Dialect accommodation in a bi-ethnic mountain enclave community: More evidence on the development of African American English

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ABSTRACT

The investigation of isolated African American enclave communities has been instrumental in reformulating the historical reconstruction of earlier African American English and the current trajectory of language change in African American Vernacular English (AAVE). This case study examines a unique enclave sociolinguistic situation – a small, long-term, isolated bi-ethnic enclave community in the mountains of western North Carolina – to further understanding of the role of localized dialect accommodation and ethnolinguistic distinctiveness in the historical development of African American English. The examination of a set of diagnostic phonological and morphosyntactic variables for several of the remaining African Americans in this community supports the conclusion that earlier African American English largely accommodated local dialects while maintaining a subtle, distinctive ethnolinguistic divide. However, unlike the situation in some other African American communities, there is no current movement toward an AAVE external norm for the lone isolated African American teenager; rather, there is increasing accommodation to the local dialect. Contact-based, identity-based, and ideologically based explanations are appealed to in describing the past and present direction of change for the African Americans in this receding community. (African American Vernacular English, Appalachian English, dialect, language change, language contact, language identity)*

The role of historically isolated enclave communities of African Americans has taken on heightened significance in recent attempts to reconstruct the structure of earlier African American English. Studies of transplant African American communities in Samaná and Nova Scotia (Poplack 1999; Poplack & Sankoff 1987; Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989, 1991, 2001), for example, have provided 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 widely accepted in the 1970s (Stewart 1967, 1968; Dillard 1972). These data, along with emerging evidence from earlier written records of semiliterate African Americans (Montgomery, Fuller, & DeMarse 1993; Montgomery & Fuller 1996) have, in fact, led to a reformulation of the Anglicist hypothesis on the development of African American English, referred to here as the NEO-ANGLICIST HYPOTHESIS (Wolfram 2000). This position is like the Anglicist hypothesis of the mid-twentieth century (Kurath 1949; McDavid & McDavid 1951) in that it maintains that earlier, 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 significant 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." Labov therefore summarizes the current position on the development of AAVE (1998:119) as follows: "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 a unique, long-term bi-ethnic enclave situation in coastal North Carolina (Wolfram, Thomas, & Green 2000, Wolfram & Thomas 2002) has offered a more qualified reconstruction of the historical development of earlier African American speech. This analysis revealed that earlier African American speech in Hyde County accommodated many localized dialect norms over the three centuries of Black and White coexistence, supporting the conclusion that earlier African American English was often closer to the regional dialect of the benchmark European American variety than is the contemporary version of AAVE. At the same time, however, this research indicated 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 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. Our analysis here extends the study of bi-ethnic enclave situations by examining Beech Bottom, a small highland community in the Appalachian region of western North Carolina

FIGURE 1: Location of Beech Bottom and Southern Highland dialect boundary.

by the Tennessee border. In some respects, the community of Beech Bottom is quite different from that of Hyde County, but there are also some important parallels, notably their historical insularity and the long-term continuity of the bi-ethnic situation. Following the reasoning that enclave communities provide a rich source in which synchronic data may be used to infer diachronic processes (Tagliamonte 1997:33), Beech Bottom therefore seems like an appropriate context for comparing the early and contemporary development of African American speech. Of necessity, the investigation of Beech Bottom undertaken here uses a case-study format for the few remaining African American residents; nonetheless, it offers an important complement to the analysis offered in Wolfram, Thomas, & Green 2000 and Wolfram & Thomas 2002.

THE SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT OF BEECH BOTTOM

Beech Bottom is a small, receding mountain community nestled in a hollow of the Southern Appalachian mountain range (Figure 1), in Avery County (U.S. Census 2000 population 17,167), about 35 miles southwest of Boone along the Tennessee border.[1] The map also indicates the dialect isogloss that situates this community within the regional context of Southern Highland English (Carver 1987:248; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998:105).

The community falls within the Southeastern U.S. region of Appalachia as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC 2000). Currently, only about ten longtime residents live in Beech Bottom, and several are related to one another. Three of these residents are European American, while others have been categorized as African American although they currently claim mixed descent – African American, European American, and Native American (Harris 1994).

African American slaves were brought to the area in the early and mid-1800s from other parts of North Carolina and from Virginia (Kay & Cary 1995). The first African Americans may have been brought by Colonel Waightsill Avery (1741–1821), for whom the county is named. Small bands of Cherokees and other

Native Americans also passed through the area as late as 1790, resulting in a population of mixed racial and ethnic heritage. Local history (Harris 1994) maintains that a man named Hampton Jackson formally settled Beech Bottom in the 1870s, after Appalachia had begun to develop as a diverse region with establishments by English, Scotch-Irish, German, and Dutch inhabitants.[2]

According to Turner 2000, Beech Bottom's population from 1900 to 1940 ranged from 80 to 111 people. According to Harris 1994, 65 residents during this period were classified as African American, which included those who were of mixed African American, European American, and Native American descent. The primary community industry was feldspar mining, but as the mines began to close in the early 1940s, residents migrated north to seek work in the shipyards of Virginia or the factories in Ohio. The mobilizing effect of World War II also took a toll on the community's population, as locals joined the military and resettled elsewhere on their return. Christmas-tree farming is now Beech Bottom's primary industry, and two farms with about 100,000 trees employ several community residents full-time; other residents tend trees on a part-time basis.

The ethnic heritage of Beech Bottom residents is, of course, contrary to the stereotype that Southern Appalachia is a "reservoir of culturally-homogeneous, white Anglo-Saxon southerners" (Billings 1989). Ostwalt & Pollitt 2001, who studied the Salem School and Orphanage for African Americans established in Elk Park, North Carolina, about ten miles from Beech Bottom, note: "The 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, and its history is replete with examples of multicultural encounters and incidences of cooperation" (2001:235). Given Beech Bottom's historical diversity, it is an ideal community for the study of the relationship between European American Appalachian speech and the speech of Appalachian non-Whites.

Our goal is to investigate the extent to which the non-White population of Beech Bottom might differ from local cohort European Americans and, in the process, to determine what this might reflect about the status of earlier African American English in this region. Since this community is historically multiethnic and multiracial, we do not want to overemphasize non-White residents' African American heritage while excluding other aspects of their ethnicity. Data from the 2000 Census, in fact, suggest that the non-Whites in the region now tend to classify themselves as multiethnic rather than African American when given a choice that includes the former category (Mallinson 2001). Nonetheless, there is an operative distinction between Black and White residents in the area that sets up an essential bi-ethnic dichotomy. Even though participants were, in general, unwilling to discuss racial issues directly with us, the historical bi-ethnic dichotomy was clearly indicated in references made by various participants during the interviews,[3] in which both African Americans and European Americans commented on social practices that defined a strict racial boundary. For example, the

older African American in the sample gave the follow explanation for his enlistment 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 and location of the Black school before integration took place in the late 1960s[4]:

> 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).

By the same token, Beech Bottom is recognized as a primary Black community by European Americans interviewed as a part of this study. As one 56-year-old European American male from Roaring Creek, a community immediately adjacent to Beech Bottom, put it:

> Well, see, there's White people and then they say Colored people here. {laughter}
> I didn't say the wrong word there.[5] {more laughter}
> Beech Bottoms was where they lived, the Colored people...
> And that's the only place they settled. (Interview 4:340)

Thus, despite the historical reality of mixed racial heritage, it is apparent that there is a fundamental bi-ethnic dichotomy that demarks the African American and European American communities.

Given its physical detachment from larger cities, the mountainous terrain that still hinders accessibility, the nature of internally focused social networks, and the constructed sense of isolation, it appears that Beech Bottom fits the criteria often used to define an enclave community and historically isolated situation (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes forthcoming, Wolfram & Thomas 2002).[6] At the same time, this situation is quite different from other sociohistorical circumstances of isolation, such as the coastal enclave situation in 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). There is the obvious physical difference, the highland Southern context and the coastal community, and further difference in terms of the surrounding regional dialect community. In Hyde County, as presented in Wolfram et al. 2000 and Wolfram & Thomas 2002, the regional variety is a unique Outer Banks dialect (Wolfram, Hazen, & Schilling-Estes 1999), while the regional dialect context of Beech Bottom is a variety of Highland Southern speech, or Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976, Hazen & Fluharty 2001, Montgomery & Hall forthcoming), with historical dialect roots quite different from the Outer Banks, Nova Scotia, or Samaná (Montgomery 1989).

There are additional differences in terms of the historical continuity of the African American community and its population demographics. The Beech Bottom African American community is much smaller than any of these other com-

munities, with only a half-dozen residents from the original population still living there – so few that we have to examine their speech as a kind of case study rather than as a sample of a larger population. Nonetheless, the results of this quasi-case study should not be dismissed in the effort to reconstruct the historical and current development of speech among African Americans. Case studies can provide invaluable information about the establishment and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. Examples that have provided significant insight into the construction and maintenance of ethnic varieties include 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. Thus, the older speakers in this study may offer perspective on what the speech of the more substantive African American speech community might have been like, and the lone young African American now residing in Beech Bottom might offer insight into speech accommodation of social isolates in the same way that Muzel Bryant of Ocracoke provided important evidence on the persistence of an ethnolinguistic boundary for well over a century.

Finally, there may be a difference in terms of the constructed identity of the residents identified here as African American. As noted above, current residents tend to self-identify as multiracial rather than African American, even though they have been segregated on the basis of biracial social division historically. This contrasts with the case of Hyde County African Americans, for example, who do not classify themselves as multiracial. Such differences may come into play as we examine and interpret the patterns of linguistic alignment between European American and African Americans in Beech Bottom and compare it with other situations.

DIALECT COMPARISON OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN AMERICAN SPEECH

As part of an ongoing sociolinguistic investigation of enclave communities in North Carolina, the staff of the North Carolina Language and Life Project conducted interviews with members of the African American community in Beech Bottom. Although we interviewed and recorded six different African Americans in all, we limit this quantitative analysis to three subjects for whom we have extensive tape-recorded interviews of adequate quality. We interviewed each of these speakers on several different occasions and recorded approximately nine hours of relatively natural conversation with them. 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, we

conclude that these three speakers are representative of the other African Americans in Beech Bottom. By extension, we cautiously suggest that the older speakers 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 traveled to any extent, when he was in the army.

For comparison, we interviewed nine European Americans from the similarly rural neighboring community of Roaring Creek, about a mile from Beech Bottom. All of them are also lifetime residents of the immediate region. They are conveniently divided into two age groups: over 55, comprising four men aged 89, 79, 69, and 55 at the time of the interview, and two women, aged 72 and 70; and those 35 and under, comprising one male aged 35, and two females aged 31 and 25. 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 simply followed topics of interest to the subjects, such as hunting, the care of Christmas trees, or mountain life – topics within the parameters of the spontaneous natural conversation interview in sociolinguistics (Labov 1966, Wolfram & Fasold 1974).

DIAGNOSTIC LINGUISTIC VARIABLES

Four morphosyntactic variables and four phonological variables were chosen for analysis. The morphosyntactic variables include 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*. Phonological variables include syllable-coda consonant cluster reduction, as in *wes'* for *west* or *fin'* for *find*; postvocalic *r*-lessness, as in *ca'* for *car* or *fou'* for *four*; /ai/ glide reduction, as in [rat] for *right* and [tam] for *time*; and an acoustic analysis of the entire vowel system for several representative speakers. All of these structures are well documented diagnostic regional and/or ethnic variables of American English (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998). Because these linguistic variables have been examined in other bi-ethnic situations (e.g., Wolfram et al. 2000, Wolfram & Thomas 2002), they provide a comparable database for examining ethnic alignment in disparate situations involving bi-ethnic enclave communities. Some of the features that we consider, like 3rd pl. -s marking and prevoiceless reduction of the /ai/ glide in *right*, are strongly associated with traditional Appalachian speech as described in Wolfram & Christian 1976, Christian et al. 1988, and Montgomery & Hall forthcoming, although there are important qualifications that must be made in referring to a label as encompassing as "Appalachian English" (Hazen & Fluharty 2001). Other features, such as 3rd sg. -s absence, copula absence, and prevocalic syllable-coda cluster reduction, are

TABLE 1. *Incidence of verbal* -s *attachment with plural subjects.*

Percentages of Third Plural -s Attachment by Ethnicity	
Beech Bottom African Americans	Local Cohort European Americans
18.3%	21.2%
N = 20/109	N = 38/179
Total Chi sq. = .35; df = 1; p = not statistically significant	

VARBRUL Analysis of Third Plural -s Attachment by Ethnicity	
VARBRUL Results: Beech Bottom African Americans	VARBRUL Results: Local Cohort European Americans
Input probability = .12	Input probability = .10
Proximity	Proximity
non-adjacent = .29; adjacent = .53	non-adjacent = .69; adjacent = .45
Subject	Subject
noun phrase = .96; collective = .76; pro = .31	noun phrase = .83; collective = .91; pro = .22
Total Chi sq. = 7.182; Chi sq. per cell = 1.197	Total Chi sq. = 2.88; Chi sq. per cell = .480

usually associated with AAVE (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Bailey & Thomas 1998, Baugh 1983, Rickford 1999). The range of variables selected for analysis is deliberately inclusive of both types of structures in order to assess dialect accommodation and alignment for the two sets of speakers. We first consider the morphosyntactic variables, then the phonological ones.

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 American English varieties that were influenced by the Scotch Irish, such as Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976, Christian et al. 1988, Montgomery 1989), although its colonial distribution apparently was not limited to the Southern Highland region (Hazen 1996, 2000a; Wolfram & Thomas 2002). By contrast, it is not a feature usually associated with subject–verb concord in AAVE (Labov et al. 1968, Fasold & Wolfram 1970, Fasold 1972, Rickford 1999), although Montgomery & Fuller 1996 and Montgomery et al. 1993 have documented its use in some earlier writing samples of African Americans. In Table 1, we give the figures for the overall incidence of verbal -*s* attachment with 3rd pl. subjects for the African American and European American speakers in the Beech Bottom sample. In addition to the overall comparison, we examine the incidence of verbal -*s* attachment in terms of two independent linguistic variables that have been shown to constrain the incidence of -*s* attachment: the subject type, and the

proximity of subject and verb. Following other studies (e.g., Christian et al. 1988; Hazen 1996, 2000a), we distinguish between noun phrases (e.g., *The dogs barks*), collective nouns (*People talks*), and pronouns (*They talks*). The so-called proximity constraint distinguishes between verbs that are immediately adjacent to the subject, as in *The dogs barks*, and those that are not adjacent to the subject because of a heavy NP (*The dogs in the trucks barks*) or clausal complement (*The dogs that barks are hungry*). The results of a VARBRUL analysis (Cedergren & Sankoff 1974, Young & Bayley 1996) in terms of these factor groups is 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.[7]

Table 1 indicates that European American and African American speakers have similar levels of 3rd pl. -*s* attachment; the application of the Chi square test for statistical significance confirms what the raw figures and percentages suggest: ethnicity is not a significant factor in these speakers' levels of 3rd pl. -*s* attachment. The separate VARBRUL analyses, however, show that ethnicity is not independent of particular linguistic factors. Both European Americans and African Americans favor the incidence of 3rd pl. -*s* with noun phrases and collective nouns over pronouns, but European Americans favor -*s* marking with 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.[8] A more significant difference is indicated with respect to the proximity constraint. European Americans favor -*s* attachment with non-adjacent subjects, but the converse is true for African Americans, who actually show a favoring effect for -*s* attachment with adjacent subjects and verbs. This pattern is quite contrary to the typical pattern described for varieties of Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976; Christian et al. 1988; Montgomery 1989; Hazen 1996, 2000a), which parallels the pattern shown by the European American speakers in this sample. These data thus 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).

The data on 3rd pl. -*s* attachment suggest that Beech Bottom African Americans are sensitive to regional vernacular dialect norms. At the same time, the data indicate that 3rd pl. -*s* attachment is receding; for example, the young European Americans show reduced levels of 3rd pl. -*s* attachment, and the young African American speaker shows no cases in the sociolinguistic interviews. This matches quite closely the type of recession documented in Hyde County African American and European English (Wolfram et al. 2000:336–7).

TABLE 2. *Incidence of 3rd sg. -s absence.*

Percentages of 3rd Singular -s Absence by Ethnicity	
Beech Bottom African Americans	Local Cohort European Americans
22.7%	1.8%
N = 32/141	N = 3/171
Total Chi square = 34.01; df = 1; p < .001	

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 US (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 restricted lexically to items such as the verbs *seem* and *don't* (Wolfram & Fasold 1974, Wolfram & Christian 1976, Christian et al. 1988).[9] In Table 2 and Figure 2, we give the figures for the African American and European American speakers in this corpus, presenting both the overall incidence of 3rd sg. -*s* absence and the breakdown by age.[10] For the comparison, we distinguish between three African American generations, but we divide the European Americans into only two age divisions, older and younger.

Our data reflect a pattern of ethnic differentiation. As indicated in Table 2, the European American speakers have an extremely low rate for 3rd sg. -*s* absence: less than 2%. In contrast, the African American speakers exhibit 3rd sg. -*s* absence at a significantly higher rate of almost 23%.

In Figure 2, we extend our comparison to include data for Hyde County African Americans, extracted from Wolfram & Thomas 2002. The graph compares 3rd sg. -*s* absence by age, ethnicity, and region (Beech Bottom and Hyde County). The Hyde County sample shows considerably higher levels of 3rd sg. -*s* absence (ranging from a low of 43% to a high of 59%). Although Beech Bottom African Americans' overall rates of 3rd sg. -*s* absence are not as high as those for Hyde County African Americans, those for the middle-aged and the older speakers still are well above the rates for their cohort European Americans. At the same time, however, it is important to observe there are no tokens of 3rd sg. -*s* absence in the speech of the youngest Beech Bottom African American, suggesting an erosion of this ethnolinguistic marker and a movement toward greater assimilation to the speech of the European American cohort.

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 amply documented
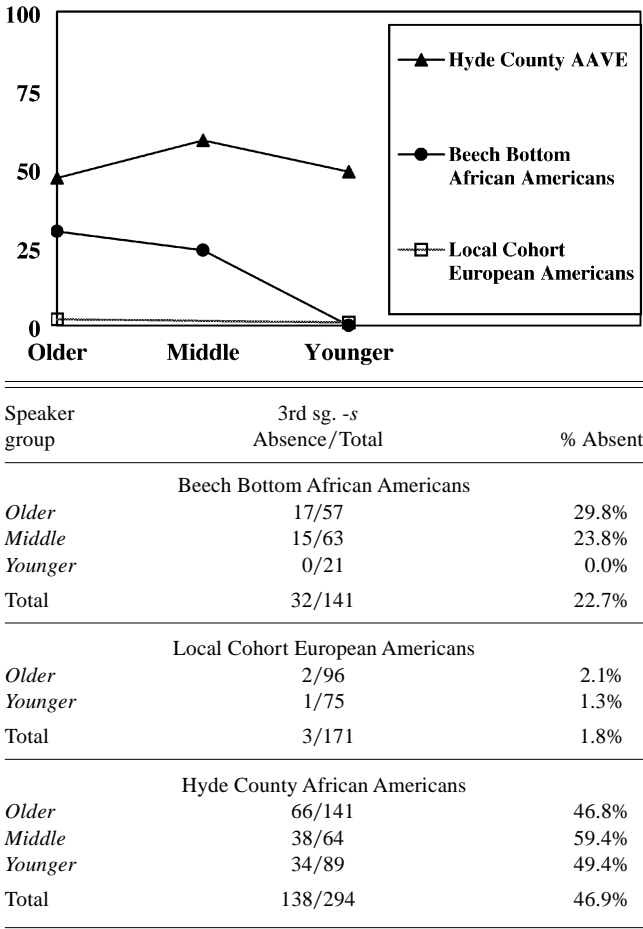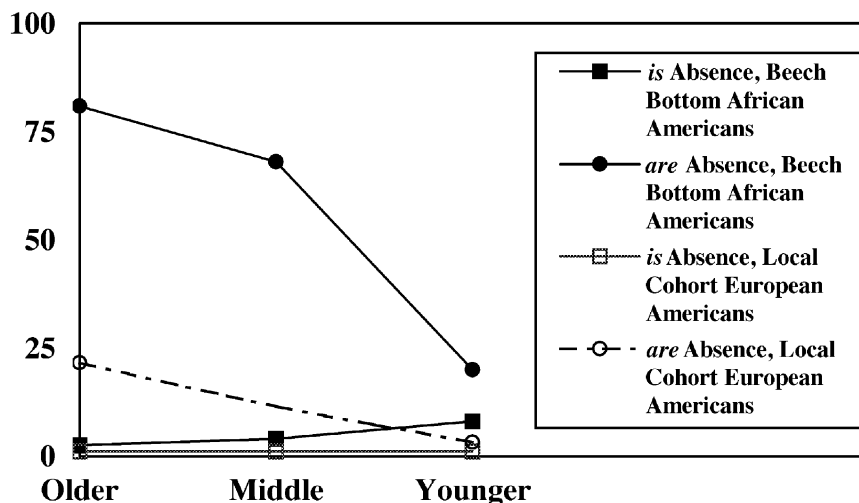
Speaker group	3rd sg. -s Absence/Total	% Absent
Beech Bottom African Americans		
Older	17/57	29.8%
Middle	15/63	23.8%
Younger	0/21	0.0%
Total	32/141	22.7%
Local Cohort European Americans		
Older	2/96	2.1%
Younger	1/75	1.3%
Total	3/171	1.8%
Hyde County African Americans		
Older	66/141	46.8%
Middle	38/64	59.4%
Younger	34/89	49.4%
Total	138/294	46.9%

FIGURE 2: 3rd singular -s absence by age, ethnicity, and region.

as a structural trait 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 rare to nonexistent in the Highland Southern variety examined by Wolfram & Christian (1976:40–4). It is therefore often considered a diagnostic ethnolinguistic marker and can serve well as an index of dialect alignment.

In Figure 3, we present a graph for the incidence of copula absence by ethnicity, generation, and type of copula, along with the raw figures and a VARBRUL

Speaker group	*is* Absence/Total		% Absent		*are* Absence/Total		% Absent	
	Beech Bottom African Americans							
Older	1/51		1.9%		17/21		80.9%	
Middle	4/99		4.0%		28/41		68.3%	
Younger	1/13		7.7%		1/5		20.0%	
Total	6/163		3.7%		46/67		68.7%	
	Copula	Auxiliary	Copula	Auxiliary	Copula	Auxiliary	Copula	Auxiliary
	4/118	2/45	3.4%	4.4%	25/39	21/28	64.1%	75.0%
	Local Cohort European Americans							
Older	1/84		1.2%		8/37		21.6%	
Younger	0/80		0.0%		1/32		3.1%	
Total	1/164		0.6%		9/69		13.0%	
	Copula	Auxiliary	Copula	Auxiliary	Copula	Auxiliary	Copula	Auxiliary
	0/147	1/17	0.0%	5.9%	5/51	4/18	9.8%	22.2%

VARBRUL Results

Input probability = .05
Ethnicity
  Black = .68; White = .29
Copula Form
  are = .86; *is* = .26
Preceding grammatical environment
  noun phrase = .53; pronoun = .49
Following grammatical environment
  adj/nom/loc = .47; verb *-ing/gonna* = .57

Total Chi sq. = 15.932; Chi sq. per cell = .996

FIGURE 3: Incidence of copula absence.

analysis. Although different procedures (e.g., Rickford et al. 1991) may be used in tabulating the incidence of copula absence, we followed the general procedure of tabulating tokens of deleted forms of *is* and *are* out of the total number of contracted forms (e.g., *She's nice*), contractible full forms (*She is nice*), and deleted forms (*She nice*) forms. We based criteria for "don't count" cases of copula absence or presence on Blake's (1997) guidelines and disregarded the following constructions: first person singular *am*; negatives; past tense cases; questions; existential *there*; *it's*, *that's*, and *what's* constructions; clause-final position; emphatic stress; and cases that preceded an identical phonetic environment ([r] for *are* and sibilant for *is*). Variation studies have demonstrated that the form of the copula, the subject, and the type of predicate complement influence copula deletion rates. Following Labov 1969, Baugh 1983, and Rickford 1997, we consider specific constraints based on the form of the copula (*is* versus *are*), subject type (NP versus pronoun), and predicate complement construction. Having limited tokens for the full range of cross-product permutations in terms of these factor groups, we restrict the division of complement construction types in only two categories, combining verb *-ing* and *gonna* into one category and the predicate nominative, adjective, and locative into another. In essence, this decision results in a distinction between copula and auxiliary functions of *is* and *are*.

Figure 3 reveals that neither group shows much copula deletion for *is*, in contrast to the high levels of *is* absence that Labov 1969, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, and Baugh 1983 found for African American speakers in New York City, Detroit, Washington DC, and Los Angeles, respectively. Older European Americans and older African Americans in Beech Bottom do, however, show absence of *are*, with the overall levels being much higher for the older African American than for the older European Americans. In the speech of both the European Americans and African Americans, *are* strongly favors deletion over *is*, and verb *-ing* favors deletion over other verbal complements, but the effect of the subject is strangely reversed for African Americans, who favor deletion with pronoun subjects while the European Americans favor it with noun phrase subjects. However, a step-up step-down VARBRUL run threw out the categories of preceding grammatical environment (noun phrase and pronoun) and following grammatical environment (adjective/nominative/locative and verb *-ing/gonna*), which again indicates that copula may be functioning slightly differently than expected in the speech of these residents. Nonetheless, we find ethnicity to be a significant factor in the incidence of copula absence; as expected, the Beech Bottom African Americans have much higher levels of copula absence than their European American cohorts, though the difference intersects with age, at least for the African Americans.

Past Tense Be *Leveling*

Because of the irregularity of person–number concord in past tense, the verb *be* is highly vulnerable to leveling; the process is very common in vernacular vari-

TABLE 3.1. *Percentages of* was *leveling by age and ethnicity.*

Speaker group	*was* leveling	% leveled
Beech Bottom African Americans		
Older	50/52	96.2%
Middle	26/28	92.9%
Younger	7/8	87.5%
Total	83/88	94.3%
Local Cohort European Americans		
Older	67/72	93.1%
Younger	24/26	92.3%
Total	91/98	92.9%

TABLE 3.2. *Percentages of* was *leveling by linguistic constraint and ethnicity.*

Subject	N. leveled/tot	%	N. leveled/tot	%
	Beech Bottom African Americans		Local Cohort European Americans	
2nd sg	6/6	100%	15/15	100%
1st pl	21/21	100%	14/16	87.5%
2nd pl	3/3	100%	4/4	100%
3rd pl NP	19/20	95%	13/17	76.5%
3rd pl Pro	29/33	87.9%	34/35	97.1%
Existential	4/5	80%	11/11	100%

eties of English around the world (e.g., Chambers 1995, Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998, Tagliamonte & Smith 1999) – a "grammatical primitive" for vernacular speech, according to Chambers (1995:243). Past tense *be* leveling is also 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 (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994, Wolfram & Sellers 1999, Britain 2002), both vernacular varieties of Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976, Feagin 1979, Christian et al. 1988) and African American English (Wolfram & Fasold 1974, Weldon 1994) level to *was*. In Table 3.1, we give the raw figures and percentages for leveling by ethnicity, age, and subject type, since studies of past *be* leveling in other contexts has shown that it is sometimes sensitive to the type of subject (Tagliamonte & Smith 1999).

As can be seen from the data in Table 3.1, all groups of speakers level to *was* at rates above 90%, with the African Americans leveling at a slightly higher rate than their local European American cohorts. The total rate of *was* leveling for the European Americans closely matches the 91% rate of *was* leveling found by Wolfram and Christian in 1976 and is somewhat higher than the 77% 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.

Some dialects show subject constraints for *was* leveling (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994, Tagliamonte & Smith 1999). For example, speakers typically favor leveling with phrase subjects such as *The dogs was there* over pronoun subjects such as *They was there*. As shown in Table 3.2, however, the Beech Bottom data do not suggest a constraint related to subject type. We find further that there is no significant ethnic distinction in past *be* leveling among our speakers. As our analysis reveals, both African Americans and European Americans share a fairly vernacular version of past *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 2001). 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), our data indicate near-parallel rates of *was* leveling for all speakers of both ethnicities, regardless of age; even the youngest speakers level to *was* in the past tense at rates comparable with the older speakers.

The examination of representative morphosyntactic structures shows both alignment and misalignment in regard to African Americans and European Americans in Beech Bottom. African Americans in this study do show the accommodation of regional vernacular structures exhibited by the European American population. At the same time, there is an indication of former ethnolinguistic division with respect to a couple of traits traditionally associated with African American Vernacular English, such as 3rd sg. -*s* absence and copula deletion. We now turn to some phonological structures to see if this same pattern prevails.

Consonant cluster reduction

Consonant cluster reduction of syllable-coda stops that share the feature of voicing (e.g., *west*, *find*, *cold*, *act*, but not *colt*, *jump*) 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 Appalachian mountains (Wolfram & Christian 1976, Hazen & Fluharty 2001). A number of phonetic and grammatical factors constrain the incidence of conso-

nant 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.

In Table 4, we provide summary statistics for syllable-coda cluster reduction for the Beech Bottom African Americans and their European American cohorts. Three different following phonetic environments are delimited – prevocalic, prepausal, and 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). An accompanying VARBRUL analysis includes the factor groups of ethnicity, cluster type, and following phonetic environment.

Table 4 shows that the incidence of cluster reduction follows the typical systematic patterning of independent linguistic constraints, but that there is a significant difference based on ethnicity. This contrast is most salient in prevocalic position: African Americans have substantive reduction, whereas European Americans have near-categorical preservation of clusters. Although we have not included age in the multivariate analysis, the percentages suggest that this difference is receding; the oldest African American speaker has the highest incidence of consonant cluster reduction, and the youngest speaker the lowest, a fairly familiar pattern also found for other variables.

To understand the significance of the cluster reduction patterns revealed for Beech Bottom, we compare these figures with those for several other varieties, based on an adaptation of the figures from Wolfram et al. 2000. The comparative summary in Figure 4 includes Southern AAVE, Hyde County AAVE, and Northern Standard English, in addition to Beech Bottom Black and White residents. While the figures for Beech Bottom African Americans fall well below those for Southern AAVE and Hyde County African American English speakers, they are still above those for the European American cohort variety, owing mainly to the oldest speaker's rates of reduction. The incidence of cluster reduction for the European American cohorts, however, aligns with other European American varieties, including those in Appalachia (Wolfram & Christian 1976). Despite the tendency for African Americans to accommodate to the local variety for other linguistic variables, Beech Bottom African Americans still exhibit the vestiges of an ethnolinguistic divide with respect to consonant cluster reduction.

Rhoticity

Highland North Carolina, like the Southern Appalachian region in general, is a rhotic area (Wolfram & Christian 1976), while AAVE is traditionally *r*-less postvocalically (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Bailey & Thomas 1998). Postvocalic *r*, therefore, may be quite diagnostic of regional and ethnic accommodation, particularly in the Southern Highland region of North Carolina. To determine the

TABLE 4. *Incidence of cluster reduction.*

Speaker group	Monomorphemic			Bimorphemic		
	Pre-voc. red/total	Pre-pause red/total	Pre-cons. red/total	Pre-voc. red/total	Pre-pause red/total	Pre-cons. red/total
Beech Bottom African Americans						
Older	11/30	8/16	37/47	5/35	2/9	13/18
Middle	2/16	3/13	14/20	2/17	0/1	2/2
Younger	2/8	5/12	11/14	1/20	–/–	1/2
Total	15/54	16/41	62/81	8/72	2/10	16/22
%	27.8%	39.0%	76.5%	11.1%	20.0%	72.7%
Local Cohort European Americans						
Older	2/38	2/15	23/43	3/55	0/10	12/32
Younger	0/12	2/19	13/27	1/14	0/5	2/8
Total	2/50	4/34	36/70	4/69	0/15	14/40
%	5.0%	11.8%	51.4%	5.8%	0.0%	35.0%

VARBRUL Results
Input variability = .29
Ethnicity
   African Americans = .65; European Americans = .33
Cluster Type
   monomorphemic = .56; bimorphemic = .39
Following Environment
   consonant = .80; pause = .37; vowel = .24
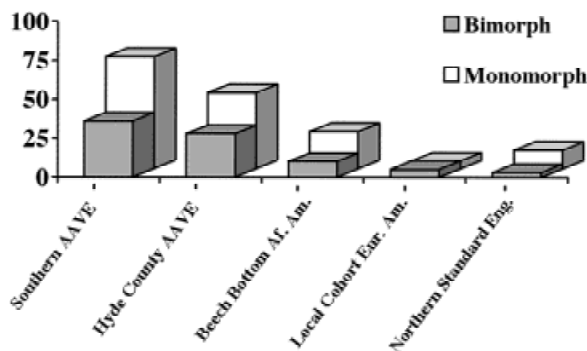
Total Chi square = 3.085 Chi sq. per cell = .257

FIGURE 4: Comparison of syllable-coda cluster reduction for representative dialects.

extent to which Beech Bottom African Americans and local cohort European Americans share the rhotic character of the Appalachian region, we extracted at least 100 tokens of postvocalic *r* for each speaker in our sample, representing three different phonetic positions: stressed nuclear position, as in *sir* or *third*; syllable-coda position, as in *four* or *card*; and unstressed nuclear position, as in *mother* or *better*. Each instance of potential postvocalic *r* vocalization was classified impressionistically as retroflexed or vocalized. The summary figures of postvocalic *r* vocalization are given in Table 5, along with a VARBRUL analysis that considers the factor groups of ethnicity and *r*-type as set forth above.

Table 5 reveals that the overall incidence of *r*-lessness – under 10% for all speakers, and less than 5% for all but the oldest African American – is extremely low for both the African Americans and European Americans. Furthermore, vocalization is generally limited to unstressed syllables, where it is the least salient perceptually. The overall comparison of figures shows that the African Americans and the European Americans share a common pattern of rhoticity, although the data for the oldest African American speaker suggest that this was not always the case. Since such high levels of rhoticity are atypical of AAVE speakers, these data justify the impression that the African Americans accommodate to the regional dialect pattern in this regard. Nonetheless (mostly because of the oldest African American speaker's figures in unstressed syllables), minor ethnolinguistic distinctions do emerge in the detailed quantitative analysis, suggesting the vestiges of an earlier subtle difference in terms of ethnicity.

/ai/ ungliding

The /ai/ glide may be reduced or monophthongized to [a] in many varieties of Southern English, including Southern Appalachia. There are, however, several different varieties of Southern English with respect to /ai/ ungliding. In some

TABLE 5. *Incidence of postvocalic* r-*lessness.*

Speaker group	Nuclear-*r*-less/total	Tautosyllabic *r*-less/total	Unstressed *r*-less/total	Total *r*-less/total	% *r*-less
Beech Bottom African Americans					
Older	0/31	5/120	16/77	21/228	9.2%
Middle	0/16	1/68	1/19	2/103	1.9%
Younger	0/10	0/57	2/38	2/105	1.9%
Total	0/57	6/245	20/134	25/436	5.7%
%	0.0%	2.4%	14.9%	4.5%	
Local Cohort European Americans					
Older	0/76	1/235	3/105	4/416	1.0%
Younger	0/55	1/220	1/88	2/363	.8%
Total	0/131	2/455	4/193	5/369	1.4%
%	0.0%	0.4%	2.1%	1.4%	

VARBRUL Results
Input variability = .02
Ethnicity
  African Americans = .78; European Americans = .32
R-type
  Unstressed = .78; syllable coda stressed = .36; nuclear = knockout
Total Chi square = .565 Chi sq. per cell = .141

TABLE 6. *Incidence of /ai/ ungliding in prevoiced and prevoiceless environments.*

Speaker group	Glide reduction prevoiceless/total	Glide reduction prevoiced/total
Beech Bottom African Americans		
Older	83/86	51/51
Middle	40/40	36/37
Younger	24/24	27/27
Total	147/150	115/116
%	98%	99.1%
Local Cohort European Americans		
Older	106/107	118/118
Younger	69/69	50/50
Total	175/176	119/119
%	99.4%	100%

regions of the South, including the Highland South (Hall 1942, Wolfram & Christian 1976, Hazen & Fluharty 2001), speakers reduce the /ai/ glide whether the following environment is voiceless (e.g., *tight*, *rice*) or voiced (*tide*, *time*). Other Southern varieties reduce it only in non-prevoiceless environments, that is, before voiced segments as in *tide* and *time*, and in open syllables, as in *lie* or *bye* (Wolfram & Fasold 1974, Wolfram 1994, Bailey & Thomas 1998).[11] Most descriptions of AAVE conclude that it aligns with those Southern varieties that reduce the glide only in prevoiced positions. Therefore, the incidence of prevoiceless ungliding might be diagnostic of accommodation to the regional version of Southern /ai/ ungliding. In Table 6, we give the incidence of /ai/ ungliding in prevoiced and prevoiceless phonetic contexts for the Beech Bottom African Americans and their European American cohorts.

Table 6 reveals that both European American and African American speakers reduce the /ai/ glide near-categorically in both prevoiced and prevoiceless position. The overall rate of prevoiceless production is greater than 97% for all subjects, regardless of ethnicity. Because the levels of /ai/ ungliding are near categorical for both ethnic groups and all ages, we could not subject the data to a multivariate analysis such as VARBRUL, or even to a simple non-parametric test such as Chi square. Though recent studies have shown that other African American populations may, in fact, reveal prevoiceless ungliding to some extent (Anderson 2002, Hazen & Fluharty 2001), none of these studies comes close to showing the levels of ungliding indicated in this study. This is probably due to the insularity of Beech Bottom and the general intensity of vernacular structures manifested by speakers from this area. 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. The dialect 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.

Overall vowel system

The data on the ungliding of the /ai/ vowel raise the issue of the overall vowel alignment among Beech Bottom African Americans and their cohort European Americans. As Thomas 2001 and Bailey & Thomas 1998 observe, there are often subtle but important distinctions that differentiate the vowel systems of Southern European Americans and African Americans. Therefore, we have conducted an acoustic analysis of the entire vowel systems for two Beech Bottom African Americans – the older and the middle-aged speakers – and an older cohort European American who represents the traditional regional vowel system. The vowel plots given in Figure 5 summarize the results of these measurements.[12] Figure 5.1 shows the vowel plot for the older African American; Figure 5.2, for the middle-aged African American; and Figure 5.3 for the 69-year-old European American. We follow the convention of Thomas 2001 in displaying relevant phonetic environments by superscripts, such as o^r for /o/ before *r*, ai^0 for /ai/ before a voiceless segment, ai^v for /ai/ before a voiced segment, and so forth.

   In interpreting these plots, it is important to note the position of a vowel relative to the rest of the vowel system rather than considering the exact location of vowels. In general, the vowel configurations of the two African Americans and the European American cohort are fairly similar, though each shows individual deviation. We see, for example, that the speakers all indicate highly unglided /ai/ production in both prevoiceless and prevoiced environments, as observed in our impressionistic extraction. We also find that all three have relatively fronted productions of the back vowels /u/ and /U/. This fronting is well documented for Southern vowels (Labov 1991) but is fairly atypical of the productions noted for African Americans in the South (Bailey & Thomas 1998, Thomas 2001); Thomas (2001:172) notes that for African Americans in the South "/o/, /U/, and /u/ usually remain backed." We also see that the speakers share a back and upgliding production of /ɔ/, and a more fronted nucleus in /aU/ towards [æ]. The overall vowel systems of Beech Bottom African Americans and their cohort European Americans seem to be quite aligned within a unitary regional dialect norm.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ETHNOLINGUISTIC BOUNDARIES

What can we conclude about the ethnolinguistic history of Beech Bottom in particular, and the development of African American English in general, based on data from the Beech Bottom African Americans? As noted earlier, the Beech Bottom African American sample is, of necessity, a quasi-case study because the vast majority of African Americans who once lived there have now migrated from

FIGURE 5: Vowel plots for African American and European American speakers.
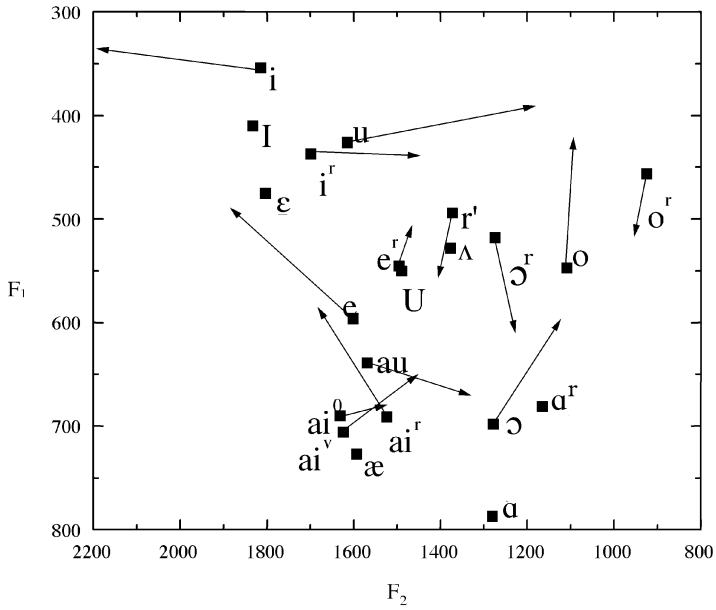

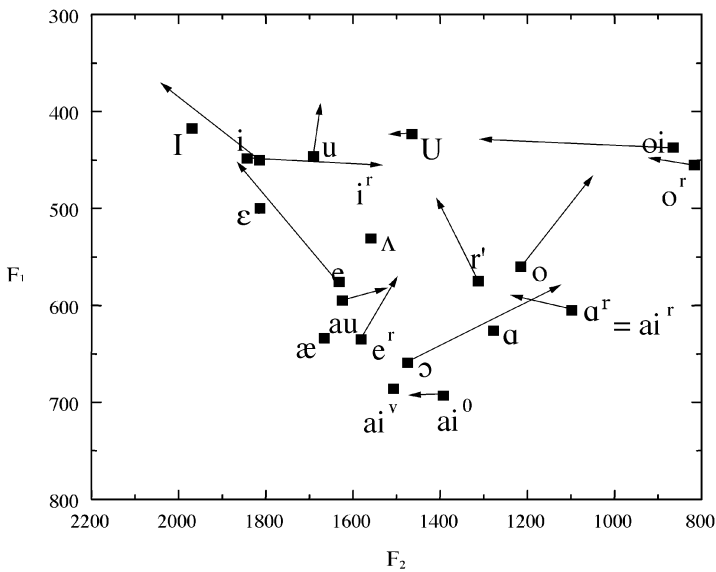FIGURE 5.1: Vowel plot for older African American speaker.

FIGURE 5.2: Vowel plot for middle-aged African American speaker.

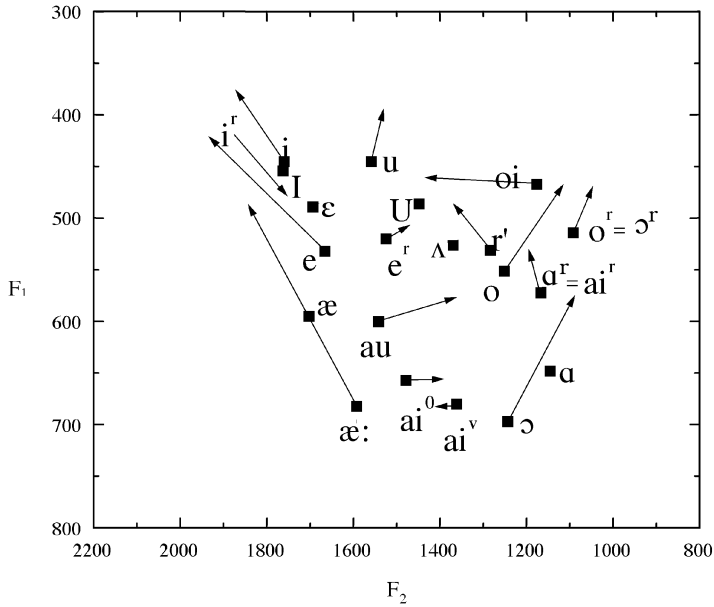FIGURE 5: Vowel plots for African American and European American speakers.

FIGURE 5.3: Vowel plot for older European American speaker.

the area. Nonetheless, our findings may be significant, especially when placed side by side with other studies, such as Hyde County, which included more than 150 participants (Wolfram & Thomas 2002), and other types of case studies based on small numbers of participants (Wolfram et al. 1997, Rickford 1985, Reaser 2002). The few remaining African Americans in Beech Bottom may still provide a picture of what the dialect situation was once like, and how it is currently configured in the context of a receding African American community.

We summarize in Table 7 the patterns of convergence and divergence derived from the analyses of individual structures. For the sake of this comparison, we consider two age groups – older and younger – for both African Americans and European Americans in this region. In addition, we compare these speakers with the more generalized norms of AAVE as described in works such as Labov et al. 1968, Labov 1972, Wolfram 1969, Wolfram & Fasold 1974, Baugh 1983, and Rickford 1999, to indicate how these speakers align with the current norms of AAVE found in large metropolitan areas.

First, we conclude that extensive accommodation to the local norm has taken place among the African Americans in Beech Bottom; however, a few features indicate a historic ethnolinguistic difference between African Americans and Eu-

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TABLE 7. *Summary of accommodation and divergence, by age and ethnicity.*

Dialect feature	Elderly Beech Bottom Euro. Am.	Elderly Beech Bottom Af. Am.	Young Beech Bottom Euro. Am.	Young Beech Bottom Af. Am.	Urban AAVE
MORPHOSYNTACTIC FEATURES					
3rd pl. verbal -*s*, NP subj. e.g. *The dog barks*	+	+	+/−	−	−
3rd pl. verbal -*s*, Pro subj e.g. *They barks*	+/−	+	−	−	−
3rd sg -*s* absence e.g. *The dog bark_*	−	+	−	+/−	+
are copula absence e.g. *They nice*	+/−	+	−	−	+
is copula absence e.g. *She nice*	−	−/+	−	−	+
was regularization e.g. *We was there*	+	+	+	+	+
PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES					
Prevocalic CCR in *wes' end*	−	+	−/+	−	+
Nucleus fronting of /au/ in *town*, *out*	+	+	+	+	−
Raised, unglided /ɔ/ in *caught*, *dawn*	+	+	+	+	−
Prevoiced /ai/ ungliding in *tide*, *time*	+	+	+	+	+
Prevoiceless /ai/ ungliding in *right*, *white*	+	+	+	+	−
Fronted /o/ nucleus in *coat*, *coke*	+	+	+	+	−
Postvocalic *r*-lessness in *father*, *fear*	−	+/−	−	−	+

TABLE 8. *Summary results for correct ethnic identification of speakers in selected regions of North Carolina.*

Percent correct identification	Beech Bottom African Americans	Local cohort European Americans
Beech Bottom	7.7%	100%
Hyde Co., N.C.	15.4%	92.3%
Robeson Co., N.C.	91.1%	70.0%
Warren Co., N.C.	96.5%	86.8%

ropean Americans. Prominent traditional features of vernacular Southern Highland varieties, including prevoiceless /ai/ glide reduction, 3rd pl. -*s* marking, and rhoticity, are evident in the speech of the African Americans in Beech Bottom at the same time that differences in 3rd sg. -*s* absence, copula absence, and prevocalic cluster reduction are shown. The African Americans in Beech Bottom also accommodate all of the prominent vowel features associated with Southern Highland English, regardless of age. This convergence of vowel systems no doubt contributes to the perception that the dialect of African Americans in Beech Bottom sounds nearly indistinguishable from that of their local European American cohorts.

To test that idea, we constructed a simple perception test and gave it to a group of students at North Carolina State University. Passages 20–30 seconds long of the conversation of nine speakers were played for the respondents. The speakers varied by age, sex, ethnicity, and residency in North Carolina, but the content of the passages was neutral with respect to its clues about ethnic identity. Listeners were simply asked to indicate the speaker's age, ethnicity, and sex. Included in this test were two of the African Americans and one of the older European American cohorts from Beech Bottom; also included were older African American and European American speakers from Hyde County, North Carolina. For comparison, we include data on the correct ethnic identification of African American and European American speakers from several other areas of North Carolina, including Robeson County (Wolfram 2001) and Warren County (Wolfram et al. 1997; Hazen 2000b). Although Robeson County and Warren County are both rural areas, neither would be considered an isolated enclave situation. The summary data are given in Table 8.

As can be seen in Table 8, less than 10% of the respondents correctly identified the ethnicity of the two Beech Bottom African American speakers. The correct ethnic identification of the European American cohort, however, was over 90%. A similar identification pattern is found for older Hyde County African Americans, confirming the results of a previously given perception test (Wolfram 2001). African Americans in the two enclave communities are quite alike in that they

were misidentified as White; this is in stark contrast with the overwhelmingly correct identification of African American residents of the rural non-enclave communities in the Piedmont region of North Carolina.

What does it mean that the vast majority of the listeners perceive the African American Beech Bottom residents to be European American? How can we account for respondents' perceptions in light of our linguistic analysis that reveals both accommodation and a persistent ethnolinguistic divide, at least for the older speakers presented in the perception experiment? The explanation may rest in the kinds of similarities and differences that are currently manifested by African Americans and European Americans in the region. For example, the African Americans share with their European American cohorts a common regional vowel system that is most often associated with Southern Highland European American speech. In a perception experiment that controlled various dialect cues, including diagnostic vowels and intonation, Thomas & Reaser 2002 report that the fronting of back vowels by African Americans in Hyde County was the most significant control factor influencing ethnic misidentification. This finding is consonant with Graff, Labov, & Harris's (1986) research on ethnic perception in Philadelphia, which showed that the production of the uniquely Philadelphian variant of /æ/ by African Americans often caused judges to misidentify them as White. Apparently, regional vowels are a strong factor in judging ethnicity, obscuring other ethnically correlated variables that include morphosyntactic structures usually considered to be quite diagnostic ethnic markers for sociolinguists. Although it must be noted that the ethnically differentiated morphosyntactic features we uncovered in this analysis occurred at modest levels by comparison with other African American communities, it is still significant that, in the identification of ethnicity these variables may be outweighed by the perceptual saliency of phonetic considerations.

Another important conclusion derived from this study concerns the historical development of African American speech. Linguistic accommodation in Beech Bottom is more complete and the vestiges of ethnolinguistic differences are more subtle in this community than they are in a community like Hyde County, but it is still noteworthy that there are vestiges of an ethnic divide that was apparently more prominent at an early stage of language development, as indicated by the generational differences for features associated with AAVE. Furthermore, the types of variables implicated in this ethnolinguistic division are the same as those 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 showing a persistent ethnolinguistic boundary in Hyde County. This pattern hardly seems to be due to coincidence. As Wolfram & Thomas 2002 argue, this lingering ethnolinguistic boundary seems attributable to an earlier boundary that has persisted as an AAVE norm even in the face of extensive regional accommodation. Although the current Beech Bot-

tom 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 British-dialect retentions in the process of the development. And it is hardly coincidental that distinct enclave communities of African Americans separated by hundreds of miles, different community situations, and different regional dialects should show such a strong affinity in the dialect features that distinguished them historically from their European American cohorts, unless there was an ethnically marked vernacular norm that they brought with them initially.

Somewhat ironically, one of the strongest arguments for the persistent ethnolinguistic difference comes from the overall profile of accommodation. It is obvious that Beech Bottom African Americans accommodated many of the regional dialect features of Highland Southern speech historically, to the point of being perceptually indistinguishable from corresponding European Americans to outside listeners.[13] The fact that a small set of ethnically distinctive features would persist in an overall context of accommodation suggests that these distinctive traits were strongly embedded in the speech of African Americans historically.

Naturally, we cannot rule out the possibility that AAVE features such as prevocalic consonant cluster reduction, copula absence, or inflectional -s absence might have developed independently as a product of natural language change among African American speakers. 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 Beech Bottom and Hyde County evidence indicates a durable ethnolinguistic division that was part of an earlier African American English norm that has endured in the contemporary version of AAVE.

Whereas enclave communities such as Beech Bottom and Hyde County seem to be aligned in their representation of longstanding ethnolinguistic differences, they are quite different in terms of their trajectory of change. Wolfram 2001 shows that Hyde County is changing in the direction of an external, common core AAVE norm, but there is no evidence of this in the middle-aged and younger Beech Bottom speakers. Although one might speculate that the assimilation by younger speakers in Beech Bottom may be due to the limited size of the African American community, Wolfram et al. 1997 have demonstrated that ethnolinguistic diversity is not about demographic ecology and community size alone; it is also about ethnic boundaries and symbolic language use. We speculate that the Beech Bottom African Americans' desire to put behind them some of the racism they have experienced in the past and to minimize the existing ethnic divide between Whites and Blacks, along with the apparent lack of a distinctive Black youth culture in this region, contribute to this accommodation. For example, the residents of the tiny Beech Bottom African American community enjoy a number of cultural practices that are strongly associated with European American culture

rather than African American culture, such as NASCAR racing, rodeo, trail bike riding, and country and western music. Although it may seem like stereotyping to assume that these are primarily European American activities, the demographics of ethnic participation clearly show a severe under-representation of African Americans in them. Converging cultural orientation in terms of leisure activities certainly would support a more pronounced movement toward the regional dialect norm, even as traces of a distinctive ethnolinguistic past continue to erode.

Small, receding communities such as Beech Bottom have much to teach us about reconstructing the past and present development of AAVE. While they underscore the lingering vestiges of an ethnolinguistically distinctive past, they also reveal how particular communities may react quite differently in restructuring their linguistic identity. In addition to the linguistic data we have obtained, our investigation of the community 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, which means that even the most extensive educational materials about the region may not mention their heritage and life history. Accordingly, Turner poses several questions about the African American Appalachian experience that still need to be investigated. For example, how much of Highland Southern culture persists among Appalachian African Americans today; and have Appalachian African Americans evolved a separate culture from the influence of European American Appalachian culture, or from isolation from other African Americans (1989:141)? These questions parallel the very issues that we have begun to explore from a linguistic perspective here. Certainly, this under-researched group merits much further sociological, anthropological, and linguistic investigation to frame the past and present sociolinguistic situation.

NOTES

[1] 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 a lowland or low field. According to Harris 1994, sometimes Beech Bottom is called Beech Bottoms; the only explanation is that the different spellings of the community's name vary according to how the name is used, and residents appear to use both variants interchangeably. Cooper 1964 spells the name of the community "Beach Bottom," with the explanation, "The sands along the banks of the North Toe River there reminded one of the ocean's beaches," but this spelling seems anomalous.

[2] 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 Native American and German, and his family thus contributed to the settlement of Beech Bottom as a multi-ethnic community.

[3] The minister of local African American church, a former resident of the area, summed up the participants' reticence about discussing race with fieldworkers by saying, "They just want to put it behind them." The comment clearly acknowledges the strength of the racial boundary that has divided the community.

[4] Five of Beech Bottom's African American residents, and no European American residents, regularly attend the community's one church, Beech Bottom Mennonite Brethren Church. This tiny church, serviced by an itinerant African American minister, was founded in 1926 by the Mennonite Brethren of Hillsboro, Kansas, as one of only six Black Mennonite Brethren churches in the United States, all of which are located in North Carolina. The existence of an African American Mennonite church is relatively anomalous in terms of the demographics of ethnicity within church denominations. Ostwalt 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. (1992:105)

[5] The "wrong word" here refers to the word *nigger*, which some of the European American participants used without any hesitation during their interviews despite widespread disapproval of it in mainstream American culture.

[6] During various visits to the area, residents often referred to the paucity of visitors. In the case of one participant visited six times over a six-month period, fieldworkers from the North Carolina Language and Life Project were the only outside visitors to his home. It should, however, be noted that a dialectologist's perception of an "isolated" community may not match the residents' perception of their own isolation or integration socially, socioculturally, or sociopsychologically (Montgomery 2000).

[7] VARBRUL is a probabilistic-based, multivariate statistical procedure that shows 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 such as following phonological environment, or external social constraints such as age group or ethnicity. 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. In other words, the higher the VARBRUL weighting, the stronger the effect of the factor on the application of the systematic effect. Although VARBRUL assumes the independence of factor groups and is thus more appropriately used for linguistic than social constraints, combining potentially interactive social variables into a single factor group (for example, combining ethnicity and age into a single factor, ethnicity/age group, rather than treating them as separate factor groups) can often be used to tease out interactive social effects indirectly (Young and Bayley 1996).

[8] We have only 10 tokens of collective noun subjects for African Americans, but 43 for European Americans.

[9] In the extraction of data here, we do not take cases with *don't* for *doesn't* because this is a lexicalized and idiomatic 3rd sg. form.

[10] Walker 2001 notes that there are a number of grammatical and prosodic constraints that may influence the relative incidence of variable 3rd sg. -*s* marking. Although we do not dispute the potential of such effects for the variable marking of -*s* marking for the African American speakers in this study, we should point out that these potential effects in no way detract from the ethnic differences in the data. It is also quite noteworthy that -*s* marking is virtually categorical for the European Americans in this study, so that these variable constraints would not be applicable to the European American speakers.

[11] For convenience, "prevoiced" will be used henceforth to include /ai/ in both tautosyllable prevoiced syllables and open syllables.

[12] Production of these vowel plots involved several steps. Signals for the production of each vowel phoneme in English 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 low pass filtered at 4 kHz. Pre-emphasis of 6 dB/oct at a factor of 0.85 was applied. Spectrographic displays of the vowels and diphthongs were then created by means of a Fast Fourier Transform, using a frame length of 100 points. From these displays, it was determined where to take readings. For monophthongs, a reading was taken in the center of the vocoid. For diphthongs, two readings were taken, one at 35 ms from the beginning of the diphthong, and the other at 35 ms from the end. For triphthongs, readings were taken as for diphthongs, but a third reading was taken between the other two where the trajectory of the formants changed. The median of linear predictive coding (LPC) values was taken for each 20-ms window. Usually, 12 LPC coefficients were used, but anywhere from 10 to 30 were used if 12 failed to produce a satisfactory reading. The points shown on the plots represent mean values of 7 to 10 tokens of each vowel. Arrows indicate the gliding of diphthongs. No more than 2 instances of a single lexical item were used in order to ensure that the phonetic contexts are not skewed. Certain phonetic contexts, such as pre-/g/, pre-nasal, pre-/l/, and pre-/r/ (except where they are shown separately) were avoided because their effects on formant values are particularly strong.

[13] The qualification "outside listeners" may be an important one in some dialect perception studies. For example, Wolfram 2001 shows that it is quite possible for outside listeners to be unable to perceive ethnic distinctions that are quite apparent to members of the local community, who obviously use a set of perceptual cues different from those of outsiders. Unfortunately, in the case of communities so small that everyone knows everyone, it is impossible to conduct blind perception studies based on anonymous speakers. Ralph Fasold (personal communication) suggests that this situation is a listener's version of the "observer's paradox" in which the ideal listener would be a lifetime resident of a local community who does not know the other members of the community.

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