

Surveying Appalachia: Language Change and Perception

This study investigates language change in Appalachia through preliminary results of a web-based survey of university students in southern Appalachia. The survey presents traditional phonetic, lexical, and morpho-syntactic Appalachian English features and asks respondents to report their use of these features and their observation of other speakers in their area including the discourse situation.

Appalachian English is often thought of as a traditional form of speech associated with the older generation (Dial 1972, Montgomery 1979, Wolfram & Christian 1976). However, within the past two generations the social and linguistic landscape of Appalachia has greatly changed. Communities that lived mainly in isolation now experience immigration and emigration with surrounding Appalachian communities and the broader South. With this openness come new language features and social practices. Recent research indicates that traditional Appalachian English features are in flux: with some dying out (Hazen 2006, Hazen, Butcher, & King 2010, Hazen, Hamilton, & Vacovsky 2011), others remaining stable (Hazen 2008), and others increasing among the younger generations (Hazen 2005, Childs & Mallinson 2004). These changes however are adapted and integrated differently by community members based on identity with the region. We study the ways that identification with Appalachia can affect a community member's linguistic practice. Moreover, we consider ways that a community in change can be reflected in the language behaviors of community members. We carefully observe young speakers because their sense of community and identity is currently forming as they are socially and linguistically negotiating what it means to be Appalachian today.