

Project Summary

Background: This project aims to study certain morpho-syntactic properties of Appalachian English. Appalachian English is a group of linguistic varieties spoken in areas of the eastern United States. The geographical area roughly coincides with the central and southern part of the Appalachian Mountain range, which includes areas of southwestern Pennsylvania and Virginia, West Virginia, eastern Tennessee and Kentucky, western North Carolina, southeastern Ohio, and northern Georgia and Alabama.

Examination of a number of sociolinguistic studies of Appalachian English (AppE) reveals that there is significant morpho-syntactic variation not only between Standard English (SE) and AppE, but across regional varieties of AppE as well; in other words, AppE does not constitute a single dialect. This variation is not just *quantitative* (with some varieties showing a higher propensity for a particular grammatical feature than others): there are significant *qualitative* differences between individual AppE varieties as well. For example, previous work on AppE claims that subject contact relatives (data samples of which have been collected, for example, from certain counties in West Virginia) are restricted to presentational contexts. However, our own preliminary fieldwork on different varieties of AppE have turned up instances of subject contact relatives which are clearly not restricted to presentational contexts.

Intellectual Merits: From the point of view of the syntactician, the findings in these studies are of paramount interest, because they present an opportunity for a testing ground for a number of research questions. In terms of the question of micro-variation, for example, the differences found among these closely-related varieties would allow one to test hypotheses that particular syntactic properties are linked to one another. The collaborators on this project thus propose to pursue a study of Appalachian syntax from the perspective of generative grammar, a theoretical framework which complements that used in previous sociolinguistic studies. In particular, the proposed research project combines an *in-depth* study of a relatively small subset of the morpho-syntactic differences and a comparison of these morpho-syntactic properties *across individual varieties* of AppE. This approach will (a) allow the collaborators to tease apart and pinpoint the morpho-syntactic variation reported across Appalachian varieties, (b) substantially enhance an understanding of the details of these differences within AppE and between AppE and other varieties, and (c) provide a particularly fruitful opportunity to assess their implications for the theory of grammar.

Broader Impacts: Beyond the immediate relevance to the syntactician, the approach taken and the research questions posed in this study promise to yield heretofore undisclosed data (that is, data which may not necessarily emerge using sociolinguistic techniques), which ultimately can be shared by the entire scientific community. Materials collected through fieldwork will be disseminated in several ways, as these materials will also be of interest to linguists studying sociolinguistic variation and discourse analysis, as well as to anyone interested in Appalachian language and culture (such as anthropologists, sociologists, and folklorists). Taped interviews (consisting of audio CDs and transcriptions) will be placed in the *Archives of Appalachia* (at East Tennessee State University), where they will be available for examination and/or borrowing. In addition, an electronically accessible database of our empirical findings will be made available via the word-wide web. The analyses of the data will also be presented at linguistics conferences and published in linguistics journals.

Finally, a vital contribution of the type of work proposed here is the documentation and preservation of data from a set of possibly endangered minority dialects. Linguistic study of non-standard, and often stigmatized, linguistic varieties promotes the legitimacy and recognizes the heritage of the varieties and their associated cultures.