Appalachian English is often thought of as a more traditional form of speech associated with the older generation (Dial 1972, Montgomery 1979, Wolfram & Christian 1976). However, recent research indicates that traditional Appalachian English features are actually in flux in the region with some dying out (Hazen 2006, Hazen, Butcher, & King 2010, Hazen, Hamilton, & Vacovsky 2011), other remaining stable (Hazen 2008), and others showing an increase among the younger generations (Hazen 2005, Childs & Mallinson 2004). This variability, especially among younger speakers, brings about questions regarding both the linguistic and social factors at play in the reclaiming of traditional, relic dialect forms (Childs & VanHerk 2013). Keeping with the conference theme, we discuss the ways which young speakers in two distinct (geographic and ethnic) Appalachian communities are bridging the past and the present, combining the old with the new. We consider data from North Carolina and Tennessee where younger speakers are using Appalachian English features more like their grandparents and discuss the curvilinear pattern of linguistic change (Wolfram 2007) that emerges in both.

This paper presents the analysis of phonological (i.e., consonant cluster reduction, post-vocalic rlessness, back vowel fronting, and /ay/ monophthongization) and morphosyntactic data (i.e., 3rd plural -s and double modals) from these two areas of Appalachia, and both confirm a movement toward several Appalachian English norms among the young speakers. We believe this curvilinear pattern is indicative of a “recycling” of Appalachian features similar to the revival of Cajun features among the young reported by Dubois and Horvath (1999) as well as the revitalization and reappropriation of particularly salient linguistic features by younger speakers in Newfoundland (Childs & VanHerk 2013). We argue that this revival is not one that happens on a wholesale level. Rather it is the most salient features and those features considered the most local that are recycled by younger speakers but with constraints that differ from those active in the previous generations. We suggest then that curvilinear patterns of linguistic change are more than just revivals of old forms, they are new manifestations based on the past yet moving the community forward within the global linguistic landscape.

References:


