative contributions of various factor groups to the overall variability of items (Cedergren & Sankoff 1974; Sankoff 1988). Factor groups may include independent linguistic constraints (e.g., following phonological environment, subject type) or external social constraints (e.g., ethnicity, age group). The weighting values range from 0 to 1 so that a value of greater than 0.5 in a binomial application indicates that the factor being considered has a favoring effect on the occurrence of the variable, while a value of less than 0.5 indicates a disfavoring effect.

Other technical methods were employed in the production of the vowel plots (see Section 4.2.4). Signals for the production of each phoneme were fed into a Kay Computerized Speech Laboratory (CSL), model 4300B, Software Version 5.X, and were digitized at a sampling rate of 10 kHz with 16-bit resolution and Blackman window weighting. They were lowpass filtered at 4 kHz. Pre-emphasis of 6 dB/oct at a factor of 0.85 was applied. Spectrographic displays of the vowels were then created by means of a Fast Fourier Transform with a frame length of 100 points, and from these displays it was determined where to take readings. For monophthongs, a reading was taken in the center of the vocoid; for diphthongs, one reading was taken at about 35 ms from the beginning of the diphthong and another reading was taken at about 35 ms from the end. Usually, 12
LPC (linear predictive coding) coefficients were used, but anywhere from 10 to 30 coefficients were used if 12 failed to produce a satisfactory reading. The points shown on the plots represent mean values of seven to 10 tokens of each vowel, and arrows indicate the gliding of diphthongs. No more than two instances of a single lexical item were used in order to reduce skewing due to phonetic context. Certain phonetic contexts, such as pre-/l/ and pre-/r/, were avoided because of their strong coarticulatory effects on formant values.
4. Diagnostic Linguistic Variables

Four morphosyntactic variables are analyzed: 3rd pl. –s attachment, as in The dogs barks; 3rd sg. –s absence, as in The dog bark_; present-tense copula absence, as in They nice; and past tense be regularization, as in The dogs was there. Three phonological variables are also analyzed: syllable-coda consonant cluster reduction, as in wes’ end for west end; postvocalic r-lessness, as in fou’ for four; and /aI/ glide reduction, as in [tam] for time and [rat] for right. Acoustic analyses of the entire vowel system are also given for three representative speakers.

All of these structures are well-documented regional and/or ethnic variables of American English (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998), and they therefore provide a comparable database for examining ethnic alignment in disparate situations involving bi-ethnic enclave communities. While some of the features, such as 3rd pl. –s marking, are strongly associated with Appalachian speech (Wolfram & Christian 1976; Christian et al. 1988; Montgomery & Hall forthcoming), others, such as 3rd sg. –s absence, are associated with AAVE (Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis 1968; Wolfram 1969; Fasold 1972; Bailey & Thomas 1998; Rickford 1999). The range of variables is deliberately inclusive of both types of structures in order to assess dialect accommodation and alignment.
4.1 Morphosyntax

4.1.1 3rd Pl. –s Attachment

The concord pattern in which –s is marked on a verb with a plural subject, as in *The dogs barks* or *People goes there*, is widely documented as a feature of English varieties that were influenced by Ulster Scots in the US, such as Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976; Christian et al. 1988; Montgomery 1989), although its colonial distribution was apparently not limited to the Highland Southern region (Hazen 1996; Wolfram & Thomas 2002). By contrast, this feature is not usually associated with subject-verb concord in AAVE (Labov et al. 1968; Fasold & Wolfram 1970; Fasold 1972; Rickford 1999), although Montgomery et al. (1993) and Montgomery & Fuller (1996) have documented its use in some earlier writing samples of African Americans. Table 2 gives the figures for the overall incidence of verbal –s attachment with 3rd pl. subjects for the groups of speakers in the Beech Bottom sample.

Table 2. Incidence of 3rd Pl. –s Attachment by Generation and Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Group</th>
<th>3rd Pl. –s Attachment/Total</th>
<th>% Attached</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beech Bottom African Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>12/43</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>8/66</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>0/11</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20/120</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Cohort European Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>16/76</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>22/103</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38/179</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to presenting the overall comparison of the rates of 3rd pl. –s attachment by age and ethnic group, the incidence of this feature is examined in terms of two independent linguistic variables – the subject type and the proximity of the subject and the verb, both of which have been shown to constrain this marking. Following other studies (e.g., Christian et al. 1988; Hazen 1996, 2000b), the analysis distinguishes between noun phrases (e.g., *The dogs barks*), collective nouns (e.g., *People talks*), and pronouns (e.g., *They talks*). The so-called proximity constraint distinguishes between verbs that are adjacent to the subject, as in *The dogs barks*, and those that are not, because of a heavy NP (e.g., *The dogs in the trucks barks*) or a clausal complement (e.g., *The dogs that barks are hungry*).

In Table 3, the results of a VARBRUL analysis (Cedergren & Sankoff 1974; Young & Bayley 1996) in terms of these various factor groups are given for each of the ethnic groups of speakers, since a preliminary analysis suggested that there might be an interactive effect between ethnicity and the independent linguistic variables.

**Table 3. VARBRUL Analysis of 3rd Pl. –s Attachment by Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARBRUL Results</th>
<th>Beech Bottom African Americans</th>
<th>Local Cohort European Americans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Input probability</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjacency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjacent</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-adjacent</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun phrase</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collective</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pro</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Chi sq.</strong></td>
<td>7.182</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi sq. per cell</td>
<td>1.197</td>
<td>.480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas Table 2 indicates that European American and African American speakers have similar levels of 3rd pl. –s attachment, the separate VARBRUL analyses in
Table 3 show that ethnicity is not independent of linguistic factors. Both European Americans and African Americans favor noun phrases and collective nouns over pronouns; additionally, European Americans favor collective nouns over other noun phrases whereas African Americans reverse this constraint order. We thus see a minor difference in the subject type constraint, which may be due to the limited number of tokens for collective nouns in the corpus (10 for the African Americans; 43 for the European Americans). A more significant difference is indicated with respect to the proximity constraint. The European Americans in this sample favor –s attachment on non-adjacent subjects – the pattern typically found in varieties of Appalachian English (Montgomery 1989; Hazen 1996, 2000b). In contrast, the Beech Bottom African Americans show a favoring effect for –s attachment with adjacent subjects and verbs.

Thus, these data on 3rd pl. –s attachment indicate that within a pattern of overall alignment there is a subtle grammatical disparity with respect to variable constraints. It is noteworthy that the difference in systematic effects on variability is similar to that found for African Americans and European Americans in Hyde County, although the particulars of the hierarchical effects are different in these two settings (Wolfram et al. 2000; Wolfram & Thomas 2002). Furthermore, while the data on this feature suggest that Beech Bottom African Americans are sensitive to the dialect norms characteristic of the regional vernacular norms, they also indicate that this feature is receding: the young European Americans show reduced levels of 3rd pl. –s attachment and the young African American speaker shows no cases. This matches quite closely the type of recession documented in Hyde County African American and European American English (Wolfram et al. 2000:336-7).
4.1.2 3rd Sg. –s Absence

A second dimension of subject-verb concord is the optional attachment of –s to 3rd sg. verbs, as in the sentence *The dog bark_. This variable is a well-documented characteristic of AAVE throughout the United States (Labov et al. 1968; Labov 1972; Wolfram 1969; Fasold & Wolfram 1970; Fasold 1972; Winford 1998; Rickford 1999). In contrast, this feature rarely surfaces in Appalachian English varieties and is generally restricted to lexical items such as the verbs *don’t and seem* (Fasold 1972; Wolfram & Fasold 1974; Wolfram & Christian 1976). For my tabulation, cases with *don’t* for *doesn’t* were not taken since this is a lexicalized and idiomatic 3rd sg. form. Table 4 presents the figures for the Beech Bottom African American and European American speakers in this corpus, with the overall incidence of 3rd sg. –s absence and the breakdown by age.

Table 4. Incidence of 3rd Sg. –s Absence by Generation and Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Group</th>
<th>3rd Sg. –s Absence/Total</th>
<th>% Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beech Bottom African Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>17/57</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>15/63</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>0/21</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32/141</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Cohort European Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>2/96</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>1/75</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3/171</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this corpus, the three examples of 3rd sg. –s absence by the European American informants are:

1. ‘I mean, seem_ like they…’ (male age 89)
2. ‘[if] a fellow live_ long enough…’ (male age 79)
3. ‘he won’t walk far before somebody stop_ and picks him up.’ (male age 35)

The first example matches Fasold’s (1972) and Wolfram & Fasold’s (1974) data on European Americans’ verbal –s absence; the second and third examples do not, and I might attribute these tokens to casual speech performance, since the context for both of them was fairly rapid speech.

The data on 3rd sg. –s absence clearly reflect, in general, ethnic differentiation. As shown in Table 4, the European American speakers have an extremely low rate for 3rd sg. –s absence (less than 2 percent), while the African Americans exhibit 3rd sg. –s absence at a significantly higher rate of almost 23 percent – though the qualification must be made that this is due mostly to the oldest speaker’s rates of absence. A Chi square test showed that the difference between the African Americans’ rates of 3rd sg. –s absence (22.7%; N=32/141) and those of the European Americans (1.8%; N=3/171) is highly significant (total $\chi^2 = 34.01; \text{df} = 1; p < .01$).

Figure 2 extends this comparison to include not only the figures for Beech Bottom African Americans and the benchmark European American variety, but also the data for Hyde County African Americans, from Wolfram et al. (2000). The graph compares 3rd sg. –s absence by age, ethnicity, and region (Beech Bottom and Hyde County).
Although the Beech Bottom African Americans’ rates of 3rd sg. –s absence are not as high as those of Hyde County African Americans, the rates for the middle-aged and the older speakers are still well above the rates for their cohort European Americans. Additionally, there are no tokens of 3rd sg. –s absence in the speech of the youngest Beech Bottom African American, which suggests an erosion of an ethnolinguistic marker and a movement toward greater assimilation to the European American cohort variety.

### 4.1.3 Copula Absence

The absence of copula and auxiliary for contractible forms of *is* and *are*, as in *She nice* ‘She’s nice’ or *They running* ‘They’re running’, has been well-documented as a distinctive feature of AAVE (Labov 1969; Wolfram 1969; Fasold 1972; Baugh 1980, 1983; Rickford 1997, 1998, 1999). Though copula absence is found to some extent in
white Southern rural vernacular varieties (Wolfram 1974; Feagin 1979; Wolfram & Thomas 2002), it is relatively rare in the Highland Southern variety examined by Wolfram & Christian (1976:40-4). Therefore, copula absence is often considered a diagnostic ethnolinguistic marker and can serve well as an index of dialect alignment.

Although different procedures (e.g., Rickford, Ball, Blake, Jackson, & Martin 1991) may be used in tabulating the incidence of copula absence, I followed the general procedure of tabulating tokens of contractible forms of *is* and *are* out of the total number of contracted (e.g., *She’s nice*), contractible full (e.g., *She is nice*), and deleted (e.g., *She nice*) forms. Specific criteria for “don’t count” cases were based on Blake’s (1997) guidelines. The following constructions were disregarded: 1st sg. *am*; negatives; past tense cases; existential *there*; *it’s, that’s*, and *what’s* constructions; questions; clause-final position, emphatic stress; and cases that preceded an identical phonetic environment ([r] for *are* and sibilant for *is*). Variation studies have also demonstrated that the form of the copula, the subject, and type of predicate complement influence copula deletion rates.

Following work by Labov (1969), Baugh (1983), and Rickford (1997), specific constraints are considered based on the form of the copula (*is* versus *are*), subject type (NP versus pronoun), and predicate complement constructions. Due to limited tokens for the full range of cross-product permutations in terms of these factor groups, complement construction types are divided into only two categories: verb –*ing* and *gonna* in one and the predicate nominative, adjective, and locative in the other. In effect, this division distinguishes between copula and auxiliary functions of *is* and *are*. 
The raw figures and a VARBRUL analysis of the copula absence data are presented in Tables 5 and 6, while Figure 3 presents a graph for the incidence of copula absence by ethnicity, generation, and type of copula.

### Table 5. Incidence of Copula Absence by Generation and Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Group</th>
<th><em>is</em> Absence/Total</th>
<th>% Absent</th>
<th><em>are</em> Absence/Total</th>
<th>% Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beech Bottom African Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>1/51</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>17/21</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>4/99</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>28/41</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>1/13</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6/163</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>46/67</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Cohort European Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>1/84</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>8/37</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>0/80</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1/32</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1/164</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>9/69</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6. VARBRUL Analysis of Copula Absence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARBRUL Results</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Input probability = .05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American = .68; European American = .29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copula Form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>are</em> = .86; <em>is</em> = .26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preceding grammatical environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun phrase = .53; pronoun = .49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following grammatical environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nom/adj/loc = .47; verb -ing/gonna = .57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Chi sq. = 15.932; Chi sq. per cell = .996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 reveals that neither group shows much copula deletion for \textit{is}, in contrast to the high levels of \textit{is} absence that Labov (1969), Wolfram (1969), Fasold (1972), and Baugh (1983) found for African Americans in New York City, Detroit, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles, respectively. Older European and African Americans in Beech Bottom do, however, show absence for \textit{are}, and the overall levels are much higher for the older African American than the older European Americans. For the European and African Americans, \textit{are} strongly favors deletion over \textit{is} and verb –\textit{ing} favors deletion over other verbal complements, but the effect of the subject is reversed for African Americans, who favor deletion with pronoun subjects while European Americans favor it with noun phrase subjects. However, a step-up step-down VARBRUL run threw out the categories of preceding and following grammatical environments, which again indicates that copula may be functioning slightly differently than expected in the speech of these residents.
Nevertheless, ethnicity is a significant factor in the incidence of copula absence. The Beech Bottom African Americans have much higher levels of copula absence than do the European Americans, though the difference intersects with age.

4.1.4 Past Tense Be Leveling

Due to the irregularity of person-number concord in past tense, the verb be is prone to leveling. It is a common process in vernacular varieties of English around the world (e.g., Chambers 1995; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998; Tagliamonte & Smith 1999), and Chambers (1995:243) calls it a “grammatical primitive” for vernacular speech. It is both a feature of AAVE (Labov et al. 1968; Wolfram & Fasold 1974) and of vernacular varieties of Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976; Feagin 1979; Hazen & Fluharty 2001). Although leveling to were/weren’t has been found in some varieties of English – e.g., in Ocracoke and mainland Hyde County, North Carolina (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994); in Lumbee English in Robeson County, North Carolina (Wolfram & Sellers 1999; Wolfram & Dannenberg 1999); and in the Fens of England (Britain 2002) – vernacular varieties of both Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976; Feagin 1979; Christian et al. 1988) and also African American English (Wolfram & Fasold 1974; Weldon 1994) level to was. Table 7 gives the incidence rates for leveling by generation and ethnicity.
As can be seen from the data in Table 7, all of the groups of speakers, regardless of ethnicity, level to *was* at rates above 90 percent. The total rate of past tense *be* leveling for the European Americans closely matches the 91 percent rate leveling found by Wolfram and Christian (1976) and is somewhat higher than the 77 percent rate reported by Christian et al. (1988) for working-class Appalachians. These figures suggest that speakers of vernacular varieties of Appalachian English are consistently maintaining – and perhaps even increasing – their rates of *was* leveling over time.

Dialects typically show slightly distinct subject constraints for past tense *be* leveling (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994; Tagliamonte & Smith 1999); speakers who level to *was* do so more often with noun phrase subjects (e.g., *The dogs was there*) than with pronoun subjects (e.g., *They was there*). The data, as shown in Table 8, however, do not suggest a constraint related to subject type.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that there is no significant ethnic distinction in past *be* leveling among the speakers. As the analysis reveals, both African Americans
and European Americans share a fairly vernacular version of past tense *be* leveling that does not show substantial movement toward the prescriptive norm. In fact, the rate of leveling aligns generally with vernacular varieties quite removed from the effects of prescriptive norms (Schreier 2002).

Table 8. Incidence of Past Tense *Be* Leveling by Linguistic Constraint and Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Type</th>
<th>Leveled/Total</th>
<th>% Leveled</th>
<th>Leveled/Total</th>
<th>% Leveled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Beech Bottom African Americans</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Local Cohort European Americans</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd sg.</td>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>15/15</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st pl.</td>
<td>21/21</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>14/16</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd pl.</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd pl. NP</td>
<td>19/20</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>13/17</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd pl. Pro</td>
<td>29/33</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>34/35</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>11/11</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although dialect studies have found differing evidence as to whether older speakers, middle-aged speakers, or younger speakers favor the use of vernacular features (Labov 1963; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1995; Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1999; Downes 1998), the data from Beech Bottom indicate near-parallel rates of past tense *be* leveling for all speakers of both ethnicities, regardless of age. Even the youngest African American and European American speakers level to *was* at rates comparable to the older speakers. (Although the youngest Beech Bottom African American’s rate of past tense *be* leveling is a bit lower, I speculate that his incidence rates might rise if more data and tokens for this feature were available.)
4.1.5 Summary of Morphosyntactic Findings

An analysis of the morphological variables revealed three different patterns in the Beech Bottom African Americans’ patterns of dialect accommodation and ethnolinguistic boundary maintenance. Two of the variables, 3rd sg. –s absence and copula absence, are relatively diagnostic in terms of how the dialect of the Beech Bottom African Americans compares to urban AAVE. Although one might expect to find all three of the Beech Bottom African American speakers showing similar usage rates for these features (and thereby preserving an ethnolinguistic distinction), the data actually show that, in contrast to the older and middle-aged African Americans, the young African American speaker accommodates almost completely to the local cohort European American variety and shows very low levels of both 3rd sg. –s absence and copula absence. Similarly, for the traditional Appalachian English variable of 3rd pl. –s attachment, the young African American shows reduced usage rates for this feature compared to the other African American speakers, attaching –s to plural verbs zero out of eleven opportunities. This pattern may be a trend for the young female European Americans as well (Mallinson 2001).

At first glance, these patterns seem to suggest that the youngest Beech Bottom African American is simply moving toward more standard speech. In my opinion, however, the data from the fourth morphological variable of past tense be absence work against such a conclusion. For this feature, all the speakers – regardless of age, ethnicity, or sex – have very high rates of was leveling, from 88 to 96%. (Though the youngest African American speaker’s rates of was leveling are indeed a bit lower than the other
speakers in this corpus, his token count is low as well, which limits speculation as to what might happen to his usage rates with more opportunities.)

Thus from this analysis of the four morphological variables, it is the young African American speaker who is noteworthy, since his usage rates for three of the four morphological features deviate most from those of the other African American speakers, who show patterns more typical of AAVE. At the same time, the fact that this young African American still levels to was at a relatively high rate seems to invalidate any conjecture that he is moving unilaterally toward standardness. Perhaps a more relevant question, then, would be to which dialect or dialects the young speaker is accommodating, since both AAVE and Appalachian English both level to was.

4.2 Phonology

4.2.1 Consonant Cluster Reduction

Consonant cluster reduction of syllable-coda stops that share the feature of voicing (e.g. west, find, cold, act, etc. but not colt, jump, etc.) is another highly diagnostic ethnolinguistic marker in American English (e.g., Labov et al. 1968; Wolfram 1969; Fasold 1972; Guy 1980; Wolfram, Childs, & Torbert 2000), particularly when it occurs in prevocalic environments such as wes’ end and fin’ out. Varieties of AAVE usually have extensive prevocalic cluster reduction and therefore differ from cohort European American vernacular varieties such as those in the Southern Appalachia mountain range (Wolfram & Christian 1976; Hazen & Fluharty 2001). A number of phonetic and
grammatical factors constrain the incidence of consonant cluster reduction, including the morphemic status of the cluster, the preceding and following phonetic environments, and the prosodic status of the syllable in which the cluster occurs. The relative frequency of consonant cluster reduction has also been linked to social variables such as social status, ethnicity, and style.

Table 9 provides the raw data for syllable-coda cluster reduction for the African Americans from Beech Bottom and their European American cohorts. Three different following phonetic environments are delimited (prevocalic, prepausal, preconsonantal), and the clusters are distinguished in terms of monomorphemic and bimorphemic status. Previous studies have found these constraints to be the major types of independent linguistic factors systematically affecting variability in cluster reduction, although there are a number of other minor effects (Fasold 1972; Guy 1980).

**Table 9. Incidence of Cluster Reduction by Generation, Ethnicity, and Cluster Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Group</th>
<th>Monomorphemic</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Bimorphemic</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-Voc. Red./Total</td>
<td>Pre-Pause Red./Total</td>
<td>Pre-Cons. Red./Total</td>
<td>Pre-Voc. Red./Total</td>
<td>Pre-Pause Red./Total</td>
<td>Pre-Cons. Red./Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beech Bottom African Americans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>11/30</td>
<td>8/16</td>
<td>37/47</td>
<td>5/35</td>
<td>2/9</td>
<td>13/18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>2/16</td>
<td>3/13</td>
<td>14/20</td>
<td>2/17</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>2/8</td>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>1/20</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15/54</td>
<td>16/41</td>
<td>62/81</td>
<td>8/72</td>
<td>2/10</td>
<td>16/22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Cohort European Americans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>2/38</td>
<td>2/15</td>
<td>23/43</td>
<td>3/55</td>
<td>0/10</td>
<td>12/32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>0/12</td>
<td>2/19</td>
<td>13/27</td>
<td>1/14</td>
<td>0/5</td>
<td>2/8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2/50</td>
<td>4/34</td>
<td>36/70</td>
<td>4/69</td>
<td>0/15</td>
<td>14/40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 9 shows, the incidence of cluster reduction follows the typical systematic patterning of independent linguistic constraints, but there is a significant difference based on ethnicity.

An accompanying VARBRUL analysis, as set forth in Table 10, includes the factor groups of ethnicity, cluster type (monomorphemic or bimorphemic), and following phonetic environment (prevocalic, prepausal, and preconsonantal). Although age is not included in the multivariate analysis, the percentages suggest that this ethnic difference is receding, as the oldest African American speaker has the highest incidence of cluster reduction and the youngest speaker the lowest. This is a fairly familiar pattern found for other variables as well.

### Table 10. VARBRUL Analysis of Consonant Cluster Reduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARBRUL Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Input probability = .29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans = .65; European Americans = .33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monomorphemic = .56; bimorphemic = .39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consonant = .80; pause = .37; vowel = .24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Chi sq. = 3.085; Chi sq. per cell = .257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To understand the significance of the cluster reduction patterns found in Beech Bottom, these data are compared to those for several other varieties, based on an adaptation of the figures from Wolfram et al. (2000). The comparative summary in Figure 4 adds Southern AAVE, Hyde County AAVE, and Northern Standard English to the figures for African Americans and European Americans from this study.
While the figures for Beech Bottom African Americans fall well below those for Southern AAVE and Hyde County AAVE, they are still above those for the cohort European Americans, whose rates of cluster reduction align with other European American varieties, including those in Appalachia (Wolfram & Christian 1976). Despite their tendency to accommodate to the local variety for other linguistic variables, Beech Bottom African Americans still exhibit vestiges of an ethnolinguistic divide with respect to consonant cluster reduction – though this is due mainly to the oldest speaker’s rates.

### 4.2.2 Rhoticity

Highland North Carolina, like Southern Appalachia in general, is a rhotic area (Kurath & McDavid 1961; Wolfram & Christian 1976), while AAVE is traditionally *r*-
less postvocally (Labov et al. 1968; Wolfram 1969; Bailey & Thomas 1998), though Wolfram et al. (2000) offer some qualifications concerning this general conclusion. Postvocalic \( r \) is a trait that may be quite diagnostic of regional and ethnic accommodation, particularly in the Southern Highlands. To determine the extent to which Beech Bottom African Americans and local cohort European Americans share the rhotic character of the Appalachian region, at least 100 tokens of postvocalic \( r \) representing three different phonetic positions – stressed nuclear position, as in \textit{sir} or \textit{third}; syllable-coda position, as in \textit{four} or \textit{card}; and unstressed nuclear position, as in \textit{mother} or \textit{better} – were extracted for each speaker in the sample. Each instance of potential postvocalic \( r \) vocalization was classified impressionistically as rhotic or vocalized. The summary figures of postvocalic \( r \) vocalization are given in Table 11, along with a VARBRUL analysis (Table 12) that considers the factor groups of ethnicity and \( r \)-type as set forth above.

### Table 11. Incidence of Rhoticity by Generation and Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Group</th>
<th>Nuclear-( r )-less/Total</th>
<th>Tautosyllabic ( r )-less/Total</th>
<th>Unstressed ( r )-less/Total</th>
<th>Total ( r )-less/Total</th>
<th>% r-less</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beech Bottom African Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>0/31</td>
<td>5/120</td>
<td>16/77</td>
<td>21/228</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>0/16</td>
<td>1/68</td>
<td>1/19</td>
<td>2/103</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>0/10</td>
<td>0/57</td>
<td>2/38</td>
<td>2/105</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0/57</td>
<td>6/245</td>
<td>19/134</td>
<td>25/436</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Cohort European Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>0/76</td>
<td>1/235</td>
<td>3/105</td>
<td>4/416</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>0/55</td>
<td>1/220</td>
<td>1/88</td>
<td>2/363</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0/131</td>
<td>2/455</td>
<td>4/193</td>
<td>6/779</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12. VARBRUL Analysis of Rhoticity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARBRUL Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input probability</strong> = .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans = .78; European Americans = .32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>R</em>-type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstressed = .78; syllable coda stressed = .35;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nuclear = knockout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Chi sq. = .565; Chi sq. per cell = .141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 reveals that the overall incidence of *r*-lessness – under 10 percent for all speakers and less than 5 percent for all but the older African American – is extremely low for both the African Americans and European Americans. Furthermore, the data from the VARBRUL analysis, shown in Table 12, show that vocalization is generally limited to unstressed syllables, where it is the least salient perceptually. The similarity of the quantitative data reveals that the African American and the European American speakers share a common pattern of rhoticity, although the data for the older African American speaker suggest that this was not always the case. Accordingly, due mostly to the older African American speaker’s figures in unstressed syllables, minor ethnolinguistic distinctions in terms of rhoticity emerge in the detailed quantitative analysis.

4.2.3 /ai/ Ungliding

The /ai/ glide may be reduced or monophthongized to [a] in many varieties of Southern English, including Southern Appalachia. In some regions of the South, including the Highland South (Hall 1942; Wolfram & Christian 1976; Hazen & Fluharty
2001), speakers reduce the /aI/ glide regardless of whether the following environment is voiceless (e.g., \textit{tight, rice}) or voiced (e.g., \textit{tide, time}). But other Southern varieties reduce it only in non-prevoiceless environments, that is, before voiced segments as in \textit{tide} and \textit{time} and in open syllables, as in \textit{lie} or \textit{bye} (Kurath & McDavid 1961; Wolfram & Fasold 1974; Wolfram 1994; Bailey & Thomas 1998). Most descriptions of AAVE have concluded that it aligns with those Southern varieties that only reduce the glide in prevoiced position. (“Prevoiced” is used to include /aI/ in both tautosyllabic prevoiced and in open syllables.) Therefore, the incidence of prevoiceless ungliding might be diagnostic of accommodation to the regional version of /aI/ ungliding. Table 13 gives the incidence of /aI/ ungliding in prevoiced and prevoiceless phonetic contexts for the Beech Bottom African Americans and their European American cohorts.

**Table 13. Incidence of /aI/ Ungliding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Group</th>
<th>Ungliding Prevoiceless/Total</th>
<th>Ungliding Prevoiced/Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beech Bottom African Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>83/86</td>
<td>51/51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>40/40</td>
<td>36/37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>24/24</td>
<td>27/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147/150</td>
<td>114/115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Cohort European Americans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>106/107</td>
<td>118/118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>69/69</td>
<td>50/50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175/176</td>
<td>168/168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13 reveals that both European American and African American speakers reduce the /aI/ glide near-categorically in both prevoiced and prevoiceless positions. Strikingly, the overall rate of prevoiceless reduction is over 97 percent for all subjects, regardless of ethnicity. Because the levels of /aI/ ungliding are nearly categorical for both ethnic groups and all ages, we could not subject the data to a multivariate analysis such as VARBRUL or even a simple non-parametric test such as Chi square.

Though recent studies have shown that other African American populations may, in fact, exhibit prevoiceless ungliding to some extent (Anderson 2002; Hazen & Fluharty 2001), none of these studies comes close to showing the near-categorical levels of ungliding indicated in this study. This is probably due to Beech Bottom’s insularity and the general intensity of vernacular structures manifested by these speakers; for example, the overall incidence of vernacular structures in this study is more concentrated than the vernacular levels indicated in Wolfram & Christian (1976), Feagin (1979), and Hazen & Fluharty (2001). Nonetheless, the level of alignment between African American and European Americans with respect to this variable is noteworthy. The speech of the Beech Bottom African Americans and that of their European American cohorts have converged to the point of being indistinguishable with respect to /aI/ ungliding.

4.2.4 Overall Vowel System

As Thomas (2001) and Bailey & Thomas (1998) observe, subtle but important distinctions often differentiate the vowel systems of Southern European Americans and African Americans. Therefore, in addition to the data previously presented on the
ungliding of the /aI/ vowel, this study also examines vowel alignment among Beech Bottom African Americans and their cohort European Americans with acoustic analyses of the entire vowel systems for the older and the middle-aged Beech Bottom African Americans and an older cohort European American (who represents the traditional regional vowel system).

The vowel plots given in Figures 5, 6, and 7 summarize the results of these measurements. Figure 5 shows the vowel plot for the older African American, Figure 6 shows the vowel plot for the middle-aged African American, and Figure 7 gives the plot for an older European American. The conventions of Thomas (2001) are followed in displaying relevant phonetic environments by superscripts, such as o' for /o/ before r, ai₀ for /aI/ before a voiceless segment, and aiᵣ for /aI/ before a voiced segment.

Figure 5. Vowel Plot for Older African American Speaker, Born 1929
Figure 6. Vowel Plot for Middle-Aged African American Speaker, Born 1962

Figure 7. Vowel Plot for Older European American Speaker, Born 1939
As seen in the vowel configurations for the African Americans and the cohort European American, the speakers’ productions of /aI/ are highly unglided in both prevoiceless and prevoiced environments, which matches impressionistic observations. All the speakers have fairly fronted productions of the back vowels /u/ and /U/; this is well-documented for the South (Kurath & McDavid 1961; Fridland 2000; Labov 1991), but it is fairly atypical of for Southern African Americans, whose productions of these vowels, as Thomas (2001:172) notes, “usually remain backed.” The speakers also share a back and up-gliding production of / /, and a more fronted nucleus in /aU/ toward [Θ]. Thus, the overall vowel systems of Beech Bottom African Americans and their cohort European Americans seem to be quite aligned in a unitary regional dialect norm.

4.2.5 Summary of Phonological Findings

The results obtained from analyzing prevocalic syllable-coda consonant cluster reduction, rhoticity, and /aI/ ungliding seem at first to be disparate, since for two of the phonological features, the Beech Bottom African Americans show at once almost complete accommodation (near-total /aI/ ungliding) and also a clear ethnolinguistic division (by maintaining, over time, relatively elevated levels of cluster reduction). Both of these features are dialect markers of Appalachian English and AAVE, respectively. But are they salient ethnic markers?

In partial answer to this question, I and other members of the NCLLP constructed a simple perception test and gave it to a group of students at North Carolina State University. In this perception test, 20-30 second passages of conversation for nine
speakers were played for the respondents, and listeners were asked to indicate the speaker’s age, ethnicity, and sex. The content of the passages was neutral with respect to its clues about ethnic identity, and speakers varied by age, sex, ethnicity, and place of residency in North Carolina. Included in the test were the older and middle-aged African Americans and one European American male from Beech Bottom. Also included were older African American and European American speakers from Hyde County.

The summary data on the correct ethnic identification of speakers from various regions in North Carolina are given in Table 14. For the sake of comparison with Beech Bottom and Hyde County, data on the correct ethnic identification of African American and European American speakers from Robeson County (Wolfram 2001) and Warren County (Wolfram et al. 1997; Hazen 2000a) are included. (Robeson County and Warren County are both rural areas, but neither is considered an isolated enclave situation.)

Table 14. Summary Results for Correct Ethnic Identification of Speakers from Selected Regions of North Carolina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker Group</th>
<th>Percent Correct Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beech Bottom</td>
<td>7.7% (n = 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde County, N.C.</td>
<td>15.4% (n = 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robeson County, N.C.</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren County, N.C.</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 14 shows, less than 10 percent of the respondents correctly identified the ethnicity of the two Beech Bottom African American speakers. Respondents correctly identified the ethnicity of the European American cohort, however, at rates of over 90 percent. A similar identification pattern to that presented here is found for older Hyde County African Americans, which confirms the results of a previously given perception test (Wolfram 2001). African Americans in the two enclave communities are quite alike in that they tend to be misidentified as white, in contrast to the overwhelmingly correct identification of African American residents of the rural non-enclave communities in the Piedmont region of North Carolina.

Results from the Beech Bottom perception test suggest that the reason why most outside listeners perceive the African American Beech Bottom residents to be European American (despite linguistic analysis that reveals a persistent ethnolinguistic divide) may rest in the kinds of similarities and differences that are currently manifested by African Americans and European Americans in the region. Most prominent is the fact that the African Americans share a common regional vowel system with their European American cohorts and that their dialect is most often associated with Highland Southern European American speech. Of course the perception test data do not undeniably confirm that phonological features such as cluster reduction were less salient for these outside listeners than was the regional marker of prevoiceless /AI/ ungliding, but this statement would be consonant with the hypothesis of Wolfram and Thomas (2002). They suggest that since all speakers reduce consonant clusters to some extent, this feature will be less salient perceptually; at the same time, they maintain that vowels are more salient in general.
Other studies have confirmed similar hypotheses. In a perceptual experiment that controlled various dialect cues, including diagnostic vowels and intonation, Thomas & Reaser (2001, 2002) found that when subjects were given speech stimuli that featured traditional Pamlico Sound vowels (such as fronted /o/), they frequently misidentified African American speakers as white. This misidentification occurred much more often than when subjects heard stimuli from the same speakers that did not feature such vowels. Furthermore, in multiple regression tests on unmodified samples, Thomas & Reaser (2002) found that the fronting of back vowels was the only significant factor influencing ethnic misidentification. This finding is consonant with Graff, Labov, & Harris’s (1986) earlier research on ethnic perception in Philadelphia. In this study, when the speech of African Americans was synthesized so that their productions of /o/ and /au/ sounded like the uniquely Philadelphian variants of these vowels, judges often misidentified them as white.

Apparently, as the results from these studies and perception tests suggest, not only are regional vowels a strong factor when judging ethnicity, but they can also obscure other ethnically correlated variables, including morphosyntactic structures and even non-phonetic phonological features such as consonant cluster reduction that are usually considered to be diagnostic ethnic markers. Although the ethnically differentiated morphosyntactic features from this analysis occur at modest levels compared to those in other African American communities, it is still significant that these variables may be outweighed by the perceptual saliency of phonetic considerations in the identification of speaker ethnicity.
4.3 Summary of Beech Bottom Dialect Features

Table 15 summarizes the absence or presence of linguistic variables in the speech of the Beech Bottom residents. The features are also compared in with those found in urban AAVE. As has been seen throughout this analysis, an overall pattern of accommodation by the Beech Bottom African Americans to the local European American variety (and, similarly, a pattern of contrast between their features and those of urban AAVE) can be quickly identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect Feature</th>
<th>Elderly Beech</th>
<th>Elderly Beech</th>
<th>Young Beech</th>
<th>Young Beech</th>
<th>Urban AAVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd pl. Verbal –s, NP Subject</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-/+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., <em>The dogs barks</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd pl. Verbal –s, Pro Subject</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., <em>They barks</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd sg. –s absence</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., <em>The dog bark_</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Are</em> Copula Absence</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-/+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., <em>They nice</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Is</em> Copula Absence</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-/+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., <em>She nice</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Was</em> regularization</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., <em>We was there</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phonological Features</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>+/-</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prevocalic CCR in</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bes’ egg</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nucleus fronting of /au/ in</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>town, out</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raised, unglided / / in</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>caught, Dawn</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prevoiced /al/ ungliding in</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>tide, time</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prevoiceless /al/ ungliding in</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>right, white</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fronted /o/ nucleus in</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>coat, Coke</em></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postvocalic r-lessness in</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>father, fear</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. CONCLUSIONS

What can we conclude from the Beech Bottom data about the ethnolinguistic history of Beech Bottom in particular and the development of African American English in general? First, it is undeniable that extensive accommodation to the local norm can be seen among the Beech Bottom African Americans. Prominent, traditional features of vernacular Highland Southern varieties – the regional vowel system, including prevoiceless /aɪ/ glide reduction, 3rd pl. –s marking, and rhoticity – are evident in their speech, which no doubt contributes to the perception that their dialect sounds nearly indistinguishable from that of their local European American cohorts.

Another important conclusion derived from this study concerns the historical development of African American speech. As has been shown, linguistic accommodation is more complete and the vestiges of ethnolinguistic differences are more subtle when the small community of Beech Bottom is compared to a much larger community like Hyde County, but it is still noteworthy that some vestiges of an ethnic divide do remain. Additionally, the patterns that surface in the generational differences for the features associated with AAVE indicate that this distinction was apparently more prominent at an early stage.

Furthermore, the same types of variables are implicated in this ethnolinguistic divide as have been found in Hyde County by Wolfram et al. (2001) and Wolfram & Thomas (2002). The ethnolinguistic boundary revealed with respect to 3rd sg. –s absence, copula absence, and syllable-coda cluster reduction, for example, is precisely
the set of structures that show a persistent ethnolinguistic division in Hyde County. This pattern hardly seems to be due to coincidence. In fact, as Wolfram & Thomas (2002) contend, this apparently lingering ethnolinguistic boundary seems attributable to a substrate effect that developed into a vernacular AAVE norm even in the face of extensive regional accommodation.

Although the present-day Beech Bottom African American community is much smaller than that of Hyde County, an appeal to the same explanation seems appropriate: it seems highly unlikely that the development of these distinctive features would take place through selective accommodation to alternative British-dialect influences. It also hardly seems coincidental that distinct enclave communities of African Americans separated by hundreds of miles, different community and social situations, and different regional dialects should show such a strong affinity in the dialect features that distinguished them historically from their white cohorts – unless there was an ethnically marked vernacular norm that they brought with them to begin with.

Somewhat ironically, one of the strongest arguments for persistent substrate effect comes from the overall profile of extensive accommodation. It is obvious that Beech Bottom African Americans accommodated many of the regional dialect features of Highland Southern speech historically, to the point that these individuals are perceptually indistinguishable from cohort European Americans to outside listeners. The fact that a small set of ethnically distinctive features would persist in a context of accommodation suggests that these distinctive traits were strongly embedded in the speech of African Americans historically.
In studies of the development of AAVE, evidence for substrate influence has often been linked directly to the creole-origin hypothesis. As Stewart (1968:3) states: Of the Negro slaves who constituted the field labor force on North American plantations up to the mid-nineteenth century, even many who were born in the New World spoke a variety of English which was in fact a true creole language – differing markedly in grammatical structure from those English dialects which were brought directly from Great Britain, as well as from New World modifications of these in the mouths of descendants of the original white colonists. However, this traditional Creolist position is hardly warranted, as contact-induced structures may come from a variety of language contact situations. For example, it is quite possible that contact with speakers of English-based Creoles can influence developing varieties of English without the adoption of a Creole as a primary means of communication. As Schreier’s (2001) discussion of the development of English on the isolated South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha shows, an earlier contact situation between British and American expatriates and a small group of apparently Creole-speaking women from St. Helena led to a large-scale adoption of typical Creole features during the formation and stabilization stages of Tristan da Cunha English.

It is also possible for typological transfer from non-Creole heritage languages and generalized interlanguage restructuring to leave a permanent imprint on an emerging ethnic variety. Wolfram & Thomas (2002), for example, argue that substantive prevocalic consonant cluster reduction in current-day AAVE is most often traceable to a language contact situation involving a language that does not have syllable-coda clusters,
as was the case for most West African languages spoken by African slaves (Welmers 1973; Alleyne 1980; Holm 1988). Thus, native speakers of one of these languages might adopt this phonological trait whether or not their learning of English involved a middle passage and the development of a pidgin or Creole language. Of course, the developing Creoles of West Africa and the Caribbean (Holm 1988, 1989) adopted consonant cluster reduction as a typological trait, so that Creole transfer, language transfer from African languages, and even generalized interlanguage strategies involving cluster reduction (Tarone 1980) would reinforce one another in the development of this phonological trait.

Of course, the possibility cannot be ruled out that AAVE features such as cluster reduction, copula absence, or inflectional –s absence might have developed independently as a product of natural language change. However, such independent development has not been documented for long-term isolated, monolingual English situations (e.g. Wolfram et al. 1999; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes forthcoming). It thus seems most reasonable to conclude that the evidence from both the Beech Bottom and the Hyde County situations argues for durable substrate influence that was part of an Earlier African American English norm that has endured in the contemporary version of AAVE.

Since enclave communities such as Beech Bottom and Hyde County are aligned in their representation of long-standing ethnolinguistic differences, a final observation concerns trajectories of dialect change. Whereas Wolfram (2001) shows that Hyde County is changing in the direction of an external, common core AAVE norm, the speech of the middle-aged and younger Beech Bottom speakers gives no evidence of this. In fact, as both the data presented here and prior analyses of these data (e.g., Mallinson 2001; Mallinson & Wolfram 2002; Wolfram 2002) have shown, the youngest non-white
speaker – who self-identifies as multiethnic, having a white mother and a non-white father – accommodates most extensively to the Appalachian European American dialect norms, which effectively reduces ethnolinguistic contrast.

Although one might hypothesize that the assimilation by the young Beech Bottom speaker may be due to the limited size of the African American community, Wolfram et al.’s (1997) study of a single African American family on Ocracoke demonstrates that ethnolinguistic diversity is not about community size alone: it is also about ethnic boundaries and symbolic language use. One speculation, therefore, is that several factors – such as the Beech Bottom African Americans’ desire to put behind them some of the racism they have experienced in the past, their desire to minimize the existing ethnic divide between whites and blacks, the apparent lack of a distinctive black youth culture in this region, and a developing consciousness of multiethnicity, especially among the younger remaining residents – have contributed to widespread accommodation. In other words, the converging cultural milieu combined with an emerging multiethnic self-identification facilitates a more pronounced movement toward the regional dialect norm, while traces of a distinctive ethnolinguistic past continue to erode.

To summarize, this study has shown how receding communities can inform the reconstruction of the past and present development of African American Vernacular English. While the Beech Bottom data draw attention to the lingering vestiges of an ethnolinguistically distinctive past, they also reveal different ways in which particular communities may react in restructuring their linguistic identity. In this way, the Beech Bottom situation offers a perspective on the options that may be available to isolated African American communities in their dialect development.
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