# REEXAMINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ENGLISH: EVIDENCE FROM ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

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Despite extensive research over the past several decades, a number of issues concerning the development of AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE) remain unresolved. These include the regional accommodation of earlier African American speech; the sources of its current, distinctive structural features; and the past and present trajectory of change. To address these questions, this study examines several longstanding, isolated biracial sociolinguistic situations in the coastal and the Appalachian regions of North Carolina. One of these situations involves a core community of African Americans, whereas two of the situations involve case studies of isolated speakers. A comparison of diagnostic phonological and morphosyntactic variables for speakers representing different generations of African Americans and baseline European American speakers suggests that extensive accommodation to localized dialects characterized earlier African American speech. At the same time, the maintenance of an exclusive subset of dialect features suggests persistent substrate influence and long-term ethnolinguistic distinctiveness along with local dialect accommodation. Younger African Americans in some historically isolated rural regions appear to be moving away from the localized dialects toward a more generalized AAVE norm.*

**1.** PRELIMINARIES. For almost a half century now, studies of AFRICAN AMERICAN VERNACULAR ENGLISH (AAVE) have dominated social dialectology. Schneider's survey (1996:3) of research articles on the dialects of American English from the mid-1960s through the mid-1990s, for example, reveals that AAVE has had more than five times as many publications devoted to it than any other variety of English, and more publications than all other varieties of American English combined. Nonetheless, the diachronic and the synchronic status of AAVE remain highly controversial. At the heart of the debate are the sources of the distinctive structural traits of AAVE and their development over time. This paper reconsiders these questions based on sociolinguistic data collected from several bi-ethnic enclave dialect situations in the US that have come to light during the last decade.

As new data have emerged, hypotheses about the origin and development of AAVE have shifted dramatically. Data from two types of sources have fueled the most recent reassessment of the earlier history of AAVE. First, an expanding base of written documents representing the speech of earlier African Americans has been uncovered. Written records, such as the extensive set of ex-slave narratives collected under the Works Project Administration (Schneider 1989), letters written by semiliterate ex-slaves in the mid-1800s (Montgomery et al. 1993, Montgomery & Fuller 1996), and other specialized collections of texts such as the Hyatt texts — an extensive set of interviews conducted with black hoodoo doctors in the 1930s (Hyatt 1970–78, Viereck 1988, Ewers 1996) — have led to the conclusion that earlier AAVE was not nearly as distinct from

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postcolonial European American English varieties as assumed under some earlier hypotheses.

The second type of data inspiring the most recent reconsideration of earlier African American speech comes from the examination of the speech of black expatriates living in enclave situations. For example, in the 1820s a group of African Americans from Philadelphia migrated to the peninsula of Samaná in the Dominican Republic, living in relative isolation and maintaining an apparent relic variety of English (Poplack & Sankoff 1987, Poplack & Tagliamonte 1989, 2001, Poplack 1999). A significant population of African Americans also migrated from the United States to Canada in the early 1800s, and some lived in relative isolation for an extended period of time in Nova Scotia. The examination of these situations (Poplack 1999, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001) has offered a significant challenge to the hypothesis that a proto-creole variety was implicated in the origin and early development of African American English.[1]

The situations examined here fall squarely within the tradition of enclave dialect studies. They are different, however, in that they involve longstanding, relatively isolated situations in the rural southeastern United States. Several different enclave circumstances are considered, ranging from a fairly extensive bi-ethnic sociolinguistic situation that has existed for almost three centuries along the coast of North Carolina to the case of a single, isolated African American family living for almost a century and a half within an isolated island community surrounded by European Americans. Although expatriate transplant communities may seem, at first glance, to hold more potential for examining the state of earlier African American speech than the types of situations considered here, it may be argued that rural enclave situations in the US offer equally compelling insight into the earlier state of AAVE and its present trajectory of change. There is comparable geographic remoteness and social detachment, though the physical dislocation is certainly not as distant as that involved in the expatriate situations. Historical continuity also characterizes these US situations; in fact, one of the situations examined here involves African American and European American communities that have coexisted in the same remote coastal location since the early 1700s.

Though it may be presumptuous to generalize about earlier and contemporary African American speech on the basis of a limited set of enclave situations and the apparent time construct, these circumstances certainly offer perspective on several central issues. One question is the extent to which earlier and contemporary African American speech has accommodated local dialect norms. At the same time, the possible persistence of long-term ethnolinguistic distinctiveness is a fundamental issue in reconstructing the history of African American speech. Recent studies (Labov 1998, Poplack 1999) have suggested that the distinctiveness of AAVE is primarily a twentieth-century phenomenon, but our evidence suggests that this view may be somewhat exaggerated. In fact, the evidence from these situations indicates that earlier African American speech combined regional traits shared with cohort European American speech communities with a set of persistent, ethnolinguistically distinct substrate features derived from the earlier contact history of Africans and Europeans. Finally, this analysis addresses the issue of contem-

[1] The validity of such evidence is premised on several assumptions: (i) that the transplant variety of the expatriate groups was an authentic reflection of a vernacular variety typical of African Americans to begin with, (ii) that such communities would be relatively conservative in their language change within the new settlement communities, and (iii) that these communities would remain relatively unaffected by the influence of African American norms developing outside of the communities under review. These arguable assumptions are, of course, the same kinds of assumptions that underlie this study.

porary language change in AAVE. Much has been made of the independent changes taking place within AAVE that are distancing it from comparable European American English vernacular varieties (Dayton 1996, Labov 1998). While there may be support for some of these claims, the evidence offered here indicates that contemporary ethnolinguistic divergence also derives from the fact that African Americans are abandoning or resisting local dialect norms in favor of external, supraregional AAVE norms.

**2.** THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF AAVE. The primary hypotheses on the origin and development of AAVE may be divided into three major positions: the ANGLICIST, the CREOLIST, and the NEO-ANGLICIST hypotheses. In the mid-twentieth century the ANGLICIST HYPOTHESIS — that the speech of African Americans derived directly from British-based dialects — was commonly accepted by prominent American dialectologists, along with the conclusion that twentieth-century African American speech was identical to that of benchmark rural Southern vernacular white speech. Kurath 1949 and McDavid & McDavid 1951 probably best represent the traditional dialectologist position:

> By and large the Southern Negro speaks the language of the white man of his locality or area and of his education. . . . As far as the speech of uneducated Negroes is concerned, it differs little from that of the illiterate white: that is, it exhibits the same regional and local variations as that of the simple white folk. (Kurath 1949:6)
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> [T]he overwhelming bulk of the material of American Negro speech — in vocabulary as well as grammar and phonology — is, as one would expect, borrowed from the speech of white groups with which Negroes come in contact. Sometimes these contacts have been such that Negroes simply speak the local variety of standard English. It is also likely that many relic forms from English dialects are better preserved in the speech of some American Negro groups than in American white speech. . . . After all, the preservation of relic forms is made possible by geographical and cultural isolation. (McDavid & McDavid 1951:12)

The traditional Anglicist position maintains that the language contact situation of African descendants in the United States was roughly comparable to that of other groups of immigrants. Slaves may have spoken different African languages, as well as some pidgin and creole varieties that arose in the African diaspora, but over the course of a couple of generations they simply learned the regional and social varieties of surrounding European American speakers.

In the 1960s and 1970s this position was replaced by the widespread acceptance of the CREOLIST HYPOTHESIS, which maintains that the roots of AAVE were embedded in an expansive creole found in the African diaspora, including the antebellum Plantation South (Bailey 1965, Stewart 1967, 1968, Dillard 1972). Stewart (1968:3) offers a strong version of the creolist hypothesis.

> 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.

Although not all AAVE researchers have accepted such a strong interpretation of the creolist hypothesis, many accepted some version of it. As Fasold (1981:164) notes, 'the creole hypothesis seems most likely to be correct, but it is certainly not so well established as Dillard (1972), for example, would have us to believe'.

The emergence of new corpora that included an expanding base of written documentation and data from expatriate black enclave communities led to the NEO-ANGLICIST HYPOTHESIS (Montgomery et al. 1993, Montgomery & Fuller 1996, Mufwene 1996, Poplack 1999, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001). This position, like the Anglicist hypothe-

sis of the mid-twentieth century, maintains that earlier, postcolonial African American speech was directly linked to the early British dialects brought to North America. However, the neo-Anglicist position acknowledges that AAVE has since diverged so that it is now quite distinct from contemporary European American vernacular speech. Based on recent studies of expatriate black communities in Samaná and Nova Scotia, Poplack (1999:27) asserts 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 (1998:119) characterizes the most recent position 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'.

Despite growing support for the neo-Anglicist hypothesis, it has hardly become a consensus position. Disputes remain over the validity of the data (e.g. Debose 1994, Hannah 1997, Sutcliffe 2001), the earlier language contact situation between Africans and Europeans (Winford 1997, 1998), and the sociohistorical circumstances that framed the speech of earlier African Americans (Mufwene 1996, 2001, Rickford 1997, Singler 1998a,b). If nothing else, the significant shifts in positions over the past several decades should caution us against arriving at premature conclusions about the origin and evolution of AAVE.

**3.** THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SETTINGS. As noted above, data from three different sociolinguistic situations in North Carolina are considered in this analysis. These include a long-term, relatively stable African American community in a bi-ethnic coastal setting, a diminishing African American community located in a bi-ethnic setting in the mountains of Appalachia, and an isolated African American family living on a once-remote barrier island surrounded by an all-white community. The locations of the sites, Hyde County, Beech Bottom, and Ocracoke, are given in Figure 1, along with dialect isoglosses demarking the regional varieties encompassing these communities.

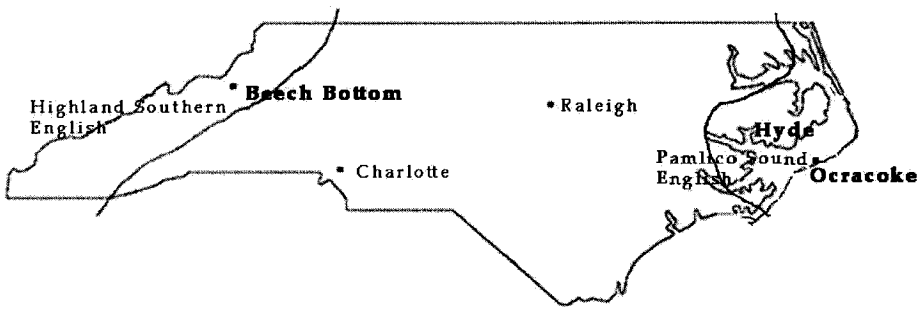



FIGURE 1. Location of Hyde County, Ocracoke, and Beech Bottom.

The first site we consider, Hyde County, is a sparsely populated, bi-ethnic community located in a remote rural region along the North Carolina coast. Although located on the mainland, this region is well within the Pamlico Sound dialect of North Carolina, one of the most distinctive dialects ever developed in the US (Howren 1962, Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1995, 1997, Wolfram et al. 1999). Until the mid-twentieth century, travel into and out of the community was mostly by water, since the marshland terrain (85 percent of the county is marshland) made it virtually impassable overland. For almost three centuries now, it has been the home of a durable African American commu-

nity comprising between 25 to 40 percent of the overall population.[2] Both the African American and European American residents in the community show historical continuity, with many of the residents' families going back to the early and mid-1700s (Wolfram & Thomas 2002:ch. 4). Since 1997, the staff of the North Carolina Language and Life Project has conducted sociolinguistic interviews with 92 African American lifetime residents and 52 European American residents of all ages. The long-term isolation and stable bi-ethnic composition within a distinctive regional dialect tradition offer an ideal sociolinguistic situation for addressing questions about the local dialect accommodation of African Americans in the past and present.

We then consider a sociolinguistic situation in Beech Bottom, North Carolina, a very small community nestled in a hollow of the Southern Appalachian mountain range. African American slaves were brought to the area as early as the late 1700s from other parts of North Carolina and from Virginia (Kay & Cary 1995), and have lived there continuously since that time. From 1900 to 1940, Beech Bottom's population ranged from 80 to 111 people; 65 of the residents during this period were classified as African American (Harris 1994). The primary industry at the turn of the twentieth century 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 factories in Ohio. Today, there are only about 10 people remaining in Beech Bottom, seven of whom are lifetime African American residents. Given the social detachment of Beech Bottom from more densely populated areas, the rugged mountain terrain that still hinders accessibility, the internally focused social networks that characterize the remaining residents, and a socially constructed sense of isolation, Beech Bottom fits the criteria often used to define a historically isolated enclave community (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes forthcoming, Wolfram & Thomas 2002:ch. 3).

Both Beech Bottom and Hyde County are isolated enclave communities involving the long-term coexistence of African Americans and European Americans. There is, however, an obvious physical and regional difference: the Beech Bottom community exists in a highland Southern context as opposed to the coastal setting of Hyde County. There is also a difference in terms of the regional dialect. In Hyde County, the regional variety is the unique Outer Banks dialect referred to here as Pamlico Sound English (Howren 1962, Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1995, Wolfram et al. 1999), while the regional dialect encompassing Beech Bottom is a variety of Highland Southern speech, or Appalachian English (Wolfram & Christian 1976, Hazen & Fluharty forthcoming, Montgomery & Hall forthcoming), with historical dialect roots quite different from those of the Pamlico Sound region. Additional differences exist in terms of the past and present population demographics. The Beech Bottom African American community is much smaller than Hyde County; in fact, the population is so small that we have to consider the speech of the few remaining African Americans as a kind of case study. Despite the small number of African Americans in Beech Bottom today, the results of the study of a few remaining speakers should not be dismissed in the effort to reconstruct the historical and current development of speech among African Americans. Case studies can, in fact, sometimes provide invaluable information about the establishment and maintenance of ethnic boundaries, as demonstrated in Rickford's (1985) study of a white and black resident in a Gullah-speaking region of South Carolina. Thus, the older speakers in Beech Bottom may still offer perspective on what the speech of the more

[2] The population of Hyde County at the time of the first official census in 1790 was 4,120; in 2000, it was 5,826. Approximately 35 percent of the population is currently African American.

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 by ethnic isolates.

Finally, we consider the case of a single remaining resident of the only African American family to live on the island of Ocracoke in the past 150 years. The speaker, Muzel Bryant, born in 1904, was one of nine children, of whom only Muzel and two siblings would spend practically all of their lives on the island.[3] Her grandparents came to Ocracoke in the 1860s after the Civil War and were the only African Americans since that time to live on this once-remote island located 20 miles across the Pamlico Sound from mainland North Carolina.[4] As with Beech Bottom we again use a case-study format. Though this approach limits its generalizability, it still provides critical insight into the role of the individual in terms of a speech community and, in this case, the potential persistence of ethnolinguistic boundaries against overwhelming demographic odds.

**4.** DIALECT ALIGNMENT IN HYDE COUNTY. In this section we consider the linguistic alignment of representative diagnostic linguistic variables for different generations of Hyde County African Americans and European Americans in order to illustrate patterns of convergence and divergence in apparent time (Bailey et al. 1991). The variables include a couple of structures traditionally associated with the distinctive regional dialect of the Pamlico Sound region — *weren't* regularization and verbal 3rd pl. *-s* marking (Wolfram et al 1999, Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994) — and several variables usually associated with AAVE in the US — prevocalic consonant cluster reduction, 3rd sg. *-s* absence, and copula absence (Fasold & Wolfram 1970, Labov 1972, Winford 1998, Rickford 1999). By comparing patterns of variation and change for distinctive Pamlico Sound dialect structures and traditional AAVE structures across different generations of African Americans and European Americans, we hope to ascertain how the vernaculars were aligned at an earlier period in Hyde County and how they are presently configured. We base our description on the quantitative analysis of 43 African American speakers divided into four different generational groups: elderly, born from 1896 to 1917; senior, born from 1927 to 1942; middle, born from 1953 to 1962; and young, born from 1972 to 1984. We assume that the elderly speakers will provide a picture of what African American speech may have been like early in the twentieth century, when the county was still highly isolated, and that the youngest group of speakers will provide a picture of the current state of African American speech. At least eight speakers are included in each generational group, at least four men and four women. A baseline European American group of 16 vernacular speakers was also selected, eight representing elderly speakers born from 1902 to 1916 and eight young speakers born from 1970 to 1983.

[3] Although it is conventional practice to preserve the anonymity of participants in sociolinguistic studies, it would be virtually impossible to do so in the case of a single African American family living on an island such as Ocracoke. Furthermore, the traditional procedure is in opposition to our attempts to celebrate the important contributions of African Americans to life on the Outer Banks (Wolfram 2002). Muzel Bryant's name is used here with her permission.

[4] Muzel Bryant's mother was a descendent of the original African American family who came to Ocracoke after the Civil War but her father came from the coastal mainland of North Carolina. Her father met her mother, who worked at a clam factory on Ocracoke, while on a boat transporting clams from the island to the mainland.

**4.1** CODA CONSONANT CLUSTER REDUCTION (CCR). In many respects, the reduction of SYLLABLE-CODA CONSONANT CLUSTERS in vernacular English dialects has been the paradigm case of systematic variability in variation studies. Although unresolved issues remain about the internal phonetic traits of CCR clusters (Browman & Goldstein 1991, Surprenant & Goldstein 1998), minor descriptive details of the reduction process (Fasold 1972, Guy 1980), and the most adequate explanatory account of the process in which a syllable-coda stop preceded by another consonant of shared voicing (e.g. *fact*, *cold*, and *find* are licensed for reduction, but not *count* or *colt*) may be variably deleted (Guy 1991, 1992, 1997, Guy & Boberg 1997, Santa Ana 1996), there is widespread agreement on the types of clusters that may be affected by CCR and the kinds of structural environments that favor the variable process. The canonical form of the segment following the cluster (e.g. consonants favor CCR over vowels), the members of the cluster in terms of a sonorancy hierarchy (e.g. nasal + stop clusters favor CCR over obstruent + stop), the prosodic status of the syllable (e.g. unstressed syllables favor CCR over stressed syllables), and the grammatical function of the final stop in the cluster (e.g. monomorphemic clusters favor CCR over bimorphemic clusters) constrain the relative level of CCR, as well as independent social variables such as social status, ethnicity, style, and language background (e.g. Labov et al. 1968, Labov 1972, Fasold 1972, Wolfram 1969, 1974b, 1980, Wolfram et al. 1986, Guy 1980, Bayley 1994, Santa Ana 1991, 1996).

One of the obvious influences on the relative incidence of CCR is language contact history. Varieties of English influenced by phonological transfer from languages not having syllable-coda consonant clusters tend to have significantly higher levels of CCR than other varieties. Although all varieties of English have CCR in preconsonantal position (e.g. *wes' side* or *fin' time*), in prevocalic position significant levels of CCR are primarily characteristic of English varieties influenced by language contact situations rather than through independent, internal linguistic change.[5] For example, in a summary of CCR in representative ethnic and social varieties of English, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998) and Wolfram and colleagues (2000) show that higher levels of prevocalic CCR are found in Hispanic English varieties (Wolfram 1974b, Santa Ana 1991, 1996), Vietnamese English (Wolfram et al. 1986), and Puebloan Native American English (Wolfram 1980)—all of which involve heritage languages that do not have coda consonant clusters. Therefore, Wolfram and colleagues (2000) hypothesized that the higher levels of prevocalic CCR observed in Vietnamese English, Hispanic English, and Native American English are probably attributable to native language influence—either direct language transfer in speakers who have learned English as a second language or a substratal influence passed on to subsequent generations as a defining trait of a social or ethnic variety.

What does prevocalic CCR reveal about the past and present alignment of African American and European American varieties of English in Hyde County? Is there evidence that these varieties were once aligned with respect to CCR, or has there been a persistent ethnolinguistic divide? What do these data suggest about the historical and current sociolinguistic relationship of black and white speech communities and their respective paths of language change?

[5] The difference between prevocalic and preconsonantal phonetic environments is critical to this claim about language contact influence. Although it may be quite possible for prevocalic CCR in English to derive through independent language change rather than language contact, we have not yet found empirical evidence for this development in our survey of a wide range of English varieties.

The quantitative analysis of CCR follows well-established procedures for data extraction and analysis. First, all cases of clusters meeting the specifications for the operation of CCR were identified, and actual cases of CCR were tabulated in relation to all cases where it might have occurred (Wolfram 1993). That is, all cases of coda stops were considered as potential candidates for deletion. Descriptive statistics were compiled for the different generational and ethnic groups, and the VARBRUL statistical procedure was applied to the data in order to determine the effect of various factors on the relative frequency of CCR.[6]

| | MONOMORPHEMIC | | | | | | BIMORPHEMIC | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PREVOCALIC | | PREPAUSAL | | PRECONS | | PREVOCALIC | | PREPAUSAL | | PRECONS | |
| AGE/ETHNIC GROUP | N/T | % Red | N/T | % Red | N/T | % Red | N/T | % Red | N/T | % Red | N/T | % Red |
| EUROPEAN AMERICAN | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Elderly | 7/68 | 10.3 | 13/37 | 35.1 | 57/107 | 53.3 | 4/101 | 4.0 | 1/29 | 3.4 | 34/73 | 46.6 |
| Young | 7/75 | 9.3 | 10/33 | 30.3 | 66/103 | 64.1 | 3/68 | 4.4 | 2/20 | 10.0 | 14/44 | 31.8 |
| AFRICAN AMERICAN | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Elderly | 36/69 | 52.1 | 47/60 | 78.3 | 88/108 | 81.5 | 14/48 | 29.2 | 8/11 | 72.7 | 59/69 | 85.5 |
| Senior | 27/49 | 55.1 | 16/23 | 69.6 | 60/83 | 72.2 | 11/49 | 22.4 | 10/15 | 66.7 | 34/40 | 85.0 |
| Middle | 44/80 | 55.0 | 23/27 | 85.2 | 120/134 | 89.6 | 29/79 | 36.7 | 10/10 | 100.0 | 38/49 | 77.6 |
| Young | 24/54 | 44.4 | 30/36 | 83.3 | 71/85 | 83.5 | 7/26 | 26.9 | 4/5 | 80.0 | 15/19 | 78.9 |

VARBRUL RESULTS: CONSONANT CLUSTER REDUCTION
Input probability = .538
ETHNICITY/GENERATION
European American
Elderly = .23; Young = .25
African American
Elderly = .67; Senior = .61; Middle = .73; Young = 65.
CLUSTER STATUS
monomorphemic = .56; bimorphemic = .40
FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENT
preconsonantal = .72; pause = .55; prevocalic = .24
Chi-square per cell = 1.436

TABLE 1. Consonant cluster reduction in Hyde County African American speech.

Table 1 gives the raw figures and percentages for the incidence of CCR for the four generational groups of Hyde County African Americans and the baseline European American older and younger groups. Figures are divided into monomorphemic and bimorphemic clusters in three different phonetic environments: preconsonantal, prepausal, and prevocalic.[7] While other linguistic variables might have been included in the analysis, the morphemic status of the cluster and the following phonetic environment have proved to be the primary independent linguistic factors in the variability of CCR (Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Guy 1980). The results of the VAR-

[6] VARBRUL is a probabilistic-based, multivariate regression procedure that shows the relative contributions of different factors to the overall variability of fluctuating forms (Cedergren & Sankoff 1974, Young & Bayley 1996). Factor groups may consist of independent linguistic constraints, such as the following phonetic environment, or external social ones, such as age group or social affiliation. The weighting values range from 0 to 1; in a binomial application, a value of greater than .5 favors the occurrence of the variant, while a value of less than .5 disfavors its occurrence.

[7] For the sake of this tabulation, the intermediate category in which tense marking includes both an internal change and suffix (e.g. *kept*, *slept*) is eliminated. For more details on tabulation procedures, see Wolfram & Thomas 2002.

BRUL analysis showing the systematic effects of the different linguistic and social factors accompany Table 1.

Table 1 indicates that CCR is a robust process for Hyde County African Americans in all phonetic environments. This contrasts with the European American speakers, who, for the most part, limit CCR to preconsonantal environments; furthermore, this contrast is consistent across different generations of speakers. At the same time, CCR is favored in monomorphemic clusters vs. bimorphemic clusters and in prepausal and preconsonantal environments over prevocalic contexts. These are, of course, the same ordered effects on variability that have been replicated in virtually all of the studies of CCR.

On one level, it is hardly unusual for an African American community to show substantive levels of prevocalic cluster reduction as indicated in Table 1. CCR is a characteristic trait of AAVE documented in a wide range of settings throughout the US (e.g. Labov et al. 1968, Fasold 1972, Guy 1980, Bailey & Thomas 1998, Rickford 1999). But this difference is, in fact, quite striking when we consider the overall historical alignment of phonological dialect features for Hyde County European Americans and African Americans as described in Wolfram & Thomas 2002. For example, the analysis of vowel systems for elderly African Americans and European Americans in Hyde County shows almost complete congruence in terms of the distinctive Pamlico Sound vowel traits (see Wolfram & Thomas:ch. 6). There is no indication that Hyde County African Americans and European Americans have ever been aligned with respect to CCR, at least in the diagnostic prevocalic environment. In Figure 2 the incidence of prevocalic CCR for the elderly and young European Americans and the four generational groups of African Americans is compared graphically. Figures for both monomorphemic and bimorphemic clusters are included.

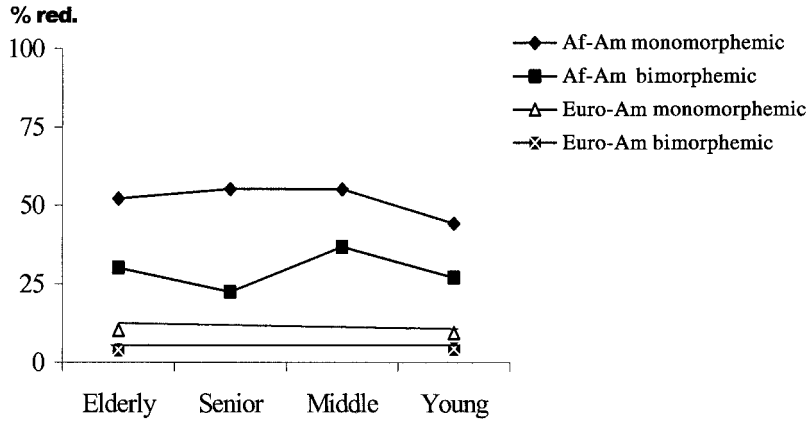



FIGURE 2. Prevocalic syllable-coda consonant cluster reduction in Hyde County.

Figure 2 indicates that CCR in prevocalic position has been a stable, variable process in Hyde County AAVE over time but a negligible one for European American speakers in the past and present. Furthermore, the consistently high levels of usage across the different generations of African American speakers do not suggest that prevocalic CCR is a recent innovation within AAVE.

The evidence suggests that African Americans probably brought this dialect trait with them originally when they were brought to Hyde County in the early 1700s — a holdover from the original contact situation involving West African languages. With a few exceptions (Holm 1988:108), West African languages do not have coda clusters (Allyene 1980, Welmers 1973), and early forms of Africanized English probably exhibited cluster reduction as a product of language transfer. Furthermore, the developing creoles of West Africa and the Caribbean (Allyene 1980, Holm 1988) adopted extensive CCR as a typological trait, and so earlier contact with creole speakers (Winford 1997, Rickford 1999) would have reinforced the pattern. Wherever it is spoken in the US, AAVE seems to distinguish itself from cohort European American varieties by its level of CCR — especially for prevocalic clusters and to a lesser extent for prepausal environments as well (e.g. Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Rickford 1999). In this respect, Hyde County African American speech corresponds with other varieties of AAVE rather than with the local dialect. If this trait were a more recent development in Hyde County, we would expect it to show increased frequency for younger speakers; we would also expect it to parallel other, more recent innovations in AAVE, for example, the rise of a grammatical feature such as habitual *be* (Bailey & Maynor 1985, Dayton 1996, Labov 1998, Addy 2000).

Why would CCR not accommodate the Hyde County European American pattern, as did so many features of the vowel system and some morphosyntactic features (see §§4.2 and 4.3)? The answer is probably related to internal phonological structure, but sociopsychological factors may also be involved. The reduction of coda consonant clusters is a well-known trait of first-language development (Ingram 1989), second-language acquisition interlanguage (Tarone 1980, 1988), and phonological transfer (Weinreich 1953, Odlin 1989). Furthermore, by comparison with segmental inventories, phonotactic transfer tends to be particularly durable. Sabino's study of Negerhollands (Sabino 1993, 1994), for example, shows the long-term persistence of phonotactic transfer patterns; she notes (1994:16) that '250 years after the arrival of the first slave ship, a substrate phonotactic constraint was still partially evident in the language of the last speakers of the language'. As it turns out, some of the most socially marked, continuous differences in African American and European American speech in Hyde County are found in phonotactic patterns. For example, traits such as *skr* for *str*, *aks* for *ask*, and a more generalized unstressed syllable deletion process ('*member* for *remember*) are among the most robust and prominent ethnic distinctions between African Americans and European Americans in Hyde County (Wolfram & Thomas 2002:131). Perhaps more importantly, these distinctions were maintained even as other phonological traits, the vowel systems in particular, converged. Though we may be impressed with the long-term persistence of CCR, it is hardly surprising that a structure involving a phonetically complex phonotactic sequence would be among those traits perpetuated as a substratal effect from an earlier language-contact situation.

The persistence of extensive levels of CCR may also be supported by its relative lack of social saliency. Labov notes (2001:196, 28) that CCR 'elicits only moderate style shifting and subjective reactions when compared to some other phonological features'. Style shifting is, of course, one of the primary indicators of social marking, as salient features are likely to show heightened sensitivity to stylistic manipulation (Labov 1966, 2001). The fact that CCR is a natural phonological process that is shared in part by practically all varieties of English may further lead to a type of CAMOUFLAGING effect (Spears 1982) in which a vernacular dialect form that appears to be like a closely related form in a standard variety may not be readily apparent to listeners. In standard

varieties of English, CCR is quite common in some phonetic contexts, in particular in preconsonantal position (e.g. *tes*' *case*, *col*' *person*), in unstressed syllables (e.g. *breakfas*'), and in unstressed function words such as *an*' for *and*. In cases of partial structural overlap, social saliency might be reduced where there is, in fact, a diagnostic difference. Accordingly, CCR would seem to be a prime candidate for manifesting a subtle, enduring ethnolinguistic difference.

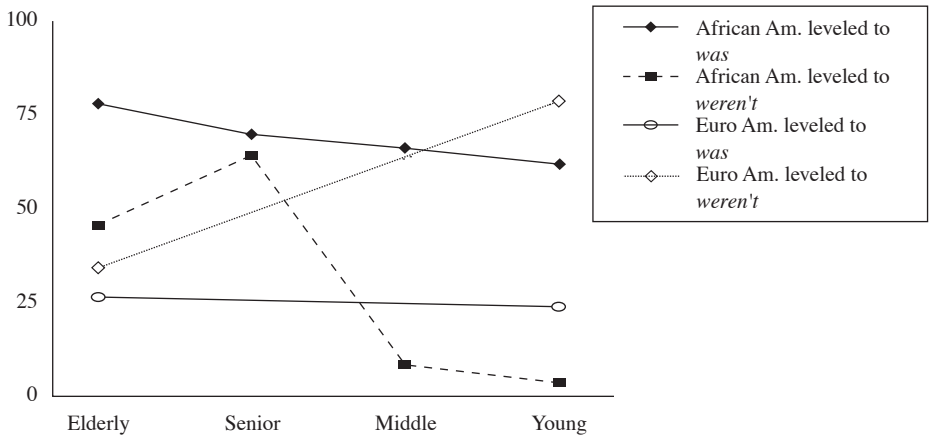
**4.2** PAST TENSE *be* LEVELING. Studies of mid-Atlantic coastal dialects of American English (Atwood 1953, Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994, Schilling-Estes 1997, 2000, Shores 2000) have shown a distinctive pattern of past tense *be* regularization in which leveling to *was* may take place in affirmative constructions (e.g. *The dogs was down there* or *We was down there*) while leveling to *weren't* takes place in negative constructions (e.g. *I weren't there* or *It weren't nice*). This pattern contrasts with the standard English concord pattern based on plurality as well as the widespread vernacular pattern of leveling to *was* regardless of plurality or polarity (*I/you/(s)he/we/they was/n't there*). The mid-Atlantic coastal pattern represents a significant remorphologization of the past *be*-stem, in which the *were*-stem is now used as a marker of negativity rather than plurality. Leveling based on negative polarity has been noted in some dialect areas in England (Cheshire 1982, Trudgill 1990, Britain 2002), but it is clearly a minority pattern compared with the predominant vernacular pattern of leveling in which *was* serves as a single pivot form.

In the US, productive use of the remorphologized pattern is now confined to a restricted region along the mid-Atlantic coastal area that extends from the eastern shore of Maryland and Virginia, including Tangier Island (Shores 2000) and Smith Island (Schilling-Estes 1997, 2000) in the Chesapeake Bay area, to the Outer Banks barrier islands and the adjacent coastal region of mainland North Carolina (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994, Wolfram et al. 1999). At the same time, descriptions of past *be* in AAVE (Labov et al. 1968, Weldon 1994, Rickford 1999) do not mention *weren't* leveling; neither do descriptions of African American speech in enclave, transplant situations (e.g. Tagliamonte & Smith 1999). It thus seems reasonable to assume that the pattern of leveling to *weren't* considered here is a distinct, regionally restricted pattern within the US. As such, it is a good indicator of the extent to which African Americans in Hyde County have been affected by a local morphosyntactic vernacular norm.

In Figure 3, we chart the incidence of leveling to *weren't* for past *be* in negative constructions and leveling to *was* in affirmative constructions, based on the same set of speakers used for the analysis of CCR. To arrive at the raw figures and percentages presented in the table accompanying Fig. 3, the occurrence of past tense *be* leveling was tabulated in relation to all possible cases for leveling to *weren't* (e.g. *I weren't there* for *I wasn't there*) and to *was* (e.g. *We was here* for *We were here*). The graph is based on the percentage of leveling for each age-group aggregate, including the four age groups of African Americans and the two age groups of European Americans. Also included is a VARBRUL analysis for *was* and for *weren't* leveling by ethnic group and generation.[8]

The figures for *was* and *weren't* leveling show that elderly African Americans and European Americans in Hyde County align for *weren't* leveling, whereas younger

[8] For a more detailed analysis that includes type of subject constraints, see Wolfram & Thomas 2002.




| ETHNICITY AND GENERATION | LEVELED TO *was* | | LEVELED TO *weren't* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N/T | % Leveled | N/T | % Leveled |
| EUROPEAN AMERICAN | | | | |
| Elderly (77–94) | 25/93 | 26.9 | 9/26 | 34.6 |
| Young (15–27) | 16/68 | 23.5 | 17/22 | 77.3 |
| AFRICAN AMERICAN | | | | |
| Elderly (77–102) | 98/124 | 78.4 | 37/81 | 45.7 |
| Senior (55–70) | 50/72 | 69.4 | 9/14 | 64.3 |
| Middle (32–43) | 23/35 | 65.7 | 2/23 | 8.7 |
| Young (14–23) | 68/111 | 61.3 | 2/53 | 3.8 |

| VARBRUL RESULTS: ETHNICITY/GENERATION | LEVELED TO *was* | LEVELED TO *weren't* |
|---|---|---|
| | Input probability = .57 | Input probability = .27 |
| EUROPEAN AMERICAN | | |
| Elderly | .22 | .59 |
| Young | .19 | .90 |
| AFRICAN AMERICAN | | |
| Elderly | .75 | .70 |
| Senior | .64 | .83 |
| Middle | .60 | .21 |
| Young | .55 | .10 |

FIGURE 3. The incidence of past tense *be* regularization in Hyde County.

African Americans have abandoned this pattern in favor of a more generalized version of *was* regularization that applies to both negatives and positives — the common pattern for AAVE elsewhere (Weldon 1994). The abandonment of *weren't* leveling by younger African American speakers is a significant departure from the older, localized vernacular norm. The trajectory of change for African Americans contrasts dramatically with that for European Americans. Whereas younger African Americans relinquish *weren't* leveling, younger European Americans intensify this pattern, showing that the different ethnic groups have taken different paths of change. In an important sense, both groups

have participated actively in expanding an ethnolinguistic divide that now characterizes the current generation of vernacular speakers.

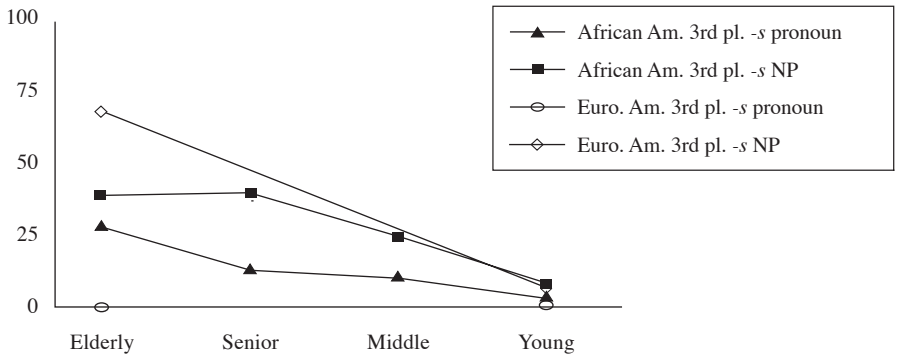
**4.3** THIRD PERSON *-s* MARKING. There are two dimensions of third person *-s* attachment that are relevant to dialect alignment in Hyde County. First, there is a pattern in which verbal *-s* attaches to verbs occurring with a 3rd pl. subject (e.g. *The dogs barks at the ducks*). This is now a widely documented concord pattern found in varieties of English influenced by the Ulster Scots (Christian et al. 1989, Montgomery 1989, 1997). Regions of the US showing this donor effect include Appalachia (Wolfram & Christian 1976, Montgomery 1997) and the Pamlico Sound (Hazen 1996, 2000, Wolfram et al. 1999). There are a couple of structural factors affecting the use of plural *-s* marking, notably, type of subject and adjacency. In many varieties, plural *-s* marking is favored with noun phrase subjects (with systematic effects from NP subtypes such as collectives and coordinates) such as *The dogs barks at the ducks* over pronominal subjects such as *They barks at the ducks*. Structural distance from the subject also favors marking over immediately adjacent subjects (e.g. *The dogs that barks all the time* is favored over *The dogs barks all the time*).

Figure 4 summarizes the incidence of 3rd pl. *-s* for four generational groups of African Americans and for two generational groups of European Americans. The figures are broken down according to noun-phrase subjects vs. pronoun subjects but are not divided on the basis of adjacency due to the relative infrequency of nonadjacent subjects in the corpus. Results of a VARBRUL analysis for an ethnicity/generation factor group and a subject type factor group accompany the figure.

Figure 4 reveals a socially convergent but structurally disjunctive pattern for Hyde County European Americans and African Americans. Elderly European Americans and African Americans are quite alike in their attachment of 3rd pl. *-s*, but differ with respect to the subject-type effect. European Americans restrict the attachment of *-s* exclusively to noun-phrase subjects, whereas African Americans generalize the rule to verbs regardless of the type of subject. In other words, European American speakers never use verbal *-s* with the subject *they* but African Americans routinely do, thus indicating a subtle but significant difference in constraints on the concord pattern.[9] Both European Americans and African Americans follow the general constraint pattern for subject type, but in differing degrees; for European Americans, there is a categorical prohibition against the use of plural *-s* with the pronoun *they*, whereas this condition is a variable constraint for African Americans. The data further indicate that plural verbal *-s* is a rapidly receding dialect trait in both African American and European American speech communities. In fact, younger Hyde County residents, regardless of ethnicity, rarely use 3rd pl. *-s* in their sociolinguistic interviews.

The other dimension of subject-verb concord relevant to the present study involves 3rd sg. *-s* absence. It is well documented (e.g. Labov et al. 1968, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Winford 1998, Rickford 1999) that present-day AAVE has optional attachment of *-s* to verbs with 3rd sg. subject forms, as in *The dog live__in the swamp* or *She like__to run*. The absence of 3rd sg. *-s* is also a trait found in some vernacular varieties of English in the British Isles, particularly East Anglia (Trudgill 1990, 1998), so that

[9] Since plural verbal *-s*, including the relaxation of the type of subject constraint, is a feature found more generally in Earlier African American speech (Montgomery et al. 1993, Montgomery & Fuller 1996) it is quite possible that this trait was brought to this region by the earliest African American speakers rather than acquired once they moved to the area.



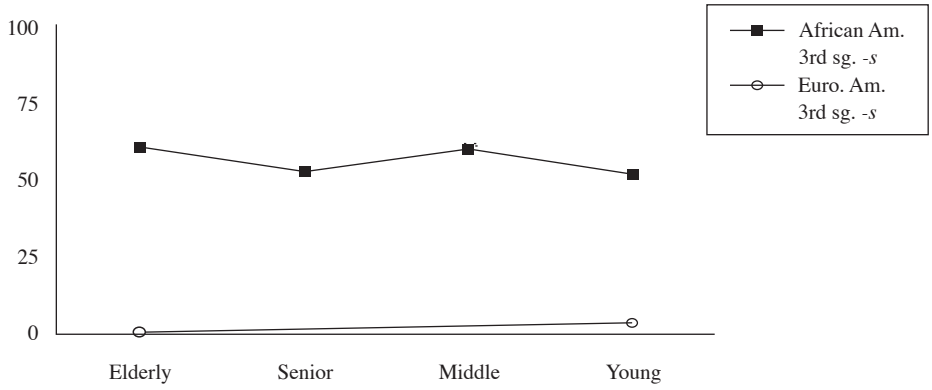

| ETHNICITY AND GENERATION | 3RD PL. -*S* PRONOUN SUBJECTS | | 3RD PL. -*S* NP SUBJECTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N/T | % Leveled | N/T | % Leveled |
| EUROPEAN AMERICAN | | | | |
| Elderly (77–94) | 0/29 | 0.0 | 18/26 | 69.2 |
| Young (15–27) | 0/93 | 0.0 | 3/74 | 4.1 |
| AFRICAN AMERICAN | | | | |
| Elderly (77–102) | 22/73 | 30.1 | 12/30 | 40.0 |
| Senior (55–70) | 4/27 | 14.8 | 9/22 | 40.9 |
| Middle (32–43) | 5/42 | 11.9 | 5/33 | 25.2 |
| Young (14–23) | 4/108 | 3.7 | 4/55 | 7.3 |

VARBRUL RESULTS:
Input probability = .08
ETHNICITY/GENERATION
European American
Elderly = .83; Young = .15
African American
Elderly = .87; Senior = .79; Middle = .61; Young = .36
SUBJECT TYPE:
Noun Phrase = .68
Pronoun = .33
Chi-square per cell = 1.642

FIGURE 4. Incidence of 3rd pl. -*s* marking in Hyde County.

it might be possible to attribute its absence to a British donor dialect rather than a language-contact source or internally motivated independent change. The relative incidence of 3rd sg. -*s* absence is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 shows that 3rd sg. -*s* absence differs sharply for European Americans and African Americans in Hyde County and that this difference has apparently persisted for generations. Hyde County African Americans participate in a pattern of optional 3rd sg. -*s* absence; in fact, every African American speaker with five or more potential examples of -*s* 3rd sg. in our sample exhibits some 3rd sg. -*s* absence. By contrast, elderly European Americans obligatorily mark 3rd sg. -*s* and younger European Ameri-




| ETHNIC AND AGE GROUP | 3RD SG. -*s* ABSENCE | |
|---|---|---|
| | N/T | % Absent |
| EUROPEAN AMERICAN | | |
| Elderly (77–94) | 1/104 | 1.0 |
| Young (15–27) | 6/165 | 3.6 |
| AFRICAN AMERICAN | | |
| Elderly (77–102) | 85/140 | 60.1 |
| Senior (55–70) | 39/74 | 52.7 |
| Middle (32–43) | 38/64 | 59.4 |
| Young (14–23) | 120/235 | 51.1 |

FIGURE 5. The incidence of 3rd sg. -*s* absence in Hyde County.

can speakers rarely have 3rd -*s* absence. We thus see a significant difference between the ethnic groups in this respect.

The different dimensions of verbal -*s* attachment described here show both alignment and misalignment. The elderly group of African Americans aligns with the elderly European Americans for plural -*s* attachment, but relaxes the noun phrase subject constraint. At the same time, African Americans have maintained and continue to maintain optional -*s* marking for 3rd sg., whereas European Americans have obligatory -*s* marking. What is particularly striking is the apparent coexistence of competing -*s* marking systems, one in which -*s* is marked on 3rd sg. and 3rd pl. and one in which the present verbal paradigm lacks inflectional marking. Wolfram and colleagues (1999) observe that the Outer Banks is an area that has been, and continues to be, a 3rd sg. -*s* marking region, a conclusion confirmed in our examination of elderly European American speakers in Hyde County.[10] While there may have been regions of colonial America that were characterized by 3rd sg. -*s* absence, there is simply no indication that this pattern

[10] The lack of concord marking in English can be dated to Middle English (Wright 1999) and has been well documented in the south of England, particularly East Anglia (Trudgill 1990, 1998), as well as southwest England (Wakelin 1986:36) and even in the West Midlands (Orton et al. 1978:map 34). While its status in earlier dialects of England is secure, its transmission to and diffusion within colonial American English is much less certain. Atwood (1953:29) finds some attestation for constructions such as *She do* from coastal Virginia to Georgia, but Schneider and Montgomery (1999) find the lack of concord in only 4 percent of cases in early European American English in the US. More importantly, there is no evidence of 3rd sg. -*s* absence in the earlier speech of coastal North Carolina.

ever existed in Hyde County. It is, of course, possible that the 3rd sg. *-s* absence may have typified earlier European American speakers in the region only to be lost by subsequent generations, but this seems unlikely given the persistence of other earlier dialect patterns. If we posited that 3rd sg. *-s* absence was part of earlier Hyde County American English, we would have to explain why earlier features such as 3rd pl. *-s* marking and leveling to *weren't* were maintained while 3rd sg. *-s* was lost. It does not seem plausible to conclude that the absence of 3rd sg. *-s* among African Americans was learned from their European American cohorts at an earlier point in their history when there is no evidence of the pattern in earlier European American English in the Pamlico Sound region. It is much more likely that African Americans brought this dialect feature with them when they came to the area, a vestige of the early contact history between Africans and Europeans.

The examination of verbal *-s* marking indicates that Earlier African American English in Hyde County apparently had a generalized version of *-s* attachment in which 3rd person forms were optionally marked regardless of number and subject type while current younger African Americans only have optional *-s* marking for 3rd sg. The earlier African American variety apparently was constructed by mixing a modified local dialect pattern with a distinct ethnolinguistic pattern brought to the region by the African Americans. The contemporary version of the 3rd person marking for African Americans remains distinct from European American speakers, but it has been reconfigured in that the optional *-s* marking rule is now restricted to 3rd sg. forms. Both the earlier and the current versions of *-s* attachment for African Americans distinguish these speakers from their European American cohorts, but in slightly different ways.

**4.4** COPULA/AUXILIARY ABSENCE. The absence of copula and auxiliary for contractible forms of *is* and *are* (e.g. *She nice* for *She's nice* or *They acting silly* for *They're acting silly*) is one of the most highlighted structures of AAVE (e.g. Labov 1969, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Baugh 1980, 1983, Rickford 1997, 1998, 1999, Walker 1999). Nonetheless, its synchronic and diachronic status remains controversial. Descriptive issues involve the structural status of NULL COPULA (Martin 1992), the relationship of copula contraction to deletion (Labov 1969, McElhinney 1993, Fasold & Nakano 1996), and the explanation of independent linguistic constraints on variable deletion (Labov 1969, Rickford et al. 1991, Walker 1999). The ethnolinguistic status of copula absence in AAVE vis-à-vis its status in cohort rural Southern European American vernacular varieties is also an issue. For example, Wolfram (1974a) and Feagin (1979) note that AAVE shares copula absence with some Southern white rural vernacular varieties of English, but that there are also some qualitative and quantitative differences in the realization of deletion in these respective varieties. Its use in European American varieties in the American South has generally been attributed to linguistic accommodation to African American speech rather than to donor dialects in the British Isles or independent development (Wolfram 1974a).

Diachronically, copula absence has figured prominently in the debate over the origin of AAVE (Winford 1998:109). Given its prominence in English-based creoles (Bailey 1965, Holm 1984, Rickford 1996, 1997, 1998), null copula has sometimes been considered the most conspicuous example of creole influence in AAVE. Alternate analyses, however, characterize copula and auxiliary absence as a natural, independent offshoot of the phonological process of contraction (Walker 1999).

Although the present analysis of copula absence in Hyde County may not resolve the dispute over the development of copula absence in AAVE, past and present align-

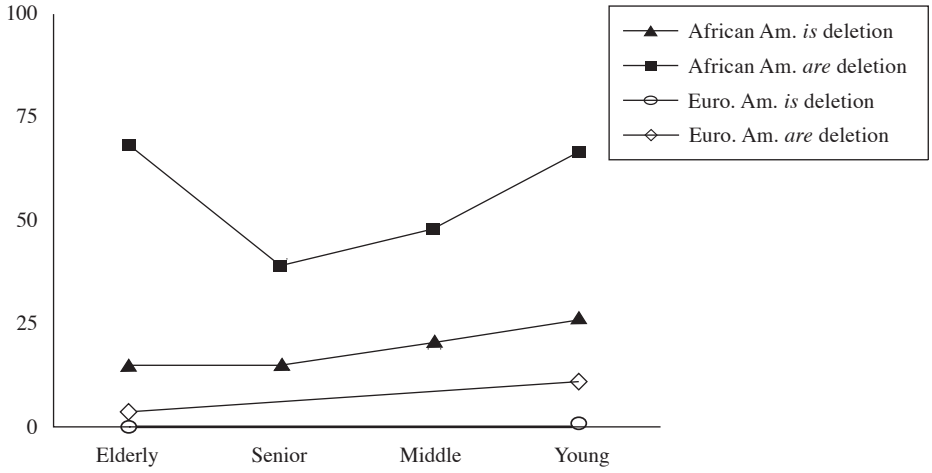
ment patterns do, in fact, have implications for understanding the distribution and development of this process in the US. Figure 6 summarizes the incidence of the absence of *is* and *are* for Hyde County African Americans and European Americans. Our tabulation of copula absence follows the general procedure in which the percentage of absence is calculated out of the total number of contracted forms (e.g. *She's nice*), contractible full forms (e.g. *She is nice*), and null forms (e.g. *She nice*) (Rickford et al. 1991). Two VARBRUL analyses were conducted. One includes the ethnic/generational grouping of speakers and the form of the copula: *is* and *are* absence. The other focuses only on independent linguistic effects for the African American speakers in the sample to determine if these constraints replicate those found in other studies (e.g. Labov 1969, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Baugh 1980, 1983, Rickford 1997, 1999, Rickford et al. 1991). Following these studies, we consider factor groups related to the surface form of the copula form (*is* vs. *are*), subject type (NP vs. pronoun), and predicate complement type (predicate nominative, as in *She the woman*; predicate adjective, as in *She nice*; predicate locative, as in *She in the house*; verb *-ing*, as in *She running*; and *gonna* as in *She gonna go*).

The comparison in Fig. 6 suggests that copula absence continues to be a distinctly African American trait in Hyde County. Although some rural Southern European American vernacular varieties share copula absence to a limited degree (Wolfram 1974a, Feagin 1979, Bailey & Maynor 1985), Pamlico Sound English is not one of them (Wolfram et al. 1999). Thus, we see an important structural discontinuity in both earlier and current versions of African American and European American speech in Hyde County.

Copula absence has been fairly stable among African Americans over the four generations of speakers included in this study, with some strengthening of the pattern among younger speakers, particularly for *is*. By comparison, elderly European Americans do not have copula absence to any degree. In this respect, the European American community in Hyde County seems more like Highland rhotic areas of the South (Wolfram & Christian 1976) than some of the lowland nonrhotic plains areas (Wolfram 1974a). Some younger European Americans, however, seem to have incipient *are* copula absence. This minor trend may indicate some AAVE influence on younger European American speakers from the African American community, though other structures, such as the leveling to *weren't* discussed in §4.2, show divergence in linguistic structures.

The VARBRUL analysis of independent linguistic constraints on copula absence in Hyde County AAVE shows close parallels with constraints found in other studies (Labov 1969, Rickford 1998): *are* favors absence over *is*, preceding pronouns favor absence over NPs, and the complements *gonna* and verb *-ing* favor absence over predicate nominatives and predicate adjectives. In this respect, Hyde County AAVE seems no different from other varieties of AAVE in the US (Labov 1969, Wolfram 1969, Fasold 1972, Baugh 1980, 1983, Rickford 1999, Rickford et al. 1991).

The evidence clearly shows absence of the copula to be a distinguishing trait of Hyde County AAVE. There is no evidence of earlier copula absence among European Americans, but African Americans show stable absence. It is quite different from past-tense *be* leveling, which showed apparent accommodation to the local regional dialect form by African Americans. Given the longstanding isolation of both European American and African American populations in Hyde County, it seems most reasonable to assume that copula absence was present in earlier Hyde County African American speech. We can only speculate as to why it should persist while other features of the local dialect were accommodated, but it seems evident that its ethnolinguistic marking




VARBRUL RESULTS:

Input probability = .15
ETHNICITY/GENERATION
European American
Elderly = .08; Young = .16
African American
Elderly = .73; Senior = .63; Middle = .70; Young = .79
*Are/Is*
*is* = .33; *are* = .76
Chi-square per cell = .555

VARBRUL RESULTS: GRAMMATICAL FACTORS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

Input probability = .28
COPULA FORM
*are* = .69; *is* = .44
SUBJECT
Pronoun = .56; NP = .43
PREDICATE COMPLEMENT
*gonna* = .76; V-*ing* = .65; adj. = .54; loc. = .45; nom. = .34
Chi-square per cell = 1.285

FIGURE 6. Incidence of copula absence in Hyde County.

is historically and currently secure. It also demonstrates that selective ethnolinguistic distinctiveness can indeed endure in the face of widespread dialect accommodation.

**5.** THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HYDE COUNTY DIALECT ALIGNMENT. The results of this selective analysis indicate that prominent dialect traits of Pamlico Sound English are manifested in the speech of elderly speakers regardless of ethnicity. At the same time, durable, ethnically based dialect differences coexisted with the localized dialect features. Some of these are persistent ethnolinguistic variables that were probably found in the speech of the African American residents brought to Hyde County in the early 1700s, making them likely candidates for substrate effects derived from the original contact situation between Africans and Europeans. In such a historical situation, the local dialect features may have been added to the core of ethnically distinct features

characterizing early African American inhabitants of Hyde County, resulting in mixed dialect configuration. Local dialect structures in the speech of African Americans may have become salient, especially to outsiders, but there is no evidence that the ethnolinguistic divide was ever completely eradicated.

The trajectory of change for the four generations of African American speakers in our corpus in terms of core AAVE features and the traditional regional Pamlico Sound dialect structures is summarized in Figure 7.[11] The four groups are broken down on the basis of different sociohistorical periods: speakers who were born and raised in the early twentieth century up through World War I, speakers born and raised between World War I and legalized school integration in the late 1960s, speakers who lived through the early period of school integration as adolescents, and those who were born and raised after institutional integration took place in Hyde County.

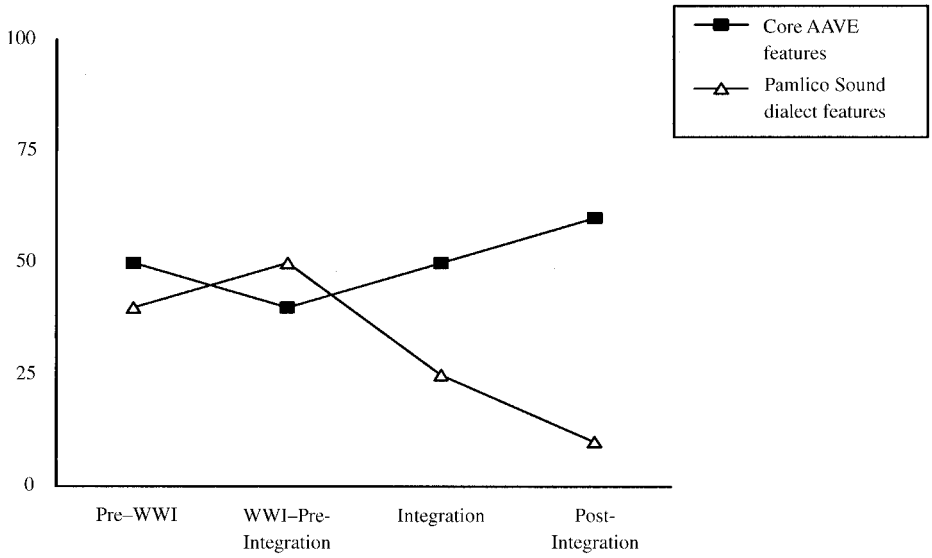



FIGURE 7. Idealized figure of language change for Hyde County African Americans.

As indicated in Fig. 7, the course of change for African Americans in Hyde County does not follow a simple regression slope. For a number of localized Pamlico County traits, the oldest group of African Americans shows a high level of alignment with their European American cohorts, followed by a period of even more intensified accommodation; this in turn is followed by a sharp regression slope in the use of Pamlico Sound features by the two younger generations of speakers. At the same time, the oldest generation of African Americans shows moderate levels of core AAVE features, the next generation shows a reduction of these features, and the two younger generations show a progressive increase. The onset of legalized institutional integration actually coincides with a reduction rather than an increase in accommodation to the local dialect by African American speakers. On one level, this path of change indicates the limited effects of institutionally mandated integration on dialect convergence. On another level, however, it reflects the symbolic role of language in maintaining ethnolinguistic iden-

[11] The figure is based not only on the diagnostic variables considered here but on a more comprehensive set of diagnostic vowel features analyzed in Wolfram & Thomas 2002.

tity — by both African Americans and European Americans — in the face of institutional and sociopolitical pressure to integrate. Evidence from Hyde County supports the claim that AAVE and European American vernacular varieties are diverging (Labov 1987, Bailey & Maynor 1989). For African Americans, local dialect features have been replaced by a more widespread, supraregional set of normative AAVE features. While European Americans also show the recession of some dialect traits, they concurrently indicate the intensification of selected, socially marked local structures. Ethnolinguistic divergence is, in fact, a bilateral process.

**6.** DIALECT ALIGNMENT IN BEECH BOTTOM. We now turn to Beech Bottom, where a once-stable community of European American and African American feldspar miners in a remote region of the Appalachian mountain range of North Carolina has been reduced to a community of less than a dozen current residents. Once again, our objective is to compare the speech of the local African Americans with a benchmark regional European American dialect community, though in this instance we are restricted to a case study of the few remaining speakers. As was the case with Hyde County, the ethnicity of speakers from Beech Bottom cannot be determined by outsiders based on a sample of speech; an ethnic identification task (Mallinson & Wolfram 2002) given to listeners in Raleigh, NC, indicates that more than 90 percent of the time African Americans from Beech Bottom were identified as white. Overall subjective assessments of ethnicity by outside listeners, however, may be different from the objective reality revealed in a detailed, quantitative analysis of diagnostic dialect structures.

We compared the speech of the few remaining African Americans in Beech Bottom with a group of nine lifetime European American cohorts from an adjacent Appalachian community about a mile from the Beech Bottom community. We consider some of the same variables we examined in §4 with respect to AAVE, but have also selected a slightly different set of structures as representative of the regional Southern Highland variety.

**6.1** CONSONANT CLUSTER REDUCTION. First, we compare syllable-coda CCR, following the same procedures for extraction and analysis used in our examination of this variable for the Hyde County sample (§4.1). The figures presented in Table 2 are based on several African American speakers, including an elderly, middle-aged, and younger speaker from Beech Bottom and the nine European Americans from Beech Bottom divided into an older and a younger group of speakers.[12]

Table 2 shows that the incidence of CCR follows the typical patterning of independent linguistic constraints on variability but that there is a significant difference based on ethnicity. This contrast is most apparent in prevocalic position. African Americans have substantial reduction in this position whereas European Americans have little if any. Although we have not included age in the multivariate analysis, the raw figures suggest

[12] Although we have interviewed and recorded six out of the seven African Americans now living in Beech Bottom, we limit our quantitative analysis to three subjects for whom we have extensive tape-recorded interviews of adequate quality for detailed analysis, a speaker aged 72, a speaker aged 39, and a speaker aged 13 at the time the interviews were conducted (2000–2001). Each of the speakers was interviewed on several different occasions so that we have recorded approximately nine hours of relatively natural conversation with them in order to ensure adequate tokens for our analysis. With several exceptions involving low-frequency items, we have sufficient tokens from the extended conversations for frequency analysis. From the limited recordings and conversations with the other African Americans of Beech Bottom, we conclude that these three speakers are representative of the other African Americans living there.

| | MONOMORPHEMIC | | | BIMORPHEMIC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SPEAKER GROUP | PREVOCALIC Red/Total | PREPAUSAL Red/Total | PRECONS Red/Total | PREVOCALIC Red/Total | PREPAUSAL Red/Total | PRECONS 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 probability = .29
ETHNICITY
African Americans = .65; European Americans = .3
CLUSTER TYPE
monomorphemic = .56; bimorphemic = .39
FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENT
consonant = .80; pause = .37; vowel = .24
Chi-square per cell = .257

TABLE 2. The incidence of cluster reduction in Beech Bottom.

that this ethnic difference is receding for the remaining African American speakers in this community. This pattern is found for other variables as well.

To understand the significance of the Beech Bottom CCR patterns in a broader framework, we compare these figures with those from several other varieties, adapted from Wolfram et al. 2000. In addition to the figures for African Americans and European Americans from Beech Bottom, the comparative summary in Figure 8 includes Inland Southern AAVE, Hyde County AAVE, and Northern Standard English. The figures are restricted to prevocalic position for monomorphemic and bimorphemic clusters.

Although the frequency of prevocalic CCR for Beech Bottom African Americans falls well below the figures for Southern AAVE and Hyde County African American

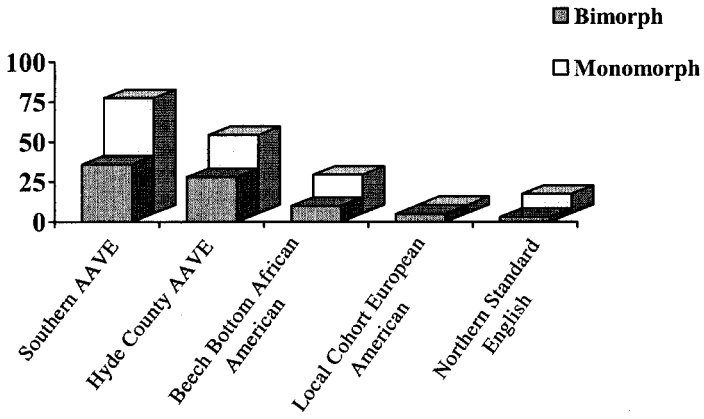



FIGURE 8. Comparison of prevocalic syllable-coda cluster reduction for representative dialects.

speakers, it is still above the figures for the European American benchmark variety, due mainly to the oldest speaker's rates of reduction. By contrast, the incidence of CCR for the European American cohorts 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 with respect to other variables (Mallinson & Wolfram 2002), Beech Bottom African Americans still exhibit the vestiges of an ethnolinguistic divide with respect to CCR.

**6.2** /ai/ UNGLIDING. In many varieties of Southern English, including those in Southern Appalachia, the /ai/ glide may be reduced or monophthongized to [a]. There are at least a couple different varieties of Southern English with respect to /ai/ ungliding (Bernstein 1993). In some regions of the South, including the Highland South (Hall 1942, Wolfram & Christian 1976, Hazen & Fluharty forthcoming), speakers reduce the /ai/ glide whether the following environment is voiceless (e.g. *tight*, *rice*) or voiced (e.g. *tide*, *time*). Other Southern varieties, however, reduce /ai/ only in non-prevoiceless environments, that is, before voiced segments (e.g. *tide* and *time*) and in open syllables (e.g. *lie* or *bye*) (Wolfram & Fasold 1974, Bailey & Thomas 1998).[13] Most descriptions of AAVE conclude that it aligns with those Southern varieties that only reduce the glide in prevoiced positions (Thomas 2001). Therefore, the incidence of prevoiceless ungliding may be diagnostic of accommodation to the regional highland version of Southern /ai/ ungliding. In Table 3, we give the raw figures and percentages of /ai/ ungliding in prevoiced and prevoiceless phonetic contexts for the Beech Bottom African Americans and their European American cohorts.

| 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% |

TABLE 3. The incidence of /ai/ ungliding in prevoiced and prevoiceless environment.

Table 3 shows 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 percent for all subjects regardless of ethnicity. Because the levels of /ai/ ungliding are so high for both ethnic groups of all ages, we could not subject the data to a multivariate analysis or even a simple nonparametric 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 forthcoming), none of these studies reveal the high levels

[13] For convenience, 'prevoiced' will be used henceforth to include /ai/ in both tautosyllabic prevoiced and in open syllables.

of ungliding indicated in this study. This is probably due to the insularity of the community and to the overall concentration of vernacular structures manifested by these speakers. Beech Bottom African American speech and European American speech have converged to the point of being indistinguishable with respect to /ai/ ungliding. To a large degree, the ethnic convergence for /ai/ ungliding is indicative of the overall configuration of the vowel systems of Beech Bottom African Americans and their cohort European Americans. Thus, acoustic analyses of the entire vowel systems of African Americans and European Americans in Beech Bottom (Mallinson & Wolfram 2002) show them to be quite aligned within a unitary regional dialect norm.

**6.3** THIRD PERSON *-S* MARKING. The concord pattern that marks *-s* on verbs with 3rd pl. subjects is widely documented as a feature of American English varieties influenced historically by the Ulster Scots, including the Southern Highland area of Appalachia (Wolfram & Christian 1976, Christian et al. 1989, Montgomery 1989). In Table 4, we give the raw figures and percentages for 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 for two independent linguistic variables that have been shown to constrain the incidence of *-s* attachment, namely, the subject type and the proximity of the subject and the verb.

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 $\chi^2 = .35$; $df = 1$; $p$ = not statistically significant

VARBRUL ANALYSIS OF THIRD PLURAL *-S* ATTACHMENT BY ETHNICITY

| VARBRUL RESULTS: | VARBRUL RESULTS: |
|---|---|
| Beech Bottom African Americans | Local Cohort European Americans |
| Input probability = .12 | Input probability = .10 |
| PROXIMITY | PROXIMITY |
| nonadjacent = .29; adjacent = .53 | nonadjacent = .69; adjacent = .45 |
| SUBJECT | SUBJECT |
| noun phrase = .96; collective = .76; pronoun = .31 | noun phrase = .83; collective = .91; pronoun = .22 |
| Chi-square per cell = 1.197 | Chi-square per cell = .480 |

TABLE 4. The incidence of verbal *-s* attachment with plural subjects.

Table 4 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, do suggest a subtle ethnic difference. 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.[14] A more significant

[14] It is quite possible that this difference may be a function of the low number of tokens for collective NPs. We have only 10 tokens of collective noun subjects for African Americans compared to 43 for European Americans.

difference is indicated with respect to the proximity constraint. European Americans favor *-s* attachment on nonadjacent 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, 2000), 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 may be a subtle grammatical disparity with respect to variable constraints. It is noteworthy that an ethnic difference in systematic effects on variability parallels the pattern found for African Americans and European Americans in Hyde County, though the specifics of the constraint effects are different in these two settings (Wolfram et al. 2000, Wolfram & Thomas 2002).

The second dimension of subject-verb concord is the optional attachment of *-s* to 3rd sg. verbs (e.g. *The dog bark__*), a well-documented characteristic of AAVE that contrasts with Southern Appalachian varieties of English (Wolfram & Christian 1976, Christian et al. 1989). In Table 5, we give the figures for 3rd sg. *-s* absence for Beech Bottom African Americans and their European American cohorts.

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 |

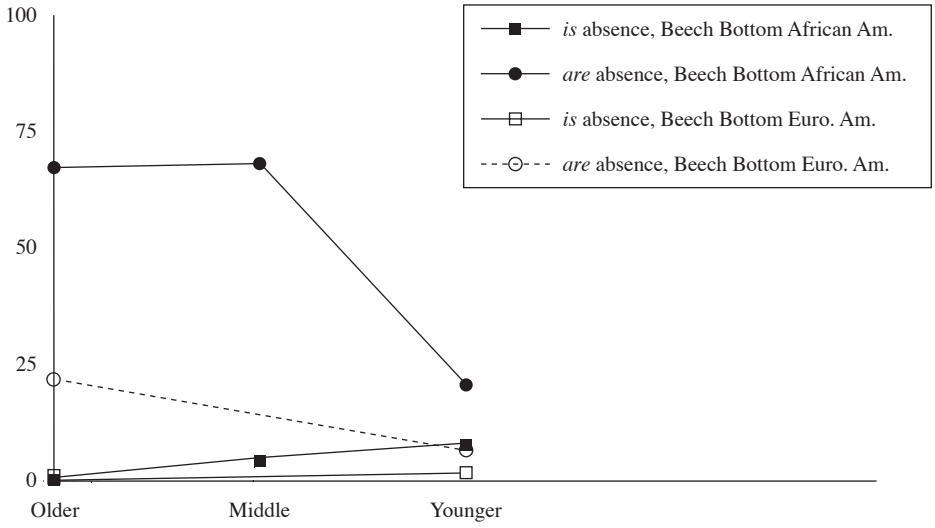
Total $\chi^2 = 34.01$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.01$

TABLE 5. The incidence of 3rd singular *-s* absence.

The data reflect a straightforward pattern of ethnic differentiation. As indicated in Table 5, the European American speakers have an extremely low rate of 3rd sg. *-s* absence—less than two percent. In contrast, the African American speakers exhibit 3rd sg. *-s* absence at a significantly higher rate of almost 23 percent.

Although the rates of 3rd sg. *-s* absence for Beech Bottom African Americans are not as high as those for Hyde County African Americans (see Fig. 5), those for the middle-aged and the older speakers still are well above the levels for their cohort European Americans. It is significant, however, that there are no tokens of 3rd sg. *-s* absence in the speech of the youngest Beech Bottom African American, which suggests a movement toward greater accommodation to the speech of the European American benchmark variety.

**6.4** COPULA/AUXILIARY ABSENCE. Though copula absence is found to some extent in white Southern rural vernacular varieties (Wolfram 1974a, Feagin 1979), it is relatively infrequent in Highland Southern varieties (Wolfram & Christian 1976:40–44), and therefore can serve as an index of ethnolinguistic alignment in Beech Bottom as well as in Hyde County. Following the same procedures for the tabulation of copula and auxiliary absence described in §4.4, we extracted the incidence of copula absence for African Americans and the cohort European American group in Beech Bottom. In Figure 9, we present a graph of the incidence of copula absence by ethnicity, generation, and type of copula, along with the raw figures and VARBRUL analysis. Due to the number of tokens needed for calculating a full range of cross-products for the various factor groups, we restrict the division of verb complements to only two categories, combining verb *-ing* and *gonna* into one category and predicate nominatives, predicate adjectives, and locatives into another. In essence, this decision results in a distinction between copula and auxiliary functions of *is* and *are*.




VARBRUL RESULTS: AFRICAN AMERICANS

Input probability = .11
COPULA FORM
*are* = .92; *is* = .25
SUBJECT
pro = .55; noun phrase = .38
COMPLEMENT
*-ing*/*gonna* = .58; nom/adj/loc = .46
Chi-square per cell = .734

VARBRUL RESULTS: EUROPEAN AMERICANS

Input probability = .03
COPULA FORM
*are* = .88; *is* = .30
SUBJECT
noun phrase = .73; pro = .38
COMPLEMENT
*-ing*/*gonna* = .88; nom/adj/loc = .43
Chi-square per cell = .662

FIGURE 9. Incidence of copula absence in Beech Bottom.

Figure 9 shows that neither group has much copula deletion for *is*, in contrast to the substantial levels of *is* absence found in studies of AAVE in large metropolitan areas such as New York (Labov 1969), Detroit (Wolfram 1969), Washington, DC (Fasold 1972), Los Angeles (Baugh 1983), and Palo Alto (Rickford 1999). Older European Americans and the elderly and middle-aged African Americans in Beech Bottom, however, do have copula absence for *are*, with the overall levels being much higher for the older African American than for the older European Americans. In both European American and African American speech, *are* strongly favors deletion over *is* and auxiliaries favor deletion over nonauxiliaries. The subject effect is different—the African Americans favor deletion with pronoun subjects while the European Americans favor it with noun-phrase subjects. We again find ethnicity to be a significant factor in the incidence of copula absence; 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.

**6.5** THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIALECT ALIGNMENT IN BEECH BOTTOM. The study of Beech Bottom African American speech is, of necessity, a case study because the vast majority of African Americans who once lived there have now migrated from the region. Nonetheless, our findings are instructive, especially when placed side-by-side with other analyses, including the Hyde County study and other types of 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 offer a glimpse of what the dialect situation was once like and how it is currently configured in a receding African American community. As with Hyde County, many earlier dialect features used by African Americans were apparently shared with the localized varieties of English spoken by their European American cohorts, giving the overall impression to outside listeners that blacks and whites speak alike. The data support the contention that earlier AAVE was probably considerably more regionalized than contemporary AAVE in many regions, though of course we are dealing here with just a few remaining speakers. But there is also evidence suggesting a subtle but distinctive ethnolinguistic divide that coexisted with localized dialect features — even in the face of extensive accommodation that made Beech Bottom speakers sound very regionalized regardless of their ethnicity.

Linguistic accommodation by African Americans to the speech of the cohort European American white community in Beech Bottom was arguably more extensive than in Hyde County, and the vestiges of ethnically correlated differences may be more subtle, but a common core of structures is implicated in the ethnolinguistic division, including 3rd sg. *-s* absence, copula absence, and prevocalic CCR. It hardly seems likely that distinct enclave communities of African Americans separated by hundreds of miles, different community circumstances, and different regional dialects would 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 to begin with.

Ironically, one of the strongest arguments for the persistent ethnolinguistic difference comes from the overall profile of congruence. It is obvious that Beech Bottom African Americans acquired many of the regional dialect features of Highland Southern speech historically, to the point of being perceptually indistinguishable from their counterpart European Americans to outsiders. The fact that a small set of ethnically distinctive features would persist in an overall context of convergence suggests that these distinctive traits were strongly embedded in the speech of African Americans at an earlier point in time.

Speakers in enclave communities such as Beech Bottom and Hyde County may be aligned in their representation of long-standing ethnolinguistic differences, but they are quite different in terms of their trajectory of change. Wolfram and Thomas (2002) show that Hyde County is changing in the direction of an external, common core AAVE norm whereas there is no evidence of this in the middle-aged and younger Beech Bottom speakers. Although one might speculate that the accommodation by the young speaker in Beech Bottom — he is the only African American teenager in the community — may be due to the limited size of the African American community, the discussion of an African American isolate on the island of Ocracoke in the next section demonstrates 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 (Mallinson & Wolfram 2002), along with the lack of evidence for a distinctive black youth culture in this region, contribute to this convergence.

**7.** OCRACOKE: THE CASE OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN ISOLATE. Finally, we review the case of a single African American speaker from the only African American family to live on the island of Ocracoke since the Civil War. In Wolfram et al. 1997, we docu-

mented the speech of Muzel Bryant, born in 1904, who was in her early to mid-90s when we conducted our sociolinguistic interviews with her. Apart from four years when she left the island for Philadelphia — from age 16 to 20 — she has spent her entire life on the island, as did one brother and a sister. Her grandparents came to Ocracoke in the 1860s after the Civil War. Though case studies of individual speakers such as Muzel Bryant are limited in terms of what they can say about a community dialect, they can nonetheless provide insight into the role of individuals or families in terms of their ethnolinguistic alignment with the surrounding speech community. In this case, the analysis of Muzel Bryant's speech provides perspective on the dialect of an isolated African American family on a remote, isolated island — a case of ethnic isolation within geographic isolation. The descriptive, quantitative details of Muzel Bryant's speech are set forth in Wolfram et al. 1997, where we compared her speech with the speech of European Americans on Ocracoke as well as inland, rural North Carolina African Americans. Instead of repeating these details here, we simply summarize and compare in Table 6 our findings for Muzel Bryant with respect to some of the variables examined in the analyses of Hyde County and Beech Bottom speech in §§5 and 6. Shading indicates instances of contrast between local African American and European American cohorts.

| | MUZEL BRYANT* | ELDERLY HYDE COUNTY | YOUNGER HYDE COUNTY | ELDERLY BEECH BOTTOM | YOUNGER BEECH BOTTOM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PREVOCALIC CCR | High | Moderate | Moderate | Moderate | Low |
| COHORT EUROPEAN AM. | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| 3RD PL. *-s* ATTACHMENT | Moderate | High | Low/None | High | Low |
| COHORT EUROPEAN AM. | Moderate | High | Low | High | Moderate |
| 3RD SG. *-s* ABSENCE | Moderate | Moderate | Moderate | Moderate | None |
| COHORT EUROPEAN AM. | None | None | None | None | None |
| *are* COPULA ABSENCE | High | Moderate | High | Moderate | Low |
| COHORT EUROPEAN AM. | None | None | Low | Low | Low |
| *is* COPULA ABSENCE | Moderate | Moderate | Moderate | Low | None |
| COHORT EUROPEAN AM. | None | None | None | None | None |
| *weren't* REGULARIZATION | Moderate | Moderate | Low/None | None | None |
| COHORT EUROPEAN AM. | Moderate | Moderate | High | None | None |

TABLE 6. Summary comparison of features: Muzel Bryant, Hyde County, and Beech Bottom.

*Analysis for Muzel Bryant based on Wolfram et al. 1997.

The comparison in Table 6 shows that Muzel Bryant has acquired some of the unique dialect features of the benchmark European American variety in Ocracoke, such as the past tense regularization of *weren't* (Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1994) and 3rd pl. *-s* marking (Hazen 1996, 2000). But Muzel Bryant also distinguishes herself from Ocracoke European American counterparts in her use of copula absence, 3rd sg. *-s* absence, and extensive prevocalic CCR. The parallels between Muzel Bryant's patterns of convergence and divergence and those in Hyde County and Beech Bottom are indeed remarkable. Although it might be argued that Muzel Bryant simply reflects the pattern found for African Africans in Hyde County because of contact between her and residents of the Hyde County African American community located 20 miles across the Pamlico Sound, information about her life on Ocracoke indicates that she did not have extensive contact with Hyde County African Americans or any other African American community outside her family. Instead, she was an authentic African American isolate on Ocracoke.

That a single African American family living on an isolated island for almost a century and a half should still manifest the vestiges of an ethnolinguistic boundary while accommodating the local dialect norm is a testament to the historic strength of an ethnic boundary. It also underscores the significance of conducting case studies of individual speakers to complement more extensive, aggregate analyses of groups of speakers. The case of Muzel Bryant, for example, indicates that ethnolinguistic boundaries can sometimes overcome great demographic odds and coexist with strong regional dialect traditions. The local contexts of mainland Hyde County, Beech Bottom, and Ocracoke are very different, but there is a most striking similarity indicating that regional dialects can be accommodated by African Americans even as durable ethnolinguistic distinctions persist.

**8.** CONCLUSION. The sociolinguistic situations considered here include several different kinds of enclave circumstances. The communities vary in size, location, and physical setting, being united mainly by their historical enclave status. Though they do not constitute a comprehensive and representative sample, they can nonetheless shed light on some of the earlier vernacular varieties spoken by African Americans and language change within AAVE.

All three situations clearly support the contention that earlier African Americans converged with localized varieties of English spoken by their European American cohorts. In this respect, the data appear to support the traditional Anglicist and neo-Anglicist hypotheses. Earlier versions of AAVE apparently differed from many contemporary versions of AAVE, which have been excluded from ongoing dialect changes (Labov 2001, Jones 2000). But there is also evidence for a durable ethnolinguistic divide that is not generally acknowledged under the Anglicist or neo-Anglicist positions. In some cases, the ethnolinguistic boundaries may have been much more subtle and selective than they are today, but the division clearly surfaces in the three situations examined here. Furthermore, some of these differences may be attributed to persistent substrate influence from the early contact history between African Americans and European Americans. One of the most compelling arguments for the potential strength of ethnolinguistic boundaries is that of the lone African American family on Ocracoke, which apparently perpetuated a subtly distinct ethnolinguistic variety of English for 150 years despite a lack of extended contact with mainland African Americans. The maintenance by a single African American family of an ethnically distinct substrate for so long is striking testimony to the strength and resilience of ethnic boundaries.

The development and maintenance of linguistic divergence is more than a simple matter of population ecology. The numbers game may provide an important context for reconstructing the historical conditions for the development of a creole (Mufwene 1996, 2001, Rickford 1997), but it is not the only game in town. The strength of racial division and ethnic boundaries, the nature of social relations, and the dynamics of inter- and intra-ethnic interaction are also critical factors to consider in reconstructing earlier African American English and may, in fact, outweigh factors related to population ecology.

In studies of the genesis of AAVE, evidence for substrate influence has often been linked directly to the creole-origin hypothesis. Accordingly, structural correspondences between copula absence and inflectional *-s* absence in AAVE and in the creoles of the African diaspora has sometimes been interpreted as supportive evidence for the existence of a creole in colonial America and the antebellum South. But this is not necessarily the case. The attribution of a structure to a creole source does not necessarily imply that AAVE per se developed from a creole language that underwent decreolization to arrive at its current form, as originally posited by Stewart (1967, 1968) and Dillard (1972). It is quite possible to maintain that contact with speakers of English-based creoles influenced developing varieties of English without the adoption of the creole as a primary means of communication. Schreier (2001), for example, in his discussion of the development of English on the isolated island of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic, shows that an earlier contact situation between British and American expatriates and a small group of creole-speaking women brought from the island of St. Helena resulted in a substantive restructuring of Tristan da Cunha English. This variety now reflects fairly extensive substrate influence — including extensive 3rd sg. *-s* absence and prevocalic CCR — from the mixing of creole features and dialect features from England and the US. The historical records, however, do not indicate that the residents of the island ever adopted a creole as a primary means of communication. It is indeed quite possible for substrate influence to exist apart from the widespread adoption of a creole.

It is also possible that creole language transfer converged with influences from other types of language contact situations, including typological transfer from non-creole heritage languages and fossilized interlanguage restructuring. For example, substantive prevocalic CCR 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 (Allyene 1980, Holm 1988). Thus, a native speaker of one of these languages might adopt this phonological trait whether or not their learning of English involved a middle passage through a pidgin or creole. Of course, the developing creoles of West Africa and the Caribbean (Holm 1988, 1989) adopted CCR as a typological trait, so that creole transfer, language transfer from African languages, and even interlanguage strategies involving CCR (Tarone 1980) would reinforce one another in the development of CCR. Our evidence certainly suggests persistent substrate influence from an earlier contact situation, but this does not necessarily support the creole hypothesis.

Finally, there is evidence to support the claim that contemporary AAVE has diverged from European American vernacular varieties in some regions (Labov 1987, Bailey & Maynor 1989). However, this position must be qualified. Although divergence may involve the intensification and, in some cases, innovation of structural traits associated with AAVE (Dayton 1996), it may simultaneously exhibit movement away from localized dialect features as well. In addition, local European American dialect communities

may intensify selected features that lead to further separation of African American and European American varieties, as typified by the escalation of past tense *weren't* regularization by younger vernacular Hyde County European Americans. Divergence may, in fact, take several different paths and be bilateral rather than unilateral. It must also be recognized that divergence is not an inevitable path of change for vernacular-speaking African Americans. In Beech Bottom, the few African American speakers appear to be converging rather than diverging over time. Such contrastive trajectories of change suggest that divergence is ultimately embedded in underlying cultural values about identity and is not an inevitable course of change for African Americans. This is an important caution that sometimes has been overlooked in discussions of divergence in AAVE.

Sociolinguistics has now been through several dramatic shifts in reconstructing the earlier and contemporary status of African American speech. In many cases, the claims and counterclaims have been highly controversial and intensely debated—and still are. Unfortunately, this has sometimes led to a type of polarization in which primary hypotheses are reduced to uncompromising, mutually exclusive positions. The sociolinguistic reality, however, may differ. AAVE is a product of its unique contact history, its distribution in time and place, and the pervasive racial categories and cultural boundaries that have separated African Americans and European Americans in the US in the past and the present. Within this sociohistorical and cultural milieu, it stands to reason that the sociolinguistic experience of African Americans should reflect regional accommodation at the same time that it manifests a durable but dynamic ethnolinguistic divide.

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